OZWORDS

MAY 1999

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 1

PUBLISHED TWICE A YEAR

CHASING OUR UNOFFICIAL NATIONAL ANTHEM
WHO WAS MATILDA? WHY DID SHE WALTZ?

FREDERICK LUDOWYK

Who's Matilda, what is she
That swaggies all commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise is she,
The heavens such grace did lend her ...

'Fair' and 'wise' she may very well have been, but hardly 'holy', I should think. A **Matilda** is a 'swag' (the collection of possessions and daily necessaries carried by a 'swagman' or 'swaggie', especially these possessions—or some of them at any rate—carried in a blanket-wrapped roll on the swaggie's back and across his shoulders). A 'swagman', of course, is a person (usually male) who travels on foot in the bush seeking whatever employment he may get wherever he may get it. He was very often an itinerant shearer wandering many miles from sheep station to sheep station.

Our flagship *The Australian National Dictionary* informs us that the name 'Matilda' for a 'swag' is a transfer from the female forename. But why did the swaggies call their swag 'Matilda'? Why not 'Jane' or 'Jill' or 'Jenny' or 'Josephine'? One explanation given is that (Once Upon a Time) there was a young and handsome swaggie who fell in love with a girl called Matilda, the daughter of a squatter. On being approached for her hand, the irate squatter sent the swaggie off with a flea in his ear. But the daughter was moved by the swaggie's swagger (or whatever) and eloped with him. (*Onya, Mattie!*) For many years the two of them wandered the bush a-swaggying. At length—and they were both now well advanced in years—the old lady died. The swaggie buried her tenderly beside a tree (who knows? It may well have been a coolibah). Then he rolled up his swag and said to it, 'Now it's only you and me, Matilda me old girl'. Whereupon he humped his newly named swag and walked away into the sunset. The story of the old man and his Matilda spread rapidly among the bush fraternity and from then on a swag was called a 'Matilda' in the old man's memory.

This sad and affecting story ought to be true if there is any justice in this world. It isn't. It's what the Germans call *ein Märchen*, 'a fairytale' or, more vulgarly, 'a load of cock and bull'—as in *erzähle mir keine Märchen!* ('Give me none of your cock-and-bull!' or 'Pull the other one, mate!'). I haven't brought this German in gratuitously, by the bye. Our Aussie swaggies' 'Matilda' very likely takes its name from a laid-back Teutonic lass.

WAS MATILDA WAGGED?

Some people named her 'bluey', aye,
And others called her 'swag',
But who christened her 'Matilda' was
The essence of a wag.

(*Western Champion*, Queensland, 30 May 1899 3/1)

Not a wag, just a follower of convention, it would seem. From the eleventh century onwards the German feminine forename *Mathilde* was vulgarly used to denote a prostitute. (For much of the German connection I'm indebted to Harry Hastings Pearce's book *On the Origins of Waltzing Matilda*, Hawthorn Press, 1971, which I can highly recommend; it makes fascinating reading). The forename *Mathilde* denoted not just any prostitute, mind, but a prostitute who followed a soldier into war to give him creature comfort when he had some respite from blasting people's heads off with his blunderbuss or rearranging their innards with his pike. The *Mathilde* also had a penchant for following itinerant apprentice tradesmen (one of the rules of their apprenticeship required them to leave their master-craftsmen for a period of some years and wander through Germany (and even outside Germany) humping their swag and seeking work in their particular trade in as many places as possible). Many *Mathildes* accompanied these young 'swagmen' in their wanderings to give them more than just the promise of what T.S. Eliot referred to as 'pneumatic bliss'. Apropos 'pneumatic bliss', the *Mathilde* was the journeyman's *Matratze* ('mattress') as well as his *Mätresse* ('mistress'). The unfortunate journeyman who was *Mathildeless* had only the bedroll containing his belongings to warm him as he slept at night under the stars.

The shift from *Mathilde* (as human mattress) to *Mathilde* (as 'swag') would have been an easy one to make. Some evidence

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EDITORIAL

A strange thing happened on the way to ... Our final proof of the previous edition of *Ozwords* was perfect, but between that final proof and the printer the last five words of Bruce Moore's article 'Of Boondies, Belgium Sausages, and Bogans' went walkabout. How it happened is a bafflement to us. We apologise to our readers, many of whom wrote to us good-naturedly about being left up in the air, so to speak. The missing five words were ... **generate their own distinctive terms**.

Several readers wrote to us expressing their interest in the OXLEX conference ('Who's Centric Now? The Present State of Post-Colonial Englishes') to be held at the Australian National University from 27 to 29 October 1999. The conference will be hosted by the Australian National Dictionary Centre in association with Oxford University Press and the Humanities Research Centre at the ANU. The theme of the conference will be the role of regional Englishes in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, etc. A public lecture will be given by John Simpson, editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Details about the conference are given in the flyer which accompanies this issue.

Frederick Ludowyk

Frederick Ludowyk
Editor, *Ozwords*

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(admittedly anecdotal) exists that that shift was, indeed, made. H.H. Pearce (pp. 22-3) quotes from an interview the editor of the German newspaper *Hamburger Abendblatt*, a Herr Zimmermann, conducted at his request. The interviewee was an old man of seventy-six named Jensen who had been apprenticed to a leather craftsman when he was a youth. At the age of sixteen he had been sent by his master on a five-year wander. The youth had made *tornisters* for his fellow wanderers, a *tornister* being 'a form of knapsack with two shoulder straps for each arm and carried across the shoulders'—very like our Aussie swaggies' Matilda, in fact. The Teutonic *tornisters*, however, had a salient difference—they were made from pelts (i.e. the fur was still on them): the wandering apprentices wrapped their blankets and other belongings in the *tornister* (the furry side on the outside) and humped them across their shoulders when they went on their wander. Herr Jensen's evidence continues:

> Jensen told Mr Zimmermann that the tornisters that he made were called 'Matildas' by his [fellow apprentices]. When these Brüder were gathered together ... it was common for them to compare their tornister 'Matildas' with real flesh and blood 'Matildas'. References would be made to the hair of each, and to the fact that the speakers would rather be sleeping with the latter than the former. They would then indulge in bawdy comparisons and ribald songs would be indulged in, even to the real Matilda's pubic hair.

