

# Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources

RICHARD ASHDOWNE

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December 2013 saw the publication of the final fascicule (part) of the British Academy's *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, an undertaking first proposed in 1913. Its current editor, Richard Ashdowne, reflects on bringing a hundred years of research to a close.

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When I joined the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (DMLBS) team as an assistant editor in 2008, it soon became clear to me that this was no ordinary research project. On my desk I found a box of slips of paper containing medieval Latin quotations, about 2,500 in number, for words sorted alphabetically starting at Scap- and running through to Scip-. There was also a pencil and a pile of further slips of paper, blank for me to complete. On the shelves around the single crowded room under the eaves of the Clarendon Building in the Bodleian Library in Oxford were many hundreds of books and hundreds more such boxes. I was joining the team of four existing assistant editors who, together with the then editor, David Howlett, one editorial assistant, and the consultant editor, Peter Glare, were hard at work on the final stages of publication of the twelfth fascicule (part) of this little-known work (covering Pos- to Pro-), while also preparing draft entries for words beginning with S. That box of slips replete with their seemingly indecipherable handwriting and cryptic abbreviations was the first of many to pass over my desk in the final five years of the DMLBS project, and it gave me a sense of the history and scale of this long-standing enterprise – which had begun with a proposal to the British Academy in 1913 for the preparation of a new dictionary of medieval Latin.

## Latin in medieval Britain

To understand the need for such a dictionary, it is necessary first to look back to the middle ages and the complex linguistic situation of Europe at the time. Though not a native language for its users, Latin was nevertheless one of the most important languages of the middle ages across almost the whole of Europe, coexisting with the

many local everyday native vernacular languages. Its significance derives from the great geographical and chronological extent of its use, and especially from the breadth and importance of the functions for which it was employed. This was particularly the case in the British Isles, where it coexisted with languages that included English, Welsh, and (after the Norman Conquest) French, from the end of the Roman empire down to the end of the Tudor period and beyond. It was used in Britain, as it was elsewhere, for a wide range of functions, varying over time, with surviving texts from the entire period in fields as diverse as accountancy and zoology, astronomy and liturgy, literature and law.

The linguistic effect of this diversity was felt especially (though not only) in the vocabulary of medieval Latin. The position of medieval Latin as a non-native language and its resulting inherent 'contact' with the other languages of its users, together with the diverse and changing world of culture, trade, and knowledge during the long period of its use across Europe, led its users to expand the available vocabulary in various ways so that they could express the meanings they wanted when the existing Latin vocabulary was (or seemed) insufficient. Thus, new meanings were developed for inherited words, sometimes in replacement for the earlier meaning(s), more often as additional possibilities (such as the specific ecclesiastical sense 'tonsure' for *tonsura* 'haircut'). New words were coined using the usual processes of derivation in the language (e.g. the creation of new verbs from nouns by the addition of conjugation endings to the nouns' stems, such as *ventosare* 'treat by cupping' from late Latin *ventosa* 'cupping-glass'). Finally, the language users' vernacular languages might supply vocabulary that was simply 'borrowed' (i.e. taken over, with any necessary addition of inflectional endings) – e.g. *huswiva* corresponding to English *husewif* ('housewife'). For these reasons, while the few (mainly minor) differences in *grammar* between the classical language and its medieval successor may cause some puzzlement to anyone who comes to a medieval text having learned the language of the Roman era, it is usually in the area of *vocabulary* that the greatest difference exists, and so that is what the modern reader needs the most assistance with.<sup>1</sup>



The dictionary completed: Editor, Richard Ashdowne (right), and two of the final assistant editors, Carolinne White (centre), and Giuseppe Pezzini (left).

