

*Roget's Thesaurus*  
*of English words and phrases*

*Susan M. Lloyd BA MPhil*

***Roget's Thesaurus***  
***of English words and phrases***

*New edition prepared by*

***Susan M. Lloyd BA MPhil***

Longman 

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by Samuel Romilly Roget 1936*

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S.M.L.

# Preface

to the 1982 edition

## *What is a thesaurus?*

*Roget's Thesaurus* is well-known to word-lovers and word-users as a collection of words and phrases arranged according to ideas rather than alphabetically—a 'treasure house' of language as its name, taken from the Greek, implies. Generations have found it invaluable in finding the most apt, the most accurate, the most telling or the most elegant expression for their thoughts. Roget began to compile a simple wordlist for his own use when quite a young man, and during his long and active life, which included much writing and lecturing (see pp xiii–xv), he continued to improve and add to it. Finally he spent some years of his retirement preparing it for publication, considering that others might find such a compilation as helpful as he himself had. The immediate and continuing popularity of the *Thesaurus* showed that he was right.

## *The originality of the Thesaurus*

It could be argued that the success of the *Thesaurus* is due to its combination of the philosophical and the practical. There had been practical wordlists arranged according to topics before, but these were mainly simple vocabularies intended for students of a foreign language, and consequently the topics were listed in no logical order and often seemed arbitrarily chosen. Roget arranged his far more extensive material into a comprehensive framework with a clearly visible structure, in which each topic, or concept, had its own logical place. In this, he was following in the steps of the seventeenth-century philosophers such as Leibniz, who had attempted the classification of concepts as a preliminary to inventing a Universal Language (this was a language of symbols rather than words which could be universally understood, as each symbol would represent a particular concept). Roget was a particular admirer of Bishop Wilkins, whose influential work "An Essay towards a Real Character and Philosophical Language" had appeared in 1668 (see *Roget's Introduction to the 1852 edition*, p xxxi). Wilkins's system of classification finds many echoes in the *Thesaurus*, but his project of inventing symbols to represent individual concepts was too cumbersome for use either for communication or as a tool for analytical and scientific thought. While Roget approved of Wilkins's aims, and expressed the wish that his own classification might be instrumental in preparing the way for further investigations into a Universal Language, his primary intention in compiling the *Thesaurus* was more practical: to offer the reader a choice of expressions from which he or she could choose the most suitable or the most effective in a given context. His task, then, was twofold. First, like the philosophers, he had to create a hierarchy of concepts which would provide the framework for his book; then he had to discover and classify the language which would express these concepts. While the philosophers sought to simplify, in order to discover what they hoped were the limited number of concepts basic to any language, Roget had to recognize and come to grips with the protean ambiguity of language itself, with all its interrelationships and its infinite capacity for expressing shades of meaning. This was the Herculean labour which Roget undertook, and as his *Introduction* makes clear, he fully realised its difficulties and pitfalls. The result was an entirely new tool for the word-user: the *Thesaurus*.

# Dictionaries, synonym dictionaries and the *Thesaurus*

As Roget pointed out in his *Introduction*, a thesaurus is just the opposite of a dictionary in that a dictionary offers meanings for a given word, while a thesaurus offers words to express a given meaning. An unknown or alternative word cannot be found from a dictionary, as without knowing how it is spelt there is no way to look it up. To fulfil this need, synonym dictionaries have been compiled – several were already in print by 1852, when *Roget's Thesaurus* was published. The purpose of these, however, was different from that of the *Thesaurus*, as by discriminating between several words close in meaning, they narrowed the choice for their readers. Roget, on the contrary, aimed to enlarge the scope for the reader, offering a wide range of expressions from which he or she could make their own choice. These might include synonyms or near synonyms, but this was coincidental. His main purpose was to illustrate every aspect of the topic under consideration. Ironically, the success of *Roget's Thesaurus* was not without its effect on synonym dictionaries, which began to interpret the term 'synonym' far more loosely, to include words which coincided in only part of their meaning. Such works have often dropped the practice of discriminating between the expressions they offer, and some claim to be a 'thesaurus in dictionary form'. The two, however, synonym dictionary and thesaurus, remain distinct forms, as they have different functions. The synonym dictionary provides alternatives for a given word, whether it distinguishes between them or not, while a thesaurus offers a variety of ways to express a given idea. The range of a thesaurus, too, is far more comprehensive, as it includes concepts represented by only one term, while a synonym dictionary concerns itself with those concepts for which several terms are available. It is the classification of words according to ideas which makes the scope of a thesaurus possible, while it also ensures that related expressions are found together. The alphabetical arrangement of synonym dictionaries means that analogous terms are separated from each other by differences in spelling, even if they are only different forms of the same word. 'Pride' and 'proud', for example, may be several entries apart. Sometimes, too, as in this case, where there is no verbal form, there will be no list of verbal synonyms.

