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Editorial

The September 2005 issue of *OED News* contains an article by Richard Boyle, one of the *OED*'s consultants, which looks at the history of Sri Lankan English. He examines, in particular, words of Sri Lankan origin or association first attested in the *OED* in Robert Knox's *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* of 1681.



Boyle is the author of the recently published *Knox's Words* (Visidunu Prakashakayo, 2004), a more detailed study of the themes covered here.

Anne Whear's article has its focus closer to home and in the more recent past, as she marks her retirement by recording her memories of her thirty-three-year career working on the Oxford English Dictionaries,

during which period she has witnessed many changes in the publishing world. As *OED* staff are currently familiarizing themselves with a brand new editorial system, it is interesting to be reminded that this is not the first time that dictionary editors have had to grapple with new technology during the course of their work.

Jemma Best, Newsletter Editor and Senior Assistant Editor, *OED*

A brief history of Sri Lankan English

It appears reasonable to assume that the roots of Sri Lankan English (SLE) go back to 1796 with the commencement of British dominion over the maritime provinces of the island then known as Ceylon. However, the real beginnings occurred some one hundred and fifty years earlier, when captured British sailors confined to remote villages in the island's Kandyan kingdom started using Ceylonese terms conversationally for everyday items and common fauna and flora with no English equivalent.



One of these sailors, a captain's son called Robert Knox, managed to escape from the kingdom in 1679 after nineteen years' confinement. On returning to London the following year, Knox made the acquaintance of Robert Hooke, then Secretary of the Royal Society, who assisted him in refining his manuscript containing an account of Ceylon, the first in the English language.

Knox's *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*, published in September 1681, laid the foundation for SLE. This popular book introduced British readers to many exotic words of Sri Lankan origin or association with a diverse future in the English language. The usage of some of these loan words, such as *dissava*, *kittul*, and *kurakkan*, would remain restricted to the island. Others, such as *gaur* and *toran*, would enjoy

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wider regional usage. Then there were those, such as *bo-tree*, *Buddha*, *puja*, *rattan*, *rillow*, *Vedda*, and *wanderoo*, which would attain international usage. All these words and many more eventually ended up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Publication of Knox's narrative enhanced British comprehension of Ceylon at a time when other European powers possessed greater knowledge of the island. However Knox's liberal use of Sri Lankan words turned out to be premature, for the Dutch ruled the maritime provinces of Ceylon and discouraged competitors. In consequence, these words had little relevance to writers of English until one hundred and fifteen years later.

Nevertheless there was limited use of these words during this period. Defoe used *dissava* in his novel *Captain Singleton* (1720), while *rillow* and *wanderoo* appeared in Goldsmith's *Natural History* (1774). *Bo-tree* and *kittul* were recorded in Birch's *History of the Royal Society* (1756). *Buddha* appeared in *Asiatic Researches* (1784), and *rattan* in *Philosophical Transactions* (1777).

After Britain acquired Ceylon in 1796, books began to be published in London describing the island and promoting its commercial potential. The authors tended to rely on Knox, indeed some quoted lengthy passages from his book. In this way Sri Lankan words recorded by Knox reached readers in the island, and their use was reinforced, even in official correspondence. Moreover, military personnel seconded from India brought with them terms from the Anglo-Indian lexicon to add to the colonial aspect of the language.

SLE expanded in a more pertinent direction with the rise in the mid-nineteenth century of a Ceylonese elite anxious to embrace the English way of life, in particular the language. So began the process whereby English was wrought by the indigenous inhabitants until it became suited to their needs and nature. Words of local origin referring to cultural and environmental characteristics were introduced, as were grammatical features considered erroneous by speakers of other varieties of English, and a host of idioms that do not exist in British English—'Ceylonisms' as they are known to this day.

A crucial step in the documentation of SLE occurred with the compilation of the first edition of the *OED*.

After James Murray assumed duties as editor in 1879, a scholar resident in the colony by the name of Donald Ferguson was assigned to read *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* for potential inclusions. Ferguson was responsible for the appearance in the *OED* of a number of words and senses of Sri Lankan origin or association first employed in English by Knox, such as the familiar *Buddha* and *rattan*.

