

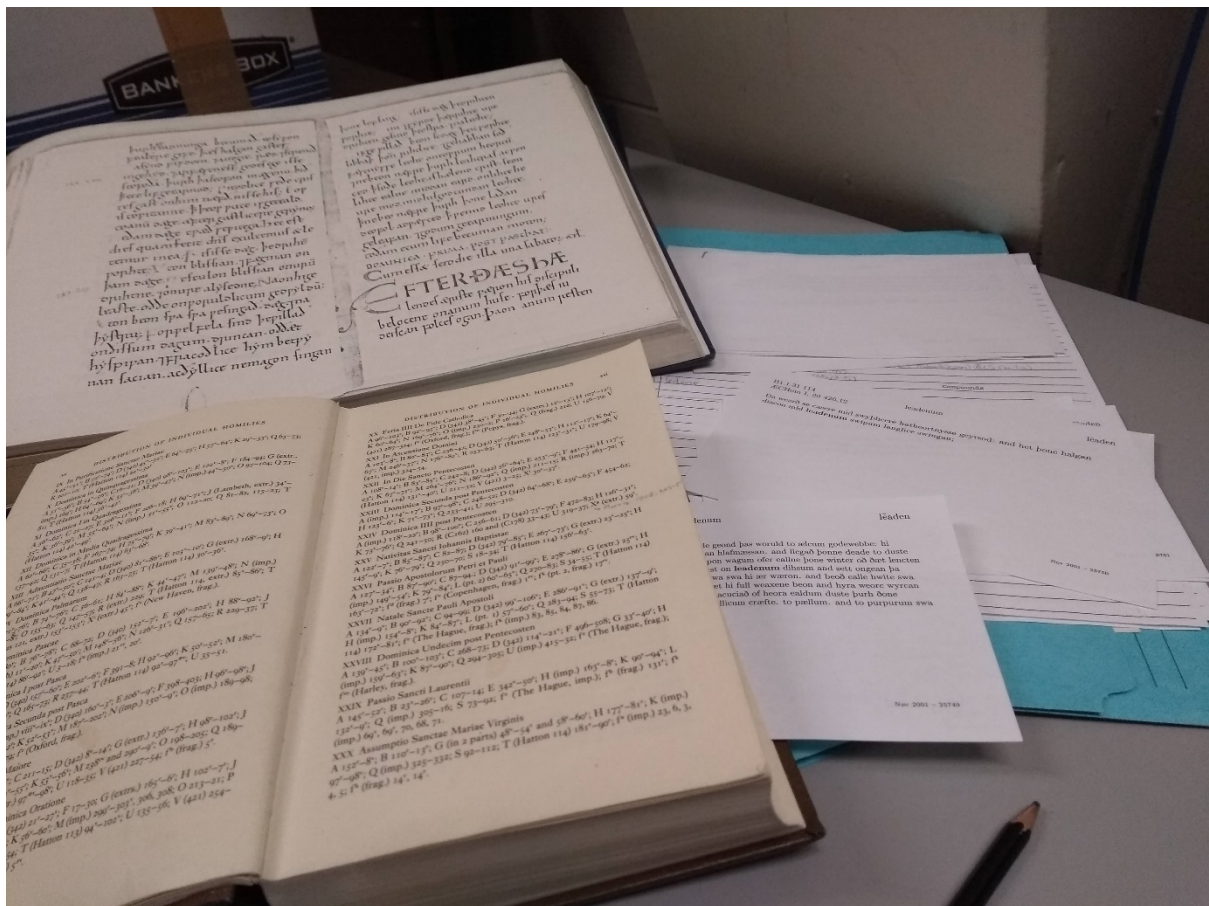
## The Lexicographer's Art

I grew up in England and completed a BA in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic with Linguistics at Magdalene College, Cambridge, before moving to Scotland to undertake postgraduate study at the University of Glasgow. My MPhil thesis examined aspects of the lexicographical methodology, intended purpose and scholarly legacy of William Somner's 1659 *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum*, the first published dictionary of Old English. I am now in the second year of a PhD, also at the University of Glasgow. My thesis examines how dictionaries of Old English represent the end of their period of coverage and the transition from Old to Middle English. Beginning with Somner's dictionary and finishing in the present day, I am building a historiographical account of how different lexicographers have written about linguistic change in English and the challenges of periodisation, adding nuance to this picture by testing their claims about the scope of their dictionaries against the evidence of how key words and texts are handled in their entries.

The final dictionary that I am discussing in my thesis is the *Dictionary of Old English*, and from early January to late March of 2019 I was lucky enough to be able to visit the dictionary's offices at the University of Toronto to carry out research. This visit had several goals: to learn more about the *DOE* from scholars involved with the project, to gain first-hand experience of producing a historical dictionary, and to make use of books and other research materials held at the *DOE* or in University of Toronto libraries.

