

# Journal of Tolkien Research

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Volume 10 | Issue 2

Article 9

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2020

## Tolkien's Work on the Oxford English Dictionary: Some New Evidence From Quotation Slips

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### Recommended Citation

Fletcher, Rachel A. (2020) "Tolkien's Work on the Oxford English Dictionary: Some New Evidence From Quotation Slips," *Journal of Tolkien Research*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/journaloftolkienresearch/vol10/iss2/9>

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## Tolkien's Work on the Oxford English Dictionary: Some New Evidence From Quotation Slips

### Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank the many scholars whose generous advice and support made this article possible. Dimitra Fimi, Robert Getz, Stephen Pelle and Edmund Weiner all provided useful feedback on draft versions of this material. Many thanks are due to the staff of the Dictionary of Old English for hosting me during my research trip (funded by a travel scholarship from the University of Glasgow) and for answering my many questions. Most of all, I would like to express my gratitude to Peter Gilliver for the initial email exchange that inspired me to write this article, and for the comments, corrections and patience that improved it immeasurably.

## Tolkien's work on the *Oxford English Dictionary*: some new evidence from quotation slips

The significance of J.R.R. Tolkien's time spent working on the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) to his development as a philologist and writer has been widely acknowledged, most notably in the 2006 book *The Ring of Words: Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary* (Gilliver et al.).<sup>1</sup> The *OED* also exploits the appeal of the Tolkien connection in its public communication; a post on the *OED* blog ([public.oed.com/blog/jrr-tolkien-and-the-oed](http://public.oed.com/blog/jrr-tolkien-and-the-oed)) describes Tolkien's lexicographical work, and several other blog posts make passing reference to his contributions. These accounts are mostly dependent either on published materials or else on papers now in the *OED* archives. However, these archives, though the most significant collection of *OED* materials, are not complete; collections elsewhere may still contain important evidence.

Here I introduce one of these smaller collections, which has until now gone almost entirely unremarked upon, and its particular relevance to Tolkien scholarship unrealised. The collection consists of *OED* slips in the possession of the *Dictionary of Old English* (*DOE*), University of Toronto. I begin by discussing the nature of these slips and how they came to the *DOE*; this will provide context for the main part of the article, in which I give an overview of those slips directly connected to Tolkien's work on the *OED*.

### ***OED* slips and the *Dictionary of Old English***

*OED* slips formed the backbone of the dictionary's production. These small pieces of paper – in most cases approximately six inches by four (15 x 10 cm) – were used from the very beginning of the project to record quotation evidence for the dictionary. As each quotation slip (save for a few exceptions) bore a single quotation intended to illustrate the usage of a single word, they could be collected from multiple contributors within and beyond the dictionary offices, sorted and re-sorted, as was necessary in the process of drafting a dictionary entry. This information alone can tell us much about the sources from which the *OED* was compiled. However, the slips frequently contain extra material. The entirety of an entry was drafted – and ultimately sent to the printer – in the form of a series of slips, so that alongside quotation slips there are also slips bearing etymologies, definitions, and so on. Furthermore, the re-use of paper was frequent, meaning that new slips were often written on the backs of discarded slips, editorial drafts, and proof pages, as well as miscellaneous waste paper.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The first part of the book is based substantially on an earlier article by Gilliver (1996).

<sup>2</sup> A much fuller account of *OED* slips, and of the process of writing an entry, can be found in Gilliver (2016: 260-77), which is the source of my summary here; see also Knowles (2000), Silva (2000) and Gilliver (2004).

The fates of the slips after the *OED*'s completion in 1928 were varied,<sup>3</sup> as already noted, many are today in the possession of the Oxford University Press, but others have been dispersed or lost. The principal cause of this dispersal was the so-called 'period dictionary' projects proposed by the *OED*'s third editor, William Craigie. Following the completion of the *OED*, these dictionaries would be compiled with the aim of documenting specific historical periods and regional varieties of the English language in greater detail than could be provided by the *OED*. Work began on several of these before the completion of the *OED*; an update made in 1925 to Craigie's original proposal of 1919 indicates that dictionaries of Middle English, Older Scots, Modern Scots and American English were already underway. These would be published as the *Middle English Dictionary*, the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, the *Scottish National Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of American English*. A planned dictionary of Early Modern English, begun in 1928, was never completed.<sup>4</sup>

To facilitate this work, Craigie obtained permission in 1927 to extract from the *OED* collections quotation slips bearing material from the relevant periods and varieties; these extracted slips were sent to the relevant period dictionary projects (Gilliver 2016: 380-1, 414-8). When the *OED* slips were dispersed, there was no period dictionary of Old English currently in prospect. In setting out his vision for the period dictionary schemes that would follow the completion of the *OED*, Craigie judged the recently-completed *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1882-98), edited by Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, to be an adequate treatment of Old English (Craigie 1931: 7).<sup>5</sup> The creation of a new Old English dictionary was therefore of low priority. As a result, there was no obvious immediate destination for the *OED*'s Old English quotation slips.

A new dictionary of Old English intended to supersede that of Bosworth and Toller was eventually begun in 1970 at the University of Toronto (Cameron 1983: 14-15). This dictionary, which is still in progress, is known as the *Dictionary of Old English (DOE)*. An essential feature of the *DOE* is that its quotations are drawn from an electronic corpus intended to comprise all known Old English texts.<sup>6</sup> This corpus thus renders the *OED* quotation slips largely redundant, as any Old English texts consulted by the *OED* readers should also be represented in the corpus, which can be searched more efficiently than paper slips.

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<sup>3</sup> The final fascicle of the *OED* was published in April 1928; a single-volume supplement was added in 1933, at which time the original dictionary was also reissued in twelve volumes (Gilliver 2016: 385-6, 410-13).

