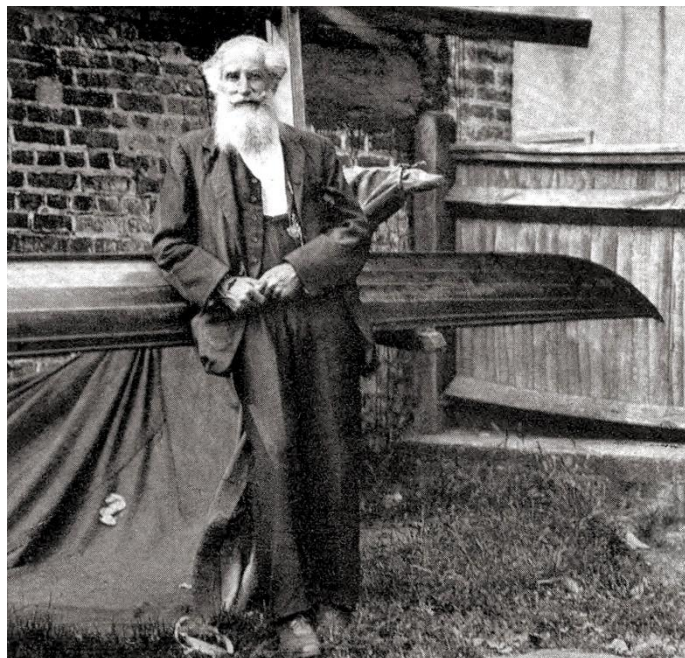


Frederick Furnivall

Born 1825. An extremely energetic Victorian.
Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk

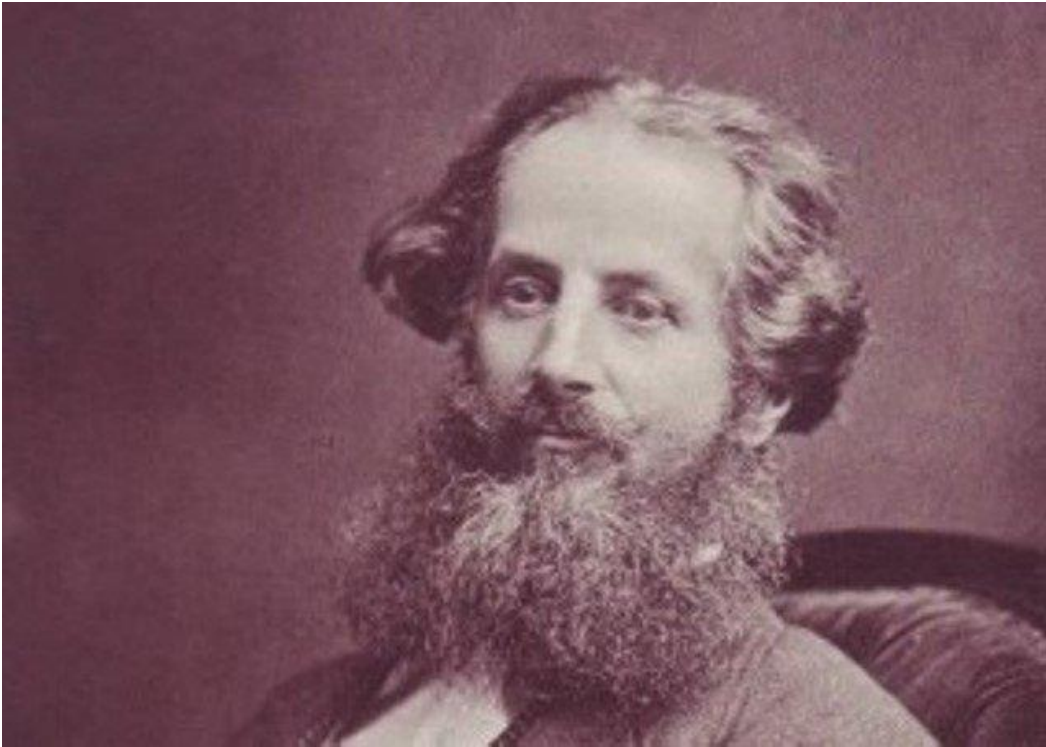


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This life story of Frederick Furnivall was compiled in 2024 by Alex Reid.

