

Oxford English Dictionary

News

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Editorial

Entries in the third edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* contain the same components as those in the first edition.

In both they are made up of headwords, parts of speech, variant spellings, etymologies, definitions, and illustrative quotation paragraphs, and give the earliest available evidence for each sense. Thus, the essence of the lexicographer's work in creating these entries has remained the same as those in the first edition.

There is a striking contrast, however, between the circumstances in which James Murray and the other early editors prepared entries for publication, and those in which the current *OED* editors work. Instead of the small corrugated-iron 'scriptorium' in Murray's garden, the *OED* now occupies a large office in the main building of the Oxford University Press. While lexicographers still use the files of 6X4 slips of paper to communicate with colleagues of the past and the future, for

many years now most work has been done using computers. The editors have recently begun to use a specially designed new system, which is a world away from the pen and paper of the first edition, and which is described in detail in this issue of *OED News*.

Another difference the original *OED* editors would notice if they were able to see the modern Dictionary offices would be the increase in the number of editors working on the project, and that many of these editors are women. This issue takes a look at the changing ways in which women have contributed to the creation and content of the *OED* since work on the first edition began over one hundred and twenty years ago.

Jemma Best, Newsletter Editor and Senior Assistant Editor, *OED*

The contribution of women to the *OED*

If you asked most people to imagine the offices of the *OED*, they would probably paint a picture of leather-book-lined shelves, with studious men consulting large tomes in dusty seriousness.

Visitors are often surprised to find that we work in a large, light and glassy office with all the usual information technology and online databases at our fingertips. Such an environment would have been unimaginable to the Dictionary's original compilers—and just as unimaginable would have been the representation of women at all levels on the staff. Women have always worked on the *OED*, just as they have always been quoted in it; when we began researching this article, however, it became clear that the interesting questions lie in the kinds of work women do, and did, for the *OED*, and in which ways and contexts their words have been used as quotation evidence in the entries.

Group photographs dating from the early twentieth century show that the staff of the *New English Dictionary* (as the first edition of the *OED* is known) was mainly, but not exclusively, male. The surnames of the few women, usually standing at the back of the group, reveal that their presence on the staff owes something to their illustrious male relatives. Henry Bradley's daughter Eleanor, and two of James Murray's daughters, Elsie and Rosfrith, for example, are recurrent figures. Eleanor Bradley was a member of Bradley's, and later Charles Onions's, editorial staff for thirty-five years, from 1897–1932. Elsie and Rosfrith, like all Murray's children, earned pocket money by sorting slips for their father, and as adults they went on to work as assistants on the

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More words that are older than you might think

editorial staff for over twenty years. It is difficult to be sure exactly how much responsibility these women were given, and how they interacted with the other editorial staff. We know that originally they were given fairly menial tasks, but that Eleanor, at least, went on to write definitions. She also prepared the entry for *make-up* and other compound headwords following on from the entry for *make*.

Several of the wives of male members of the *NED* editorial staff also became closely, if often unofficially, involved with the project. Ada Murray was instrumental in her husband's decision to accept the editorship, acted as his unpaid secretary for many years, read for the *OED*, and assisted the project in many other ways. During the First World War, Craigie's department was almost emptied of men, so his wife helped him to pre-sort material relating to the letter U. After the war was over, she, along with some of their daughters, continued to be on the payroll.

Many other educated, literary women helped out to various degrees with slip-sorting, proof-reading, sub-editing, reading for, and promoting the *OED* during this period. Among these were the writer, Harriet Martineau, the novelists Charlotte Yonge and Hilda May Poynter, and the historian Edith Perronet Thompson and her sister Elizabeth, who between them supplied over fifteen thousand quotations. In fact, as K. M. Elisabeth Murray argued in *Caught in the Web of Words*, the lack of other intellectual and scholarly opportunities available to intelligent women at the time made the response of women to the Dictionary 'particularly warm'. Women were not admitted to full membership of Oxford University until 1920, for example, and no woman was appointed to a full professorship there until 1948.

