THE OXFORD LATIN DICTIONARY: A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The first fascicle of OLD (A–Calcitro), published on 2 May 1968, must have surprised some readers, since neither on its rich red soft covers nor on its title page was an editor named, though a List of Editorial Staff on page vii set out the names and working dates of seventeen scholars. The list followed a short Publisher’s Note which gave a sketch of the dictionary’s history. This Note was, as will emerge below, as much a diplomatic as a historical statement, and is itself, over forty years later, part of the history of the dictionary. My own account, which involves reading between the lines of the note, will aim inter alia to explain why it was so much less expansive than the preface to the first fascicle of the ninth edition of Liddell and Scott’s Greek–English Lexicon (1925)—hardly more than a page, to the latter’s nine.¹

The history of Latin–English and English–Latin dictionaries goes back to about 1500, the former concentrating on ‘hard words’ for which English speakers were thought to need special help.² The universality of Latin as a medium of communication in early modern Europe meant that most dictionaries of both classical languages were written in Latin.³ It was only with the rise of nationalism and vernacular publishing in the eighteenth century that this pattern began to be eroded.⁴ I. J. G. Scheller’s Latin–German dictionary of 1783, which served as the ancestor of several nineteenth-century Latin–English dictionaries, belonged to this new movement. It was drawn on by Wilhelm Freund for his own Latin–German dictionary (1834–45), which was later translated into English by the American Ethan Andrews (1850). Andrews’s dictionary in turn was enlarged and adapted by two other Americans, the lawyer Charlton T. Lewis and the classical scholar Charles T. Short, whose large Latin–English dictionary was published by Harper Bros of New York in 1879 as Harper’s Latin Dictionary.⁵ The book was published simultaneously in Britain as A Latin Dictionary by Oxford University Press, who printed it from plates shipped over from New York. This unusual procedure was adopted after the failure of an Oxford project. Four years earlier, in 1875, Harry Nettleship of Lincoln College, Oxford, later to be Corpus Professor of Latin, and John Mayor, Kennedy Professor of Latin at Cambridge, had been commissioned to assemble a book based on a fresh reading of the sources; but Mayor failed to deliver, and Nettleship was unable to cope by himself. The Press did have stocks of an earlier dictionary, John Riddle’s 1835 translation of Scheller’s Latin–German original, but they may have felt this to be out of date, and it was also a very large and expensive book.⁶ So ‘Harper’s Latin Dictionary’ (its American title) became ‘Lewis and Short’s Latin Dictionary’. The story of OLD begins in 1921, when Mayor’s pupil Alexander Souter (1873–1949), apparently at the invitation of the Press’s Secretary R. W. Chapman, submitted a memorandum complaining of the deficiencies of Lewis and Short and urging OUP to commission a comprehensive revision.⁷

