



# TOEBI Newsletter

Teachers of Old English in Britain and Ireland

<http://info.ox.ac.uk/oucs/humanities/toebi/>



## Issue 4, September 1996

### TOEBI Committee

Prof. Barbara Raw (President)  
Prof. Donald Scragg (Chairman)  
Mrs Ann Squires (Secretary)  
Prof. Malcolm Godden  
Mr George Jack  
Dr Stuart Lee (Newsletter Editor)  
Dr Hugh Magennis  
Dr Richard North  
Prof. Jane Roberts  
Dr Elaine Treharne

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## Secretary's Report

As was agreed in the constitution for TOEBI, two members of the committee will be retiring in November and nominations are needed for their replacements. The retiring members are: Professor Malcolm Godden (Oxford) and Dr Richard North (London). Seconded nominations with the signed agreement of the nominee should be sent to the Secretary, Ann Squires, as soon as possible (proposals by e-mail are acceptable provided that e-mail addresses for the seconder and nominee are included). The President, Professor Barbara Raw, has also come to the end of her three year term and we need, similarly, nominations for a new president. The President and committee members will be elected at the AGM which

will take place at the end of the conference in Leicester on 9th November. The Secretary would be very grateful if members could notify her of any change of address details or other emendations needed in the membership list.

Ann Squires  
University of Durham

## CCUE Inaugural Conference

One of the objectives with which TOEBI was founded was to raise the profile of Old English within English Studies and to do something to improve the frequently unfavourable press we receive both among students and post-renaissance colleagues. With this laudable aim in mind I attended the CCUE inaugural (and to be biennial) conference in Loughborough University on 10th - 12th September 1996 entitled 'English for the Millennium'. From the perspective of this conference it would seem that Old English and Medieval Literature as a whole has little, if any, place in English Studies in the year 2001. I was not only the sole Old English specialist speaking, but I was the only one present (although Stuart Lee came on the Wednesday as part of the Oxford computing team, and from the later medieval period Pam King, University College of St Martin, was there for one day to present the York Doomsday Project). Pam and I presented the only papers that had a medieval reference, and both were grouped with other papers on the use of computers rather than medieval topics. Indeed, no periods earlier than the nineteenth century were strongly represented. Admittedly, the majority of those present were from the newer universities which have never had much of a tradition of early English studies.

With over seventy papers crammed into a two-day conference, it was impossible to attend more than a few in the areas of one's interest and difficult to get any general overview. However, it was noticeable that two of the plenary speakers saw English as having to fight for its position in the universities of the next millennium and having to justify its value as a discipline in a market place which looked for measurable, practical results from study.

Given the increasing number of conferences, the decreasing amount of finance and the constant pressure on time, it is not perhaps surprising that Old English specialists (often isolated in their own department) prefer to attend I.S.A.S., Fontes, Leeds, or TOEBI, where they are certain to meet those they wish to talk to, rather than CCUE or ESSE. However, there are dangers in this. It is difficult to see where Old English does have a home if not in departments of English, yet we are all aware that staff appointments nowadays reflect student numbers.

If Old English is going to maintain itself into the millennium as a flourishing discipline we need courses that attract students, and colleagues who acknowledge the value of our area as a part of English literature or English studies. While I accept that conferences are of limited value and significance, I feel we need to be careful how far we allow our subject to be invisible at those with titles such as 'English for the Millennium' since we do appear to be confirming by our absence the view of many of our colleagues that Old English has little place in the future of English studies.

Ann Squires  
University of Durham

## TOEBI AGM

TOEBI's November General Meeting will take place on Saturday, 9th November 1996, in the Charles Wilson Building, University of Leicester, from 10.30am to 4.30pm. The cost, which includes coffee, buffet lunch, and tea will be £13.00 for members, £11.00 for postgraduate members, and £15.00 for non-members.

There will be three sessions during the day: 'Teaching Old English: New Approaches', 'Teaching Old English: Postgraduate Degrees', and 'Addressing Undergraduate Problems with Old English'. Speakers will include Susan Rosser (Lancaster), Dr Stuart Lee (Oxford), Dr Paul Cavill (Nottingham), Dr Elizabeth Tyler (York), Dr Mary Swan (Leeds), Dr Julie Coleman (Leicester) and Professor Don Scragg (Manchester). The AGM will follow the sessions at 4.00pm. There will be also be a bookstall available during the day which will include publications from Durham Medieval Texts, Exeter University Press, CUP and other publishers.

If you would like to receive further information, please fill in the enclosed form. Please feel free to duplicate and circulate this form to colleagues and postgraduates. For more information contact: Dr Julie Coleman, Department of English, University of Leicester, Leicester, LE1 7RH. You may also e-mail Elaine Treharne at [emt1@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:emt1@leicester.ac.uk)

Elaine M. Treharne  
University of Leicester

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**Lester, G., *The Language of Old and Middle English Poetry* (Macmillan, 1996). £37.50/£11.99**

Understanding the language of Old and Middle English poetry is not just a matter of 'translating' medieval texts into a digestible form. The

language was itself the subtlest expression of the whole culture. To understand all its complexities would be impossible, but to make the attempt immeasurably increases the pleasure of the reader's experience.

This book is concerned with those aspects of Old and Middle English language which most effect poetry, particularly vocabulary, semantics and syntax. It assumes no prior knowledge of the language or literature of the period and is an ideal starting point for students tackling these texts for the first time and those who wish to explore the language of medieval English poetry in more detail.

