

NELL'OFFICINA DEL DIZIONARIO

Excerpt

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NELL'OFFICINA DEL DIZIONARIO

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a cura di
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Printed in Germany

John Simpson
(Chief Editor, *Oxford English Dictionary*)

Why is the *OED* so small?

When the surviving editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* laid down their pens on the completion of the first edition of the dictionary and its supplement in 1933 they wrote a preface which opened with the following statement:

“If there is any truth in the old Greek maxim that a large book is a great evil, English dictionaries have been steadily growing worse ever since their inception over three centuries ago. To set Cawdrey’s slim small volume of 1604 beside the completed Oxford Dictionary...is like placing the original acorn beside the oak that had grown out of it.”⁵⁵

Historical dictionaries are necessarily large: typically they trace a language over centuries of use. In the *OED*’s case, the dictionary deals with English from the earliest records around 1,500 years ago right up to the present day. By 1989 the *OED* had grown to twenty volumes, and when the current Third Edition is complete it will probably run (if it were to be printed) to around forty volumes.

What is the Third Edition?

The Third Edition of the *OED*, available to subscribers at oed.com, is a project on which about sixty editors are currently working in Oxford and New York. The objective is (simply) to give the original *OED* and its Supplement (published together as the Second Edition in 1989) a comprehensive revision and update - the first in the dictionary’s long life. To this end *every entry* in the dictionary is being thoroughly reviewed. New and often earlier documentation is provided for words; new words and new meanings are added; definitions are rewritten as necessary; etymologies are enhanced with the latest knowledge, pronunciations are reviewed (and broadened to include North American forms as standard); and bibliographical details are being aligned with modern knowledge. This is a large task, especially when you consider that the *OED*

⁵⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1933), p. vi.

seeks to cover English in all of its varieties throughout the world. The first results of our revision were published in March 2000 and every three months since then we have released more and more revised, updated, and new entries - now at the rate of some three thousand entries each quarter. The cycle of revision and update will take more than another ten years, though we haven't yet fixed on a firm completion date.

It is instructive to investigate the results of revising just one of the *OED*'s many thousands of entries. The following entry is the Third Edition's entry for the word *menagerie*. There had been no alterations to the entry in the Second Edition of the *OED* (1989), and so the current entry (published in 2001) updates the original *OED* entry of 1906. The entries below show the entry as it appeared in the Second Edition, followed by the text now available in the Third (online) Edition⁵⁶:

menagerie (mɛˈnædʒɪəri) Also 8-9 **-ery**, (8 **managerie**, **menegerie**). [a. F. *ménagerie* domestic administration, management of cattle, building of a cattle-farm, now chiefly in sense 1 below; f. *ménage*: see *MÉNAGE* and *-ERY*. Cf. *MANAGERY*.]

1. a. A collection of wild animals in cages or enclosures, esp. one kept for exhibition, as in zoological gardens or a travelling show. Also, the place or building in which they are kept.

1712 J. JAMES tr. *Le Blond's Gardening* 23 Menagery is a Place where they keep Animals of several Kinds for Curiosity. **1762-71** H. WALPOLE *Vertue's Anecd. Paint.* (1786) IV. 8 Laguerre's father..became master of the menagerie at Versailles. **1829** LANDOR *Imag. Conv., Albani & Pict.-Dealers Wks.* 1853 II. 12/2 As to the lion, he has been in the menagery from his birth. **1886** J. G. WOOD in *Leis. Hour* 445 From early childhood I have been in the habit of frequenting menageries.

b. *transf.* and *allusively*.

1784 COWPER *Tiroc.* 293 What causes move us, knowing as we must That these *Menageries* all fail their trust, To send our sons to scout and scamper there? **1850** CARLYLE *Latter-d. Pamph.* vii. (1872) 241 Our menagerie of live Peers in Parliament. **1854** MACAULAY *Biog., Johnson* (1860) 121 An old quack doctor named Levett..completed this strange menagerie.

⁵⁶ All entries are the copyright of Oxford University Press and are reproduced by permission of the Secretary to the Delegates of Oxford University Press. The First Edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED1*) was published by Oxford University Press in instalments between 1884 and 1928; the Second Edition (*OED2*) was published in 1989; and the Third Edition (*OED3*, 2000-; in progress) is available online to subscribers at <http://dictionary.oed.com>.

†2. An aviary. *Obs.*

1749 LADY LUXBOROUGH *Lett. to Shenstone* 29 Aug., I have reared but one single Guinea-chick this year. - If I had such a command of corn and of water as you have, I should be apt to fall into the expense of a *Ménagerie*. **1757** MRS. DELANY in *Life & Corr.* 461 The menagerie is not stored with great variety, but great quantities of Indian pheasants. **1830** 'B. MOUBRAY' *Dom. Poultry* (ed. 6) 129 The Noblemen and Gentlemen who have private menageries for pheasants.