¹ Liddell and Scott was published by OUP in ten fascicles between 1913 and 1940. In the case of both books, evidence contained in fascicles has been destroyed by the stripping of their covers and prelims for rebinding as single volumes.
⁵ Short was appropriately named: he supplied material only on the letters A–C, and B and C were then lost by Harpers, so that the book as published was almost entirely assembled by Lewis, who was also responsible for the abridged versions which followed. See F. J. Sypher, ‘A history of Harper’s Latin Dictionary’, Harvard Library Bulletin, 20 (1972), 349–66.
⁶ Riddle had used the third edition of Scheller’s dictionary (1834–55), which was published in five volumes.
Souter, who had held the Oxford chair of New Testament Greek, was now Professor of Humanity (i.e. Latin) at Aberdeen. He had produced a pocket lexicon of New Testament Greek in 1916. Like his master Mayor, Souter was fond of pointing out to his bewildered classes the inadequacies of Lewis and Short. The first result was a commission in 1924 to produce a concise Latin dictionary, on which Souter was working in 1929 when the Assistant Secretary of OUP, Kenneth Sisam, reviewed the Press’s range of dictionaries. The Oxford English Dictionary had been completed in the previous year, while the revision of Liddell and Scott’s Greek–English dictionary had been under way for nearly thirty years, and the fascicles of the new edition had been appearing since 1925. OED had been assembled de novo on the basis of a large-scale reading programme; the new Greek lexicon combined revision with fresh reading: which strategy should be adopted for Latin? The revision of Lewis and Short proposed by Souter in his 1921 memorandum, Sisam concluded, was out of the question, as the book was not OUP’s property—the Press printed and sold it, but for North American sales paid 10 per cent royalties to the American Book Company, successors to Harper Bros. An entirely new dictionary was thus desirable on both scholarly and economic grounds. The other presence in the field was that of the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, a vast project first proposed in the early nineteenth century which after several false starts had got under way in 1894, supported by five German and Austrian academies. Its first fascicle appeared in 1900, when Charles Cannan, then Secretary to the Delegates of the Press, wondered whether OUP should ‘plunder or translate it’, but it was knocked off course by two world wars; in 2010, having skipped over the letter N because of its difficult entries (including non, it reached the end of the letter P. The forbidding scale and slow progress of the Thesaurus were in a sense reassuring, since they suggested that it could be discounted as a competitor to a single-volume dictionary. An abridged version had begun to appear in 1912, and might have dissuaded OUP from embarking on their own book, but the First World War intervened, its senior editor died, and the Press was left with a clear field.

Sisam consulted Souter, A. E. Housman (Professor of Latin at Cambridge 1911–36, and also famous as the author of A Shropshire Lad), and others on candidates for editorship of the new book. Housman replied:

I do not think that a new Latin dictionary should be undertaken till the German Thesaurus is complete, as the duplication of labour would be cruel and wicked. But to remove the actual errors in Lewis and Short, though no light task, should be practical; and if only the false quantities were corrected, and ‘relative’ amended to ‘interrogative’ in the hundreds of places where it should be, that would be something. I cannot say that I know a young lexicographer.

W. B. Anderson, Souter are names which suggest themselves.

Souter himself sent a list of three names, headed by his own; he gave his age (56), but added helpfully that he came from a long-lived family. The other two names were those of his brother-in-law W. B. Anderson (also named, as we have seen, by Housman), and his ex-pupil Ronald Burn, who later


9 The revision was edited by (Sir) Henry Stuart Jones, with the help of Roderick McKenzie; its fascicles were collected in 1940 in two volumes, and later in a single volume.


11 F. Vollmer and E. Bickel, Epitome Thesauri Latin I: A–Aedilis (Leipzig: Teubner, 1912), planned to be completed in four volumes. Vollmer died in 1923.

worked on the revision of Liddell and Scott.\textsuperscript{13} In 1933 Souter was invited to edit the dictionary, with the help of another ex-pupil, James McLeod Wyllie. Souter was to work from Aberdeen, coordinating the work of volunteer readers (who eventually numbered more than fifty), while Wyllie was to be based in Oxford. Wyllie had been hired to work on the \textit{OED} Supplement in 1929: this was to be published during 1933, so he would soon be available, and he was already seen by the Press as a promising young scholar who had absorbed the principles of Oxford lexicography from William Craigie of the \textit{OED}.\textsuperscript{14} The \textit{OLD} project was thus conceived of from the beginning in relation to other \textit{OUP} dictionaries. Sisam had pointed out to the Press’s Finance Committee in 1932 that ‘When L[iddell] & Sc[ott] is done, payable or really payable dictionaries, which are our speciality, will be exhausted except for Latin . . . it will be very awkward if, e.g., Cambridge, looking for a new field, took up a Latin Dictionary and so cut us out all along the line.’ The move forward in 1933 thus combined three separate concerns: to replace Lewis and Short, to occupy the field of Latin lexicography so as to discourage competition, and to retain the services of the Press’s most talented young lexicographer after the end of the \textit{OED} project.