Apart from 'Knox's words', scores of other words from SLE entered the first edition of the Dictionary, among them *beriberi*, *bilimbi*, *cadjan*, *calamander*, *chatty*, *cutcherry*, *dagoba*, *domba*, *hackery*, *kokoon*, *marmala-water*, *olla*, *parangi*, *patana*, *poonac*, *puja*, and *punatoo*. Then there are *anaconda* and *serendipity*, two words of remarkable etymology with Sri Lankan connection, yet which did not form part of the lexis of SLE.

Around Independence in 1948 there arose a conviction among the Sinhala-speaking majority that SLE was divisive, and it was termed *kaduwa*, or 'sword'. Subsequently Sinhala replaced English as the official language and medium of education. This resulted in the emigration of the Dutch Burgher community and other first-language English speakers. Together with the contraction and dispersion of SLE came a merging of it with Sinhala so that the hybrid 'Slinglish' was formed.

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The creative stimulus provided by the political turbulence, ethnic conflict, social changes, and terrorism that have characterized the country's recent history resulted in a number of acclaimed works of fiction in English by authors of Sri Lankan origin belonging to the national diaspora. Romesh Gunasekera (*Reef*) and A. Sivanandan (*When Memory Dies*) in Britain, Yasmine Gooneratne (*The Pleasures of Conquest*) and Michelle de Kretzer (*The Hamilton Case*) in Australia, and Michael Ondaatje (*Running in the Family*) and Shyam Selvadurai (*Funny Boy*) in Canada, have been instrumental in forging a post-Independence literary identity for SLE.

Meanwhile in Sri Lanka the abandonment of isolationist attitudes and the embracing of open-market policies resulted in much greater exposure to British, American, and Australian language and culture. In addition, the growth of English-medium schools, of the expatriate community, and of the number of expatriate Sri Lankans returning from abroad, has meant another evolutionary path for SLE.

The September 2005 *OED Online* update includes many words deriving from the names of real, fictional, and mythological people, such as **Paul-Bunnell**, **Paulian**, **Paul Jones**, **peach Melba**, **Peacockian**, **Pecksniffery**, **Penelopean**, **penfieldite**, **penroseite**, and **Pepysian**.

The newsletter of the *Oxford English Dictionary*

More words of Sri Lankan origin or association were included in the *Supplement to the OED* (1972–86). When the *Supplement* was incorporated into the first edition of the OED, for the publication of the second edition in 1989, the number of SLE words covered increased to over two hundred, with the inclusion of such examples as *chena*, *illuk*, *kangany*, *kumbuk*, *mudalali*, *pansala*, *pol sambol*, *poya*, *ratemahatmaya*, *Sinhala*, and *Sri Lankan*. Furthermore, the number of words first exemplified by Knox rose to twenty-four, with the inclusion of *kabaragoya*, *kurakkan*, *perahera*, and *vihara*, among others.

As I reside in Sri Lanka and have an interest in English literature pertaining to the island, I answered the 1999 OED Appeal for volunteers to assist with the revision

programme in the hope of making a contribution in the sphere of SLE. Since then I have trawled this literature for antedating, interdating, and post-dating references for the words mentioned, and assisted with amendments to derivation and definition. Incidentally, the third edition will contain at least two relevant additions, *ambalama* and *malkoha*, the latter already being published online.

It remains for me to report that a fellow British resident, Michael Meyler, has compiled the first comprehensive dictionary of SLE, to be published next year. Long overdue, this defining work will be invaluable to SLE-speakers and indeed to the editors of the OED.

Richard Boyle, Sri Lankan English Consultant, OED

Memories of the Oxford English Dictionaries, 1972–2005

My involvement with the Oxford English Dictionaries began in 1972, as a homemaker typing the fifth edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* on to 6x4 slips for the late John Sykes's sixth edition.

John then revised them as required and some were retyped if necessary. When the sixth went to the printers in 1976 they were so pleased to have typed, easy-to-read copy that they asked if all dictionary slips could be typed in future.

By 1974 I was going into the dictionary rooms for one day a week to do clerical work, and I gradually became a jobbing typist / clerk, working on anything from a complete dictionary to smaller tasks, as required. In 1975 I began to type marked-up quotations in journals on to slips for the quotation files. In the early 1980s I did some reading for quotations for the *Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* under Lesley Burnett's guidance, and learnt a great deal about what constitutes a good quotation (and how difficult it could be to find one). Being paid to read was a great privilege.