<sup>4</sup> The history of the period dictionaries is discussed in detail by Aitken (1987) and Adams (2009).

<sup>5</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* later received a supplement by Toller (1921). Several decades later, further addenda and corrigenda were published by Alistair Campbell (1972).

<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing, fascicles A-I of the *DOE* have been published and are available (with limited access to non-subscribers) at [www.doe.utoronto.ca](http://www.doe.utoronto.ca) (Cameron et al. 2018). The *DOE Web Corpus* (Healey et al. 2009) can be accessed at the same link.

Nevertheless, a small number of *OED* slips found their way to the *DOE*. My own examination has confirmed that these are slips that had originally been sent by the *OED* to the *Middle English Dictionary (MED)*, one of the period dictionaries begun following Craigie's scheme.<sup>7</sup> Presumably unintentionally, a certain number of Old English quotation slips were mixed with the Middle English material; these were later passed on to the *DOE*. Almost all of the *OED* slips held by the *DOE* were received in the early 1980s, during the editorship of Ashley Crandell Amos; a few were sent at a later stage, during the editorship of Antonette diPaolo Healey.<sup>8</sup> Doubtless as a result of their roundabout path of transmission, the slips in the possession of the *DOE* are not a large or balanced collection. They number perhaps a few thousand (enough to fill two boxes approximately 30cm x 45cm x 26cm) and include very few slips illustrating words in the earlier part of the alphabet. When I examined them in early 2019, the majority of them had clearly not been consulted since their arrival at the *DOE*; they were unsorted, and included miscellaneous material such as *OED* correspondence, non-Old English *OED* slips and original *MED* slips.

Despite the small size of this collection, and its obvious gaps, it nevertheless represents a substantial addition to the number of known *OED* slips dealing with Old English material. Happily, this also makes it an excellent source of evidence for Tolkien's work on the *OED*. Tolkien's expertise as a Germanic philologist meant that he dealt especially frequently with Old English material in his lexicographical work.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the *DOE* collection's disproportionate coverage of the later letters of the alphabet means that slips produced during the years in which Tolkien was employed on the *OED* – when the project was nearing completion – are relatively well represented.

### **Tolkien as slip-writer**

In the *DOE* collection, sixty-six slips appear to bear quotations copied out by Tolkien.<sup>10</sup> These quotation slips give some insight into the texts and words assigned to Tolkien in his work on the *OED*. In addition, draft definitions and etymologies are found on the backs of a few slips, showing us more of Tolkien's thought processes in writing entries.

<sup>7</sup> For an account of the *MED*'s history and its use of *OED* slips, see Adams (2009: 335-45). Extraction of Middle English slips appears to have begun in 1929 (Gilliver 2016: 381 n. 75).

<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank Peter Gilliver for communicating this information to me, from a private email sent to him by Robert Lewis of the *MED* (sent 8 April 2011).

<sup>9</sup> This expertise was recognised in a later recommendation given by Henry Bradley, Tolkien's supervisor at the *OED*: 'His work gives evidence of an unusually thorough mastery of Anglo-Saxon and of the facts and principles of the comparative grammar of the Germanic languages.' (quoted in Carpenter 1977: 101; see also Hammond & Scull 2017, II: 65)

<sup>10</sup> I would like to thank Peter Gilliver for confirming my tentative identification of the handwriting on some slips, and for correcting some of my misidentifications. Any oversights or errors are, however, my own.

Quotations copied in Tolkien's handwriting exist for the following words: *styan* n.1 (1 slip<sup>11</sup>), *wade* v. (6), *waldend* n. (3), *walm* n.1 (20), *walrus* n. (1), *wander* v. (4), *wane* n.1 (2), *warlock* n.1 (16), *weald* n. (1), *wield* v. (8), *wold* n. (4).

These include quotation evidence for two words – *styan* n.1 and *wade* v. – for which Tolkien is not already known to have contributed to the entry-writing process; in this I follow Gilliver et al. (2006: 42). As there are no known definition slips in Tolkien's handwriting for these words, either in the *DOE* collection or elsewhere, it is almost certain that Tolkien was only a minor contributor to these entries, responsible only for the copying out of quotations and not for the actual compilation of the entry.<sup>12</sup>

As has been mentioned, many *OED* slips are written on re-used paper, including re-used slips. Therefore, it is not surprising that several of the quotation slips written out by Tolkien have draft material from his entry-writing process on their reverse sides. Some of these notes are simply hastily-written quotations from Old English texts, but there are also drafts of etymologies and definitions. I have found four partial drafts for various senses of *walm* (n.1), one draft of the etymology for the same, and one draft of the etymology for *walrus* (n.).

One further slip has especially interesting material on the reverse. The front of the slip, in Tolkien's hand, bears a quotation from the Old English poem *Beowulf*, illustrating *walm* (n.1). The reverse, however, was used by Tolkien to make various notes clearly relating to his work on the etymology of *walrus* (n.). These notes are unlike the draft etymologies mentioned above; they are rough and exploratory, and do not conform at all to *OED* format. It is possible to identify some of the reference works he consulted when making these notes, thus giving us a glimpse of the etymologist at work. This is of particular interest given that *walrus* is one of the entries singled out for attention by *OED* editor Henry Bradley in the Note to the fascicle W-Wash as containing 'etymological facts or suggestions not given in other dictionaries'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In counting the numbers of slips that bear a quotation for a particular word in Tolkien's hand, I have excluded cancelled draft material found on the backs of slips. I have included one slip (for *walm* n.1) where Tolkien's quotation is a later addition to a slip originally written by another person.

<sup>12</sup> This point is thanks to Peter Gilliver.

<sup>13</sup> Available online at <http://public.oed.com/wp-content/uploads/Volume-X-Second-Half-W-Wash.pdf> (last accessed 14th November 2019).