The links with \textit{OED} deserve to be emphasized. By 1930 the Press was unique as a publisher in its lexicographical resources. Since the early days of \textit{OED} in the 1880s it had built up both an unparalleled wealth of lexicographical expertise and a substantial in-house dictionary department. It also had a dedicated working space, the Dictionary Room in the Old Ashmolean Museum, which the \textit{OLD} team took over in 1933 from the group which had worked on the \textit{OED} Supplement.\textsuperscript{15} It was this lexicographical tradition which was passed from English to Latin through Craigie’s training of James Wyllie, who in 1935 was given glowing endorsements by Chapman and Sisam.\textsuperscript{16} On occasion Wyllie referred to himself as ‘Lexicographer to the University of Oxford: No such post existed, but Wyllie was certainly the Press’s main in-house consultant on lexicography; at one time or another he worked or advised on dictionaries of English and several foreign languages, as well as on Latin.\textsuperscript{17} In terms of lexicographical practice, the tradition Wyllie inherited centred on the technique of ‘slipping’: the use of paper slips filled in by the Oxford team or their volunteer readers, sorted and filed into drawers, and then sent to the Press’s compositors for printing. Wyllie himself developed this tradition, first by using colour-coded slips with paper bands for holding them together, then in 1942 by designing and making sorting boxes for slips.\textsuperscript{18} The system was described by the Polish lexicographer Marian Plezia, who paid several visits to the Dictionary Room, and whose account refers to a photograph reproduced in the \textit{OUP} journal \textit{The Periodical}:

The photo shows clearly the wooden shelves on which there are endless stacks of cards (tied with string) containing excerpts which constitute the material of the dictionary . . . We trust we do not betray any ‘editorial secrets’ if we reveal that the text of the O.L.D. is set directly from these cards (which are white in colour) . . . Before they are sent to the printing room, the white cards are interleaved with similar pink

\textsuperscript{13} In spite of a physical disability and poor map-reading skills, Burn is claimed by some to have been the first person to scale all the ‘Munros’—Scottish mountains over 3,000 feet high. See Henderson, ‘\textit{A/-ZYTHUM}’ (n.7), 171, n.26.

\textsuperscript{14} Wyllie was a ‘lad of parts’ in the best Scottish tradition: he was the son of a labourer, and had risen from poverty through intelligence and hard work, ending his education as an outstanding student at Aberdeen University. He had been awarded a three-year Croom Robertson fellowship at Aberdeen (1931–3) to prepare a lexicon to the works of Sallust; this was completed in 1936, but at that point, according to Wyllie, Sisam, who had originally suggested that it could be published, refused to consider it.

\textsuperscript{15} The Dictionary Room had housed \textit{OED} staff since Henry Bradley and William Craigie had moved there from the Clarendon Press building in 1901.

\textsuperscript{16} Sisam declared that ‘I am sure he will be the outstanding general lexicographer of the next generation’, and Chapman referred to ‘a reasonable probability that, if his services are retained, he will be for life a scholarly compiler of great value, comparable with Murray himself’ (Sir James Murray, editor of \textit{OED}). Cf. Henderson, ‘\textit{A/-ZYTHUM}’ (n.7), 153.

\textsuperscript{17} In recognition of this work, in 1936 the university gave him an honorary MA, and he was given membership of the senior common room at Balliol College. On Wyllie’s work for \textit{OED}, see C. Brewer, \textit{Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 80–6.

\textsuperscript{18} J. M. Wyllie, \textit{The Oxford Dictionary Slanderers: The Greatest Scandal in the Whole History of Scholarship} (St Andrew’s, Guernsey: The Barras Seer, 1965), 66–7. The boxes, some single and some double, were variously made from mahogany, oak, and deal. A double box is still in use by the team working on the \textit{Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources}, whose first fascicle appeared in 1975; the letter S was reached in 2010. On the early history of slipping, see A. Blair, \textit{Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 93–103, 210–29; J. Considine, ‘Cutting and Pasting in Early Modern Information Management’, forthcoming in W. Sherman, J. Fleming, and A. Smyth (eds.), \textit{The Renaissance Collage}.  