During this period I also began to card and interfile the BBC Pronunciation Unit bulletins. At some stage I typed bibliographical information for John Paterson, and did a specimen for the late Joyce Hawkins's *Encyclopaedic Dictionary*. I recall learning a great deal

about car engines from Tony Augarde's *School Dictionary*, and I compiled and typed an index for Edmund Weiner's *Mini Guide to English Usage*. Another interesting job was typing Oxford Word and Language Service (OWLS) letters.

Great changes to the printing world occurred during this period, and, after the 1986–7 printers' strike at Wapping was over, to OUP as well.

Great changes to the printing world occurred during this period, and, after the 1986–7 printers' strike at Wapping was over, to OUP as well. Computers were in the pipeline for everyone, and this interested me greatly. Until their arrival, when a dictionary was completed there was no way of checking cross-references, or of recovering a particular vocabulary, say for O-level Biology. From what I had read about computers, I thought you could probably do this sort of thing.

I also thought that the introduction of computers might mean the end of my association with the dictionary rooms, but thankfully Bob Burchfield had faith in me and made it clear that I would still have a role.

The Miles 33 system was the first computer system to be installed. There was a good deal of rivalry for

Words and phrases covered in the September 2005 *OED Online* update could help you to...

... peer pensively at a pavonaceous peacock... play peekaboo pauselessly with a paunchy peasant... peel a peculiar paw-paw peacefully... peek perceivably at a pedagogical pedestrian... perch on a pearlized pea-green pebble...

possession of a workstation. By then Bob Allen's *Concise Oxford Dictionary 8* was on the stocks, together with the *Oxford Spelling and Hyphenation Dictionary* and the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. We also had the use of a word processor, courtesy of Wang Electronics, which was then run by Andy Rosenheim in an office above the Munchy Munchy café in Park End Street. He was very helpful indeed to us, and at one stage we ran classes there in the lunch hour for people who needed a basic introduction to keyboards and how this new technology worked. The aim was to create a pleasant, familiar environment in which everyone could proceed at their own pace and practise as much as they liked. My grandchildren seem to have been born knowing what we had to learn and remember to do, like 'saving'.

In 1985 the Press appointed a consultant, Ronald Mackintosh, to help with the choice of computer systems. Ronald had been a printer, and the Society of Printers awarded him a gold medal for his work in bit-mapping characters for computer storage. He soon decided that a local firm, Compulexis, could provide the best system, and we enjoyed a happy collaboration with them. The system was elegant and flexible, and the documentation well-written and clear. The hardware was Apricots, and IPA and Greek were marked up for us on the keyboard. The printers were daisy-wheels, which were unbelievably noisy, and changing the ribbon could be so messy that replacements came with plastic gloves.

During the middle and late 1980s and early 1990s I worked on the *Concise Oxford Dictionary 8*, organizing the keyboarding and filing routine, the storage of all the paper copy, and, eventually, the critical-reading and proof-reading. I also did some work on the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, and some keyboarding of new entries for the *OED*. All the back-up was manual in those days, and most of each Friday afternoon was taken up with feeding in floppy disks and labelling them.

In the mid-nineties, the decision was made that trade dictionaries editors would type directly into the database, but John Simpson found a place for me on the *Oxford English Dictionary*, performing various keyboarding tasks as a 'Data-capture Assistant'. For some time I retained a link with the trade dictionaries, occasionally updating databases, and so on, but gradually all my time was spent on the *OED*. Keying

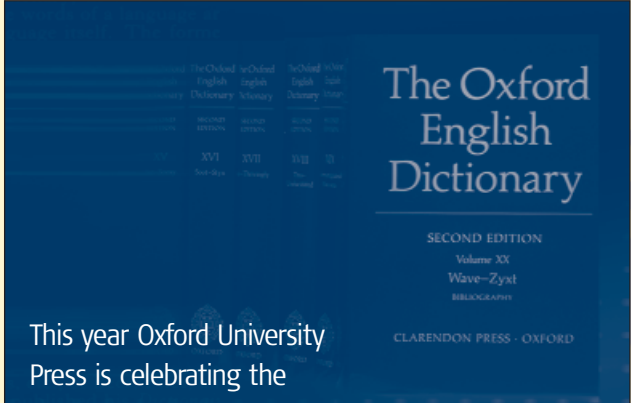
January 2001 brought a huge change to the *OED*, with the introduction of the searching of selected databases on the internet to expand quotation paragraphs. My work at last had an editorial content.

the results of the quotations checking programme (QEMS work) was fascinating for a bookworm like me. It is difficult to think of any other set-up which lets you dip into the best of such a wide range of works, and revisit those you know you will never have time to read again.

