**Mark:** [00:00:00] Welcome to The Endless Knot Podcast,

**Aven:** where the more we know,

**Mark:** the more we want to find out.

**Aven:** Tracing serendipitous connections through our lives

**Mark:** and across disciplines.

**Aven:** Hi, I'm Aven.

**Mark:** And I'm Mark.

**Aven:** And today we are talking to Haggard Hawks.

**Mark:** Paul Anthony Jones is the man behind the brilliant Haggard Hawks Twitter account filling the online world with odd facts and curious Etymologies for about a decade now. He's also the author of numerous books, including the original Haggard Hawks and Paltry Poltroons: The Origin of English in 10 Words, The Cabinet of Linguistic Curiosities: A Yearbook of Forgotten Words, Around the World in 80 Words: A journey through the English Language ,and The Cabinet of Calm:Soothing Words for Troubled Times.

**Aven:** He joined us to talk about his newest book: Why Is This a Question? Everything about the Origins and Oddities [00:01:00] of Language You Never Thought to Ask. Which has just been released in the UK and will hopefully be available in the US and Canada and around the world soon. This short book is jam packed with information about the origin of language, why English works the way it does, and how our writing system has developed from its earliest to beginnings.

Among other things, it would make great Christmas present as would any of his books. We had an absolutely lovely time talking to Paul, so without it further ado, let's go to that interview. So, hi Paul. Thanks so much for being here.

**Paul:** Oh, a pleasure. Thank you so much for asking me back.

**Mark:** You, you have the, the great honour of being the very first repeat guest on the show, . I think that's very fitting that it's you.

**Paul:** Oh yeah. I, I'm absolutely not deserving of that at all, I'm sure.

**Aven:** Well, I think you are one of the guests who is perhaps the most closely aligned with the work that [00:02:00] we do in your own way We've had other people on who do language and etymology and things. I do definitely think we have much in common. .

**Paul:** Yeah. Yes. I think you're right. Yeah, definitely. Oh, as if that's amazing. Oh, thank you. I feel, I feel very touched.

**Aven:** Well, as I've often said, the real reason we do this podcast is to give us an excuse to talk to people we wanna talk to.

Yeah. So if we can't use it to talk to a friend that we haven't been able to talk to in a while, then what's the point of having it ? Exactly.

**Paul:** Yeah. That's a good enough excuse as as any, I'm sure.

**Aven:** So what we'll do though, to be formal and proper before we just get into just chatting is , start off by asking you the question we, these days, ask all of our guests, so Mark:

**Mark:** So, are there any unexpected connections in your life, in your work in your, relating to your current book or anything like that that you would like [00:03:00] to talk to us about?

**Paul:** You know, that's, since I knew that I was going to have to talk about connections, I, I've sat here and come up with about 10 and now I'm kinda , I'm kind thinking which one to narrow it down to. Cause I used to, one of the weird ones actually, I dunno if this counts, but I used to be a piano teacher years ago.

And yeah, the, I I've gone completely off piste already. Where are we? Like two minutes in. But yeah, I used to be, used to be a piano teacher and this was kind of back when I was very, very first starting writing and the number of overlaps between music and language was insane. They always kind of struck me. And my teacher, as it was a, a brilliant musician around here called Kevin, who runs a big music school in Newcastle. He was kind of fascinated by this cuz it had never kind of struck him before. So both me and him kind of connected. He's a superb musician. And I'd kind of just finished my masters in linguistics, so we'd sit in my lessons and talk for an hour about how language has phrasing and music has phraseing and it all has a [00:04:00] natural pulse and a natural rhythm that sounds right and it sounds wrong sometimes. So that, yeah, that, that's one that kind of has just sprung to mind. But yeah, kind of career wise as well, the, the way that I've always kind of worked with writing books is that quite often something will crop up in the research for one that'll give me the idea for the next one.

it's it's probably not the best , it's probably not the best or most organized way of writing, to be honest. . But yeah, it's always been, there's always, so, there's always been like a little connection between. Each book and between kind of each project, I guess this one had a long connection to a blog that I wrote, I think like 2014, 2015, something like that.

That kind of gave me the idea for that. And now it's cropped up in this book. Even the books before this one though, I remember I was writing the yearbook, the cabinet, which was like about three, four years ago. And one of the words I wanted to include in that is Stellenbosch, which I love, which is to sort of tactically [00:05:00] demote somebody, is to stellenbosch them.

So you sort of give them a job that they can't complain about, cuz it's still a really high status job, but it's, it's not one that has an awful lot of an awful lot of impact. So it's sort of like a backroom kind of position. And it comes from the Boer war when people whose military tactics hadn't worked out on the frontline would be sent to the Stellenbosch remount camp to look after the horses, which is a really important job.

But it wasn't , it wasn't frontline, not

**Aven:** a decision making one.

**Paul:** Yeah. Yeah. And so I, I loved this story and I loved this word and there wasn't room to put it in the Cabinet. So I, I kept hold of it. And that ended up giving me the idea for the, Around the World book, which was all about word origins that come from place, names. So, right. Yeah. There's, there's always been these little kind of threads that run between kind of probably everything that I do. I'm always kind of looking at something and then, I'll spot something that I can use somewhere else. for me, probably, it just proves how kind of butterfly minded I am, to be fair.[00:06:00]

**Mark:** Yeah. I imagine your, your research often goes along the lines of just sort of casting about, generally and, finding little cool surprise things that you weren't really looking for, but they're really cool.

**Paul:** Yeah. Yeah, that's exactly how it is. And what's, what's nice about running the Twitter account as well is that I remember when I was doing the research for this book, I, I stumbled across the the thing from Malagasy where all the demonstrative pronouns are, are ordered by distance as well as, so you can, I think there's seven layers of distance in it, like kind of baked into the language.

And I thought this was really interesting. So about halfway through kind of research in that chapter, I thought, I'll put this on Twitter. And it took about half an hour to write to write it up and get it to fit into, what, about 200 characters or something. But I kind of just randomly stumbled across it and put it up on Twitter and that, that kind of became the acid test for, you know, is this as interesting as, I think it is, if people kind react to it on Twitter, then yeah, then it kinda works and it stays in the final draft.

**Aven:** Right, so you have an immediate [00:07:00] beta reader as it were.

**Paul:** Yeah. Yeah. So if I just sort of stumble across something that I think is interesting, I can kind of put it out there and hopefully, hopefully other people think the same.

**Mark:** I imagine with, the kinds of topics that you talk about in this book, it is a lot harder to get them into tweets than say a word, right?

You can talk about a surprising word in a relativly short amount of space, but yeah. You know, talking about a linguistic concept must be harder.

**Paul:** Absolutely. Yeah. One of the things that I mean, it did kind, Twitter did kind of become my acid test for this, and I remember writing one of the chapters is kind of roughly about pragmatics, and I wanted to write about scalar implicature, and I thought, is this interesting?

And so I put it up on Twitter thinking, you know, I'll explain this and put it out and see if people enjoy it. And it took genuinely, it took about 40 minutes to condense it into 240 characters or something, in a way that kind of still explained it, well hopefully explained it in an accurate way, but also kind of made it relate [00:08:00] to , relate to the real world.

So, yeah, it's a bit of a double-edged sword sometimes .It's, yeah. I think this is a really interesting topic. Now how can I get that into one tweet?

**Aven:** okay. Let's talk about the book then. There's some other things that we'll come back to, but since we're onto it, this is a different book than what you've written so far. Oh, not completely, obviously, but many of your previous books have been a little more based around a list, really, essentially.

Yeah. Or, or, you know, a collection of thematically related words or as you said, there are words around, you know, place names around the world or whatever. Or here's a bunch of really cool, little essentially standalone facts. Yeah, I suppose, yeah. This one, although perhaps because you are used to that, it is sort of organized in its table of contents as if it's a list.

