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EDITORIAL

Our usual editor was not available for this edition, and it has been edited by members of the Dictionary Centre.

The Commonwealth Government's draft Australian Curriculum includes a glossary for the English section that indicates how terms such as *auxiliary verb*, *colon*, and *modal verb* are to be taken seriously. This is obviously a good thing. The glossary also indicates how the language of English teaching changes. Just when you thought you had worked out what CVC means (the Card Verification Code on the back of your credit card, although this is now often CVV: Card Verification Value), you now need to know about CVC words—'words containing one consonant, one vowel and one consonant, e.g. cat, pig, dog'. Graphophonic knowledge is 'the knowledge of how letters in printed English relate to the sounds of the language'. I suspect there is an extra word in the definition of the term *alphabetic principle*, and the definition itself could do with a little massaging: 'The understanding that letters are used to in systematic and predictable ways to represent speech sounds and that speech can be written down.' Perhaps the superfluous word will be gone by the time you receive *Ozwords*. The website is <<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au>>.

The lead article in this edition of *Ozwords* looks at the history of *wog* in Australian English. The Mailbag section deals with readers' letters as well as some queries that have come from users of the Oxford dictionaries that are edited at the Centre (via OWLS 'the Oxford World Language Service'). Some of the implications for lexicographers of online digitised newspapers are explored in an article on new resources from the National Library of Australia. In our series on the history of Australian lexicography we look at the *Sydney Slang Dictionary* of 1882.

WOG BRUCE MOORE

On 4 December 1937, an article in the *Canberra Times* gave details about the forthcoming Christmas party of the Northbourne Tennis Club: 'The Christmas party of the club is to take the form of a "wog" night and dance at the Lady Hopetoun Room, Y.W.C.A., on Thursday evening.' In the following two decades in the *Canberra Times* there are other references to 'wog nights' and similar references to 'wog afternoons', 'wog socials', and 'the game of wogs'. Another 1937 article described the Christmas party of the Church of England Men's Society in Braddon Hall, and concluded: "'Wogging" was the principal pastime and those uninitiated into the game have something yet to live for.' The last such reference in Canberra is in 1954: 'The Civic Young Marrieds' Club will hold a wogs social in the Y.W.C.A. lounge tonight' (*Canberra Times*, 3 March 1954). Outside Canberra, *wog nights* were also held in Melbourne. In 1938 the *Argus* reported that 'The Wee Ten Clan will give a "wogs" night at headquarters on Saturday night' (14 July), and 'The Brownie Guiders' Committee for the Guide camp house funds will hold a "wog" night at the Girl Guide headquarters' (11 August).

What were these social groups up to with these so-called *wog games* and *wog nights*, and with this predilection for indiscriminate (not to mention indiscriminating) *wogging*? This was a great puzzle. Did we have evidence for some extremely non-politically-correct activities proliferating especially in the suburbs of Canberra? The mystery was finally solved when we discovered that the *wog game* was elsewhere called the 'beetle game' and that it is a variant of 'hangman': groups of people are seated at separate tables; a dice is rolled and bits of the beetle are constructed from the fall of the dice: a six gives the main body of the beetle, another number the head or a leg or a feeler and so on; the winning table in each round is the one that first constructs the complete beetle. 'WOG!' they cry in triumph.

This beetle *wog* seems to be unrelated to the international racist term *wog* for a foreigner. The racist *wog* was included in the 1986 *Supplement* to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), and the earliest evidence is from 1929, in an example of sailors' slang: F.C. Bowen, *Sea Slang*, 'Wogs, lower class Babu shipping clerks on the Indian coast.' Much of the evidence that was available to the OED editors in the 1980s pointed to the word being used of Arabic people, and so the definition given was:

'A vulgarly offensive name for a foreigner, especially one of Arab extraction.' For the etymology, the OED said in 1986: 'Origin uncertain: often said to be an acronym, but none of the many suggested etymologies is satisfactorily supported by the evidence.' In spite of the OED's warnings about the unlikelihood of an origin in acronyms, various acronyms continue to be put forward as possible origins: *Westernised Oriental Gentleman*, *Wily Oriental Gentleman*, *Working on Government Service*, and the like. For some reason, amateur etymologists love acronyms. In its December 2009 online revision of the word *posh* the OED comments: 'A popular explanation (still frequently repeated) is that the word is from the initial letters of the phrase *port outward, starboard home*, with reference to the more comfortable (because cooler) and more expensive side for accommodation on ships formerly travelling between Britain and India. It is often suggested that the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company stamped tickets for such cabins on this route with the letters *P.O.S.H.*, whence the word. However, no evidence has been found for the existence of such tickets.' Equally wrong are the suggestions that Australian *pom* is from *Prisoner of Mother (England)* and *wowser* from *We Only Want Social Evils Righted*.

The most likely etymology for the international *wog* is *golliwog*. The golliwog was introduced as a character in an 1895 illustrated children's book, *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls and a Golliwogg*, by Florence Kate Upton. Upton wrote more books with this character in it annually until 1909. Upton was born in New York to parents who had emigrated there from Britain, and it was no doubt in New York that she had been exposed to stereotypes of Black Americans in the minstrel shows, the likely models for her 'Golliwogg' books. The books were very popular, and soon after their publication there appeared children's dolls based on the 'Golliwogg'. It is very likely that the abbreviated form 'wog' was thereafter transferred to non-white people.