ALL RIGHT, BUT WHY DID MATILDA WALZ? WAS SHE MAD?

The simple answer is that neither she nor it did. The German word for 'waltz' in the sense 'a kind of dance' is *Walzer*. But there is another word *Walz(e)*, which means 'a roll' or 'cylinder' of various kinds, from which the verb *walzen* 'to rotate' or 'roll around' etc. is formed. In colloquial German the same word was used for 'roving, tramping'; hence the expression *auf die Walze gehen* 'to go a-wandering', 'to go on one's travels' (*Brockhaus German Dictionary*). The term *auf der Walz* was used especially of the wandering apprentices going on their lengthy prescribed walkabouts. The practice of these young journeymen going 'on the *Walz*' did not, according to Pearce, cease until circa 1911.

There were mass migrations of Germans to Australia from the 1830s onwards. Many of these, no doubt, were young apprentices of the kind described who, back in the Vaterland, had been *auf der Walz*, humping their *Mathildes* (in one sense at least), preparatory to getting their qualification as craftsmen. Our earliest citation for **Matilda** in the sense 'a swag' is **1892**: 'An old stager of a sundowner ... slung "**Matilda**" off his back, and leant across the rail' (*Bulletin*, Sydney, 9 Apr. 18/2). Our earliest citation for the collocation **to waltz Matilda** comes from Banjo Paterson in **1893**: 'Who'll come **a-waltzing Matilda**, my darling,/ Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me./Waltzing Matilda and leading a water-bag,/Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me' (A.B. Paterson, *Singer of the Bush: Complete Works 1885–1900* (1982), p. 254).

It is easy to understand how Aussies confused the German *Walz* with 'waltz'. Henry Lawson, I suspect, was guilty of such a confusion when, not knowing how the deuce one could *dance* with a swaggish Matilda, he changed **waltzing** to *walking*: **1893**: 'No bushman thinks of "going on the wallaby" or "**walking Matilda**", or "padding the hoof"; he goes on the track—when forced to 't' (*Bulletin*, Sydney, 18 Nov. 20/3). In **1898** a writer, faced with the same difficulty of swag-dancing, gave us a delightfully fanciful yarn (mixed metaphors and all) to account for the dancing: 'The variant *Waltzing Matilda* ... was born from a "tender" swagman's habit of resting his back by carrying the burden in his arms, when he and it are really suggestive of a lydy [*sic*] and a gent, embracing in the wrestlers' hug of a "push" dance-room' (*Bulletin*, Sydney, 20 Aug., Red Page).

The following citations are of some significance, given what we have said above. They reveal that over a period of many years **Matilda** has continued to be most peculiarly personalised. **1898**: 'I was once shocked to see **Matilda** brutally assaulted by a Murrumbidgee whaler [i.e. a swagman following the course of the Murrumbidgee River]. Stopping at a camping spot he pitched "Billy" aside with a growl; and then took hold of Matilda by her tentacles, swung her high overhead, and banged her on the ground' (E.S. Sorenson, *On the Track*, in the *Bulletin*, Sydney, 30 July 32/2). **1905**: 'As for the writer, well he *is* married—to **Matilda**! Like the Old Man of the Sea, she has a tight grip and refuses to be shaken off' (*The Shearer*, Sydney, 2 March 8/2). **1905**: 'When I met him he was sauntering up North with his inseparable friend, Lady **Matilda**' (*The Shearer*, Sydney, 2 Sept. 4/1). **1915**: 'But ah! a wintry wind/Awakes **Matilda's** charms:/I calmly spread the old girl out/And snuggle in her arms' (J.P. Bourke, *Off the Bluebush*, p. 62). **1955**: THE SWAGMAN'S FAREWELL TO MATILDA by Jacy Hill: 'The swagman paused and bared his head beneath the darkened sky;/Then raised **Matilda** in his arms and breathed a last good-bye./The brand of Cain was on his brow, but anguish in his soul,/As, with a frenzied cry, he cast her in the waterhole./A startled night-bird gave a scream and flapped across his sight—/"Matilda's ghost!" he gasped, and fled, a madman through the night' (Douglas Stewart & Nancy Keesing (eds) *Australian Bush Ballads*, p. 253). **1978**: 'The swagmen, each with his blue blanket tied at either end like a long sausage, his few worldly belongings inside, and carried over his shoulder by a piece of rope, had long lost truck with families and friends. Their "wives" now were the **matildas** (i.e. swags) they carried around the bush' (R.A.F. Webb, *Brothers in the Sun: A History of the Bush Brotherhood Movement in the Outback of Australia*, p. 53).

I cannot say with certainty that the term **waltzing Matilda** came from the German *auf der Walz gehen mit Mathilde* or some formulation such, but it seems likely.

> Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong
> Under the shade of a coolibah tree ...
> And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong,
> *'Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?'*

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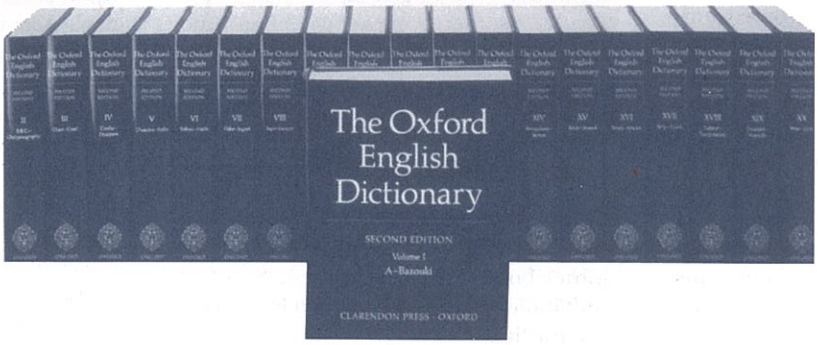

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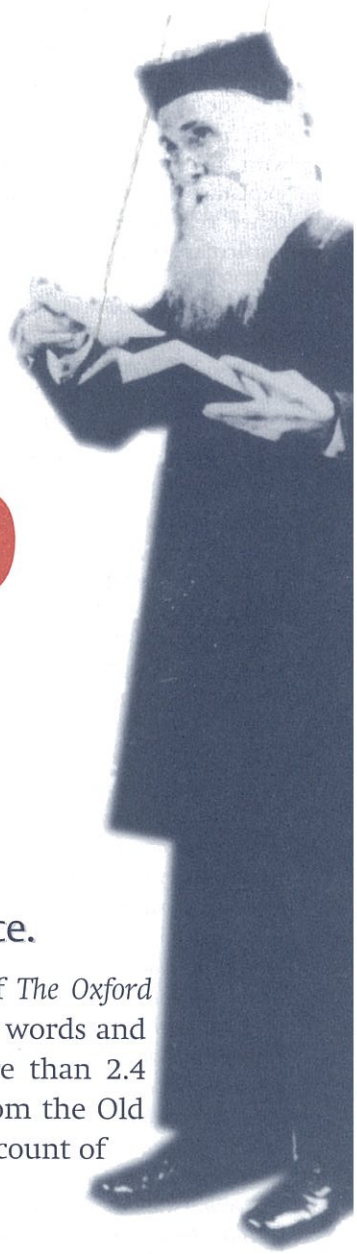

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We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those not easily answerable from the standard reference books.

FOOLSCAP

I was a printing supervisor for many years, and out of the blue the other day, a worker asked me why a particular paper size is called 'foolscap'. So off to the Oxford Dictionary I went, and the details as stated are size of paper (about 330 x 200 or 400 mm) and the use as a watermark of a fool's cap (a jester's cap with bells). While I appreciated this explanation, I wondered if there was any other reason for such a name for this particular size of paper.

James Stewart
Vic

A veritable teaser of a question, James. No one knows why (or even exactly when) the jester's cap watermark (now obsolete) was first used on some types of paper. One theory is that the Rump Parliament in England (1648–60), which decreed the beheading of Charles I, ordered the fool's cap to be used as a watermark in place of the royal arms in official documents, but there isn't a smidgin of evidence for this. Another theory is that the watermark was introduced by a German, Sir John Spielmann, who built a papermill at Dartford in 1580, but there isn't proof of this either. All we know for certain is that the use of the watermark is quite ancient. The British Museum's copy of John Rushworth's 1659 book Historical Collections of Private Passages of State *etc. (the title goes on for ever) uses this watermark. And the catalogue of the Caxton Exhibition (1877) notes that examples of the fool's cap watermark dating from 1479 are to be found in a German Caxton collection. By the bye, the picture above is a drawing made of the fool's cap watermark on a sheet of a fifteenth-century manuscript.*

My theory, for what it's worth, is that the collocation of the fool's cap and paper is an example of the 'Pig and Whistle' syndrome. Why did an English publican in the year dot call his pub the Pig and Whistle*? Perhaps he had a pig who startled him one May morning by whistling the medieval pop song* 'I haue a gentil cook' *('I Have a Well-bred Cock'). Perhaps* Pig *was the local yokels' surreptitious nickname for their hated local landowner and* Whistle *was their name for his gaunt and equally hated wife. Or perhaps (and this is the most convincing explanation) the answer is to be found in the following colloquy.* 'Whoi an' all an' all,' *asks the goodwife of her husband the host,* ''ast thou gone an' called our pub Pig and Whistle, Barney?' 'Why not?' *asks the goodman, scratching his head.* 'Came to me sudden loike, it did.' **Ed.**

PERPLEXING APOSTROPHE

My query ... is about the use of the apostrophe to show possession, e.g. 'John's book' ... Why is it used? Surely it can't indicate the omission of a letter as in 'it's' for 'it is'?

John Davies
Qld

That's exactly what it does indicate. Now before you protest that your name 'John' is complete in John's book *and that no letter has been omitted, let me shove in my historical oar. Had you lived in the Old English period, the possessive would have been shown by the addition of* ***-es*** *to your name. So 'John's book' would have been* ***Johnes boc****. The same would have been the case in the Middle English period. Scribes, who developed a kind of shorthand to save space (parchment was expensive), used an apostrophe-like sign to mark the omission of the* ***e****, hence they'd have written* ***Johnes boc*** *as* ***John's boc****. Grammarians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who did not know their Old and Middle English puzzled their little heads mightily over formulations such as* John's book*. Apostrophes, they knew, indicated omission, but what was omitted here? They came up with the crackpot solution that* **John's book** *was really* **John his book***, the apostrophe indicating the omission of the* ***hi*** *of* ***his****. That's why we find Dickens giving us the mysterious inscription in* The Pickwick Papers **'BILL STUMPS HIS MARK'**. *I wonder how these grammarians got over the problem of, for example,* Mary's book *since the formulation* Mary her book *has no* ***s*** *in it at all. I suppose they felt that Mary, being merely female, had no right to possess a book in the first place, let alone mystify male grammarians manlily pondering possessives.* **Ed.**

WHAT IS RAINING?