Hence *me'nagerist*, a keeper of a menagerie.

1850 in Cansick *Epitaphs Middlesex* (1872) II. 130 To the Memory of George Wombwell (Menagerist),...died..1850.

menagerie, *n.* *Brit.* /m[†]nadʒ(ə)ri/, *U.S.* /m^ənæ(d)ʒəri/ Forms: 16 **managirie**, **minagerie**, 17 **menagerie**, 17-18 **managerie**, 17-18 (18- *Eng. regional*) **menagery**, 17-**ménagerie**, **menagerie**, 18- (*Eng. regional*) **menaagery**. [< French *ménagerie*, † *mesnagerie* (1664 in sense 1; 1530 in Middle French as *mesnagerie* in sense 'administration of a house and esp. a farm', 1552 in sense 'dovecote', second half of 16th cent. in sense 'farmyard, farm') < Old French *mesnage* MÉNAGE *n.* + *-erie* -ERY. Cf. **MANAGERY** *n.*, **MESNAGERY** *n.*]

1. a. A collection of wild animals in cages or enclosures, *esp.* one kept for exhibition, as in a zoo, etc. Also: a place or building in which such a collection is kept. Travelling menageries which presented live animals in cages (normally distinct from circuses, where the animals typically perform tricks and other feats) were extremely popular from the 1830s, and died out around 1930. Two of the most famous in Britain were Mander's Royal Menagerie and Bostock and Wombwell's Menagerie.

1676 R. HOOKE *Diary* 13 May (1935) 232 Talkd of anatomy, of the French managirie [etc.]. **1712** J. JAMES tr. A.-J. Dezallier D'Argenville *Theory & Pract. Gardening* 23 Menagery is a Place where they keep Animals of several Kinds for Curiosity. **1762-71** H. WALPOLE *Vertue's Anecd. Painting* (1786) IV. 8 Laguerre's father..became master of the menagerie at Versailles. **1838** W. S. LANDOR *Imaginary Conversat.* in *Monthly Repos.* Apr. 236/2 As to the lion, he has been in the menagery from his birth. **1853** E. F. ELLET *Summer Rambles in West* 219 The visit of a travelling menagerie at Bunker Hill caused an excitement through the country for miles around. **1886** J. G. WOOD in *Leis. Hour* 445 From early childhood I have been in the habit of frequenting menageries. **1906** *Westm. Gaz.* 24 Dec. 4/1 An African thumbless monkey is among the recent additions to the 'Zoo' menagerie. **1931** S. MCKECHNIE *Pop. Entertainments* viii. 222 Bertram W. Mills' Circus and Menagerie..only in its second tenting season..has already revolutionised the status of the circus. **1988** B. CHATWIN *Utz* 55 We passed from the monkeys to the rest of the menagerie.

b. In extended use.

1771 H. MACKENZIE *Man of Feeling* xxi. 77 You waste at school years in improving talents, without having ever spent an hour in discovering them... From this menagerie of the pedagogue, a boy is turned loose upon the world to travel. **1777** K. O'HARA *April-day* III. 31 The bear's arctic, catartic, Saturnus, Urnus, Ops, Hydrops, Libra, Zebra, (Wi' the rest of the menagerie celestial). **1850** T. CARLYLE *Latter-day Pamphlets* (1872) VII. 241 Our menagerie of live Peers in Parliament. **1854** MACAULAY *Johnson* in *Biogr.* (1860) 121 An old quack doctor named Levett..completed this strange menagerie. **1925** *Amer. Mercury* May 4/2 When the old-fashioned drunkard..made a jovial exit astride a purple dipsosaurus or some other animal of the alcoholic menagerie, the Anti-Saloon League gathered around his coffin and wept. **1975** P. D. JAMES *Black Tower* iii. 75 Someone on the staff of that over-equipped and ill-disciplined menagerie..ought to have been able to recognize a scholar. **1992** *Discover* May 78/3 A veritable menagerie of illnesses caused by protozoa, nematodes, fungi, viruses, and bacteria.

†2. An aviary. *Obs.*

1749 LADY LUXBOROUGH *Let.* 29 Aug. in *Lett. to W. Shenstone* (1775) 117, I have reared but one single Guinea-chick this year.—If I had such a command of corn and of water as you have, I should be apt to fall into the expense of a Ménagerie. **1757** MRS. DELANY in *Life & Corr.* 461 The menagerie is not stored with great variety, but great quantities of Indian pheasants. **1830** 'B. MOUBRAY' *Domest. Poultry* (ed. 6) 129 The Noblemen and Gentlemen who have private menageries for pheasants.