" walrus "

morsa " " " " " " " " " " " "

romar " " " " " " " " " " " "

houshwalr

(CN rom - offal)

✓ rommál m. walrus.

✓ romhwalr

✓ rommijöll Réuar. Adv. 17.

o aasen rommaal and rommar

✓ romstungur walrus

[ sitte rommá ~~rom~~ file

ent. what about Lappo

morsa morka morsa.

o Res mork. morka korva

niekla

Kannis

skannis

rant

paimene pa

of romarine

romar

Figure 1: Reverse of quotation slip, with notes on the etymology of 'walrus'

Near the top of the slip are several words in Old Norse: *rosm* ‘offal’, *rosmáll* ‘walrus’, *rosmhvalr* ‘walrus’, the phrase *rosmufföll Rínar*, and, two lines later, *rostungr* ‘walrus’. They are apparently taken directly from *An Icelandic Dictionary* (Cleasby & Vigfusson 1874). The Cleasby-Vigfusson dictionary includes all these words and would have been a natural point of reference for Old Norse vocabulary. The reference, between *rosmufföll Rínar*<sup>14</sup> and *rostungr*, to ‘Aasen *rosmaal* and *rosmaar*’, supports the theory that Tolkien was using Cleasby-Vigfusson as his source, but also introduces a new reference work. Ivar Andreas Aasen was the author of the *Ordbog over det norske Folkesprog* (1850); this work must thus be the ultimate source of the reference in the published *OED* entry for *walrus* to ‘Norwegian *rosmaal*, *rosmaar*’. The form *rosmall* is also cited, with a reference to Aasen’s dictionary, in the Cleasby-Vigfusson entry for Old Norse *rosm-hvalr*; this reference strengthens the connection between Tolkien’s notes and Cleasby-Vigfusson, but Tolkien apparently also consulted Aasen directly, as the form *rosmaar* is not given in the Cleasby-Vigfusson entry.

I am unable to identify specific lexicographical sources for the forms given further down the slip as ‘OHG’ (Old High German) and ‘Lapp’. However, the inclusion of the Russian words *morj*’ and *morskaia korova* points to another dictionary that Tolkien may have been consulting when drafting etymologies. Tolkien is clearly considering these as cognates of the English noun *morse*, ‘walrus’. Note, however, that although the *OED*’s entry for *morse* (n.1) was already in print (the fascicle for L-N having been published in 1908), the first edition form of the entry gives *morj*’ in untransliterated Cyrillic as моржъ<sup>15</sup> and includes no mention of *morskaia korova*.<sup>16</sup> In other words, it appears that Tolkien was referring either to unpublished *OED* material or to some external source. Walter Skeat’s *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (1888: s.v. *morse*) derives English *morse* from the Russian *morj*’, and also suggests a connection with *morskaia korova*, ‘sea-cow’. The fact that the two forms appear side-by-side in both Skeat’s dictionary and Tolkien’s notes and employ the same romanisation of the Russian words suggests that Tolkien was consulting the *Etymological Dictionary*.<sup>17</sup>

The hypothesis that Tolkien was consulting Skeat’s dictionary when working on the etymology of *walrus* can be further strengthened. Skeat’s entry for *walrus* includes the following comment:

<sup>14</sup> *Rosmufföll* is a *hapax legomenon*; both *An Icelandic Dictionary* (Cleasby & Vigfusson 1874: s.v. *rosmufföll*) and Tolkien’s notes identify its sole occurrence in ‘Ak. 17’ – that is, stanza 17 of the Eddic poem *Atlakviða*.

<sup>15</sup> The modern standard spelling would be морж, usually transliterated *morzh* or *morž*.

<sup>16</sup> Written морская корова in Cyrillic, also transliterated *morskaya korova*.

<sup>17</sup> The form *morj*’ is especially suggestive, since the decision to transliterate жъ as *j*’ is distinctively non-standard; in the introductory material to his dictionary, Skeat describes the transliteration system he uses for Russian as ‘one which I made out for my own convenience’ (1888: xx).



The name is very old, since the word *ross* (for *horse*) is no longer in use in Swedish and Danish, which languages now employ *häst*, *hest* in its stead; but we find the word, in an inverted form, in Icel. *hross-hvalr*, a walrus, lit. a horse-whale; **the name being given (it is suggested) from the noise made by the animal, somewhat resembling a neigh.**

(Skeat 1888: s.v. *walrus*, emphasis mine)

This is reminiscent of comments found on two of Tolkien's *OED* slips, one held by the *DOE* (reproduced below) and the other still in the possession of Oxford University Press.<sup>18</sup> These refer respectively to 'the supposed "neigh" of the walrus' and 'the interpretation "horse-whale" (a description supposed to be due to the neighing voice of the animal)'. No equivalent comment is found in the published form of the entry.