\textsuperscript{19} Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age
ones, which contain anything that is editorial in the text of the dictionary . . . By cutting out the intermediate stage of a typescript . . . an important set of errors is thus eliminated.19

The function of slips in reducing errors of transmission between compilers and printers was further enhanced by another of Wyllie's innovations, the use of dozens of copies of Oxford Classical Texts, cut up so that words and passages could be marked.20

The Press's contract with Souter specified that he would be assisted by Wyllie in producing a dictionary which would cover Latin literature up to about the death of Suetonius. Sisam helpfully commented, 'I believe the date is not certainly known' (it was c. AD 140). In practice the dictionary's coverage extended to c. AD 300. The avoidance of later Latin removed from the task not only the works of the church fathers Jerome and Augustine, whose bulk at least equalled that of the classical writers, but also those of the classicizing poets Ausonius and Claudian. It was motivated in part by Souter's desire to avoid competition with another of his ex-pupils, J. H. Baxter, who was preparing a dictionary of later Latin for the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. Souter, according to his contract, was to finish the concise Latin dictionary in the next three years, the timetable for the larger work being set at ten years. Like most initial estimates for such large-scale works, this proved to be wildly optimistic. By 1937, when Souter retired from Aberdeen to Oxford to concentrate on his work for OUP, it had become clear that he would never finish the concise dictionary.21

In the following year he was asked to provide OLD sample entries for assessment by Press advisers, whose verdict on his specimen of accipio was damning. First William Craigie wrote that 'Even the old Freund–Andrews was superior in every way to this', then C. J. Fordyce of Glasgow University concluded that the specimen was 'one of the worst pieces of work on Latin that I have ever seen . . . As a dictionary it is useless.' No wonder that R. W. Chapman, Secretary to the Delegates of the Press, wrote to the Oxford Latinist Cyril Bailey, a Delegate since . . . As a dictionary it is useless. ' No wonder that R. W. Chapman, Secretary to the Delegates of the Press, wrote to the Oxford Latinist Cyril Bailey, a Delegate since 1920 and a crucial advisory figure in the Press's classical publishing, 'The speech of the Second Murderer is even bloodier than its predecessor.'22 In July 1939 Souter was persuaded to resign as editor of OLD, and in compensation was employed to edit a glossary of later Latin.23

At this point Wyllie understandably expected to be put in sole charge, but instead the Delegates appointed Cyril Bailey, well known in Oxford as an academic diplomat and conciliator, to collaborate with him under the title of Senior Co-Editor.24 Internal tensions in the OLD team prompted the removal of some of its members to a house near the Press buildings, to work under Bailey's direction; the rest stayed in the Dictionary Room, reporting to Wyllie.25 Some of the tensions related to Charles Brink, a German Jewish refugee who had been appointed to the staff in 1938: Wyllie felt that Brink, who had spent five years working for the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, brought with him a methodical rather than an intuitive approach to lexicography.26 Brink and Wyllie were on good terms at first, but...

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19 M. Plezia, 'Oxford Latin Dictionary, fasc. 3, A–Calcitro', Eos, 59 (1971), 177–80, at p. 178. Plezia was the editor of a Latin–Polish dictionary (5 vols., 1959–79), and from 1955 until his retirement in 1988 of a Polish dictionary of medieval Latin which by 2010 had reached its eighth volume and the word septimana. The 'cards' were in fact paper slips.

20 In some cases, this prevented the use of a superior text, as in the case of Virgil, where the established use of F. A. Hirtzel's OCT of 1900 made it impossible to use R. A. B. Mynors's replacement of 1969.

21 A smaller book still, the ‘Little Latin Dictionary’, had been proposed by Wyllie in 1932. In December 1933 he supplied a sample page which Sisam found ‘extraordinarily concise & business-like’. Wyllie was paid £100 a year to work on it in his own time, but found it impossible to continue, and in November 1935 asked for the payments to be stopped. OUP Archive, CPEd 853.

22 J. Henderson, ‘As–ZUTHUM’ (n.7), 159. Souter apparently claimed that he had assembled the dictionary material almost single-handed, having supplied over 25,000 slips (Getty, ‘Souter’ (n.8), 268). By 1937 almost a million slips had been completed.