Yeah. It really isn't , it's more Well, rather than me telling you what your book is about, , why don't you why [00:09:00] you tell us a little bit about sort of how it's organized and how you conceived of it as a book.

**Paul:** Yeah. I kind of had the idea, well, like I said before, I've kind of had this idea to write a book like this for about seven or eight years.

The book, I should say, is 20 chapters, that are questions about language that hopefully you've never thought to ask or have never come across the answer to almost, right. So it's things like why is the alphabet in the order that it's in and why we put our words in the order that they go on and why do some languages have gender and what are words and languages at all and all that sort of stuff.

So yeah, I kind of had this idea of this would be a cool book to write and answer some of these questions cuz some of them that I kind of was coming up with in my. Mind, I didn't know the answer myself. I, I've got no idea why the alphabet's in the order that it's in. I had no idea at all. So, yeah. I thought, yeah, that'd be a cool book to write.

And I kind of stored it away for about six or seven years cuz I knew that it would be a big, big project and [00:10:00] it, and it really, really was. So I kind of, when I first thought of it, I kind of almost felt like I wasn't ready to write it. I kind of needed to convince myself that I could actually write in a way that it was sort of cohesive and works and that I wasn't gonna make an absolute hash of it.

So yeah, I kind of feel like I've sort of been orbiting this idea for a little while and working on, working on other books that are, like you say, they, they are kind of based more around, I guess the kind of Twitter-y approach. It's, it's kind of lots and lots of individual stories or individual etymologies or whatever.

This is the first kind of longer form stuff that I've, that I've written, I guess. But yeah, it was, it was that thing of like I needed to convince myself that I could do it and, cause I knew it was gonna be massive. I told my publishers originally that when I pitched it to them that it would take about six months to write and it took I think, I think it took two and a half years

Right. So I slightly underestimated the amount of work involved and the amount [00:11:00] of research that it would need to bring it together. Yeah, it was kind of down to the wire, I think I was contracted January of this year, and I think I submitted it in July. Right. Yeah. So it's a little bit, a little bit off schedule.

**Aven:** I mean, As an academic, that seems like a completely sensible . Yeah, that's on time .

**Paul:** See, it's in my blood. It's in my blood . So yeah, it was a much bigger project than I thought it was gonna be. I mean, I always kind of knew it was gonna be a big project, but there was just so much stuff that I needed to triple check and I wanted to, it's, it's a hard way to write as well.

I think, cuz I've said this before in interviews that I, I think it's as hard, if not actually a little bit harder to write for a general audience than it is to write for a kind of closed or academic audience. Because if you write a paper or a thesis or something, you are writing for people whose knowledge of a subject you can kind of second guess, you kind of enter on their [00:12:00] level and they're either gonna be on your level or above it and if they don't understand some of the terms or the models or studies or whatever that you are referring to, then it kind of behooves them and them alone to go and read up on it and come back to your work to understand it.

It, if I was doing that in a book like this, that's, yes, it's gonna hopefully appeal to kind of people who have a background in language and who are interested in it, but hopefully it's also appealing to people who just have a kind of armchair interest in it and who have never studied linguistics, but just find language interesting. And if I suddenly kind of start dropping things like. Proto Indo European and Speech Act theory and the cooperative principle. And if I suddenly start talking about these things as if, you know, everyone , everyone knows what they're, you're instantly kind of alienating people, but at the same time, there is gonna be a lot of people who do know what that stuff is.

So you're kind of, you have to walk this line of hopefully not massively talking down to people who do get it and not talking massively over the heads of [00:13:00] people who don't. It's sort of, you're walking this very, very thin, tight rope the entire time. And yeah, so every kind of sentence in this had to be, had to strike that balance, which made it, like academically it was difficult to kind of research it and hopefully bring it all together in a way that made sense.

But then having to kind of package it in that way was was probably just as hard as sort of 80,000 words needed to kinda walk, needed to walk that tight rope between those two, two audiences. So yeah, I can only hope that I've got it right, I guess.

**Mark:** And I imagine that's, the reason that you did it as a series of questions because, you know, if you titled a chapter proto into European, that's gonna kind of turn people off pretty quickly, if they don't know, you know, what the title of the chapter means. But if you state it as a question, it sort of invites them in a bit more.

**Paul:** Yeah. And I think I was gonna go for many more shorter chapters, at first. I think I kind of had the concept, this was originally like about 40 or 50 different chapters that were individual questions that were gonna be much more back and [00:14:00] forth.

It would be a bit more punchy, but it, it kind of became quite obvious quite early on that there's so much overlap. You kind of can't explain. What's a good example, like one of the chapters is about why the letter I has a dot over it. Right. And you kind of, you can't explain that without explaining why we have upper and lowercase letters at all.

And you can't explain that without explaining why we use the alphabet that we do. And you can't explain that without explaining what an alphabet itself actually is. And you can't explain that without explaining how, how writing works and how we even kind of begin to understand what's written down on a page.

So the closer you look at it, the more stuff that needs to kind of all go into the same section. So yeah, that, that original long form lots and lots of short chapters, but in a much, much broader list of chapters that quickly was reshuffled into a smaller section.

But hopefully, hopefully the question and answer thing still works in this format.

**Aven:** Well that's, so that's sort of what I meant by saying that while it's [00:15:00] theoretically organized into a list, I mean a list of questions, but into these discrete pieces, it strikes me on reading it all that what it -- please, I don't wanna make this sound like it's gonna put anyone off of it, because this is not what it is, but it, it in essentially becomes an introductory textbook.

**Paul:** Oh, I'm so, I'm so glad you said that. Yeah. I, I I'm so glad you said that. Yeah. I, I met with Danny Bates a couple of weeks ago and he said that it's almost like a primer in linguistics, which is exactly what was kind of, I know that each chapter's sort of a question, but behind the scenes, there's a continuity. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it's sort of like, yes. I'm answering a funny question that hopefully you've never thought to ask, but I'm secretly telling you what paralinguistics is, right?

Sorry, . . that behind the scenes I'm like technically introducing you to the concept of pragmatics, ,

**Aven:** that kinda thing. Yeah. Well, and, and not only that, but also what you were saying about how the, you know, the chapters do they rely while you can read each individual chapter on its own? I don't think that they rely on [00:16:00] each other completely.

Nonetheless, one builds on the knowledge of another or you cross reference them or whatever. Such, in such a way that what you're doing, I think with the whole book is sort of taking us from, we don't have language to, we are modern human beings interacting with written texts.

Yeah. And understanding some, certainly not all of the neurological reasons why we do so. And that the story in the whole book, you know, you go at it from different directions as you go along, but kind of takes you that journey.

. . And that's the way in which I sort of think it's an introductory textbook, not just to linguistics, but to what is language. Yeah, I, I, I know it's only one of your chapters, but really is the whole thing, it

**Paul:** kind of technically is the whole thing. Yeah. Kind of secretly It's just one long question.

Yeah, .

**Aven:** And, and I mean, I, I found that like, I've found it very [00:17:00] effective. I found it really good and I think you do walk that line of being clear, but also being really quite highly technical in some sections. Like in a way that's not, I don't think off putting or hard to understand. I mean, obviously it's a little hard for me to be the naive reader.

Yeah. You know, that's the difficulty every expert faces when they write for non-experts is, yeah. It's really hard to put on the non expert hat Again,

**Paul:** I know, sees this is the irony of me talking about how hard this was. Right. I'm talking to you two who are like the, like the experts in your fields. It's amazing. .