I've got a grammatical question. In the sentence 'It is raining', what does the pronoun 'it' stand for?

Joanne M.
NT

The **it** *in your sentence isn't a pronoun. In* Twelfth Night *Shakespeare's clown Feste ends the play with a sad song containing the repeated line* 'For the raine it raineth euery day'. *Now* there *the* **it** *is a pronoun. What rains? Why, the rain rains. It's what rains usually do when they rain. The* **it** *in your sentence doesn't 'stand for' anything at all. For this reason it is what some modern grammarians call a* 'dummy'. *Its sole function is to serve as the subject of a sentence which would otherwise have none. The use of the dummy* **it** *is very ancient. King Ælfred used the dummy in his translation (c. 888 AD) of* De Consolatione Philosophiae *by Boethius:* On sumera **hit** bith wearm and on wintra ceald *('In summer* ***it*** *is warm and in winter cold'). Thanks for the info, Boethius!* **Ed.**

ARE CLICHÉS OLD HAT?

What's wrong with using clichés? ... Take 'A watched pot never boils', for instance. It is clear, everyone understands what it means, and it saves you the trouble of trying to think of another way of saying the same thing.

E. Marsh
NSW

You've hit the nail on the head (to coin a brand new phrase—but Plautus put the same idea much more pointedly in about 200 BC: rem acu tetigisti *'you have touched the matter with the point of a needle'). Clichés are old and mouldy things used by the mentally lazy, those who can't be bothered to 'think of another way of saying the same thing', as you put it. Open any newspaper on any day and you'll find a congelation of clichés on every page. It took me but ten seconds to find in this morning's paper (*Canberra Times, *Saturday 13 March)* 'Embattled ... Phil Coles quit' *and* 'Workers' union rejoins the fold'. *Politicians, too (with the refreshing and rare exception of Gough Whitlam), are much given to clichéing. It saves them the trouble of saying exactly and pithily what they mean and so engaging the listener's/reader's mind. Andrew Peacock, for instance, was addicted to* 'as sure as night follows day'. *And in the past few days I've heard the following clichétic examples of pollie-speak: (referring to a pre-election poll which showed the speaker's party trailing):* it's the actual poll that counts; that's for other people to judge; a level playing-field. *In his biography of Julius Caesar, Suetonius had Caesar exclaiming* 'Veni, vidi, vici' *('I came, I saw, I conquered'). That was fresh and pithy then. One would no more use* 'Wainie, weedy, weakie' *today than one would use for one's sandwich bread which has green stuff growing on it, just because one is too lazy to walk to the milk bar for a fresh loaf of bread.* **Ed.**

FROM THE CENTRE

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE

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

DEPARTURE

Hilary Kent, who began work at the Centre in 1992, retired at the end of February. She edited *The Australian Little Oxford Dictionary* (1995) and *The Australian Oxford Minidictionary* (1998), and was senior editor of *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1997). She is greatly missed. We wish her well in her retirement.

DOBBERS

We can all **dob in** to buy a present for a workmate's birthday, but it is most un-Australian to **dob in** that same workmate if he takes a sickie and is sighted at the local racecourse. But where does the word come from? Do these two **dob ins** have the same origin? And do we have the same **dob** when an Aussie Rules footballer **dobs** the ball through the goalposts? The clue to the origin of these Australianisms may lie in British dialect. There we find the verb **dob** meaning 'to put down an article heavily or clumsily; to throw down', with examples from Nottinghamshire ('I dobbed my cap on to the butterfly') and Kent ('Dob down the money'). The problem with this theory is that most Australian words and meanings which have their origin in British dialect appear during the nineteenth century. The Australian **dob in** does not appear until the 1950s. A second dialectal meaning of **dob** is 'to throw stones etc. at a mark'. Thus from Cornwall we have 'He dobbed a great stone at me'. In this case, one interesting aspect of the sense is its connection with the game of marbles. In Cheshire the verb means 'to throw a piece of slate, or other flat missile, at marbles placed in a ring at a distance of about six or seven feet from the player', and in Northamptonshire 'When one boy strikes another boy's marble, without his marble first touching the ground, he is said to dob on it'. A **dobber** in British dialect is 'a large marble'. This word was retained in the United States, and in a 1934 text from the US we read: 'There was marbles, and there was a game of marbles called Dobbers, played with marbles the size of lemons. You played it in the gutter on the way home from school, throwing your Dobber at the other fellow's and he would throw his at yours'. Is it possible that the Australian notion of **dobbing in**, and being a **dobber** or **dobber-in,** is a transfer from some aspect of the game of marbles? Were the terms **dob**, **dob in**, and **dobber** used in the game of marbles in Australia earlier this century? We have no evidence for this, but would welcome information from readers.

POSTS AND ANTES

Mudgee stone. /mʌdʒi 'stoʊn/. [f. the name of *Mudgee* a town in N.S.W.] A slate found in the Mudgee district and particularly suitable for use as a whetstone; a whetstone of this material. Also **Mudgee.**

1909 R. KALESKI *Austral Settler's Compl. Guide* 24 The oilstones I prefer are the Lily white Washita or the best Mudgee stone. **1913** *Lassetters' Compl. Gen. Catal.* 691 Stones, Turkey and Mudgee, in 14 lb. boxes. **1964** H.P. TRITTON *Time means Tucker* (rev. ed.) 47 A good whetstone was a prized possession and 'Mudgee Stones' (a slate found only in that district) were always admired and envied. . . Few shearers would allow anyone to use their 'Mudgee'.

