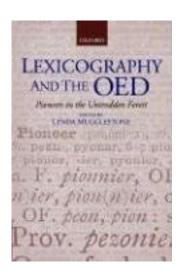
Lexicography and the OED



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The authors of this book draw on previously unpublished archive material to explore the pioneering endeavours of the scholars who conceived the Oxford English Dictionary and, with the assistance of an army of correspondents, brought it into being after half a century of Herculean labour. Its first publication in 1928 as the twelve-volume A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles was an important cultural event. In lexicographical and linguistic terms it was a revolution. Deliberately conceived as a new departure in English lexicography, the dictionary constituted an emphatic return to first principles, in terms of the evidence by which the record of the language was constructed and in the nature of the work itself. The prescriptive policy of earlier dictionaries was replaced by empirical description, while new scientific principles of philology were deployed to advance the understanding of the meaning and function of language. Lexicography and the OED provides new perspectives on the principles of the work and on the people, readers as well as editors, who created it. It includes chapters on its early history; the sources that were read for it; the nature of Englishness and the concept of the 'alien'; questions of inclusiveness and correctness;

the standards of usage which the dictionary came to record; the treatment of early English and of science; the representation of pronunciation; the fundamental issues of word-formation; and the at times intractable problems of meaning. The book also sets the dictionary in the context of international lexicography, and examines how it was received by scholars and by the public. This is the most wide-ranging account yet published of the creation of one of the great canonical works of the twentieth century.
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