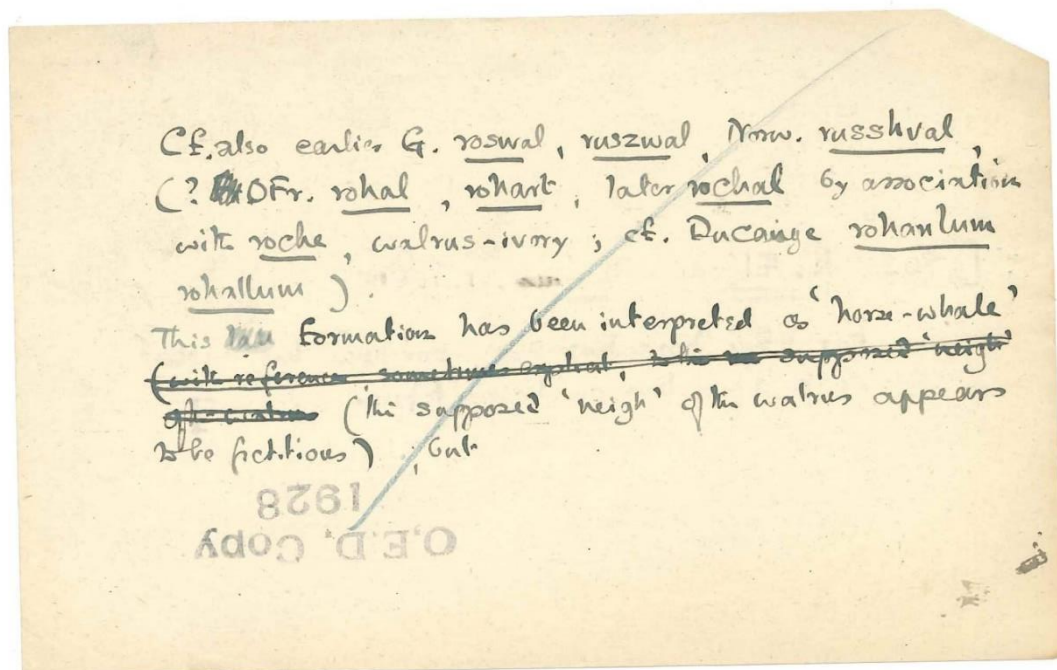


Figure 2: Reverse of quotation slip, with a draft etymology of 'walrus'

As Skeat's wording suggests, the belief that the name of the walrus was connected to its horse-like vocalisations was relatively widespread.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Tolkien's awareness of the folk etymology may well have come from some other

<sup>18</sup> Published online at <https://public.oed.com/blog/jrr-tolkien-and-the-oed/tolkien1> (last accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

<sup>19</sup> It appears, for instance, in works directed at the general public, such as *The Young Folks' Cyclopaedia of Common Things* (Champlin 1916: s.v. *walrus*).

source. Nevertheless, given the links with Skeat's dictionary that have already been established, the similarity is suggestive, and the fact that Tolkien mentioned this point in (at least) two draft etymologies may reflect a desire to acknowledge and correct the etymological suggestion given by Skeat.

A final point of interest in Tolkien's etymological notes on the Figure 1 slip is the five words near the bottom: *niekla*, *kaunis*, *skauns*, *ranta* and (struck out) *paimene*. At first glance, these words bear no relation to the rest of the material on the slip, but they are in fact an example of how Tolkien's research into etymologies could lead him into more general philological exploration.<sup>20</sup> *Niekla*, 'needle', is Karelian (a language closely related to Finnish); *kaunis* and *skauns*, both meaning 'beautiful', are Finnish and Gothic, respectively; *ranta*, 'shore', is Finnish; *paimene* appears to be an attempt to deduce the Finnish singular form *paimen*, 'shepherd', from the plural *paimenet*.<sup>21</sup> Tolkien's general interest in both Finnish and Gothic is well known, but more relevant here is the linguistic principle underlying the selection of these words.

Further up the slip, we see Tolkien considering the sound changes associated with the borrowing of Finno-Ugric words into Germanic languages. After noting the Old High German form *ros(a)mo*, he writes 'but what about Lapp morsa morssa mursu'.<sup>22</sup> In other words, Tolkien is considering the potential etymological origins and relationships of the English words *walrus*, *morse* and *rosmarine* (another, rare, name for the walrus, noted at the bottom of the same slip); compare the etymological note in most recent form of the *OED* entry for *morse* (n.2): 'Origin uncertain. Compare Old Russian *morž*" (Russian *morž*), Saami *moršá*, Finnish *mursu*, although these are all attested only later.' This consideration of possible borrowings from Finno-Ugric in Germanic languages seems to have prompted Tolkien to think about influences in the other direction. Finnish *kaunis* shows the borrowing of a Germanic word represented by Gothic *skauns*, which Tolkien wrote immediately below it on the slip; both the Finnish and Gothic words can be traced back to a reconstructed proto-Germanic *\*skauni-z* (Kylstra et al. 1991-2012: s.v. *kaunis*). Similarly, Karelian *niekla* is derived from proto-Germanic *\*nēþlō*, which developed into, among others, Gothic *nēþla*, Old English *nædl* and present-day *needle* (Kylstra et al. 1991-2012: s.v. *neula*). The precise etymological history of *ranta* has been debated, but it also appears to be a

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<sup>20</sup> I would like to thank Edmund Weiner of the *OED* for first pointing this out, and for the analysis and etymologies that follow.

<sup>21</sup> I would like to thank Karoliina Ollikainen of the University of Glasgow for identifying the Karelian and translating the Karelian and Finnish words.

<sup>22</sup> Note that the term *Saami* (also spelt *Sámi* or *Sami*) is now preferred to *Lapp*; the reference to the language in the etymology field of the *OED* entry *morse* (n.2) was updated accordingly in 2002 for the *OED*'s third edition (s.v.).

loanword and is most likely to be related to English *strand* and proto-Germanic *\*strandō* (Kylstra et al. 1991-2012: s.v. *ranta*).

These etymological connections do not readily explain the presence of the struck-out form *paimene*; *paimen* (the correct singular form) has no entry in the dictionary of Germanic loanwords in Finnic languages by Kylstra et al. (1991-2012) and no obvious Germanic cognate. However, the other words are well-established in the literature as Germanic loanwords, and the general interest behind these notes seems clear. In fact, *kaunis*, *neula* (the Finnish cognate of Karelian *niekla*) and *ranta* are all used by Kylstra et al. (1991-2012, vol. I: xix-xxii) to illustrate typical changes affecting consonants in the borrowing of Germanic words into Finnic languages.

