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EDITORIAL

The Australian National Dictionary Centre was established in 1988 after the publication of the *Australian National Dictionary* by Oxford University Press in the same year. The Centre is jointly funded by OUP and the Australian National University. It conducts research into Australian English, and provides Oxford University Press with editorial expertise for its Australian dictionaries, including the *Australian Oxford Dictionary*, the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*, and the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*.

The Centre's research into Australian English is focused primarily on the *Australian National Dictionary*. The first edition included about 10,000 Australian words and meanings, illustrated by about 60,000 dated and referenced quotations drawn from over 9000 Australian sources. The forthcoming second edition will add about 5000 words and meanings. The Centre has also published monographs on regional Australian English (Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland, and South Australia), Aboriginal English, Australian Aboriginal words in English, as well as monographs on historical themes—the convict era, the gold rushes, and the language of Australians at war.

2007 is the twentieth year that the agreement between OUP and ANU has been in place. At the end of 2006, Mr Peter van Noorden was appointed managing director of OUP in Australia, and negotiations took place for a new agreement. We are delighted to announce that a new five-year agreement between OUP and ANU has been signed, and this comes into effect from the beginning of 2008.

Frederick Ludowyk
Editor, *Ozwords*

HELLO POSSUMS

Barry Humphries and Australian English

ANNE PENDER

In August this year an Australian woman visiting the United States found herself in trouble after she answered an air steward with the words 'fair dinkum'. The young woman was responding to the steward's statement that there were no pretzels. After uttering the phrase, Sophie Reynolds of Queanbeyan in New South Wales, was ordered to hand over her passport to the SkyWest Airlines staff and was told that she might be charged with committing a federal offence. When she disembarked at Pittsburgh, Ms Reynolds was met by three uniformed officers who said: 'You swore at the hostess and there are federal rules against that.' Reynolds replied: 'I did not swear at the hostess, I just said fair dinkum' (*Australian*, 11 August 2007, p. 5).

In Barry Humphries' provocative Barry McKenzie films the term *fair dinkum* is used frequently. It is not one of the phrases that attracted any adverse attention however. Yet when Humphries' book *The Wonderful World of Barry McKenzie* was published in 1968, the book was banned. The Australian Minister for Customs and Excise stated that it relied on indecency for its humour. Two years later the Australian Government, under Prime Minister John Gorton, fully funded a film version of the book, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972), through the newly established Australian Film Development Corporation. In 1974 another Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, appeared in the sequel *Barry McKenzie Holds His Own*, playing himself.

During his fifty-five years as a performer Barry Humphries has celebrated, resurrected, and invented phrases of Australian English. Many of them date from the Barry McKenzie period. However Humphries' character Les Patterson, and his signature character Dame Edna Everage, are also speakers of Australian English. One of the elements of their comic appeal is their use and abuse of Australian English.

Humphries' satire has served to reflect and to influence Australian English through his peculiar talent for discovering and unearthing expressions that are obsolete, and bringing them back into the everyday language of his characters. In 1988 the Australian expatriate writer Clive James argued that Humphries, unlike anyone before or after him, offered Australians a sense of their own vernacular. James stated that Humphries 'identified the pristine

quality of everyday Australian English, a language which the self-consciousness of a literary culture had not yet dulled'. He refers to Humphries' character Sandy Stone as a 'neo-Elizabethan who treasures detail' and regards Stone's speech as a 'paradigm of Australian English' (*Snakecharmers in Texas*, 1988, pp. 31, 34).

Sandy Stone, or Alexander Horace Stone, is an old man who sits on stage in his worn dressing gown in a Genoa velvet armchair. He usually clutches a hot-water bottle. Sandy lives at 36 Gallipoli Crescent, Glen Iris. Humphries first performed Sandy in revue at the New Theatre in Flinders Street, Melbourne, in 1958. Sandy talked about going to the RSL and having 'a nice night's entertainment', and about his enthusiasm for 'the football', Beryl ('that's the wife'), and their friends Valda Clissold and Ian Preston.

Beryl's not a drinker but she had a shandy... I had a beer with old Norm and some of the other chappies there. I don't say no to the occasional odd glass and Ian Preston, an old friend of mine, got up and sang a few humorous numbers—not too blue, on account of the womenfolk.

Sandy Stone is one of Humphries' enduring characters. He embodies Humphries' nostalgic portrayal of Australian masculinity; he is a totally domesticated man who is representative of Australia before the social revolution of the 1960s.

I was glad we hadn't made it too late a night as we had to be down the junction pretty early on the Saturday morning for the weekend shopping. Had a bit of strife parking the vehicle though. You know what it's like at the junction of a Saturday morning. However I found a nice possie in the long run just when we were beginning to think we might miss the blessed butcher. I had a few minutes worry, though. I lost Beryl in the Foodorama but she had the good sense to go back to the car. I got home in time for a bit of lunch and then I had to whiz out again to the football. Beryl stayed at home to do the weekend baking. Had the usual trouble parking the vehicle. You know what it's like at Memorial Park on a Saturday arvo. However, found a possie in the long run just when I was thinking I'd be late for the bounce. Oh, you wouldn't catch me missing an important semi. Beryl had packed me a nice Thermos of Milo and

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I was pretty glad of it. It's very cold and blowy in the outer (Barry Humphries, 'Days of the Week', *The Life and Death of Sandy Stone*, Melbourne, 1990, p. 7).

Humphries' ear for the Australian vernacular places him within a tradition of Australian humour in which oral culture is central. In many ways Humphries' comedy embraces what might be regarded as two classic features of Australian humour, a talent for abuse and invective and a focus on men and homosocial experience. Barry McKenzie's speech is full of crude and abusive expressions made up by Humphries, but also using some Australian English words. For example: 'You can put it up your freckle if you don't flamin' like it.' The evidence for 'freckle', meaning 'anus', dates back to 1967 in a publication called *The Kings Cross Whisper*, and it was first used by Humphries in 1968, and again in 1978 in the voice of Sir Les, with reference to the Labor Prime Minister, who was dismissed in the constitutional crisis of 1975: 'I too believed that the sun shone out of Gough's freckle.' The repeated use of the term and in the special combination used by Bazza, 'freckle puncher' (1968; dates in round brackets refer to the first recorded evidence in the *Australian National Dictionary* [AND]), meaning 'a male homosexual', has found some currency in Australian English.