Staff photographs from a later period show many more female faces, as more women entered the workforce. Often, in fact, there are more women than men in the pictures taken during work on the *Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* in the 1960s and 1970s, and on the *OED3* staff, women outnumber men by roughly two to one. Women currently head four of the six main

editorial groups, leading the two groups working on general revision, the science group, and the bibliography group, with men running the etymology and new words groups. The position of Director, Editorial Projects, is also held by a woman, Penny Silva:



Rosfrith Murray

'I attended Rhodes University, where I was taught by the pre-eminent South African English lexicographers William and Jean Branford. As a new graduate I became one of the first full-time editors in the Dictionary Unit for South African English at Rhodes University, working on the early entries for the large *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles*. In 1989, after four children and a variety of short-term jobs, I returned as Director of the Unit, and saw the *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* through to publication (OUP, 1996), with a lot of advice and assistance from the *OED*. In 1995 I spent ten weeks in the *OED* Department, working on the South African vocabulary and leaving notes for future editing. Little did I imagine then that in 1998, just after Christmas, my family and I would take the huge step of moving to England, when I was appointed to the *OED* revision project as Deputy Chief Editor. In 2001 I became Director of the *OED* department, and Director, Editorial Projects in 2005.'

Women are also taking a leading role in the non-editorial work associated with the Dictionary. Yvonne Warburton is currently in charge of *OED Online*:

'I started work as a library researcher on Volume III of the *Supplement* in 1976, based in the Bodleian Library, checking quotations and searching for information and antedatings. Four years later I was moved 'in-house' to learn how to draft entries, and eventually progressed to revising other people's entries. As the *Supplement* drew to an end in the 1980s, I transferred to the ambitious project to rekey the *OED* into an electronic database, organizing an army of freelance proofreaders to check the data. After that, having learned about structured text, I helped produce the first *OED* on CD-ROM. When the revision project began, I did a spell running the Bibliography Group, but soon did another sideways move in the late 90s, when the concept of *OED Online* began to emerge. I now manage the online publication, an absorbing job that has taught me an immense amount, and has taken me all over the United States. More than I could have imagined when I saw that ad in the *TLS* back in 1976 and began work in the dusty library stacks; but I still retain a sneaking fondness for checking the odd Shakespeare quotation that comes my way...'

Yvonne's 'army of freelance proofreaders' included Veronica Hurst, now her successor as head of the Bibliography Group:

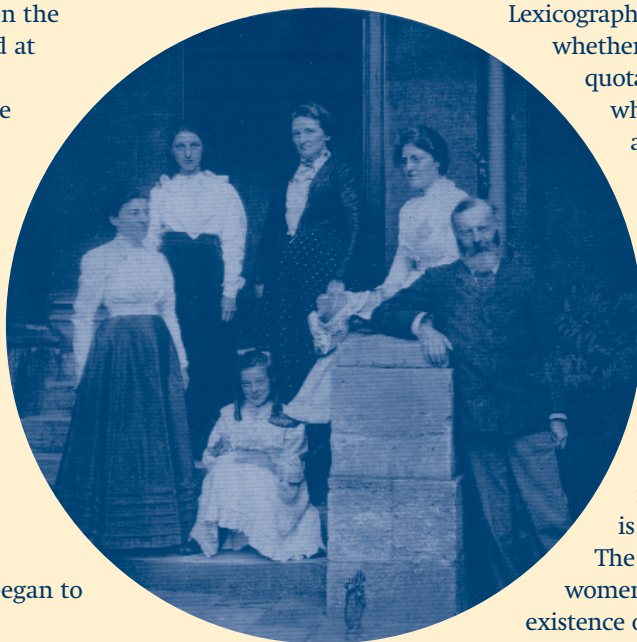
'I saw an advertisement in the *University Gazette* in the early 1980s, inviting proofreaders to apply to

The newsletter of the *Oxford English Dictionary*

Ms. Warburton for work on the Dictionary. Having worked at home on *OED* proofs for a while, I became part of the in-house team checking other proofreaders' work. Over the months I grew more aware of the way quotations underpinned the whole structure of the Dictionary, and began to realize that electronic searching of these sources would have long-term significance for users of the *OED*. At this point (in 1989–90) *OED*'s bibliographical citations began to exert their own long-term significance in my working life; my realization of the need to rationalize them chimed with the aims of the project at the time, and I began to work on standardization to improve search results for the *OED* on CD-ROM and to supply an accurate date and authorized style for citations.

'From there I moved to the Bibliography Group. I am now Principal Bibliographer within the sixty-strong editorial team at *OED*, with a group of nine staff and more than twenty-five researchers of various kinds. We are busy learning to use the database we have looked forward to acquiring since the early 1990s, and deciding bibliographical policy and practice for the Dictionary's future—but happily it's still part of my job to check the accuracy of bibliographical citations, authorize styles, and contribute to the improvement of the three million-plus quotations in *OED*.'

