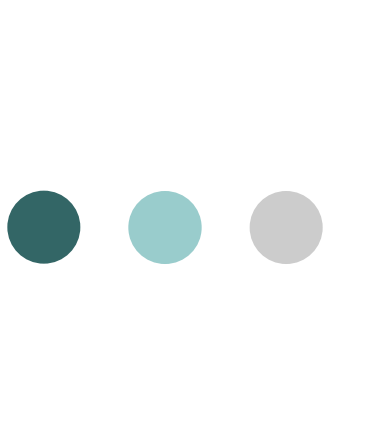




Iconic Fowler

100 years of the *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*

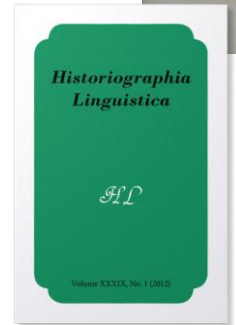
Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade
Leiden University Centre for Linguistics

Retired & Kicking 7

LUCL Symposium, 29 October 2026

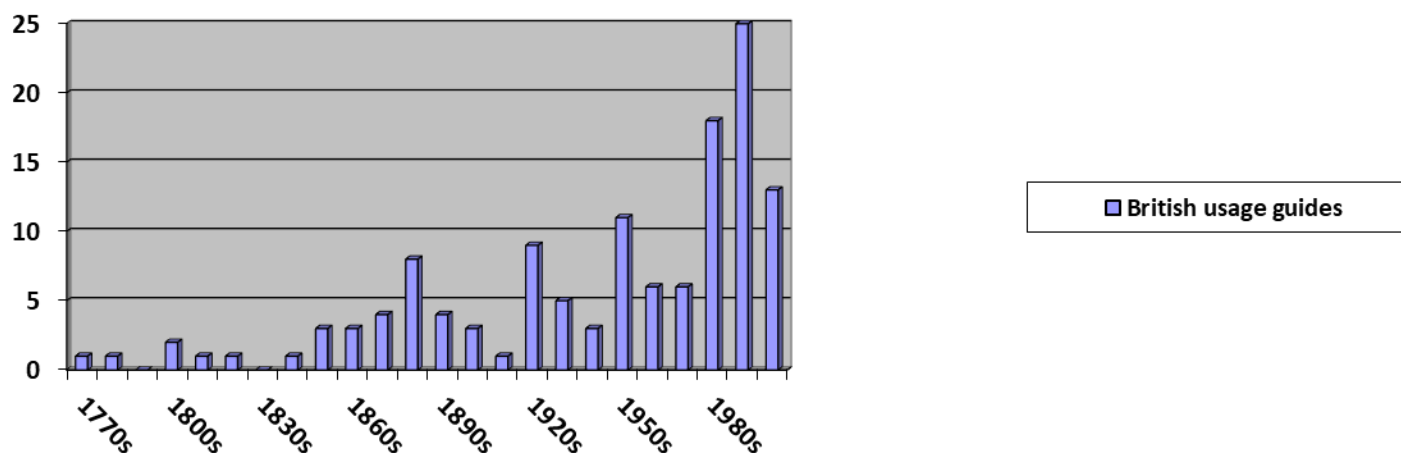
Centenaries in my work

- 1995 – 200 years of Lindley Murray
- 2010 – 300 years since Lowth's birth
 - VICI closing symposium, December 2010
- 2017 – Jane Austen Festival (death in 1817)
 - English Department's Alumni Day
- 2025 – 250 years since Jane Austen's birth
 - Many papers and presentations
- 2026 – a Fowler year: 100 years since *MEU*



