

More information about the *Historical Thesaurus (HTOED)*

- At just under 4,000 pages, the *HTOED* is the largest thesaurus in the world. It covers approximately 800,000 word meanings from Old English to the present day.
- The *HTOED* is the *first* historical thesaurus ever created in any language. It shows the earliest recorded use of each word, lists synonyms in chronological order (with the earliest synonyms first), and details the change and development of the English language in breathtaking detail.
- The *HTOED* provides a breadth of knowledge that is found in no other work, and has more synonyms than any other thesaurus. The word *immediately*, for example, has 265 synonyms, ranging from *ædre*, which is only found in Old English, to *yesterday*, which is first recorded as being used in the sense of *immediately* in 1974.
- It uses an entirely new thematic system of classification, with a detailed meaning structure that distinguishes between true synonyms and closely related words.
- Comprehensive index enables easy look-up of every occurrence of a specific term in the thesaurus.
- A fold-out colour chart for reference is enclosed, which shows the top levels of the classification structure.

Facts and figures at a glance

- The first historical thesaurus in any language
- The largest thesaurus in the world
- 2 volumes (thesaurus and index) containing 3,952 pages
- c. 800,000 meanings
- c. 236,000 categories and subcategories
- Largest category: 'immediately' (265 meanings)
- Words dating from c. 700 AD to today
- 44 years to complete (started in 1965, published in 2009)
- Total number of people who have worked on the project: 230
- Hours taken to complete the project: 320,000 (the equivalent of 176 years)
- Approximate cost of the project: £1.1 million (equivalent to c. 0.75p per word meaning)

A brief history of the project

1965	Announcement by Michael Samuels, Professor of English Language at the University of Glasgow, that his department intended to undertake production of a historical thesaurus. Work on the
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	<i>Historical Thesaurus</i> began.
1969	When the scale of the project became apparent, a successful application for funding led to the employment of Irené Wotherspoon and Christian Kay as research assistants, mainly collecting data. A number of volunteers began to work on the project in Glasgow, Germany, and Canada.
1978	The project faced many challenges during the 1970s, the most significant being a major fire in 1978 which threatened to destroy the entire archive of paper slips used to record each entry. Classifying the data became the main focus. A decision was also taken to include material from the Supplements, and the forthcoming Second Edition and Additions Series of the <i>OED</i> . This enriched, but also slowed down, the project.
1981	During the 1980s the Old English material was entered into electronic databases developed in London. The UK government sponsored a programme to train people in editing and data entry skills. The trainees helped to edit and input the bulk of the <i>Historical Thesaurus</i> data into an electronic system.
1989	Christian Kay became Director of the project.
1995	The Old English material was published in the <i>Thesaurus of Old English</i> by Jane Roberts and Christian Kay. Material from this publication entered into the <i>Historical Thesaurus</i> in simplified form. Early sections of classification were updated, and material from the Second Edition plus the Additions Series continued to be cross-checked with the original First Edition material.
2008	The last entries in the <i>Historical Thesaurus</i> were completed.
2009	Publication of the <i>Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary</i>

Advance praise for the Historical Thesaurus

Melvyn Bragg

"The *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* will be outstanding and indispensable and so much fun! Who would have thought that 'Smacker' (one who gives loud kisses) came in in 1611! At the same time as the first King James Bible."

Philip Pullman

"I can hardly imagine any reference book more valuable for the historical novelist: here is the information we had to spend hours hunting down through the thickets and coverts of the great *OED*, shot, stuffed, and mounted for us. But quite apart from its usefulness, I congratulate OUP on producing what will be the greatest and most enjoyable work-deferring device since the invention of computer Solitaire."

Alexander McCall Smith

"The publication of this historical thesaurus is a momentous (important, significant) event for all lovers (admirers, devotees, aficionados) of words. I anticipate being overcome (overwhelmed, absorbed) by this book!"

David Crystal, Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor

"The *OED* gave us individual trees, but never a sight of the whole forest or helpful pathways through it. The thesaurus does precisely that."

Barbara Kingsolver

"I've been waiting nearly all my life for a book like this - as it turns out, literally! I am thrilled that the *Historical Thesaurus* is now a reality. The only problem is that I may dive in and never come out again. This is a word lover's dream."