We are now bringing together the work of the past ten years into a new edition of *The Australian National Dictionary*. The salient feature of our dictionary is the fact that, like the large *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is based on historical principles. This means that in addition to headwords, meanings, and etymologies, we give quotations (technically called citations) from texts to illustrate the history of the words in the dictionary.

The inset for the word **Mudgee stone** illustrates our methodology. We will be adding many new Australianisms to the dictionary, but we will also be adding what we call antedatings and postdatings. In the case of **Mudgee stone** we will be trying to find earlier written evidence for the existence of the word (i.e. an antedating) and later written evidence for the continuing use of the word (i.e. a postdating). We suspect that this is a 'dead word', but it is possible that we are wrong. As you can see from the citation evidence, we would also be interested in finding more quotations between 1913 and 1964 (technically these are called interdatings). We should like to have a citation from each decade.

So for the next few editions of *Ozwords* we will be presenting a list of words for which we are seeking citation evidence, and asking readers of *Ozwords* to let us know if they are able to track down written evidence for any of them. We are not interested in citations from dictionaries or books of slang. We are looking for fair dinkum usages. Here is the first list:

ADRIAN QUIST Australian rhyming slang for 'pissed, inebriated'. Post 1982.

BACHELORS' QUARTERS 'accommodation provided on a station for single men, especially jackeroos and overseers'. Anything between 1891 and 1964, and post 1964. Also the variant **bachelors' hall** (post 1913).

BOGAN GATE 'a makeshift gate of barbed wire and sticks'. Pre 1980 and post 1980.

BREAKAWAY 'an animal that rushes free from a flock or herd'. Anything between 1881 and 1947, and between 1955 and 1990.

CHUNDER (or **chunda**) 'to vomit'. Pre 1950, and between 1951 and 1963.

DINK (or **double-dink**) 'a lift on a bicycle, or a horse, ridden by another'. Post 1981.

DRY BIBLE 'a condition of cattle characterised by dryness of the omasum (third stomach), an affliction which may result from any of several causes, especially as occasioned by drought'. Post 1982, and 1943 to 1981.

FANG 1 (verb) 'to drive in a motor vehicle at high speed'. Post 1984. 2 (noun) 'a drive in a motor vehicle at high speed'. Post 1969.

FLAMING FURY 'an outdoor earth-closet, so-called because the contents are periodically doused with a flammable liquid and ignited'. Pre 1960 and post 1982.

GOON 'a flagon (or cask) of wine'. Pre 1982.

JIG 'to play truant from school'. Pre 1977.

LIZARD 'a flathead (i.e. the fish)'. Pre 1990.

MAGIC PUDDING This now means 'an endlessly renewable resource' and clearly it is derived from Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* (1918). We are searching for any pre-1995 evidence of the figurative use of the term.

ON ONE'S ACE 'on one's own, using one's own resources; alone'. Post 1968.

PUT THE ACID ON 'to exert a pressure which is difficult to resist'. Post 1968.

UP IN ANNIE'S ROOM **(behind the clock etc.)** 'the supposed location of something that cannot be found'. Anything from 1950 to 1980, and post 1982.

BRUCE MOORE, DIRECTOR

QUEEN & SLUT ARE SISTERS UNDER THE SKIN

A SIMPLISTIC LOOK AT RELATED LANGUAGES

FREDERICK LUDOWYK

An Australian of Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) descent wrote to *Ozwords* recently raising the issue of related languages. He noticed the similarity between the Sinhalese word **nama** 'name' and the English word **name** and wondered whether the similarity were simply coincidental. It is not, of course. Sinhalese and English are related languages, a fact which may be a surprise to many. The language of the *Beowulf* poet, of Chaucer and Shakespeare and Donne and Dickens and Dame Iris Murdoch, is, putting it loosely, cousin german to Sinhalese, a language spoken nowhere in the world except in the tiny island of Sri Lanka.

In the Old English poem *Beowulf* (written about 850 AD), the hero Beowulf introduces himself as follows: **Beowulf is min nama** ('Beowulf is my name'). Had he been speaking modern Sinhalese, he would have said **Magé nama Beowulf** ('My name Beowulf'—by the bye, **my** and **magé** are related as well). In Latin Beowulf would have used **nomen** for 'name'; in classical Greek **ónoma**; in Sanskrit **nāman**; in modern French **nom**; in modern German **Name**; in modern Italian **nome**; in modern Spanish **nombre**; in modern Swedish **namn**; in Old Frisian **noma**; in Old High German **namo**; in Gothic **namô**—this listing is becoming tedious, but there's enough there to indicate the similarities. Why the similarities? Because all these languages are descended from a single hypothetical language, variously called *Proto-Indo-European*, *Aryan*, *Indo-Germanic*, etc., which is believed to have originated somewhere in northern India long before 2000 BC. Why 'hypothetical'? Because not a trace of it exists.

Proto-Indo-European spawned a number of offspring. (Good going for a hypothetical language!) Among the oldest of these for which records exist is Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hinduism. Its earliest form was spoken in India from about *c.*1800 BC, and it is still used in India as the language of religion and learning. One of its many descendants is Sinhalese, the native tongue of about three-quarters of the inhabitants of Sri Lanka.