## The advantages of a thesaurus

By contrast, in the *Thesaurus*, all the words dealing with the same idea are grouped together in one place, regardless of their spelling and grammatical function. Every topic is followed by its negative, if there is one, and sometimes by a correlative topic, so that every aspect of each is represented. Closely related topics follow each other in the text, or are indicated by cross-references. The reader can therefore inspect all the ways of expressing a given concept, and choose the most suitable. If a noun, say, cannot be found to convey the exact shade of meaning required, a verb may be substituted. Rephrasing the sentence in the negative may prove more effective or add variety to the writer's style. Not only new words, but new ideas may result from consulting the *Thesaurus*. A cross-reference may suggest a new train of thought, or a metaphor a new image. The reader may recognize the word lurking at the back of his or her mind, or discover a new one to add to his or her own wordstock. The range of vocabulary offered in a thesaurus is wider than that in a synonym dictionary: metaphors, euphemisms, catchphrases, slang, poetic and literary expressions, archaisms, illustrations from history, literature and everyday life – all are grist to the mill of a thesaurus as long as they illustrate the topic in question.

## Who will find a thesaurus useful?

The special arrangement and wide range of the *Thesaurus* make it an invaluable tool for *anyone* concerned with language, whether they are writing a speech, a novel or a letter. Not only does it offer expressions for every occasion, it encourages the formation of a better style, by obviating repetition and suggesting alternative ways of structuring sentences. It is conducive to clarity of thought and expression by making the user more aware of what he or she wishes to say, by offering a choice between several alternatives representing every shade of meaning.

Creative writers such as poets, playwrights, novelists and above all, translators, naturally give *Roget's Thesaurus* a special place on their bookshelves, not only for the quantity of its vocabulary but for its variety of register, from the everyday to the poetic; the possibilities of finding a suitable rhyme or a striking simile, too, are greatly enhanced by following up the cross-references. But students of English will also find the work helpful, especially in writing essays, as the grouping of words under topics provides them with a ready source of suitable expressions and reminds them of the ideas connected with the subject under consideration. Linguists will find ready-made semantic fields, with cross-references to suggest the links between them. Roget, as we have noted above, had linguists very much in mind when he constructed the *Thesaurus*. In view of the renewed interest in the possibility of reducing language to its basic concepts, it is to be hoped that Roget's aspirations for the *Thesaurus* in this connection may at last be realized.

### *The present edition*

Since Longman (then known as Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans) first published Roget's *Thesaurus of English words and Phrases* in 1852, it has been revised many times. (The history of the *Thesaurus* is traced in "Dr Peter Mark Roget and his *Thesaurus*", pp xvi–xviii). The most recent revision was undertaken in 1962 by Robert A. Dutch OBE, who gave the *Thesaurus* its present form, reducing the number of Heads to 990, and printing them consecutively rather than in contrasting pairs. He also introduced the idea of keywords. Roget's system of classification has, however, survived all revisions virtually unchanged, as it has proved capable of absorbing new concepts and new vocabulary. The present edition, like its predecessors, should therefore be seen rather as an overhaul of an efficient and valuable machine, than as an attempt to completely rebuild it. New refinements have been added, worn parts replaced, and advantage taken of modern computer technology to ensure reliability and smooth working.

\* \* \* \*

The main task has been to incorporate the huge number of new expressions generated by twenty years of rapid technological change, and the corresponding changes in our life-style. A modern man or woman may work as a *Eurocrat*, an *ombudsman*, a *trouble-shooter*, a *psephologist*, a *spokesperson*, an *anchorman*, a *gogo dancer* or a *DJ*. Their children may be *yobs*, *punks*, *skinheads*, *groupies*, or *Hell's Angels*, learn *modern maths* at the local *poly* or *sixthform college*, attend a *playgroup* or study *structuralism* with the *Open University*. They pay *VAT* and *PAYE*, but do not practise *tax evasion* as they disapprove of the *black economy*. Instead they *bulk-buy* at the *cash and carry* with their *credit cards*. They may live in a *tower block*, a *mobile home*, a *listed building* or *condemned housing*, while their mother has a *granny flat*. Their home has *solar panels* and a *heat exchanger*, and is *sound-proofed* against *sonic boom*. They eat *junk food* from a *takeaway*, though some are *vegans* eating *wholefood*, or *dropouts* into *self-sufficiency*. They wear *kagoules*, *caftans*, *bodystockings*, *jumpsuits*, *homeknits*, or *unisex hipsters*, which they buy *off-the-peg* at a *boutique* or in a *bargain basement*. They speak *Basic English*, *franglais* and *Strine*, but sometimes they *fudge* with *weasel words* and *buzz words*. To get to work, they travel along a *ring road*, *bus lane*, *cycleway* or *pedestrian precinct*, driving a *hatchback*, *minicab*, *gas guzzler* or a *juggernaut*. They might take the *high speed train* or the *intercity*, but the *jet set* prefer to go by *jumbo jet*, *chopper* or *airbus*, in spite of *hijackings* and *jetlag*, and may plan to take off in a *space shuttle* to look for *UFOs*.