## The 1913 proposal

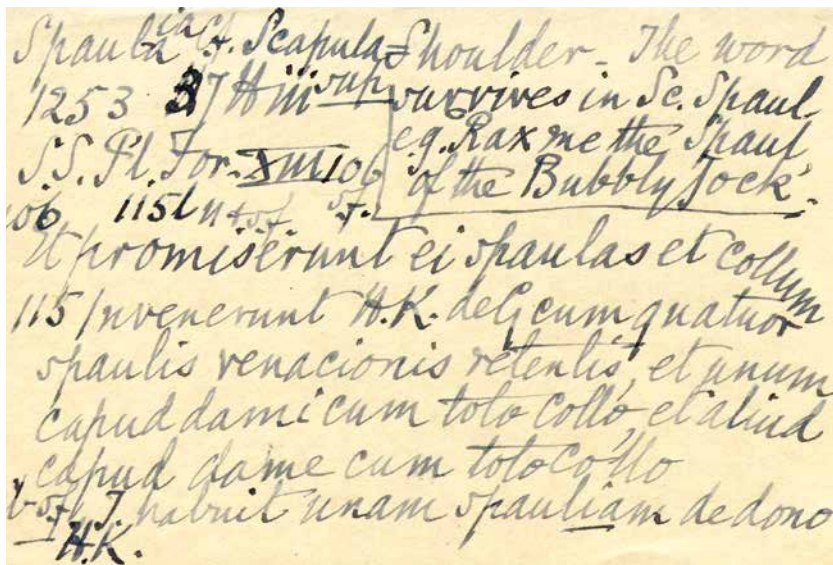
By the time that Robert Whitwell, historian, presented his proposal to the British Academy in January 1913 for a new dictionary of medieval Latin, the need for a new guide to the vocabulary of the language had already been felt for many years. This had emerged out of a growing interest in medieval Latin material, coupled with the ‘invention’ of systematic scholarly lexicography. In Britain, numerous societies had been formed in the 19th century dedicated to local history or to the history of particular fields of human activity (such as liturgy and the law), and many of these had taken to publishing series of editions of original materials related to their interests, including substantial amounts of medieval

1. The medieval language shows considerable variation in the consistency of the application of the rules of Latin grammar observable in the classical language. For instance, the indicative is often substituted for the subjunctive, sequence of tenses may be less strictly followed, the infinitive may be used to express purpose instead of a final clause introduced by *ut* or *ne*, and indirect statement is frequently expressed using *quod* or *quia* (‘that’) followed by a finite verb. The medieval language also shows great variation in the spelling of its vocabulary, often corresponding to variation in the way it was pronounced aloud and/or, for new borrowed vocabulary, to the lack of a standard spelling in the donor language. Typical features include the addition or dropping of *h*, the use of *b* for *v* and vice versa, the use of *ae* (or *oe*) for *e* and vice versa, the use of *y* for *i*, the doubling of consonants and the reduction of some double consonant to single consonants. Throughout the period consonantal *i* and *u* are ordinarily written *j* and *v* respectively. Medieval scribes also frequently used abbreviations and contractions.

material, much of it in Latin. Several series of formal state publications had also been established, including those by the Records Commission and the Rolls Series (‘The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages’, published from 1857 under the oversight of the Master of the Rolls, eventually over 250 printed volumes containing almost 100 sets of materials, mainly in Latin, considered fundamental for the study of the history of Britain).

There had been abortive attempts in the late 19th century to produce a new revision of the already much-revised and supplemented *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae latinitatis*, first compiled in the 17th century by the French antiquarian scholar Charles du Fresne, Sieur du Cange (first published Paris, 1678), which was scholars’ main reference work for medieval Latin at the time.<sup>2</sup> However, Whitwell had the idea that medieval Latin could be subjected to the method of the on-going *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), namely the gathering of quotation evidence on slips of paper by volunteers reading texts for the purpose, so that a new dictionary based on ‘modern scientific principles’ could

2. ‘Du Cange’ was in fact the standard reference work well into the late 20th century. The publisher John Murray in the late 19th century had tried to initiate the preparation of an abridgement of Du Cange, to be edited by E.A. Dayman assisted by J.H. Hessels. This plan was abandoned in 1882. Hessels took up the challenge for a second time in 1897, but again the project was abandoned in the face of the scale of the task.



**Figure 1**  
 The slip for 'spaula' sent in by Robert W. Cracroft (1857-1932), a barrister who contributed hundreds (probably thousands) of slips from legal sources, especially Selden Society volumes. On the right, the slip is shown awaiting editing in one of the trays used for sorting.

be compiled. (Whitwell had himself been a significant contributor of quotation slips to the *OED*.)

Whitwell's proposal to the Council of the British Academy was received warmly, and he was encouraged to present the idea to the International Congress of Historical Studies to be held in London in April 1913. Reporting the paper he gave at the Congress, he wrote on the following day in a letter to *The Times* (7 April 1913) that 'a rational economy demands that scholars combine to prepare a new dictionary ... By the collaboration of workers in all countries, materials should be collected; and this ... could and would be done by volunteers, some of whom (and those among the best qualified scholars) have already tendered their services. ... I shall be most happy to receive the names of any who are willing to co-operate in the scheme by contributing material or in any other way'. His letter immediately elicited many dozens of replies offering assistance, not only from academics but from the wider learned public, including, for instance, one from a 'master of the Supreme Court Bench'.