23 This was eventually published just after Souter's death as A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 AD (Oxford: OUP, 1949), and covered the period between the end dates of OLD and of Lewis and Short (100–600). After Souter's death, an OUP official noted that ‘The record of Souter’s last years is a pathetic one of failing powers and uncurbed expenditure.’ ‘The late Professor Souter’: OUP Archive, PBEd 12933, finance file.


25 There had been a long history of disagreement and possessiveness over furniture and working space in the Dictionary Room. Wyllie had suffered from it when he first arrived in Oxford in 1933, when he was given a 'peculiarly dirty table': Sisam to Chapman, 12 Feb. 1933: OUP Archive, PBEd 9764.

26 Another staff member, E. A. Parker, referred in 1943 to Brink’s ‘totalitarian lexicography’. Such comments reflect an antipathy to a perceived Teutonic style of scholarship, common in Britain in the 1940s as it had been during the First World War. Brink went on to be...
later fell out, and it was probably Brink's declaration that they could not work together amicably that prompted the splitting of the OLD team. To escape from this difficult situation, on the outbreak of war Wyllie volunteered for active service, although he was in a reserved occupation. After a short period in the Artillery, he was recruited by the code-breakers of Bletchley Park and there, ever the lexicographer, assembled a glossary of cryptographic terms. He was also commissioned by the Press to produce a dictionary of English synonyms. At Bletchley Park he met John Chadwick, then a Cambridge undergraduate and later to be famous for his part in the deciphering of Linear B. Chadwick was recruited to the OLD team in 1946, trained by Wyllie, and soon seen as the most promising representative of the next generation of Oxford lexicographers. Wyllie's hope was that Chadwick would be successively his assistant, colleague, and finally successor.

After the war, work was resumed and the prospect of completion seemed closer. Sisam, who had succeeded Chapman as Secretary in 1942, was himself succeeded in 1948 by Arthur Norrington, who in March 1949 formally appointed Wyllie editor of the dictionary, telling him 'You have in fact been acting in the capacity of editor-in-chief for a long time past.' Wyllie proposed the setting up of a panel of specialist consultants, and also a Latin Dictionary Committee to monitor progress. The committee, consisting of Delegates, Press officers, and the OLD editor, met several times a year from May 1951. Its members included Roger Mynors, a Balliol man who was currently Kennedy Professor of Latin at Cambridge, but who returned to Oxford in 1953 to succeed Eduard Fraenkel in the Corpus chair. Mynors pressed for the abandonment of the AD 200 cutoff date and the inclusion of material from the following four centuries. This was at first agreed, but in 1952 Chadwick left for a permanent academic post in Cambridge, and the Press concluded that staffing was insufficient to cope with the extra work involved. Another major decision, taken unanimously in October 1952, was that a printing timetable should be planned. Norrington had consulted William Craigie, who had advised that 'the compilers of dictionaries always worked faster and more efficiently once they had to keep up with the Printer and had the satisfaction of seeing the book in the making instead of just a distant prospect.' At this point it was estimated that the dictionary could be published in annual parts over the next eight years.

In the same year Wyllie's situation became very difficult. The cost of raising a family and living in Oxford had left him in debt, and the resultant anxiety led to debilitating intestinal cramps. These pressures in turn led to an experience of heightened consciousness in the first weekend of October, in which Wyllie believed he had had a revelation of Truth and God. In the following week he sent Norrington a lengthy memorandum giving a detailed account of his difficulties with the Press, and in particular with Kenneth Sisam. This led to a series of difficult interviews and exchanges, and in the following year, after a brief spell in the local psychiatric hospital and several months' leave, Wyllie was dismissed from his position by the Press. It was a sad end to twenty years of work and struggle.

With both Wyllie and Chadwick gone, the Delegates turned to Peter Glare, who had joined the dictionary team in 1950, to see the book through to publication. Glare had come from Cambridge, where his director of studies at Jesus College, who gave him a glowing reference, was Hugh Lloyd-Jones, like Mynors an émigré from Oxford; he returned there in 1951 and was Regius Professor of Greek 1960-89. Wyllie very much approved of Glare, writing to Norrington that he had 'the healthy easy-going

Kennedy Professor of Latin at Cambridge (1914–74).