To amuse themselves, they go *hang-gliding*, *wind-surfing*, *sky-diving*, *backpacking*, or *orienteering*, visit a *safari park*, or play *bingo* at the *community centre*. *Discos* attract

those who are *with it*, others feel more *laidback* listening to *reggae* or *country-and-western* on the *hifi*; they might read some *sci-fi*, dip into a *coffee-table book*, or watch a *telethon*, *sitcom*, *dramadocumentary* or *soap opera* on the *box* or the *video*. Some get their *kicks* from *jogging*, others from *yoga* or *TM*. If they go to a *shrink* with their *hang-ups*, he will set them *role-playing* in an *encounter group*, or is this just an *ego trip*? If they consult a *naturopath*, a *barefoot doctor* or a *paramedic* with a *bleeper*, he or she may study their *biorhythms*, and prescribe *hormone therapy*, *pep pills* or *EST*. If they become unconscious, they may be put on a *life support system* or given the *kiss of life*.

The neighbours include a *mole*, a *lookalike* and a *talking head*. One is a *cowboy* who *rips off* his customers with *downmarket double glazing*. Another is a *groovy trendy* who has good *vibes* – when he is *psyched up*. In a *squat* nearby live a *dissident*, a *single parent family*, a couple of *gays* and a *captain of industry* given a *golden handshake* by his *multinational*.

In their own *nuclear family*, the brother is an *ex-directory supergrass* who *keeps a low profile* since he *got on the gravy train* with *leaks to the colour supplements*. The sister, a *conservationist* who *recycles* whatever is not *biodegradable*, is a *militant* who does a lot of *legwork* for *civil rights* and *women's lib*. Her husband is a *Male Chauvinist Pig* and not *supportive* as a *house-husband*, but they have a *meaningful* relationship and go to *sit-ins* together. All of them would like to see the *neutron bomb* put down a *black hole* or lost in a *time warp*.

\* \* \* \*

We live in a technological age, and this accounts for a large proportion of the vocabulary which is new to the *Thesaurus*. New paragraphs have been added to deal with *data processing*, *microelectronics*, *space travel* and *sources of energy*, while existing paragraphs on *nucleonics*, *bombs*, *spaceships* and *satellites*, to name but a few, have been expanded. The danger here is to betray Roget's intention of catering primarily for the layman. But most of us have become familiar with *strokes*, *lasers*, *aerosols*, *silicon chips*, *word processors* and *PWRs*, and at least the names of sciences such as *robotics*, *cybernetics*, *computer programming* and *advanced technology*. Many of these terms are also found in commerce and industry, which adds *ergonomics*, *market research*, *cost-benefit analysis* and *operational research*. (A new paragraph has been added for statistical terms.) We also have *factory farming* and *agribusiness*, *privatization* and *hiving off*, *fringe benefits* and *bridging loans*, *monetarism* and the *Common Market*, and unfortunately also *soft sell*, *hard sell* and *hype*. Telecommunications has seen the new science of *informatics*, technological developments such as *Viewdata*, *ENG* and *quadrasonic sound*, and terms such as *feedback*, *multimedia* and *bugging*.

The increasing part played by technology in our lives has led to a reaction against it by many people, who question whether the benefits it brings may not be outweighed by the problems it causes. *Ecology* and *conservation* are areas of increasing public awareness, and concepts such as *intermediate technology*, *renewable energy sources*, *recycling*, *post-industrial* and *greenhouse effect* are becoming familiar. Sociology and politics have also seen an explosion of terms: *The Third World*, *superpowers*, *multinationals* and the *global village*, for example. Modern warfare gives us *theatre nuclear weapons*, *cruise missiles*, *defoliation*, *overkill* and *fallout shelter*. Politics offers *grass roots*, *slush fund*, *quango* and *cover-up*, the *National Front* and the *Ecology Party*. The *Swinging Sixties* and the *permissive society* have contributed *doing your own thing*, *letting it all hang out* and the *open marriage*, but also *flashing*, *streaking*, *mugging* and *hard-core porn*. (A new paragraph has been devoted to *drug-taking*.) On the other hand, there is a growing awareness of the *civil rights* of every human being, seen in movements such as *feminism*, *Negritude*, *black power*, *women's liberation* and *gay lib*, and opposed to *sexism*, *ageism* and *machismo*. Linked with these are *positive discrimination*, *networking* and *civil disobedience*.



Advances in science and medicine have led to many new treatments, including *transplants*, *dialysis*, *immunotherapy*, *AID* and *fertility drugs*. (*Family planning* has been given a new paragraph.) We now have the *cyborg*, the *bionic man* and the *test-tube baby*, along with *fringe medicine*, *genetic engineering*, *clones* and *interferon*.

Living longer and healthier lives, we can spend more time and energy on leisure activities. Broadcasting, which provides much of our entertainment, has three new paragraphs, and film has one. Many new terms have also been added to relevant paragraphs such as those on literature, art forms and the drama, while ballet now has a paragraph to itself. In the field of philosophy and religion, we have *lateral thinking*, *transcendental meditation*, the *Baha'i faith*, new sects such as the *Moonies* and the *Rastafarians*, the *Hare Krishna* sect and *Black Muslims*. Names and places which have become familiarly associated with a particular idea include *Rachmanism*, *Leavisite*, the *Berlin Wall*, *Water-gate*, *Heath Robinson*, *Carnaby Street*, *McCarthyism*, the *Peter principle* and the perhaps mythical *Murphy's Law*, while literature and film contribute *Catch-22*, *Pinteresque*, *Big Brother*, *King Kong*, *Lolita*, *hobbits* and *orcs*. Though not all of these appeared after 1962, they have become more familiar to us since then.

