

This is a slightly different *Ozwords* from the numbers edited by Fred Ludowyk since 1996. At about the time that the last *Ozwords* was being printed Fred went into hospital in Canberra for a fairly routine, though serious, bowel operation. The operation went well, but three days later he developed a condition called Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS). This life-threatening condition resulted in a stint of almost eight weeks in intensive care, and another four weeks in a general ward.

As a result, some of your letters and emails may have been unanswered, although members of the Centre have tried to attend to them. Fred has not been up to working on this number of *Ozwords*, but he will be back for the next one. The Aussie Words section is taken from some material he had been preparing for future numbers of *Ozwords*. For this number we have expanded the Mailbag section to two pages.

Among the words, one interesting feature in the past few months has been the terms used to describe the influx of refugees. Officially they are **asylum seekers** or **refugees**, and in the recent past they were **boat people**, but now they are **queue jumpers**, **illegal immigrants**, **economic migrants**, **illegals**, and **aliens**. The new electronic version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines **asylum seeker** as 'a person seeking refuge, esp. political asylum, in a nation other than his or her own'. The term was first recorded in 1959, but it was not widely used until the late 1990s.

Bruce Moore

WHO IS SHEILA?

DYMPHNA LONERGAN

In 1828 the Sydney newspaper the *Monitor* reported a street fight that had occurred in Sydney on Saint Patrick's Day. The report included the comment that following the fight 'many a piteous Shela [*sic*] stood wiping the gory locks of her Paddy' (22 March). This is the earliest written evidence of the use of the Australian word *sheila*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines *sheila* as 'a young girl or young woman; a girlfriend. Playfully affectionate and predominantly in male use'. The OED also includes the Irish origin of the word: 'It may represent a generic use of the (originally Irish) personal name *Sheila*, the counterpart of PADDY. ... In any case, it became assimilated to this at some later stage'. We can detect some uncertainty in the OED commentary on the word *sheila*; a sense that some information does not fit, that something is missing. More recently, the author of *The Dinkum Dictionary* (2001), Susan Butler, is confident that:

'Sheila' was a common female name in Ireland, used alongside the name 'Paddy' to represent the archetypal Irish couple. From this early usage (dating from the 1820s in Britain) 'Sheila' came to mean any female, whether Irish or not. This British use of 'sheila' was then transported to the colonies.

I suggest that the reason we have such divergent views on the origin of the Australian English word *sheila* is because of an etymological error made from the beginning. It is surprising that no one, apparently, has questioned these written assertions that the name *Sheila* is common in Ireland. It is not. Nor has the name *Sheila* ever been used in the generic sense of a counterpart to *Paddy* in Ireland. Neither was the name *Sheila* common in eighteenth century Australia. Between 1788 and 1828 over two thousand female convicts were transported to Australia from Irish ports (see <http://carmen.murdoch.edu.au/community/dps//convicts/index.html>). The most common name among them was *Mary*, followed by *Ann/e*, *Catherine*, *Margaret*, *Elizabeth*, *Brigid*, and *Sara*.

These, of course, are official first names. Many of these women would have used Irish names or diminutives of the English names, such as *Máire*, *Áine*, *Cáit*, *Kitty*, *Kathleen*, *Peg*, *Maggie*, *Éilis*, *Brid*, *Bridie*, and *Biddy*. There were no *Sheilas* on board these convict ships. The Irish language name *Síle* is usually translated into English as *Julia*. There were no *Julias* on board these convict ships.

That the word *sheila* is used as a term for a 'girl' or 'girlfriend' in Australian English is indisputable. That the generic nature of the name derives from the Irish female first name is however, disputable. If a generic name, a counterpart to *Paddy*, had existed at that time it would most likely have been the name *Biddy*, a shortened form of *Brigid*. This is a name that was used in America in the nineteenth century as a term for an Irish servant (see entry for *biddy* in the OED). Given this, the question arises as to why the name *Sheila* became associated with that of an Irishwoman in Australia, and later as a generic term for Australian women? Why did Australian *sheila* not also surface in Britain or America, places that experienced a greater number of Irish migrants at any time than Australia? These factors cast doubt on the popular belief that Australian *sheila* derived from the Irish female name *Sheila*. The Irish language, not Irish English, provides a more satisfactory explanation for the origin of the Australian word *sheila*.

In Ireland, the Irish language word *Síle*, which is always written with a capital 'S', is used generically in the world of nature and mythology. The most famous is the *Síle na gCioch* (often anglicised as *Sheela na Gigs*), the name given to grotesque female figures of uncertain origin and purpose that adorn the walls of churches in Ireland, and to a lesser extent those found in England and France. In the world of nature there is the *Síle na bPice* 'earwig', literally 'Síle of the Forks'; *Síle na bPortach* 'heron', literally 'Síle of the Bog'; and in the phrase *Síle chaoch a dhéanamh de dhuine*, literally 'to make a Síle of someone', figuratively 'to make a fool of someone'. Finally, the name *Síle* is applied to

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Ireland herself, in the term *Síle na Geira* (the word *Geira* in this case may be a corruption of *gadhar* 'dog'). The histories surrounding these words and phrases have been lost with the loss of the Irish language. As applied to humans, however, *Síle* is usually a derogatory term, especially when referring to male behaviour. The following are some Irish dictionary definitions:

Síle: 'An effeminate man'. 'A man too fond of female society, a mollycoddle'. 'He's around the house like an old sheelah'. Diarmaid Ó Muirthe, *A Dictionary of Anglo-Irish*, Dublin, 1994.

