# EDITORIAL

Wars often produce new words and the war against Iraq by the 'coalition of the willing' has been no exception. Perhaps the most unusual new meaning to come out of this war has been the use of **embed** as both a verb and a noun. As a verb, **embed** has been with us since the late eighteenth century, with the literal sense 'fix (an object) firmly and deeply in a surrounding mass (*he had an operation to remove a dagger embedded in his chest*)', and in figurative senses 'implant (an idea or feeling) within something else so it becomes an ingrained or essential characteristic of it (*the Australian values embedded in Lawson's stories*)'. The new military sense is closer to the literal sense of the verb than the figurative. Many reporters took up the opportunity to be located within US and British troop units, so that they could be close to the action, and they were described as being 'embedded' with these troops—though some commentators felt that this was being in bed in an even more literal sense! I have mentioned before in *Ozwords* a basic rule of English word formation: there is no noun that cannot be verbed and there is no verb that cannot be nouned. And so those reporters who were thus embedded were called **embeds**, with the stress quickly moving from the second syllable for the verb (em-**bed**) to the first syllable for the noun (**em**-bed).

*Frederick Ludowyk*

Frederick Ludowyk
Editor, *Ozwords*

# A BONZER CONUNDRUM
## FREDERICK LUDOWYK

**BONZER (also BONZA): noun something (or someone) which excites admiration by being outstandingly good of its kind. adjective outstandingly good. adverb wonderfully, splendidly.**

In the first decade of the twentieth century a number of seemingly related words make their appearance in Australian English— **bonzer**, **bontosher**, **bontoger**, **bonsterina**, **bosker**, **boshter**, etc. They all mean much the same thing, and their meaning is covered by the definition of **bonzer** above. In spite of the similarities among these words, and their recorded emergence at much the same time into Australian speech, lexicographers have argued that **bonzer** developed independently from the others. S.J. Baker, for instance (*The Australian Language*, 1966, p. 131), cites a *Bulletin* correspondent from 1906 who claims that *boshter* had been current for about ten years, and from this concludes that *boshter* dated back to the mid-1890s. Baker comments:

> Since the first printed example of *bonzer* is not to be found until 1904 we are left to surmise that this term was either a good deal less popular than *boshter* and *bosker* at the beginning of this century, or that it arrived subsequent to them. If the latter is correct, then *boshter* and *bosker* are not variants of *bonzer* but independent terms, which merely have similarity in use and sound.

This demonstrates the danger in matters lexicographical of relying on hearsay evidence rather than on printed evidence. If back in 1906 the *Bulletin* had asked its readers how long **bonzer** had been around, it may well have received the same hearsay evidence. But when we look at the real evidence, the printed evidence, we find that **boshter** precedes **bonzer** by only one year. A reconsideration of the evidence confirms my earlier statement that all of these terms really do appear at about the same time. Moreover, in the early evidence they are often used interchangeably, and as late as 1911 E. Dyson in *Benno* writes: ' "Oh, a bonzer, a bonzer, a boshter, a bontoshter!" screamed our Christian brother'.

Much of the early evidence for the terms appears in three passages in the *Bulletin* in **1904**. These are the passages:

14 April. 'Jimmy S': *Re* that bulwark of Austral Slanguage—'Bonster'. It is possibly a corruption of 'born star'. There are several additions, one contortion and one abbreviation, the usage of which is, however, governed by arbitrary definitions. A 'fair bonus' is a real trier, a fair goer, or a bit of a don; a bonser or bonster is comparatively superior to a bons; and a bontosher is a real slasher, a fair hummer, virtually a past master. A bonsterina is a female bonster, but no female has yet achieved the dignity of a bontosherina.

5 May. 'William L.': 'Jimmy S.' is on the wrong track. 'Bonster' is a corruption of Bontojer, pronounced Bontodger; and Bontojer is a corruption of two French words *bon* and *toujours*—'always good'.

30 June. 'McG.' *Re* the word 'Bonster' (B. 14/4/04). It *may* be a corruption of 'born star', but I should say not, as Australian slang, though very inclusive in its meaning, is seldom synthetic. I should derive the word from the Spanish 'bonanzo' or 'bonanza', if from any word at all. The goldfields brought a number of Spanish words across from California and Mexico, while the port trade of Australia brings the foreign sailor constantly. The foreign sailor is best known in the class that develops 'slanguage'. He corrupts English words in a mistaken use and malpronunciation [i.e. *mispronunciation*] of them, and the Australian push-ite does the same with his words. From this, as a partial source, 'slanguage' grows. On the other hand, I think a large number of such words are of spontaneous growth, some of them imitatively so. (This word 'bonster' may be the latter, and simply a spontaneous parallel of 'monster', meaning 'not hideous' but 'great', 'fine', and, in a way, 'admirable'.)