The First World War meant that actual progress with the scheme was rather limited for the first few years, and it was in fact not until the early 1920s that the Academy took up the proposal in earnest, establishing two committees to oversee collection of materials for the enterprise. By this time the proposal had also been adopted by the recently founded Union Académique Internationale (UAI, of which the British Academy was a member) as one of its major projects, having as its plan the production of a pan-European dictionary of medieval Latin (the '*Novum glossarium mediae latinitatis*') covering the period of roughly AD 800 to 1200, to which each relevant member academy would contribute material, and the production by member academies of various dictionaries of the medieval Latin from within their respective territories (covering such dates as appropriate in each area). The British Academy's

two committees occupied themselves with collecting material for these two undertakings. They recruited a small army of volunteer readers, establishing further committees in Scotland, Ireland, and the United States to co-ordinate their efforts; these volunteers were to read texts and excerpt quotations in a standard format on slips of paper (6 inches × 3¾ inches), according to a set of rules. Readers were instructed to include the 'word or phrase, written boldly and legibly in the left-hand top corner; the meaning (if certain) in the right hand top corner; the date; the source; and the quotation'. Readers were directed to be selective, making slips only for obviously non-classical words and for classical words used in a non-classical manner: words and usages given in a standard dictionary of classical Latin were normally to be disregarded. The Public Record Office (PRO) in Chancery Lane provided a home for the slips as they were sent in (Figure 1).

### The Word-Lists

By the early 1930s the collection of slips had grown to such an extent that it was possible to publish an interim report on progress, the *Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* (edited by J.H. Baxter and Charles Johnson, and published by the British Academy in 1934). It included only vocabulary new to Latin during the medieval period and it offered only a brief gloss translation along with dates of known examples for each item. The list of texts that had been read by this time filled some four pages. However, though still far from being a dictionary, the *Word-List* clearly filled a need: it was reprinted five times in the following 30 years. From the perspective of the overall project, the preparation of the *Word-List* marked a significant point too. Three observations may be made.

First the *Word-List* at last provided scholars with a new

reference work for British medieval Latin. Though still incomplete in coverage and limited in its content, it was of enormous value to British scholars in virtue of its British focus, its English definitions (compared with Du Cange's Latin glosses), and the fact it was based on a fresh reading of a wide range of texts as far as possible in the best up-to-date editions. It also had the advantage of being compact, appearing as a single easy-to-use volume (compared with the multi-volume Du Cange).

Second, its preparation clarified what further excerpting work could most usefully be undertaken towards the eventual dictionary. In fact the *Word-List* made this explicit to prospective contributors. Items of vocabulary for which the editors considered enough material had already been obtained were marked with an asterisk, while the Preface (p. vi) restated the earlier appeals for volunteer readers: 'The Committee invite scholars to help them make this Word-List a step towards the fuller Dictionary which they are preparing, by contributing dated quotations from British and Irish writers illustrating Latin words not found in this List, or extending the limits of date given for individual words. Quotations which define or explain obscure terms are invaluable. Such notes should be sent to The Secretary, Medieval Latin Dictionary Committee, Public Record Office, Chancery Lane.' Indeed collection of material continued throughout the 1930s and beyond, especially concentrating on gaps in the existing coverage (e.g. in technical fields). Though at all times intentionally selective, the breadth of the survey of British medieval Latin organised by the committee(s) from the 1920s onwards has enabled the resulting dictionary to be confident in its claim that no significant area of material has been overlooked, maximising its usefulness to medieval scholars whatever their field of interest.

Finally, the *Word-List* had a long-term value in preparing the way for the eventual *DMLBS*. The very process of preparing the *Word-List* began to order the collected material and arrange the editorial ground in such a way that greatly facilitated the eventual dictionary project: for instance, attention was directed to how the diverse spellings of any individual word could be handled, the slips being arranged to bring the diverse spellings together and to do so at a point in the alphabet based on a principled decision.

Twenty years after the publication of the *Word-List*, work began on a revision, a process which contributed even more greatly towards clearing the way for the *DMLBS*. This revision was undertaken by Ronald Latham, an assistant keeper at the PRO, assisted still by Charles Johnson until the latter's death in 1961. The result was the British Academy's *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* of 1965 (again reprinted many times down to the present day). Its completion confirmed to the then Academy committee that the assembled collection of material was sufficient to justify work beginning on a full-blown dictionary. Latham, now retired as Principal Assistant Keeper of the Public Records, was appointed as full-time editor and began work in 1967 with two assistant editors and one part-time editorial assistant.