Sheela: Used in the South as a reproachful name for a boy or man inclined to do work or interest himself in affairs properly belonging to women. See 'Molly'. P.W. Joyce, *English as we Speak it in Ireland*, Dublin, 1988.

Síle: Homaighnéasach.

This last dictionary definition translates as 'homosexual'. It occurs in *Foclóir na Collaíochta*, a recent Irish language dictionary of sexual terminology. The majority of the words in this dictionary do not occur in standard Irish language dictionaries. As the *OED* suggests, the Australian word *sheila* is also 'predominantly in male use'. Furthermore G.A. Wilkes, in his *Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (Melbourne, 1996, p. 337), states that 'no woman would refer to herself as a "sheila"'. I suggest that this male connection is where Australian *sheila* is evocative of the Irish language word *Síle*. Both words are also pronounced the same.

The use of the Australian term *sheila* by males towards males is not generally mentioned in dictionaries which focus on standard Australian English. Significantly, however, *The Penguin Book of Australian Slang* (Melbourne, 1996) records a secondary meaning for *sheila* as 'a man who is weak, effeminate, lacking in bravado' (p. 363). Here, I suggest, is a connection with the definitions discussed earlier of the Irish word *Síle*. It is significant that in Australia the official recognition that

sheila may be used by males of males arises in a dictionary of slang words. It is likely that Australian *sheila* was originally a taboo word for a homosexual. In Ireland, the only dictionary to admit to the meaning of 'homosexual' for the word *Síle*, is the recent dictionary of sexual terminology, a work that is written entirely in the Irish language. Such words are apparently 'taboo' in Ireland today. They are reserved for those who use the Irish language. In this they are out of reach of the majority of the population.

In his book *Inishkillane* (London, 1974), a social study of family and community in the West of Ireland, Hugh Brody outlines the divide in the roles of a typical rural Irish husband and his wife in the 1970s. The daily ritual consisted of the wife rising first and preparing breakfast for her husband and the children. The husband then went to work in the fields. The couple never ate together, and in the evenings it was customary for the husband to visit neighbours or have neighbours visit him while his wife continued with the household and family work. Finally the husband went to bed before his wife. Male and female lived separate lives, in effect, due to 'a highly developed division of sexual roles' (p. 112). We can presume that any noticeable crossing of this divide would have been commented upon, and in the case of a male, through the use of Irish language terminology such as *cistineoir*, *piteog*, and *Síle*. Diarmaid Ó Muirthe in *A Dictionary of Anglo-Irish*, provides for the word *cistineoir* the definition: A cotquean. 'A man who spends a lot of time about the house taking an interest in women's work'. For the word *piteog* he provides the definition:

An effeminate man. 'A man who pries into things, in the household or elsewhere, that are supposedly or understood to belong entirely to the sphere of women'.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Irish convicts who were transported to Australia would have experienced not only a change in landscape and climate but also a way of life that was new and no doubt alienating. Especially in those early days when there was a shortage of females,

and with the nature of a convict's life in the Penal Colony, work such as washing clothes, cooking, and cleaning would have fallen to the male. It may be that those who were seen to be doing this work well, or who may have taken undue interest in it would have been ridiculed for demonstrating effeminacy. It may have been in this climate that the term *Síle* was applied to males by males. However, given the double use of the word *Síle* in Ireland, to denote not just effeminacy but also homosexuality, we must conclude that the surfacing of this Irish word in Australia may have been prompted by stress following undue exposure to this way of life:

'A speaker's ability to cope with the difficulties of language varies according to his state of mind, and it is well known that any kind of emotional stress, favourable or unfavourable tends to promote a reversion to the primary language. Alan Bliss, *Spoken English in Ireland 1600-1749*, Dublin, 1969, p. 255.

Many Irish-speaking convicts under the system of transportation to Australia were men from rural areas, brought up with social norms some of which were peculiar to their own small part of the world. Even before arrival in Australia, conditions on board the convict ships necessitated participation in what may have been considered women's work: cooking, cleaning, the washing of clothes, and so on. However, convicts were also entering a world in which, according to Robert Hughes, 'homosexual activity was as utterly pervasive in the world of hulks and penal settlement as it is in modern penitentiaries' (*The Fatal Shore*, London, 1987, p. 265). Hughes explains further that homosexuality was also the 'norm' in Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney; young boys especially were preyed upon by old lags. It is likely that few of these boys would have had any homosexual experience before they got to Australia. This would have been doubly traumatic for a young rural, Irish Catholic boy, who lived in a society where such behaviour was not only condemned by the Church, but also denied emphatically by society. In 1832 the Molesworth Committee received testimony from the Catholic Bishop of Sydney of the extent of homosexual

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activity in the Colony, and its effects on the young. The bishop quoted one particular youth as saying: 'Such things no one knows in Ireland' (p. 268). In addition, an 1847 report on Norfolk Island noted: 'In general, it was the English who turned to sodomy; the Irish Catholic prisoners abjured it' (p. 538).