1. Introduction

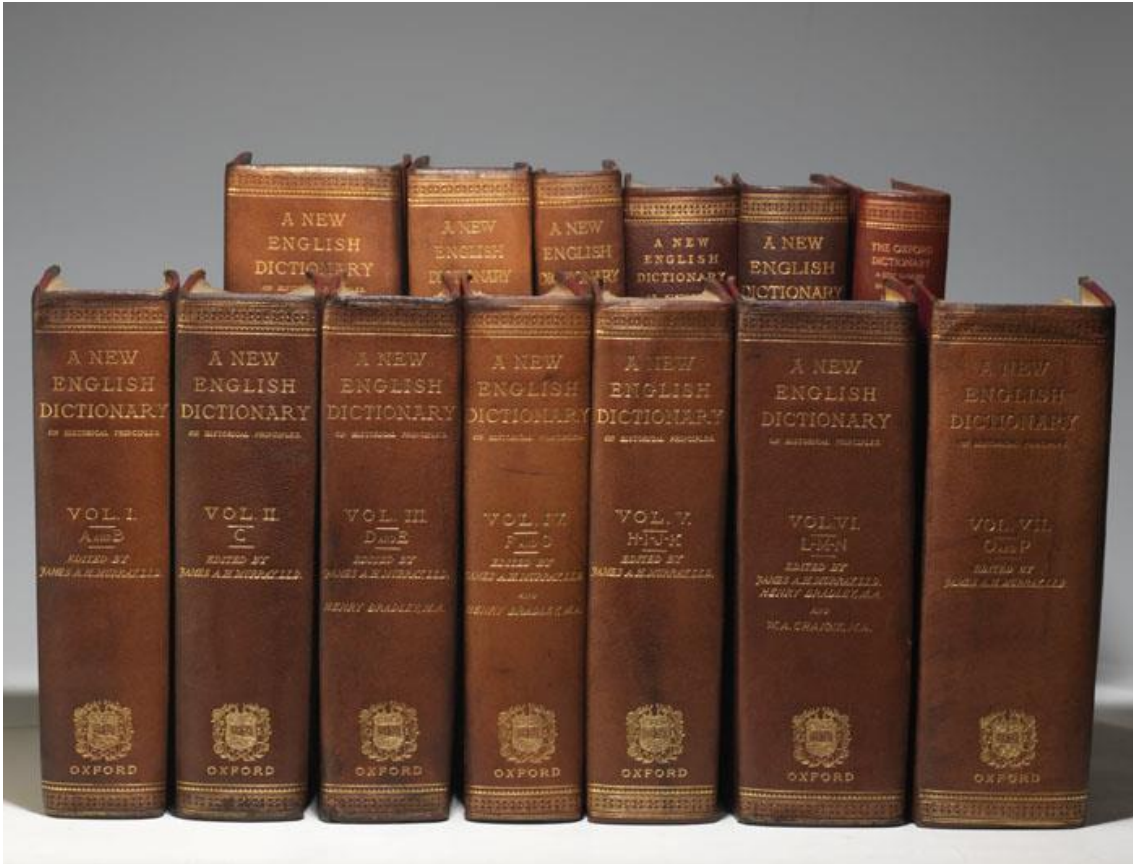


Dr. Furnivall was a true Victorian. Not only did he found the Furnivall Sculling Club when he was a young 71 but he was also the ultimate enthusiast; passionate about social justice and personal health. He never smoked or drank and, unusually for the time, became a vegetarian.

In 1849 he opened a school for poor men and boys and in 1851 he sold his book collection so as to give £100 to support striking woodcutters. The following year he helped establish the Working Men's Association. But it was his literary work that attracted national attention. In 1861 he started work on a dictionary which finally saw the light of day as *The Oxford English Dictionary*. That task was taken out of his hands as he was diverted by new pursuits.

He founded the Early English Texts Society in 1864, the Chaucer Society in 1886, the Ballad Society and also the New Shakespeare Society in 1873, the Wicliff Society in 1881, and in 1886 the Browning Society and the Shelly Society. In his spare time he became the leading expert of the day on Chaucer.

2. The Oxford English Dictionary



The first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (above). The following chapter was archived in 2024, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Wikipedia website.

The dictionary began as a Philological Society project of a small group of intellectuals in London (and unconnected to Oxford University): Richard Chenevix Trench, Herbert Coleridge, and Frederick Furnivall, who were dissatisfied with the existing English dictionaries. The society expressed interest in compiling a new dictionary as early as 1844, but it was not until June 1857 that they began by forming an "Unregistered Words Committee" to search for words that were unlisted or poorly defined in current dictionaries. In November, Trench's report was not a list of unregistered words; instead, it was the study *On Some Deficiencies in our English Dictionaries*, which identified seven distinct shortcomings in contemporary dictionaries:

- Incomplete coverage of obsolete words
- Inconsistent coverage of families of related words
- Incorrect dates for earliest use of words
- History of obsolete senses of words often omitted

- Inadequate distinction among synonyms
- Insufficient use of good illustrative quotations
- Space wasted on inappropriate or redundant content.

The society ultimately realized that the number of unlisted words would be far more than the number of words in the English dictionaries of the 19th century, and shifted their idea from covering only words that were not already in English dictionaries to a larger project. Trench suggested that a new, truly *comprehensive* dictionary was needed. On 7 January 1858, the society formally adopted the idea of a comprehensive new dictionary.

