

(Free) The Making of the Oxford English Dictionary

# The Making of the Oxford English Dictionary

*Peter Gilliver*


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## *The Making of* **THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY**

PETER GILLIVER



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**Peter Gilliver : The Making of the Oxford English Dictionary** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Making of the Oxford English Dictionary:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Chronicling A Herculean Task By John D. Cofield "Herculean Task" is an overused phrase, but there is really no other way to describe the creation of the Oxford English Dictionary. Conceived in the nineteenth century, labored over by the most diligent and conscientious men and women imaginable over decades, published gradually with the greatest of care, unceasingly updated and corrected, the OED stands at the summit of scholarship. As a member of the OED's editorial staff for the past thirty years Peter Gilliver is the ideal chronicler. Practically every detail of every committee meeting, conference, interview, and even postcards spoken or

written by the creators, organizers, and laborers over the OED is included here. That makes the book sound overwhelming and possibly dull, but it isn't. Gilliver has an ear for nuance and a nice sense of humor which definitely enliven the narrative. I especially enjoyed the short histories of some of the OED's entries like "chalcenterous," "strafe," "moron," and "chav," which illustrate how the English language has developed over the last few centuries. Simon Winchester's "The Professor and the Madman" and "The Meaning of Everything" are wonderful short histories of parts of the continuing drama of the OED, as are the more recent "The Word Detective" by John Simpson (another OED veteran) and "The Ring of Words: Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary," which was co-written by Gilliver himself. But for the comprehensive full story (nearly 600 pages worth,) The Making of the Oxford English Dictionary has no rival.

This book tells the history of the Oxford English Dictionary from its beginnings in the middle of the nineteenth century to the present. The author, uniquely among historians of the OED, is also a practising lexicographer with nearly thirty years' experience of working on the Dictionary. He has drawn on a wide range of sources--including previously unexamined archival material and eyewitness testimony--to create a detailed history of the project. The book explores the cultural background from which the idea of a comprehensive historical dictionary of English emerged, the lengthy struggles to bring this concept to fruition, and the development of the book from the appearance of the first printed fascicle in 1884 to the launching of the Dictionary as an online database in 2000 and beyond. It also examines the evolution of the lexicographers' working methods, and provides much information about the people--many of them remarkable individuals--who have contributed to the project over the last century and a half.