Whether for the purpose of condemning the activity or merely talking about it, the Irish-speaking convicts had a word for a person who took part in homosexual activity; he was a *Sile*. This was a word that was known and understood among the Irish convicts and could be passed on to others, but yet was a secret word and so safe to use even in the hearing of authorities. The circumstances that were favourable to the utterance of and continued use of the Irish language

word *Sile* in Australia were the reversal of male/female domestic roles, homosexual activity of a violent nature, and strong religious beliefs.

The probability that Irish *Sile* meaning 'homosexual' is the origin for Australian *sheila* is further enhanced when we consider that the word *sheila* as a generic name for an (Irish) female did not surface in Britain nor in America, countries which experienced far greater numbers of Irish settlers than did Australia. The Australian word *sheila* is geographical. It reflects the nature of Australian society at that time. Finally, the Australian word *sheila* is a word used almost exclusively by males, is always slightly derogatory when used of females, and, according to *The Penguin Book of Australian Slang*, can also mean 'a man who is weak, effeminate, lacking in

bravado'. In the underworld where slang lives, this connotation for Australian *sheila* more clearly reflects an origin in Irish *Sile* 'effeminate male', 'homosexual', than the traditionally held origin of the Irish Christian name *Sheila*. The Irish language may also provide clues as to how the Australian term *sheila* is primarily applied to females. Most importantly, we must look to the Irish language directly as a possible source for Australian English words of unknown or uncertain origin. For too long the lure of Irish English has masked this other, more potent, source.

[Dymphna Lonergan is researching a PhD thesis in the English Department at Flinders University on the Irish language in Australia.]

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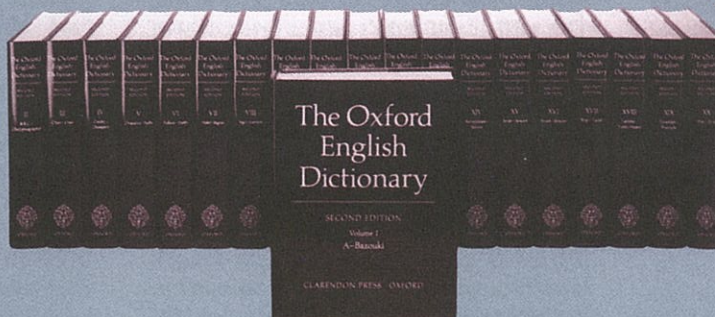
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We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those not easily answerable from the standard reference books.

HOW MANY LAMS?

Growing up in the thirties, my mischievous friends and I were terrified of being **lambasted** by an old Irish woman, Granny Bourke. 'I'll lambaste you kids when I catch you!' she would threaten. My mother **basted** the Sunday roast lamb by scooping hot dripping over it. Is this practice the origin of lambasting, or were we kids seen as being 'on the **lam**', i.e. escaping lawbreakers, who should be basted with tar, prior to feathering?

J. Whittaker, Vic.

All of these words are related, although in ways that are not entirely clear. **Baste** meaning 'to pour fat or juices over meat during cooking in order to keep it moist' first appears in the fifteenth century, but its origin is unknown. In the mid-sixteenth century another verb **baste** in the sense 'to beat someone soundly; thrash' appears. Is this the same word? It seems likely that it is the same as the earlier **baste**, now being used in a figurative sense. The verb **lam** meaning 'to hit someone hard' appears in the sixteenth century, and is possibly of Scandinavian origin, related to the Danish and Norwegian word **lamme** 'paralyse'. **Lam** and **baste** come together in the seventeenth century in the form **lambaste** and the sense is 'to beat, thrash'. By the twentieth century the verb **lambaste** had lost most of its physical connotations, and had come to mean 'to criticise someone or something harshly', as in 'they lambasted the report as a gross distortion of the truth'. It's interesting that your Granny Bourke was still using it in its original physical sense in the 1930s. The phrase **on the lam** meaning 'in flight, especially from the police', arose in the United States towards the end of the nineteenth century. Its origin is uncertain, but it could be a punning development of **lam** in the sense 'to beat' i.e. 'to beat it'.

FRITZ

In the April 2001 *Ozwords*, Bruce Moore mentioned that the word **fritz** was a South Australian coinage. I have seen elsewhere too, the claim that **fritz** is purely South Australian, and is unknown in the other states. However, I have very distinct memories—recently confirmed by my mother—of being given an end of fritz by the butcher when I was a small child growing up in Sydney in the 1950s. My mother (born 1912) claims that fritz was

known to her as a child (in Sydney) as well, and says that the term became less popular with many people during and after the Second World War—replaced, we think, by 'devon'. I wonder if other Sydneysiders remember the term?

A. Day (email)

GOOSE CLUBS

*[In an earlier number we asked for information on the term **goose club**. Among the many responses was the following from N. Beaumont of Queensland. The letter mentions another interesting term, **vegie tray**. **Veg(g)ie tray** is common in the United States, but there it means a dish of vegetables. On 24 August 1999 the Federal Joint Committee on Electoral Matters was discussing the disclosure threshold for political donations, and a senator explained that a reasonable threshold had to be set to avoid 'the administrative burden of having to declare every ticket in a chook raffle or veggie tray raffle'. Another Australianism?]*

I was first involved in a goose club raffle in 1982 when I was a member of the Gold Coast Aero Club in south-east Queensland. The Club was ailing financially and one of the social committee members suggested we introduce a goose club raffle to raise funds, mainly by getting people to attend the Club for the draw when they would spend their money on food and drink. The raffle itself didn't raise a great deal of money. We simply called it 'the goose raffle' and this is how it operated.