Some other examples of Humphries' insults that have gained a limited place in the vernacular are: 'You smell like an Abo's armpit'; 'You're boring the strides off me' (1968); 'that sheilah bangs like a shithouse door!' (1968), referring to a woman who engages in frequent sexual activity; and 'She was droning on like a blow-fly in a milk bottle' (1989).

Humphries' profanities are exaggerated versions of the actual invective found in Australian English. At the same time the semantic areas of Humphries' language are those favoured by the satirist. For example, much of the speech of Barry McKenzie and Les Patterson is dominated by an obsession with the sexual and the gustatory. In fact food, drink, and sex feature heavily in the language of all Humphries' key characters. The term 'liquid lunch' (1964), meaning a lunch made up of beer and alcoholic drinks only, is one of Humphries' expressions that gained currency for some years in Australia. The following exclamatory expressions are almost certainly Humphries' inventions and are not widely used: 'I'm that thirsty I could drink out of an Abo's loincloth' (1968), 'I've got a thirst you could flamin' photograph' (1968), and 'I'm dry as Nullabor Nellie's knickers' (1979). However, these expressions echo the 'elaborate inventions' of the tall story

in Australian humour and the numerous exclamations about the weather being so hot it's a hundred in the waterbag, or drought country you couldn't flog a flea over, or hunger so great you could eat a galah and bark sandwich (Lenie Johansen, *The Penguin Book of Australian Slang*, 1996, p. 525). The invented exaggerations therefore build on an established syntactic pattern in Australian English.

In fact Humphries' preference for expressing a great thirst, for vomiting, and for urinating expands an already large set of expressions using this syntactic pattern to express hunger, thirst, and satiety. The *Penguin Book of Australian Slang* lists forty-four expressions of this kind. Humphries' term for vomiting, 'technicolour yawn' (1964), has passed into the vernacular as have 'big spit' (1964) and 'liquid laugh' (1964). The term 'yodel' (1965), used by Humphries but not his invention, also gained currency through his repeated use of it. Yet some of his other euphemistic expressions for this unappealing bodily function have not passed into general usage, for example: 'laughattheground' (1968), 'playthewhale' (1968), 'throw the voice' (1968), 'chuckle' (1968), 'call Charlie' and 'hurl' (1964).

Just one of Humphries' numerous expressions for urinating, 'siphon the python' (1968), found its way into the idiom. Various others were used frequently by Barry McKenzie but did not enter the lexicon. These include 'Strain the potatoes', 'drain the dragon', and 'flog the lizard' (all 1968).

Most of Humphries' expressions for sexual intercourse (the f-word was never used by Humphries' characters because of his preference for the euphemistic and colourful), suggest a battle or conquest. They sustain the sexually predatory image of the Australian male, even when used by the hapless Bazza McKenzie who never consummates any of his friendships. Bazza's expressions 'park the prawn', 'spear the bearded clam', and 'dip the dagger' (1968) have not come into general usage. However other terms such as 'go the grope' (1964) and 'crack a fat', popularised by Humphries since 1968, but first recorded in 1941, have gained some currency.

The terms used by Humphries' characters for the female genitalia are not as numerous as those for the male member, reflecting a general pattern of Australian slang. One of Humphries' expressions, 'bearded clam' for the vulva, is derived from American slang. The term 'golden doughnut' (1972) also meaning vulva, and attributed first to playwright David

Williamson, cannot be said to have passed into the vernacular.

Leslie Colin Patterson, or Sir Les, is Humphries' most grotesque character. Originally Les was an entertainment officer at a Sydney RSL club, but he was later elevated to diplomatic status as Australia's Cultural Attaché to the Court of St James. In this character Humphries builds on the satire of cultural nationalism that characterised the Barry McKenzie films. In the program notes for Humphries' show *Tears Before Bedtime*, Les Patterson appears grinning in a photograph, a young and voluptuous blonde woman in a short dress with plunging neckline draped over him. Underneath the photograph is a poem by Sir Les entitled 'In Terms of My Natural Life'. The poem satirises the language used by politicians in the 1970s and 1980s. In the title of this poem Humphries parodies the title of the novel by Marcus Clarke (*For the Term of His Natural Life*). In the second line, Humphries uses the term 'public servant', which originally meant 'a convict assigned to public labour'. The earliest date for the expression given in the *Australian National Dictionary* is 1797. The poem begins:

I am an Australian in terms of Nation
And a Public Servant in terms
of vocation,
But there's one thing amazes my critics
and that's
How many I wear in terms of hats:
I chair the Cheese Board, I front
the Yartz
You could term me a man of
many parts.

It concludes:

Yes, in terms of charisma I've got the
game mastered
In anyone's terms I'm a well-liked bastard.
(*Tears Before Bedtime*, 1983)

Sir Les is probably at his best on stage, sporting his stained powder-blue Hong Kong suit, 'kipper' tie, and two-toned Cuban heeled shoes donned by fashionable men in the early 1970s (Barry Humphries, *My Life as Me*, 2002, p. 221). He is also particularly caustic in his book review of the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (1976), edited by Grahame Johnstone. 'The Plain Pom's Guide to the Mysterious World of Strine' (in *The Illustrated Treasury of Australian Humour*, ed. Michael Sharkey, 1988, pp. 239–241) is one of Humphries' most scathing attacks on his own attackers, those Australians who lamented the way in which Humphries portrayed his countrymen.