"Peter Gilliver's meticulous account ... is essential reading for historians, linguists, and literary scholars who are interested in Anglophone lexicography and its most important creation: the OED....This book is not a history of a single dictionary but, instead, the ramified history of an evolving tradition of lexicography that has given rise to an array of indispensable scholarly resources....Gilliver's work is much more than a history of the OED and its makers. It is also a media history of the last 150 years."--History "...Gilliver has written an interesting book on how this dictionary went from proposals in 1858 to its current form....[I]f you have an interest in how meaning develops, The Making of the Oxford English Dictionary is a good book for you to have personally or in the company library."--Tom Warren, Technical Communication "A narrative which manages to combine detail with telling a good story. [Peter Gilliver's] detailed examination of the records, down to individual quotation slips in many places, allied to his own experience and ability to distill such detail, has resulted in an account which will be as unrivalled for its content and accuracy as it is for its lucidity and insight. This is, after all, a quite fascinating story by any standards, and Gilliver tells it in an accessible and highly readable fashion. The whole is designed and produced in an elegant, handsome and welcoming volume, which does its author, his publishers and, above all, its subject proud. This will be the standard account of the OED for as far as one can see and should be held in pretty well any library collection as an account not only of a preeminent reference work but also as a tribute to the many men and women who eventually brought it to fruition."--Reference s "Dictionaries are never 'finished', but merely bow to publishers artificial, if commercially necessary, deadlines. The OED is no exception, but Gilliver provides a peerless progress report. It is to his credit that for all the inescapable longueurs of dictionary production, this account has something of the ripping yarn...Like its equivalent dictionaries across the world, the OED is a national treasure. That it has a fascinating story is to be expected. That it is told by so skilled a narrator as Peter Gilliver is a bonus: both for the great work, and for those who read this book."--Jonathon Green, The Times Literary Supplement "This self-described 'project history' offers depth, breadth, and insights aplenty. Gilliver's writing style is crisp and clear, synthesizing a ludicrous amount of characters and events into a coherent record. If you're a hardcore word enthusiast and OED-aholic, it's going to be hard to resist. Gilliver has done an impressive task that substantially adds to the record of the OED, which is surely the first wonder of the lexical world."--Visual Thesaurus "A work of real scholarship...the author was able to maintain a ready sense of humour for the enterprise, making the history a work that one can dive into and discover new insights on almost every page, leavened with that humour....There is much to enjoy in this scholarly work and the scholarship is lightened by the illustrations, and by the examples of how individual words have been treated. It is not a work to read at a sitting and, indeed, many will probably prefer to treat it as a reference work, to be dipped into to resolve some issue of lexicography, but it is easy to dip into and then to be captured by a train of events in the history of the fascinating Oxford English Dictionary."--Information "One of the strengths of Gilliver's history...is that it offers nuanced assessments of all participants...In doing so, he brings to life the drama of this enterprise in ways that show how difficult it was for all sides."--Australian Book "a good, old-fashioned and weighty book which pays you the compliment of assuming that you're both interested in the subject and reasonably literate. Contained in its 625 closely printed pages is a story which leaves you mentally breathless by the time you arrive at the end. All of human existence is here--life, death, birth, war, madness--much of it contained in the wonderful footnotes, which sometimes occupy as much of the page as the text does. [ ] if you're genuinely interested in the English language, and enjoy your linguistic history leavened with quirky details and a touch of dry humour, it's a book which any true language-lover should have

on their shelf."--Vulpes Libris"[A] wonderful book... I hate to use the word 'definitive' about any book, but this one justifies it....A riveting story that Gilliver writes up brilliantly, even to the extent of giving us chapter-ending cliffhangers. I can easily imagine a television drama coming out of it."--David Crystal"A riveting read that could absorb the whole of Christmas."--Church Times"A dream book for logophiles."--Europaeum Bulletin"The book gives an absorbing and vivid account and a detailed and exhaustive presentation of the meticulously researched facts dealing with the development of the OED and its related dictionaries. At the same time it is a worthy and meritorious tribute to the hundreds of people, who collaborated in establishing one of the great historical dictionaries."--Lexikos"Gilliver's prose is a pleasure to read and his research indefatigable." --The Spectator "[L]ong, careful, authoritatively written, handsomely produced and fascinatingly detailed history..." Financial Times "The material is marshalled with erudition and elegance." --Daily Telegraph "This detailed historical account of the Oxford English Dictionary is written by a long-time OED staff member and lexicographer ... The result is an encyclopedic treatment not only of the project's history and the lives and careers of its editors but also of the compositorial methodology involved in putting such an enormous product together--from the earliest slips of definitions on paper contributed by readers of early English texts to the modern mining of online resources, Twitter included. The volume explains editorial policies and shows the lengths to which the editors often went in seeking information on specific words, writing to people such as Alfred Lord Tennyson or the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, to elucidate something. The information in this volume, much of it gleaned through careful analysis of written correspondence and annotations on the primary archival material, makes this history definitive."--Choice"The story, personalities, and rich archival photographs make this a thoroughly engaging book for logophiles or those interested in this most enduring of achievements, running on through the Second Edition (21,728 pages in 20 volumes) and digitisation."--Common Room"Skilfully telling the story of a national treasure ... Gilliver provides a peerless progress report. It is to his credit that for all the inescapable longueurs of dictionary production, this account has something of the ripping yarn." --Jonathon Green, Times Literary Supplement

About the Author Peter Gilliver has been an editor of the Oxford English Dictionary since 1987, and is now one of the Dictionary's most experienced lexicographers; he has also contributed to several other dictionaries published by OUP. In addition to his lexicographical work, he has been writing and speaking about the history of the OED for over fifteen years.