Finally the past decades have given us a ragbag of slang and jargon words which we may deplore, but which are now part of the language. These include *track record*, *hatchet job*, *disaster area*, *interface*, *infrastructure*, *ongoing*, *knock-on effect*, *freewheeling*, *on the ball*, *double think* and *walkabout*. All the terms given as examples represent just a fraction of those added during this revision.

Besides words representing new concepts, many old ones have been added to make the vocabulary of the *Thesaurus* more representative, or to give better coverage to ideas previously underrepresented. Words whose meanings have changed since 1962 also had to be reallocated to a more suitable position. It has also been our aim to include as many as possible of the idioms and colloquialisms which give liveliness and colour to the language. Many of these originated in American English, but only those which have become naturalized have been included. In listing nouns denoting people, we have borne in mind the fact that according to recent research the particle 'man', in such words as 'mankind', is not always taken, as formerly, to include men *and* women. Care has therefore been taken to include female terms as well, or general terms such as 'chairperson', where these exist.

Inevitably, the number of additions has meant that some deletions have had to be made. Bearing in mind the range of vocabulary which should be available in a thesaurus, this has not meant simply deleting obsolete words and archaisms. Only when such a word is both obsolete *and* forgotten can it be safely omitted. But there are other obvious candidates for deletion: yesterday's catchphrases, forgotten neologisms, unidiomatic expressions or explanatory phrases no longer needed. Less familiar words are not repeated under different Heads, as long as these can be found by using the cross-references. Latinisms that have dropped out of sight except in learned journals, and some abstruse classical or mythological allusions have also been removed. A few paragraphs felt to be of little interest to modern users, such as *theosophy* and *theomancy*, have been taken out, and any worthwhile material they contained incorporated into other paragraphs.

The lists (of animals, plants and so on), which Roget himself included rather apologetically (see his *Introduction*, p xxviii) have been retained, both for their usefulness to crossword puzzle enthusiasts, and because it is often helpful to be able to look up the name of something, such as a particular kind of tool or aircraft, which cannot be found from a dictionary. No attempt has been made to make these lists complete, but they have been brought up to date and expanded where necessary.

Changes to the actual layout of the *Thesaurus* have been few, and are designed to make the book more accessible to readers. The Heads are numbered as in the 1962 edition, with the following changes: *Propagation* has been separated from *Production* (164) and given a Head of its own, 167. *Producer*, formerly at 167 is now a paragraph within 164. The colours have been rearranged into the order of the spectrum, so that 432 becomes *Orange*,

434 *Greenness* and 436 *Purple*. The paragraphs *Messenger* and *Courier* have been moved to 529 *News* to leave room for *Broadcasting* in 531 *Communications*. Headwords and keywords play an important part in finding one's way around the *Thesaurus*, so they should be easily understandable and unambiguous. It has therefore been necessary to change many of them, but as they are still in their original position former users of the *Thesaurus* should quickly become accustomed to the replacements.

Roget's original layout contrasted positive and negative aspects of the same idea by printing the Heads opposite one another. This proved too space-consuming and later editions of the *Thesaurus* have printed the Heads consecutively. To remind readers of the ideas behind the *Thesaurus*, and to make more clear the relationship of one Head to another, we have set out the *Tabular Synopsis of Categories* to show pairs and opposites, as it did originally, and kept Roget's subtitles. It is hoped that this will enable the reader to understand the classification and find his or her own way around the text. A few titles have been changed or simplified: Division Two of Class Five is now called *Social volition*, while Class Six becomes *Emotion, religion and morality*. The Sections in Class Six have been renamed *General*, *Personal emotion*, *Interpersonal emotion*, *Morality* and *Religion*.

Still with the aim of keeping Roget's system in the reader's mind, we have added catchwords at the top of each page. Those on the left give the Class title, those on the right the Section title. The text itself has been divided into the six Classes, with each Class beginning a new facing page. To guide the reader to connected Heads, many more cross-references have been added, and in the lists at the end of each Head, those references most likely to be helpful are now printed in bold type. Within the actual cross-references, the part of speech label has been omitted, as the reference is always to the same part of speech. This saves space, and enables the *keyword* to be more easily seen as part of the vocabulary within the Head.

Accuracy is essential in a book of this kind, and the resources of modern technology have been drawn on to eliminate human error where possible. All cross-references have been checked by computer, and the lists of cross-references at the end of Heads have been computer-generated. Above all the Index, now much expanded, is based on a computer-listing of all the items in the text. The use of a computer, and the resources of the Lexicographic Unit of Longman's Dictionary and Reference Book Department should make this edition accurate, comprehensive and a worthy successor to earlier editions. But improvements are also due in no small measure to the efforts of readers themselves, who have kindly written to point out errors and omissions and suggest modifications. It has been encouraging to discover in what great affection *Roget's Thesaurus* is held by its users, and the editor hopes that readers will continue to offer suggestions and criticisms.