In his capacity as Australian Cultural Attaché in London, Les offers his review of the Dictionary to the Sunday Times,

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stating up front: 'London to a brick ... I don't cop more than half a dozen highbrow hardbacks a week of dimension incompatible with the S-bend on the Aus House throttling-pit. Such a work is the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*.' Sir Les continues:

In his intro, Grahame Johnston kicks off with a few completely uncalled-for rudies about the so-called 'Australian accent'. Now, I would be sticking my neck right out, asking for the chop, if I tried to kid Sunday Times readers that the average Australian Joe Blow talks like a limp-wristed la-dee-dah Mayfair shirtlifter. Let's face it, you can't demolish two dozen Sydney rock oysters, a rare T-bone and six chilled tubes with a plum in your flaming mouth! ...

More to the point, this is a book which could accidentally fall into overseas hands—thereby giving the erroneous impression that we're a nation of foul-mouthed no-hopers. ... Who does this Professor Jackson think he is, mucking up a perfectly acceptable little dicksh like this with a load of locker-room

lingo, not to say toilet talk? If that's his game, search me why he's left out words like *brown nose v.tr to flatter person in authority* and *naughty n. an act of immodesty committed by person of the opposite sex*.

Les laments some other 'regrettable lacunae' such as 'dingo degree, the educational qualification of most Australian politicians', but praises the inclusion of 'the words on all Australian lips, namely *étitism* and *shortfall*, *software*, *hopefully*, *archetypal* and *quintessential*. All of them bonzer little words and handy Down-Under epithets which any possum can use whilst boiling a billy'.

Dame Edna's most obvious contributions to Australian English derive from her use of the word 'gladdy', a shortened form of 'Gladiolus' and Edna's favourite flower, as well as 'possum'. The shortening of the name of the flower to 'gladdy' follows a recognisable feature of English in this country, and that is the habit of giving words an 'ie' or 'y' ending—for example, 'sickie', 'pressie', 'cossie', and 'blowie'. Edna was not the first to use the

word 'gladdy', however. It was first recorded in 1947 in *Township* magazine. Humphries' Edna has popularised the word. In 1982 she warned readers of her *Beside Companion* that 'in the spring unsuspecting lawn-squatters run the terrible risk of being "goosed" by an upwardly mobile gladdy' (*AND*, p. 174).

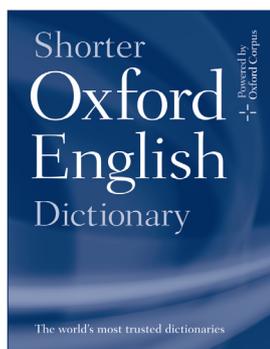
Edna's other favourite term is 'possum'. She addresses her audience on stage and on television with the exuberant cry 'Hello possums' as she prances into view. As well as being the name of the arboreal marsupial, the term possum is defined as a 'mildly derogatory term for a person' and as 'an affectionate mode of address'. It was first recorded in this manner in 1894: 'Bob Fogarty, as I'm a living sinner, delighted to meet you, old possum' (*AND*, p. 496).

[**Anne Pender**, a former staff member of the Australian National Dictionary Centre, now lectures in English and Theatre Studies at the University of New England. She is currently working on a study of Barry Humphries for a project funded by the Australian Research Council.]

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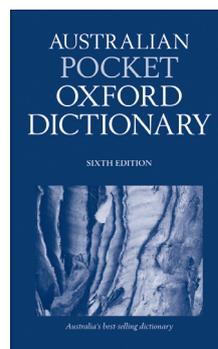
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We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those not easily answerable from the standard reference books.

FOCUSING ON FOCUS

I am uncertain about how to spell the past tense of the verb focus. Usage seems to be divided between focused and focussed. Can you help?

L. Robertson (via email)

There are some general rules about this, but there are exceptions to all of them. One guideline is that if the verb has only one syllable, there is a doubling of the final consonant. Hence **wet** has **wetting**, **wetted**. If the verb has two or more syllables, and the final syllable is not stressed, there is no doubling of the final consonant. Hence **target** has **targeting**, **targeted**, and **budget** has **budgeting**, **budgeted**. On the contrary, **regret** (stress on the final syllable) has a doubling of the final consonant—**regretting**, **regretted**. This rule has some validity, as long as you ignore verbs ending in -l, such as **label** (**labelled**, **labelling**), and **travel** (**travelled**, **travelling**). On this principle the verb **focus** should have **focusing** and **focused**.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* has not revised its entry for 'focus' since the first edition. This great (in size as well as stature) dictionary recommended the spellings *focused* and *focusing*, and added: 'in England commonly, but irregularly written *focussed*, *focussing*'. It puzzles me, however, that in the illustrative quotations that show how the word has been used over time, all seven examples the *OED* gives use **focussed** and **focussing**. There is nary a **focused** or **focusing** in sight!

Something very interesting is going on in Australia with these forms. A Google search of all sites worldwide shows that **focused** with 157,000,000 hits (92.25%) is overwhelmingly preferred to **focussed** with 13,200,000 (7.75%) hits. When the search is limited to Australian sites, however, the figures are **focused** 2,960,000 (55%) and **focussed** 1,610,000 (45%). Similarly, internationally, **focusing** (92.3%) is preferred to **focussing** (7.7%), whereas in Australia the margin is 73.8% to 26.2%.

Focused is the 'preferred' spelling, but **focussed** is evidently still very common. I've often wondered whether the relatively wide preference in Australia for the -ss- is because the -s- opens up the possibility that focused is pronounced 'foh-KYOOZD' (to rhyme with 'accused'), whereas the -ss- insists on the hard -s-. Then again there lurks the possibility that **focussed** might lead to the horrible temptation to rhyme it unnaturally with lust. **ED.**

CRICKET TRAGICS

Do you know the origin of the expression 'cricket tragic'? I love the term (and all it implies) but can't find anything on when or where we started using it. I suspect our most notable cricket tragic may have had it coined especially for him.

