



**ENDANGERED:** American signing, which is based on Old Kentish Sign Language

# Old signing needs hand for survival

By **STEVE KNIGHT**

steve.knight@kosmedia.co.uk

A CENTURIES-old sign language thought to have been spread throughout America by Kentish settlers is on the worldwide endangered list.

Evidence of the use of Old Kentish Sign Language dates back as far as the mid-1600s, but is now thought to be extinct thanks to the rise of British Sign Language in its place.

It is also thought to be one of the forerunners of American Sign Language, as a number of 17th century settlers on the island of Martha's Vineyard near Massachusetts – the majority of whom knew how to sign – migrated from the Kentish Weald.

### At risk

“We’ve listed it as extinct because for a long period of time there has been no reported use of it,” said Dr Mark Turin, an anthropologist who helped compile the World Oral Literature Project.

“But we don’t know for sure that nobody uses it anymore and sometimes there’s quite a lot of disagreement about certain languages.

“But what we’ve done is collate and compile a database using information from three different sources, so don’t shoot the messenger.”

One of the earliest recorded uses of Old Kentish Sign Language is thought to be included in Samuel Pepys’ diary of 1666, when he describes how a deaf servant gave news to his master of the Great Fire of London.

Languages included in the World Oral Literature Project are judged to be at risk if there is a combination of few speakers and little enthusiasm or support for learning.

Others spoken in Britain which are also included on the endangered list include Cornish, Guernsey French, Scottish Gaelic, and even Welsh.

“The real question is, do we care about the past and do we care about where we come from?” said Dr Turin, who currently specialises in the various languages of the Himalayas.

“There are lots of buildings that receive lottery funding for their restoration even though nobody lives in them any more, and the same goes for animals, plants and so on.

“Languages are not just about words and grammar: they are vehicles for history, knowledge and a sense of identity.

“They provide a unique insight into human culture all over the world and help us to understand what makes people give up certain methods of communication in favour of new ones.”

The three sources researched for the project were the online linguistics journal Ethnologue, the Unesco Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger, and the work of conservation biologist Professor William Sutherland.

• *If you know how to use Old Kentish Sign Language please contact steve.knight@kosmedia.co.uk.*

## KCC’s ‘poor’ score

KENT County Council has received a ‘poor’ rating as part of Ofsted’s annual assessment of children’s services.

The authority had been warned the verdict was likely after the watchdog rated its safeguarding and looked-after children services as “inadequate” last month.

Areas of concern include the management and supervision of staff, low educational attainment of youngsters in care, and social workers with high caseloads.

KCC is one of just 12 councils across England judged to be performing poorly.

## University sit-in

STUDENTS occupied the Senate building at the University of Kent’s Canterbury campus on Thursday, as MPs in Westminster debated plans to raise tuition fees.

The sit in by about 20 students began on Wednesday evening, with protestors demanding the vice-chancellor, Prof Dame Julia Goodfellow “retract being a signatory of the letter published in the Telegraph supporting the government’s proposal”.

A spokesman for the group said the sit-in would go on “indefinitely”.

To see this search ‘james’ @ yourkenttv.co.uk



Julie Maddocks meets Chamber of Commerce chief executive Jo James to discuss changes facing businesses

# Race to stop police cuts clashing with Olympics

KENT Police Authority chairwoman Ann Barnes has written to the Home Office and asked for the timing of planned funding cuts to be reconsidered.

Constabularies across the UK will have their budgets slashed by 20 per cent over the next four years, with the bulk of the cuts – 14 per cent – coming in the next two.

Acting in her role as deputy chair of the Association of Police Authorities, Mrs Barnes has now asked the policing minister Nick Herbert to rethink the proposals. “2012 is a decisive year for

British policing,” she said. “Not only will there be the frontloading of cuts to funding taking place and the reduction of police numbers that will bring, but there is the biggest policing operation of all time taking place in the UK, namely the Olympics.

“I do appreciate that all new governments wish to move forward at pace but, if nothing else, please can some thought be given to the timing of all these changes.

“There is just too much going on at the same time, and public safety is not something we should take risks with.”

Kent Police expects to lose 500 police officers and 1,000 other members of staff as a result of the cuts.

Mrs Barnes has also reiterated her opposition to plans for police authorities to be replaced by directly-elected commissioners in 2012, claiming it would cost just under £2 million to hold an election in Kent.

“I strongly urge the Government to take time out to consider and reflect on everyone’s views,” she said.

“There is absolutely no need to rush headlong into this.”

## Globe Bathrooms

**Special Offer**  
Complete Bathroom Suite  
**£399**  
ask instore for details

**Special Offer**  
460mm Pivot Door  
**£199**  
Also available in 800mm & 900mm Please ask for details

**20% OFF**  
**EVERYTHING**  
Excludes Special offers & Ex-Displays

**SALE STARTS 29<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER**

32 Milton Road, Gravesend, Kent DA12 2RF

Opening Times: Mon-Sat 9am-5pm

Tel: 01474 533222 Ample Free Parking [www.globebathrooms.com](http://www.globebathrooms.com)