27 Bailey to Chapman, 28 May 1939; OUP Archive, PBEd 12933. Wyllie believed that Brink had complained of his staff management to Bailey: Oxford Dictionary Slanders (n.18), 106–7.


29 Wyllie to his wife, 9 Oct. 1945 (Wyllie papers). After Wyllie's death in 1971, Chadwick wrote a memorial notice which he sent to Colin Roberts, Secretary of OUP, but after seeing Roberts's detailed criticisms, decided not to publish it.

30 Norrington to Wyllie, 9 Mar. 1949; OUP Archive, PBEd 12942.


32 Wyllie later published this as The Unanswered Memorandum, or the Clarendon Press Shown Up (Oxford: The Barras Seer, 1959).

33 Between 1944 and his death in a car accident in 1971, Wyllie wrote and distributed a long series of pamphlets attacking OUP and its servants, some of them posted in envelopes which themselves bore accusatory inscriptions. The best-known of these pamphlets was The Oxford Dictionary Slanders (n.18 above).
outlook of the sportsman; which is one of the best counterpoises to the intenseness which is so apt to beset the lexicographer.34 The official estimate, one of many triumphs of optimism over experience, was now that seven to ten years would be needed for completion. Re-examination of the existing articles showed that cutting was needed to bring the text down to a manageable size. Glare also felt that apart from the work done by Wyllie and Chadwick, most of the articles needed revision. Chadwick’s departure was symptomatic of a long-standing problem in finding scholarly staff who were willing to give up the prospects of higher pay and better job security in the university sector. Nor was scholarship enough: as Wyllie had often stressed, to make a good article one also needed training in lexicography. After the long and troubled history of the previous twenty years the Press was determined that the book’s publication should run to a guaranteed timetable, and though there is evidence for the imminence of the first fascicle in 1956, it did not appear until 1968, when about two-thirds of the material was judged to be in final shape. Seven more fascicles followed at regular intervals, the final fascicle appearing in 1982, when the OLD was published as a single volume of 2,150 pages.35

The publication of the first fascicle, A–Calctiro, posed a problem for the Press. Their normal procedure would have been to give editorial names on the title page, but this would have meant acknowledging Wyllie, who was at this point still circulating anti-OUP pamphlets. In order to circumvent the problem, the title pages of the first three fascicles carried only the dictionary’s title, the Press’s arms, the words ‘At the Clarendon Press’, and the date. Only in the fourth fascicle, published in 1973 after Wyllie’s death, was Peter Glare named as editor. The first two fascicles carried a Publisher’s Note giving a short account of the book’s history; this was dropped from later fascicles, but resuscitated for the single-volume publication in 1982. The note is a minor masterpiece of mandarin prose in which juxtaposition is artfully employed: ‘By 1939 it was clear that progress, whether measured in terms of quality or quantity, was unsatisfactory. In the same year Professor Souter retired from the Editorship.’ A similar reference to Wyllie comes later on: ‘Mr Wyllie’s editorship terminated in 1954. A fresh study of the material showed that a thorough revision of the material, including what had been thought approximately ready for the printer, would be necessary.’ As Wyllie wrote in a pamphlet issued soon afterwards, ‘The innuendo is plain.36 He was then teaching at a girls’ school in Guernsey, and was provoked to write his pamphlet when some of his pupils showed him a recent issue of The Guardian containing a review of the first fascicle by Christopher Driver. Driver wrote with inside knowledge, mentioning for example that an earlier pamphlet of Wyllie’s, a verse epic entitled The Clarendon Press (1958), displayed ‘such strong and curious passions’ that it had been read aloud twice a term by a group of Balliol undergraduates.37