**Aven:** Well, I mean, but it's, it, it's the same.

I mean, we both struggle with that all the time and I absolutely. You know, I've recently taken on a few projects that involve taking stuff I know really intimately at an academic level and writing it for sometimes for an academic audience, but one that's non specialized, which, which is its own kind of [00:18:00] weirdness.

Yeah. Where. You can expect them to be familiar with academic argumentation and style, but not any of the content . That was interesting. And then also writing for a more general interested, you know, interested and thoughtful public that doesn't know any of the details. And yeah, I definitely find it a challenge that is a very distinct, I don't know if it's harder than writing, academic writing, but I've done a lot more of the academic writing, so it's something when I'm much less practiced at, whereas you are used to writing for a general public at

**Paul:** least.

Yeah, I, I think it took me a long time to kind of get the voice right as well for doing that. I think, I think a lot of that came actually out of blogging. I think that really helped I think, cuz especially some of my first books and even probably some of the first blogs were still kind of written in a sort of academic ease almost.

There was, they were kind of quite formal still. Whereas I think hopefully now I guess it's communicating it more than anything. It's just [00:19:00] getting it in a way that yeah, it's accessible, I guess. . , that's the kind of angle that I want to go at, but it's hard.

it's really, really hard.

**Mark:** So, so you've talked about, you know, the fact that you had this idea, what is it like eight years ago now? Why now? Why, why did, why did, was now the moment that you decided to, finally take, take on the topic.

**Aven:** Or two and a half or three years ago. Why then?

**Paul:** Yeah, that's true. That's a really good question.

Yeah, part partly it was like I say, partly it was kind of a confidence thing that I thought that I was good enough a writer now to, to tackle it and to try and take it on. And...having said that even then, I wrote the, there's a chapter in there about why we move our hands when we talk.

. , it's ironically, it's the last chapter in the book, but it was the first chapter that I wrote cuz I knew nothing about that . That was, that was a topic I had never, ever researched. It was something I had no experience of. So I thought, right, [00:20:00] I'll get this one out of the way. And it was, I actually wrote that before I'd pitched the book, cuz that was kind of my sort of asset test.

I thought, right, if I can write this chapter and make this vaguely interesting and hopefully comprehensive and explain it in a way, then yeah, I can, I can kind of tackle all the rest. So I, I wrote that. I think, I mean even that one chapter on its own took about four, five months to get right. .

and yeah. So I, I wrote that and that kind of gave me the boost to go, actually, you know what, I, I can tackle this now. I can, I can do this one now, but. So that was the kind of professional side of it. But also two and a half years ago lockdown happened. . Yeah. And suddenly yeah, I wasn't contracted to do anything for the first time in a while and I suddenly had all of this time and nothing to really fill it with, so I thought, well, if I don't write this now when am I gonna do it

So yeah, it was the free time that gave me that yeah, that suddenly gave me the, the space in my timetable to go, actually, you know what, I can take on a bigger project that's gonna have me reading books and [00:21:00] papers for the first time in a long time. Yeah.

So it was a combination of me knowing that I was, it sounds a bit bigheaded, but knowing that I was good enough to, to write it. And also the time constraints, they, they kind of loosened off during lockdown. So yeah, I certainly had the kind of time to be able to really take deep dives into subjects and fields that I wasn't before this, all that experienced in personally.

**Aven:** Yeah. That, raises the question I was gonna ask is I do remember our last conversation. We talked about how do you do research and you basically said, I read dictionaries, and I read weird dictionaries and I read, you know, it's, it's a sort of a magpie approach to some extent.

Yeah. And I imagine that the research task was, and you've alluded to this rather different for this book. Yeah. Uh, Not only are you going into the linguistic stuff, which you do, you know, you have studied and do have knowledge of, and presumably had some idea of where to go to find, you know, where has the field got to on these subjects.

Yeah. But you've also got stuff in there about, brain scans and [00:22:00] about As you were talking about the gestures and you've got stuff Yeah. About, there were a couple of things. I'm trying to remember the particulars where I was thinking there is no way you had any idea about any of this before you started

Some of the stuff about the physical body and the way the vocals folds work and

**Paul:** you know, some of that stuff. Oh yeah. The, the Bernoulli effect. That, that was that was new to me. . Exactly. No. Yeah, this is very, very true. Yeah, I, cuz it was really not my I mean even when, even when I was kind of studying at uni and, and doing my masters and things, I was still studying mainly historical stuff.

So I, I was doing toponomy, so I was, I was doing place name studies in, in the north of England. That was my kind of main thing. So I was still dealing with old documents and old maps and old dictionaries and all sorts of things. I was kind of right at the back of the library and the archives and suddenly with this book, you know, I'm having to talk about the elasticity of vocal folds and [00:23:00] things like that.

I, I am not, I am not a scientist in any way, shape or form. So that took a long, long time to make sure it was accurate and made sense. I almost was like, if I can understand it, then anyone can, cause this is not, this is not my field at all. A really good friend of mine Matt, who lives up in, in Edinburgh, I've known him decades and decades.

we've known each other since you were three and we could not be more different. I, I've gone down the full humanities route and he's gone full science and he's now a biochemistry doctor of biochemistry at Edinburgh Uni, and I was emailing him back and forward going, just explain this to me, , and said, I do not understand this.

I actually sent him that, that very first chapter before it went to my publishers. I sent him that because there was a study in there that postulates that one of the reasons why we move our hands is because our primordial ancestors would've had the same bundle of nerves in their hind brain that that would've allowed [00:24:00] them to signal with gills and fins.

And I was reading this and I was like, this is amazing. I want, I wanna put this in the book. And I wrote it up and sent it up to him and he was like, no, this, this makes no sense. This is not , this is not what this paper says. You, you can't say this. I basically was like, you know, I might as well just have called them like flappers rather than fins.

It was, I was way, I was way off kilter. So yeah, he reined me back in. He get, got a shout out in the acknowledgements for sorting my science out whenever it comes up . But yeah, I mean that was like a lot of the questions that I wanted to answer. I kind of wanted to know the answer myself, because it was just so outside of my comfort zone to sort of talk about the physiology of speech and, like how the brain stores language and things. It's sort of not my not my wheelhouse really. It was challenging I was amazed kind of how rusty I was at reading academic papers and looking at models and interpreting them.

Cuz like you say, my way of [00:25:00] writing about language has always been, this is an interesting word, let me tell you about how it's connected to Latin and Greek or, or the Germanic tree or whatever it might be. and that's been my shtick for a long time. So to walk outside of that and suddenly start talking about some quite high level stuff was yeah.

I had to make sure I was , I had to make sure I was kind of on my toes with it. Definitely.

**Mark:** in a way I think it, it's an advantage to, to have a general knowledge, but not the very specific knowledge because it makes you think, well, how, how would I understand that? How, how can I explain this to myself? Then you're already halfway there to explaining it to your readers. Yeah.

**Aven:** Yeah. It helps you with that expertise problem because in fact, you're not an expert in those specialized components anyway.

**Paul:** Yeah. I, I guess you become your own audience in that respect. It's kind of like .

If you can get it down to a, to a level where you can understand it, then that's the level that you need to pitch your As. So yeah, some of those technical chapters yeah, I read them back now, this is the first book that I'm really kind of [00:26:00] proud of. That sounds bad, but , I think a lot of writers will tell you the same thing that.

Because you need to be really self-critical, I guess. Cause you need to, I mean, I'm sure you'll do the same with your work as well, that you'll, you'll read it and redraft it and redraft it and redraft it because you notice this bit doesn't work or this bit needs to go before this bit or this bit needs to come out and this bit needs to be explained differently.

So you're constantly looking at what you've done really critically and it's difficult to turn that off. Even when it goes to print and you're sat there holding a hard copy of it and it's in a shop. It's difficult to stop going, oh, actually, you know, I think I was maybe closer in an earlier draft with this section, or maybe I should have put this chapter before this one, or, or whatever it might be.