The most recent OUP dictionaries from the UK label *wog* as 'British, offensive' with the definition 'a person who is not white'. This definition is not satisfactory for Australia, where the word had taken a somewhat different direction. In the 1950s and 1960s in Australia *wog* came to be used to describe migrants of southern European origin, especially those from Italy or Greece. Later, the usage expanded to include migrants of Middle Eastern

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

origin. In general, *wog* would not be used in Australia to describe a person from India or Pakistan, whereas in Britain this would be the primary sense. *Wog* in Australia does not have the degree of taboo that it has in Britain, probably due to theatre and television comedies such as *Wogs out of Work* (1988–90) and *Acropolis Now* (1989–92). It is nevertheless a word that should be used with great caution.

Australian English has developed some compounds based on *wog*. *Wogball* for ‘soccer’ was first recorded in 1974: ‘The benefits to soccer from Australia’s participation in the World Cup finals will not be felt immediately, but a side benefit is already obvious. ... The game, widely regarded as “wog ball” or “sissy” in the past, has suddenly captured the nation’s imagination’ (*Age*, Melbourne, 14 June 1974). *Wogspeak*, for a variety of Australian English that includes pronunciations influenced by Greek and other migrant languages, was first recorded in 1990, used by the actor who played lead roles in *Wogs out of Work* and *Acropolis Now*: ‘[Nick] Giannopoulos says the language, the “wog-speak” of *Acropolis Now*—particularly of Memo, Jim and Effie—was developed from the way the writers themselves grew up, speaking one language at home and another at school’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1990, The Guide). A *wog mansion* or *wog palace* is a kind of McMansion influenced by the use of southern European architectural features such as elaborate columns: ‘Remember the wog mansion? There was a time not long ago when this form of immigrant housing was ridiculed by popular culture for its excess of phallic pillars and pebble-mix driveways. Today, the wog mansion has an Anglo imitator, the outer suburban McMansion’ (*Australian*, March 2005). *Wog telly* is television broadcast by SBS: ‘She watches those films on wog telly with writing at the bottom’ (*Age*, Melbourne, April 1988). A *wog chariot* is the kind of car favoured by some ethnic youths: ‘Con was mohair and drove a wog chariot. The kids at teachers college called it a “Marrickville Mercedes”—a red ET Monaro with a sun roof and mag wheels’ (Kathy Lette, *Girls’ Night Out*, 1987).

But to return to our Australian beetle *wog*. For the Australian ‘beetle’ sense of *wog* the evidence of the *Australian National Dictionary* is sometimes cited on the Internet, with the claim that the first evidence for this sense is from 1909. While it is a wonderful thing to see these references to the *Australian National Dictionary*, most have missed the fact that the 1909 quotation is placed in square brackets: [1909 F.E. Birtles *Lone Land* 111 The little water that remained was filled with a kind of water beetle, locally known as ‘wee woggies’.] The editor placed

this quotation in square brackets because the form of the word is *woggie* rather than *wog*, and this is much earlier than the first ‘real’ quotation he had for *wog* in 1938: ‘As the water moves slowly down the bays countless root-eating “wogs” break for cover and an irregular line of starlings perform efficient mopping-up’ (*Bulletin*, Sydney, 7 September). It is possible that the 1909 *woggie* is an earlier form of *wog*, but we cannot be sure.

Where did this *wog* come from? By the 1950s, the term was used to describe a wide variety of bugs: ‘At a very youthful age I learned the strengths and weaknesses in the armaments of the wogs in my life. Hornets were essentially “in-fighters”; at long-range they were harmless. “Spitfires”, on the other hand, could get in their dirty work from a distance of anything up to 3 ft. ... The “itchy grub” (processional caterpillar) left behind a powerful irritant’ (*Bulletin*, Sydney, 4 October 1950). In the early references, however, there seems to be some emphasis on bugs that appear in water. Further research has discovered an article headed WOGS in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 January 1917, which describes rock pools at North Bondi Beach:

‘WOGS’

The rock pools, filled to the brim with fresh sea water ... form the haunts of starfish. ... Chitons and limpets too, are there, and frisky little amphipods and anemones of rich hues. ... And one has only to rustle the sea-weeds to bring out an army of amphipods—those little cousins of the prawns. How they spring on their slender back legs. The pool becomes alive with them.

Given the emphasis on water creatures, it is perhaps worth considering whether this *wog* may have come from *pollywog* meaning ‘tadpole’. *Pollywog* appeared in the fifteenth century, and was widespread in British dialects, with many spelling variants including *pollywig*, *pollywag*, and *pollywiggle*. It became part of American English, with the main spellings there being *pollywog*, *polliwog*, *pollywoggle*, and *pollywoggy*. The term is perhaps best known from Hilaire Belloc’s poem ‘The Frog’ (quoted from a version printed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in July 1925, with ‘Uncle James’ for what is usually ‘Ugly James’):

Be kind and tender to the Frog,
And do not call him names,
As ‘Slimy skin’ or ‘Polly-wog’,
Or likewise ‘Uncle James’.
Or ‘Gap-a-grin’, or ‘Toad-gone-
wrong’,
Or ‘Billy Bandy Knees’:

The frog is justly sensitive
To epithets like these.

No animal will more repay
A treatment kind and fair,
At least so lonely people say
Who keep a frog (and by the way,
They are extremely rare).

In 1875 the *Queenslander* newspaper published a long poem called ‘Poll Tadpole’ by the American writer Rose Terry Cooke, which begins:

There was a little pollywog
The sprawling baby of a frog.
Hatched in a green and slimy bog
One pleasant day.

In 1926 in the *Sydney Morning Herald* there is a poem by a writer who uses the pseudonym of ‘Alter Ego’, with the *pollywog* appearing in the variant form *polly-woggle*. It begins:

The Polly-woggle waggled in the
grimy, slimy ooze,
Where it wasn’t really deep enough
to swim.

A year later in the same paper the same writer has a poem about a creature that is now called a *wog*:

If a Wog
In a bog
Found a log
On which to float,
He would cry—
‘Here am I!
Look at my
Lovely boat!’