Fowler's *Modern English Usage*

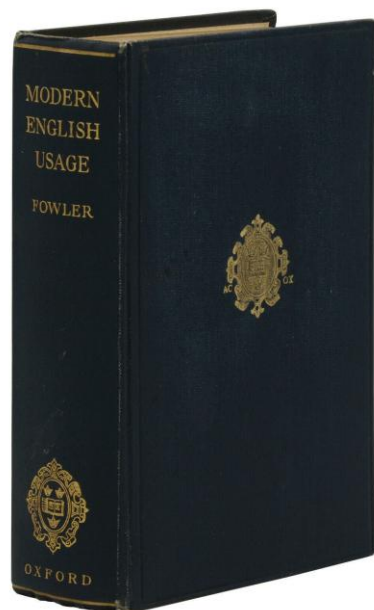
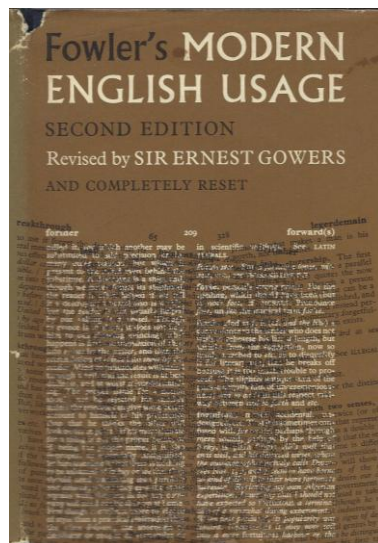
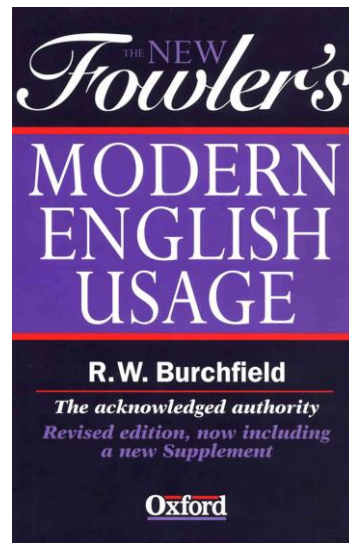
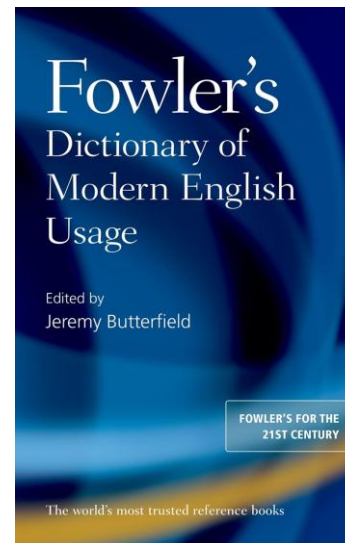
- An iconic usage guide – 1926
 - Immediately very popular
- Sometimes believed to be the first (not!)



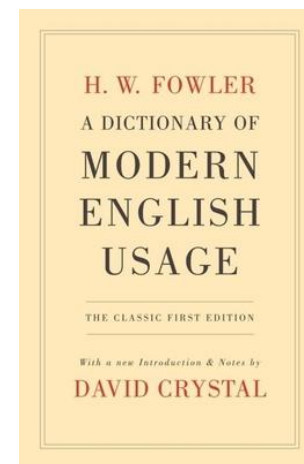
- An English household name
 - ₃ → a centenary volume (OUP 2027)

Source: *Describing Prescriptivism* (2020)

Four editions of *MEU* (1926)



- Gowers (1965), Burchfield (1996), Butterfield (2015)
- All three authors published usage guides themselves
- Many second-hand editions on offer
- Crystal's facsimile edition: 2009 (OUP)
- Will there be a 5th edition?



Fowler, *Fowler*

Bridging the Unbridgeable

A project on English usage guides



Search Results for: *Fowler into*

Fowler into the OED

Posted on September 18, 2011 by David Tatham

In 2009, the first edition of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* (1926) was reprinted by Oxford University Press, as part of their World Classics Series. In the introduction, David Crystal assesses Fowler's status as a writer of this popular usage guide, as well as the book ... [Continue reading →](#)

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[Fowler into](#) [Search](#)

Tags
[ain't](#) [Americanisms](#)
[attitudes to usage](#) [BBC](#)
[Bryan Garner database](#)

○ A word in the *OED* – at last (c.2018)

OED | Oxford English Dictionary Dictionary Q Advanced search AI Search Assistant Signed in as MediSurf

[First published 2017 \(entry history\)](#) [More entries for Fowler](#) [Nearby entries](#) [Share](#) [Cite](#) [Contribute](#) [Single page](#) [Tabbed](#)

Fowler

NOUN²

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QUOTATIONS

☐ Hide all quotations

CONTENTS

H. W. Fowler's *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, first...

H. W. Fowler's *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, first published in 1926; an edition or abridgement of this work, especially taken as the standard guide to correct English grammar and usage. Also in the genitive, used *absol.*, as Fowler's.