It's really difficult to stop doing that even when it's finished. But this is the first book that I've, I'm kind of reading through, especially those sciencey chapters and I'm like, this is, this is really good . I'm really proud of this. I didn't think I'd ever be able to explain this sort of stuff and, [00:27:00] and there it is.

So, yeah, it's it's, yeah, it's been a challenge and it's taken me out of my comfort zone, definitely. But yeah, I'm really, really happy with it.

**Aven:** Well, I think you should be. I agree. I think it's, well, you know far be it for me to be the person who's in a position to make this kind of judgment, but I think it's well written and clear and engaging.

It's engaging. No, I really do think so. And I think it's interesting because you frame it with these questions and you have a conversational tone and you make, you know, mild jokes along the way in a pleasant and charming way, and it's all great. But it's not as, I don't know how to say this in a way that...

it's not as flippant as it maybe could be, which is good. So let me be clear here, . Yeah. But I think that it's, it's engaging without being please do not take this the wrong way without being entertaining. I don't think it's about, you know, that that's sort of making language entertaining, which is fine.

Yeah. And I have no problem with that. And making language [00:28:00] entertaining is something, you know, many of us try to do a lot of the time and that's fine. But I think this book maybe sits in a slightly different place where it is engaging because it's making you think and it's thoughtful and it sounds like you're having a conversation with your clever friend down the pub, rather than doing a sort of game show about Isn't this funny with a comedian?

Oh, that's

**Mark:** what I mean. Yeah. Yeah. You, you bring out the, what's interesting about the topic without having to do. Yeah, a lot of kind of window dressing around it to sort of make it sound more interesting than it is. You do a good job of kind of really showing why the thing actually is very interesting.

**Aven:** Yeah.

I think that's a, that's a good way of what I was trying to, to say, and, and please like those, those listening who maybe have different kinds of books, that's not a criticism of different ways of doing it. Yeah. I just thought it was something that struck me as I was reading that it is engaging, but it's a different kind of engaging than some popularizing approaches out there.

Yeah. [00:29:00]

**Paul:** That's good. No, I, that's I'm, yeah, I'm glad you said that as well, . It's really good. . Thank you. Yeah. . I, I, you know, that's a really good point cuz I remember when I first started writing about language, Haggard Hawks came out just after Mark Forsyth's Etymologicon, which was massively popular all over the world.

And he has that very kind of, He's still obviously really accurate and he still gets facts across, but he is almost like a kind of comic writer. He's very wryly witty alongside everything. . And a lot of publishers, I think wanted that mark two out of me, and I kind of was always, no, I'd rather make the information interesting on its own and let it speak for itself almost in Yeah.

Hopefully, hopefully that's what this book's pitched at. It's not kind of like you said. Yeah. Not flippant. That's not to say that Mark's work's flippant.

**Aven:** It's just No, flippant's not quite the right word, but it's not yeah. It's, it's just pitched differently. Yeah. I'm thinking a little bit of you know, the Greg [00:30:00] Jenner podcast,

You're Dead to Me, which is very good. It's a podcast about history and he has a historian and a comedian on and they talk and it's good, well-researched history and they talk about really interesting things. But it is framed as a comedian and a historian and you know, this is going to be a comic approach to historical topics.

I like it very much. I enjoy it very much and it does a really good job of getting the history across within that framework. But it's a particular kind of framework that says, you're, you're coming at this for entertainment and you'll learn some stuff along the way. Yeah. And that's fine and, and sensible, but I don't think that's what this particular book does and .

and I like that about it. So good.

**Paul:** Yeah. I'm

**Aven:** sort groping for how to categorize it. .

**Paul:** Yeah. No, I think, cuz I think that's my kind of, yeah, that's my sort of style of writing, I think is not overtly let's make this funny and Yeah. I'm gonna tell you some stuff along the way. It's more, the stuff on its own is interesting enough, so I'm gonna kind of package it in a way that's hopefully I'm gonna

**Aven:** pull out and highlight the parts [00:31:00] that are interesting and exciting.

Yeah, yeah. In themselves. Yeah. Yeah. And I think you do a good job of that. Good. Oh,

**Paul:** thank you.

**Mark:** And the other thing I wanna say just so it's, you know, clear I mean yes, it's, it's certainly very accessible to, you know, a lay audience, but for those potential readers out there who do know more about language and linguistics, just given the breadth of stuff that you cover, there's a lot in there that I didn't know about, or I sort of vaguely, had a, an idea about this, but that it, you know, existed but never really, properly learned anything about it before. Yeah. So there is a lot in there to interest, I think all levels of, of readers. Oh, that's good.

**Paul:** That's good. Yeah. Cause that, that's, that's always my worries. I'm kind of. Especially as when Haggard Hawks first started. The first people who followed it really were, were probably people like yourself. It was fellow language bloggers and language writers who work a large part of their work is online and they were kind of the first people to discover it organically cuz you find stuff on Twitter and then they share it to their audience.

So that first, I don't know, that [00:32:00] first 500,000 followers on twitter or something was, was a lot of other writers and other people from the same field. And then when it started to get picked up from like Buzzfeed and and Huffington Post and stuff, suddenly this great waft of people who don't have that kind of background, but have the same kind of interest came in as well.

So that's what's made me walk this line between the two, the two audiences I guess. So yeah, I, I'm glad that I'm glad that you said that, that, that it's not yeah, it doesn't, it doesn't sort of talk down to you if you've already got some background in this.

I did want to kind of, I, I had it kind of weirdly had it in my head that I wanted there to be something on every double page that even if you knew the topic, maybe it would be explained in a way that you maybe hadn't heard before, or that there would be a case study or an example that you've maybe not come across before.

So I always tried to hopefully pick like, I remember doing it right in this section. It's on the dialect continuum. And the classic example of that is always the Romance languages and how they're all related to each other. And I wrote up [00:33:00] this big section about how you can start in Sicily and move up through all the regions of Italy and then you can go across Southern France and you'll hear all these things.

And on a map it's different countries that have different languages, but on the ground it's one long kind of chain that just blends into each other and I wrote this big section up based around the Mediterranean, and then I thought, no, that's the example that everyone bloody uses. So I was, I've been the whole thing and I was like, no, I'm gonna write a different dialect continuum. And I, I ended up doing the Turkey one out, out into Russia from the Black Sea. And that was so much more interesting for me, and I thought, yeah. Hopefully that's an example that maybe doesn't get, isn't in that

**Aven:** intro textbook that everyone else has read.

Yeah. Yeah.

**Paul:** So I, that was always in the back of my mind is that, even if you do know this material, hopefully it's explained in a way or there's something alongside it that's, takes it outside of something you're already familiar with.

. .

**Aven:** Well, I think you succeeded. So there you go, . Thank you.

**Paul:** I was so nervous, so nervous about this book, honestly. So yeah, anything like, [00:34:00] any good feedback, I'll, I'll definitely take it.

**Aven:** So that brings me just moving away from the book a little bit though I suspect it'll come back to it. So the last time we spoke was October of 2016, or not the last time we spoke, but the last time we interviewed you. Yeah. Oh, wow. Which is, that's mad Feels like essentially decades ago . Yeah. realize it's not quite 10 years, but I mean, it's a fair number.

Yeah.

But so since 2016 then, , this is a rather large question, that decades ago time how's, how's things gone? How's things changed? What's been going on ? And I realize that's a rather big question, but, you know, when we spoke to you, you'd been doing Haggar Hawks for a while. You'd had a couple books out, but Yeah.

I feel like the social media landscape blogs maybe even interest in language and Linguistics have the world has changed fairly [00:35:00] substantially since 2016. Yeah. And I don't know if you can cast your mind back there to even remember what it was like then, but are there, are there trends or differences are, how are you finding, sort of making a career in this field, going in this last while?