January 2001 brought a huge change to the *OED*, with the introduction of the searching of selected databases on the internet to expand quotation paragraphs. My work at last had an editorial content, which was quite a responsibility when all the emphasis before had been for accurate copying. However, my interest soon overcame my nerves, and I am glad I did not miss it, even though some databases have strange habits.

My first pay cheque was for March 1972, and my last pay slip was for February, 2005, so the years are even, which contents my tidy mind. Please join me in a toast to a happy, part-time, casual working life at the Oxford English Dictionaries, and in another to the continuing success of OUP.

Anne Whear, Oxford English Dictionaries (1972–2005)



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16th birthday of the Oxford English Dictionary (2nd edition)

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Words for various trees, plants, and flowers appear in the September update of *OED Online*, including **paulownia**, **peach blossom**, **pea-flower**, **pearlwort**, **pear tree**, **peepul**, **pelu**, **pennywort**, and **pepperwort**.

Appeals

Words or phrases which appear on the Appeals List are those currently being drafted or revised for the *OED* for which the documentary evidence is incomplete. Often these are slang or colloquial items which cannot be researched in specialist texts and are most likely to be found by a general reader in non-specialized or popular literature.

Usually the appeal is for an earlier example than our current earliest (e.g. 'antedate 1970' for a word for which our earliest example comes from 1970), but sometimes the appeal is for an interdating where there is a large gap in the *OED*'s quotation evidence (e.g. 'interdate 1589–1910'). Occasionally we ask for a post-dating (e.g. 'post-date 1875'), if an editor feels that an item being revised is still current but has failed to find any recent examples through the usual avenues of research.

Please note: it is generally safe to assume that examples found by searching the Web, using search engines such as Google, will have already been considered by *OED* editors.

chat-up (a.: designating or relating to flirtatious conversation)
antedate 1986

Dutch pot (n.: an earthenware or iron cooking pot)
any 18th or 19th century evidence

pneumonia blouse (n.: a low-necked thin blouse)
antedate 1902

point (n.: a post at which a police officer is stationed)
post-date 1972

point (n.: a pin used to locate a sheet when printing)
post-date 1963

popple (n.: a bulge caused by a bubble in manufactured metal)
interdate 1635–2001

power base (n.: a source of authority or support)
antedate 1943

power-egg (n.: an ovate housing for an engine on an airship)
antedate 1961

powermonger (n.: a person who wields or deals in power)
interdate 1654–1879

powermongering (n.: the action of a powermonger)
antedate 1965

powermongering (a.: that acts as a powermonger)
antedate 1972

Please send submissions to oed3@oup.com

Interesting antedatings

Revision of the entries in the September 2005 *OED Online* update has revealed an earlier origin than previously known for many words, including:

paunched (antedated to 1528 from 1649)
perceptiveness (1823 from 1852)
peremptorily (1435 from 1513)

pawner (1611 from 1745)
pawnshop (1656 from 1712)
peach bloom (1652 from 1856)
pearlescent (1938 from 1949)
peculative (1779 from 1909)
pedalo (1941 from 1959)
pedicure (1839 from 1842)

Quotable quotes

Thought-provoking snippets from the *OED* quotation files:

anyone for cudgels?...

1700 J. Puckle *England's Path to Wealth & Honour*, No Country but Great Brittain can boast, that after twelve Hours hard Work, its Natives will (in the Evening) go to Foot ball, Stool-ball, Cricket, Prison-base, Wrestling, Cudgel-playing, or some such vehement Exercise for their Recreations.

essential supplies?...

1480 *Wardrobe Accts. Edward IV* in N. H. Nicolas *Privy Purse Expenses Elizabeth of York*, Powderings made of bogy leggs.

an unusual choice of footwear...

c1945 J. Cranko in J. Percival *Theatre in my Blood*, [She] is making an excellent Scarlet Woman, but her ankles are too weak for point shoes, so she's doing it in high heels.

...and the wisdom of college authorities...

1762 W. Dodd *Poems*, 'Tis..a point of great prudence in the governors of colleges, that the she bed-makers should be bothe aged and uninviting..

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