### **Catchwords: Tolkien and the lemmatisation of Old English**

In addition to those slips written in full by Tolkien, there are numerous slips in the collection on which the quotation was written out by someone else, but which nevertheless bear writing in his hand. To explain Tolkien's role in the production of these slips, it is necessary to discuss in more detail an important difference between the majority of *OED* quotation slips and those recording evidence from mediaeval English texts.

*OED* quotation slips typically have a 'catchword' in the top left-hand corner, which gives the word that the slip is intended to illustrate.<sup>23</sup> These catchwords were normalised to a form that might be used as a dictionary headword, meaning that the catchword form was not necessarily identical to the form found within the illustrative quotation itself: plural nouns in quotations were normalised in catchwords to singular, past tense verbs were normalised to infinitive and so on. Normalisation of this kind would for the most part have been an uncomplicated process. In the case of past stages of the language, however, the process was considerably more difficult. Knowledge of the inflectional systems and orthography of Old and Middle English was necessary even to produce a normalised form of the mediaeval word, and connecting that mediaeval form to the appropriate present-day English dictionary entry might require further experience with problems of etymology and language change. As a result, many slips bearing quotations from Old and Middle English texts were left unlemmatised by the original writer of the slip; as someone with expertise in these languages, Tolkien was one of a few people to be assigned the task of lemmatising such slips (Gilliver et al. 2006: 9).

The *DOE* collection contains considerably more slips lemmatised by Tolkien than slips for which he copied out the quotation, indicating that this lemmatisation task represented a significant proportion of his work on the *OED*. I have not examined in detail all of the slips lemmatised by Tolkien; nevertheless, it is possible to make some general observations.

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<sup>23</sup> On catchwords, see especially Knowles (2000: 24).

When copying out quotations himself, Tolkien often added the modern English catchword himself. In cases where he did not do so, sometimes there is no catchword at all, often because these slips were rejected for use in entry-writing before the catchword was added. However, there are also instances of Tolkien copying out the quotation and a catchword being added in another hand. Catchwords were sometimes added in clear batches; thus, all the quotations copied out by Tolkien for *wield* (v.) have the catchword added by the same hand. This acts as a reminder of the complex, collaborative process of writing entries; Tolkien also worked on the etymology of *wield* (Gilliver et al 2006: 29, 42), but both his etymologies and the quotations he copied must have preceded the compilation of the entry, and would have been set aside to be completed by another lexicographer when work on the dictionary reached that point.<sup>24</sup>

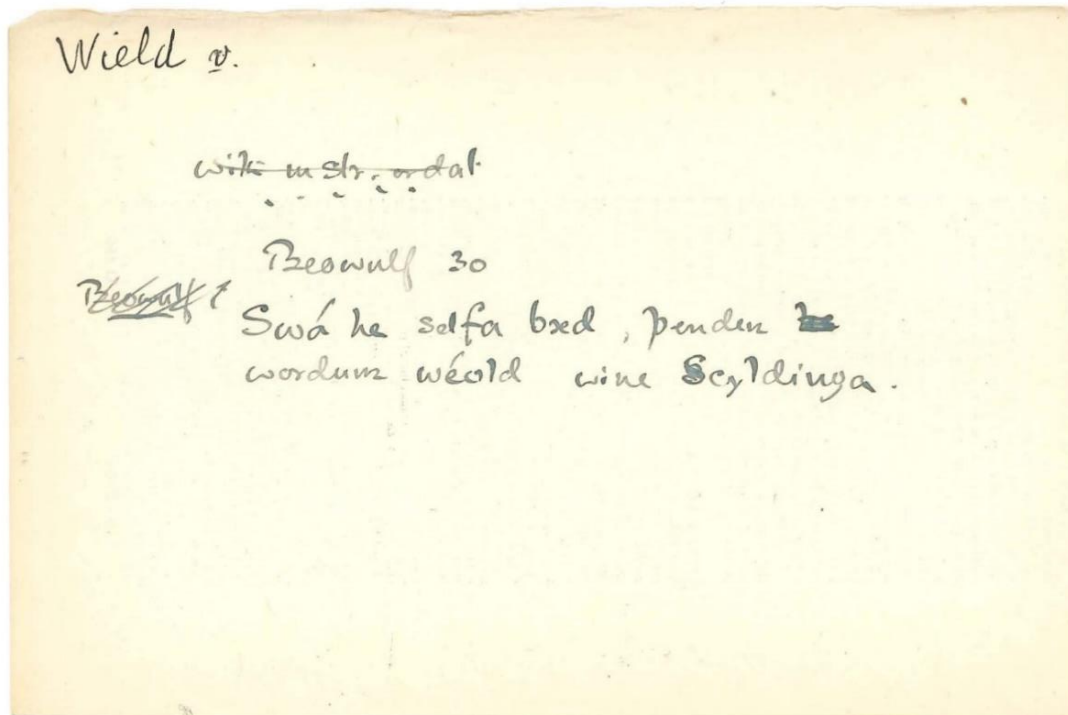


Figure 3: Quotation slip copied by Tolkien with the catchword added by another hand

<sup>24</sup> I would like to thank Peter Gilliver for explaining the order in which the steps would have taken place for this entry; he suggests that Tolkien ‘researched and wrote about the etymologies of *wield* and other words of the form *wVld* (V=vowel(s)) all at the same time, and then the slips he’d written were then filed, for eventual use when the main work on the relevant entry began (which in most cases was years after he’d left the *OED*).’ (Private communication, 22 December 2019)

Whether lemmatising quotations he copied himself or those copied by others, Tolkien seems to have been inclined to include more detail than most other *OED* lexicographers; in addition to the catchword, Tolkien sometimes made a note of variant spellings attested in Old English, provided a translation of a catchword that did not survive into present-day English, or added etymological notes. On a group of slips bearing quotations (copied in Tolkien's hand) for *warlock* (n.), Tolkien did not add catchwords but did make notes in the top right-hand corner of the slip identifying the people to whom the noun referred in the Old English text: 'the devil', 'cannibals', 'an evil man' and so on. This clearly represents part of the process of distinguishing senses in preparation for writing the entry (on which Tolkien is known to have worked; see Gilliver et al. 2006: 42). Presumably this atypical approach was prompted by the term's wide literary application in Old English in contexts rather different from those of present-day English 'warlock', although the lack of catchwords on slips that were not rejected for inclusion is nevertheless unusual.