**Paul:** That's a really good question. Yeah, I, I'm thinking like 2016 cuz 2016 was the Brexit year over here. . .

**Aven:** Yeah, that's right. It just happened that summer. Yeah.

**Paul:** Yeah. It kind, that kind of feels like a bit of a tide mark. Everything before then, like there was the 2012 London Olympics, which was like super and open and vibrant and then .

kind of Brexit happened and it was just, everything's just been a little bit sour ever since then. And I think especially being predominantly on social media, You're at the sort of coal face of that a lot of the time it's people have just suddenly start taking.

Yeah, taking a lot of that out on social media, which is, it's understandable. So yeah, [00:36:00] I think my personal Twitter account hasn't really changed cuz I've just, I'm not interested in arguing with people on that. But because I like to subtweet the news on Haggard Hawks that sort sort of 2016, then the sort of downward slope from then threw me into some of those conversations sometimes.

and I think as well, weirdly, I, I've had this conversation with people before that I think too, in lockdown, I don't know whether it was the effect of lockdown and how everyone was suddenly really stressed and a bit anxious and, you know, it was a horrible experience that everyone went through.

Or whether it was the fact that the account Haggard Hawks got so big at that point, just like the replies and things just became a little bit snide sometimes and I was just like, no, I'm not really interested in that anymore. I don't really read the replies ever anymore. Whereas I, one of the early days of Haggard Hawks, I used to love getting into conversations with people about it and if someone asked a question, I would go and research it and come back to them and explain it and all the rest of it.

I love that kind of back and forth of it now, and now I kind of don't, I just [00:37:00] leave it to run in the background and hope it sort of looks after itself. So, yeah. And in terms of like the social media landscape, I think that's changed a lot in those what, six years? It feels like maybe things that, well, I was gonna say politically things sort of feel like they're maybe starting to turn a page a little bit. But then again, you know, just the last couple of weeks Twitter's had a new wave of things happening to it. .

**Aven:** Yeah. New existential threats.

**Paul:** Yeah. Which is lovely. . Yeah. So that's another we'll weather

**Aven:** that. Have you tried out Mastodon yet?

**Paul:** I, you know, one of my mates text me and he was like, have you joined Mastodon yet?

And I was like, no, not yet. And he went, well, I'm gonna steal Haggard Hawks and I was like right. I'm getting on this straight away . So I, yeah, I've pitched the tent, but I'm, yeah, I'm not in it yet. So I've got I've got Haggard Hawks at Mastodon, whatever it is, just, just in case. This things like objectively it's hilarious, but kind of personally I'm really sad about it because I really, I really do love Twitter.

I think [00:38:00] it's great and my, and my personal feed, I follow loads of photographers and loads of comedy writers and lots of art history accounts and stuff that I just love having to look at every day. I absolutely love it. And professionally as well. There is something, I think actually this is probably another one of these things that's changed maybe in the last sort of six years, Twitter kind of democratizes writing, I guess in a way. Especially over here, I think in the last few years publishing has become very much like, it's not the quality of your work, it's who you are. And so you look at, I was gonna say the top 20 books on Amazon. You look at the top 100 books on Amazon in the UK and they'll all be from people who are already well established as something else before they got a book deal.

So it'll be TV chefs or it'll be TV presenters who are now writing children's books or novels or something. And publishing has gone down that route because that's a really easy way to make lots and lots of money, which for someone like me who didn't go to the right school, didn't go to the [00:39:00] right uni, and I'm not kind of, Oxford or Cambridge, and I don't live in London.

I don't talk the right way and I don't, like, can't just, you know, drop in on meetings and things down in the home counties or whatever. I turned up in publishing without any contacts or anything. And it's now the, it's so, so contact based now that what's nice about Twitter is that that kind of gives me something to bring to the table.

So it democratized that a little bit. You can go, yes, I don't have any contacts to call on and I don't have the right education and I didn't go to the right private school. I went to some bog standard , like state comprehensive in Tyneside, in the nineties, you know, , it's like after the Thatcher government, it wasn't, you know, the most affluent place in the world.

And so, yeah, I can't kind of bring anything, well I couldn't bring anything to the table when I first started. . Whereas Twitter was my in, I say yes, I don't have that, but I have this. So if that goes pop, I mean, I'm lucky in a way that I've got the blog and the website and everything that's all [00:40:00] set up now, whereas .

if this had happened around about that kind of 2016 time, I, I don't think I'd have probably ended up having the career that I have just because publishing's gone down a very different road, I guess in, in this country. Yeah. So, yeah, that's another kind of change.

I think that's happened kind of industry wide, I guess as, as a writer over the last few years it's, it's becoming harder and harder for untried right as over here to break through. Which is one of the reason why I like to help them. If people ask or email me about getting into this, I, I love it.

I absolutely love it cuz. Yeah, it doesn't happen enough that people get chances and get contacts and things now. So yeah. It's, it's becoming, it's becoming trickier.

**Aven:** Definitely. Yeah. I think there's a next, I think it's, I mean, I can't speak to the North American publishing scene maybe with quite the same knowledge, but I think in general, everywhere it's about coming with a ready made audience.

That's what they need. And if you don't have a ready made audience and a, a fairly clear [00:41:00] way that you are going to use that audience to, you know, convince that audience to buy your book. Yeah. They don't have the. Publishers don't do the promotion anymore. Yeah. Is what I mostly hear. Yeah. If there's, you have to be the promoter and Oh, definitely.

Definitely. If they don't think you're gonna be able to do that promotion, then it doesn't matter what the content of the book is. Yeah. And I mean, I certainly, that's never not been true to some extent, but I think it's the balance shifting

**Paul:** seems to be. Yeah, definitely. I mean, I, in a way, I kind of understand it because publishing, again, it's this kind of six, seven year thing that a publishing was sort of at the tail end of that.

Like DVDs were wiped out by streaming and CDs were wiped out by Spotify and MP3s and iPods and all that. And there was a real kind of panic that bookshops and traditional publishing was gonna get wiped out by Kindles and e-readers. So I kind of understand why for a time publishing went down that, [00:42:00] what's the easiest way to make a cheap book kind of route.

Oh, it's the, you know, get. Stories written by celebrities because they have a million Twitter followers or whatever. I kind of understand why they did that to weather that storm. But now, I mean, publishing just had the best, most profitable year for 10 years this year. So it's like well you've weathered maybe they could start taking chances again.

Yeah, exactly Right. Yeah, it's sort of but they're not, they're kind of still playing it very safe and it's, it's and it's difficult as well because it if, I mean, it's the nature of the beast, but if you give a, a book contract to a very, very famous person, all of the newspapers are gonna want to interview that person and review that book and all the radio stations are gonna want that person on, and all the book festivals are gonna want that person there. And that's taken a slot of a lot of untried authors who are maybe publishing their first book and just want one little opportunity to just get into a different realm and the more famous faces that are being elevated in, into a, a [00:43:00] different industry, alongside one that they're already in. It kind of overshadows everyone else, so, yeah, it's, it's becoming tricky. It's definitely becoming tricky, but I mean, that's the reason why I set Haggard Hawks up in the first place was that nobody cared.

nobody cared who I was. And yeah, but I, I mean the book, Haggard Hawks came out and it wasn't reviewed anywhere. And it wasn't even in my local shop , cause nobody knew who I was or what I was doing. And I had a conversation with my agent. He was like, well, you know, you have to sometimes do a lot of this stuff yourself.

And I was like, oh, okay. Now I'm just sort of sat at home waiting for the royalty checks to turn up . So yeah, it was, that was kind of the reason almost why I set it up was, was because no one was interested. Having said that, this book that's just come out, I mean, I'm a lot further down the road now.