The first point to note is that there is no change in the form of the headword. However the next field of information, the pronunciation, shows two transcriptions rather than one. The first represents the modern British English pronunciation (presented in an updated version of the International Phonetic Alphabet); the second shows for the first time in the *OED* an American pronunciation. Next comes the list of recorded spelling variants: there were only three in the original version, but there are now eight in the revised text, illustrating spelling variants of *menagerie* from the seventeenth century onwards. The new etymology is also completely rewritten. The original etymology derived the word from French, giving the spread of meanings in French, and cross-refers to the entry for *managery*. In *OED3* the etymology still, of course, records the term as derived from French but, as a result of substantial work in French etymology over the past century, is able to document variant forms within French, and dates the first occurrence of the significant meanings

in French, for comparison with the historical emergence of senses in English. The French word is now derived from the Old French form, about which *OED1* was silent. The impression given is of more interplay between English and French over the past four centuries than had been apparent from *OED1*'s one-dimensional presentation of the facts.

The principal and oldest meaning of *menagerie* in English (sense 1) is predated in *OED3* by 36 years from 1712 to 1676, to the diary of the scientist Robert Hooke (published since the original edition of the dictionary was published). A further nineteenth-century illustrative example is given (1853), this time from an American text, and three twentieth-century examples are provided to document the word's continued existence up to the present day. Careful readers will notice that the Landor quotation (1829 in the original edition) has been reverified and correctly dated to 1838. The extended use in sense 1b has also been antedated, from 1784 (Cowper) to 1771, with a further earlier quotation added from 1777. Again three twentieth-century examples have been provided, to document the use to the present day. No further documentation has been found for the final meaning of the word ('an aviary', recorded in both the original edition and *OED3* from 1749).

The overall effect of the revision has been to augment the historical and modern information we have for this word, mirroring the types of improvements which have been applied to thousands of other entries to date. We now know that *menagerie* entered English in the seventeenth, rather than the eighteenth, century; that its earlier history within French is more complex than had previously been recorded; that spelling variants persisted in mainstream English into the eighteenth century and continued within the English dialects into the nineteenth century and beyond. Finally, we have confirmation of the obsolescence of the final meaning 'an aviary', which appears to have lasted for only about a hundred years in English.

How do we keep the dictionary under control?

The answer is that we employ a strict editorial policy aimed at allowing us to describe the language concisely and yet as comprehensively as we think appropriate. We can now examine several of the features of this.

Selection criteria

English is traditionally divided into three major periods: Old English (up to around 1150 AD), Middle English (to around 1500), and Modern English (from around 1500 to the present day). The first pragmatic decision that the original editors of the dictionary took was to concentrate principally on the language from the Middle English period onwards. This is not to say that Old English is excluded, but that Old English words are only included if they survive into the Middle English period. The following list gives examples of Old English words from a short range of the alphabet which were excluded from the dictionary because they failed to survive into Middle English:

hunthyrle 'holes in the upper part of a mast'

hunu (?) 'a disease'

huruthinga 'at least, especially'

husa 'member of a household'

husærn 'dwelling-house'

husbrycel 'burglarious'

husbryne 'burning of a house'

husclie 'shameful'

huselbeorn 'communicant'

The policy of selection is crucial. It allows us to exclude large areas: for example proper names which do not have a lexical component and some regional language or dialect. It is not that the *OED* excludes all dialect (that would not be possible, for example, in the early days, before a standard variety had established itself). But regional English is typically only included if it is recorded in a reasonably wide geographical area, and is therefore known to a considerable number of speakers. This applies in Great Britain, but also to the *OED*'s coverage of the regional varieties of other forms of English abroad, in North America, Australia, etc.

Technical vocabulary (Science)

Scientific vocabulary is another area where many unfamiliar items might claim a place in the dictionary. Chemical names can run to hundreds of letters in length; compounds can be extremely long and convoluted in their form. Many

terms are restricted to an arcane (though perhaps significant) corner of science. How should the *OED* differentiate between those items it includes and those it excludes? As ever, our criteria are generally based upon frequency, though we are influenced by evidence showing that a scientific term has drifted into more general usage.