The draw was every Friday evening at 6.30 p.m. and there were 15 prizes comprising meat trays, veggie trays, half ham, turkey, two chooks, whole fish, plus a \$10 cash prize which jackpotted each week if the winner wasn't there to claim it. People would buy a 'ticket' for \$2. However, it was not in the form of a ticket; instead, they would write their name on a sheet of paper beside letters of the alphabet, for example AA, AB, AC, and so on. I'm not sure how many we sold, but say we went up to DZ, this would represent 104 tickets. During the day of the draw, someone who had a bit of spare time would go around to the various business operations, firefighters, etc., at the airport selling 'tickets'. The majority of people who bought tickets would then come to

the Club for the draw. Tickets could also be purchased at the Club during the week and on the evening of the draw.

Wooden balls in a small barrel were used for the draw. Each ball had one of the sets of letters, as represented on the ticket sheets, painted on it. The 15 prizes were drawn in succession and different members of the audience were asked to draw a ball out each time. When the ball was drawn out the raffle organiser would call out the letters and another member of the social committee would look up the sheets with the names on and would then call out the name of the winner. After each draw, the winning ball was returned to the barrel, so contestants could win more than one prize—and this quite often happened.

The last draw of the evening was 'the goose hat', which was a baseball-style cap with a stuffed, fabric goose sewn on top of it. This prize was rigged. It was usually cooked up by the social committee and the drawer was briefed in advance what letters to call out. It was usually given to someone who had done something silly during the week or was getting married, etc. The person had to wear this hat for the rest of the evening; otherwise, they had to shout the bar.

END OR EDGE

I've always used the idiom **the thin end of the wedge**, but my ear tells me that this now commonly appears in the barbarous form **the thin edge of the wedge**.

K. Evans, SA

*The correct form is certainly **the thin end of the wedge**, and it means 'an action or procedure of little importance in itself, but likely to lead to more serious developments'. The expression first appears in 1858. It also appears in the form **the little end of the wedge** (1858) and **the small end of the wedge** (1868). I agree with you that **the thin edge of the wedge** is becoming very common. An Internet search produced 8140 instances of **the thin end of the wedge**, but there were 5090 instances of **the thin edge of the wedge**. Perhaps people don't come across many wedges these days. 'Thin edge' makes sense in a way, and there is the attractiveness of the rhyme.*



ROARING HORN

A possible example of folk etymology? When I was a youth in Sydney in the 1950s, we called an erection a 'horn', or for emphasis, a 'roaring horn'. For short, a 'roarer'. Thus, if we (say) missed a putt, we would complain 'not within a bull's roarer of it'. This has apparently passed into wider use as 'not within a bull's roar of it', which is the version now seen in dictionaries of Australian slang. Our use of 'horn', of course, was not original or local or even particularly Australian, but I have not seen 'roaring horn' or 'roarer' in print with this meaning. (Partridge has 'roaring Jack' with the same meaning, and 'roarer' with unrelated meanings.)

N. Speirs, Vic.

It is now clear that within a bull's roar is Australian. G.A. Wilkes in A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms defines it as 'a measure of distance', but it now usually occurs in negative constructions, and typically refers to a great distance. Typical examples from our recent reading are: 'The Lions, made up of players from four countries, were not as strong as a full-strength England side because of a dozen injuries to the touring party, while the Australians did not come within a bull's roar of first class'; 'I have in some way unwittingly invited this unwelcome behaviour from you. If so, you rest assured that I have no interest in being within a bull's roar of you ever again'. The most recent edition of Partridge's Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional Usage gives roaring horn as 'erection' and labels it Australian, so that part of your folk etymology has support. Interestingly, there is a similar Australian phrase within a bee's dick. This phrase means the 'shortest possible distance'. Typical examples from our recent reading are: 'Best moment on a bike: Beating Jared Rando at Thredbo last year by a bee's dick'; 'The neurosurgeon said "you've come within a bee's dick of dying"'. The existence of this similar phrase makes the folk etymology for bull's roar tempting, although we would need more evidence for the intermediary form bull's roarer.

KNOWUN

I have been waiting for comment on the new trend by the 'me' generation to insert 'u' into words ending in -OWN. Thus we are now SHOWUN things on TV. Heard thus far have been SHOWUN, GROWUN, KNOWUN, but I may have forgotten some. Does *Ozwords* think this trend will expand into similar-sounding words such

as JOAN (JOWUN) and GROAN (GROWUN)?

B. Sadler, Qld

I agree that this is becoming very common in Australia. The Oxford Companion to the English Language has the following note about typical features of New Zealand English: 'A tendency to pronounce grown, mown, thrown as disyllabic with a schwa: "growen", "mowen", "throwen"'. Are we being influenced by New Zealand pronunciation?