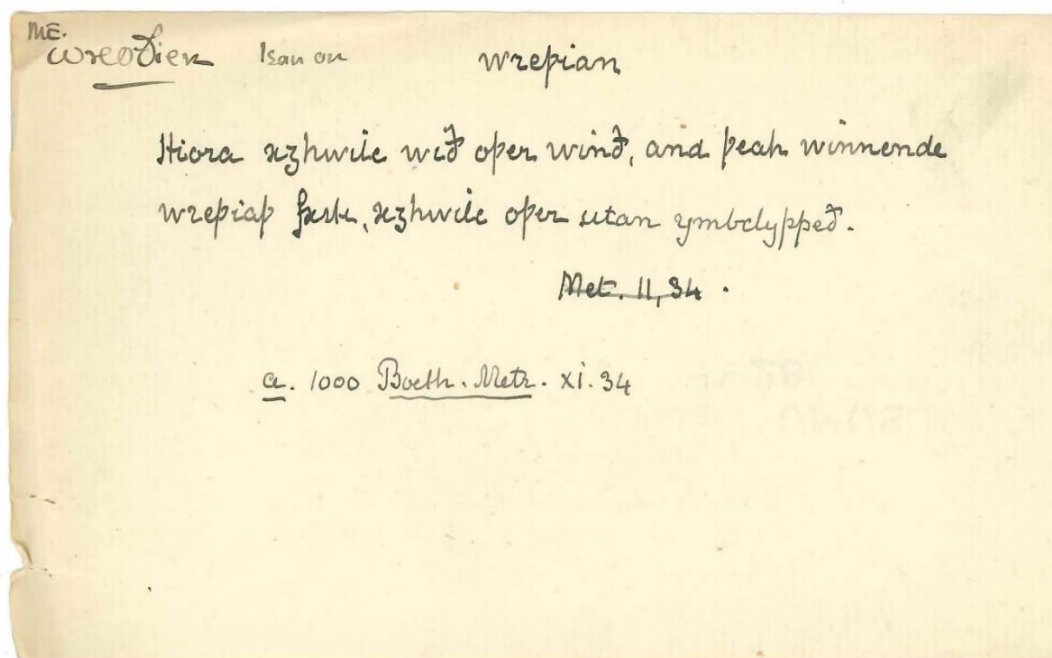


Figure 4: Quotation slip showing Tolkien's addition of a Middle English catchword, 'wreoðien' (*OED wrethe* v.2), and its modern English translation 'lean on'

[ wreath sb ]  
from wraeth wræð

wræd

wrædes fascis .

Hpt. Gl. 529,4 .

fascis .i. more wrædes .

Napier O.E. Gloss. . I . 5453 .

Figure 5: Quotation slip showing Tolkien's addition of a catchword with etymological note

warp v.!

[ worp - v.  
werp-  
wurp- ]

~~wearpan~~ 18<sup>20</sup> 116<sup>11</sup>

601

Da hine mon on þæt fyr wearp þa alycde ic hine  
mid heofonlicum rene. ✓

✓

c 888 ~~AE~~ ÆLFRED Boeth. vii. § 111.

Figure 6: Quotation slip showing Tolkien's addition of a catchword with variant spellings

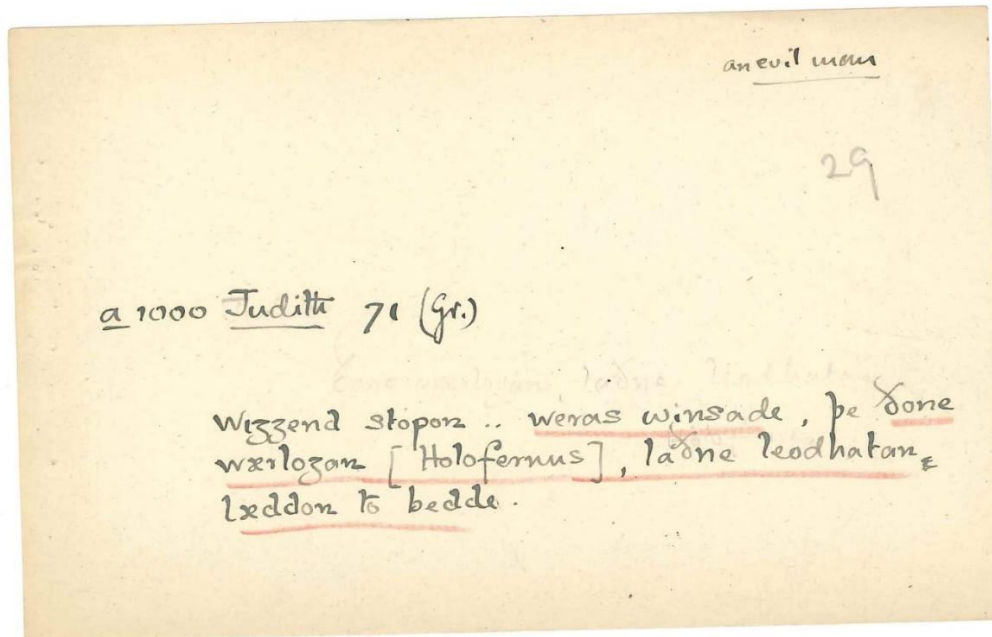


Figure 7: Quotation slip showing Tolkien's addition of a contextual note identifying the 'wærloga' (present-day English 'warlock') described in the text

Not all slips for which Tolkien provided the catchword represent entries known to have been assigned to him. Of course, lemmatisation could be carried out without any in-depth engagement with the text quoted, or with a word's meaning or origins. However, if we bear this caveat in mind, we can still note that Tolkien contributed, at least in the minor capacity of adding catchwords, to work on *warp* (v.), *wrethe* (v.2) and *whilom* (adv. [and adj.] and conj.), among others.

