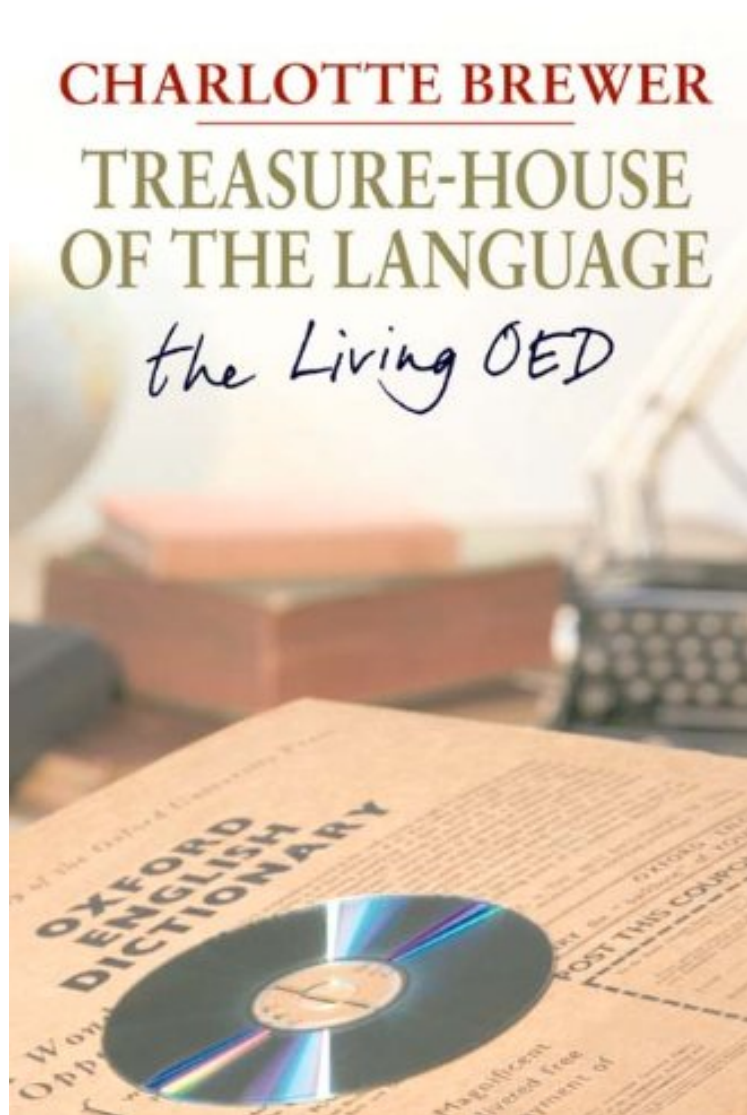


(Mobile ebook) Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED

Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED

Charlotte Brewer

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Charlotte Brewer : Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED:

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Continuation of a Remarkable Story By Gary M. Olson This book traces the recent history of the Oxford English Dictionary, from the publication of the first edition in 1928 (itself the culmination of decades of work) up to the present work on a third edition to be published entirely on-line. It is a fascinating history, shaped by policies and practices first established for work on the first edition (primarily by the

