

Oxford English Dictionary News

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Editorial

The contribution made by members of the public to the revision of the *OED* is something for which we professional lexicographers never cease to be grateful.

The First Edition of the Dictionary benefited enormously from the willingness of private individuals to carry out local research which would otherwise have been impossible; an example of this research is described overleaf by Jenny McMorris in the latest of her fascinating reports from the *OED* archives, this time in relation to Charles Kingsley's use of the puzzling word *ochidore*.

The *OED* in its electronic incarnation is now able to incorporate such voluntary contributions even after the revised version of an entry has been published, as Juliet Field explains in her article. Finally, Jane Windebank sheds light on the tricky business of displaying exotic and unusual symbols in *OED Online* – an aspect of the publication process to which I would imagine few readers had given much thought, but something which we must

get exactly right if the *OED* is to present its information clearly and accurately.

This is perhaps a convenient point to mention that users of *OED Online* have just been given better access than ever to the information in the Dictionary: a wide range of enhancements have been made to the user interface, so that it is now possible to ask far more sophisticated questions of the Dictionary. (For example: which words of Hindi origin, and relating to food, entered English before 1900? Which verbs introduced into English since 1800 rhyme with *joust*?) The new interface for advanced searching has been developed in response to extensive feedback from users; so that the appearance of the Dictionary, like its content, is something to which everyone can make a contribution.

Peter Gilliver, Newsletter Editor and Associate Editor, *OED*

'Doh!' before Homer: the Appeals List and the process of continuous revision

I would be prepared to bet that many readers, on receiving this newsletter, turn first to the Appeals List. Among the reasons for this interest could be the hope of being able to make a contribution to the Dictionary and perhaps even beat *OED* staff at our own game; there is also the opportunity to gain an insight into work in progress.

Users of *OED Online* may have noticed that we have now introduced a refinement to the amalgamated version of the Appeals List, indicating how contributions and

research have changed the information originally provided, so that everyone has up-to-date information from which to work.



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Simpson, that is. Juliet Field acknowledges the value of your contributions to the Appeals List

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*Another interesting selection of quotations from the *OED* and its files*

From our point of view here in Oxford, this interest from the public is invaluable. Even given the wealth of resources already available to us, including our unique collection of data from voluntary contributors past and present, we cannot hope to track down all the evidence we need. Some of our contributors have only ever sent us one (sometimes crucial) piece of information, while some are amazingly prolific, even recruiting friends and colleagues to the task. Our earliest example to date of the exclamation 'doh!', for instance, is a one-off contribution, and an extremely significant one; whereas we sometimes feel that contributors such as our old friend Fred Shapiro at Yale must have sent a valuable suggestion for almost every entry in the book!

One of the most interesting aspects of the work I do is the introduction of such material, as it becomes available, to entries which have already been published online. As you know, we have the ability to refresh the existing online revised text every three months, at the time when the latest batch of new and revised entries is added. This enables us to continue to keep abreast of new research and developments, and to reflect the contribution of the 'Friends of the OED' as you respond to the challenge of the revised text. The changes we make include improving the bibliographic information in citations, adding earlier and later evidence to the paragraphs of quotations, and incorporating more up-to-date or detailed information into definitions, etymologies, lists of variant spellings, and so on. These changes can vary from the tiny to the dramatic, but all are significant; in some entries a six-month antedating can be vital, while others may be antedated by 10, 20, 50, or 100 years.

When we first started working on the entry for *doh*, it was easy enough to find post-Homer Simpson evidence (in the form 'd'oh!'), but we had a feeling that he wasn't

Then came another suggestion: that we should look at the 1940s British radio show ITMA

the first to express himself in this way. It was also, as with many of the performing arts, very difficult to find the evidence in print for Homer's expletive. While some of us were trying to resolve this difficulty, others hurried excitedly to find our copies of Anthony Buckeridge's 'Jennings' books for the earlier examples we knew we would find there. However, it was not long before even earlier suggestions came in from our readers, thanks to the Appeals List. References to Laurel and Hardy films were common, and the research team started to try to track down scripts for these. Then came another suggestion: that we should look at the 1940s British radio show *ITMA*, where our correspondent remembered hearing it. Sure enough, we were able to find

excellent examples in the scripts for this show held in the BBC's archives, and to use this material as a substantial antedating. This can be seen in the revised version of the entry for *doh*, published online in March 2002. Watch out in subsequent quarterly updates to see whether our search for a quotation from a Laurel and Hardy film is successful.