W. Cox (via email)

It had not occurred to me that **cricket tragic** might have an Australian origin, but a search of the Australian and British newspapers reveals that your hunch is right. It was first used in association with Prime Minister Howard. The earliest reference I can find is from November 1998. I have quoted a passage from the *Illawarra Mercury* on 10 November 1998, although the story appeared in other newspapers at about the same time:

John Howard is so obsessed by Australia's national sport that Mark Taylor calls him a 'cricket tragic'. When the nation's two highest public office-holders got together at a celebration lunch yesterday, the Prime Minister called the Test captain a great leader. But the Test captain responded by branding the PM a 'cricket tragic'. 'I hope you can call the Prime Minister that, because he is', Taylor told the crowd. 'He loves the game better than I do.'

Tragic noun someone who is obsessed with something, usually a sport. 'Tragic' has the undertone of being 'over the top'. Why, I wonder idly, aren't there (can't there be?) cricket comics? Much more fun! Apropos Howardesque over-the-top 'tragicality', the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in his address to the joint sitting of Parliament on 11 September 2007, had this dig at Prime Minister Howard: 'Prime Minister, I promise that if I can get you to a top-level hockey game, you will see why you should never again propose that I should watch cricket.' Now there is a true cricket comic in action. **ED.**

BAGGY GREEN

I was wondering when the term *baggy green* or *baggy green cap* arose to describe the cap worn by Australian test cricketers.

C. James, NSW

Our two earliest pieces of evidence for this term come from newspapers in the 1970s. The first is from the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 8 March 1972: 'I don't underestimate any Aussie when he pulls on the baggy green cap.' The second is from the *Sun-Herald* (Sydney) 21 October 1979:

'Now the cricket rift is healed, it is that total commitment that could see him once again wearing his beloved baggy green cap in the dual series against England and the West Indies.' Since this is close to being an encyclopedic rather than a lexical item, it is possible that our readers for the *Australian National Dictionary* did not pick it up in an earlier period. We should be pleased to hear of any earlier evidence. **ED.**

DOUBLE POSSESSIVES

Recently the following appeared in *The Economist* (14 July 2007, p. 37): 'The two most likely beneficiaries of Mr McCain's troubles will be Rudy Giuliani, the front-runner, and Fred Thompson, an *old friend of Mr McCain's* who is expected to declare his candidacy any day now.' The italics are mine. Is this correct English? Surely it is double-dipping in the possessive department, with the 's referring to nothing in particular. It is commonly used by those who might be assumed to be good writers, so perhaps there is a convention?

B. Hill, NSW

This is what is called the 'double possessive' or 'double genitive', since the possessive is marked in the construction by both the preposition **of** and the possessive 's. The construction is by no means new: it is first recorded in English in the fourteenth century. *Logic* says very clearly that all you need in this construction is the formulation 'an intimate friend of Mr McCain'. 'An intimate friend of Mr McCain's' may well raise the question 'An intimate friend of Mr McCain's *what?*' Of Mr McCain's wife? *Usage*, however, tells us very clearly that, at least when speaking, most of us would say 'an intimate friend of Mr McCain's'. The double possessive construction is sometimes very useful in clarifying sense, as in the difference between 'a picture of Mr McCain' (a painting or photograph made of Mr McCain) and 'a picture of Mr McCain's' (a painting or photograph that Mr McCain possesses). We can further point out that in these constructions what follows the preposition **of** is likely to be human: it is most unlikely that we should say 'a good friend of the National Gallery's'. The issue becomes even more interesting if we substitute a pronoun for the noun. Would we say 'an old friend of me' or 'an old friend of mine'? Would we say 'an old friend of his' or 'an old friend of he' (or even 'of him')? In these constructions the double possessive (the use of **of** plus the possessive pronoun 'mine' or 'his') is the only possibility. Usage therefore wins out over logic. **ED.**

A new edition of the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, edited by Bruce Moore, was published in September. Many of the new international words are from the continually expanding world of computing, the Internet, mobile phones, etc. They include:

blog: *noun* weblog; *verb* add new material to or regularly update a weblog; *noun* blogger.

blogosphere: *noun* personal websites and weblogs collectively.

cyberstalking: *noun* the repeated use of electronic communications to harass or frighten someone, for example by sending threatening emails.

egosurf: *verb* search the Internet for instances of one's own name or links to one's own website.

google: *verb* search for (something) on the Internet with the use of a search engine.

memory stick: *noun* a portable device onto which information can be downloaded and stored from a computer.

mobile television: *noun* television and video material delivered to a mobile phone.

podcast: *noun* digital recording of a radio broadcast, made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player; *verb* broadcast in this way.

wiki: *noun* website or database developed collaboratively by a community of users, allowing any user to add and edit content. [probably from Hawaiian *wiki* fast, quick]

The more general international terms and colloquialisms come from a variety of areas, including the **environment** (*carbon credit, carbon offset, carbon trading, ecological footprint*), **international politics** (*bioterrorism, cyberterrorism, profiling*), and various other fields: *cold case, dog-whistle politics, the elephant in the room, identity theft, intelligent design, pear-shaped, senior moment, sudoku*.

New Australian words include:

barbecue stopper: *noun* an important topic of public discussion, esp. a political one.

billy lid: *noun* a kid, a child. [rhyming slang]

branch stacking: *noun* the improper increase of the membership of a local branch of a political party in order to ensure the pre-selection of a particular candidate.

chigga: *noun* (in Tasmania) a person who is regarded as uncultured, lacking style, etc. [*Chigwell* suburb of Hobart]

chroming: *noun* the inhaling of chrome-based spray-paint.

dak: *verb* to pull down or remove the trousers etc. of (a person) as a joke or as punishment.

enterprise agreement: *noun* a work contract between employers and employees, covering pay, working conditions, productivity outcomes, etc.

grey nomad: *noun* a retired person who travels extensively, esp. by campervan etc.

hornbag: *noun* a sexually attractive person.