S. M. Lloyd  
 Harleston, Norfolk  
 January 1982.

# Dr Peter Mark Roget and his Thesaurus

The name of Roget has become synonymous with the *Thesaurus*, yet Dr Roget himself is a shadowy figure. This is rather surprising as he played an active part in the intellectual, scientific and social life of his time, besides achieving some eminence in his own profession of medicine. It is also ironic that one who made such an important contribution to the study and practice of the English language should have so little English blood in his veins. His father, Jean Roget, was a Genevan pastor only recently come to Britain, while his mother's grandfather was a French Huguenot who had fled to London after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Roget's early years were spent in the French Protestant community, where he absorbed liberal ideas and a belief in the perfectibility of man, which was soon shaken, however, by the aftermath of the French Revolution.

Jean Roget died when his son was only four, so the young Roget was brought up by his mother Catherine, with some financial and moral support from her brother, the famous law reformer Sir Samuel Romilly. Catherine was strongly influenced by the ideas on education of Jean Roget's countryman Jean Jacques Rousseau, and went to great lengths to try to find the ideal environment for her son, even moving to Edinburgh when he was fourteen so that he could complete his education at the university there, considered superior to Oxford and Cambridge, and especially so for mathematics and science. These were Roget's absorbing interests, and remained so throughout his life. However, science was not yet a safe or lucrative career for a young man, and Roget finally took his degree in medicine and became a doctor.

In later life, Roget appears to us as rather a staid, unimaginative figure, but as a young man he found himself in some far from staid situations. He spent some time at Bristol observing Dr Beddoes's and Humphrey Davy's experiments with laughing gas at the famous Clifton 'Pneumatic Institution'. He also worked for a while for Jeremy Bentham on a project for a 'Frigidarium'. The unconventionality of the Bentham household soon led him to leave, but he was influenced all his life by Bentham's ideas of Utilitarianism and the happiness of the greatest number. Perhaps his most exciting adventure was when he took two young boys from Manchester on their 'Grand Tour' of Europe. This was during 1802-3, and when the fragile entente between Britain and France broke with the collapse of the Peace of Amiens, Roget and his charges were trapped in Geneva. He showed great ingenuity and persistence in getting them safely away, and only just in time: his friend Edgeworth did not succeed in escaping, and was imprisoned for eleven years.

On his return to England, Roget began to practise as a doctor, gaining experience in Manchester before settling in London, where he had a house in Barnard Street, Bloomsbury. His lively mind, his eagerness to become part of the ferment of scientific life of the capital, and his willingness to work hard quickly made him acceptable in intellectual circles. Only five years after his arrival, he was elected a Fellow of the prestigious Royal Society, of which he was later Secretary for twenty years. This was just the beginning of a long and energetic working life, both as a doctor and a scientist. Roget's medical skills were soon being called upon by people he knew socially and he quickly built up a considerable practice. He was also instrumental in setting up a charity clinic, the Northern Dispensary, where he treated needy patients free of charge. He added to his medical

reputation by giving lectures to medical students and writing papers for the Medical and Chirurgical Society, of which he soon became Secretary. This involved him in editing their Transactions and classifying the library. Roget's reputation as a doctor was such that in 1823 he was one of the doctors appointed to investigate the Millbank prison epidemic. Later, he was called in to head a Commission to investigate London's water supply. One of his recommendations, that of sand filtration, is still in use today.

The crowning point of Roget's medical career came in 1831, with his election as Fellow *speciali grata* to the Royal College of Physicians. For many men such a distinguished career would have been enough. But simultaneously with his work as a doctor, Roget was also strenuously pursuing his other love, science. Besides his work for the Royal Society, he was a member, and frequently an active member, of many of the learned societies then proliferating in London. It was an exciting time, a time of discoveries, experiments and inventions, a time when the flood of new knowledge was leading inevitably to the specialization that is even more marked today. Societies were therefore formed to deal with separate branches of science, the Zoological Society, the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Astronomical Society and so on. Roget, a polymath, like many of his generation, belonged to a number of them, writing papers on every aspect of knowledge, from insects to electricity. He also conducted his own experiments, and enjoyed inventing mathematical and optical devices. This was not mere amateur tinkering: Roget's reputation as a scientist was as high as his reputation as a doctor. Some of Roget's inventions indeed, still affect us today. It was Roget who invented the log-log scale still used on modern slide rules. It was this which secured his entry to the Royal Society. Always busy with new ideas, he left it to others to explore the possibilities of his inventions or observations. It was the same with his paper on the effects of seeing a moving object through slats—in this case a carriage wheel seen through the venetian blinds in his basement. Roget had noticed that an image appeared to be retained on the retina for a fraction of time after it had disappeared from sight. This discovery was taken up by other scientists, notably Faraday, and eventually led to the making of moving pictures and the cinema industry.