#### **Stigend: dating Tolkien's arrival at the OED**

Another interesting detail that may be gleaned from the *DOE* slips is biographical. The period immediately following the end of the First World War is a relatively poorly documented time in Tolkien's life. As a result, a certain amount of vagueness surrounds the chronology of his beginning work at the *OED*. Carpenter (1977: 98-102) offers few specific dates, save for mentioning that Tolkien and his family found rooms in Oxford in late November 1918. Garth's account of the period (2003: 248-9), though generally more detailed, nevertheless depends on Carpenter for the circumstances surrounding the beginning of Tolkien's employment on the dictionary.<sup>25</sup> Some *terminus ante quem* dates are given by Gilliver (1996: 174):

<sup>25</sup> Although Carpenter (1977: 100) mentions a diary begun by Tolkien on New Year's Day 1919, he does not report any information it contains relating to the dating of Tolkien's arrival at the *OED*.

Tolkien must have started writing definitions before 3 April 1919, which is when the first bundle to which he contributed was sent to press. Beyond this, all that is certain regarding the start of his work is that by the end of March 1919, according to Oxford University Press accounts, he had been paid one-and-a-half months' salary, although this may have been for work begun late in 1918 and carried out part-time.

Hammond and Scull's *Chronology* (2017, I: 115) gives the beginning of Tolkien's employment on the *OED* as January 1919; the detail of the March salary records is included, but note is also made of the 'flexible' hours worked by many *OED* staff, leaving open the possibility of an earlier start. No further attempt is made to account for the interval between this and Tolkien's acceptance of an offer to join the *OED*, given by William Craigie in early November 1918 (Hammond & Scull 2017, I: 114). Most other accounts of Tolkien's movements in this period, if committing to any date for the beginning of Tolkien's employment on the *OED*, likewise place it in 1919; this is the date given on the *OED* blog in multiple posts.<sup>26</sup>

However, one of the slips found in the *DOE*'s collection shows conclusively that Tolkien was writing out slips for the *OED* before the end of 1918. The slip in question is both written and lemmatised in Tolkien's hand; it represents a single entry from an eleventh-century glossary of Old English. This glossary has a complex editorial history, but was consulted by Tolkien in the edition by Wright and Wülcker (1884: 104-67), then standard.<sup>27</sup> The glossary entry in question, in which the Latin noun *ordeolus* is glossed by the Old English *stigend* (Wright & Wülcker 1884: 114), is represented in the *OED* under the modern form *styan*, which is noted to have survived into the twentieth century only in dialectal usage. The *OED* defines it as a 'sty', or 'an inflammatory swelling on the eyelid' (*OED* s.v. *sty*, n.4). The Old English glossary entry contributed by Tolkien is the first of five quotations given in the entry.

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The diary does not seem to have been available to Garth, and it was not available to Gilliver (1996: 173).

<sup>26</sup> <https://public.oed.com/history/oed-editions/contributors/#tolkien>,  
<https://public.oed.com/blog/jrr-tolkien-and-the-oed>

<sup>27</sup> Ladd (1960) gives a useful account of the glossary, the provenance of the manuscript in which it is found and the misattribution of the work to the tenth-century grammarian Ælfric of Eynsham. The glossary is available in a recent edition by Porter (2011) under the title *The Antwerp-London Glossaries*. This is considerably more accurate to the manuscript source than the Wright-Wülcker edition used by Tolkien, which is ultimately dependent on a loose, partial transcription made in the seventeenth century by the philologist Francis Junius. I follow Porter in dating the glossary to the eleventh century, rather than (as in the Wright-Wülcker edition) to the tenth.



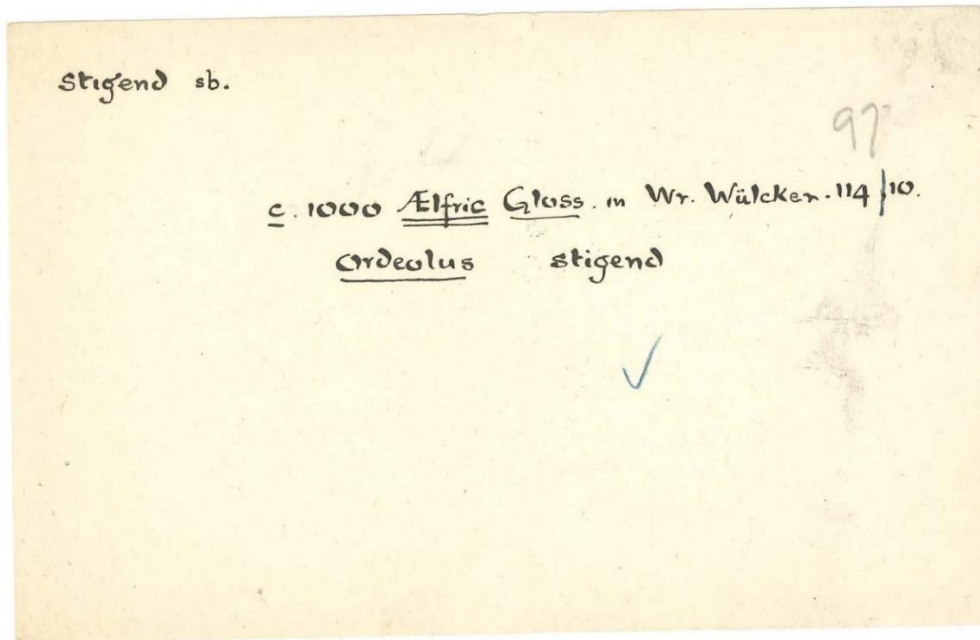


Figure 8: Quotation slip for the Old English word 'stigend' (present-day English 'sty')