The following table shows the frequency of words beginning with *prot-* (of which there are over 7,000) in a large corpus drawn from Chemistry journals.⁵⁷ The terms already in (or about to be added to) the *OED* are highlighted in gray:

protein 2018 proton 1026 protons 950 proteins 821 protonation 325 protonated 240
Protein 205 Proteins 146 protected 135 protease 120
Proton 111

protection 97 proteinase 86 proteolytic 69 protomers 68 Protonation 63 protocol 62
protomer 58 protic 37 proteolysis 33 protecting 28 Protection 23 protective 23
protonolysis 23 proteases 22 prototype 22 protect 17 proteoliposomes 17
protoporphyrin 16 proteinases 15 prototypical 13 Proteinase 12 Protons 12 protio 11
protoplasts 11 protoplast 10 PROTEINS 9 Protease 9 protein·min 9 protocols 9
Proteolytic 8 protein·h 8 prothiophos 8 Prot 7 Protonated 6 proteolyzed 6 Proteolysis 5
prothrombin 5 protonating 5 protrude 5 Protected 4 Protective 4 protects 4 protiated 4
protomeric 4

Protas3 Proteases 3 Protocol 3 proteobacteria 3 proteolytically 3 protonate 3
protonations 3 prototypic 3 PROT 2 PROTEIN 2 Proteinaceous 2 Proteoliposomes 2
Protic 2 Protomers 2 Prototropic 2 protamine 2 proteincollagen 2 protein·mM 2
proteobacterial 2 proteoglycan 2 protiolytic 2 prototropic 2 protozoa 2 protruding 2

Protasiewicz 1 Protector 1 Proteinpreparations 1 Protein staining 1
Protheroe 1 Prothiophos 1 Protio1 Protiva 1 Protoblot 1 Protomer 1 Protonolysis 1
Protoplast 1 Protoplasts 1 Protoporphyrin 1 Prototype 1 Prototypical 1 Protsessa1
protectants 1 proteinaceous 1 proteinic 1
proteinlike 1 proten1 potential 1 proteoglycans 1 protioamine 1 protiodiethyl 1 protium
1 proto 1 protoheme 1 protolysis 1 protolytic 1 protonaromatic 1 protones 1 protonic 1
protonmeasurements 1
protonolyzing 1 protonylsis 1 protooncogene 1 protooncogenes 1

⁵⁷ This database was made available to the *OED* several years ago by Dr Michael Lesk, formerly of Bell Labs, Murray Hill, New Jersey.

prototrophic 1 prototypes 1 protozoan 1 protractor 1 protsessov 1

Again the dictionary seems to cover the major terms, as well as many lesser-known ones which are significant in the subject. But a fair number of typographical errors, loose collocations, and other occasional forms are omitted.

The evidence of word usage employed by the dictionary derives principally from its collection of data held on cards and on its computer databases, and also from the ever-growing assembly of word data accessible via the Internet. This evidence allows the editors to select words and senses of words for inclusion according to their frequency of usage. Terms which are well attested will be included in the dictionary; terms for which there is only scant evidence will normally be omitted. The dictionary's files contain many thousands of terms which have not been added to the dictionary. As evidence grows, some of them may be added in the future.

The following list shows a sequence of words (and their frequency of occurrence) accessible in the word-index to the Literature Online (LION)⁵⁸ database of literary texts in English from the Middle English period onwards. The terms below have all been excluded from the *OED* for the reasons given:

<i>menai</i> (29)	- proper name
<i>menai</i> (3)	- proper name
<i>menaida</i> (204)	- proper name
<i>menaida's</i> (34)	- proper name
<i>menaing</i> (1)	- typographical error for 'meaning'
<i>menai's</i> (17)	- proper name
<i>menai's</i> (3)	- proper name
<i>menajery</i> (2)	- humorous variant of 'menagerie'
<i>menaka's</i> (1)	- proper name
<i>menal</i> (65)	- abbrev. for proper name (Menalippe) in plays, etc. though included in the OED as a variant form of 'menial'
<i>menala</i> (1)	- proper name
<i>menalacs</i> (1)	- typo for proper name 'Menalcu'
<i>menalaij</i> (1)	- proper name
<i>menalaion</i> (1)	- proper name
<i>menalaos</i> (1)	- proper name

⁵⁸ See <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/marketing/index.jsp>.

menalape (1) - proper name

This second list, from the same source, displays another sequence from elsewhere in the alphabet:

deanness (3)	- all from Sterne's <i>Tristram Shandy</i> : in <i>OED</i>
deaneth (1)	- typographical error in 1585 side-note for 'meaneth'
deanger (1)	- Scots variant of 'danger' (not in <i>OED</i> , <i>DSL</i>)
deangthi (1)	- <i>Be-deangthi</i> , in discussion of Hebrew and other terms
deanhaugh (1)	- proper name
deanish (1)	- rare derivative of 'dean' (not in <i>OED</i>)
deanite (2)	- from the work of Sir Walter Scott: = 'an ally of Mr Deans'
deanorie (2)	- 18th-century archaism found as part of a proper name
deanport (186)	- proper name

It is worth emphasizing this selectivity, as it is a common misconception that the *OED* seeks to include all the words in the English language. It would be better to say that the *OED* seeks to include all those words which have or have had a substantial place in the language.