With all this activity, Roget still found time to read voraciously, including works in French, Latin, German and Italian, and to amuse himself by the setting and solving of chess problems. Moreover, he was no recluse. He enjoyed dining with friends, going to the theatre and, especially after his marriage in 1824, strolling or driving round the London parks and squares, noting the new buildings and other improvements. He was an affectionate father to his two children, Kate and John, and with his wife Mary took great pleasure in their education.

Writing and lecturing took up a good deal of Roget's time. He was eager to communicate knowledge to as wide a public as possible, and took a professional pride in his lectures, which were very popular, especially in an age of self-improvement. He lectured for thirty years at the Russell Institution, where he was appointed Fullerian Professor of Physiology, and also gave courses at the Royal Institution, a signal honour. But it was typical of Roget that he should also be one of the founders of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which issued sixpenny treatises in simple English on such subjects as electricity and magnetism. Of Roget's involvement with his Society, its publisher wrote:

"Amongst the founders of the Society, Dr Roget was, from his accepted high reputation, the most eminent of its men of science. . . . He was a diligent attendant on its committees; a vigilant corrector of its proofs. Of most winning manners, he was as beloved as he was respected. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Less ephemeral than such treatises, but also with a lay audience in mind, were Roget's articles for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. These included a major piece on his speciality, physiology, and shorter ones on subjects ranging from ants and bees to phrenology (on

<sup>1</sup> D. L. Emblen, *Peter Mark Roget* (London 1970), p. 187

which he poured scorn), and from the education of the deaf and dumb to the kaleidoscope. These, with several brief biographies of European scientists, were first published in the Supplement to the 4th, 5th and 6th Editions, but were often reprinted in a shortened form in later editions, though without acknowledgment. Roget's other major publication (apart from the *Thesaurus*), was much praised by his contemporaries, who thought it would carry his name to posterity. This was *Animal and Vegetable Physiology considered with reference to Natural Theology*, one of eight similar works commissioned by the Earl of Bridgewater to propound 'the power, wisdom and goodness of God, as manifested in the creation'. The world view it expressed, however, was already being challenged when it was published in 1834, and though it went through several editions, Roget's monumental work is no longer remembered.

Ironically, the work which did make him known to later generations, the *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, was a product of Roget's retirement. Ousted from his Secretaryship of the Royal Society by a younger and more adventurous group of scientists, he found himself with unwonted leisure, and promptly began to devote himself to the conclusion of a project he had nursed for many years: the classification and organization of the English language. This may seem a strange preoccupation for a scientist and mathematician, but it was in many ways a task which Roget was uniquely equipped to carry out. All his life he had been concerned with order, with marshalling a mass of facts or observations into a meaningful form which both expressed their special qualities and reaffirmed their unity. He had done this, in particular, in his Bridgewater Treatise, where he had set out Natural History in all its variety, while showing the close links between the parts, and claiming that the whole revealed the design of the Creator. His involvement with the classification of the libraries of the Medical and Chirurgical Society, and of the Royal Society, had also been valuable experience. As a doctor, his preference had been for anatomy and physiology, subjects which by their very nature involved dissection and classification. It was the organization of knowledge (rather than the making of profound discoveries, for which he lacked the imagination), that was Roget's forte, and which he was able to put to good use in compiling the *Thesaurus*. Then again, his lifelong belief in progress and utilitarianism were served by the book, which he hoped would enable people to communicate with each other more easily and effectively. Roget had always been concerned with communicating knowledge and was more concerned with this aspect of language than with beauties of style. Though a Renaissance man in the variety of his interests, literature for its own sake seems to have held little attraction for him: he was more concerned with facts and ideas. Though the *Thesaurus* is often used nowadays to achieve a polished style, Roget's intention for it was chiefly utilitarian and philosophical, as he made plain in his Introduction.

The *Thesaurus* began as a notebook Roget had carried round with him from his earliest lecturing days. In it he made lists of related words and phrases in various orders to help him express himself in the best possible way. Now, in his seventies, he was able to draw on a lifetime's experience of lecturing, writing and editing to make these lists into a coherent system available for others to use. It took him four years, longer than he had thought, and required all his organizational skills and the meticulous attention to detail that had characterized his editing work. Not only did the *Thesaurus* utilize all Roget's competences, it also fulfilled a need for him: the need, in a society changing with frightening speed, where the old moral and religious order was increasingly in question, to reaffirm order, stability and unity, and through them the purpose of a universal, supernatural authority.

Even with the publication of his *Thesaurus* when he was seventy-one, Roget did not cease from his labours. He continued to note improvements and prepare new editions as well as pursuing many other projects. He died in his ninety-first year at West Malvern secure in the knowledge that the work which summed up all his achievements in a long and productive life had gained public acceptance and proved its worth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> My thanks are due to John Herkless, who is preparing a new biography of Roget, for some of the above information. I have also drawn on D. L. Emblen's biography (see p xiv).