Reviews of the first fascicle in academic journals were overwhelmingly favourable. In Greece & Rome R. H. Barrow, founding editor of the journal and a former Inspector of Schools for Classics, welcomed the enterprise and sketched a historical context, from Scheller through Andrews to Lewis and Short.38 In the Classical Review the Cambridge classical scholar and bibliophile E. J. Kenney, while giving a long list of detailed criticisms, praised both the advance on Lewis and Short and the production values: ‘The printer . . . must be congratulated on a technical tour de force . . . he has managed to produce a page of three columns on thin paper in predominantly small type that is not only legible but positively a pleasure to contemplate.’39

34 Wyllie to Norrington, 25 Feb. 1950: OUP Archive, PBEd 12942. In 2011, over sixty years after he began his work on OLD, Peter Glare continues to work on Latin lexicography as a member of the team producing the Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources.
35 The fascicles continued to be sold separately till they went out of print in 1987/8.
37 C. Driver, ‘A to Calctiro’, The Guardian, 2 May 1968, 7. Wyllie’s 1958 pamphlet, like most of his output in this genre, is held in Aberdeen University Library, Special Collections, MS 3216.
38 Barrow could fairly be called an OUP insider: he had acted as an advisor to the Press, had been a member of the OLD team since 1954, and was also Colin Roberts’s father-in-law.
Kenney’s major criticisms were related to the exclusion of Latin literature after AD 200 (he mentioned specifically Ausonius and Claudian) and the almost exclusive use of Oxford Classical Texts, which in some cases had meant that the best available texts had not been employed. Kenney also regretted in a footnote (p. 93) the decision not to mark vowels unless they occurred in a metrically indeterminate position. This lack of marking of ‘hidden quantities’ remains a common criticism of OLD. The editorial decision seems to have been taken in the early stages of the project, and it is unclear what led to it, though in 1969 Peter Glare commented that ‘it was felt that the area of dispute... was so great that it would be best to omit them.’

Two other editorial decisions were less controversial. For the first time in a Latin dictionary, articles were included on word suffixes (another innovation of Wyllie’s), so that one finds, for example, the sequence anus’, anus’, anus’, -anus, the last being a suffix, as in Romanus. One reviewer thought this ‘a kind of didactic experiment, and a whimsical one at that, but possibly useful.’ The other decision was to return to the ancient alphabet, in which I and U were used for both vowels and consonants, and therefore to abolish J and V. This decision followed the usage of the Oxford Classical Texts (1898–), for which Charles Cannan had laboured to provide a standard style, though some editors had stuck to ‘v’ for consonantal ‘u’.

While the reception of OLD was generally positive, in some quarters its authority made it a target for scholars keen to measure their scholarship against it. In 1983 the Cambridge Latinist F. R. D. Goodyear published an almost entirely negative review of the completed dictionary, complaining of excessive multiplication of categories and of missing evidence from post-AD 200 authors whose work included earlier material. Goodyear’s characteristically heated criticisms derived in part from discussions with another Cambridge scholar, H. D. Jocelyn, who also disagreed in print with the dictionary. The two men were accustomed to ‘sit disparaging it endlessly’, as one scholar has said: it may be pertinent to note that both were Cambridge-trained, and that there was a long-standing Cambridge tradition of denigrating the textual scholarship of Oxford classicists, Benjamin Jowett being a notable target. The critical comments of Goodyear and Jocelyn are reminiscent of the brutally disparaging reviews published by A. E. Housman.

By the time the first fascicle appeared in 1968 a stable team had been established, as the List of Editorial Staff shows; two of them, R. H. Barrow and R. C. Palmer, had joined in the 1950s and worked on the book till it was complete. G. M. Lee’s working dates (1968–82) indicate that he was hired to read the proofs of the fascicles. Mervyn Lee (1914–86) was a learned eccentric who after a fine undergraduate career in Cambridge had failed to keep a teaching post at Downside. He worked on the OLD proofs in the public libraries of Bedford, accompanied by suitcases full of books borrowed from academic libraries in Cambridge.