## Getting the dictionary going

At this point certain important editorial decisions were made, establishing for instance the design and scope of the dictionary. The design was adapted by Oxford University Press from that of the then on-going *Oxford Latin Dictionary* edited by Peter Glare (itself in the mould of the *OED*). The scope was finally established as British medieval Latin from the 6th to the 16th centuries (in practice from Gildas in c. AD 540 to the end of the reign of Elizabeth I, a notably longer span than any other dictionary project in the UAI scheme). In particular, the notion of British was clarified to exclude early material from Ireland, which was due to be covered by a project of the Royal Irish Academy (the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources*). Thus the *DMLBS* includes within its ambit all Latin written by Britons, whether writing in Britain or abroad (such as Alcuin and Boniface in the 8th and 9th centuries, or royal or other officials in areas under the control of the English crown on the continent or in Ireland), or by foreigners writing in Britain (such as the 11th-century archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm). In addition, since language is not only produced but also read, the *DMLBS* covers the Latin of letters and other materials sent to British Latin authors that have been preserved among the collections of their own letters.

The most significant editorial decision at this point, however, was to bring surviving classical usage within the scope of the project (as contrasted with the earlier *Word-Lists*' limited, i.e. strictly medieval, remit). This was not only a wise decision in philological principle – regardless of its ancestry such vocabulary *was* of course part of the medieval language, and the greater part at that; it also had practical benefits too. While admittedly hugely expanding the scope of the dictionary (and thus the work of its compilation), it means the reader of a medieval text can turn to a single dictionary for all its usage and does not need to consult separate classical and medieval dictionaries. Moreover, the inherited classical vocabulary provides a framework within which the new medieval can be set, especially in the case of additional or replacement meanings for inherited classical words.

Since 1965 the process of drafting and publication of the dictionary has gone on continuously, with the first batch of entries, A-B (232 pages), published as Fascicule I of the dictionary in 1975. (Latham in fact chose to begin drafting with the 'interesting' words beginning with B and returned to face the challenges of A, including such grammatical words as the prepositions *a*, *ab* ['by, from'] and *ad* ['to'], once the inevitable teething troubles of the new operation were resolved and the necessary processes and conventions were more settled.)

## A new editor

Latham's retirement in 1979 brought David Howlett, formerly an assistant editor on the *Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, to the helm. He inherited C (which formed Fascicule II) in a well-advanced state of proofs and saw this through the press at the same time as starting to bring his lexicographical and philological

experience to bear on a project that in the 1960s had been estimated (albeit perhaps knowingly unrealistically) at some seven or maybe 10 years to produce a final dictionary of around 1600 pages. David's transformation of the enterprise was profound, retaining the best of the existing procedures and style, but reforming radically across the whole operation.

The range of sources being used and the bibliography were systematically reviewed, a process in which Richard Sharpe was also instrumental after joining the project as an assistant editor in 1981. This was greatly aided by the move of the project to Oxford in 1982, into the Clarendon Building adjacent to the Bodleian Library. The Bodleian Library agreed to allow books not required elsewhere by readers to be ordered to the project office, forming an invaluable in-house reference collection together with the project's existing small holdings; these were supplemented with books borrowed from other Oxford libraries and a complete set of the Rolls Series bought by David himself from the PRO. This in-house resource, combined with ready access to the numerous Oxford libraries' open-shelf collections, enabled the research base of the dictionary to be greatly strengthened by allowing much easier and more extensive checking and finding of quotations and their contexts (often in more recent or better editions than those used by the original slip-takers).

Around the same time came an offer from the University of Cambridge's Literary and Linguistic Computing Centre to create printed concordances showing 'keyword-in-context' for major authors and works (namely Frithegod, Wulfstan, Anselm, William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* 'Lives of the Irish Saints'), complementing the project's existing concordances for the works of Aldhelm and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. These, too, were transformative in enabling rapid scanning of large numbers of examples of an item's use to reduce the likelihood that usages might be overlooked. They had a particularly valuable role in offering a ready supply of examples of surviving classical usages that were now needed for the dictionary but largely absent from the slips.

Similarly transformative were David's revisions of the dictionary's conventions and design. Small changes to the design, such as additional leading (interline spacing) in quotation paragraphs and the introduction of an explicit bold sense number '1' for the first sense in entries with more than one sense, made the printed text more legible and user-friendly. Improvements in conventions included better treatment of doubtful readings. Medieval texts and their editions frequently contain phrases, words, or sequences of letters that are certainly or likely to be erroneous: especially in a manuscript tradition, where one manuscript is copied from another, itself a copy of another etc., words often become corrupted by misreading, misunderstanding, or miscopying by medieval scribes and/or modern editors. Sometimes it is fairly clear that there is an error and what the text should correctly say is obvious; sometimes there is merely a suspicion of error or the original author's intended text cannot be surmised.<sup>3</sup> The new convention was that such so-called *falsae lectiones* ('false readings')

could not be given a definition, and the erroneous form would be accompanied in the dictionary where possible with a suggested correction in square brackets and the quotation would then be entered under the entry for the corrected form if the correction were certain (e.g. if a check of an original manuscript revealed a printed form to be the result of an editor's misreading), or under the doubtful form if not. The dictionary now contains hundreds if not thousands of such suggested corrections. In his lecture to mark the completion of the *DMLBS*,<sup>4</sup> David Howlett recalled discussing this particular change in conventions with Richard Sharpe: 'When I said that perhaps no reader would ever notice, Richard fell silent for a few moments, and then said, "Do you know what this means? You and I are writing a dictionary of 6,000,000 words for each other."'