1931–

1931 When I noticed *smazyva' belkom* translated by to glair [in a Russian-English dictionary], I had to consult my Fowler.
Slavonic & East European Review vol. 9 749

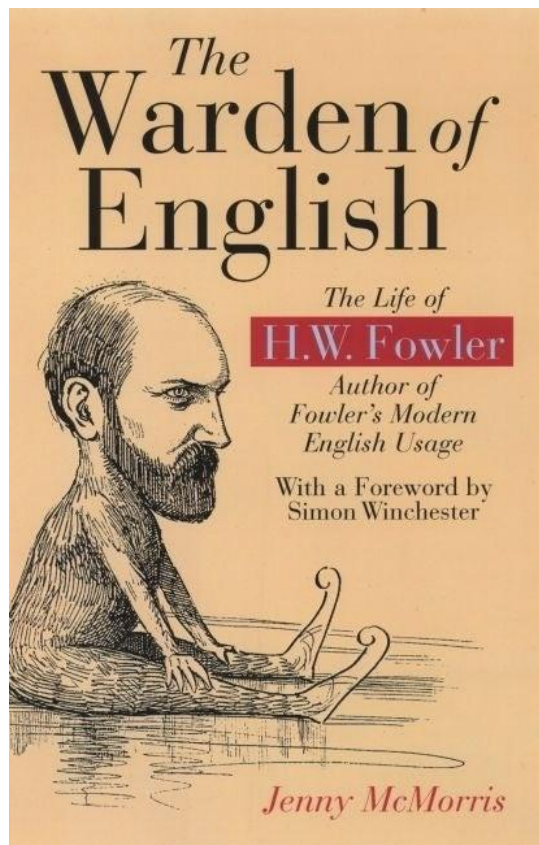
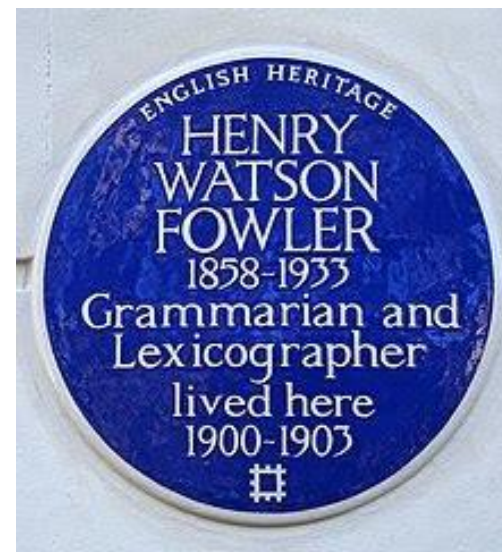
1948 Hand me my Fowler... The accepted spelling..for the trade is 'fish friers' [rather than 'fish fryers'.
Alphabet & Image May 80/2

1963 I take the liberty of changing Church's 'calculi' to 'calculuses' for the reason stated in Fowler.
H. B. Curry, *Foundations of Mathematical Logic* iii. 115

1991 If Fowler allows 'try and'..it's no surprise that Webster's Dictionary of English Usage..is glowingly positive about it.
Ottawa Citizen (Nexis) 8 September d9