This book hasn't had any press at all. It's not, not been reviewed in any newspapers. So it's really, it's become quite difficult to even for, I mean, I'm [00:44:00] much more, you're a

**Aven:** fairly established author

**Paul:** at this point. Yeah, yeah. It's, yeah, it's difficult to, even at this stage to get your foot in the door sometimes.

But that, you know, maybe, maybe things will change and, and publishing will start taking a few more chances in, in the next few years once it sort of shakes off that idea that it doesn't have to fight so hard. Yeah. . Hopefully, hopefully,

**Aven:** Well, we'll do our best to reach our vast, vast audience with their immense amount of disposable wealth to convince them to

**Paul:** Yeah, that, that's another issue. Well, no one's got any money in them, .

**Aven:** That that is an ongoing concern, I would say for many people in the world. Definitely. But but you know, I can't imagine, put it this way, I think that your book could function as an intro textbook. But not at the price that a textbook normally costs.

I don't know exactly what price it's selling for, but I can confidently state that it will be less than a university textbook

**Paul:** would cost. Yeah, that's true actually. Yeah. [00:45:00] I had to buy a couple of old textbooks to do the research for this and I was looking at them online and that's like 45 pound and stuff.

I, yeah. , I'll I'll go around the local second hand shop and see if they , see if they've got a copy and yeah, it's pricey .

**Aven:** Exactly. So think of this everyone as your opportunity to get that level of information at a different price point. ,

**Paul:** I'll take that. Yeah, we should put that on the cover.

**Aven:** University content for bargain Basement prices.

I don't know if it's bargain basement, but anyway,

**Paul:** that's it. Put that on the dust jacket in quotes. I like it.

**Mark:** So you, you mentioned that, you get more snide comments and things back these days. In what other ways do you think the, audience has changed? Are they, more aware or less aware of, you know, language and linguistic kind of stuff? Yeah. Are they misinformed about stuff more now or,

**Aven:** or has the, that [00:46:00] sort of degree of peevery . Yeah. That's changed at all, would you say ?

**Paul:** Yeah. I'd tell you what, one thing that has changed, I remember weirdly, I remember back when I first started, the word that springs to mind instantly is Snollygoster. Which, as six, seven years ago. I mean, it's 10 years ago now since I set up Haggard Hawks now. That was an odd term that no one really knew. And now you'll see that in the press , it'll be in a newspaper. And it's I mean, I can't, I'm not saying that I deserve all the credit for pulling that word out of obscurity.

I absolutely don't. But it, it almost feels, it sort of, maybe it's the social media thing maybe that, that there's been a sort of wealth of language books and there's a lot more bloggers and a lot more language writers and things and, and podcasts like yours. Like there is many more kind of avenues now to get, to get information out.

So it almost feels like things that were quite obscure 10 years ago now maybe aren't so [00:47:00] obscure. It's almost like it's like what you were saying before, that kind of level of the kinda laymen interest is almost sort of higher in some respects. The sort of floor. Yeah. Yeah. It's like, and maybe that is the social media thing that, you know, if you are on your commute now, if you've got an iPhone, you've, you can.

Go on Twitter and learn stuff. . or go on a blog and learn stuff. Whereas before you would, you know, maybe sit and read a paper or read a novel or something, suddenly you've got all the world at your fingertips and you can fill up your social media feeds with whatever knowledge you want. So there's this maybe drip feed of knowledge has raised the bar a little bit almost.

So yeah, there, there's been a shift definitely in that direction. I think that, people are generally more attuned to stuff. What's annoying a little bit is one of the things I've always tried to do with Haggard Hawks is only use words and only talk about words that have like a really traceable past and that come from responsibly written dictionaries.

And I'm starting to see lots of It's the [00:48:00] kind of Uber Facts thing of the, people are sharing words and I'm like, don't, it's not really strictly speaking a word that's just, it's only ever existed on the internet. . Yeah. Yeah. that's always the sort of stuff that I steer clear from.

It's one of the reasons why I did this. People used to buy me, like for Christmas presents, like books that were like 1,001 funny words. And they, they only ever have existed in books that have titles like that. Like they've, they don't have any, they don't have any independent records. They've just been sort of passed around from one to the other for years and years and years.

I noticed this, just this week actually. I was what was I looking for? What was the, I've I wanted to subtweet a certain new Twitter owner, I wanted a word that meant like really thin skinned and unable to take ridicule . And so I kind of went searching for one and I found this word rectopathic which is defined in a book that I've got here, which is one of these thousand and one funny word kind of things as [00:49:00] overly sensitive to criticism or overly sensitive for ridicule or something.

And I thought rectopathic, like. That's not what that would mean. I can't kind of figure out what that is. So I, got my detective hat on and went sort of searching and there was a book published in the fifties, I think in America that listed this book and that was the earliest thing that I could find it.

And that said rectopathic, this is what this means. And it was one of these, you know, 2000 words you never knew kinda thing. Right. And I'm absolutely convinced that the person who compiled that book made that word up. Right. Absolutely convinced of it. And I think they're probably trying to be witty cuz rectopathy is the field of medicine that deals with back passages, shall we say.

Your rear end. Yeah. . So I think they've maybe tried to be a bit witty and go, you know, they're very yeah, very sensitive. There's a connection there, , so I think they've maybe kind of made that up. And then that word's just been passed around through all of these books and it's never really been used and it's never existed anywhere else.

And I'm seeing words like that now crop up on, [00:50:00] Twitter or on certain kind of feeds and things. And I'm like, no, that's not, that's not a proper word. You're doing language wrong. . .

**Aven:** Well, it, it's, it's a little bit like the version oh, there's a term for it now and I've forgotten what it is. There's this term for the, the Wikipedia problem where something gets erroneously added to Wikipedia with a bad source or with no source or, you know, very, yeah. And that's not true. And then some journalist is looking something up, journalists or other authors, but obviously journalists are often, you know, trying to do things really quickly and look things up and they see it on Wikipedia and they don't check the source.

Yeah. And then they cite it in an article and then someone comes along and finds the article and says, oh, that's a good citation. And puts that citation into the Wikipedia article. And now the Wikipedia article has a, a citation, and now the next journalist who comes along will look at the thing and maybe they will check the sources and they'll, oh no, no.

It was in the New York Times. Okay, well fine. . And now that's, and it's now [00:51:00] like it's unremovable that will never be removable ever again. That's a, a new thing that exists. And there's a term for it that I was listening to a podcast, of course. Cause everything in my life comes from podcasts. But where there was a particular, particular term for it, and I can't remember what it was.

And. that's what you're talking about though. I think it has existed. Wikipedia has obviously exacerbated that problem, but it's existed before wi I mean, it comes out of, I like, it's, it happens in a scholarship too. There's what you know of the fact one of the favorite ones is the idea that Carthridge was salted by the Romans.

Right. That they plowed under and salted it, was made up somehow. God only knows why by an author in an early edition of Cambridge Ancient history in the late 1800s. And it, you know, now it was in a very reputable source and it has been cited for a hundred and however many years.

It's not true. That's the first time it's mentioned. It's complete nonsense. The Romans wouldn't have used how much salt would, that was so expensive. Think about it for minute, it's not [00:52:00] physically possible

salt is really expensive in the ancient world. So, you know and, and they were resettling Carthage a hundred years later. Anyway, it's, it's ludicrous. But it's, it's been cited so much by people who have been in good faith using historical sources, that it's, you can debunk it as many times as you want.

It's never going to vanish because Yeah. Yeah. It's become a figure of speech. Right. Well, and that too, but no, it's we'll never be able to dig that out. And I think these word lists and it's like like the terms for group names for animals. Yeah, there's a bunch that are definitely real ones that get used, and then there's a, yeah.