By the time of David Howlett's retirement in September 2011, when I succeeded him as editor, drafting had advanced to the end of S (roughly 90% of the total), with entries in T and beyond in preparation, and publication of Fascicule XIV (covering Reg- to Sal-, pages 2729–2920) was imminent. The final two years has seen the completion of drafting and the publication of the final three fascicules (XV, Sal- to Sol-; XVI, Sol- to Syr-; and XVII, Syr- to Z; pages 2921–3750).

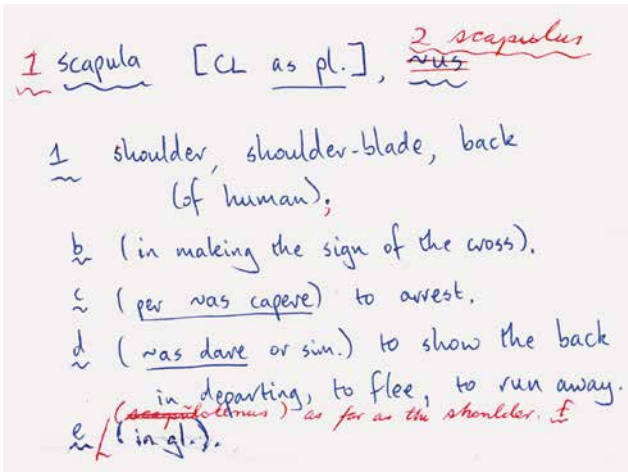
### Continuity and change

Like David Howlett before me, I too came to the *DMLBS* with some relevant past experience in dictionary making, in my case with experience of the technical details of electronic working in the lexicographical world. It was immediately clear to me that the project could benefit hugely from the kind of technology being widely used for other dictionaries, not only in terms of rate of progress but also the accuracy that could be achieved. Thus first as an assistant editor and latterly as editor, I have followed in his footsteps matching continuity of the underlying lexicography with changes that have enabled the project to reach the end of the alphabet and to do so at an unprecedented rate while preserving and enhancing the quality of the text.

Latham and later Howlett both prepared the early part of the dictionary on foolscap paper, copying out the selected quotations and adding interspersed definitions, into a handwritten draft that was subsequently typed, corrected and sent for typesetting by hand. Even when I joined the team in 2008, quotations were edited by hand on the slips with any additional quotations being written onto new slips, and then sorted into their ordered groups; definitions were prepared in manuscript on yet more slips (Figure 2), which were interleaved

3. Error and 'correction' typically go hand in hand, in that there must be a plausible account of how the erroneous surviving form could have arisen out of what the original author is being supposed to have written: given the variability of medieval Latin spelling and the sometimes inconsistent grammar, the mere presence of text that looks odd is not of itself evidence that the transmitted text is anything other than what the original author may be supposed to have written.

4. Completion of the dictionary was celebrated on 12 December 2013 at the Bodleian Library with a lecture by David Howlett on 'Making the Dictionary' and a reception.



**Figure 2**  
 A definition slip from October 2008 showing draft editorial text for 'scapula' (headwords, etymology, definitions for sense 1 and its subsenses), and the editor's first set of revisions.

in the relevant places; slips not used for an entry were bundled together at the back of the entry, and the whole sequence was replaced in the box ready for revision and, subsequently, typing, checking and typesetting. In the last few years, however, the final fascicules were prepared entirely electronically, with assistant editors drafting their entries directly on screen, the editor revising the entries in that electronic form, and typesetting done from the prepared data (Figure 3).