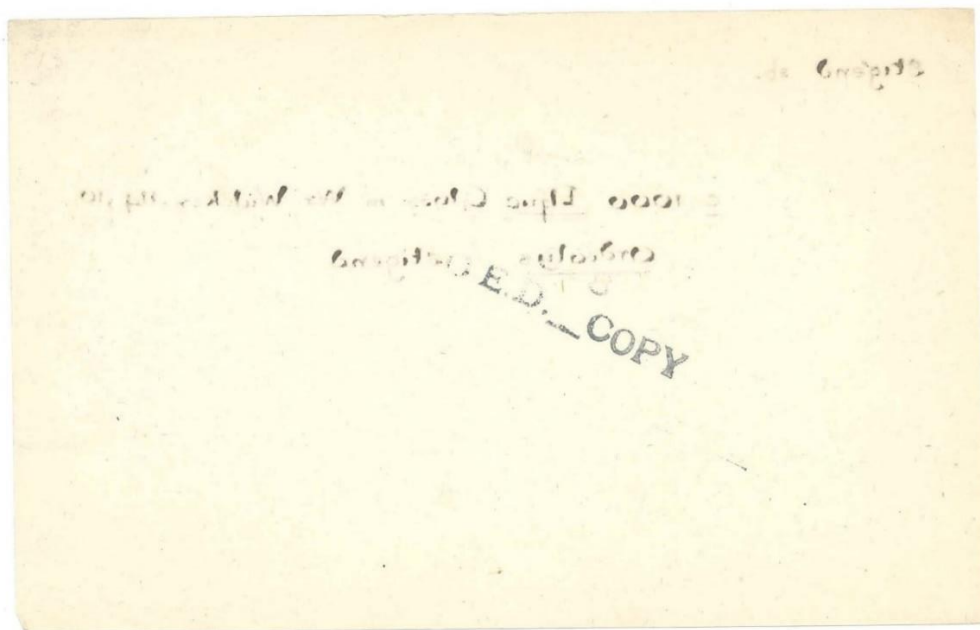


Figure 9: The reverse of the 'stigend' slip in figure 8, showing the stamp marking it as part of OED copy

To the researcher interested in Tolkien, what stands out immediately about *stigend* is the fact that it does not begin with the letter W, the part of the *OED* on which Tolkien is known to have worked. Carpenter states that ‘for his first weeks [Tolkien] was given the job of researching the etymology of *warm*, *wasp*, *water*, *wick (lamp)*, and *winter*’ (1977: 101); Gilliver, Marshall and Weiner identify *waggle* and its related words as Tolkien’s ‘first editorial range’ (2006: 12). How, then, did Tolkien come to contribute to the *OED*’s entry for *styan*, in an earlier alphabetical range?

We can rule out the possibility that this slip was a late addition to the S entries, written during work on W. Although many of the quotation slips in the *DOE* collection were ultimately not used in the *OED*, the *stigend* slip is not among these. Not only does the quotation appear in the published *OED*, but the slip itself is clearly stamped on the reverse ‘O.E.D. COPY’, as opposed to the ‘O.E.D. UNUSED’ found on other slips.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the pencilled ‘97’ on the front of the slip identifies it as part of a bundle of slips covering the range *sty-stylate* that was sent to the printers on 24 December 1918.<sup>29</sup> In other words, this slip indicates that Tolkien must already have been carrying out at least some work for the *OED* before Christmas of 1918.

From the evidence of one slip, it is difficult to reconstruct exactly what this work would have been. Tolkien would not have been the first reader for the *OED* of the glossaries published by Wright and Wülcker. An earlier edition of the glossary collection (Wright 1857) is cited in the first edition of the *OED* from the very beginning of the alphabet, and the Wright-Wülcker edition (1884) begins to be cited under the letter B. It is more likely that Tolkien had instead been given the task of finding overlooked quotations to supplement quotation evidence that had already been collected, and that the *stigend* slip is one of the results of this. The *OED* archives contain an undated (post-1885) list entitled ‘Resources for the addition of quotations and completion of the sense-history of words’ (OED/B/5/1/4); ‘Wright-Wülcker Vocabs.’ is listed as one of the resources for the Old English period. This seems plausible as a first task that might have been assigned to Tolkien on his arrival at the *OED*, and, as it would not have involved taking responsibility for entire entries, need not be taken as a contradiction of the assertions by Carpenter and Gilliver et al. quoted above.

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<sup>28</sup> ‘The stamps were used at the time of extraction of material from the *OED* files, to identify which sequences of slips each slip was extracted from: either the bundles of ‘printer’s copy’, or the boxes of material that was (for various reasons) ‘unused.’ (Peter Gilliver, private communication, 22 December 2019)

<sup>29</sup> I would like to thank Peter Gilliver of the *OED* for this information, as well as for confirming my identification of Tolkien’s handwriting on this slip.

## Conclusion

The *DOE*'s collection of *OED* quotation slips is a valuable resource for researchers interested in the development of the *OED*, and especially its treatment of mediaeval material. Much work remains to be done towards understanding the collection as a whole. I have attempted to demonstrate how close attention to these slips in the context of dictionary history may reveal unexpected details, and the collection will no doubt repay further study in this. However, I hope that this preliminary study has revealed details of Tolkien's work as a lexicographer that scholars of his life and work will find interesting, and will stimulate future discussion.

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