If a Trout
Pulled him out
By the snout.
And took him in;
He would cry—
‘Here am I!
Look at my
Submarine!’

Another passage from a newspaper in 1940, at about the time when *wog* starts to refer to a wide range of insects and crawl creatures, continues the emphasis on things that are found in water:

A bottle of water insects received from R. Morgan [was] collected by sweeping a soup strainer through the water weeds—a very profitable method. There are seven different kinds of wog in it. ... The large green fellows are shrimps, sometimes called river fleas. ... The remaining wogs are larval forms of beetles and dragonflies. (*Argus*, Melbourne, 2 May)

All this provides strong evidence that *pollywog* was abbreviated to *wog*, and that *wog* was originally applied in Australia to various crawly or wriggly water creatures. Thereafter the sense widened to insects and crawly creatures of many kinds: 'Campers and bushwalkers will discover that, other "wogs" that strike without warning are the famous bulldog and the green head ants' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, December 1951).

Some of these insects were creatures that caused disease in garden plants. An article on 'Garden Wogs' in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1941 lists 'red spider', 'tomato mite' and 'red spider' along with 'spotted wilt' and 'bacterial blight'. Associations of this kind (between insects and disease) were the next step in the development of Australian meanings of *wog*: the 'insect

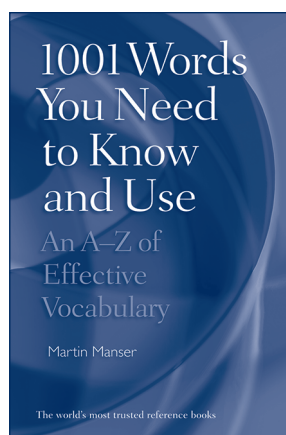
or grub' sense that morphed into what is now the primary Australian sense of *wog* 'a microbe or germ, a "bug", an illness'. This sense emerged in the 1940s. It could refer to an illness such as malaria: (1956) "What actually was wrong with him?" Number One looked at him steadily. "Like I said. A wog." "Yes, I heard that. What sort of wog?" ... "Malaria," he said briefly' (J.F. Macdonnell, *Commander Brady*). More typically, it refers to any of many seasonal ailments ranging from serious cases of flu to relatively minor coughs and colds: (1978) 'A "flu wog" struck, and several families of children were absent with, as their neighbours put it, "terrible hackin' coffs"' (C. Green, *The Sun Is Up*); (2009) 'US officials are desperately seeking a new name for the swine flu because other countries are banning their pork exports.

So why not re-name the Hog Wog the Suidae Calamitous Acute Respiratory flu, or SCARE flu?' (*Australian*, 1 May).

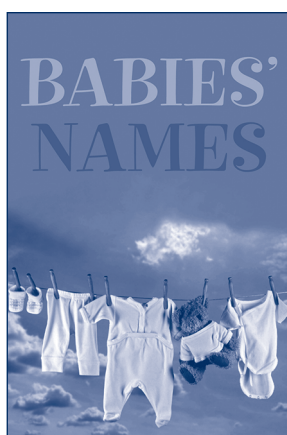
We saw that Canberra was the centre of *wog games* and *wog socials* in the 1930s, and in the 1950s a particular form of illness became known as the *Canberra wog*. Some Canberrans had obviously been blaming the water supply for the appearance and spread of the *wog*—for given the history of the word *wog*, where else would you expect *wogs* to come from? But the Director General of Health insisted that 'the "wog" was not caused by the Cotter water supply' and 'laid a serious charge against some people in Canberra handling food as the cause of the "Canberra Wog"' (*Canberra Times*, October 1954). *Wog* had clearly emerged from the primordial slime.

For Lovers of Language

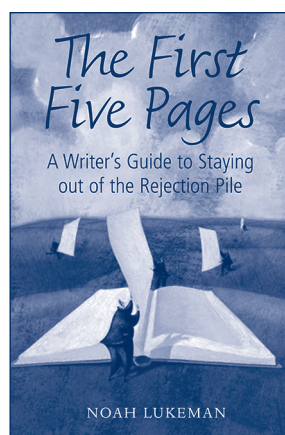
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We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those not easily answerable from the standard reference books.

ADVANCE AUSTRALIA FAIR

A person who had recently taken out her Australian citizenship wrote to OWLS to ask what 'fair' means in the title of the Australian national anthem: 'Advance Australia Fair.' She said that many Australian-born citizens seemed a bit puzzled about it when she asked them.

The poem was composed by the Scots-born Peter Dodds McCormick (1834–1916), and was first performed in 1878. The line is part of the refrain ('In joyful strains then let us sing, / Advance Australia Fair'), and also occurs at the end of each stanza: 'In history's page, let every stage / Advance Australia Fair'; 'With courage let us all combine / To Advance Australia Fair.' I think there are two main issues here. What part of speech is *fair*? What is the mood of the verb *advance* (indicative, imperative, or subjunctive)? When I asked around about the grammatical function of *fair* in these lines, most people instinctively said that it is an adjective, and that the line means 'Advance Australia the fair'. But is *fair* really an adjective here? *Fair* could also be an adverb modifying the verb *advance*, with the senses 'in a fair manner or degree; in a beautiful or comely manner; agreeably, beautifully, brightly, handsomely, nobly' (OED). The OED quotes a John Wesley hymn to illustrate this sense: 'Spread out his boughs and flourish fair'. At the end of each stanza of 'Advance Australia Fair' the verb *advance* is part of an infinitive structure: 'let ... advance', 'to advance'. But the structure is different with the refrain, where there is no infinitive, and where the sense is close to the subjunctive mood in its role of expressing a wish: may Australia advance fairly. This is how I would read it. Does anyone have any strong alternative views?