This is not the place to go through in detail the finer technical points of my development of the new XML electronic editorial architecture and its use, but a brief summary of the four main phases is worthy of record.<sup>5</sup> The first phase of the transition was to focus on ensuring the necessary continuity, i.e. to establish the underlying structure for the new way of working, by identifying the different parts of entries, how they relate to each other, and how they are displayed, and then modelling this in the electronic system. The second phase was to introduce the new system for the input of material that had already been drafted but not yet typed up for publication, of which a considerable backlog existed: here the system showed its first significant efficiency by making typing up an easier task, less susceptible to error (thus increasing speed and reducing the burden of proofreading and correction); it also made it possible for additional staff to be appointed to carry out this task, which the previous data entry method had made effectively impractical. The third phase extended the system to assistant editors

5. The data structure of choice for lexicography for around two decades now has been 'extensible mark-up language' (XML), in which a continuous string of text (such as a dictionary) is subdivided into sections (e.g. entries) that may be further subdivided and so on, each nested subdivision being marked by descriptive tags. XML encoding offers several important features, of which I would highlight two here. First, data and its structure are independent of presentation: any identifiable part of a text marked up in XML (e.g. a date or author name) can be presented using any formatting available to the system (e.g. bold, small capitals). Second, any such part can be presented in any order through a process of transformation, which takes XML as its input and produces an output based on selecting parts and processing them as required (e.g. by alphabetical sorting, counting, changing upper to lower case).

for drafting entries (and to the editor for checking and revising the draft). Again efficiencies and improvements in accuracy were immediately clear: to give just a couple of examples, the former process of finding new quotations in online databases and copying them by hand onto slips ready to be typed into the draft dictionary text, had been laborious, inefficient, and liable to introduce errors of transmission which the new system, by allowing careful use of 'copy and paste' functionality, effectively eliminated; time-consuming tasks such as cross-referencing and alphabetisation were taken on by the software allowing editors to concentrate on editorial matters.<sup>6</sup> As a final phase, the project was able to have the previously published dictionary text captured as XML data, enabling editors to search and use the printed text more rapidly than ever before.

The challenges of changing the project's basic working tools while retaining the core lexicographical process and not interrupting or even slowing the on-going work of drafting and publication were significant for the team as a whole but the end result now shows they were worthwhile to meet. The *DMLBS* stands complete sooner than many had expected and in better shape to face the future, with well-developed plans for its online publication as a searchable database using the full dataset that has therefore been compiled.

## Final reflections

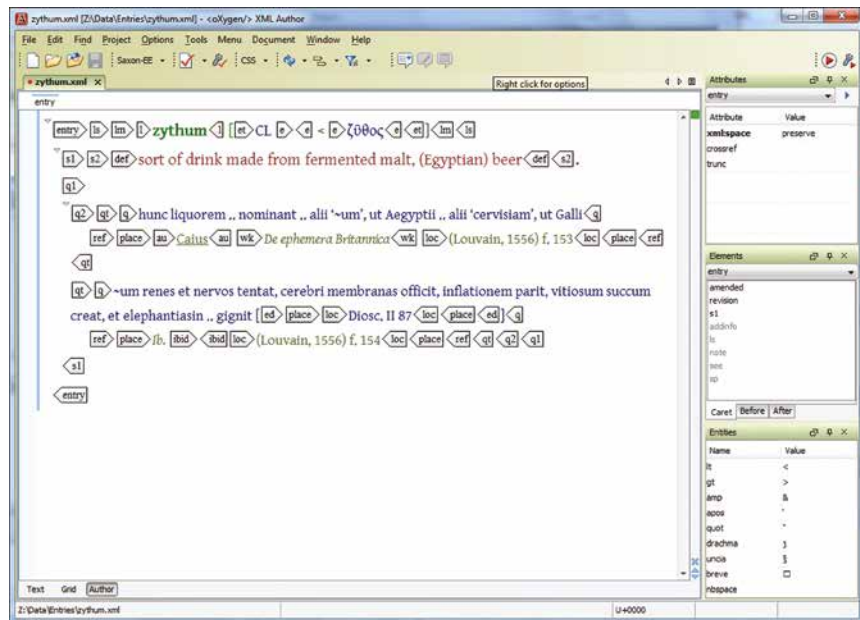
The publication of the final fascicule has prompted us to a good deal of looking back over the project's century-long history, and of course each of the team will take different memories from their association with the project. Many of the aspects of everyday working life will stay with us for years to come, including for instance the series of editions of a type-written set of miscellaneous guidance notes under the waggish title 'MLD Hints: being a collection of *Wrinkles*, or Matters useful to be known, alphabetically dispos'd, for Editors of the *Mediaeval Latin Dictionary ...*' which once circulated among the team to assist with some of the idiosyncratic intricacies of the operation.<sup>7</sup> What stand out for me, however, are the occasional moments of vivid connection with those who went before us.

6. Alphabetization of entries can be done rapidly and without error by a machine, while a human editor can struggle to sort correctly when having to take account of the fifth or even the ninth or tenth letter of a word (e.g. *tetragonalis*, *tetragonalitas*, *tetragonaliter*, *tetragonicus*, *tetragonus*, *tetragrammaton*, *tetragrammatus*).