editor James Murray), both lexicographical and business (the latter the Oxford University Press). The history takes us through the initial Supplement published in 1933, a reduced but existant trickle of work until the 1950s, the production of a second Supplement in four volumes between 1957 and 1986, the release of a Second Edition of the complete dictionary in 1989, the brief phase of CD-based releases, and finally the current ambitious program to do a completely revamped and updated Third Edition on line. Brewer does a masterful job of surveying and commenting on this fascinating period of history. Any project of the scale of the OED will have lots of shortcomings, errors, and biases, and Brewer reflects in detail how these have characterized each of the phases of this history. The ongoing tensions between the desire for "perfect" entries by the lexicographers and the need to publish something by the OUP is a central part of the story. All projections of project timelines have turned out to be hopelessly inaccurate -- including the present Third Edition project. Brewer presents fascinating details (aided by the current electronic resources that allow for searches that reveal interesting patterns) that show how the practices of the principals (editors and their staff, contributors from the general public, publishers) in the social and cultural context of their times (spanning more than a century) have led to numerous peculiar properties of the dictionary. A project begun in Victorian England will of necessity have properties that are alien to our early 21st century world. To their credit, the editors of the Third Edition intend to reflect the values and practices of our contemporary world, though of course whoever writes the history of the OED a century from now will certainly find as many quaint and unusual features as Brewer has found in her history. This is an altogether remarkable and enjoyable history, and a much-needed addition to the growing collection of histories of the OED itself.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The Grand _OED_ after the First Edition
By Rob Hardy
There have been many books about the compilation of the original _Oxford English Dictionary_, and this is as it should be. The monumental work started publishing its A volume in 1888 and finished the Z in 1928, with 15,000 pages defining over 400,000 words. At a banquet to celebrate its conclusion, it was hailed as "unrivalled in completeness and unapproachable in authority; as near infallibility, indeed, as we can hope to get this side of Rome." Millions of people trust that near-infallibility; to say "The _OED_ says..." about a word is to give the strongest of evidence. Yet although the dictionary was finished in 1928, it was not really finished (and never could be), and it was far from error-free. In 1951, a co-editor of the original _OED_, C. T. Onions, wrote that the great work had "hosts of wrong definitions, wrong datings, and wrong crossreferences. The problem is gigantic." How the lexicographers and the Oxford University Press handled the problem of updating and correcting the dictionary by supplements, abridgements, electronic versions, and the current online version is the subject of *Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED* (Yale University Press) by Charlotte Brewer. Anyone who uses the _OED_, and anyone with any interest in words and the roles dictionaries play in the use of language, will find stimulating this scholarly history of the _OED_ after its first edition was completed. Since the dictionary took forty years to print from A to Z, and since English had plenty of new words and new emphases by the time the great task was completed, everyone knew that there would have to be a supplement volume to cover the years when the dictionary was in production, a supplement that would have plenty of entries for the early part of the alphabet and fewer for the later part. This first supplement came out in 1933, and some thought that this would be the end of the _OED_ effort, since such a gargantuan project could not be completely revised, and indeed work on the dictionary did go into hibernation in some ways. However, the readers and contributors who had from the inception of the dictionary sent in slips with examples of words and usage simply continued; they were in the habit of excerpting quotations from everything they read and did not stop. There were, indeed, four more supplements issued, the last one in 1986. This was unwieldy, because if you wanted to be sure about a word, you had to look it up in several different volumes. The need for a second edition was eventually clear, and in 1989 it was published with the help of the electronic storage and retrieval available at the time. These twenty volumes were heralded as a masterpiece, but Brewer explains that it was more than anything a marketing triumph. The second edition had essentially the same content that had gone before, but was a financial step in bringing forth a complete revision. That revision is in progress. There may be a third edition printed, maybe twenty or thirty years from now, but maybe a print edition will never emerge. Brewer's book ends with a review of the latest version, the *_OED Online_*, launched in 2000. I can confirm that this really is the best *_OED_* ever from a user's view; the subscription fee is daunting, but plenty of libraries can get you on for free, and the website is much more fun to use and browse around than was my old microprint *_OED_*, the one with the inescapable magnifying glass. Brewer, who does research on the *_OED Online_* to investigate the *_OED_* itself, explains that in the web format, "*_OED_* was poised to escape the tyranny of alphabetization." Searching does not have to go by alphabet, but can be done electronically by dates, suffixes, etymologies, cited authors, and more. Also, there is plenty of space and no worry about how many column inches would be used up by cramming in a new word or new quotation; this is a fundamental difference in how the dictionary is put out. Revised chunks are issued every quarter, the full revision-in-progress including even changing the wording of definitions, replacing "the late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century locutions that now look quaint..." Even in the online age, however, the dictionary-maker's "dull plodding... is still an inextricable part of the lexicographical process." Brewer gives fascinating details about how that process has changed, and stayed the same, over the past century.

The legendary Oxford English Dictionary today contains over 600,000 words and a staggering 2,500,000 quotations to illuminate the meaning and history of those words. A glorious, bursting treasure-house, the OED serves as a guardian of the literary jewels of the past, a testament to the richness of the English language today, and a guarantor of future understanding of the language. In this book, Charlotte Brewer begins her account of the OED at the point where others have stopped the publication of the final installment of the first edition in 1928 and carries it through to the metamorphosis of the dictionary into a twenty-first-century electronic medium. Brewer describes the difficulties of keeping the OED up to date over time and recounts the recurring debates over finances, treatment of contentious words, public vs. scholarly expectations, proper sources of quotations, and changing editorial practices. With humor and empathy, she portrays the predilections and personalities of the editors, publishers, and assistants who undertook the Sisyphean task of keeping pace with the modern explosion of vocabulary. Utilizing rich archives in Oxford as well as new electronic resources, the author uncovers a history no less complex and fascinating than the Oxford English Dictionary itself.

From Booklist The treasure-house of the language, the Oxford English Dictionary, has inspired its own treasury of books, of which Brewer's is just the latest. The 70-year process of creating the OED's first edition, chronicled in Simon Winchester's *The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary* (2003) and Lynda Mugglestone's *Lost for Words: The Hidden History of the Oxford English Dictionary* (2005), has passed into heroic dictionary legend. Brewer takes the history forward from the first edition's completion in 1928 into less familiar territory: the making of the first (1933) and second (1972-86) supplements; OED2 (1989), which merged the supplements with the original; and several Additions containing new entries. The need for a thorough revision, long recognized, began in earnest in 1994. Ironically, despite the OED's relatively early conversion to an electronic medium, completion of the long-awaited third edition may take as long as the first; it was originally planned for 2010 but has been deferred. Brewer's account is not light reading, but intrepid dictionary lovers will eat it up. --Mary Ellen Quinn "Rich. . . . The OED is a text that has always fascinated me, and in Brewer's hands, it becomes even more interesting." Michael G. Cornelius, *The Bloomsbury*