## *The Thesaurus*

Roget's *Thesaurus of English words and phrases* was first published by Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans in May 1852, selling at 14 shillings. It was a handsome volume, a generous octavo, printed on good quality paper, with the text well spaced-out. The Heads numbered exactly one thousand, and were printed in two columns, positive Heads facing their negatives or correlatives. This layout, which Roget explained in his *Introduction* (see p. xxiii), was retained in the copyright edition until 1962. The text was divided into the six Classes, each Class beginning a new page, with double column headings. Within each Head, the words given were sorted into parts of speech, and grouped according to ideas. Roget made a point of including phrases and idioms (see his *Introduction*, pp xxiv), though these were not included in the Index. The vocabulary reflected Roget's wide knowledge, and the many classical and literary allusions, with some examples from the theatre of the day, could be expected to be familiar to all educated men and women. The work still bears some signs of being adapted from a private compilation to one for public use: explanatory subtitles were subjoined to the Class and Section titles, and sometimes to the Head titles as well, while footnotes frequently drew the reader's attention to points of interest or usage.

The success of the first edition (of only one thousand copies) led to a second in March 1853 and a third, described as "a cheaper edition, enlarged and improved"<sup>1</sup>, which sold for half a guinea, in February 1855. This edition was stereotyped, and used as the basis for the frequent subsequent printings until the plates were worn out. For the 1855 edition, Roget rewrote parts of the text, added "many thousand" new expressions, and introduced a number of subsidiary Heads, labelled (a), to fill gaps which he had noticed in his scheme. Though the new duodecimo volume necessitated smaller type and a less spacious-looking format, Roget welcomed it in his *Advertisement to the third edition* as "more portable and convenient". The fame of the *Thesaurus* appears to have crossed the Atlantic, as he notes with some asperity that "in the course of last summer, an imperfect edition of this work was published at Boston, in the United States of America, in which the editor, among other mutilations, has altogether omitted the Phrases . . . and has removed from the body of the work all the words and expressions borrowed from a foreign language, throwing them into an Appendix, where . . . they are completely lost to the inquirer . . ." The American edition<sup>2</sup> was the first of many imitations of Roget's work, both at home and abroad.

Roget continued to collect new words and expressions for his *Thesaurus* until his death in 1869. He noted them in the margins of his copy, planning to use them in a new enlarged edition. This duly appeared ten years later, thanks to the labours of his son, John Lewis Roget, MA. A lawyer, who was active in art circles as a critic and watercolourist, and later wrote the history of the Old Water-Colour Society (1891), John Roget modestly disclaimed in his Preface any special qualifications for his task, claiming that it was "almost entirely of a practical nature, demanding industry and attention, rather than philosophic culture or the learning of a philologist". Without changing Roget's system of classification in any way, he nevertheless made a distinctive contribution of his own to the evolution of the *Thesaurus*. Discovering that the sheer number of additions, both his father's and his own, threatened to overload the different Heads and blur the distinctions made between them, he extended the system of cross-references already present in embryo, and gave this policy a sound linguistic basis by observing that "the fabric of our language has become a texture woven into one by the interlacing of countless branches, springing from separate stems". To place each word in only one of its possible locations would be to lose much of the richness of the language, but to insert it under every suitable Head would lead to ideas being lost in a welter of words. The system of cross-references

<sup>1</sup>Samuel R. Roget, in the Preface to the 1933 edition

<sup>2</sup>Probably that by Rev. B. Sears (Boston 1854)

was the ideal compromise between too much or too little repetition, and has been adopted and extended by successive editors.

John Roget's other major contribution to the development of the *Thesaurus* was his recognition of the importance of the Index. Roget himself had thought of it only as a last resort – his original notebook had not had one. John Roget, however, noted in his Preface to the 1879 edition: "I believe that almost everyone who uses the book finds it more convenient to have recourse to the Index first." He accordingly expanded it to include for the first time not only all the words in the text, but also most of the phrases. The index, now in four columns rather than three, took up very nearly half of the new edition, which had also expanded from the original 418 pages to 646 of smaller, close-set print, in a rather smaller octavo size.

Frequent reprints of the *Thesaurus*, revised by John Roget, continued to be issued by the publishers, now known as Longmans & Co., until the former's death in 1908. New words added to the text were listed in a supplementary index, bringing the book up to 670 pages. These additions reflect the topics of the day – 'veldt', 'outspan' and 'Afrikaner' from Southern Africa, weapons such as 'Lee-Metford rifle' and 'Gatling gun', with the appearance of 'electrolier', 'lorry' and 'motor car'.

Samuel Romilly Roget, John's son, now took on the editorship. He was an electrical engineer who had something of his grandfather's gift for popularizing, publishing among other works a *Dictionary of Electrical Terms*<sup>1</sup> which was still in print twenty years later. He greatly expanded the vocabulary of the book, and extended the system of cross-references, but made no changes to the layout. His energetic promotion of the *Thesaurus* in papers such as *The Times* kept it in the public eye and helped to consolidate it as an English institution. The great crossword-puzzle boom soon generated a new class of Roget-user, and editions followed each other with great rapidity. From a printing about every other year, between 1890 and 1908, there was at least one a year from 1911 to 1929, and five printings in 1925, when Samuel Roget brought out his own new enlarged version. A New York edition was published in 1933, containing many expressions "in commoner use in America than in England". This seems to have been the same edition to appear in 1936 at home. The importance of the Index was now well-established: Roget noted in his Preface that it had been checked line by line for the 1936 edition. New plates were made, and used for frequent reprints, even during the war years. In 1953, a Penguin paperback *Thesaurus* appeared.