Another learned eccentric who read the proofs of the dictionary was A. H. Buck (1900–87), according to OUP convention not named in the Publisher’s Note because he worked in the Press’s Printing House. Buck was taken on after being sacked from Christ’s Hospital, where he had taught both Peter Glare and E. J. Kenney. One of his colleagues remembered him as a

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40 In verse a syllable is ‘heav’y if it ends with two consonants (e.g. -act-); hence the length of the vowel cannot be determined from reading. One needs to know, e.g. from etymology, that the a in actus (from ago) is long, though in ago it is short.


43 The decision was Souter’s, made in 1933 and approved by Sisam in a letter to him of 1 May that year (OUP Archive, PBEd 12940). The history of i/ and u/v is long and complicated: see, for example, D. G. Scrugg, History of English Spelling (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1974), 81. The first lexicographer of English (one can hardly call him an English lexicographer) to distinguish I from J and U from V was Noah Webster, in his Compendious Dictionary of the English Language (1806: his typically forthright denunciation of his predecessors is at p. xxii of his preface).


45 The article on cinaedus was criticized in Jocelyn’s Catullus, Mamrurus and Romulus cinaedus, Sileno, 25 (1999), 97–113, where he remarked (p. 109 n. 79) that ‘older dictionaries did a better job.’

46 Richard Palmer later worked on the fourth volume of the OED Supplement before becoming editor of botanical terms for the New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, which was published in 1993.

47 P. Considine (ed.), George Mervyn Lee: A Portrait (Bedford: Via tor Press, 2002). Lee is shown with his suitcases in Plate XIV.
man learned in Latin and Greek, and also in cricket and rugby, from whose reader’s cubbyhole oaths could be heard as he encountered foolish errors in the proofs he was reading: a man ‘whose favourite word rhymed with his surname’.}

The print run for the eight fascicles was 8,000. After its initial complete publication in 1982 the dictionary was reprinted a dozen times, most recently in 2002, with the 1996 reprint incorporating some detailed corrections. In the decade 1998–2007 sales exceeded 10,000 copies. In the same period the old warhorse Lewis and Short, unrevised since its first publication in 1879, sold nearly 5,000 copies, and it too was reprinted in 2002. This may seem surprising, but there are several reasons for it. First, as we have seen, OLD’s coverage ends at AD 200, while Lewis and Short takes in another four centuries. Second, the older book is less than half the price of its successor. Finally, though Lewis and Short is in many ways outclassed by OLD, it is widely used as a convenient desk reference by those for whom it is not ideal, but is good enough. The baby of the Lewis and Short family, the Elementary Latin Dictionary (1891), is still on sale in 2011, but the market for small Latin dictionaries is now dominated by new compilations. OUP itself commissioned a book from James Morwood, then Head of Classics at Harrow School, partly in response to the appearance of OLD: this appeared as the Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary (1994), later also published in a smaller format as the Oxford Latin Mini Dictionary (1995). The intermediate version of Lewis and Short, the School Latin Dictionary of 1889, was last reprinted in 1964, and went out of print in 1974. In an age when so much linguistic enquiry takes place via the Internet, the print dictionary market is polarized between large and (very) small books. In the longer term the latter are likely to be the survivors, as large projects migrate to the Web.

Since the publication of the first fascicle of OLD in 1968, both dictionaries and books in general have become distinct subjects of interest and study. It has been recognized that their texts are not produced in a vacuum, but have histories, and that these histories involve not only authors, but also publishers, printers, and readers. Books are material objects produced for profit, but in many cases not just for profit: so much is evident in the history of Oxford University Press, which in the twentieth century became one of the largest general publishers in the UK, while remaining, as it does today, a department of Oxford University. In this brief account of the history of OLD I have attempted to explain how it was planned, assembled, published, and received by readers and reviewers, and to situate it within its publisher’s output and in relation to other works which offered models for imitation or avoidance. As I have suggested above, the crucial reference points for OLD were the foreign, blessedly different, and conveniently slow-moving Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, the massive and exemplary in-house methodological resource of the Oxford English Dictionary, and somewhere between these two, ‘not our book’ and yet seen as ‘our book’ by several generations of readers, the long-established Lewis and Short.

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