CROSSWORD FINISHERS

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Over the years, a number of books have been published to aid the crossword solver faced with a word having one or two letters filled in. Such books can become prohibitively large, depending on the number of letters in the partially-solved word. For instance, a five-letter word with one letter filled in must appear in five different lists, and one with two letters filled in, in ten lists, corresponding to the patterns xx---. x-x--, x—x-, x--x, -xx--, -x-x-, -x—x, --xx-. —x-x and ---xx. For six-letter words, the corresponding repetitions are 6 and 15, for seven-letter words, 7 and 21, etc. The various crossword finishers therefore impose limitations:

Frank J Russ, The Crossword-Puzzle and Word-Puzzle Solver's Handbook—A Unique Thesaurus (Vantage, 1986): one letter specified, words 2 to 8 letters long

Evelyn Marshall, Longman Crossword Key (Longman, 1983): one letter specified, words 3 to 15 letters long

John Griffiths, The Crossword Finisher (St Martin's, 1975): no plurals, two letters specified, words 3 to 7 letters long

Edmund Schwartz & Leon Landovitz, Funk & Wagnalls Crossword Puzzle Word Finder (Stonesong, 1979): two letters specified, words 2 to 6 letters long

Stanley Newman & Daniel Stark, The Million Word Crossword Answer Book (Collins, 2007): two letters specified, words 3 to 7 letters long, formerly The Crossword Answer Book (1996)

J C P Schwarz, Chambers Crossword Compiler (Chambers, 1987) points out that British crosswords alternate between checked and unchecked letters; therefore it is only necessary to specify filled-in letters 2, 4, 6… spaces apart. They supply two word lists of 4 to 15 letters, one in which checked letters are in the even positions of a word, the other in the odd positions. As a consequence, one can readily find words with x-x--- or –x-x—patterns of specified letters, but no compact listings of words with other patterns.

The Internet has made all such crossword finisher books obsolete. The website onelook.com, for example, enables one to check *any* pattern of filled-in letters in a word, not just one or two, for words of all lengths. Two lists are provided—one of common words, the other listing words found in any of a wide variety of specified dictionaries. Comparing the various two-letter crossword finishers for words having the xWxRxx pattern:
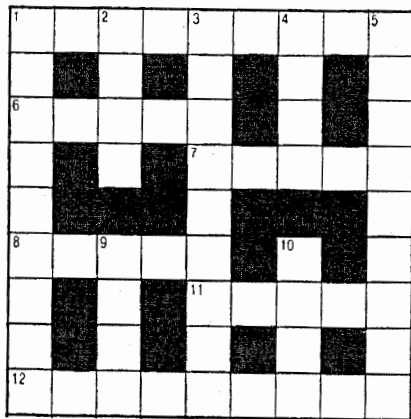
	Inter	N&S	Cham	F&W	Grif
awards	x	x	x	x	x
awarer		x			
awmrie			x		
dwarfs	x	x	x	x	x
Owerby			x		
qwerty	x	x			

	col1	col2	col3	col4	col5
swaraj	X		X	X	
swards		X	X	X	X
swardy	X		X		
Swarga			X		
swarms	X	X	X	X	X
swarve	X		X		
swarth	X		X	X	
swarty	X		X	X	
Swerga			X		
swerve	X	X	X	X	X
swirls		X	X	X	X
swirly	X	X	X		X
swirlz		X			
swords	X	X	X	X	X
twerps		X	X	X	X
twirls		X	X	X	X
twirly	X	X	X		
twirps		X		X	X

Owerby and swirlz are not even on the onelook.com extended list of 106 words; the latter may well be a typo.

A CRYPTIC PUZZLE FROM THE LONDON TIMES

DANA RICHARDS
Fairfax, Virginia

ACROSS

1. Nominates Irregular site for Shaw's library.

6. Sound lodge Doyle attended without mother.

7. Guide Altamont within best path.

8. Adler disguise you think, without ink.

11. Agent heard the end of most stories.

12. A hundred composer's unfinished notes on Lone Star's trips.

DOWN

1. I cosign my misguided Sherlockian attitude to women.

2. Sent two articles back to the sister of Vernet, for Sherlock.

3. Creep in, S.H. stealthily keeps secret.

4. Formerly, one went around the head of C.I.D.

5. Gilchrist's exercises unfortunately latches it.

11. Upon Brunton's inner heart.

12. Still Sherlock primarily left small number.