2010 The second edition of Fowler's is informative and drily witty.
Times 4 December 104/5 (heading)

Fowler the man

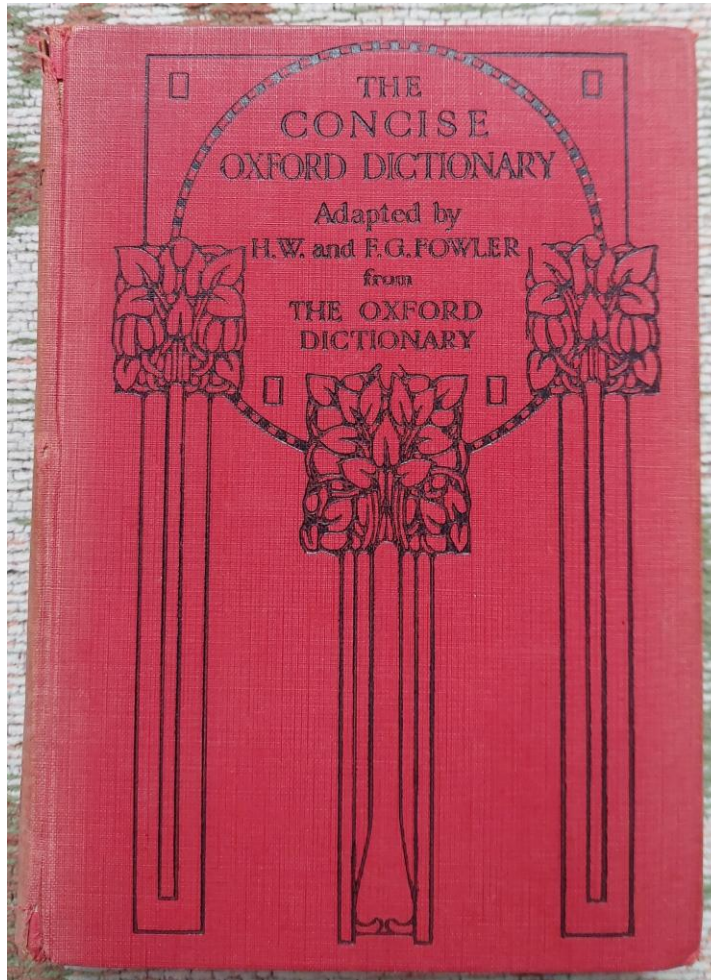
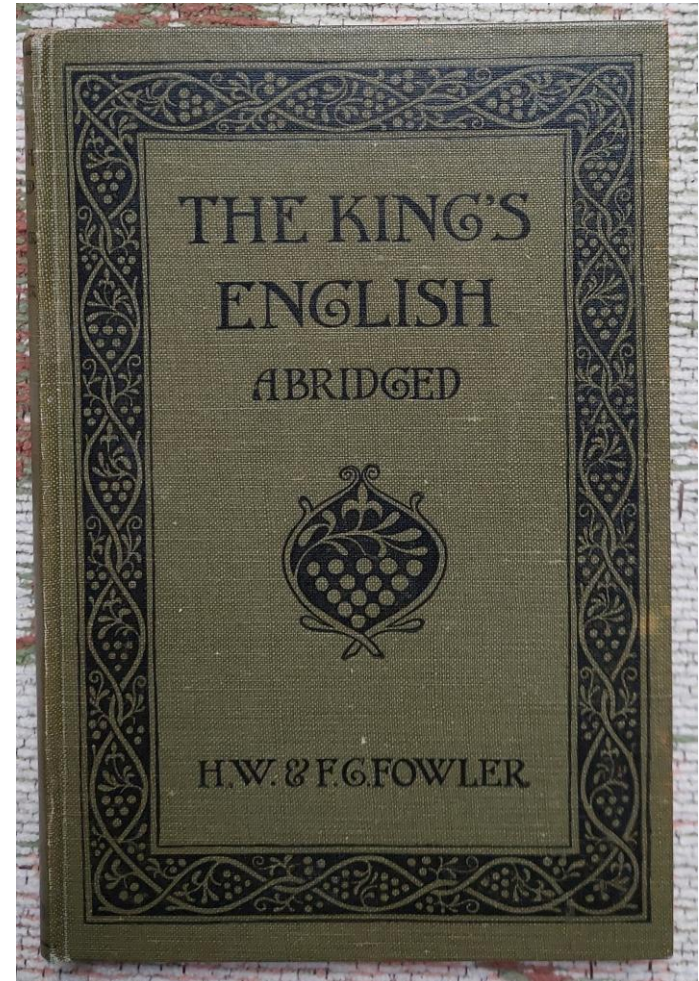


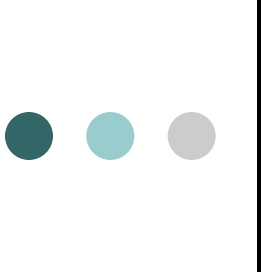
Fowler – how it all began

- A joint project on usage
 - With his brother Frank
 - After *Lucian*: OUP interested
 - *The King's English* (1906)
 - 5000 copies the first year
 - *COD* – even though *OED* still unfinished
 - 1911 – 40,000 copies after one year
 - “almost universal praise” (McMorris 2001: 94)
 - Highly profitable for OUP (paid in lump sum)



