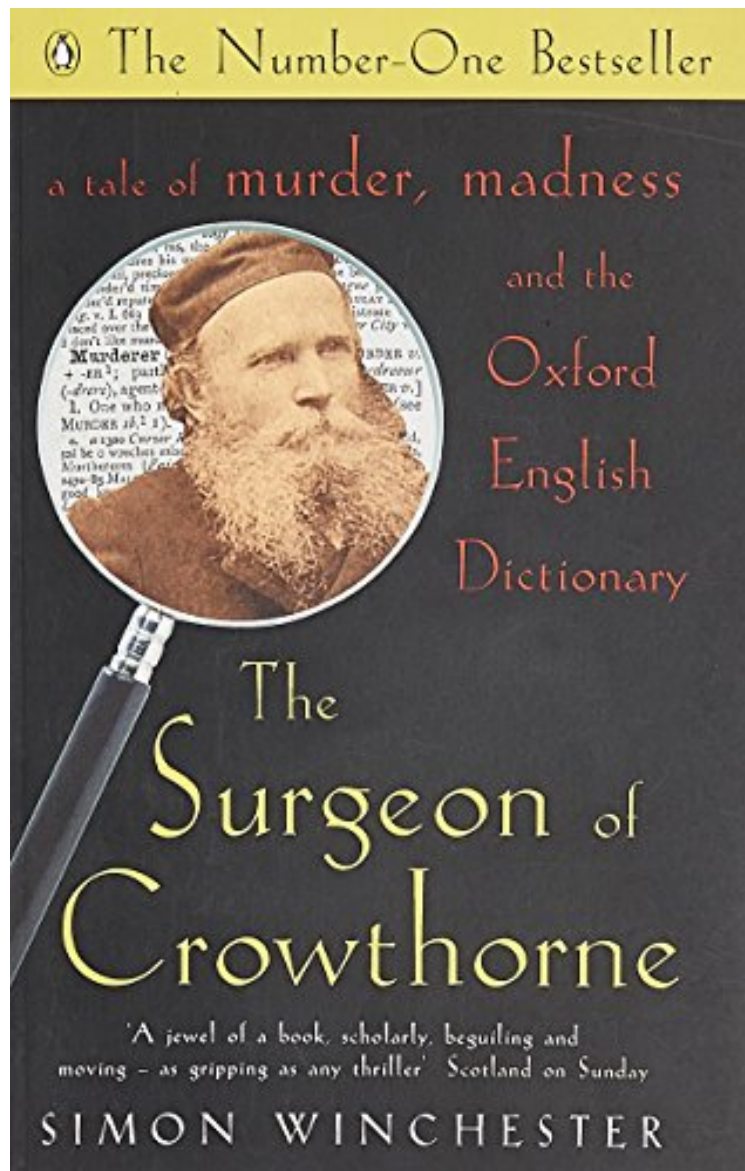


(Library ebook) The Surgeon of Crowthorne: A Tale of Murder, Madness and the Oxford English Dictionary

The Surgeon of Crowthorne: A Tale of Murder, Madness and the Oxford English Dictionary

Simon Winchester

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Simon Winchester : The Surgeon of Crowthorne: A Tale of Murder, Madness and the Oxford English Dictionary before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Surgeon of Crowthorne: A Tale of Murder, Madness and the Oxford English Dictionary:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A life: Profit or Loss? By C McGhee THE SURGEON of CROWTHORNE It's the story of the relationship between the Scottish man that headed the creation of the Oxford English Dictionary the man that contributed the most as a volunteer layman to it's creation. The head of the project started life as a commoner the layman was from a dynastic American family. The layman became a surgeon served during the Revolutionary War. These opposites ring their lives yet they spent 20 years working together on the OED (which took 70 years to finish) but never met until about 10 years into their collaboration on the project despite the fact they were but few miles apart. The Scot holds the place of one of the finest scholars that ever lived the American descended into madness killed an innocent Englishman in England due to his insanity. The American then spent all but the final 10 years of his life in a sanatorium, quite literally insane until his death in 1920 the Scot did not know that his number one amateur contributor was in an asylum until ten years of collaboration had past. This, despite the fact they lived less than 45 miles apart. The book is a contrast of their lives a telling of their collaboration done in such a way as to be hypnotic. It also covers the difficulties of creating dictionaries but that is a side story. The contrast, comparison, confluence inverted results of these two lives from their beginnings to their ends is told in a style that I can only compare to Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story. It is also a grander use of the English language than Paul used in my mind. I simply can't read it fast because I don't want to. I read a few pages, think about what's in them then read a few more. I can't recommend it highly enough to those that like History researched personal stories about those that lived through them. Two great fascinating characters who you would never expect to meet each other, let alone becoming the cornerstones of a great undertaking that didn't end for seventy years. It's a good primer on those times too certainly not an extremely long read. The ending of the story is a paean to sadness, tragedy loss amidst the creation fulfillment of a great project that is today the foundation of communication of thoughts, ideas understanding in the English language. The Author's Note at the end of the tale is not to be missed due to the accurate description of this tale the impact on those involved. A story of powerful achievement that is yet overpowered by its description of an all too human series of events that has as it's single redeeming feature its facilitation of understanding between humanity.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Surgeon of Crowthorne By funner things Wonderful Simon Winchester wrote three books on the development of the Oxford Dictionary and all are worth reading as they together provide a full picture of the writing of this dictionary. When reading, I noticed how erratic spelling was, even with proper names. Words drop in and out of use and even seem to change meaning. Hah! There was no standard such as a dictionary for spelling, meaning and usage of words. It's a wonder that Shakespeare, the American Founding fathers, Hawthorne, and so many others wrote text we read and understand now in the absence of a reference. This particular books tell about the contributions of an American doctor who was institutionalized for mental health problems, perhaps due to his service in the army during the Civil War. The doctor was institutionalized in England where he passed his time reading and submitting papers about words and examples of their usage in English literature. What a wonderful contribution to our appreciation of English. Hurray for Simon Winchester who writes superb books on a range of topics and makes the science and/or the history so very accessible.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A MUST FOR LANGUAGE LOVERS By Joy Nason This book was recommended to me by lucky chance, as otherwise I may never have discovered the delight of reading The Surgeon of Crowthorne. Simon Winchester is a master of his craft - every page is written with sensitivity and takes you into other worlds. Right down to the final Postscript, Simon keeps you enthralled with this compelling narrative. Tragic it may well be, but an extraordinary tale, not only of the fine line between madness and genius but how the Dictionary that shaped our very language came into being.

The making of the Oxford English Dictionary was a monumental 50 year task requiring thousands of volunteers. One of the keenest volunteers was a W C Minor who astonished everyone by refusing to come to Oxford to receive his congratulations. In the end, James Murray, the OED's editor, went to Crowthorne in Berkshire to meet him. What he found was incredible - Minor was a millionaire American civil war surgeon turned lunatic, imprisoned in Broadmoor Asylum for murder and yet who dedicated his entire cell-bound life to work on the English language.

About the Author Simon Winchester has had an award-winning 20 year career as Guardian correspondent. He lives in New York and is the Asia-Pacific Editor for Conde Nast Traveler and contributes to a number of American magazines, as well as the Daily Telegraph, the Spectator and the BBC. He has written numerous books. THE RIVER AT THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD (Viking 1997/Penguin 1998) has been shortlisted for the 1998 Thomas Cook/Daily Telegraph Travel Book Award.