The *Australian National Dictionary* (*AND*) illustrates bontosher with parts of the Bulletin passages from 14 April and 5 May: 'A **bontosher** is a real slasher, a fair hummer, virtually a past master ... but no female has yet achieved the dignity of a bontosherina'; ' "Bonster" is a corruption of Bontojer, pronounced Bontodger; and Bontojer is a corruption of two French words *bon* and *toujours*—"always good" '. **Bonzer** is illustrated by another part of the 14 April letter: '*Re* that bulwark of Austral Slanguage "Bonster"... A bonser or bonster is comparatively superior to a bons'. The 30 June letter is not used in *AND*, and the possible connection with **bonanza**, although mentioned in the etymology for **bonzer**, is noted in the citations only in a 1908 entry for **bontosher** from the *Australian Magazine*. 'Bonanza was another Californian term brought over, but the Australian soon turned it into bonzer, and he has been varying it ever since till we have bosker, boshter and bontoger'. Two passages in the *Bulletin* in 1906 enforce the notion that **boshter** and

# A BONZER CONUNDRUM
## FREDERICK LUDOWYK

**bosker** are variants of the same term: 22 November 'What is known here [i.e. in Victoria] as boshter is called bosker in Sydney. We never hear of a bosker here'; 20 December 'Boshter is as common as bosker—perhaps even more so—in Sydney'.

Among all of this information there are two possible 'non-English' origins, from French and Spanish. How convincing are they? I have a strong suspicion that the French *bon toujours* theory is a bonzer red herring. It is spelt out in the May 1904 *Bulletin* letter, and revived briefly in the 1908 *Australian Magazine* citation, but there is no other evidence for **bontojer**. In any case it is difficult to imagine under what historical circumstances Australian English might have borrowed a French word or expression in the first decade of the twentieth century. A few years later, in the context of the First World War, Australian soldiers borrowed *vin blanc* from the French, and miraculously transformed it into **plonk**. But that was a very different matter, for the borrowing can be explained by the particular historical circumstances. And for similar reasons it is difficult to believe that Australian English borrowed and altered French *bon* 'good'. The Spanish *bonanza* seems more plausible, since in this case the claim is that it is borrowed via US English. *Bonanza* meant literally 'fair weather; prosperity' (ultimately from Latin *bonus* 'good', and therefore the same word as French *bon*), and in the US it was applied to prosperity or success in mining. This sense, however, does not appear in the US until the 1870s, so it is unlikely that it was brought to Australia by Californian miners in the 1850s. Even so, it could be a later import from the US. From general appearance and sense it seems possible to derive **bonzer** from **bonanza**. My main worry is that in all the early records the form **bonzer** alternates with forms such as **boshter** and **bosker**. **Bonzer** ultimately triumphs, and all the other forms disappear from Australian English, but the victory for **bonzer** does not mean a corresponding victory for **bonanza**.

The publication of H.W. Orsman's *The Dictionary of New Zealand English* in 1997 enabled us to reconsider the evidence. The interesting feature here is that while **bonzer** appears in New Zealand at about the same time as in Australia, in New Zealand there is no evidence of the -z- spelling or pronunciation (with one exception) until 1937. Until then, the word is spelt **bonser** or **bonsor** etc., with an -s- pronunciation:

- **1906**: 'Wallace made one "bonsor" shot at goal from a difficult angle'

(*Truth*, 25 Aug. p. 3); **1906**: 'America said she was a real boncer' (A. Picard, *Some Ups and Downs in New Zealand and Australia*, p. 26); **1910**: 'Their joy [at seeing old-fashioned wing-forwards] was like the thrill of the alleged Spaniard, who watched a game in the heyday of "wingerism": "Caramba! eet ees splendida! Eet ees to me your bonsa or bosca" ' (L.S. Fanning, *Players and Slayers*, p. 13); **1916**: 'The boys had fixed to give us a boncer welcome, but ... in the words of our informant, "they blued their cheques, got shikkared and the show was bust up" ' ('Anzac', *On the Anzac Trail; being Extracts from the Diary of a New Zealand Sapper*, p. 27); **1917**: 'Bonser little nurse goes past; comes to light with lollies an' tips a cove a smile' (*Tiki Talk*, p. 35).