TRENCH PORRIDGE

After reading Bruce Moore's article 'The Anzacs and their Words' in your April 2000 issue, I was interested to come across a recipe using Anzac wafers and 'shellhole water if procurable', in an old edition of the *Barossa Cookery Book*. It is titled 'A soldier's recipe from France—how to make "trench porridge"'. It reads: 'Take 1/2 lb. Anzac wafers, commonly known as whole meal biscuits or jaw breakers, powder up, and soak over night in about 1 pint of water—shellhole water if procurable. Care must be taken in the soaking stage, or the biscuits may get too soft (I don't think!). Next day boil for about 20 minutes, then add a quarter lb. raisins, and boil for another 10 minutes. Then add milk and sugar to taste. If prepared in this way a most nourishing and tasty dish will be the result. Sent by PTE. VICTOR OFFE, Machine Gun Co.' The first edition of the *Barossa Cookery Book* was published in 1917 and 'quickly sold out', so I imagine this second undated edition was produced a year or so later.

L. Grosse, ACT

REGIONALISMS

I have recently moved further 'outback' in Queensland and I am amused at certain words and phrases that are not used much closer to the 'Big Smoke'. The phrase **get up 'im** has no sexual connotations but is used regularly in situations where someone is yelling encouragement to another, like in the chasing of a breakaway beast. Another is cadged from the sport of campdrafting where a horse and rider, against the clock, chase a beast around a set course. The word 'campdrafting' is then borrowed for other circumstances, as in the lady who told me of having to **campdraft** a frog out of her bedroom.

Conversely, the word **nature strip**, pertinent to the grass verge between a suburban road and footpath, is more likely to be mistaken here for a Noosa topless beach. Is *Ozwords* interested in collecting such examples, say even asking for reader input and promoting the collection in a future issue?

B. Knight, Qld

We certainly value this kind of information coming from our readers. Some of it will be useful for a new edition of the Australian National Dictionary; some of it will find its way into our work on regional Australian English, as in the recently published Voices of Queensland; and some of it will be useful in our work in editing the Australian range of Oxford dictionaries.

HUEY AGAIN

I have just had occasion to read the October 1999 edition of *Ozwords*, and your article on the Australian phrase **send it down Hughie**. I noted the extract from the 1912 *Bulletin*: 'I first heard the expression in Narrandera (NSW). ... I believe that it originated in that district, by reason of a Mr Huie ... an amateur meteorologist, who had luck in prophesying rain'. My next job involved checking the NSW birth, death, and marriage indexes on quite an unrelated matter—but, idly, I entered 'Huie' and discovered that one John Zeigler Huie and his wife Ada (née Jenkins) had two daughters, born in 1896 and 1897 in Narrandera. A coincidence perhaps, but I would note that the name Huie is most unusual in NSW at the time.

P. Pemberton, ACT

This is fascinating confirmation of the existence of the eponymous Mr Huie, and confirms the story in the Bulletin that the phrase send it down Hughie (meaning 'may the rain god send down rain') became attached to his name. I wonder if someone will be able to track down the similarly (pseudo?)-eponymous inventor of the neenish tart. In the November 1996 number of Ozwords we cited a passage from the Sydney Morning Herald: 'But a Mrs Evans said they were first made in her home town, Grong Grong. She and her sister, Venus, nominated Ruby Neenish, a friend of their mother's, as the originator. Mrs Evans said that in 1913, running short of cocoa and baking for an unexpected shower tea for her daughter, Ruby made do by icing her tarts with half-chocolate, half-white icing'.

GRANT

Bruce Moore has been awarded an Australian Research Council Discovery Project Grant to write a social history of Australian English. This will be a study of the development of attitudes towards Australian English in the period 1788 to 2000. It will explore the significance of the growth of Australian English as a marker of national identity in the nineteenth century, the suppression of Australian English in the first half of the twentieth century, and the acceptance of Australian English in the second half of the twentieth century. The funding will be used for research assistance.

VISITOR

Dr Vincent Ooi of the National University of Singapore will be a Visiting Fellow at the Centre from the beginning of December to the end of February. He is an expert in computational lexicography, and has done much work on Singaporean-Malaysian English. Vincent was one of the speakers at our 1999 conference 'Who's Centric Now? The Current State of Post-Colonial Englishes'.

SCHOLARSHIP

Judith Robertson has been awarded a PhD scholarship, and will be based at the Centre for three years. The topic of her thesis is 'Australian Lexicography 1880–1920'. Part of the thesis will be a critical edition of the unpublished manuscript 'Material for a Dictionary of Australian Slang', compiled by A.G. Stephens (editor of the *Bulletin*) and S.E. O'Brien (a journalist) in the period 1896 to 1910.

PAPERBACK

A new edition of the *Australian Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, edited by Frederick Ludowyk and Bruce Moore, will be published in November. New words include: ABN, bevan, carbon credit, cybercafe, data casting, domain name, drop bear, Easter bilby, echinacea, economy-class syndrome, erythropoietin, genetically modified organism, ovine Johne's disease, saltwater people, secret men's business, and trackie daks.