Big number of ones that are only ever found in lists of group names for animals. .

**Mark:** Well, it's sort of nice to know that people were writing those, you know, 1000 words you've never heard of books like back in the 13th century.

**Aven:** Yeah. I mean, what is Isidore of Seville, [00:53:00] name checked in your book, if not somebody who wrote exactly 2000 words, you never knew the origins of

**Paul:** Exactly that. Yeah. There's people, and

**Aven:** once they were written there and, and, and his stories that he told there are still circulating . Yeah. That's just get

**Paul:** That's a good point. Yeah. Yeah, of course. Yeah. This is a lot older than, it's a lot older than the 2020s, that's for sure. .

**Aven:** But I agree with you that it, you know, the, the proliferation makes it that much harder to do anything about, you know? Yeah. Once, once it's, once it's circulating in so many different ways.

Absolutely.

**Paul:** I think it's that thing if you, yeah. You can't put the genie back in the lamp. It's like that sort of, once the story's out there and it's on a blog and it's on a website and then it's on a Twitter feed, then it, it, you can't, there's no debunking that you can do that's gonna cancel that out to any point.

Exactly.

**Mark:** Yeah. It's, sort of like ghost words, I guess. How we talked about dictionaries [00:54:00] in the famous example of dord. Yeah.

**Aven:** D or d, it's got misread as dord and it's in there now.

**Paul:** It's almost the equivalent of dord now being used to actually mean density in scientific literature as

**Aven:** if

**Paul:** they picked it up.

Yeah. They've actually kind of taken it on. Yeah. I'm sure that there is an example of that happening, and I'm trying to remember what it is. Oh, it's it's, yeah, it's the group terms thing. baboons is a troop ordinarily. But there was a comedy sketch over here in the eighties on a show called, Not The Nine O'clock News, which had Rowan Atkinson in it.

And he used in one of these sketches, he, he said it was a, a troop of baboons or as it's known a flange. And now primatologists use the term a flange of baboons.

So that's one of those things that's sort of taken the extra step

**Aven:** at least that's merely entertaining . Yeah. [00:55:00] I don't think it ruins our scientific understanding of the world. That's

**Paul:** true. Yeah. , and it's got a good etymological story behind it as well. If you can

**Aven:** trace it back and one that you can actually Yeah. If you can trace it to the exact moment,

**Mark:** Have you ever been tempted to like a trap street thing, put in a fake word somewhere and just see if anyone

**Paul:** Yeah. . Absolutely. Actually there's one in, in the book Hagard Hawks. There's a word in there that I just made up. Absolutely. Then I, I'm just waiting for it to turn up on one of these on one of these, or in another book or on one of these Twitter accounts. I think as well, years ago I might have put up on the blog and I'm just waiting. I'm, but now, see, this is my problem. I can't remember what it was. , I can remember the one from Haggard Hawks. I can still remember that because in the explanation of where this word comes from I name check some of my mates , I'd like make out that they're like 18th century dictionary writers or something.

And it's not, it's just, it was my housemate at the time, . [00:56:00] So I've always, I've always remembered that one in Haggard Haws. So yeah, there's a little trap in that one. I'm trying to think what the one on the blog was. Now I'm really annoyed that I can't remember what it. I'll have done the same thing. I'll have, I'll have credited one of my mates with taking it up, but said that they were a sort of 16th century dictionary writer or something.

Yeah. It'll be on there somewhere. So, so yeah, I've done a couple of a couple of little copyright traps if I ever spot one of them, I'm gonna, yeah, that'll be, that'll be a red letter there. Definitely.

It's interesting how it's changed. I, I'm thinking, yeah. I'm thinking about how it has changed online on Twitter over the last few years. . And it, it's almost like the bar being kind of lifted in some respects, and people are a lot smarter, but also there's a lot more, there's a lot more of that stuff.

There's a lot more of that a hundred funny words thing going around now as well. . . There's

**Aven:** a lot of people who want to do that sharing of information but aren't necessarily, and I, this makes, I don't, I don't want this to sound like I'm, you know gate [00:57:00] keeping. It is, language is perpetually fun and interesting, and there's a lot of that sort of, Ooh, I think I'm gonna talk about these interesting things.

And if you, if you come at that with, from that perspective and don't know how to differentiate your sources particularly well, for instance, then it's very easy to replicate those, those issues. Yeah. And then there are some out there that are just, I mean parallel issues. There's a whole bunch of Twitter feeds that are about the ancient world.

They put up pictures of ancient art or pictures of ancient statues or ancient facts. And you know, some of them are run by enthusiastic amateurs who sometimes get stuff right and sometimes get stuff wrong. And that's one thing. Yeah. But there's also a bunch that are run quite cynically by people who just want the clicks.

Yeah, absolutely. And they have no, clearly no concern at all about, cuz when people tell them that's utter, you know, that's completely not true that does, you know, they'll run it again the next week. They don't care. Yeah. And, and those, you know, so there is, and I think that's true in language too.

There are, you know, there's a [00:58:00] subset, there's people who maybe don't know where to get the best information. But then there are also some that are, by people who have no interest in the subject and are just using it because it's something that gets them clicks on Twitter. Yeah. And those ones, I think are the egregious ones where you do see a lot of those common myths and because, you know, they're, the fun stories or the, the best.

Yeah. Most attention grabbing or controversial or whatever.

**Mark:** Well, it's like that, that Ishtar Easter one, that crop keeps cropping up again and again. . , I wonder who started that

**Aven:** And because it's way better as a story than, well, we're not totally certain. . . Yeah.

And this is where the etymology stuff comes in. The folk etymologies are often much more fun than the, well, I don't know, dog probably comes from Celtic. We don't know where dog comes from. Yeah. Like , it's not a great, it's not a great story, but making something up,

**Paul:** you know? Yeah. And I think as well, those kind of, like you say, those kind of quite cynical accounts tend to be they'll just copy and paste [00:59:00] from each other and, and from other accounts and other websites and things that maybe aren't sort of, like you say, as responsible with the information.

So yeah, there's a lot of that kind of reinforcing the same stuff going on. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's interesting. I, I, there was one of these accounts, I won't name it, but they went through a phase of everything that I put on Haggard Hawks would turn up on there a like three, four days later.

**Aven:** I remember this, I also won't name it, but

**Paul:** and I had an email from them and they said, no, this, it's just a coincidence it's not happening.

And then me being me, I posted something on Haggard Hawks that had a really glaring typo in it, and then it turned up on that account a few days later with the same typo in it. . Oh no. I was like, oh, okay. So yeah, that email wasn't true , but yeah, it's interesting that everything kind just gets passed around, sometimes not in the most responsible way.

**Mark:** Well, you know what would be neat is a book about wrong etymologies, like [01:00:00] all the etymologies in it are, ones that are, incorrect folk etymologies and

**Aven:** stuff. Popular but untrue basically is the.

**Paul:** Oh yeah. That's a really good idea. Mark. You've gotta write that

**Aven:** Do I see a collab in the future here? ?

**Paul:** Yeah. Cause there's so many. If I see Posh explained as port out, starboard home one more time. I,

**Aven:** yeah, there'd be a whole chapter that was just, that was just false acronyms. Yeah. and Initialisms. Yeah. . Yeah. There's so many. I'm sure people, there are people who compile them, but yeah, one could, one could compile a list pretty fast, I think.