The *DOE* staff were extremely generous with their time and knowledge, not only allowing me to observe and learn from their work but also agreeing to be interviewed as part of my thesis research. As a significant proportion of my PhD involves reconstructing the possible thought processes of the lexicographers of the past using the evidence of their dictionaries, I found it rewarding to be able to ask the *DOE* lexicographers directly about the choices they face in the process of writing an entry. By speaking to all the current *DOE* staff, I also gained an insight into the many other tasks that go into the making of a dictionary. Everyone I spoke to also lent their particular expertise to suggest further avenues and methods of enquiry that might help me in my research, and shed light on aspects of work at the *DOE* past or present.

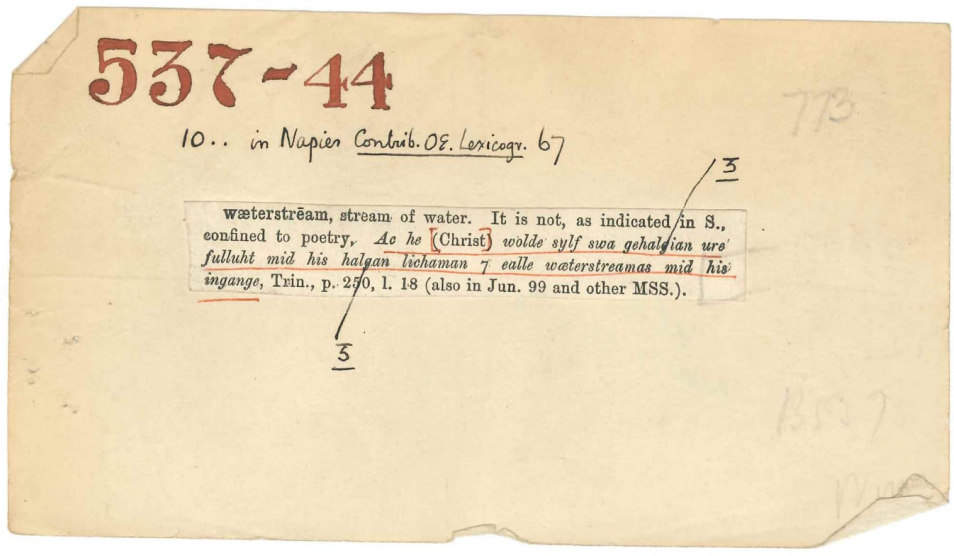
I was very pleased to be allowed to help with the task of drafting *DOE* entries. I began by finding and categorising variant spellings to be recorded in the attested spelling field of the dictionary. This task involved consulting not only quotation slips representing texts in the *DOE* corpus but also printed editions of texts and, on occasion, manuscript facsimiles; it was therefore an excellent introduction to navigating the *DOE*'s resources as well as engaging in depth with the critical apparatus of editions I had previously read only in passing or not at all. Later, I took on other parts of the entry-writing process, from identifying Latin sources and equivalents to writing definitions and selecting illustrative quotations. With the expert guidance of Rob Getz, I eventually drafted entries for six words: *lead*, *leadan*, *leohtfæt*, *leornere*, *stæfleornere* and *stærleornere*. It was a real privilege to be able to contribute to the *DOE*, and it gave me an invaluable personal insight into the work of the lexicographer and the challenges of writing an entry.



### Checking attested spellings

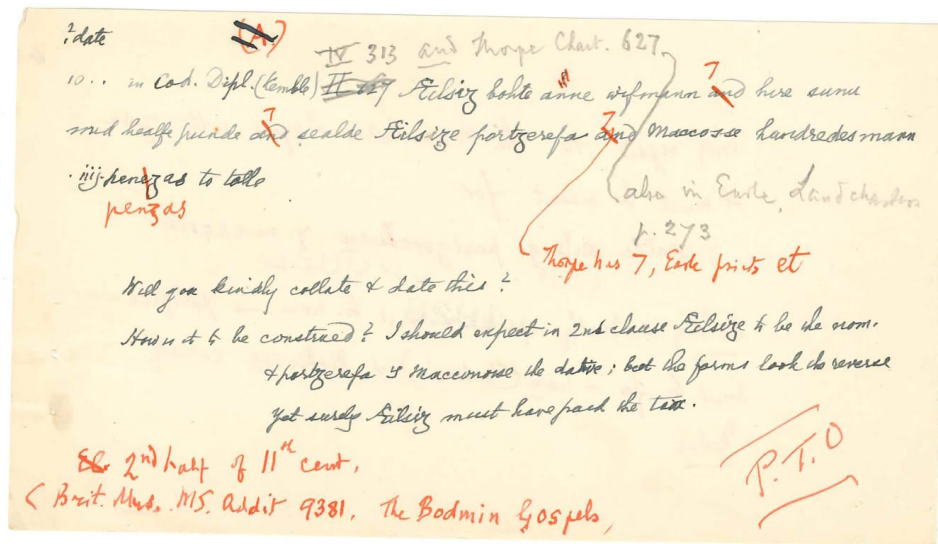
At the *DOE*, I had ready access not only to scholarly editions of texts but to a wide range of other resources, many of which are hard to find elsewhere. Publications relating to the early stages of planning and writing the *DOE* were especially useful for my PhD research. I was also very excited to be allowed to examine the *DOE*'s collection of quotation slips produced at the *Oxford English Dictionary*. These slips, containing Old English quotations, had originally been sent from the *OED* to the *Middle English Dictionary*, and from there came to the *DOE*. *DOE* lexicographers, working primarily from the *DOE* corpus, had not needed to consult them to any great extent; however, they were very interesting to me as artefacts of another major historical dictionary project.