I could continue citing many similar examples; at the last count we had made nearly 550 substantive changes to the published revised text, as well as many more less obvious ones. These can be found not only in the main block of revised entries in the letter M, but also in the new entries which are now being added to *OED Online* throughout the alphabet. To give a few examples, the entries for *full on*, *full monty*, and *been there, done that* have changed since they first joined the Appeals List, and there is interesting added material in the current entries for *magnetic declination*, *male chauvinist*, *Maliseet*, and *merveilleux*.

Juliet Field, Senior Assistant Editor, *OED*

For your chance to contribute, see the Appeals List in this issue.

Hunting the ochidore: Charles Kingsley in the OED

'O! the blue ochidore! Look to the blue ochidore! Who've put ochidore to maister's pole?' It was too true: neatly inserted between his neck, and his collar as he stooped forward, was a large live shore-crab, holding on tight with both hands.

Charles Kingsley was, it seemed, the only man who had ever mentioned the word *ochidore*. Consequently, in 1901, when the relevant section of the *OED* was

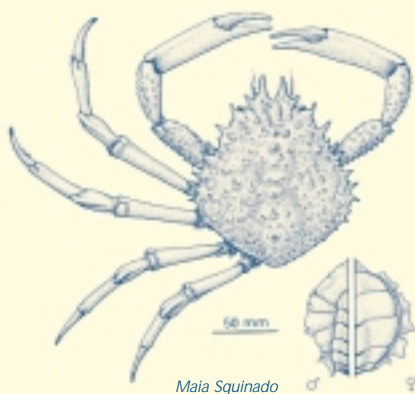
being prepared for publication, it caused a great problem, for this quotation from his novel, *Westward Ho!*, was the only evidence that could be found for the



Several terms in the March *OED Online* update are derived from the Latin word *minor*.

These include **minimum**, **minister**, **minor**, **minus**, and **minuscule** – but not **miniature** and **minion**, whose origins are different.

The newsletter of the *Oxford English Dictionary*



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word. Others began to investigate; their results came back to the Dictionary office, and we can follow their progress by reading the letters that survive in the *OED* archives.

First the vicar of Clovelly, T. L. Simkin, set out to explore the term in the village, where Kingsley had been rector. He had no success among the

local young fishermen, but he did eventually discover an elderly sailor of 85 who had known Kingsley well and understood at once what Simkin meant by the word *ochidore*. The old man said that it meant 'spider crab' but, when the rector asked if that was the same as the shore-crab, the ancient sailor replied that it was, but that the sailors always called it the spider crab. Mr Simkin felt that he had never heard anyone but Kingsley call it by the name 'ochidore'; it was therefore, he felt, not the Clovelly local name for it. The old sailor said he had often heard Kingsley call it so, but he had no idea where the writer got it from; he 'imagined he had invented it, he often called things by very funny names'.

The old sailor described the crab to the Clovelly rector; it was edible, with a round back, and its legs were very much longer than those of the common crab. It was this description which caught the eye of James Murray, the *OED* editor, when he read it, and he added to the Clovelly vicar's letter 'evidently *Maia Squinado* the large spider crab, of which this is a good description'.

While these investigations were going on there was more exploration by E. L. Brandreth, a London barrister and a devoted Dictionary man, working hard in the British Museum. Charles Kingsley's daughters were invited to help. Miss Rose Kingsley did not reply when approached; her sister, Mrs Mary St Leger Harrison, the widow of a former rector of Clovelly, did reply, but simply to say that she felt sure that *ochidore* was only a North Devon coast word and – feeling delighted to have dealt with that – to invite the letter-writer to an afternoon tea. In the end Brandreth suggested that 'the errors of Kingsley, himself a noted naturalist' should not be shown up. However, James Murray did not approve of Brandreth's proposed wording: 'A name maybe humorously invented by Kingsley for some kind of crab, as the name appears not to be known on our English coast.' The Dictionary entry for *ochidore* which eventually appeared in 1902 simply quoted the passage from *Westward Ho!*, and appended an extract from the Rev. Simkin's letter recording the recollections of the old man of Clovelly.

Jenny McMorris, Archivist, *OED*

The *OED*'s special characters

The subject of this piece is not in fact the staff of the Dictionary, but rather the characters and symbols which are non-standard in the English language, and known to typographers as 'special sorts' – or, less esoterically, the thousands of alphabetic, mathematical, and assorted obscure symbols that pepper the text of the *OED*.

Well, I had to find some way of grabbing your attention for a topic not generally known for its entertainment value!