DEVONSHIRE TEA

The Better Homes and Gardens website explains **Devonshire tea**: 'Scones, jam and clotted cream served with a pot of tea as a light mid-morning or mid-afternoon meal'. Perhaps 'clotted cream' is now the fashion (and clotted cream remains a special delicacy of Devon), but I think that whipped cream is the more usual form in Australia. I expected that **Devonshire tea** would be a common term in the United

FROM THE CENTRE

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Kingdom, but surprisingly it is not. On the Internet the closest I came to it was a website in Devon that promised 'a delicious Devonshire Clotted Cream Tea ... awaits your arrival', and a Church of Scotland site that used the term in a way we would not: 'We have what we call a Devonshire Tea in November and a Daffodil Tea in March—the ladies bake, prepare the hall, make tea and coffee, serve tables and at the end of the day go home exhausted but very satisfied with their efforts'. One puzzling piece of evidence occurs in a novel by Californian-based Laurie R. King (writing as Mary Russell). In her Sherlock Holmes mystery *The Moor* (1998) the following passage appears: 'We arrived back in time for afternoon tea. ... It was a superb reward for our day's outing, and I gathered that Mrs Elliott has taken advantage of the Harpers' presence to create a true Devonshire tea, the piece de resistance of which was a plate piled high with crumbly scones to rival Mrs Hudson's, a bowl of thick, yellow clotted cream, and a second bowl containing deep red strawberry jam'. It seems that the term **Devonshire tea** is used primarily in Australia and New Zealand (about 500 websites use the term), although there is a small pocket of usage in British Columbia, Canada. The term **cream tea** is the standard one elsewhere. Does anyone have any books or old newspapers which mention **Devonshire tea** prior to 1990?

CANBERRA-BASHING

In 1994 a writer to the *Canberra Weekly* complained: 'The media does not help things by blaming bad news on "Canberra" when they actually mean the Federal Government. Canberrans are made to feel as if they are different to the rest of Australians by misplaced blame, and this increases the isolation felt by residents'. The term **Canberra** is often used allusively to refer to the federal government, the federal parliamentary system, or its

bureaucracy. Typical is this passage from a magazine in 2000: 'The recent average time between elections has been just under two and a half years but really Canberra is in permanent election mode anyway'. Our earliest evidence for this usage occurs in 1967, and we would be interested in any earlier evidence. **Canberra-knocker** occurs in 1972, but our earliest evidence for **Canberra-bashing** is 1989. Again, does anyone have any earlier evidence?

A QUEENSLAND VOICE

The following passage is from R. Barrett's novel *Goodoo Goodoo* (1998): 'Norton recollected a version of cane toad racing they had at home when he was a kid. You got several cane toads, tied fire crackers to their backs with rubber bands then let them hop off. The last one to get blown to bits was the winner'. **Cane toad racing** is one of the entries in *Voices of Queensland: Words from the Sunshine State*, edited by Julia Robinson and published by Oxford University Press. The term is illustrated by the Barrett quotation and several others. The book includes entries for some 500 words of significance to Queensland—the ideal Christmas present for your Queensland relatives!

OTHER SEARCHES

We are looking for printed evidence of the following:

cackle tub 'a pulpit'. Between 1905 and 1973, and after 1973.

in the cactus 'in difficulty'. After 1984.

the cactus 'the backblocks'. After 1980.

camel-neck or **camel back** 'a drought-emaciated rabbit'. After 1973.

canagong or **canajong** 'pigface'. Between 1889 and 1990.

cark (1) '(of a crow) to caw'. (2) '(of a person) to laugh or speak raucously'. After 1985.

carney or **carni** or **carnie** 'a lizard, especially a bearded lizard'. After 1961.

cartwheel damper 'a large damper'. After 1948.

casey or **Casey Jones** 'a small conveyance used by railway workers'. After 1972.

cast fleece 'a fleece of inferior quality'. After 1980.

cable gum 'a kind of eucalypt with twisted stems'. Between 1855 and 1969.

cap rail 'a horizontal rail laid on top of a fence post'. After 1935.

dead finish 'the limit, the end'. After 1984.

deadwood fence 'a fence made of piled-up logs'. Between 1861 and 1910, between 1910 and 1980, and after 1988.

deli 'a corner shop'. Before 1989.

delver 'an implement to clear drains, esp. in fruit growing areas'. Between 1919 and 1972, and after 1984.

demon 'a convict'. Before 1966.

demon 'a bushranger'. Any evidence.

A **bludger** in Australian English is 'a person who lives off the efforts of others; a person who does not pay his fair share or who does not make a fair contribution to a cost, enterprise, etc., a cadger; an idler, one who makes little effort'.

Our Aussie **bludger** is a form of **bludgeoner**, 'a person who is armed with and doesn't hesitate to use a *bludgeon*, a short stout club with one end loaded or thicker and heavier than the other'. The word **bludgeoner** appears in a mid-nineteenth century English slang dictionary as a term for 'a low thief, who does not hesitate to use violence'. Thus in 1852, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* inveighs against 'Those brutal **bludgeoneers** [who] go out in gangs'. The derivation of the Aussie **bludger** from the British **bludgeoner** is surprising since, by definition, a bludger is too lazy a person to lift even a finger, let alone a bludgeon.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century the term **bludger** was in use in Australia, although its meaning had narrowed somewhat. The bludger was no longer just a general thug but a thug who lived off the earnings of a prostitute in his keep and was not above a bit of bludgeoning on the side. In 1882 the *Sydney Slang Dictionary* has this entry: 'Bludgers, or *Stick Slingers*, plunderers in company with prostitutes'. C. Crowe, in his *Australian Slang Dictionary* (1895), defines a bludger as 'a thief who will use his bludgeon and lives on the gains of immoral women'. In 1900 *Truth* (Sydney) fulminated: 'This "shop" is not occupied by girls, but by "**bludgers**"—the men who own the girls and live on their prostitution'. *Truth* again in 1901: 'Girls of no more than 13 years of age smoked their cigarettes and *mopped up booze* as freely as their **bludgers**'. And again in 1905: 'In Australia ... **bludger** means what in London and other large English cities is known as a "ponce". ... In other words, it seems that the Australian **bludger** lives on the earnings of a prostitute'. A final glimpse at *Truth* in 1915: 'To enter Australian politics, to abide there, and to succeed therein, a man must have the instincts of a loafer, the aptitudes of a pickpocket, the conscience of a whore, and the honor of a **bludger**'.