The Australian National Dictionary Centre is jointly funded by **Oxford University Press Australia** and **The Australian National University** to research all aspects of Australian English and to publish Australian dictionaries and other works.

irukandji: *noun* box jellyfish of tropical Australian waters. [Aboriginal tribal name from near Cairns]

kumanjaji: *noun* (in Aboriginal society) a substitute name for a person who has recently died. [Western Desert language]

mates rates: *noun* discount prices on goods, labour, etc., for one's friends.

salary sacrifice: *noun* a financial scheme whereby part of an employer's pre-tax salary is paid into a superannuation fund; *verb* to take part in such a scheme.

There is another group of words that have been in the dictionaries for some time, but were not necessarily recognised as being Australian. The following are among the terms that now have an Australian label:

base hospital: *noun* a hospital in a rural area, or (in warfare) one removed from the field of action.

big lunch: *noun* a meal eaten at lunchtime by schoolchildren (cf. **little lunch**).

blood and bone: *noun* fertiliser made from powdered animal residues.

callithumpian: *noun* a member of an unspecified nonconformist religion (often used to indicate a lack of adherence to any religion). [alteration of British dialect *gallithumpians* society of social reformers]

chiko roll: *noun* a hot snack food, consisting of a savoury mixture of vegetables etc., coated in batter and fried.

clubby: *noun* a member of a surf lifesaving club.

copha: *noun* solidified coconut oil, used in biscuits etc.

corbie: *noun* a moth, the larval stage of which is a pest of pastures.

dagwood dog: *noun* a saveloy coated in batter and deep-fried, usu. served on a stick. [after *dagwood sandwich*, a thick sandwich named after the US comic-strip character *Dagwood* Bumstead]

disendorse: *verb* to cancel party support for a candidate at an election.

dishlicker: *noun* a greyhound.

little lunch: *noun* light refreshment eaten during a mid-morning break by school children (cf. **big lunch**).

preselection: *noun* the choosing of a candidate for a forthcoming election by (local) members of a political party.

THESAURUS

Mark Gwynn's *The Australian Middle Years Thesaurus* was published by OUP in July. It is designed to encourage students to expand their vocabulary and increase their confidence in reading and writing. It forms a companion volume to Sarah Ogilvie's *The Australian Middle Years Dictionary*, also published in July. Sarah was a Visiting Fellow at the Centre in 2006.

VISITING FELLOW

Dr Bernadette Hince is a Visiting Fellow at the Centre from June to December. Bernadette published *The Antarctic Dictionary: A Complete Guide to Antarctic English* in 2000. This dictionary contains over 2000 terms relating to many aspects of Antarctica—snow and ice, flora and fauna, whaling and sealing, climate, food and shelter, and, especially interesting, colloquial terms for everyday life. These terms are illustrated by more than 15,000 citations from a great variety of sources. She is now conducting a study of Arctic English, which will be combined with her earlier work to produce a book on English words of the polar regions.

TOKENS

Are you familiar with tokens at weddings? Here are three quotations from South Australian newspapers: 'Tokens were hung on the bride's arm by Barry Smith, Belair', *Leader* (Angaston), 14 January 1960; 'The bride received three tokens—a ceramic slipper, cream bag with rose tie and a silver pig (Nicole collects pigs)', *Leader* (Angaston), 26 June 2002; 'Anthea and Andrew received many good luck tokens', *Barossa & Light Herald* (Tanunda), 17 July 2002. In her book *Bardi Grubs and Frog Cakes: South Australian Words* (OUP 2004), Dorothy Jauncey explained how these good-luck tokens are hung on a looped ribbon, and often placed on the bride's arm as the newly-wedded couple walks down the aisle. The custom is known elsewhere, but instead of *tokens* the objects are called *keepsakes* or *charms*. Is the term token used only in the Barossa region? Can anyone point us to other printed records of this usage?

WORD OF THE MONTH

As mentioned in the April *Ozwords*, Oxford University Press Australia, in association with the Centre, is publishing a Word of the Month. It is distributed by email, and if you would like to subscribe to it, send an email to <wordofthemonth.au@oup.com>.

Bruce Moore

Director



In his 1899 book of poems *Hits! Skits! and Jingles*, W.T. Goodge tries to give a sense of what ‘a distinctive Australian literature’ is like. As many others have done, he goes straight to the tradition of the bushman:

There's the everlasting swaggie with his
bluey on his back
Who is striking out for sunset on the
Never-never track;
O'er the flat and barren country we can
hear him tramping still,
And he's Billy from the Darling or he's
Murrumbidgee Bill.

This is the ubiquitous ‘jolly swagman’, evoked by terms such as *swaggie*, *bluey*, and *never-never* (‘the far outback’).

In 1893, in an article entitled ‘Some Popular Australian Mistakes’, Henry Lawson attacked the romanticising of the bush tradition:

10. Men tramping in search of a ‘shed’ are not called ‘sundowners’ or ‘swaggies’; they are ‘trav’lers’.

11. A swag is not generally referred to as a ‘bluey’ or ‘Matilda’—it is called a ‘swag’.

17. It's not glorious and grand and free to be on the track. Try it. ...

23. &c. Half the bushmen are not called ‘Bill’, nor the other half ‘Jim’. We knew a shearer whose name was Reginald!

In spite of Lawson’s qualifications, the world of the swagman generated a large number of Australian terms: the **swagman** (first recorded in 1869) was called **bagman** (1866); **bundleman** (1853) from German *Bündelmann*; **bushman** (1872); **drummer** (1898) from the fact that the swag was sometimes called a *drum*, with reference to its usually cylindrical shape; **footman** (1900); **swag carrier** (1898); **swaggie** (1891); and **traveller** (1845). There was also a **swagwoman** (1890).