Documentary evidence

The dictionary provides documentary evidence for each of the words and senses that it includes. It will always include the earliest illustrative quotation available for a word or a meaning of a word, as well as a selection from later years, up to the present day (or until the point of obsolescence). This is an area which could lead potentially to a significant explosion in the dictionary's size. So much documentation is available for common terms over history that paragraphs of quotations illustrating usage could be easily manufactured. But again this hazard is sidestepped by a strong editorial policy. Editors are instructed to *select* from the wealth of illustrative documentation. This selection is based on many criteria: we seek to illustrate the variety of genres in which a term is used; the introduction of major variant spellings; geographical and chronological spread; quotations which add (through their text) some historical or semantic information which cannot be included in the definition; etc.

The revised entry for the word *porthole* illustrates the point well.⁵⁹ The highlighted quotations have been added to the entry in the process of revising. But these additions represent only a minute proportion of the documentary evidence available to the editors in the dictionary's own word-files and other sources. It is interesting to note that one database, the Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)⁶⁰ contains over 1,100 instances of the word *porthole* alone! In order to accommodate this new material, it is sometimes necessary to remove existing but superseded quotations from the text of the dictionary.

porthole, *n.* *Brit.* /pɔːthəʊl/, *U.S.* /pɔrt(h)oʊl/ [< PORT *n.*³ + HOLE *n.*]

1. a. *Naut.* Originally: an aperture in a ship's side through which a cannon may be pointed. Subsequently: a small window (usually circular) in the side of a boat or ship. Also *fig.*

1569 T. STOCKER tr. Diodorus Siculus *Hist. Successors Alexander* III. xi. f. 121^v, He picked oute hys strongest Barques and furnished them with thicke planchers made out with great wyndowes, which serued in stead of Port holes to open and shut. **1591** R. PERCYVALL *Bibliotheca Hispanica* Dict. s.v. *Portañola*, A port-hole, *porta*. **1602** J. MARSTON *Antonios Reuenge* II. ii. sig. D2, The port holes Of sheathed spirit are nere corb'd vp. **1618** W. RALEIGH *Observ. Royal Navy* 26 Wont to plant great red Port-holes in their broad sides, where they carried no Ordnance at all. **1691** T. HALE *Acct. New Inventions* p. x, So contrived the Port Holes therein, that most of her Guns might point to one Center. **1759** W. FALCONER *Descr. Ninety-gun Ship* 41 Full ninety brazen guns her port-holes fill. **1792** E. BURKE *On Negro Code* in *Wks.* IX. 285 Grated port-holes between the decks. **1842** DICKENS *Amer. Notes* I. i. 6 There was a beautiful port-hole which could be kept open all day (weather permitting). **1892** W. C. RUSSELL *Marriage at Sea* iii, A black steam-boat, her portholes glittering as though the whole length of her was studded with brilliants. **1943** D. WELCH *Maiden Voy.* xiii. 105 In the evening I walked round the deck passing constantly the portholes of Mrs Wright's cabin. **1992** *Ships Monthly* Apr. 40/3 Lit from the truck of her mast down to the lowest row of portholes at the waterline, she was a fine sight to see as she made her way downriver.

b. A small window in the side of an aircraft or spacecraft.

1927 *Times* 3 Aug. 7/6 Portholes [*sc.* in a flying boat] complete the illusion that one is in an ordinary liner. **1937** *Lincoln* (Nebraska) *Evening Jrnl.* 25 June 12/4 There is a hint of a woman's touch on the interiors—such as in the linen curtains at the portholes—but

⁵⁹ "porthole, *n.*" OED Online. June 2007. Oxford University Press. 18 September 2007
<<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50184561>>.

⁶⁰ See <http://gale.cengage.com/EighteenthCentury/>.

for the most part they are merely great winged flying machines. **1962** W. SCHIRRA in *Into Orbit* 33 They..pointed out that they had already stuck on a periscope and a couple of small port-holes, but we all felt strongly that a pilot ought to have a clear, visual reference to his surroundings. **1968** *Listener* 27 June 827/1 Departure by air could involve hazards quite separate from the lurking fears..of being sucked, à la James Bond, out of a porthole. **1970** T. HUGHES *Crow* 13 It was cosy in the rocket, he could not see much But he peered out through the portholes at Creation. **2000** *N.Y. Times* 1 Jan. A30/1 From the porthole of their spacecraft that Christmas Eve in 1968 we could see how small, how wondrous our planet is.

2. In extended use.

a. An aperture in a wall, esp. serving as an embrasure; a small circular window in a building, resembling a ship's porthole (cf. *porthole window* n. at Compounds 2).