Other descendants of Proto-Indo-European include Greek; Italic (which produced Latin, which in turn produced the Romance languages, French, Italian, Spanish, etc.); West Germanic (which produced English, Dutch, and German); North Germanic (which produced the Scandinavian languages); Celtic; Baltic (which produced Lithuanian and Latvian); and Slavonic (which produced, in alphabetical order, Belorussian, Bulgarian, Czech, Macedonian, Polish, Serbo-Croat, Slovak, Slovene, Russian, and Ukrainian).

Testing. Sanskrit **mātr**, Sinhalese **matha**, Old Irish **māthir**, Greek **mētēr**, Latin **mater**, French **mère**, Italian and Spanish **madre**, Old English **modor**, modern English **mother**, German **Mutter**, Dutch **moeder**, Swedish and Danish **moder**, Old Slavonic **mati**.

Testing **father** is a bit more difficult because the German philologist Jakob Grimm (he of fairytale fame) went and invented a law called, naturally enough, 'Grimm's law' just to complicate matters. Because of Grimm we must bear in mind that whereas conservative languages such as Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin staidly minded their **p**s and **q**s (forget about the **q**s; they are a red herring), the larrikin Germanic languages changed almost every **p** they could get their hands on, and then they went on to change **k**s and **d**s. And so they turned their **p**s into **f**s, their **k**s into **h**s, their **d**s into **t**s, *und so weiter.* Bearing this in mind, let's test **father**: Sanskrit **pitr**, Sinhalese **pitha**, Greek **patēr**, Latin **pater**, French **père**, Italian and Spanish **padre**; (now for some grim ones) Old English **fæder**, German **Vater** (they changed the original **p** sound to an **f**, but did they use an **F**? Not on your nelly!—they used a **V** and pretended that it made an effish sound), Old Frisian **feder**, Dutch **vader**, Old High German **fater**, Old Norse **father**, Modern Swedish and Danish **fader**, Old Irish **athir**.

To Grimm it a bit further, let us look at the Latin word **dens** (**dent-**). In Greek it is **odous** (**odont-**). In Sanskrit it is **dan**, **danta**. In Lithuanian **dantìs**. In Old Irish **dét** (***dent**). In Sinhalese **datha** (plural **dath**). Sinhalese has lost the nasal sound in the middle of the word and so has the Old Irish (***dent** being the hypothetical ancestor of **dét**). In French **dent**. In Italian **dente**. In Spanish **diente**. Now for the Germanic languages: Old English **tōth** (plural **tēth**), Old Frisian **tôth**, Middle Dutch **tant**, Modern Dutch **tand**, Old High German **zana**, Modern German **Zahn** (pronounced /**ts**ahn/), Modern Swedish and Danish **tand**. Grimm's law, by the bye, enables us to see at a glance that *dentist* and *dental*, for example, are late borrowings into the language (earliest citations **1759** and **1599** respectively). Had these words not been borrowed, you would be visiting your **toothist** tomorrow to have an impression of your mouth taken and sent to a **toothal technician** for the crafting of your new false teef.

Sinhalese culture, literature, architecture, and the arts were flourishing from the 3rd century BC, a time when the Brits were running around dressed in nothing but woad and goose-bumps. When the Brits conquered Sri Lanka in 1815, they were probably culturally inclined to look down their noses at the dark-skinned 'savages' they had subdued. None of the Brits would have had the faintest inkling that the language they spoke was almost cousin german to the 'gibberish' the natives were speaking. Take the English word **queen**, for instance. It goes back in time to the Old English **cwēn,** and **cwēn** is related to the Sinhalese word **gani**. But **queen** is a woman who rules in her own right or is the wife of a king—you can't get more top-of-the-ladderish than that—whereas **gani** means 'woman' with pejorative undertones, almost akin to 'slut'. The Sinhalese **gani** comes from the Sanskrit **ganikā** 'female whore'. It is a cognate of the Greek **gynē** (**gynaik-**), a neutral word meaning 'woman', from which we get such recent English borrowings as 'gynaecology'. **Gani** and **queen**—sisters under the skin! The Sinhalese **gani**, of course, is also related to the English word **quean**, which the 20-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as 'a bold, impudent, or ill-behaved woman ... a harlot, strumpet'. And so in Langland's *Piers Plowman* (1393) we have *At churche in the charnel cheorles aren vuel to knowe ... other a queyne fro a queene* ('At church in the charnel-house it is difficult to distinguish a churl from a churl ... or a quean from a queen'). I am 'richt laith' to point this moral at modern royals.

By the bye, the small township of Baddaginnie in Victoria (between Benalla and Violet Town) doesn't derive its name from an Aboriginal language. It comes straight from the Sinhalese word **badagini** meaning 'hunger' (**bada** 'belly' + **gini** 'fire'). I thought I'd throw that in to acknowledge the small contribution Sinhalese has made to the Aussie language.

LAMINGTON OR LEMMINGTON?—THE OZ 'NATIONAL DISH'

LAMINGTON: *noun*, a small square of sponge cake (meant for one person) coated all over in softish chocolate icing and then in desiccated coconut.

Our earliest citations (**1909**) for the very Aussie **lamington** are in recipes. Part of the recipe in the *Guild Cookery Book* (Holy Trinity Church Ladies' Working Guild) reads: 'ICING FOR [A LAMINGTON CAKE]: Quarter lb. butter, 1 cup icing sugar; beat to a cream; 2 tablespoons of cocoa, mixed with 2 tablespoons boiling water. Mix all well together, and put over the **Lamington**'. This lamington is obviously a whole cake, not one cut up into individual-portion squares; and although there is cocoa in the icing, there is no coconut. *The Schauer Cookery Book* (1909) gives a similar recipe, and concludes: 'spread, when cold, with chocolate icing, and sprinkle with cocoanut'. Here the coconut makes its appearance, but again we are dealing with a whole cake.