There were particular kinds of swagmen. A **sundowner** (1868) was a swagman who turned up at a place at the end of the day, ostensibly looking for work, but really after food and a place to sleep for the night. He would be on the move again the following morning, without working for his food at all. A **swamper** (1894) was a swagman who travelled on foot, but who paid for his swag to be carried on a wagon, usually pulled by bullocks. The term itself was a transferred use of the American verb *swamp* meaning ‘to clear a road’. A **whaler** (1878) was a swagman whose route followed the course of a river. The *whale* refers to the fact that such swagmen survived in part by catching fish. The whalers were further qualified according to the river they followed, hence **Darling whaler**, **Murray whaler**, and

Murrumbidgee whaler.

In British thieves’ slang the *swag* was ‘a thief’s plunder or booty’, often carried away in a bag. In Australia the term **swag** was transferred from the thief’s booty to the possessions carried by a traveller in the bush. The **swag** was also called **bluey** (1878) since the outer covering was traditionally a blue blanket; **bundle** (1853); **donkey** (1872), a transferred use of donkey in the sense ‘a beast of burden’; **drum** (1866); **knot** (1896); **Matilda** (1892); **Royal Alfred** (1896); and **shiralee** (1892). The reason for the swag being called a **knot** is explained in this 1898 passage: ‘The ... swag was fastened near the ends with the binders, through which was passed the sling, so arranged that the knot came out just below the breast and gave a rest for the hand’ (*Bulletin*, 8 October 1896, p. 15). The reason for the swag being called a **Matilda** is more difficult to discern. There is some evidence of a German tradition in which wandering apprentices carried their possessions in a bag made of fur pelts. The bag was called a ‘**Matilda**’, in allusion to the woman they would have liked to be sleeping with, in preference to the furry bag (see Frederick Ludowyk: ‘Who is Matilda? Why Did She Waltz?’ *Ozwords*, May 1999, pp. 1–3). It is possible that this German tradition was brought to Australia, but it is also possible that it is merely an arbitrary use of the name. The **Royal Alfred**, alluding to Prince Alfred, the son of Queen Victoria, who visited Australia in 1867–68, was the ‘cream’ of the swags, as explained by Henry Lawson: ‘The weight of the swag varies from the light rouseabout’s swag, containing one blanket and a clean shirt, to the “royal Alfred”, with tent and all complete, and weighing part of a ton’ (*Children of the Bush*, 1902, p. 139). The reason for the swag being called a **shiralee** is a complete mystery. It is mentioned once at the end of the nineteenth century, then Sidney Baker lists it in his 1941 *Popular Dictionary of Australian Slang*, and it is popularised when D’Arcy Niland uses it as the title of his 1955 novel.

The process of travelling through the countryside carrying a swag is expressed in various phrases: **hoist Matilda** (1897), **hump one’s swag** (1851), **hump one’s bluey** (1891), **hump one’s drum** (1870), **hump one’s Matilda** (1902), **push the knot** (1896), **shoulder one’s drum** (1894), **shoulder one’s swag** (1896), **swag it** (1859), **walk Matilda** (1893), **waltz Matilda** (1895), or **with Matilda up** (1895). The phrase **waltz Matilda** might again owe something to German, where the expression *auf die Walze gehen* meant ‘to go a-wandering’ (see Frederick Ludowyk ‘Who is Matilda? Why Did She Waltz?’ *Ozwords*, May 1999).

Whatever the term, the journey was made **per boot** (1895), that is to say, ‘by means of boot, i.e. on foot’. The feet were protected by **Prince Alberts** (1893), strips of cloth wound around the feet, the poor man’s humble substitute for socks—and thus the ironic allusion to the rich world of Prince Albert, the consort of Queen Victoria. The swagman’s food was kept in his **tucker bag** (1885).

Most of these terms are gone from everyday speech, but they still assume significance in literary and historical memory. **Swag** is still commonly used, and its sense is sometimes broadened to include a form of tent for outdoor sleeping. **Swag** in the sense ‘a great number’ is related to the ‘bundle’ sense, but has had a parallel existence. It is first noted by J.H. Vaux in his 1812 slang dictionary, produced while he was a convict in Australia: ‘A *swag* of anything signifies emphatically a great deal.’ In some parts of rural Australia the vocabulary of the swagman era is more strongly remembered. Marie Mahood in *Icing on the Damper* (1995) uses an interesting idiom: ‘Two days later the manager told me to grease my swag straps and take the next plane out. In other words, I was sacked.’ Bruce Simpson in *Packhorse Drover* (1996) uses the same idiom: ‘Ringers, by and large, were drifters and when a man spoke of greasing the swag straps he really meant he was thinking of moving on.’ A variant of this idiom has become part of Australian political life. In 1958 John Pringle in *Australian Accent* reported the following incident in the Commonwealth parliament:

On one occasion a Liberal Minister, noted for his long and boring speeches, had been on his feet for many minutes when a Liberal Whip was seen to scribble something on a sheet of paper which was passed up to him. The Minister glanced at it, paled with anger and crumpled up the paper which he threw away. However he sat down shortly afterwards. At the end of a debate another member rescued the piece of paper which had rolled under a bench and unrolled it. The message said: ‘Pull out, dig. The dogs are pissing on your swag!’

Towards the end of 1991, Senator Gareth Evans is reported to have used the idiom to Prime Minister Hawke to express the parliamentary Labor Party’s view that it was time for him to move on and allow Paul Keating to assume the prime ministership: ‘“Pull out digger, the dogs are pissing on your swag”, was how Gareth Evans advised his Prime Minister to retire’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 May 1992, *Good Weekend*, p. 14).



TUCKING IN TO TUCKER

FREDERICK LUDOWYK



The term **tucker**, in all its manifestations to do with food, is firmly Australian. The word comes, however, from English slang. There was a verb in England meaning ‘to consume or swallow (food or drink)’, as represented by this passage from 1845: ‘The strawberries ... which our Grandmother’s Uncle tuck’d in like a pig.’ There is also an English noun **tuck** in school slang, which means ‘delicacies such as sweets, cakes, etc.’, and from the slang noun **tuck** (or **tuck-out** or **tuck-in**) it came to mean ‘a good feed, especially (once again in school use) a feast of delicacies’. Hence, in 1857 in Thomas Hughes’ novel *Tom Brown’s School Days*, we have this comment on the altogether too-tuckful Slogger: ‘The Slogger looks rather sodden, as if he didn’t take much exercise and ate too much **tuck**.’

