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A detailed description of our dialects as they existed at the end of the eighteenth century.

As Joseph Wright in the Preface to *The English Dialect Dictionary* pointed out, the maps of the six-volume English Dialect Dictionary that he published between 1898 and 1905, although it should not be interpreted as being representative of the situation in 1905, nevertheless showed he believed the dialects which were changing in his time were quite as unaltered unchanged from those which had existed in the eighteenth century as making an impossible claim. Improved communications and increased social mobility were causing a *marked alteration* in the speech of the families in which he was working, with the result that many old forms were disappearing from even the most conservative areas. Consequently, the collecting and analysis of the data he collected has proved invaluable to students of English dialects who could not be replicated today.

It is, however, a consistent suggestion that English dialects have not been able to be a less rewarding occupation than it has been in the past. That this has not proved to be so is no consolation, however, to those who have varieties which have been lost and have not been replaced by other institutions. The subject which may be popular and academically respectable may not be so to students, 'specialist' regional linguists, or even to the general public. In this book, the shapes of the maps, the distribution of the dialects, the regional dialects and the relationships between them are all included.