Multi-volume English dictionary, which provides a detailed historical record of each word, with usage and senses illustrated by quotations. It is subject to continuous revision (and now computerization). Originally called the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, it was first conceived by the Philological Society in 1858. The first part appeared in 1884 under the editorship of James Murray and the final volume appeared in 1928.

A supplementary volume was published in 1933, and four new supplementary volumes appeared from 1972–86, edited by R W Burchfield (1923–2004). The 20-volume second edition, the *New Oxford English Dictionary* was published in 1989. Shortened and concise versions of the dictionary are also published.

Since its first publication the OED has been uniquely important in providing a full survey of the English vocabulary from 1150 and looking back to the earlier history of words in use at that date. Full dialect coverage is given into the 15th century. Each main entry identifies spelling, variant forms and pronunciation, and provides etymological information. Senses are listed according to their chronological emergence, illustrated by at least one or two quotations per century of usage. Conceived as an aid to reading English literature, the 's bias has made it a valued quarry for writers and literary scholars.

The most notable of many abridgements and adaptations is the two-volume *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, retaining the most essential historical information, first published in 1933.