FOCUSING ON FOCUSED

A person wrote to OWLS wondering why in addition to the past *focused* and present participle *focusing*, dictionaries also give *focussed* and *focussing*. This is our reply.

There are some 'rules' about the doubling of consonants in contexts such as this, although as with all grammatical and spelling 'rules' there are inevitably exceptions. Here I am following the *Oxford Guide to English Usage*. I will stick to the past tenses of verbs. If the preceding vowel is written with a single letter (e.g. *bed* rather than *bead*) and if that vowel carries main stress (*bed* is a monosyllable, and so it carries main stress), the vowel is doubled:

bed: bedded. Thus: beg: begged; step: stepped; stir: stirred; bus: bussed. However, in the following examples, the vowel is written with two letters (a digraph), so there is no doubling: *head: headed; seat: seated.*

With words of more than one syllable, if the immediately preceding vowel carries the main stress, the consonant is doubled in the past tense. The following verbs have their stress on the second syllable: *occur*, *befit*, *deter*, *admit*. In the past tense, these will double the consonant: *occur: occurred; befit: befitted; deter: deterred; admit: admitted.*

With words of more than one syllable, if the immediately preceding vowel does not carry the main stress, the consonant is not doubled in the past tense. The following verbs have their stress on the first syllable and the second syllable is unstressed: *offer*, *benefit* [2nd and 3rd syllables unstressed], *gallop*, *audit*. In the past tense, these will not double the consonant: *offer: offered; benefit: benefited; gallop: galloped; audit: audited.*

In the examples in the previous paragraph, the unstressed syllables are largely insignificant as far as sense is concerned. But there is a group of words that cause a major exception to this rule, because while they are stressed on the first syllable, the second syllable carries some weight as far as meaning is concerned. It is as if they are true compounds. Examples are: *backlog*, *format*, *kidnap*, *sandbag*, *worship*. Past tense: *backlogged, formatted, kidnapped, sandbagged, worshipped*. (This is an area where British and Australian usage varies a bit from the US: in US texts you will sometimes see *kidnaped, worshiped*.)

So back to *focus*. The stress is on the first syllable, and the second syllable is unstressed and without any weight for meaning. According to the rules, the past tense should be *focused* (and the participle *focusing*). If you chase this up on the Web you will find a lot of nonsense about *focused* being the preferred American form, and *focussed* being the preferred British form. In fact, the preferred forms everywhere have always been *focused* and *focusing*.

In spite of all this, many people spell these forms as *focussed* and *focussing*. This has become so widespread and common that dictionaries have been forced to allow the double *s* as a variant spelling. In Australia, the more common spelling is still *focused*.

GAOL OR JAIL

A person wrote to OWLS wondering why in recent years there has been a shift in Australia from the spelling *gaol* to the spelling *jail*.

This word came into English from French after the Norman Conquest. As with a number of English doublets, the word came in twice, once from Norman French and then from Old French (or Central French). The Norman French form was *gaol* and the Old French form was *jail*. Similar doublets are *guarantee* and *warranty*, *guard* and *ward*. For the next few centuries English favoured the *gaol* form, and the pronunciation was with a hard *g* as in *goat*. This pronunciation lasted until the end of the seventeenth century. The form *jail* was around, but not commonly used. However, its pronunciation, with the *j* sound, replaced the hard *g* sound of *gaol* at the beginning of the eighteenth century. *Gaol* remained the standard spelling only because it was so entrenched in the English courts and legal system.

Gaol has always been a very odd looking word in English, and it is clear that this is one of those instances where the *jail* spelling is more 'logical'. Of course, 'logic' has never counted for much in English spelling, but in this case it did, and gradually usage replaced the *gaol* spellings. The big shift occurred in the 1970s and 1980s when most newspapers, for example, shifted to the *jail* spelling. Dictionaries have followed usage, and I think you will find that there is no dictionary anywhere in the world that now has *gaol* as the preferred spelling (except perhaps for some legal dictionaries).

JUST DESERTS

J. Foster of the ACT asked Ozwords about confusion over just deserts and just desserts. She pointed to an item in the Alumni News of the University of Sydney School of Physics & International Science School: 'the culprit ... got his just desserts'. She wondered if confusion is bred in part by the proliferation of punning uses of the phrase in association with actual 'sweets' that are desserts.

Of course the correct phrase is *just deserts*—coming from *deserve*, always in the plural; and usually found in this phrase. Once shops selling sweets started calling themselves Just Desserts there was no end to the punning. The dry *desert* is pronounced differently, and the sweet that is the *dessert* has nothing to do with *deserving*: it is from French *desservir* 'clear the table'. Playing around with these words can get you into real trouble, as with this writer in the *Australian*, 1 December 2009: 'Dubai's boom has been sustained by foreign capital, so if investors desert over desert debt, the bankers will get their just desserts.'

WORD OF THE YEAR

The tradition of choosing a 'word of the year' generates much interest. In 2006 the Australian National Dictionary Centre chose *podcast*, in 2007 it was *me-tooism*, and in 2008 *GFC* (*Global Financial Crisis*). What was it to be for 2009?

The international political landscape was dominated by two issues. First, there were policies associated with *global warming* and *climate change*, especially the development of an *ETS* (*Emissions Trading Scheme*) and the rooting out of *climate-change sceptics*. Secondly, there was the continuing outfall from the *GFC* (*Global Financial Crisis*), especially the government's *stimulus package* that helped prevent Australia from moving into recession. In a more specifically Australian context, *Black Saturday* emerged as the term used to describe the devastating bushfires that occurred in the state of Victoria on 7 February, in which some 170 people were killed. At the end of the year, the term the *Forgotten Australians* (or the *Forgotten Generation*) was used to describe people who underwent institutionalised care as children, especially the 10,000 child migrants who were shipped from Britain to Australia after the Second World War, often being told they were orphans when they were not. The official apology from the Prime Minister echoed the 2008 apology to the *stolen generations* of indigenous people.

The Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, was also at the centre of *Utegate* (or the *utegate scandal*), when a forged email was used to suggest that the Government offered special favours to a car dealer in the Prime Minister's electorate, a car dealer who in the past had provided Rudd with a *ute* (a 'utility truck') for use in his electorate. Mr Rudd was further at the centre of a controversy about Australian English when he used the idiom *fair shake of the sauce bottle* (meaning 'fair go!' or 'give me a break!'). Many Australians knew the idiom as *fair suck of the sauce bottle*, although not realising that in the original idiom the sauce bottle was a bottle of alcoholic liquor. The idiom has moved on, and the Prime Minister's usage reflected the change in the idiom. The Australian version of the television program *MasterChef* was the runaway ratings winner of the year, and the verb *to plate up* was suddenly on everyone's lips: young children no longer ask their parents when the food will be ready, but want to know when they will start *plating up*.

In October 2008, when we were planning a new edition of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (published in October 2009), I can recall wondering if all the *twitter* and *tweet* business would last, or whether other players would come into the marketplace and challenge this web-based networking site. Because of the Internet and the way new words spread so rapidly, many new words find their way into dictionaries much more quickly than they did in the past, and we needed to decide if these were stayers

FROM THE CENTRE

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL
DICTIONARY CENTRE

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or fly-by-nights. We included the new senses of *twitter* and *tweet* in the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*, and I am very glad we did, because in 2009 they were everywhere. We chose *twitter* as our 2009 Word of the Year—and of course you can also throw in *tweet*.

The American Dialect Society also chose *tweet*. Oxford University Press in the United States chose the verb *unfriend* in the sense 'to remove someone as a "friend" on a social networking site such as Facebook'. Merriam Webster in the United States chose the word that was most looked up on online searches, and this turned out to be *admonish*: the House of Representatives announced plans to 'admonish' a Republican after an outburst against President Obama, and this sent many Americans scurrying to the online dictionary to find out what *admonish* meant. The American Dialect Society chose *google* as its word of the decade, and I don't think anyone could grumble about that one.

NEW DICTIONARIES

Mark Gwynn's edition of the *Australian Little Oxford Dictionary* was published at the end of 2009. Mark has just completed the editing work on new editions of two more dictionaries: the *Australian Student's Colour Dictionary*, and the *Australian Oxford Mini Dictionary*.

HEARD ISLAND DIARY

Dr Bernadette Hince produced *The Antarctic Dictionary: a complete guide to Antarctic English*, and is a Visiting Fellow at the Dictionary Centre. She is working on a number of projects, and one has just been completed. Bernadette writes: 'In the Centre's cold corner, I have been editing a Heard Island diary from 1953. From the end of 1947 (when we acquired this external territory) until early 1955 Australia maintained a station on this remote, ice-covered subantarctic island

halfway between Australia and South Africa. During this time small groups of about a dozen men lived there, each party staying for a year. John Béchervaise was the station leader during 1953. He wrote prolifically—almost a thousand words a day—about life in the rain, snow, and grit, and about the men's two unsuccessful attempts to make the first ascent of the island's volcanic peak (9005 ft or 2745 m high). His Heard Island diary is now in the National Library of Australia, which has commissioned this edited version for publication later this year. It's interesting to see Australian expressions like *emu-parading* crop up in the text, as well as words most Australians would not know (such as *slushy* for a kitchen helper, or *nelly* for a large bird, the giant petrel). A South African who recently visited us queried one word unknown to him, but very familiar to anyone who lived on Heard Island then: the *furphy*, which was used on the island to collect water from glacial streams and hut roofs.'

WORD OF THE MONTH

The OUP Word of the Month is delivered to subscribers via email. Each month a new or unusual Australian word is examined. If you would like to subscribe, send an email to wordofthemonth.au@oup.com with 'Subscribe WOTM' in the subject line. A few months ago the Word of the Month was *schmick*, meaning 'stylish, excellent'. On 24 January 1995 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported: 'North Sydney's Greenwood Plaza now has a very schmick-looking Cantonese restaurant doing yum cha seven days a week.' On 31 October 2008 the *Hobart Mercury* reported on some 'very schmick buses'. Even fishing tackle can be *schmick*: 'Peter ... knows how to fish. ... [He] has all the schmick tackle including light line and small hooks' (*Canberra Times*, 10 May 2009). We thought this was a word that emerged in the 1990s, and most people have assumed that it must be Yiddish, and that it belongs to that large set of Yiddish words, beginning with *sch-*, that have found their way into English: *schlep* 'a stupid person', *schlock* 'cheap goods; trash', *schlong* 'penis', *schmuck* 'a foolish person', and so on. But there seems to be no evidence that this is a Yiddish word, or that it is used in Englishes other than Australian English. It was perhaps modelled on the structure of the other well-established Yiddish words. While we thought the word emerged in the 1990s, more recent research shows that it came into Australian English in the 1970s, and that then it was usually spelt *smick*. Our earliest evidence is in a car advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1972: 'Panel vans, super paint, super cond., super smick, mag wheels.' Does anyone have any theories on the origin of this word?

BRUCE MOORE
DIRECTOR



NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA: NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE

BRUCE MOORE



The *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Australian National Dictionary* are dictionaries based on historical principles. One of the distinguishing features of such a dictionary is that it provides quotations from books, newspapers, and so on, to illustrate how a word has been used over time. One important aim of the editor is to provide the evidence of when the word first appeared in print—or, in the case of a diary or other manuscript, when it first appeared in writing.