TOEBI members will also be interested to know that Geoff Lester's *Handbook of Teachers of Medieval English Language and Literature in Great Britain and Ireland* will soon be mounted on the World-Wide Web at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/academic/D-H/ell/>. For more information contact Geoff Lester, Department of Language and Linguistics (G.A.Lester@sheffield.ac.uk).

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## World-Wide Web News

**ORB—Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies**  
<http://orb.rhodes.edu/>

The Online Resource Book for Medieval Studies (ORB) is a co-operative effort on the part of scholars across the internet to establish an online textbook source for medieval studies on the World-Wide Web. ORB maintains several pages of links to existing medieval resources on the Internet.

The Library page lists primary sources, many in translation. The Graphics page provides links to scanned images available for downloading. The Reference Shelf contains a melange of useful tables, timelines, and discussions of technical matters. The Connections

page provides links to other useful collections, the home pages of medieval scholars, and other relevant pages on the Internet. Links to existing resources are also provided in essays or contents pages where their presence is deemed helpful and convenient for the reader.

ORB also has sections entitled 'The ORB Encyclopaedia', which collects together original essays, and 'Resources for Teaching'. The latter contains a growing list of syllabi relating to the teaching of medieval studies and a Medieval Sourcebook.

At present the Old English section is edited by myself. It provides a list of links to sites of interest to Anglo-Saxon studies, and two original essays. If you are interested in contributing to this section, or have willing graduate students who would like to help maintain and update the information, then please contact me ([Stuart.Lee@oucs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:Stuart.Lee@oucs.ox.ac.uk)).

## TOEBI Web Pages

Please note that the new URL for the TOEBI Web pages is <http://info.ox.ac.uk/oucs/humanities/toebi/>. I am still looking for information relating to courses on offer, but have recently expanded the list of other Anglo-Saxon Web sites to over forty titles.

Stuart Lee  
Oxford University Computing  
Services

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## A Celebration

A celebration of the publication of the *Thesaurus of Old English (TOE)* was held in Glasgow on 29 May 1996. Lynne Grundy, Jane Roberts, Harold Short, and Louise Sylvester travelled up from King's College London to join colleagues from the English Language Department and the Historical Thesaurus team at Glasgow University. Among the guests were Emeritus Professor M. L. Samuels, to whom the *Thesaurus* is dedicated, and Emeritus Professor Jack Aitken, doyen of Scottish lexicography.

One of the main events was a seminar chaired by Professor Graham Caie. Jane Roberts looked back to the beginnings of the *TOE*, a gathering of word meanings out of standard dictionaries to provide the files of the Glasgow 'Historical Thesaurus of English' project with a fuller idea of Anglo-Saxon vocabulary than could be gained from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Many Old English words are infrequent or unusual in distribution. These the *TOE* editors indicate by four flags: o (noncewords); p (poetry); g (gloss); and q (doubtful). In Category 09 **Speech, vocal utterance**, subcategory 09.02 **Silence, refraining from speech**, we find 15 words, of which 5 are flagged g and 6 o. The decision to include such words means that the *TOE* picks up many potentially interesting forms, even if some appear utterly remote. For example, the curious *gyrdelbred*<sup>og</sup>, not just 'a writing-tablet', but specifically a 'tablet to be carried', might seem no more than an oddity from glosses, had not just such small tablets that must have attached to a girdle turned up recently in York. We are glad therefore that we chose to leave out as few words as possible.

Christian Kay talked about some of the problems involved in classifying

the vocabulary of Old English into semantic fields. She confessed that at times the Old English lexicon seemed to consist entirely of words which were either so vague in meaning that one could hardly categorise them at all, or so specific that each word required a category to itself. As an example of the former, she cited the numerous words defined by a subset of such terms as 'an outer garment, a cloak or cape, an overgarment, a mantle, robe or pall'. The latter were exemplified by words such as *mus\_eof* or *paddanieg*. A further problem was the sometimes mysterious metalanguage of the source dictionaries, a favourite definition being Clark Hall's for *ætfeohstan* 'to grope about, feel earnestly'.

Louise Sylvester described work recently begun at KCL on a bibliography 'Middle English Word Studies', to contain an index of lexical studies and authors, and a register of words discussed, with references guiding the reader to the relevant studies. A second volume is also planned, 'Middle English Semantic Field Studies', which will offer notes and information on lexical field analyses under the headings devised for the 'Historical Thesaurus of English'. These studies are intended as preparatory work

towards a Middle English Thesaurus, to be based on a skeleton provided by the files of the main thesaurus held at Glasgow University. For an account of the *TOE* database and its potential see Lynne Grundy's article in the last issue of this newsletter.

Jane Roberts & Christian Kay with Lynne Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old English*, 2 volumes, King's College London Medieval Studies XI, 1995. To obtain a copy, write to Professor David Hook, Spanish Department, King's College, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, enclosing a cheque for £55, made out to King's College London.

### Stop Press

The dates of next year's Leeds International Medieval Congress have been announced as July 14-17, 1997. For more details contact the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, Parkinson 1.03, Leeds LS2 9JT; tel: 0113 233 3614; e-mail: [IMC@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:IMC@leeds.ac.uk).

**Contributions for the next issue of the *TOEBI Newsletter* should be submitted to the Editor by the 28th February, 1997—Dr Stuart Lee, OUCS, 13 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6NN (Tel: 01865-273221; E-mail: [Stuart.Lee@oucs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:Stuart.Lee@oucs.ox.ac.uk))**