7. For instance, in references the dictionary generally puts 'f.' in front of folio numbers, but not for the Domesday books nor for Rastell's *Entries* nor the medical texts by John of Gaddesden and Gilbertus Anglicus. With many thousands of works on the bibliography and many more such intricacies, the need for help just with referencing is considerable. The situation is yet more puzzling when one contemplates the fact that what a slip identifies as *De invent. sanct. cruc.* is in our (loosely alphabetically arranged) published bibliography as *Found. Waltham*: this is the foundation of Waltham Abbey, i.e. *De inventione sanctae crucis* ed. W. Stubbs (1861), from which our slips were taken, now cited from *The Waltham Chronicle* ed. L. Watkiss and M. Chibnall (1994). A considerable number of the texts in our reference collection have the addition of multiple alternative numerations in pencil in their margins and/or complex home-made concordances between editions to facilitate these conversions.

**zythum** [CL. < ζῆθος], sort of drink made from fermented malt, (Egyptian) beer.  
 hunc liquorem .. nominant .. alii '-um', ut Aegyptii .. alii 'cervisiam', ut Galli CAIUS *De ephemeris Britannica* (Louvain, 1556) f. 153; ~um renes et nervos tentat, cerebri membranas officit, inflationem parit, vitiosum succum creat, et elephantiasin .. gignit [Diosc. II 87] *Ib.* (Louvain, 1556) f. 154.  
**zyzanium** v. zizanium.

**Figure 3**  
 Right: A screenshot of the XML entry for 'zythum', the very last one in the dictionary.  
 Above: the entry as printed in the dictionary.



The project would not have been what it has been without the early volunteer readers, who are made real to the team today through the slips bearing their writing. They include, for instance, B.W. Swithinbank, a District Commissioner in the Burmese Division of the Indian Civil Service, said by project folklore to have excerpted some of his tens of thousands of quotations onto slips sat atop an elephant while making his travels through Burma, occasionally sending telegraph requests to send more books (Figure 4). But even just a single slip itself can give an idea of its writer: on the reverse of one slip (from another excerptor) containing a quotation from *securus* we find:

The late Arthur James, the well known Eton master, once drew some most amusing sketches illustrating — safety.

Securus. The Indian taking lunch with the tiger about to pounce on him, i.e. careless, without security.

Incolumis. The Indian safely up a tree, after escaping the tiger's bound: safe after danger.

Tutus. The Indian behind the city wall defying the animal's efforts: safe & securely found.

The med. sense of security is purely financial here.

Others who have made their presence felt include Col. John Summers Drew (1879–1949), a First World War hero who went on to become a leading amateur historian of Hampshire, and Canon John Lionel Fisher, an expert on the history of the county of Essex, who both made a huge contribution of material relating to agriculture.

Some of the sources themselves stand out for bringing the medieval world to life. There is William Merle's note of the earthquake of 28 March 1343 in his weather diary (so powerful that stones were dislodged from chimneys). We have used a 14th-century diagram of a body with captions and pointers indicating sites for effective bloodletting. We quote the record of expenditure in 1252

pursuant to an instruction to the keeper of the 'white (i.e. polar) bear' at the Tower of London, recently sent to the king from Norway: he was to have a muzzle made together with 'a long and strong rope to hold the bear while it fished in the Thames'. With more than 400,000 printed quotations across 58,000 entries on 3,750 pages, there is hardly a page of the *DMLBS* that does not offer something unexpectedly revealing about life in medieval Britain.

Long-running projects with such a particular unchanged focus are rare, especially ones with a full century of history, and so it is rare for a project such as the *DMLBS* to come to an end, but for two reasons it seems to me a healthy thing that it does. First, the end is the result of completing the task that the project set out on, fulfilling the needs of dictionary users. They deserve not just an accurate dictionary but a *finished* dictionary, and so while numerous linguistic or practical problems may be encountered along the way they must be (and have been) dealt with in such a manner as to allow the overall process to conclude nonetheless.<sup>8</sup> Second, a project of the nature of the *DMLBS* would hardly be proposed today: to me it does not seem to be reducible to an enterprise that could be completed within the period of a single research grant period, however large a team

8. As Anthony Harvey, editor of the Irish *DMLCS* once observed, 'library shelves [are] replete with fascicules of definitive dictionaries of various languages that were complete for the first few letters and then petered out, either abandoned ignominiously or else still in progress after decades; scholars were as likely to wish to look up a word beginning with S or T as they were one commencing with A or B'. It would be unfair to compare the *DMLBS*'s progress directly with that of the other projects around Europe under the UAI Medieval Latin Dictionary initiative, which have all had to work in very different circumstances from each other and with reference to different medieval linguistic situations. For reference, however, I would record that by the date of the completion of the *DMLBS* in December 2013, the Finnish, Swedish and Dutch dictionaries had been completed, and, for instance, the Polish dictionary was published to a point in S, the Czech in M, and the German *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch* in H, all having begun at A; the supranational *Novum glossarium* appeared stalled, having begun at L and reached the middle of P.