In looking through the *OED* slips, I was able to make a variety of interesting observations and discoveries. It can be seen that certain key Old English texts were read, and quotation slips made from them, at an early point in the *OED*'s history, as slips for these texts in the same layout and handwriting occur throughout the alphabet. It is also possible to see the uncertainty of some *OED* editors when it came to lemmatizing Old English; some slips show several attempts at lemmatization, with citation forms given in Old, Middle and Modern English. There is also indecision and inconsistency in aspects of the transcription of Old English texts, with many quotations showing instances of eth being corrected to thorn and vice versa, or changes in the use of insular versus Caroline g in transcribed quotations.



OED quotation slip, showing the correction of the printed source's <g> to <3>

Other slips offer us a glimpse of the people behind the *OED*. Two lexicographers may have a conversation on a slip about some aspect of an entry, or the back of a slip may have been used to write a draft definition or etymology. Individuals can be identified by their handwriting; especially interesting in this respect are the slips written by the Anglo-Saxonist and fantasy author J.R.R. Tolkien, who worked on the *OED* as a young man. There are also traces in the slips of the many scholars who corresponded with the *OED*, though they did not work as lexicographers. The *DOE*'s collection of slips included several postcards addressed to the *OED* editors James Murray and William Craigie by noted Anglo-Saxonists including Felix Liebermann, A.S. Napier and Ferdinand Holthausen.



"Will you kindly collate and date this": OED lexicographers in conversation

Beowulf  
 2135  
 Ic Sees waelmes. Grundhyrde fond.

OED quotation slip in the handwriting of J.R.R. Tolkien

David Murray to Bend Sinners  
 My answer to your Berlin 15<sup>th</sup> Sept 1902  
 inquiry was addressed to Sinners. I beg  
 to send you copy in a separate envelope,  
 which I should thank you occasionally to  
 return, as it is on Sinners's letter which I  
 should not like to lose.  
 The Rochester charter with furis comprehensio  
intra foris is also in ms. Show 631 p. 37 (now  
 Brit. Mus.) - but I do not know its date. There  
 are traces in it of pre-XI<sup>th</sup> century, may pre-  
 -XI<sup>th</sup> cent. orthography. Not is it such a bad  
 forgery as the Gastonbury one. But it may be  
 one or it may at least have been lampooned  
 with, in other words the formula may be an interpola-  
 tion. If it is so, it still remains a proof that  
 the privilege did exist about 1100. The Rochester  
 scrib<sup>e</sup> is one of the most conscientious order,  
 though he found forgeries which he did copy.  
 He lived c. 1120-50 in the Textus Roffensis f. 137.  
 Possibly you care to read Earle's note in his  
 Handbook to Land-charters p. 128<sup>2</sup>.  
 My Rochester-reference would, of course,  
 be no use, if the entry were made after the origi-  
 nal compilation. The Chapter Clerk, A.A. Arnold,  
 would, I trust, be willing to answer this question.  
 Truly Yours  
 Felix Liebermann  
 (Thorpe printed it twice p. 66-71; Arnold Domesday 276<sup>1</sup>  
 Diplom. Angl.)  
 quotes it without warning

Postcard from Felix Liebermann to James Murray

My visit to the *DOE* was both academically enriching and personally rewarding, and I am very grateful to have been given the chance to spend time there as part of my PhD research.

### **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to everyone at the *DOE*: Rob Getz, Christopher Landon, Catherine Monahan, Stephen Pelle and Xin Xiang, as well as Antonette diPaolo Healey and Haruko Momma, both of whom gave up some of their time when visiting the *DOE* to speak to me. Thank you to the University of Glasgow and the University of Strathclyde for the travel scholarship that funded my visit, and to the University of Toronto for hosting me through the IVGS programme. *OED* quotation slips are reproduced here with the kind permission of the *Dictionary of Old English*, University of Toronto, where they are now deposited; thanks are also due to Peter Gilliver of the *Oxford English Dictionary* for his generous help in interpreting them.

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