To some extent this contrasts with the Australian evidence. All the early Australian citations of the word as an attributive *adjective* meaning 'surpassingly good' use the spellings **bonzer** or **bonza**; that is, they spell the words with a -z- and thus the similarity to **bonanza** is kept alive:

- **1906**: 'There's allers bits o' jobs about ther Farm; Doin' Polly, breakin' metal, keeps a bloke in bonza fettle' (*Bulletin*, Sydney, 5 July, p. 17); **1908**: 'Molross took a bonza mark on the wing, and from a pass Rait scored a sixer amidst great applause' (*Clipper*, Hobart, 19 Sept., p. 2); **1910**: 'Look, we'll 'ave real bonzer times goin' out tergether' (L. Esson, *Three Short Plays* (1911), p. 19); **1913**: 'The bonzer smell o' flow'rs is on the breeze' (C.J. Dennis, *Backblock Ballads*, p. 85).

When used as a *noun*, however, in Australia the -z- spelling alternates with an -s- spelling:

- **1904**: '*Re* that bulwark of Austral Slanguage—"Bonster".... A bonser or bonster is comparatively superior to a bons' (*Bulletin*, Sydney, 14 Apr. p. 29); **1904**: 'King Ned is a "bonser" ' (*Truth*, Sydney, 28 Aug. p. 1); **1906**: 'There is a bonza, a sort of improvement on the boshter' (*Bulletin*, Sydney, 22 Nov. p. 17); **1908**: 'The banquet was a bonza, a rare recherche feed' ('Dryblower' (E.G. Murphy), *Jarrahland Jingles*, p. 164); **1914**: 'Blime, th' car's a bonser; travel! why, she bloomin' well flies' (A. Wright, *In the Last Stride*, p. 14); **1915**: 'The parson's as good as 'e looks if 'e ain't better; 'e's a bonser' (G. Sargant, *The Sweet Heart of the Bush*, p. 45); **1918**: 'Cherry—in the language of the boys of the village ... was a "bonser" ' (A. Wright, *Over the Odds*, p. 11).

In the light of the New Zealand evidence, these early Australian variations might lead us to the conclusion that while the later stabilisation of the -z- spelling perhaps owes something to the influence of the American **bonanza**, the original form may in fact have been pronounced with an -s-, and that therefore we should be looking not at a corruption of the American **bonanza** or the French *bon*, but at an entirely original form **bonser**.

Is there such a word anywhere else? Harry Orsman suggests that there is. His etymological note at **bonzer** says: 'Possibly from British dialect *bouncer* anything very large of its kind; itself possibly ultimately from British dialect *bonce, boncer* var. *bounce, bouncer* a very large marble (originally used for "bouncing" or playing checkstones, a kind of knucklebones)'. The *English Dialect Dictionary* gives **bonce** from Hampshire, Dorset, and Somerset with the meaning 'a very large marble, a stone ball', with Hampshire also recording the variant **boncer**. Such a large marble was used to strike other marbles from the ring. Another variant spelling, **bouncer**, with the same meaning, is recorded from Yorkshire. The *Dictionary of American Regional English* records one example of **bonce** in the sense 'a large marble' from 1955. There is some evidence that this sense existed in Australia, but at a much earlier time, at the time our **bonzer** was in the process of developing. A passage in the *Bulletin* in December 1908 reads: 'It was Sam's eye-drop taw! ... "Me only boshter taw!" he roared'. 'Taw', of course, is a word for 'marble'. At a much later date, Norman Lindsay in *Saturdee* (1933), p. 57, writes: 'With a grief-stricken howl of "Me only boshter taw", he leaped for Bulljo'. In both cases I believe the **boshter taw** is the large marble that is elsewhere called a **boncer** or **bouncer**, further evidence that **boshter**, **bosker**, and **bonzer** all derive from the same source in **bonser**. The extended meaning of **bo(u)ncer**, 'anything very large of its kind' is recorded in a number of dialects. From Lincolnshire in 1877 we are told that 'A fine child, a large turnip, or an astounding lie are all bouncers'. In the 1908 passage from the *Australian Magazine* quoted above, there is a remarkably similar explanation for the range of contexts in which **bosker** can appear: 'You will hear a young Australian, perhaps, all in the one conversation, say that a certain girl is a bosker, a football hero is a bosker, a murderer is a bosker, a storm is a bosker, and a calm placid evening is a bosker'.