One can see the word **bludger** in the process of losing the violent connotation of *bludgeoning* and acquiring a more 'laid back' sense. After all, it wasn't the

bludgers who had to do all the hard work! For better or for worse, the sense of **bludger** as 'pimp' became obsolete by the 1960s. R. Edwards in *Australian Bawdy Ballads* (1973) gives some lines that were clearly composed earlier in the century (and sung to the melody of 'My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean'): 'O, a strapping young harlot lay dying/A pisspot supporting her head./And all the young **bludgers** were 'round her/As she leaned on her left tit and said...'

From the early twentieth century the term **bludger** widened to a general term of abuse, with no pimp-specificity. Thus in 1906 *Truth* was able to sling off at the Salvos in this fashion: 'Dancing, according to a Salvarmy **bludger** in Melbourne, is sinful and wicked. It is no sin for sour Salvarmy salties to ... hug the officers, though'. This general abusive sense was especially applied to a shiftless person who seemed to live off the efforts of others (as a pimp lived off the earnings of a prostitute).

The sense of laziness associated with **bludger** occasioned the next shift: the term was used by blue-collar blokes (the ones who do all the manual work, the hard yakka) to derogate the 'shiny bums', the white-collar workers who sit on their arses all day doing bugger-all. This sense appeared as early as 1910, again in *Truth*: 'Blackguard band of blatant, bumptious bummers and **bludgers**, who bum and bludge on Labor'. But its typical use is represented by this passage from D. Whittington's *Treasure Upon the Earth* (1957): "**Bludgers**" he dubbed them early, because in his language anyone who did not work with his hands at a laboring job was a bludger'. And in 1976 Dorothy Hewett has a shiny bum say: 'The working class can kiss me arse/I've found a **bludger's** job at last' (*This Old Man Comes Rolling Home*).

By the 1940s the term had widened to include any idler, not just a shiny bum. In the war newspaper *Ack Ack News: the Monthly Magazine of the Anti-Aircraft Units (RAA and RAE) in Victoria* in 1942 the question is asked: 'Who said our sappers are **bludgers**?' The next shift is to a person 'who does not make a fair contribution to a cost, enterprise etc.; a cadger'. In *The Shiralee* (1955) Darcy Niland pinpoints such a one: 'Put the nips into me for tea and sugar and tobacco in his usual style. The biggest

bludger in the country'. In 1971 J. O'Grady in *Aussie Etiket* gives us this admirably useful advice: 'When it comes to your turn, return the "shout". Otherwise the word will spread that you are a "**bludger**", and there is no worse thing to be'.

The term **dole bludger** (i.e. 'one who exploits the system of unemployment benefits by avoiding gainful employment and making do on the dole') made its first appearance in the *Bulletin* in 1976: 'A genuine **dole bludger**, a particularly literate young man ... explained that he wasn't bothering to look for work any more because he was sick and tired of being treated like a chattel'. In 1977, a citation in the *Cattleman* (Rockhampton) indicates a reaction to the use of the term: 'Young people are being forced from their country homes because of a lack of work opportunities and the only response from these so-called political protectors is to label them as "**dole bludgers**"'. A fair enough comment, given the penchant of some pollies and some political parties to use the term as a convenient bludgeon, or, at the least, to use it indiscriminately. Finally, P. Adams in *More Unspeakable Adams* (1979) includes the following quotation: 'I, the undersigned, am a rotten **dole bludger** who is living on the hard-earned taxes of my fellow Australians' (p. 88).

Throughout the history of the word, most bludgers appear to have been male. The term **bludgeress** made a brief appearance in the first decade of this century—'Latterly, bludgers, so the police say, are marrying **bludgeresses**' (*Truth*, 1908)—but the term had the decency to cark it shortly thereafter.

The verb to **bludge** (on), a back formation from **bludger**, has existed from the late nineteenth century, as has the verbal noun and participial adjective **bludging**. These mirror the various senses of the core noun. Thus early in the twentieth century we find: 'She had called him a "**bludging** bastard", to which he replied, "Like your mother, who keeps a brothel"' (*Truth*, 1903). The 'pimp' sense has disappeared by the middle of the century: 'Look at yers lying there, you **bludging** pack of no-hopers' (S. Dusty & J. Lapsley, *Walk a Country Mile*, 1979, p. 58). There is a verbal noun and participial adjective **dole bludging**, but a verb to *dole bludge* has yet to make its presence felt.