**Paul:** Yeah, yeah, definitely. You just need to read one of those other Twitter accounts,

copy and paste. Again, ,

**Aven:** but this time with a whole paragraph underneath, explaining what's wrong and what, The book would be called "well actually", well, [01:01:00] well actually dot dot dot, you know false etymologies and why they're wrong. . Yeah,

**Paul:** that's a great idea. Definitely Mark, you've definitely gotta write that

**Aven:** That's it. The next, that'd be fun. The next six videos are just gonna be you starting off with, well, actually,

**Paul:** here's why everything you thought was Right is wrong. ,

**Aven:** that's a Tiktok genre if I, I've ever heard one, but yeah. Yeah. True. Well, We could just keep chatting forever because this is very nice to catch up and to chat. But I have a one burning question with which I wish to end this. . You know, not, I don't want to end the conversation, but since by all logic, we do need to end it at some point.

here's the question that I, I need to know the answer to. It's very serious and very important. Will there be more episodes of Yes or [01:02:00] BS?

**Paul:** Oh yeah, there will be . I wasn't expecting that at all. I was really braced for something there. I know . Yeah. No. Yeah, they actually, you know, if I hadn't taken this book on, there would've been a lot more three seasons. Yeah. Yeah. And yeah, this book ended up being so massive and, and Ant has changed jobs and now works a lot down in Manchester.

So it, it's kind of, when I finished this, He changed his work schedule. So , it's just, yeah, it's been on the back burner for ages and every time we meet up, every single time. Cause I still see him every few weeks. .Oh, We'll, we'll do some more. I've got some great ideas. We'll do some more. We'll do a Christmas one, we'll do this even if we just do a one off, we'll, like, we'll, we'll do it, we'll get all the equipment back out.

Round at yours. Cause he's a voiceover artist. So he's he's got all the kit around to his and then something will come up and he'll be away and I'll not be able to do it. And or I'll have [01:03:00] some sort of book business coming up . So, yeah, it it, and it's just rolled on and it's rolled on and it's rolled on.

I, there will be definitely this is the problem though, is that last time we were out it was me and, and another one of my mates, Gav, who, anyone who follows me personally on Twitter will know that Gav is one of my best mates. And his entire sense of humor is based around taking the mickey outta me constantly.

That's the only joke that he has. And last time we were out, Anthony was like, well, why, why don't you do it with Gav? And I can see me and Gv trying to do this, and it's just, it, it'll just end up as like a rinsing competition. It'll just be him. just ever bringing me down, ever more pegs. Every single week. So yeah, maybe, maybe not with Gav.

Yeah. I'll, I'll run this by Ant again, when I see him, I'm sure I'm Well

**Aven:** tell him that there's a clamorous public Yeah. A clamorous public requesting more, but if anyone hasn't listened to the back catalog of Yes or BS podcast. Yes. If you, if you

**Mark:** haven't [01:04:00] heard of this podcast before you, you've got, you know, a real treat awaiting you.

Exactly. . This is, it's the funniest podcast out there, . And it's one that I always have to make sure I don't listen to when I'm out in public , because I will just suddenly burst out with maniacal laughter.

**Paul:** It's odd cuz like, I mean, it's been a while since we've done one, but every time we go out, Anthony is still annoyed about Mozart having a pet starling. And this comes up all the time. He'll go, I can't believe you got me with that starling fact. It comes up all the time. It's still a sore point. So, yeah, it's it's been a while, but it's still there in the background every time, every time we meet up . So, yeah. I, I'll I'm sure, well, Ant'll probably listen to this to be fair.

Yeah, I'll, I'll, yeah, we'll, we'll definitely get it sorted and we'll definitely do some more. It's when, when our, when our paths align, oh,

**Aven:** I mean, we are the last people to to hold [01:05:00] anyone to any kind of fixed schedule because we are terrible at doing the very many things we want to do in any kind of timely fashion.

So, you know, please don't take it as a criticism merely as our enthusiastic

support.

**Paul:** Yeah. I mean, we, I'm so glad that people enjoyed it and like yeah, it's great hearing that people are still listening to it and still laughing at it and stuff. Cause we absolutely loved doing it. It was so much fun. Yeah, it's, it's just, it's honestly just been scheduling for a, like the last Oh, I understand that.

Goodness. How many years? Yeah. Two years or something Now. Yeah, there will be, I'm sure of it. Cause we've both got a list of facts still that we need to do and

**Aven:** yeah, each of you held a, I'm sure have grudges you were holding against the other Absolutely. That you need to pay off, so

**Paul:** Absolutely. I'm still mad about that ghost ship fact

Right. I'm raging about that and what to say. This is the other thing as well, is that when we recorded that Ant went off on like a 15 minute diatribe about the history of the coal industry and how [01:06:00] Collier ships, what the Collier route across the Atlantic was and all this, and I sat there, thinking this isn't interesting, none of this is interesting.

Even people who are interested in coal ships aren't gonna find this interesting, and, and when he sent me the file across, he edited it all out and I was like, I had to sit through this.

So that's still a sore point. I still need to get him back for his listed collier facts. Definitely

**Aven:** Well now you'll, you'll be able to test him on whether he's read your book or not. Cause you can give him facts about like the Vernoulli effect in your mouth and things like that. That's true. See if he catches it.

**Paul:** Oh yeah, that's true. Spoiler alert. He won't have read it a hundred percent.

**Aven:** There you go. So now you've got a whole, a whole field of surprising facts that you know, in science no less. Yeah, that's

**Paul:** a good idea. I'll be like, well, you know, if you'd know this, if you'd read my book , that's really good. Yeah. I might drop that in. [01:07:00]

**Aven:** Especially if it is something that's not in your book that would be particularly

**Paul:** Yeah, set a real trap for him.

**Aven:** Yeah. Oh yeah. Of course I read that. I remember. It's true.

**Paul:** He's still sour because he didn't end up in the acknowledgements. This is the thing. Oh, you're a Oh, oh yeah. Yeah. I should have Tricky. Yeah, I put Gav in and all it says is Gavin Howard for no reason. I just, I thought it would be funny just, just to put his name in print for once.

**Aven:** Well this has been an absolute delight. Yes. And as I said, we'd be perfectly happy to just spend the rest of the afternoon chatting. Yeah. But we should be responsible people and not, probably. So let me ask you to go over the many and multifarious ways people can access your information and knowledge and wit on the internet and in person.

Where

**Paul:** can you be found? Yeah, well, HaggardHawks.Com is kind of the hub, I guess, the Haggard Hawks website, [01:08:00] and that'll link you to Haggard Hawks on Twitter plus me on Twitter, Paul Anth Jones, which is a terrible handle cuz everyone always gets it wrong. Yes. It's got an aitch in the middle of it. . So yeah, you can track me down there or paulanthonyjones.com for me, but I haven't updated that website for a donkey's, so maybe don't go there.

Haggard Hawks, just head for Haggard Hawks. You'll be fine. Everything's on there.

**Aven:** And the new book is called,

**Paul:** Why is this a question? And I think, is it is it out in Canada now? I don't know.

**Aven:** I don't should think so. I should check. I will. I

**Paul:** think it might be on its way, but I think maybe it's next year.

**Aven:** Right. Well, so thank you so much and it was a delight. Oh,

**Paul:** pleasure. Yeah.

**Aven:** And the book is a delight,

**Paul:** so good to speak you. Oh, thank you. Thank you .

**Aven:** And everyone should go out and buy it. Christmas presents, support more of the same, so that in six more years we can talk to you about. Something else. .

**Paul:** Yeah. Why is this also a question? I . [01:09:00]

**Aven:** Why is this still a question? Is actually what the second one should be .

**Paul:** Yeah. So I'm writing that down right now. .

**Aven:** It's all yours. All right. Well, we'll hopefully talk to you on Twitter or some other site soon,

**Paul:** Yeah, definitely. Oh, thank you so much guys. Honestly, I've loved that.

**Aven:** Oh, it was great. Bye

**Mark:** Bye bye.

**Paul:** Bye.

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**Mark:** Bye.