Just as women have always worked on the *OED*, they have always been quoted in it. In the *NED*, many female authors were cited as, for instance, 'Miss Stone', 'Mrs. Browning', 'Miss Braddon', 'Mrs. Carlyle', and 'Mrs. Radcliffe'. In subsequent revisions this form is no longer used, and in the vast majority of cases female authors are cited in exactly the same way as male writers: that is, by initial(s) and surname. The exceptions, as with male authors, are the cases in which the author has a particular title (such as Countess) by which they might be more easily recognised. Thus we cite Mary Sidney as the Countess of Pembroke, and Robert Boyle as Lord Orrery for those publications issued after he assumed that title.



The Bradley family at OUP
(Eleanor is on the far left)

Lexicographers are often not aware whether the author of a potential quotation is a man or a woman, as when quoting from many academic journals, newspapers, and magazines, and from anonymous works. This makes it impossible to assess exactly how many quotations in the *OED* are written by women, but it is inevitable that the general bias that has always existed in the publishing industry towards male writers is reflected in the Dictionary. The number of quotations by women can only be increased by the existence of the *OED*'s reading programmes, which seek out material that is less easily available to editors, and are dedicated to increasing the coverage of areas that may have been neglected in the past, including writing by women. In addition to this, there are now many scholarly corpora of women's writing available to editors online.

As well as including quotations from many works written by women, the *OED*'s representation of works written for women before the twentieth century has also been improved considerably by the availability of substantial electronic databases containing multiple issues of nineteenth-century periodicals aimed at women such as the *Ladies' Pocket Magazine*, the *Young Ladies' Journal*, and the *Ladies' Repository*, which provides first quotations for one hundred and twenty-four words and senses, including: *birthday cake*, *marriageability*, *minestrone*, *narcotizing*, *pericardial fluid*, *photoheliographic*, and *piano-playing*. Some of these quotations are already published online, others appear in entries still under revision.

The *OED* still takes quotations from published material which has been specifically marketed at women, including the well-known women's fashion and 'lifestyle' magazines, which represent a valuable source for popular culture and modern life in general. *Elle*, for instance, has supplied quotations used as examples for approximately sixty headwords, such as: *chic*, *dramedy*, *high-street*, *bootylicious*, *Hinglish*, *indie*, *majorly*, *Medusa-like*, *omega-6*, *party spirit*, *texting*, and *try-hard*. Although *Elle* has as yet provided us with no first quotations, *Vogue* has thirty-five, including: *beautiful people*, *blusher*, *cellulite*, *laundrette*, *low-impact* [aerobics], *miniskirt*, *peep-toe*, *talc* [=talcum powder], and *upswept* [hair].

Several words first attested in 1705, three hundred years ago, feature in the December update of *OED Online*: **peripety**, **pesade**, and **pestring**. Words with histories beginning four hundred years ago include **Pharsalian**, **petticoat-monger**, **phantic**, **Pharaoh's rat**, **perishless**, **periwig** *v.*, and **perplexedness**.

Just as the increase in the number of women working for the Dictionary has followed the increase in women in the workplace in general, the quotations in the *OED* reflect society. The *OED* seeks to represent usage, rather than be prescriptive about what should or should not be the case. Therefore, if more women write and are published, more women will be quoted.

This is also the case with other groups of the population who have been under-represented in the past, and it is an ongoing aim of the *OED* revision to be as fair a representation of the whole community of English-speakers as we can possibly be.

Meraud Grant Ferguson, Senior Assistant Editor, *OED*, and Jemma Best, Senior Assistant Editor, *OED*

Project news

Pasadena: a brand new system for the *OED*

By the mid 1990s the need for a new computer system for the *OED* was becoming apparent to its editors. The old system, a hybrid of software developed for *OED*, for other Oxford dictionaries, and for corpus analysis, was becoming increasingly elderly and unstable. Indeed by the time it was finally switched off to make way for the new system it was over twelve years old, old enough to be drawing its pension in computing terms. In 2002 the process of developing a new system was initiated when the former Director, Penny Silva, appointed Laura Elliott as *OED* Development Manager with this remit. A long process of planning, designing, and development began.

In June this year the *OED* launched its new electronic editing system, Pasadena (or more fully, the optimistically named Perfect All-Singing All-Dancing Editorial and Notation Application). The launch marked the conclusion of a very successful project with input from every member of the department at the different stages of consultation, design, development, testing, and training. In particular the success of the project owed much to the close and happy collaboration between the Pasadena project team, led by Laura Elliott, Michael Proffitt, and Tom Gilmore, and the team of French software developers from IDM, led by Alban Fonrouge, Philippe Climent, and Marc Ariberti, which resulted in not only a wonderful new system but also a whole new vocabulary of Franglais for the *OED*. Thanks to the efforts of all involved, the go-live period went very smoothly. In the period since Chief Editor John Simpson made the first ceremonial edits in the entry for the noun *panache*, almost three thousand entries have been edited in Pasadena, and the first batch of entries has been extracted for publication.

