

About the Dictionary of the Scots Language

What is the Dictionary of the Scots Language?

The **Dictionary of the Scots Language (DSL)** comprises electronic editions of the two major historical dictionaries of the Scots language: the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (DOST)* and the *Scottish National Dictionary (SND)*. *DOST* contains information about Scots words in use from the twelfth to the end of the seventeenth centuries (Older Scots); and *SND* contains information about Scots words in use from the eighteenth century to the present day (modern Scots). These are the most comprehensive dictionaries available for, respectively, Older Scots and modern Scots, and are therefore essential research tools for anyone interested in the history of either Scots or English language, and for historical or literary scholars whose sources are written in Scots or may contain Scots usages.

In the **DSL**, these two dictionaries are being published together in their full form for the first time. Thus, information on the earliest uses of Scots words can be presented alongside examples of the later development and, in some cases, current usage of the same words. In this way, we hope that the **DSL** will allow users to appreciate the continuity and historical development of the Scots language. By making the **DSL** freely available on the Internet, we also aim to widen access to the source dictionaries and to open up these rich lexicographic resources to anyone with an interest in Scots language and culture.

The project to create the **Dictionary of the Scots Language** has been based at the University of Dundee in Scotland and has been funded largely by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board. This three-year project began in February, 2001 and was completed in January, 2004. By a happy coincidence, the building in which the **DSL** project was housed in Dundee is situated only a few streets away from the birthplace (on 13 August, 1867) of the founding editor of *DOST*, William Alexander Craigie. It was also to the Dundee branch of the English Association that Craigie gave a lecture, in 1907, which was to lead to the establishment of the Scottish Dialect Committee and, ultimately, to the compilation of the *SND*. It seems therefore quite apt that it has been in the same city of Dundee that these two great dictionaries have been brought together to be reborn in a digital format for an Internet audience.

Scots is a living language and, although the examples of modern Scots included in *SND* only date as far as the publication of the last part of that dictionary, in 1976, work has continued since then on collecting information on Scots usage. Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd. (formerly the Scottish National Dictionary Association) are currently compiling a new Supplement which incorporates recent research and there are plans to publish this on the **DSL** website in the near future, so as to bring the lexicographic record of Scots truly up to date.

What does the DSL contain?

The **Dictionary of the Scots Language (DSL)** contains four separate files of lexicographic data: the *DOST* main text file, *DOST Additions* file, *SND* main text file, and *SND Supplement*. Users can limit searches to any one of these data files; to a combination of the *SND* main text plus *Supplement*, or the *DOST* main text plus *Additions*; or can run searches on all four data files simultaneously.

Together, these data files represent twenty-two volumes of printed text and contain more than eighty thousand full-word entries. Each entry traces the chronological and semantic development of a Scots word, and gives details of orthographic variants, grammatical inflections, derivative words and phrases, and etymological history. The words and terms defined in the **DSL** are illustrated by quotations drawn from over six thousand sources, covering a wide range of subject areas within Scottish culture and history. Many of the modern Scots words are also illustrated by evidence from oral sources, and include information on phonological and dialectal variation.

The *SND Supplement* file contains data originally published at the end of volume ten of the *SND*. It comprises a mixture of complete new entries (which were compiled after the publication of the relevant alphabetical section in the main text); additional senses or illustrative quotations for entries already in the main text; and other editorial amendments to existing entries. A number of short entries concerning personal names, place-names, festivals and scientific terms – originally published in appendices in *SND* – are also included in the *SND Supplement* file.

The *DOST Additions* file is drawn from three short supplements, published in each of the first three volumes of *DOST* (A-C, D-G and H-L). It contains only additional senses and/or quotations, and editorial amendments. All complete new entries have been moved from their original place in these supplement sections and incorporated into the *DOST* main text file.

The *SND* Bibliography and the *DOST* Register of Titles have also been digitised and can be searched in the same way as the main data files, as separate resources.