Samuel Roget sold the family rights to Longmans, Green & Co., in 1952, and with his death in 1953, the family connection with the *Thesaurus* came to an end. The publishers commissioned Robert A. Dutch OBE, sometime Senior Scholar of Christ's College, Cambridge, to prepare a new edition, bringing *Roget's Thesaurus*, still much in the form the author had left it, up to date.

The new editor had to adapt the *Thesaurus* to users whose needs and background were rather different to those of the first generation of Roget readers a hundred years or so earlier. The philosophical interest in classification and analysis of words and their relationships, which had played an important part in Roget's conception of his book, already relegated to second place by his son John's extension of the Index, was now thought to be of negligible interest to most modern readers, who looked on the work as a purely practical aid in communication. The system of classification, therefore, though still the basis of the book, became latent rather than apparent in the text. While keeping the two-column layout, Heads were now printed consecutively instead of opposite each other, without any visual reminder of their relationship other than their consecutiveness. Classes and Sections were not labelled or separated in any way, the Heads following each other without a break. The original titles and subtitles were listed in the Tabular Synopsis for reference, and this too was printed consecutively, rather than in columns showing Roget's three categories of positive, negative and intermediate.

<sup>1</sup>London 1924

Robert Dutch's revision resulted in the *Thesaurus* familiar to us today. He rewrote the whole text, within Roget's Heads, aiming to make each group of related words follow each other in a logical sequence, so that "the mind is led by easy transitions from one nuance to another without distraction" (Preface, p. xii in the 1962 edition). Heads which had shown their superfluity by wasting away in successive revisions were absorbed elsewhere, thus reducing the number of Heads to 990. Other Heads whose titles had become obscure were renamed. A useful innovation for linguists and others was the appending at the end of each Head a list of cross-references used. But perhaps Robert Dutch's happiest idea was the invention of *keywords*. The *keyword*, the word in italics at the beginning of each paragraph, whose use is explained on page xxxiii, showed readers where to begin their search for the right word within the Head. Its use to identify paragraphs in cross-references and in the Index at once standardized references and enabled readers to pick out the most suitable of several locations for the meaning they sought.

After almost twenty years of rapid social and technological change, and more than two hundred years after Roget was born, the *Thesaurus* has now been revised yet again. (See the Preface, pp ix–xii for the changes made by the present editor). There can be little doubt that revisions will continue to be called for, as the never-ending task of inserting new vocabulary and reassessing the existing word-stock continues, so that *Roget's Thesaurus* may continue to serve future generations as well as it has done past ones. With the dawn of the electronic age, however, the possibilities become very exciting. All editors of *Roget* have had in the past to exclude many items for lack of space. The data bank of a computer knows no such limitations. Every new use of every word could be fed in, thus creating a thesaurus that was continually updated. When every home has its own computer terminal, the *Roget* user would have the resources of such a thesaurus at his or her fingertips. Every item, moreover, could be listed in the Index. Even this, however, does not exhaust the possibilities. Roget's original dream could be fulfilled: since a thesaurus consists of concepts first, then words, any language in the world can be analyzed according to Roget's Classification and thus added to the data bank. Such a multilingual thesaurus would have more than merely practical applications: it would greatly assist international understanding. It might even be the imperfect forerunner of that Universal Language to which Roget and his fellow reformists aspired, which would help to bring about a golden age of union and harmony.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the Introduction to the original edition, p. (xxxi).



# Preface

*to the first edition, 1852*

It is now nearly fifty years since I first projected a system of verbal classification similar to that on which the present Work is founded. Conceiving that such a compilation might help to supply my own deficiencies, I had, in the year 1805, completed a classed catalogue of words on a small scale, but on the same principle, and nearly in the same form, as the Thesaurus now published. I had often during that long interval found this little collection, scanty and imperfect as it was, of much use to me in literary composition, and often contemplated its extension and improvement; but a sense of the magnitude of the task, amidst a multitude of other avocations, deterred me from the attempt. Since my retirement from the duties of Secretary of the Royal Society, however, finding myself possessed of more leisure, and believing that a repertory of which I had myself experienced the advantage might, when amplified, prove useful to others, I resolved to embark in an undertaking which, for the last three or four years, has given me incessant occupation, and has, indeed, imposed upon me an amount of labour very much greater than I had anticipated. Notwithstanding all the pains I have bestowed on its execution, I am fully aware of its numerous deficiencies and imperfections, and of its falling far short of the degree of excellence that might be attained. But, in a Work of this nature, where perfection is placed at so great a distance, I have thought it best to limit my ambition to that moderate share of merit which it may claim in its present form; trusting to the indulgence of those for whose benefit it is intended, and to the candour of critics who, while they find it easy to detect faults, can at the same time duly appreciate difficulties.

P. M. Roget  
29 April, 1852