Volunteer readers would be assigned particular books, copying passages illustrating word usage onto quotation slips. Later the same year, the society agreed to the project in principle, with the title *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles (NED)*.



Herbert Coleridge, the first editor of the Oxford English Dictionary, died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty.

Richard Chenevix Trench (1807–1886) played the key role in the project's first months, but his appointment as Dean of Westminster meant that he could not give the dictionary project the time that it required. He withdrew and Herbert Coleridge (above) became the first editor.

On 12 May 1860, Coleridge's dictionary plan was published and research was started. His house was the first editorial office. He arrayed 100,000 quotation slips in a 54 pigeon-hole grid. In April 1861, the group published the first sample pages; later that month, Coleridge died of tuberculosis, aged 30.

Thereupon Furnivall became editor; he was enthusiastic and knowledgeable, but temperamentally ill-suited for the work. Many volunteer readers eventually lost interest in the project, as Furnivall failed to keep them motivated. Furthermore, many of the slips were misplaced.

Furnivall believed that, since many printed texts from earlier centuries were not readily available, it would be impossible for volunteers to efficiently locate the quotations that the dictionary needed. As a result, he founded the Early English Text Society in 1864 and the Chaucer Society in 1868 to publish old manuscripts. Furnivall's preparatory efforts lasted 21 years and provided numerous texts for the use and enjoyment of the general public, as well as crucial sources for lexicographers, but they did not actually involve compiling a dictionary. Furnivall recruited more than 800 volunteers to read these texts and record quotations. While enthusiastic, the volunteers were not well trained and often made inconsistent and arbitrary selections. Ultimately, Furnivall handed over nearly two tons of quotation slips and other materials to his successor.

In the 1870s, Furnivall unsuccessfully attempted to recruit both Henry Sweet and Henry Nicol to succeed him. He then approached James Murray, who accepted the post of editor. In the late 1870s, Furnivall and Murray met with several publishers about publishing the dictionary. In 1878, Oxford University Press agreed with Murray to proceed with the massive project; the agreement was formalized the following year. 20 years after its conception, the dictionary project finally had a publisher. It would take another 50 years to complete.


3. The Furnivall Sculling Club



In April 1896, the 71-year-old Dr. Furnivall founded the Hammersmith Sculling Club for girls, later becoming Furnivall Sculling Club. Having learnt to row in his teens, rowing became a lifelong obsession for Dr. Furnivall. He was admitted to Trinity Hall Cambridge in 1842, where he rowed in the first eight. He also sculled regularly and at the age of 20, he and his friend John Beesley built the first narrow, outriggered single scull to be seen on the Cam.



The Biffen family, whose boat yard was next door to the Furnivall Sculling Club and is seen in the photo above, operated one of many 19th century boat building and boat repairing businesses which were situated along this stretch of the Thames. Their advertisement below shows that they were the inventors of the Patent Portable Boat and offered a wide range of four-oared, pair-oared, sculling, and pleasure boats for sale or hire. They proudly report the success of their racing boats as far afield as Melbourne and China.



By appointment to H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh.

W. BIFFEN & SONS,
INVENTORS OF THE
PATENT PORTABLE BOAT,
And General Boat Builders,
METROPOLITAN BOAT HOUSE,
MALL ROAD, HAMMERSMITH.

Within Five Minutes' Walk of the Metropolitan, City, and South Western Railway Stations.

W. BIFFEN & SONS beg to return their grateful acknowledgments for the liberal share of patronage with which they continue to be favoured.

They have erected at a great expense a Boathouse, constructed to meet the requirements of the times, both for housing boats and general accommodation. One floor, with balcony, is devoted to the different Metropolitan Rowing Clubs; another to the general public. A portion of the building is adapted to the housing of canoes. The most exciting part of the University Boat Race visible for two miles. A Waiting-room for Ladies.

They possess a large stock of four-oared, pair-oared, sculling, and pleasure boats, for Sale or Hire. Gentlemen's boats taken care of by the day, week, or year.

They also call attention to the success of their Racing Boats in foreign parts, having won the Grand Challenge Cup, Pair-oared, and Sculling Races, at the late Melbourne Regatta, and the principal Sculling Races in China.

J. BIFFEN, QUEEN'S WATERMAN BY APPOINTMENT.

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In 1891 when the Amateur Rowing Association refused to accept working men as ‘amateurs’, Furnivall founded the National Amateur Rowing Association which anyone could join. Given his passionate opposition to discrimination, he wanted to break into the traditionally male-dominated world of river sport, by building a club for women. Membership of the Hammersmith Sculling Club was extended to men in 1901. It was also in this year that the name was changed to Furnivall Sculling Club for Girls and Men. The captaincy continued to be restricted to female members for the first half of the century, however, in honour of Dr. Furnivall's original purpose for founding the club.