Full details on how to search any or all of these data files, and on the kinds of searches available, are given in the **Help** section of the **DSL** website.

In addition, selected parts of the original Preliminary material from both *SND* and *DOST* have been digitised and included in the **Information Pages** section of the **DSL** website, which is accessible from the main menu. The *SND Introduction* listed there is the original Introduction to *SND* written by its first editor, William Grant, and published in the first fascicle of *SND* in 1931. The *DOST Prelims* section comprises mainly material published in the last volume of *DOST* in 2002; but it also contains the original Preface to *DOST* written by its first editor, William A. Craigie, in 1937. A list of the geographical abbreviations used in *SND*, and copies of the maps which accompany Grant's Introduction to *SND*, can also be found in the Information Pages.

We hope that everyone who points their web browser at the **Dictionary of the Scots Language** will find something that interests them and brings them back. We have included a 'serendipity' feature on the website to encourage users to browse alphabetically adjacent entries; and thereby, perhaps, to find words they may not otherwise have consulted. There is a great deal of delight, as well as information, to be found in the **DSL**: in the headwords themselves, in the illustrations drawn from seven centuries of Scots literature, in the quoted speech of hundreds of Scots speakers, and in the definitions honed by teams of Scots lexicographers for over half a century.

How has the DSL been created?

The source data for the **Dictionary of the Scots Language (DSL)** was made available to the project in a variety of formats: print only, word-processed files with typesetting codes, and SGML text files. During the course of the **DSL** project, all parts of this data were fully digitised, collated and converted into a single electric format.

The bulk of the data (all ten volumes of *SND* plus the first five volumes of *DOST*) was available only in printed form. These sections were captured using digital scanning followed by Optical Character Recognition (OCR) processing, carried out at the Centre for Data Digitisation and Analysis at Queen's University, Belfast, and were later proofread and otherwise checked for errors by members of the **DSL** project staff.

Structured markup was then added throughout the text in the form of eXtensible Mark-up Language (XML) tags. These identify the lexicographical function of particular parts of the text and so allow refined searching on these features. In the initial stages, most of the markup was added automatically by running our own macros in Microsoft® Word. Thereafter, extensive error checks were run and the final files were parsed with XML tools developed by the Language Technology Group at the University of Edinburgh.

As far as has been possible, the **DSL** markup scheme follows the recommendations of the international Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) for lexicographical tagging. Occasionally, in order to represent our historical source texts accurately, we have had to create our own element names where there was no equivalent available in the TEI lexicographical scheme. Similarly, we have used TEI standards for coding special characters, such as Greek or phonetic characters, whenever these were available.

We have concentrated on identifying and tagging features which would meet the search requirements of the majority of users, so as to provide a usable online resource within the three years of the project. The online **DSL** therefore offers search options for: full text, headword form, etymology and citation – the latter subdivided into date, author, title, geographical region (for *SND* only) and quotation text.

The **DSL** website makes use, whenever possible, of open-source software or software components developed making use of open-source tools. Searches on the **DSL** data files are run through Amberfish®, an open-source text retrieval search engine developed by Etymon®, which supports searches on XML elements as well as phrase searches and right-truncation.

All parts of the **DSL** web interface, including the programs and scripts necessary to interact with the search engine, were developed for us by Jeffery Triggs of Global Language Resources, whose expertise in developing online lexicographic resources has greatly enhanced the project.

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Finally, the **DSL** could not have been created without the work of the many lexicographers who compiled the source dictionaries which it contains. The names of those who contributed to the creation of *DOST* and *SND* are listed in the Preliminary materials for those dictionaries and can be found in the corresponding section in the **DSL** Information Pages.

Susan Rennie
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A web archive copy of the original online publication (captured 13/06/2004) is available at:
<https://web.archive.org/web/20040613105003/http://www.dsl.ac.uk/dsl/aboutdsl.html>