By 1912 the possibility of the cake being cut into the squares we know today enters the picture: **1912**: ' ... when [the cake] is cold, cut into squares and ice. ICING FOR ABOVE CAKE:—1 lb. icing sugar; quarter lb. butter; crush sugar fine, melt butter, mix both together; add one and a half tablespoonfuls of boiling water and 4 teaspoonfuls of cocoanut [this is obviously a mistake for 'cocoa']. If too thick for spreading, add another teaspoonful of water. Spread all over little squares and roll in grated cocoanut. Half the quantity is sufficient, if the cake is not cut into squares' (*The Kookaburra Cookery Book* (Committee of the Lady Victoria Buxton Girls' Club, Adelaide), 2nd edition, p. 242).

The (perplexing) popularity of lamingtons in Australia, then and now, is well attested, but what is the origin of the term? All the current dictionaries say that it is probably named after Charles Wallace Baillie, Lord Lamington, who was governor of Queensland 1895–1901. But there are some puzzles here. Sidney Baker in his *Australian Language* (2nd edition, 1966) mentions a **lamington**, but that lamington is a *hat*, not a cake: '*Lamington*, a Homburg hat, as worn by Baron Lamington, Queensland Governor, 1896–1901' (p. 272). Elsewhere in his book Baker mentions the cake, but it doesn't occur to him to impute it to the Baron as he does the hat: '*Lamington*, a square-cut piece of sponge, chocolate coated and sprinkled with coconut ... I know of many Australians who ... identify it as a luxurious symbol of Australia. I fail to understand why' (p. 86). We can, I think, conclude from this that the Baron Lamington story was not current in the 1960s. In 1976 Grahame Johnston's *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* was published. Johnston includes the term **lamington** (the cake), but indicates in the etymology section that the origin is unknown.

As far as we can ascertain, the first appearance of the baronial attribution is in an article by John Hepworth in *Nation Review*, July **1977**. He tells us that at Cloncurry in Queensland, at a glittering banquet, 'an irascible diner seized a piece of spongecake which had dropped into a dish of brown gravy and hurled it over his shoulder in a fairly grumpy manner. The soggy piece of cake landed in a dish of shredded coconut which was standing on the sideboard waiting for the service of an Indian curry'. A certain Agnes Lovelightly, in a flash of genius, saw the possibility of substituting chocolate sauce for the brown gravy, and so the lamington was born. Hepworth continues:

> It would have been nice ... had this great good gateau been named for the humble genius whose invention, or divine perception, it was. But in the snobby bumsucking manner of the day it was named in honor of Baron Lamington, who was governor of Queensland at the time. For many years lamingtons were served on state ceremonial occasions in Queensland and won universal approbation. But Baron Lamington himself could by no means abide them. He invariably—and somewhat oddly—referred to them as 'those bloody poofy woolly biscuits'.

Now this has all the appearance of a furphy, similar to the claim made in the *Bulletin* in **1981** that the lamington was 'named after the man who broke the world record for running from Sydney to Perth carrying a dog'. (I find the long-distance dog-humping runner almost as difficult to swallow as the cake.) In **1978** in *The Australian Slanguage* Bill Hornadge repeats the baronial etymology, drawing attention to the Hepworth article, but not indicating the generally facetious tone of the article as a whole. Australian dictionaries from **1981** on follow one another like lemmings in alluding to Baron Lamington in their etymology. And once the humble squidgy lamington had become firmly attached to the noble (and no doubt equally squidgy) Baron Lamington, the way was open for various embellishments. Hepworth's story surfaces in a slightly different form in the *Courier Mail* in **1981**:

> A colleague [of the staff reporter writing the article] ... swears this really is how the **lamington** came about. At one stage when Baron Lamington was Queensland Governor, there was a large amount of stale cake in the Government House kitchen. In an attempt to make it palatable, the cake was dipped in chocolate and then tossed in desiccated coconut. The parliamentarians liked this 'gateau' and ordered their cooks to obtain the recipe from the Government House cook.

Receyt for the Makyng of Ye Lamyngtones: First, find a lot of stale cake ...

The same article included a competing etymology:

AND NOW, SCOTLAND LAYS CLAIM TO THE LAMINGTON ...

> Mr Mal Hay, from Wordsworth Street, Strathpine, delivered an extract from a Scottish newspaper, the *Sunday Post*, describing the popularity of a small Scottish village with Australians. The village was Lamington, near Biggar in Lanarkshire. The article said a group of hungry, travelling sheep shearers were having afternoon tea on an outback property. The property owner's wife, a Scot from Lamington, made a large sponge cake, cut it in squares and served it with chocolate icing and coconut. The shearers loved it and asked about its name. 'Oh, just a Lamington cake,' the woman replied. When the shearers were treated to afternoon teas on the other properties they would describe the Lamington cake and ask the women there to bake it.

Another furphyesque story? Probably so. The evidence from New Zealand, however, presents more feasible a possibility. New Zealanders too love lamingtons. It is interesting that most of the citations for **lamington** in Harry Orsman's *Dictionary of New Zealand English* (1997) spell the word as **leamington** or **lemmington**, although we have not found this spelling in the Australian evidence. It is common to find place names used in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

the names of cakes—the Bath bun, the Chelsea bun, the Eccles cake, etc. The village of Lamington in Scotland may be a false eponym, but there is Leamington (Spa) in Warwickshire and Lemmington in Northumberland. It is just possible that the **lamington** has its origin in a British place name. Do any readers have an ancient English recipe book which includes a recipe for a **lemmington** (or **leamington**) **cake**?