In the past, this meant reading through these texts, usually at libraries. The Internet and electronic publication have changed all this. Google Books <<http://books.google.com>> enables us to search through a massive number of digitised books, although because of the many unresolved legal problems associated with the digitisation project, the site often provides only small snippets of the text you want to consult. The National Library of Australia is in the process of providing digitised versions of a huge range of out-of-copyright Australian newspapers from 1803 (when the first Australian newspaper was published in Sydney) to the mid-1950s (when copyright applies). By December 2009 some 10 million articles were available, and by 2011 some 40 million articles will be available.

Recently at the Dictionary Centre we were re-examining our evidence for Tasmanian regional words. When the Centre published *Tassie Terms: A Glossary of Tasmanian Words* in 1995, there was an entry for *yaffler*. It was defined as 'a garrulous person' and was illustrated by a quotation from the Hobart *Mercury* newspaper in 1989: 'And as for the dignity of Parliament, may I ask just one question? What dignity? Any dignity or sanctity that might have existed dissipated the day that MPs started calling one another slob, imbeciles, louts, yafflers, whackers, harlots and maggots.' There is no doubt that this word found its way to Tasmania via British dialect, from either a name for the green woodpecker, a bird that 'shins about, yells, laughs, and yikes to his heart's content', or the verb *yaffle*, recorded in a number of northern and midlands English dialects, meaning 'to bark, yelp, yap as a little dog'. Our problem was that if this word came from British dialect, it must have arrived in Tasmania in the nineteenth century, but all our records of it were from the 1980s and later. In spite of our pleas for people to provide earlier evidence, there was none forthcoming. At the end of 2009 we turned to the National Library of Australia's newspaper site (click on 'Australian Newspapers' at <<http://www.nla.gov.au>> and entered 'yaffler' into the search mechanism. It took us to another article in the Hobart *Mercury* newspaper, but this time from 1887. This was a report of the Tasmanian House of Assembly in which a member commented on a recent 'Royal Commission (or Royal Humbug) on Public Works', saying that 'it was not only the report of that commission that he objected to, but at the way it was treated, and also the

manner in which all sorts of "yafflers" came in at the end of it'. Here was the missing evidence, filling a gap of one hundred years.

smallgoods, *pl.* Cooked meats and meat products. *Freq. attrib. as smallgoods shop.*

[N.Z. 1879 W.J. BARRY *Up & Down* 181, I had also tradesmen at work making up 'small goods' which I sold to retail butchers.] 1905 *Truth* (Sydney) 25 Apr. 1/7 The small goods in a Leichhardt ham and beef shop. 1917 *Ibid.* 2 Sept. 4/7 The meat muddle. Smallgoods held up. 1924 F.J. MILLS *Happy Days* 52 Polonious . . . was not, as his name suggests, the owner of a smallgoods-shop. 1948 R. RAVENHART *Canoe in Aust.* 134 There were better assortments of sausages and the like down here, in the delicatessen shops. . . They are 'Small Goods' shops in Australia. 1955 *Bulletin* (Sydney) 7 Dec. 12/1 A kitten . . . was abandoned in a suburban smallgoods shop. 1975 *Ibid.* 25 Aug. 30/3 What are the smallgoods manufacturers putting in their sausages now that mutton, the backbone of their industry, has ceased to be cheap and plentiful?

In preparing a new edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*, one of the tasks has been to try to provide earlier evidence for the entries that are already in the dictionary. The inset shows the first part of the entry for the Australian word *smallgoods* meaning 'cooked meats and meat products'. The first quotation from 1879 is in square brackets because it is from New Zealand. Since we share many words with New Zealand, when we have such evidence it is included, although we get a bit stropky about the fact that the New Zealanders have the earlier evidence (as, to our great chagrin, they still have the earlier evidence for *pavlova*). The earliest evidence for *smallgoods* from Australia is dated 1905. However, when we checked the National Library newspaper archive, there was plenty of earlier evidence from the nineteenth century, starting in the 1850s:

[Advertisement] To Pork Butchers and Poulterers.—Wanted by a Young Man, a situation in the above. Has had many years practice in making small goods, and is a first rate poulterer. *Argus* (Melbourne) 18 August 1854

Tickle . . . is a hawker of small goods in the pork butchering line. *Argus* (Melbourne) 19 February 1858

In the new edition we will be able to fill out the previous entry with evidence from the 1850s to the 1890s.

In the following examples the date in round brackets refers to the earliest date in the present edition, and the date following refers to the new evidence provided by the newspaper archive:

Saint Andrew's Cross spider (1936): 1909

sandakwooder (1932): 1881

screaming woman bird (1958): 1936

scrub block (1927): 1896

sea garfish (1906): 1880

serrated tussock (1958): 1949

shearing team (1926): 1907

shoddy dropper 'hawker of cheap clothing' (1950): 1920

skeleton weed (1935): 1927

sly groggery 'place that sells illegal grog' (1907): 1854

sly grogging (1952): 1899

snig track 'track along which timber is hauled' (1979): 1928

spinifex country (1875): 1862

spatteress (1878): 1867

stobie pole '(in South Australia) a telegraph pole' (1970): 1927

swag strap (1902): 1859

sweating pen 'pen for drying sheep before shearing' (1882): 1846

This newspaper archive resource has also been invaluable in preparing new entries for the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*. The word *snarler* is an Australian and New Zealand word for 'sausage' (although certainly not as common in Australia as *snag*). The word may allude jokingly to the popular myth that animals such as dogs end up in sausage meat, although it is just possibly a similar jocular allusion to the American *hot dog*. Our earliest Australian evidence was 1982 (much later than the New Zealand 1941 evidence), but the newspaper archive took us back to 1940: 'Scavenger Hunt. . . First One Back Will Receive £2/2/- . . . Snarlars, Hot Dogs and Dance to Follow' (*Canberra Times*, 9 April 1940).

