

PREFACE

THIS second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* amalgamates the text of the first edition, published in twelve volumes in 1933, the *Supplement*, published in four volumes between 1972 and 1986, and approximately five thousand new words, or new senses of existing words, which have gained currency since the relevant volume of the *Supplement* was published. The editorial policies which informed each of the constituent parts of this edition are detailed in the Introduction, which also includes information on the way in which the task of bringing the parts together was accomplished.

The University of Oxford has the honour, with Her Majesty's gracious permission, of dedicating this edition of the Dictionary to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second. In 1897 'this historical dictionary of the English language' was dutifully dedicated by the University to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, and on the completion of the first edition in 1928 it was presented to His Majesty King George the Fifth.

The aim of this Dictionary is to present in alphabetical series the words that have formed the English vocabulary from the time of the earliest records down to the present day, with all the relevant facts concerning their form, sense-history, pronunciation, and etymology. It embraces not only the standard language of literature and conversation, whether current at the moment, or obsolete, or archaic, but also the main technical vocabulary, and a large measure of dialectal usage and slang. Its basis is a collection of several millions of excerpts from literature of every period amassed by an army of readers and the editorial staff. Such a collection of evidence—it is represented by a selection of about 2,400,000 quotations actually printed—could form the only possible foundation for the historical treatment of every word and idiom which is the *raison d'être* of the work. It is generally recognized that the consistent pursuit of this method has worked a revolution in the art of lexicography. In 1891 a great English philologist wrote of the 'debt' which 'English grammar will some day owe to the *New English Dictionary*'; and the debt has been mounting up ever since. There is no aspect of English linguistic history that the Dictionary has not illuminated; its findings have called for the revision of many philological statements and the reconsideration of many judgements on textual matters. So wide is its scope and so intensive its treatment that it has served for students, both native and foreign, as a lexicon of many languages, and, though it deals primarily with words, it is virtually an encyclopaedic treasury of information about things. It has provided a ready quarry of material for many authors of treatises and dissertations. Abridgements and adaptations of it in several forms have been produced by the Oxford University Press: the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, the *Little Oxford Dictionary*, and numerous dictionaries for the use of students, children, and foreign learners.

In preparing this new edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we have received help and support from a wide range of individuals and organizations. Foremost among these were IBM United Kingdom Limited, which donated the equipment on which the text was held and manipulated, made available to us proprietary software, seconded three computer experts to assist in the development of the computer system, and maintained throughout a close involvement in the management of the project; the University of Waterloo, in Canada, which provided valuable help in the structuring of the text and was an ever-ready source of technical advice; and the Department of Trade and Industry, which provided a grant—from its Support for Innovation Fund—to help cover the cost of lexicographical research. The very professional service provided by International Computaprint

Corporation in converting the text of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Supplement* into machine-readable form was of crucial importance.

The successful completion of the project is attributable in very large measure to the application and dedication of all those who were involved: lexicographers, computer staff, consultants, readers, library researchers, keyboarders, and proof-readers; and to the support and encouragement of the Advisory Council and Editorial Board (listed below), and of the Delegates and senior management of the Oxford University Press.

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