But the poms never had the good sense to turn **tuck** into **tucker**. That was left to our currency lads and lasses. And of course the Aussie **tucker** is made of sterner stuff than cakes and sweets. It is the very stuff and staff of life that C. Julius Caesar referred to when he commented on starving people who were begging: *Flentes orabant, ut se cibo juvarent* (‘Weeping, they begged that they might have the support of some food’—*Bellum Gallicum*, 7. 78 fin.). In Australia our earliest citation for this sense is in pidgin English in 1850: ‘So hearing that “plenty **tucker**” was their desire, I let them know by signs that I was not the sort of fellow to offer opposition to their very proper request’ (*Monthly Almanac and Illustrated Commentator*, Adelaide, p. 44). In 1864 the writer obviously felt the need to gloss the word: ‘The manner in which they make the agreement is, by giving them £1 each, and plenty of “**tucker**” (a word for food)’ (N. Shreeve, *A Short History of South Australia*, p. 25). In 1877 Caesar’s role (as putative provider of human ‘provender’) is played by draymen: ‘I got round into the Sydney-road, and stopped some draymen, asking them for some **tucker**’ (*The Vagabond Annual, Christmas*, Melbourne, p. 148). The speaker in our next citation seems to have determined his priorities quite firmly (and most unromantically): ‘I didn’t marry her to look at her. I married her to cook my **tucker**’ (*Truth*, Sydney, 6 August 1905, p. 1).

Tucker then develops the somewhat narrower sense ‘the barest means of subsistence’. The earliest record of this new sense is 1858: ‘They seemed to think that to work for any wages at all, over and above “**tucker**” would be considerably to improve their fortunes’ (*Colonial Mining Journal of Victoria*, October, p. 23). Most of the occurrences of this sense occur in mining contexts: ‘There are few fields [i.e. goldfields] in which he may not find what

is called “**tucker**”, that is to say, enough to provide the necessaries of life’ (1870, C.H. Allen, *A Visit to Queensland and her Goldfields*, p. 249); ‘Men have been known to work for years scarcely making what is colonially called “**tucker**”’ (1878, *Illustrated Australian News*, Melbourne, 10 June, p. 107).

The verb **to tucker** then follows the noun, and (in the sense ‘to take a meal’, and then simply ‘to eat’) it first appears in 1870: ‘They shifted us out of our Mess hut. **Tuckering** now in the stable shed’ (G.P. Deane, *Diary*, 10 February). While the verb is now rare, it was still present in the 1970s: ‘A greasy chop an’ a hunk o’ bread ... an’ y’ reckoned you were **tuckerin’** like a lord’ (1978, D.R. Stuart, *Wedgetail View*, p. 61); ‘She had Alec Ricketts “**tuckering**” at her table’ (1979, B. Martyn, *First Footers in South Gippsland*, p. 109).

Better known than the verbal senses now is the use of the noun in the combinations **tucker bag** and **tucker box**. The **tucker bag** is ‘a bag for provisions, especially as carried by a swagman’. The best-known, perhaps, of all uses of **tucker bag** is A.B. (Banjo) Paterson’s, when the jolly swagman sees the serendipitous jumbuck (sheep) and stows it away for future reference in that most commodious receptacle:

Down came a jumbuck to drink at
that billabong,
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed
him with glee,
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck
in his **tucker bag**:
‘You’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.’

A typical early use of the term is illustrated by this 1893 quotation: ‘I suppose he’s tramping somewhere where the bushmen carry swags, / Cadging round the wretched stations with his empty **tucker-bags**’ (*Bulletin*, Sydney, 16 December, p. 17). More than just the bare necessities of food could go into a tucker bag (as Banjo’s jumbuck gives witness): ‘He produced from his **tucker bag**, and allowed us to sample, one of the choicest ox tongues ever seen inside or outside of a butcher’s shop’ (1905, *Observer*, Adelaide, 2 September, p. 47).

The **tucker box** was simply a box of any kind in which drovers, bullockies, and so forth stored their provisions for the long haul. It could, by extension, be a food-box used by anyone. Our earliest citation for the term comes from A.F. Paterson in 1897: “Now, Miss Kerr ... will you ... help me to pack the **tucker box**.” “Tucker box, what is that?” “Well, perhaps I ought to say lunch box; for in the bush we do not boast of hamper baskets.” (*Mid Saltbush and Mallee*, p. 30). The **tucker box** was invaluable to itinerants, especially in

terrain where food was not to be begged or bought for miles. This fact explains the best-known allusion to a tucker box, which occurs in the swag of anecdotes and ditties associated with whatever a dog was doing on top of a tuckerbox, five or nine (the distance is elastic) miles from the town of Gundagai in New South Wales. Every Aussie and his aunt knows the yarn. So iconic has the yarn become that there is a monument in bronze of the dog sitting complacently on the box near Gundagai. Well, what was the dog doing on the tuckerbox? And why should the fact of a dog jumping on top of a box provoke so very much comment? One would imagine that the drover or bullocky or whoever happened to own the silly beast would simply have said ‘Down, Rover!’ in a no-nonsense sort of voice, and there an end.

But that dog was (to mix metaphors outrageously) the last straw to break the bullocky’s spirit and the beast didn’t do it by sedately sitting. Perhaps the best-known version of the yarn comes from Jack Moses in 1923: ‘And the dog sits on the tucker box, / Nine miles from Gundagai’ (*Beyond the City Gates*, p. 27). That’s the respectable version. What follows accounts for the dog’s lasting infamy and fame. The much put-upon bullocky bemoans:

I’ve done my share of shearing sheep,
Of droving and all that;
And bogged a bullock team as well,
On a Murrumbidgee flat.