1637 H. HEXHAM *True & Briefe Relation Famous Seige of Breda* 42 These [batteries] being planted beate vpon the Ennemies port holes, and put one of their halfe Canon presently to silence. **1645** N. DRAKE *Jrnl. Sieges Pontefract Castle* 11 May (1861) 37 One of our men was looking out of a porthole on the Round tower. **1677** EARL OF ORRERY *Treat. Art of War* 118 Erect your Parapets, which may be Cannon-proof, with Portholes, or with great Cannon Gabions well fill'd with Earth. **1701** H. MAUNDRELL *Journey to Jerusalem* (1703) 18 It has the face of a Castle being Built with port-holes for Artillery, instead of Windows. **1753** J. HANWAY *Hist. Acct. Brit. Trade Caspian Sea* (1762) I. III. xxxiv. 157 This city is inclosed within a wall above a mile in each square, with a great number of regular turrets and port-holes for arrows. **1847** G. R. GIBSON *Jrnl.* Feb. (1935) 336 The best of artillery has no effect upon them [*sc.* walls] except to make portholes for the enemy. **1892** *Catholic World* Apr. 107 It was also a trading-post, but a yet more extensive and elaborate structure, built after military models, with turrets, bastions, and portholes. **1931** *Internat. Affairs* 10 864 The frowning towers over the gates of Peking with port-holes filled with painted cannon. **1983** P. FUSSELL *Class* iv. 84 Some proles aim for status by going in for 'portholes' on their split-level ranch houses, circular openings a foot and a half in diameter with white surrounds. **2005** *N.Y. Times* (Nexis) 26 Jan. F.7/1 A fine lobster roll was served to me in a booth complete with a porthole.

b. An air-hole or access hole in a furnace.

1677 W. DERHAM *Philos. Exper. & Observ. Eminent Dr. Robert Hooke* (1726) 175 At the Bottom, make two Port-holes, opposite to one another, and capable to receive a Hand; make a Bottom of the same Clay, which may reflect the Heat. **1791** *Philos. Trans.* (Royal Soc.) 81 175 He now stops the port hole in the door [of the furnace] at which he had introduced his tools, and applies a fierce flame for 6 or 8 minutes. **1858** *Jrnl. Soc. Arts* 3 Dec. 32/2 There is an airhole in each back corner [of a roasting furnace], called a porthole. **1871** J. T. TROWBRIDGE *Lawrence's Adventures* iii. 54 Lawrence, shielding his

eyes with his hand, advanced to one of the port-holes, and saw what seemed a pot of liquid fire within. **1997** S. MEGY et al. in P. Fauchais *Progress Plasma Processing Materials* 468 On the roof, there are a port hole (0 ~ 100mm.) in the center for a cathode assembly, and three auxiliary holes.

c. *Austral.* and *N.Z.* An aperture in the wall of a shearing shed through which shorn sheep are passed into a counting-out pen.

Sometimes also applied to the chute or ramp into the counting-out pen; see quot. 1982.

1882 A. S. ARMSTRONG & G. O. CAMPBELL *Austral. Sheep Husbandry* xv. 175 Upon the opposite side of the shearing board, 'port-holes', or small doorways, are made (one for each shearer), through which the sheep are turned when shorn. **1933** *Press* (Christchurch, N.Z.) 30 Sept. 15/7 *Counting out pens*. Each shearer has his own and passes his sheep through a *porthole* into his, so that each man's tally may be counted. **1956** G. BOWEN *Wool Away!* (ed. 2) iii. 43 A lot of time and effort can be wasted in switching off and kicking sheep out the porthole. **1982** J. S. GUNN in *Austral. Lang. Res. Centre Occas. Papers* (Sydney Univ.) 20 7 The *chute* (ramp) and *porthole* (opening to the ramp) were once quite distinct but soon carelessly confused.

d. *Archaeol.* A hole in a slab or adjacent slabs of stone, forming the entrance to a tomb or other chamber.

1928 H. PEAKE & H. J. FLEURE *Steppe & Sown* ii. 24 The circular hole, or porthole as it has been called, is a usual feature [of stone cists near Tzarevskaya], and occurs elsewhere. **1940** *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.* 6 133 Problems associated with the nature and origin of portholes in megalithic tombs in Europe. **1958** G. DANIEL *Megalith Builders W. Europe* ii. 44 Port-holes occur in southern Iberia and in a small number of tombs in France and Britain, as well as in the Gallery Graves of southern Sweden. **1988** *Man* 23 548 The provision of internal constrictions within the tomb, in the form of septal slabs or portholes, has usually been interpreted as a means of restricting access.

