



The Making of
**THE OXFORD
ENGLISH
DICTIONARY**

PETER GILLIVER



The Making of the Oxford English Dictionary

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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.

The Making of the Oxford English Dictionary Details

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Author : Peter Gilliver

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Sue Bridgwater says

HISTORICAL PRINCIPLES: a reader's response to
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On his five hundred and fiftieth page, opening the thirteenth chapter of this astonishing book, Peter Gilliver says: 'The body of archival material relevant to this period [1989 -] becomes increasingly incomplete, and incompletely accessible, as one approaches the present.'

I feel his apparent concern that this may make for a loss of readerly interest in the closing pages to be unfounded, since by the time of reaching this chapter the reader – this reader for certain - has been drawn deeply into the esoteric world of dictionary-making by way of a narrative as compellingly drafted and structured as any novel. The experience of coming to the end was as much one of loss as the moment of finishing a fictional narrative whose characters and events have led one into another world. The diverse and remarkable characters that people this world and drive forward its story are captured with the same narrative skill and deft handling of cliff-hangers and subtle hints at possible futures, as a great detective story.

Gilliver takes us back to the early nineteenth century to show us the role of the Philological Society and the scholarly European context in which its ideas about the importance of a national dictionary were developed, before leading on to the involvement of the Oxford University Press and the whole vast history thereafter. Now, many might assume that a work thus rooted in those Victorian scholarly realms, concerning itself with Lexicography, Philology, and Etymology, could not possibly be the sort of exciting read that I claim to have found it. But it is. Gilliver's research and scholarship are deep- and broad-reaching, leaving no memo unturned and no crisis undescribed. But the enduring strength of this book will be its blend of that scholarship with its readability. Not every academic can write; Gilliver can.

The cast of characters of this book comprises – among others - some of the most eccentric, learned and dedicated scholars who ever lived. But they do not appear to us as mere dry old Victorian men with funny whiskers; we see their pains and joys, we are aware of their quarrels and friendships and illnesses and of how the Dictionary subsumed their lives and impacted on their families. F.J. Furnivall, James Murray, Henry Bradley, William Craigie, C. T. Onions and their twentieth century successors are presented as real living people and this brings alive to us the nature and importance of the Dictionary as a less personalised study could not do. Although the book, considered as a biography, is in fact the biography of the OED itself, Gilliver never lets us lose sight of the people who made it.

It's the best book I've read for a long time. And it's a beautiful book, if I may indulge my love of the physical object; the quality of its production. The paper looks feels and smells nice. In spite of its size, it asks you to pick it up. I found only two very minor typographical errors in all its '625 pp'. I recommend it, I love it, and I have expanded my reading list by a ridiculous number simply by adding so many of the books listed in its bibliography.

Simply excellent.

Hilary Fawcett says

As an English grammar pedant this book rates 5 stars for such detailed and factual information, great read, a

chapter at a time!

Katy says

I received my copy free from the publisher through Goodreads Firstreads.
