

On closure and its challenges. History, historical principles, and the final stages of OED1.

This paper will examine the newly discovered editors' proofs of the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Long considered lost (with the exception of a single volume in the *OED* archives at Oxford University Press), these were a serendipitous find in the Bodleian Library in 2021 where they were filed under the heading 'Amusements'. Signed and dated, as well as richly annotated, they offer a complex narrative of the final stages of the making of the OED, documenting the working practices of the different editors, and presenting a heteroglossic space where the interactions of editors, assistants, and press workers constitute a unique community of practice, united – and at times divided – by the different agendas at stake. On one hand, these offer compelling insights into the material historicity of the original text, where pen, ink, and the demands of hot metal can reveal an uneasy symbiosis. On the other, the proofs emerge as a site of new historical inquiry, marked by the visible shaping of the final stage of the text in which e.g. the demands of in-text justification can drive a range of conflicted decisions, while the salience of substitutive revision – by which any addition must be compensated by an equivalent process of loss – impacts in critical ways on the presentation of evidence, labelling, semiotic analysis, as well as entries as whole, and with casualties that suggest their own narratives in relation to canonicity, gender, and nationality.