Spinoffs

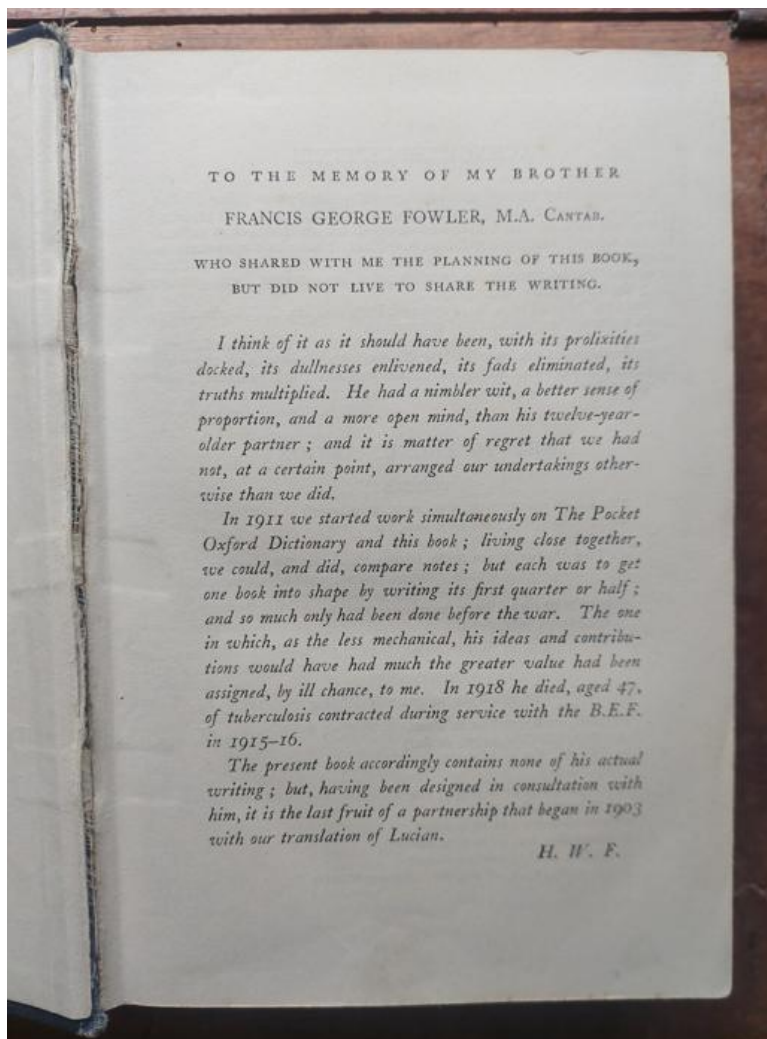




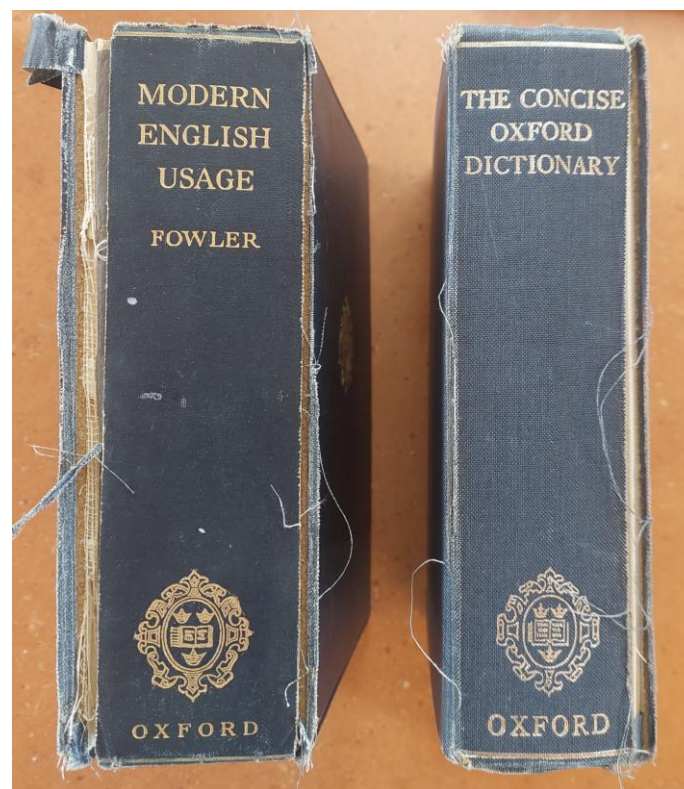
Modern English Usage

- Plan for an “Idiom Dictionary”
- But: WW-1 – the brothers on active service
 - Frank’s death in 1918
- A new collaborator:
 - Lt-Col. H. G. Le Mesurier, C.I.E.
 - Acknowledged in *MEU*’s preface
 - Merely: “reading and commenting on the usage guide before it was published” (McMorris)
- Basis: work done with Frank → tribute

MEU's dedication



OUP's misunderstanding:
Dictionary ≠ Usage guide



● ● ● | OUP's misunderstanding

- *MEU* presented like *COD*
 - But: usage guides are “integrative all-in-one reference works [...] that bridge the traditional divide between a grammar and a dictionary” (Busse and Schröder 2009)
- No “true lexicographer; the only parts of the science I care about ... are grammar & idiom”
- Misrepresented in *ODNB*