The Pasadena project involved not only the creation of a new computer system, but also the conversion of the entire electronic text of the *OED* (containing approximately a quarter of a million entries) and the huge 'Incomings' database from the Dictionary's reading programmes (containing two million quotations), into XML, a more standardized and

adaptable form of encoding than was previously used. It was a process that could be likened to trying to create a single picture from several different one-thousand-piece jigsaws; but it enabled the creation of many new features which facilitate the editorial process and allow editors to concentrate on lexicography rather than formatting and other technical aspects of presentation. In the new entry-editing software, previously time-consuming tasks such as ordering quotations within senses, renumbering senses, and creating cross-references, can now be done either automatically or at the click of a button.

The new bibliographical system means that information arising from the work of the *OED*'s bibliographical editors can be stored electronically rather than on paper slips, and is accessible to *OED* editors by a series of links, leading from the entry they are editing to the bibliographical record. The linking of quotations from the same source to a single, central citation means that implementing a new bibliographic style (such as the expansion of *Haml.* to *Hamlet*) can be carried out by making one change rather than one thousand.

Requests for external research can be launched directly from the entry an editor is working in, and their progress can be monitored via the Search Interface. Electronic prompts can be sent automatically to consultants, who can view the very latest state of the entry on which they are being consulted via a web browser; and editors are notified by automatic emails when research has been completed and the results are awaiting them in their entry.

Finally, the ability to access the *OED* database remotely means that for the first time *OED* editors in New York can edit entries in exactly the same way as their counterparts in Oxford.

With the launch of Pasadena, the *OED* editors are now well equipped to speed up the revision and updating of the Dictionary for publication online.

Liz Thompson, Data-capture Assistant (Deputy Key User Manager), *OED*

Words and phrases covered in the December 2005 *OED Online* update could help you to...

... permit a perma-tanned Peter Pan to perform... persuade a philandering perjurer to persist...

... perplex a persnickety perfumier peskily... pester a petulant pew renter perniciously...

Balderdash and Piffle

There have been lights and cameras in the *OED* Department recently: the London production company, Takeaway Media, has been filming for the forthcoming BBC2 series on words called 'Balderdash and Piffle'. This series, made in collaboration with the *OED*, is to be broadcast in January and February 2006. Each of the six programmes will be based upon one letter of the alphabet, and will explore evidence gathered by the public—evidence resulting from the 'Wordhunt'

launched by the BBC in June, in which the *OED* asked for help with fifty words. Each programme will also include a short film on an aspect of *OED* work. See <http://www.oed.com/bbcwordhunt/> or <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/programmes/wordhunt/> for more—including a list of the fifty words.

Penny Silva, Director, Editorial Projects, *OED*

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 post-dating (e.g. 'post-date 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.

Please note: it is generally safe to assume that examples found by searching the Web, using search engines such as Google, will have already been considered by *OED* editors.

cwtch (n.: Welsh English, a cupboard or cubby-hole, a hiding place) antedate 1973 with non-glossarial evidence
cwtch (n.: Welsh English, a cuddle, a hug) antedate 1992
cwtch (v.: Welsh English, to hug) antedate 1965
doobrey (n.: a 'thingummy') antedate 1984
portcullis (v.: to furnish with a portcullis; to close with or as with a portcullis) interdate 1773–1932
potch (v.: to slap, smack) post-date 1973
pot ear (n.: a pot handle) interdate ?c1475–1952
potency (n.: the state or rule of a potentate; supreme power) interdate 1715–1916
poutish (adj.: somewhat pouting) interdate 1725–1913
praemunire facias (n.: a writ charging a sheriff to summon a person accused of asserting or maintaining papal jurisdiction in England) interdate c1475–1929
prairie chicken (n.: a newcomer) antedate 1911, or post-date 1976
prairie skirt (n.: a long, full skirt with a gathered waist) antedate 1965
prat (n.: an idiot, a fool) interdate a1542–1968
prat digger (n.: a pickpocket) any non-glossarial evidence
prat digging (n.: the action of stealing from a hip pocket) post-date 1927

Please send submissions to oed3@oup.com

Interesting antedatings

Revision of the entries in the December 2005 *OED Online* update has revealed an earlier origin than previously known for many words, including:

perforating (adjective, antedated from 1661 to 1578)
petrifier (from 1891 to 1794)
phalaris (from 1911 to 1548)
Pharisaism (from 1610 to ?1573)
pharmacist (from 1834 to 1721)
Phidian (from 1809 to a1650)

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