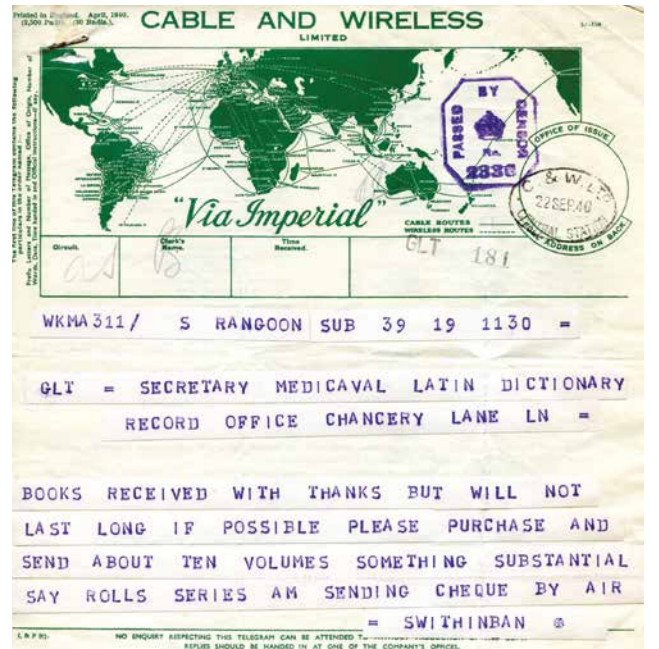
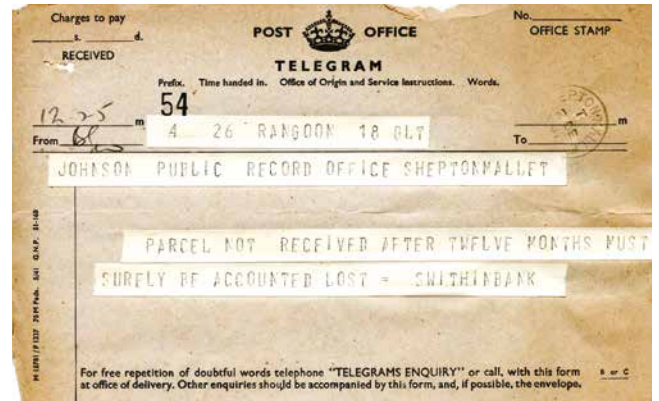
that might be assembled, and it would be foolhardy, even reckless, to begin without assurance of the resources needed to see the enterprise through. Still, the completion of the *DMLBS* shows that projects of this kind can be brought to a successful conclusion with proper attention to marrying academic research and effective organisation and planning, and that therefore the scale of such projects should not of itself stand in the way of their being proposed, established, and subsequently completed according to plan. Moreover, the need for fundamental tools for scholarship, such as dictionaries, does not diminish, though their role continues to go largely uncredited: people are little more likely to cite the dictionaries that they rely on so absolutely in reading their sources than to cite the word-processing software they then use to write up their research.

My final words are of salute for those who have made the dictionary over the years: our first editor, Ronald Latham, his successor David Howlett, who devoted his career to the enterprise and so nearly saw it through to completion before his retirement, the fifteen assistant editors over the years, and our remarkable consultant editor Peter Glare. I salute too the volunteer readers and the successive British Academy committees, most recently chaired by Professor Michael Winterbottom, Professor J.N. Adams, and Professor Tobias Reinhardt, whose role throughout has been critical to the project's success. As the project now winds down, I can only reflect on the fact it has been a privilege for me to face the challenges of bringing to an end something to which so many great people have devoted so much of their time and energy over such a long period, for the *DMLBS* is not merely at an end but now complete. It stands ready for the next phase of its existence, in use by all who can benefit from what it has to offer.

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Previously funded by the British Academy itself, from the late 1990s onwards the dictionary project was funded by a succession of significant grants from both the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Packard Humanities Institute, together with smaller sums from the John Fell OUP Research Fund.

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**Figure 4**  
 Telegrams sent from Rangoon by volunteer reader B.W. Swithinbank, asking to be sent more books to work on.