3. A port (PORT *n.*³ 5a) in a steam engine. Now *rare*.

1854 *Sci. Amer.* 8 July 342/3, [I claim] the form and operation of the induction valves..closing the port holes on a circle section against the water after it passes them.

1888 P. N. HASLUCK *Model Engineer's Handybk.* 27 On turning the fly-wheel the crank draws the piston-rod out and inclines the cylinder sideways, bringing the port-hole to the left. **1913** L. WHITE *Catskill Water Supply N.Y. City* 689 In one position the valve allows air to enter through port holes to the space above the piston cylinder.

†4. *Zool.* Each of the tiny apertures in the columnar body of a sea anemone, through which the stinging acontia may project; = *CINCLIS n. Obs. rare*.

1897 T. J. PARKER & W. A. HASWELL *Text-bk. Zool.* I. 188 Many Sea-anemones possess curious organs of offence called acontia. These..can be protruded through minute apertures in the column, called 'port-holes' or cinclides.

COMPOUNDS

C1. General *attrib.***porthole shutter** *n.*

1862 G. WELLES *Let.* 20 Sept. in *Official Rec. Union & Confederate Navies War of Rebellion* (U.S. Naval War Rec. Office) (1905) 1st Ser. XIX. 319, I have respectfully to report the repairs of this vessel completed, including the machinery and boilers and the plating of four *porthole shutters. **1892** E. REEVES *Homeward Bound* 95 We now find the advantage of the port-hole shutters. **1917** *Syracuse* (N.Y.) *Herald* 7 Oct. (Magazine section) 8/1 We turned off the electric lights and pushed aside a porthole shutter.

C2. porthole cist *n. Archaeol.* a stone chamber or coffin entered through a porthole (sense 2d).

1939 V. G. CHILDE *Dawn European Civilization* (ed. 3) ix. 168 Forssander seems inclined to explain Pontic elements in Central Europe by a migration from the Caucasus of the makers of Globular Amphoræ who would also have brought the idea of the *porthole cist and the pit-cave tombs. **1973** *Current Anthropol.* **14** 440/1 The usual run of dolmens, porthole cists, and menhirs.

porthole slab *n. Archaeol.* a stone slab with a circular hole, forming an entrance to a tomb or other chamber; cf. sense 2d.

1946 *Man* **46** 97 *Porthole slabs are admissable as indices of megalithic architecture. **1983** *Macmillan Dict. Archaeol.* 402/2 *Port-hole slab*, a stone slab with a usually circular hole, or two adjacent slabs each with a semi-circular hole, most often found in megalithic tombs, from western Europe to India.

porthole stone *n. Archaeol.* = *porthole slab* *n.*

1939 V. G. CHILDE *Dawn European Civilization* (ed. 3) xii. 206 A *porthole stone often enhances the resemblance of a built tomb's doorway to the entry into a natural or artificial cave. **1956** V. G. CHILDE *Short Introd. Archaeol.* iv. 74 A port-hole stone is a slab, forming one end of a megalithic tomb or interrupting the entrance passage, in which has been neatly carved a round or sub-rectangular aperture through which access to the chamber might be obtained.

porthole window *n.* a small circular window resembling a ship's porthole.

1708 E. HATTON *New View London* I. II. 172/1 It has a camerated Roof, beautifully adorned with Arches of Fret-work, bet[wee]n each of which is a Panel of Crocket-work, and Fret-work, and a *Port-hole Window. **a1891** H. MELVILLE *Billy Budd* xviii, in *Wks.* (1924) XIII. 80 At each end of the oblong space were two sashed port-hole windows easily convertible back into embrasures for short carronades. **1991** M. RIPLEY *Angel*

Touch (BNC) 88 Lisabeth and Fenella..were riveted to the porthole window like two old men sharing a What the Butler Saw machine.

DERIVATIVES

portholed *adj.* provided with a porthole or portholes (in various senses).

1854 W. H. HURLBERT *Gan-Eden* vii. 74 The cars had a familiar look, having been built in those long *port-holed edifices. **1938** *Antiquity* 12 302 Some of these (e.g. Züschen, Fritzlar) have a portholed septal slab. **1984** M. A. JARMAN *Nightly in Tavern* 63 Port-holed shanties perch a line between eelgrass and air. **2002** *San Diego Bus. Jrnl.* (Nexis) 7 Jan. 28 There are portholed diving helmets and '30s-era cameras.

The search for the perfect selection of illustrative quotations is an illusory quest. At some point the editor has to call a halt to the search, or encounter grossly diminishing returns. In fact editors rely on the principle that they spend as much time as they can afford in searching, but in the end they know that the entry must be published, and that others outside the editorial offices may well find better documentation - which can then be imported into the online dictionary for the benefit of everyone. The purpose of this selection is to present the reader with a manageable digest of the data available in such a way that it can be understood and interpreted in a relatively straightforward manner. It would often be easy to add further documentation, but this would be at a considerable cost, both in terms of the practical aspects (the more there is, the more the editors have to check and verify) but also in terms of usability. A large entry soon becomes unwieldy for the reader, and loses its focus.