OZWORDS COMPETITIONS

Ozwords Competition No. 15: results

You were asked to provide witty Johnsonian-type definitions of **economic rationalism**, **synchronised swimming**, **keep the bastards honest**, or **please explain**.

Honorable mentions to the following for definitions of **economic rationalism**: J. Smith, NSW, 'euphemism employed by politicians, economists, businessmen etc. in late twentieth century for old game of beggar my neighbour'; P. Cox, Vic., 'a process that facilitates the flow of wealth (from the poor to the rich) by dredging away snags such as branches, personnel, and services'. For **keep the bastards honest**: W. Wetherell, NSW, 'Australian idiom adopted as a slogan by a political party and meaning to Chip and chase the cheats of every other political party while claiming the Democratic right to be harbingers of a new, completely honest party to the Lee of Labor and a Despoiler of corruption'. For **please explain**: H. & D. Alexander, Tas., 'A form of words used by a political candidate unafraid of displaying ignorance, demonstrating that one can show all the symptoms of, and suffer from, xenophobia without knowing what it means'; L. Evans, WA, 'a common response given to interviewers who insist on using words of more than one syllable; most useful when pronounced "expline", which has a disarming effect on even the most hardened journalist; commonly, Pauline's point of order'.

The best **please explain** definition came from T. Hosking, NT: 'Trademark expression (patent pending) of the One Notion Party in Australia; normal shortened convenient form of the original expression "please explain in words of one syllable"; widely used by members of the party to display petulance or aggression when put under pressure, in accordance with the maxim that attack is the best form of defence in politics; also known colloquially as dummy spitting; designed to complement the party's political credo, "Simplism Is Bonzer"'. The best **keep the bastards honest** definition came from E. Marsh, Qld: 'Carry out the self-appointed task of holding others to behaviour from which one is self-exempted'. The best **synchronised swimming** definition came from D. Andrews, Qld: 'The movements of party members dancing to their leader's tune while trying to keep their heads above water'. Each of these three entries wins a second prize (books worth \$50 from the OUP catalogue). First prize (books worth \$100 from the OUP catalogue) goes to M. Pyke of Qld for his definition of **economic rationalism**: 'A policy for making a wood visible by removing the trees'.

Ozwords Competition No. 16

In the October 1999 number of *Ozwords* various theories about the origin of *Send her down, Hughie!* were offered. In this number's Mailbag some more information is supplied about the Mr Huie of Narrandera. F.S. Owen of NSW sent us a new explanation:

To have occupied the minds of so many lexicographers, etymologists and miscellaneous theorists for so many years, this matter is obviously of no little importance. But now, let us all relax—the answer is to hand.

With several international sports writers I was in the press box at the Australian

Open Tennis Final. The game had reached match point, the likely winner being Lleyton Hewitt, whose turn it was to serve. It was at this crucial stage that all present, along with a worldwide TV audience, were startled by a dramatic flash of lightning and a violent thunderclap. A huge downpour obviously being imminent, continuation of the match was in doubt as all eyes turned to the umpire. Not surprisingly, the onlookers were keen for the game to be decided forthwith—not only were most of them in danger of being drenched, but all faced inconvenience and delay should play be interrupted.

As Hewitt stood, poised, awaiting a nod from the umpire, spectators' cries soon became an impatient crescendo as they called on the server to 'Send 'er down, Hewie!' Which, given the appropriate nod, he did, an ace securing his victory. Within a few seconds the heavens opened, players, officials, and spectators rapidly dispersing.

The crowd's rendition of Hewitt's name is explained by the fact that the venue's electronic scoreboard designated each player by his surname's first four letters, in this case *H, E, W, I*. Understandably, listeners, viewers, and news media assumed that the phrase was 'Send her down, Hughie!', being an Australian plea for rain. And so it has become.

This is a good example of popular etymology. When the true origin of a phrase is unknown or lost, people invent seemingly plausible origins. For example, we do not know the origin of the Australian phrase **no good to gundy**, meaning 'no good at all; positively disadvantageous'. Yet all of the early evidence for the term in the *Australian National Dictionary* attempts to explain its origin:

1906 'Gundy' is a corruption of a Welsh word meaning to steal, shake, pinch, or hook, and the expression means that a thing is not worth stealing. 1907 Gundy is an abbreviation of Gundagai and the phrase originated way back in 1852—the year of the big flood. A bullocky looked towards the blank that had been Gundagai, and remarked sadly, that 'Tweren't much good to Gundy'. 1908 A temperance fanatic many years ago lectured at Gundy [i.e. Gundagai]. The cold tea advocate was going to shut up every hotel in the land. 'What!' yelled the audience in united voice, 'shut up our pub'. 'Precisely', replied the ranter. 'Be hanged', chorused the crowd, 'that's no good to Gundy'.

Thus, your task. In no more than 250 words, make up an interesting story about the origin of one of the following Australian phrases:

draw the crabs 'to attract enemy fire; to attract unwanted attention, especially from the police'.

go for the doctor 'to go "all out"; to abandon all restraint'.

give it the herbs 'to give (a car etc.) some power'.

stir the possum 'to excite interest or controversy; to liven things up'.

spit chips 'to display extreme anger'.

have tickets on oneself 'to be conceited'.

Entries close 15 February 2002.

Entries sent by email should also contain a snail mail address.

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