So popular are lamingtons with Aussies that the cakes are a favourite means of raising money and have spawned a new Aussie term—**lamington drive**. This is an organised effort by a school, community group, or charity to make lamingtons (in probably mind-boggling quantities) and sell them to the lamington-starved populace in order to raise money. In **1977**, in the *Nation Review* article already cited, John Hepworth, writing about 'the dreaded Pavlova' and 'the even more dreaded Lamington', has the following appalling facts about a lamington drive in the 'cataplexic Melbourne suburb of Camberwell': the mothers (sisters, cousins, and aunts too, surely) of the Camberwell South Scouts made and *sold* well nigh a quarter of a million (19,040 dozen or 228,480) of 'the little furry buggers' in as little as a day and a half. The lamington drivers certainly know when they are on to a good thing. That is why we have lamington drives by the hundred but nary a 'rock-cake drive' or 'home-made fudge with peanuts drive' or 'scones with currants and candied peel drive'.

The etymology I really like (what a pity it isn't true) is that the word **lamington** derives from **lemming** (the suicidal rodent) plus **ton** as in 'tons of'. **Lemmingtons**, as everyone knows, are cakes made out of (minced) lemmings who haven't yet drowned themselves. The lemmingtons are then liberally sploshed with chocolate and rolled in desiccated coconut. I empathise strongly with the indignation of this Enzedder (quoted in *The Dictionary of New Zealand English*), **1992**: 'The lemmingtons in the café aren't made of real lemmings (something should be done about this)' (*Salient*, Wellington, 17 Aug. 32). I love that parenthesis.

F.L.

OZWORDS COMPETITIONS

Ozwords Competition No. 10: results

Many thanks to reader Peter A. Harley of South Australia for some interesting information on the sloganising of numberplates (since inventing such slogans is what this competition was all about). 'I am a collector of number plates from around the world,' writes Peter, and he adds, 'This ridiculous idea of putting slogans on plates started over 70 years ago in Canada and the US (1928 Idaho had "FAMOUS POTATOES") ... One of the oddest cases I can remember was "THE PLACE TO BE IN '73" on plates of New Brunswick, which was OK until it was noticed on a couple of hearse rego-plates. The authorities then decided that a special plate for hearses would be more appropriate.'

Honourable mentions (in alphabetical order): **Heather Britton** for 'TASMANIA—THE STATE OF DETACHMENT'; **Lianwe Evans** for 'VICTORIA—HOME OF THE CROWN DUELS'; **Kathryn Featherstone** for 'TASMANIA—CHIPS AHOY' and 'WA—COURT IN THE ACT'; **Peter A. Harley** for 'SA—THE GRIPE AND WHINE STATE'; **Martin Pikler** for 'VICTORIA—KENNETT BE TRUE?'; **Sue Salthouse** *et al.* for 'ACT—THE PLACE FOR CARNELL KNOWLEDGE'.

Equal second ($50 worth of books from the OUP catalogue): **Trish Burgess** of the ACT and **Thomas Riddell** of NSW for 'NT—THE NEVER-NEVER STATE'.

First prize ($100 worth of books from the OUP catalogue) to **Barbara McGilvray** for 'QUEENSLAND—PLEASE EXPLAIN?'

Ed.

Ozwords Competition No. 11

Reader G.D. Bolton kindly sent me a few samples of his collection of mixed metaphors used by Aussies. Some of the gems he recorded were the following. 'Heard Simon Crean on Radio National as he stated why pressure should be maintained on government front-benchers over the "travel rorts" affair: he responded ... that: "... **we're not preying over dead carcases ... the dogs are still barking, but the caravan's moved on.**"' 'Peter Manning of the ABC, responding to the Bob Mansfield report on the national broadcaster: "**It is when Mansfield steps out in uncharted waters, after the quickest of learning curves, that he fumbles the ball.**"' Geoff Bolton gives credit to Frank Devine (in his excellent weekly feature in the *Weekend Australian* 'That's Language') for picking up that superb specimen of the species. The Master Mixed Metaphoriser of them all, however, has to be Tim Fischer: 'On Radio National when commenting on an Israeli politician: "**He is going a long way on a bed of coals [and] is now on a razor's edge.**"' The wonderful Tim again in the Channel 9 Sunday programme (7 September 1997) 'as he dismissed renewed media speculation on another coalition leadership issue: "**[The leadership issue] had become a mantra but John Howard has lanced that boil!**"'

The challenge to you is to come up with a mixed metaphor (real or feigned) which beats the real ones above. (**NB** Shakespeare is disqualified from entering.)

Ed.

Entries close 31 July 1999.
Entries sent by email should also contain a snail mail address.

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DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: 31 JULY 1999

Payment: The publisher reserves the right to edit or not to publish letters and articles submitted. There is no payment for letters. Payment for articles accepted for publication is by credit note from Oxford University Press for books from its list to the value of A$100.

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GPO Box 2784Y,
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Fax: (03) 9934 9100 email: Ozwords@oup.com.au
Back Issues: Back issues currently available (upon request): November 1998.

OZWORDS

Ozwords is published by
Oxford University Press
253 Normanby Road
South Melbourne VIC 3205
Website: www.oup.com.au
Email: cs@oup.com.au
Publisher: Peter Rose

in partnership with
The Australian National Dictionary Centre
Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
Phone: (02) 6249 2615
Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre: Bruce Moore
Editor: Frederick Ludowyk

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ISSN 1321-0858