We had some very late evidence from the 1980s and 1990s that the term *snipe shooting* had been used in the nineteenth century as a euphemism for 'killing Aborigines', but had been reluctant to include it in the new edition because of the lateness of the evidence. The newspaper archive provided the following extraordinary passage in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1874 (2 February):

Private persons go out to kill blacks, and call it 'snipe shooting'. Awkward words are always avoided, you will notice. 'Shooting a snipe' sounds better than 'murdering a man'. But the blacks are never called men and women and children. 'Myalls', and 'niggers', and 'gins', and 'piccaninnies' seem further removed from humanity. The convenient phrase (used by every sub-inspector in his report after attacking a camp), 'We dispersed them in the usual manner', means, in plain English, 'We shot and tomahawked so many men and so many women, killed all the little children, and left the lot to be eaten by the native dogs'.

The National Library's newspaper archive is a wonderful resource for dictionary makers, and for anyone interested in Australian history.

After James Hardy Vaux's *New and Comprehensive Vocabulary of the Flash Language*, written in 1812 and published in 1819, there was a large gap of time before another dictionary was produced in Australia. The second Australian dictionary is usually called the *Sydney Slang Dictionary*, and was probably published in 1882. Only two copies of this dictionary have survived, and both are in the Mitchell Library in Sydney. One copy has a cover page with the title 'The Detectives' Handbook, The Sydney Slang Dictionary, etc.' as given in the reproduction of this title page. When the text of the dictionary proper begins, however, each page is headed 'The Australian Slang Dictionary'. The second copy lacks the title page. There is no author listed. There is no date on the pamphlet, and the accepted date of publication, 1882, is in fact the date of accession of the item at the Mitchell Library.

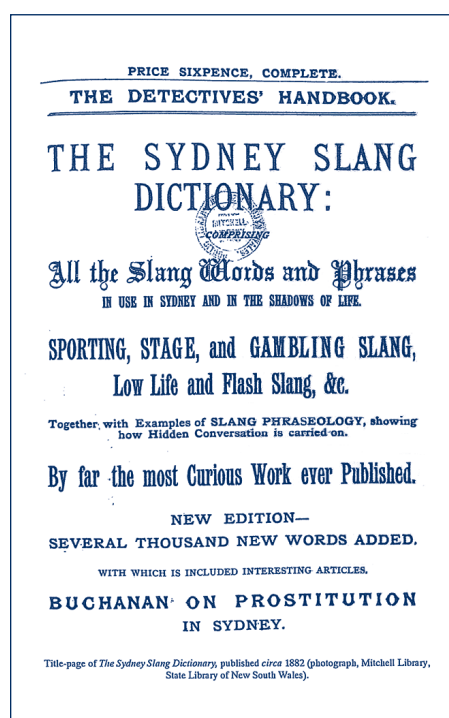
One of the advertisements in the pamphlet suggests that this is the second edition of the dictionary. It reads:

The New Edition.
The Australian Slang Dictionary.

This book having been entirely sold out in the space of three or four weeks, a NEW EDITION, with three thousand words added, together with the latest changes in the elegant colloquial peculiar to denizens of the dark retreats of Sydney. Price 6d.

The 3000 words must refer to the word count of the pamphlet, since it certainly does not apply to the number of slang terms in the dictionary. No copy of the first edition has survived—assuming, of course, that this is not merely an advertising ploy.

Whether we call it the *Sydney Slang Dictionary* or the *Australian Slang Dictionary*, we need to be clear from the start that this is not a dictionary of the size and scope of Vaux's. It is really just a small pamphlet, with the dictionary proper taking up only eleven pages. There are 558 entries. The rest of the pamphlet is padded out with some 'Specimens of Slang Talk' and 'Back Slang', advertisements, and two articles on prostitution. While this text is often given a prominent place in the history of Australian dictionaries, its titles promise



much more than they deliver, and the titles bestow on it a significance that it does not really possess.

Dr Judith Robertson, in her 2005 thesis 'Australian Lexicography 1880–1910: An Evaluation' (researched at the Dictionary Centre), analysed this dictionary and concluded that most of it was plagiarised. Of course, there is nothing unusual in dictionaries pinching material from other dictionaries. This was a standard procedure in the nineteenth century, especially for collections of slang. Indeed, it is the non-plagiarised status of Vaux's dictionary that makes it such an important lexicographic and social document. Dr Robertson established that 469 of the 558 entries were taken holus-bolus from the 1874 edition of J.C. Hotten's *Slang Dictionary*, published in London. Other terms were taken from an American source—from George Matsell's *The Secret Language of Crime* (1859) or Matsell's *Slang Dictionary of New York* (1880).

This all casts a great cloud over the claim that we have either a 'Sydney' or an 'Australian' slang dictionary. Much of the material is simply the slang of the London or American underworld, which may or may not have been used in Australia. Only about 50 of the 558 entries turn out to be Australian, and half of these were taken from the plagiarised texts. From Hotten's book,

the unknown compiler took *gully rakers* 'cattle thieves', *shicer* 'a hole that yields no gold', and *shout* 'to pay for a round of drinks'. There are about 25 Australian words for which Robertson could find no source, and it is possible that these are the compiler's own original contribution to the pamphlet. Most of them are obscure, and probably the only two that a modern audience would recognise are *putting on jam* 'assuming a false air of importance' and *yacker* 'to talk'.