The special characters in the *OED* data are recorded in code form known as 'character entity references', each symbol having its own unique code. Some of the more commonly occurring characters in the Dictionary, such as é, æ, â, etc., can be displayed in HTML (hypertext markup language, the code used to mark up web pages) – which is how you come to be reading them

now if you are looking at the online version of *OED News*. But what about characters that don't belong to standard HTML, such as characters from non-Roman alphabets, mathematical symbols, and the like?

Before *OED Online* was launched, it was decided that the special characters should be displayed as inline GIF images. 'GIF', by the way, is shorthand for Graphics Interchange Format. Downloadable fonts are available on many web sites for the purpose of displaying special characters, but we wanted to make the *OED Online* site



Words and phrases covered in the March *OED Online* update could help you to...

...migrate a million miles with the Milanese military...

...mildly mill minerals in the Midlands...

...feed mints to a miniature minotaur at midnight...

...mirthfully mime a minuet with a minstrel...

as user-friendly as possible. GIF images, despite not being cutting-edge technology, have the advantage of taking up minimal amounts of memory, and are quick to download. Also, the ALT text feature (the HTML coding responsible for displaying a text description of a graphic on a web page) means that users with older versions of browsers which are unable to display graphics can identify the character at least by its entity name.

Once we'd made the decision on how to display the special characters, we set about analysing the Dictionary data to identify exactly which characters had to be produced. Then the task of commissioning approximately 2,500 hand-drawn GIF images lay ahead.

Going online posed a challenge for displaying special characters in the sense that there is a conflict between the way the data is described for the web, on the one hand, and in the *OED* text itself on the other. More specifically, a special character is listed in the *OED* data table only once, but it can in theory exist in many forms in *OED Online*, depending on where in a particular entry the character appears: headword, etymological form, and so on. In fact, there are at least 12 potential areas in which a character may appear within an *OED* entry.

To illustrate this, take a look at the revised *OED* entry for *meliphane* (noun).

Note that Greek text occurs twice in the entry – as a form in the etymology, and in the smaller-type 1868 quotation within the etymology. The size, the font, and even the colour of a character is dependent on the context in which it appears. So,

in this entry, we can say that the character ‘Greek lower-case epsilon with acute accent’ occurs twice, as a 12-point character and as an 11-point character (which is blue in the online version).

The goal was to commission a GIF image for every special character, no matter how infrequently it appeared in the data

What we wanted to achieve for *OED Online* was a digital approximation of the printed text of the Second Edition, and the goal was to commission a GIF image for every special character, no matter how infrequently it appeared in the data. The ε symbol for a scruple, the apothecaries’ unit of weight, for instance, might reasonably be expected to occur in a definition or quotation, but never in a headword or etymology. In fact, it occurs only once – in definition text. Pinpointing exactly where each special character occurred in the Dictionary was

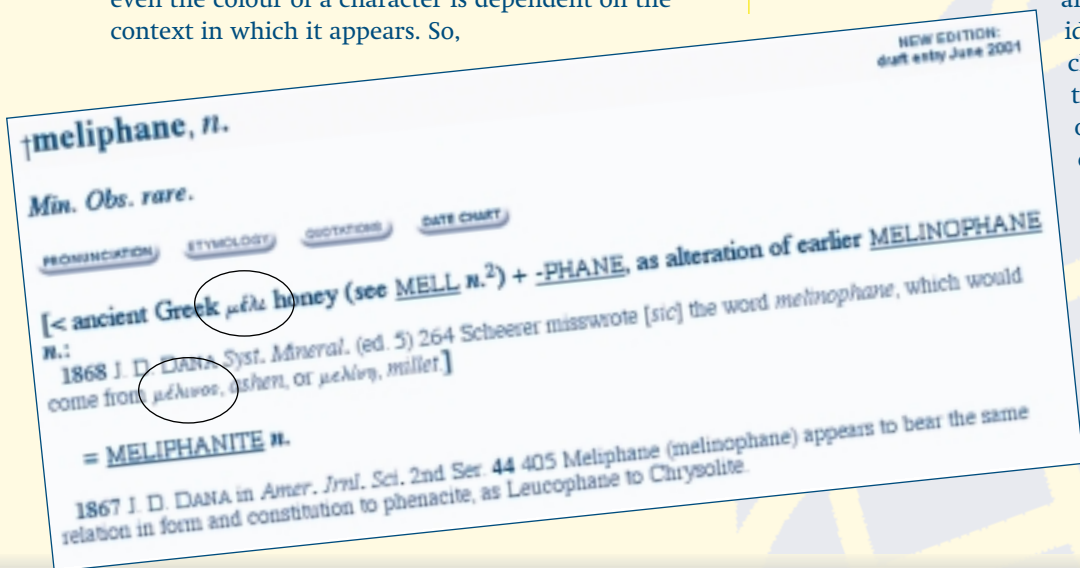
carried out by a lengthy process of analysis. This involved cross-checking data from a program which had parsed the characters into 12 different ‘sets’ against the entities in the *OED* database. Eventually, we arrived at a figure of approximately 2,500 special characters to be produced as GIFs out of a potential 12,000.