I’ve seen the bullock stretch and strain
And blink his bleary eye,
And the **dog shits in the tuckerbox**
Nine miles from Gundagai.

We’ve all got our little troubles,
In life’s hard, thorny way.
Some strike them in a motor car
And others in a dray

But when your dog and bullocks strike,
It ain’t no apple pie,
And the dog shat in the tuckerbox
Nine miles from Gundagai...

The dog, ah! well he got a bait,
And thought he’d like to die,
So I buried him in the tuckerbox,
Nine miles from Gundagai.

Serves the dog right, perhaps? There is a folk saying in Sri Lanka denoting the acme (or should that be *nadir*?) of malice and meanness: ‘to put sand in a person’s portion of cooked rice’. What the dog deposited in the bullocky’s food-box (although, to be fair, the beast was innocent of miching mallecho unlike that beastly depositor of sand in rice) far exceeds sanded rice in sheer godawfulness.

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 28: RESULTS

Readers were asked to devise a devilish definition in the manner of Ambrose Bierce in his *Devil's Dictionary* of 1911, which offered comic, witty, cynical, devastating, and satirical definitions. Readers were to choose one from a number of words and phrases offered for their definition. Very many entries were received. These are our adjudications.

Honourable Mentions: Definitions of **1. BRANCH STACKING:** 'The practice of placing additional weight on the lower limbs of a decaying political tree in the hope of accessing the higher sweet-tasting fruits of public office' (**G. Case**, Qld); 'One way of going left when everything is turning right, or vice versa' (**W.H.J. Edwards**, Vic.); 'Branch Stacking—Pollies out on a limb' (**E. Mangan**, Qld); 'How a political party labours to have a liberal supply of local members' (**A. Wilson**, NSW). **2. COALITION OF THE WILLING:** 'A polygamous political marriage of convenience' (**E. Castle**, SA); 'A pear-shaped group of nations with egg on its face' (**J. McGahey**, NSW). **3. ETHICAL INVESTMENT:** 'An oxymoron' (**W.H.J. Edwards**, Vic.). **4. CORE PROMISE:** 'A political pun. Used to portray the idea of something deep, sincere, and unchangeable, when in fact it indicates that the speaker is meaninglessly imitating a crow' (**J. Dean**, Tas.); 'The opposite of a Clayton's type of promise (which is a promise you make when you're not making a promise)' (**W.H.J. Edwards**, Vic.); 'A politician's more enduring lie, unlikely to be carried out after an election, as opposed to a non-core promise, which was never intended to be honoured under any circumstances whatever' (**P. A. Harley**, SA); 'Eve's opening gambit to Adam' (**A. Joass**, NSW); 'A promise you promise not to break, as opposed to other promises you are prepared to compromise' (**M. & G. Manoy**, WA); 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' (**B. Stewart**, Vic.). **5. GLOBAL WARMING:** 'Hell on earth' (**J. McGahey**, NSW). **6. INTELLIGENT DESIGN:** 'a. a faith statement for those unwilling to accept the universe's absolute indifference to their existence; b. a low-cut bra' (**P. Howland**, SA); 'A theory that the Creator actually designed absolutely everything, with the possible exception of the camel and the platypus, both of which, it is still widely held, were assembled by a committee' (**J. McGahey**, NSW); 'A theory proposed by people who believe that a benevolent and intelligent deity actually considered, designed, and created all the stupid and annoying things around us' (**A. Sandison**, Herts, UK); **7. METROSEXUAL:** 'One who

prefers sex on an underground railway' (**P. Drakeford**, Vic.). **8. MULTICULTURALISM:** 'Australian Government policy encouraging all non-Muslim immigrants to maintain their own cultures' (**J. White**, Tas.). **9. NEO-CONSERVATIVE:** 'A contradiction in terms, because conservatives conserve the old and not the new' (**J.-L. Kenning**, Vic.). **10. SALARY SACRIFICING:** 'A method of dodging tax in the hope that one will live to be very old and filthy rich' (**J. McGahey**, NSW). **11. SORRY:** 'A common word in Australian English which is nevertheless unrecorded in the dialect spoken by one tribe in the vicinity of the national capital' (**G. Case**, Qld). **12. WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION:** 'The writing on the wall for the Mass—the theses Martin Luther nailed to a church door in 1517' (**C. Gregoriou**, Vic.); 'Three-Year-Old chucking a whammy' (**H. Passamani**, WA).

2nd Prize (books to the value of \$50 from the OUP catalogue): **J. McGahey**, NSW, for 'podcast: a sonar broadcast designed to warn the rapidly diminishing whale population of a new Japanese offensive'.

1st Prize (books to the value of \$100 from the OUP catalogue): **D.J. Mercer**, SA, for 'Multiculturalism: The manufacture of many varieties in a yoghurt factory'.

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 29

The *Sydney Morning Herald* in its edition of 26 April 1988 announced a 'Prize for the best Swiftie' in these terms:

Tom Swift became immortalised in a tautological construction called a Tom Swiftie in which the verb and/or adverb said much the same thing as the quotation preceding it. An example: "I bought the drinks", Tom shouted'. A more complex form is the double-barrel: "I let them in for nothing", Tom admitted freely' or "I forged the cheque", Tom uttered fraudulently'.

In 1988 we challenged our readers to compose Swifties, and commented: 'The wittiest Tom Swiftie we receive gets our prize'. Competition 29 requires you to compose a Tom Swiftie, but we have decided to make things a tad more challenging by demanding that the Swiftie contain an Australian reference—the name of an Aussie animal or person, for instance, or any other Aussie word. As always, wit wins the prizes.

ENTRIES CLOSE 29 FEBRUARY 2008.

Entries sent by email should also contain a snail mail address. All entries should be sent to the editor.

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