Marcus Clarke, the author of *For The Term of His Natural Life*, wrote a number of newspaper articles on underworld language in the late 1860s, and after pointing out that most of it is international criminal slang, adds a few comments on Australianisms:

Perhaps there are only some half-dozen words in the whole of this Melbourne thieves-lexicon to which we can assign a local origin. *To lamb-down*—that is, to make drunk and incapable—of course originated with some shepherd; and the derivation of *Sydney-sider* and *Derwenter*, &c., is obvious. *Cornstalk* and *gumsucker* are both of colonial growth, and so, I think, is *shout*, *bullocky* (a teamster), *quamby* ... and *sheoak* (as applied to beer).... *Nugget* is an old English country word, meaning a 'lump of dirt'. Some other terms are noticeable—'the *Government stroke*', 'humming a *swag*', 'on the *wallaby*', 'knocking down a *cheque*', and, alas! for fashion, 'doing the *block*'.

The compiler of the *Sydney Slang Dictionary* has *on the wallaby* (filched from Hotten), but none of Clarke's other terms. He has *swag* from Hotten, and defines it as 'stolen property', not even giving to it Vaux's stress on the *bundle* that was used to wrap the booty, as it began its journey to becoming the Australian *swag*.

This dictionary is therefore of very little value in the history of Australian lexicography. It appears to be an attempt to cash in on a popular and salacious interest in criminal slang. There is little that is distinctively Australian. This is a fact that should be clearly on the public and scholarly record.

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 33: RESULTS

For this competition you were asked to imagine how the processes of folk etymology might change the form and meaning of some Australian idioms. For example, will *stone the crows* become *stone the cats* because the Geelong Cats AFL team wins the premiership ten years in a row? (Some entries were not strictly Australian, but we were flexible.)

Honourable Mentions (alphabetical by surname of entrant): *brass razoo* becomes *paper razoo*: after a dramatic increase in the price of copper and zinc on the metals market (**R. Byard**, Vic.); *he doesn't know whether he's Arthur or Martha* becomes *he/she doesn't know whether he/she is 'Shift' or 'Control'*: no sexist language in 2060, and computer language is our new lingua franca (**L. Calitz**, Tas.); *penny wise, pound foolish* becomes *Penny wise, Brown foolish*: with the memory of non-decimal currency fading, the idiom retains its paradoxical twist, but now addresses confusingly similar, but not equally marketable, climate change policies (**G. Case**, Qld); *take the mickey out of ...* becomes *take the McGuire out of ...*: the referent for mickey having been long forgotten, the phrase becomes a plea for a greater variety of program hosts on commercial television (**G. Case**, Qld); *flat out like a lizard drinking* becomes *flat out like a lizard drowning*: due to rising sea levels as a result of climate change (**J. Dewar**, NSW); *flash as a rat with a gold tooth* becomes *flash as a rat with dental implants*: due to advances in aesthetic and implant dentistry (**J. Dewar**, NSW); *stone the crows and starve the kangaroos* becomes *relocate the ravens and enrol the marsupials in a weight-management course*: politically correct and environmentally sound (**L. Evans**, WA); *shoot through like a Bondi tram* becomes *crawl through like a Sydney train* (**P. Higgins**, NSW); *I'm not stupid mate, I didn't come down in the last shower* becomes *I'm not stupid mate, I came down in the last shower*: as a result of the increasing dryness of the climate (**M. Lean**, Qld); *don't come the raw prawn with me* becomes *don't come the raw prawn with mee*: the bewilderingly opaque obsolete colloquial meaning of 'prawn' (fool) was easily reinterpreted by Australia's Asian food lovers for whom it would be an affront to serve uncooked prawns with mee [i.e. 'noodles' **Ed.**] (**M. Pikler**, ACT); *send her down, Hughie* becomes *send her southwards, Hughie*: climate change leading to rain-intensive Queensland sending its water south to the country's southern areas (**S. Robson**, Qld); *starve the lizards!* becomes *starve the cane toads!*: after the disappearance of the lizards as a result of pesticides etc. (**D. Tribe**, NSW);

2nd Prize (books to the value of \$50 from the OUP catalogue): **P. Higgins**, NSW, for this entry: *beyond the black stump* becomes

beyond the tele tower: referring to the insidious spread of telecommunication towers into areas where no-one has gone before.

1st Prize (books to the value of \$100 from the OUP catalogue): **R. Byard**, Vic., for this entry: *back o' Bourke* becomes *back o' Walgett*: after Bourke disappears due to drought and other effects of climate change.

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 34

In the lead article the issue of false etymology from false acronyms was addressed with the examples *wog*, *posh*, *pom*, and *wouser*. Of course acronyms are an important way of creating new words, and this was especially true in the twentieth century: *Anzac* from 'Australian and New Zealand Army Corps'; *Aids* from 'acquired immune deficiency syndrome'; *laser* from 'light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation'; *nimby* from 'not in my back yard'; *scuba* from 'self-contained underwater breathing apparatus'. False acronyms, such as *pom* from 'Prisoner of Mother (England)' persist, including such absurdities as *golf* from 'gentlemen only, ladies forbidden', and *Adidas* from 'All day I dream about sport'.

There are many Australian words for which we have been unable to find an origin. They include:

berley 'bait spread in the water to attract fish'

bogan 'a rough and uncultured person'

donga 'a temporary, usually transportable, dwelling'

franger 'a condom'

grom 'a young surfer'

joey 'a young kangaroo'

There are Australian other words whose origin is known, but which are ripe for the folk etymologists to get to work on them and to claim that they are really acronyms. For example:

bung *plonk*

crook *rort*

dag *sheila*

hoon *shonky*

nong *swag*

It is your task to choose one (or more) of these Australian words, and come up with an acronym that might explain its origin. The best entries will be witty as well as wise.

ENTRIES CLOSE 31 JULY 2010

All entries should be sent to one of the addresses at the top of the next column.

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