Agfa Monotype, the specialist typographers, were commissioned to produce the GIF images for the *OED*. They worked with great patience to come up with images we were happy with; and HighWire Press, *OED Online*’s developer and host, implemented the GIFs on the web site, applying the finishing touches just a few weeks before the site went live.

But the work didn’t stop there. Each quarterly update brings another batch of new entities to the Dictionary, and the process of identifying new special characters for displaying on the web site is ongoing. As of March 2002, *OED Online* contains around 2,950 special character GIFs.

And counting...

Jane Windebank,
Web Site Production Editor, *OED*



Sporting terms in the March *OED Online* update include **middleweight** (boxing), **midfield** (football), **midfield** (cricket), **Minnesota shift** (American football), **minor league** (baseball), and **minor suit** (bridge).

Appeals

Words or phrases which appear on the Appeals List are those currently being drafted or revised for the *OED* for which the documentary evidence is incomplete. Often these are slang or colloquial items which cannot be researched in specialist texts and are most likely to be found by a general reader in non-specialized or popular literature.

Usually the appeal is for an earlier example than our current earliest (e.g. 'antedate 1970' for a word for which our earliest example comes from 1970), but sometimes the appeal is for an interdating where there is a large gap in the *OED*'s quotation evidence (e.g. 'interdate 1589-1910'). Occasionally we ask for a postdating (e.g. 'postdate 1875'), if an editor feels that an item being revised is still current but has failed to find any recent examples through the usual avenues of research.

do someone's head in (*confuse, annoy, etc.*) antedate 1989
easy peasy antedate 1976
get one's head (a)round (*comprehend, master*) interdate 1922-81
never-heard (*adjective; as distinct from never-heard-of*) antedate 1989
nickel-and-dime (*adjective*) antedate 1937
nickelize (*verb*) postdate 1890
niger (*noun: kind of goatskin*) postdate 1952
niplet (=nipple) interdate 1648-1996
noddee (*person nodded at*) postdate 1868
noir (*noun: person with black hair*) postdate 1687
notice (*noun: announcement read to a church congregation*) postdate 1967

Please send submissions to oed3@oup.co.uk

Interesting antedatings

Revision of the entries in the March *OED Online* update has revealed an earlier origin than previously thought for many words, including:

middle-aged (antedated to 1536 from 1608)
migrate (1623 from 1697)
migration (c 1527 from 1611)
mile-a-minute (1883 from 1957)

millimetre (1797 from 1807)
milliner (1449 from 1529)
mind-bending (1952 from 1965)

Quotable quotes

Thought-provoking snippets from the *OED* quotation files:

the speed of a striking snake...

1932 *Discovery* Nov., Pythons are so sluggish that they have been nibbled to death by striped mice.

...nipping out to the corner shop...

1843 *Ladies' Repository* Mar., Katrine's present errand..was to procure morphine for her mother.

...musical strains...

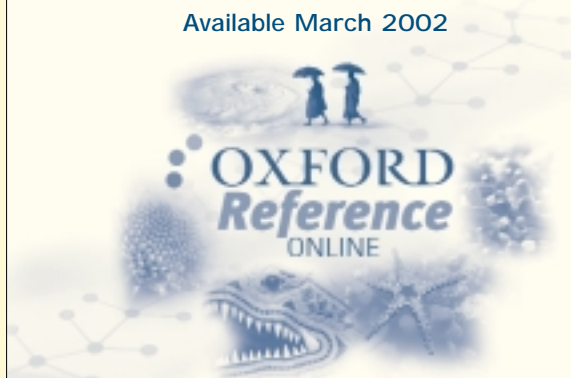
1676 T. Mace *Musick's Monument*, [In making a lute] First bring your Back and Belly together, and see if they will fit.

...and the perils of our work?

1958 J. Cannan *And be a Villain*, 'I approve of slang,' said Laura. 'It keeps a language alive and kicking. It's these fearsome words like - well, like finalize and motivate that should be barred. They're much more dangerous.'

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