Dr. Furnivall continued to row regularly every Sunday, to Richmond and back, a habit he maintained throughout his life until he died in 1910 aged 85.



As of 2024 the Furnivall Sculling Club continues to flourish.

4. Furnivall Gardens



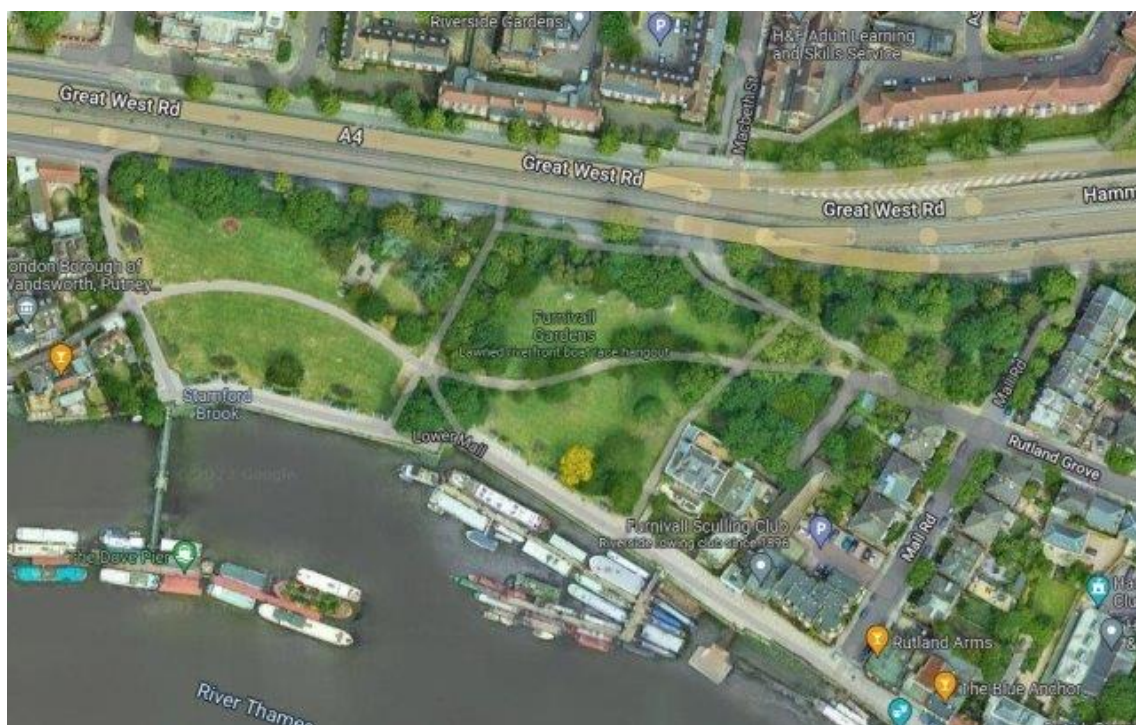
Furnivall Gardens is a small public park, overlooking the Thames at Hammersmith, which is named after Dr Furnivall. It was once the location of the mouth of Hammersmith Creek, which had an active fishing trade until about 200 years ago. The creek, shown in the image below, was filled in during 1936.



In 1948, it was decided that there should be a public open space on bomb-damaged land between the river and the Great West Road, to coincide with the 1951 Festival of Britain. The new riverside park was named after Dr.

Furnivall. A park was created on what had been the Hammersmith Friends Meeting House burial ground, destroyed by a flying bomb in the war.

In 1963, a street lamp that had formerly been in West Berlin was given by Willy Brandt, then Mayor of West Berlin, to mark Hammersmith's twinning with the Berlin (previously West Berlin) district of Neukölln. It now stands on the wall of Westcott Lodge, facing the gardens. Below it is a plaque which reads: "The lamp above this plaque was formerly used to light a street in West Berlin. It was presented by Herr Willi Brandt, Mayor of West Berlin to Councillor Stanley Atkins, L. P., The Worshipful the Mayor of Hammersmith, as a token of friendship between the two communities on the occasion of the Jumelage held in this Borough, 1st June 1963."



Aerial view of Furnivall Gardens.

As will be seen in the photo above, the riverbank alongside Furnivall Gardens has two piers – Dove Pier to the left and Hope Pier to the right. Dove Pier was built in 1951 to accommodate passenger ferries taking visitors to the 1951 Festival of Britain. Hope Pier is much older, evolving from a boat building and repair operation.

Both now host a characterful variety of houseboats, offering a life on the water. The houseboats provide interesting views from Furnivall Gardens, as can be seen in the following photos.



Early morning, low tide, at Hope Pier.



Dove Pier.