 Fowler, Henry Watson (1858–1933), lexicographer and grammarian

R. W. Burchfield

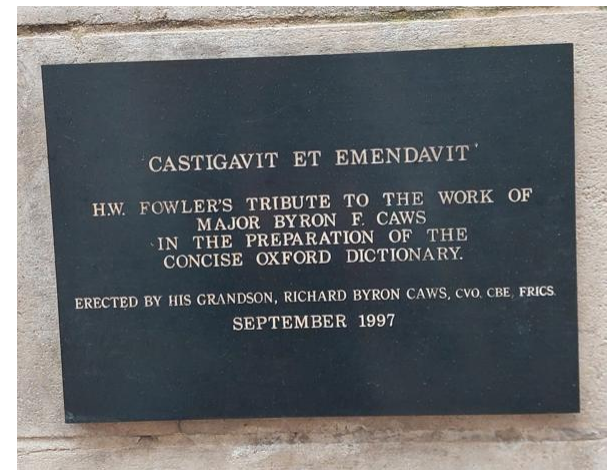
Published in print: 23 September 2004

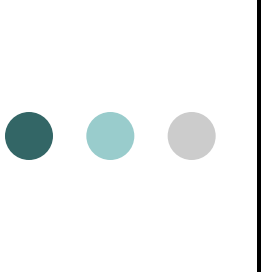
Published online: 23 September 2004

mark on **Fowler** himself. Dr Jowett, the famous master of Balliol, gave him a routinely worded testimonial: 'Mr H. W. **Fowler** ... is quite a gentleman in manner and feeling ... He is a very fair scholar

Fowler in London

- Another plaque
 - Dr Johnson's cat Hodge
- OUP: *COD* needed updating
 - A new collaborator –
 - Major Byron F. Caws
 - Leiden MA student
 - Caws' identity revealed
 - Acknowledged 1934 copy
 - London remembers





Who uses *Fowler*?

The Henry Sweet Society
for the History
of Linguistic
Ideas

- HSS survey: not linguists (16 responses)
 - One of them had “trained my husband out of taking any notice of [his inlaws’ discussions about correct usage]”
 - Another only consulted Fowler “to win tedious arguments about grammar”
 - For research
 - → the Bridging the Unbridgeable project
- Amazingly: people still used Fowler-1

After *Fowler* ...

- A fifth edition?
- Survey Lukač & Stenton (2023: 280)
 - Copy editors and proofreaders

Chicago Manual of Style (CMoS)★
Oxford★

Associated Press Stylebook (AP)★

Merriam-Webster

American Psychological Association *Manual of Style* (APA)★

Grammar Girl

Hart's Rules★

Cambridge

Fowler

Grammarly

→ Strunk & White★

Modern Language Association *Stylebook*★

American Medical Association *Manual of Style* (AMA)

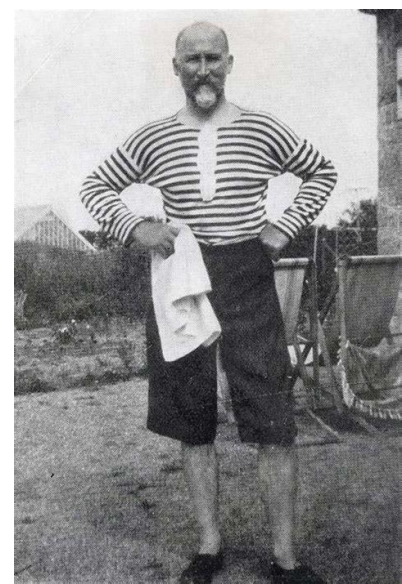
Online usage advice

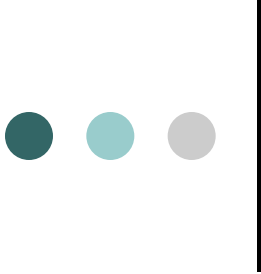
- Grammar (and spelling) checkers
 - American English?
- Grammar Girl
- Grammarly
 - 2022: LUCCL a free trial
 - Website UL: “Useful for language support” – default program
- And what about AI?



Conclusion

- The swimsuit ...
- Paul Bennett on the BtU blog
 - [“Bennett’s Word Finder”](#) (Fowler-2)
 - Much more than just the entries!
 - [“Fowler is funny”](#)
- OUP made a fortune out of him
- *ODNB* → “linguist and writer of usage guides”
- Iconic Fowler, not only *MEU*





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