The principle of sampling applies to many aspects of work on the dictionary, such as the reading of historical and modern texts in search of illustrative quotations. Although more or less the whole of the extant corpus of Old English (some 3 million words) is searchable electronically, the situation becomes more difficult the closer we come to the present day and the need for sampling therefore becomes similarly greater.

Editorial text

The last major portion of text in a historical dictionary which could become too large is that which the editors themselves create: the text of definitions and etymologies. Here I should point out that our system of working involves a number of interrelated processes. Put simply: data (from our files and databases, and from external databases) is collected together by research assistants; editors are then allocated a range of words to revise or draft within a finite amount of time (editors are divided into general and scientific editors); their work is then reviewed by a senior member of their editorial group, before being passed to the *OED*'s etymology group. This group is responsible for writing or rewriting the etymologies for the older and typically more complex words in English. At the same time the *OED*'s Bibliography group vets the bibliographical standards of the illustrative quotations. Finally the work comes to myself or the dictionary's Deputy Chief Editor for final editing and passing for press.

This is a very short description of a complicated process, which is supported by a tailor-made computer system allowing editors to edit and research their entries, and to monitor their progress against their schedule. I say this in case you think that controlling the dictionary is mainly a matter of controlling the policy. The largest single investment in the dictionary is represented by its editorial staff, and so how the staff are trained, motivated, and managed is central to the success of the current revision. There are, however, many aspects of editing that benefit from strong rules and guidelines. I am in general not in favour of a totally rule-based editorial process: the business of analysing and defining words needs to be more flexible than that. So we have rules for style and guidelines for policy. Editors learn to apply the guidelines better the more experience they have gained. There is no substitute for experience in lexicographical work.

Here are some typical guidelines to help steer editors in casting definitions:

- 1) Use standard modern English vocabulary and idioms – be neutral (if anything, slightly conservative) and not colloquial
- 2) Some aspects of a word are central to a definition, others are relevant but not central, and yet others are peripheral. You should not try to include every possible facet of a term in a definition

- 3) Beware of creating lists (especially those punctuated with ‘etcetera’ and ‘and the like’), as these lead to a scattershot approach to definition; make words fight for a place in your definition
- 4) If you are not certain whether to add some feature to a definition, it is usually best to leave it out
- 5) Write the definition for the user, who can be assumed (in a historical dictionary) to have a general knowledge of the language used in definitions, and not to need absolutely everything spelled out
- 6) Don’t define solely by context, as this means that you will end up with many more subsenses than you need (this is the ‘lumping’ versus ‘splitting’ argument)
- 7) If you are revising an older definition, do not assume that ‘old’ is wrong and ‘new’ is right; avoid the wilful destruction of the old if it is still the best way to define a word
- 8) Once you have written a definition, read it again several times to check that it flows, in terms of style, and aligns with the facts that you have, and then make it slightly shorter.

A historical dictionary supplements its definition with illustrative quotations. Editors can use these to flesh out less central aspects of a term’s use. Appropriate subject labelling can help the definer, by leading the reader to interpret polysemous vocabulary accurately (a ‘cell’ in a word labelled as a term from Chemistry can be understood to be different from a ‘cell’ used in defining an Electrical term). There is clearly much more that can be said about defining style, but time restrictions mean that this is not the place to say it.

If I can summarize what I have said in general about scale in team lexicography, maybe I can put it in four statements:

- 1) Your editors are your greatest asset, so make sure they remain motivated and fixed on the goal
- 2) Sample your language data – don’t try to be too comprehensive, or you will never finish!
- 3) Be brief. Select. Pare back. Give an ordered digest, as that is more useful to the reader than a chaotic accumulation of information

- 4) Just because you can do something, do not feel you have to do it. I am tempted to say: just because you can do something, don't!

Riassunto italiano

I dizionari storici sono di solito testi di grande estensione e consistono di vari volumi. Questo articolo esamina alcune strategie con cui la lessicografia storica può tener sotto controllo la mole dei suoi prodotti. Qui vengono discussi i criteri di scelta, il trattamento del vocabolario specialistico e aspetti delle scelte editoriali.

La recente proliferazione di dati storici e contemporanei *on line* costringe i lessicografi ad affrontare nuovi problemi relativi alla misura dei loro prodotti. I vari punti esaminati vengono illustrati in questo articolo con esempi che provengono dalla versione corrente dell'*OED*.

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