

Foreword: A Paean for the *Dictionary of Old English*

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In retrospect the foundation of the *Dictionary of Old English* reads like the New World coming to the aid of the Old. Its founder, Angus Cameron, had the vision and the hope needed. His dissertation on a difficult Old English word had shown to him the insufficiency of Old English lexicography, no better really in the late 1960s than it had been a hundred years before. Neil Ker's *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* had been published in 1957, and Angus for his thesis had rearranged its contents by turning it into a classified catalogue of texts for him to use as he hunted through the texts for his word in its many divergent senses. The standard dictionary at that time was effectively a work of the 1830s and earlier, supplemented by a good Mancunian scholar at the turn of the century. The work was mainly at second hand, relying on two good German lexicographers and on glossaries and translations of Anglo-Saxonists, some good, others less so. Angus's vision was that the basis was the textual evidence of the manuscripts and that a new age of technology had dawned, available in Canada, rich then, and led and encouraged by John Leyerle, of the States (resident as a professor in Toronto), a conference was organized to give substance to a hope. The assembled Anglo-Saxonists were united in spirit — rye, in my recollection — and it was determined that Toronto, with space provided in the Robarts Library by the University of Toronto, would be an excellent place for a new dictionary based on new technology, photocopies of manuscripts, so that all texts could be checked rather than merely used at second hand, and on the new electronic invention, the computer, at that early stage of its rapid development, especially good for concordances. A Canadian, Elaine Quanz, who had worked with Angus, was given the

task of typing out all the texts of Old English, several thousands of them, for concord-ing by the computer. If you wish to build high you need a firm foundation, and Angus saw to it that the foundation of the new dictionary was firm.

The first of the two good German lexicographers found reliable a hundred years later was C. W. M. Grein, whose dictionary of the vocabulary used by the Old English poets was based on Grein's own excellent edition and translation into quaintly anti-quated alliterative German verse of almost all the Old English verse; that edition pre-ceded his *Sprachschatz*, 1861-1864, also brilliant. Grein, however, had never himself worked from the manuscripts in which his texts were preserved. The second good lex-icographer was Heinrich Leo, whose dictionary of Old English verse and prose appeared in 1872, arranged on sound phonological principles which made it virtually unusable till a word index in alphabetical order was added in 1877 (after Leo's death) by a Swiss doctoral student, Walther Biszegger. Leo was excellent at defining, and not bad at ety-mologizing, and he had the advantage of not feeling that he needed to invent a pagan past to explain a word used in a Christian Anglo-Saxon present, a pagan scholarly fic-tion of a kind in which almost all other Germans (and some English-speaking schol-ars) took pleasure during the nineteenth century and after.

Angus and his team and (after his tragically early death) his successors — notably now the brilliant lexicographer, Professor Antonette diPaolo Healey — working in Toronto, have, like Leo, no such mistaken views and, like Grein, form their lexicogra-phy on a totality. A complete concordance of Old English is available, now online, before that on microfiche (a new invention at the time). A virtually complete list of word studies of Old English, produced by the *DOE* team, gives easy access to previous schol-arship on any word, especially if one is working in the offices of the Dictionary Pro-ject where the word studies have been assembled, as have editions of texts and pho-tocopies of manuscripts. It is a great Canadian enterprise: the New World has come to the aid of the Old, in that excellent relationship Toni Healey has established with the editors of the current revision of *The Oxford English Dictionary*, so that the new *OED* has been able to rely for Old English on *DOE*, and, in the opposite direction, *DOE* makes good use of *OED*. May *DOE* be given the financial backing to flourish. It has the backing of scholars of Old English world-wide, as is shown by the financial sup-port given by individual scholars, by the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists, by the Early English Text Society, and by the British Academy.