G.A. Wilkes in the second edition (1985) of his *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* labels **bonzer** '*obsolescent*',

although there was no such label in the first edition (1978). Given the citation evidence we have at the Australian National Dictionary Centre, I am delighted to report that the word is still very much alive. The following are recent sightings of this irreplaceable word:

**1999** 'A safe and happy Christmas and a bonza New Year to all those who patrol our beaches' (*Manly Daily*, 18 Dec., p. 133). **1999** 'Make the effort to get up really early and arrive at the Kiosk in time for a "bonza brekkie"—definitely worth the effort' (*Northern Beaches Weekender*, 19 Feb., p.34). **1999** 'Anne was, if not exactly beautiful, very nice looking and, according to those who made early contact with her, a bonzer girl into the bargain' (T. Parsons, *The Call of the High Country*, p. 11). **2002** 'I visited a bonzer little crew of year 5 and year 6 students' (*Hansard: Queensland Legislative Assembly*, 21 Feb., p. 265). **2002** 'The English

cricket team has been on the crest of a slump for a full eight Ashes series now, and you can't blame us for riding that wave like a bottler bonzer beauty off Bondi' (*Age*, Melbourne, 4 Dec.)
I must admit, however, that **bonzer** is not a word used greatly by the younger generation, who are more likely to describe a party as 'awesome' rather than 'bonzer'.

Yet even if it eventually disappears from Australian English, **bonzer/bonza** will live on in two contexts. Most Australians are unaware that the term **bonzer** is used worldwide for a kind of surfboard. *The Surfin'ary: A Dictionary of Surfing Terms and Surfspeak* (2001) explains: '**bonzer** *n.* A type of surfboard with double concaves shaped into the tail area that can be used in conjunction with a multitude of templates and bottom contours. The design also features two short, angled ventral fins and a short-raked center fin placed at the outside edge of the concave. The term "bonzer", which is equivalent for "bitchin" in Australia,

was adopted by the Campbell Brothers of Southern California in the 1970s for their five-fin surfboard'. Within Australia, **bonza** is the name not of a surfboard but of a kind of sweet eating apple originating at Batlow in New South Wales: **1998**: 'Fresh Crisp Batlow Bonza Apples 15 for Only $1.99' (*Manly Daily*, 20 June, p. 15).

A bonzer word, bonzer. It can express one's admiration for just about anything. The party was a bonzer; met a bonzer bloke at the pub; drought's broken at last—she's coming down bonzer. Even Queen Elizabeth II can be bonzer (if one wishes—though the mind boggles a bit at the thought): **1995**: 'Arise Elizabeth, a bonzer sheila.... A laterally-thought solution to the republic: "why doesn't Keating just grant dual citizenship to the Queen and the royal family" ' (*Age*, Melbourne, 11 June p. 28)—God forbid! The demise of **bonzer**, however, would be a great loss to Australian English.

# ✉ MAILBAG

Letters are welcome. Please address letters to: Frederick Ludowyk, Editor, Ozwords,
The Australian National Dictionary Centre, Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200
Email: Fred.Ludowyk@anu.edu.au  Fax: (02) 6125 0475

**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.**

### AND AMPERSAND

I'd like to know the origin of the word 'ampersand' for the symbol &. My dictionary only says that it means 'and'. But how did the name come about?
**Wells**, Vic.

*The word* **ampersand** *is a corruption of the mnemonic phrase* **'and per se and'** *(or, to make the phrase more clear, '[the symbol]* **&** *—per se (i.e. by itself) — [stands for]* **and***'. The symbol* **&** *is an (often fanciful) ligature of* **et***, the Latin word for 'and', although most people do not realise that* **&** *is a stylised combination of the letters* e *and* t*. Here are a few examples:* & & & &*. The commonest form nowadays is* **&** *where the* e *and* t *are lost in the stylisation. Though the symbol* **&** *is of ancient use, the word* **ampersand** *dates back only to the early nineteenth century:* **1837***: 'He has hardly learned what Ampersand means, afore they give him a horse' (Thomas Haliburton,* The Clockmaker*, p. 399). The word/symbol* Ampersand *used to be placed at the very end of the alphabet:* **1882***: ' "Ampussy and," that is, in full "*and per se and*," is the name of the sign for the conjunction* and*, &, which used to be placed at the end of the alphabet' (Freeman in* Longman's Magazine *I. 95). Hence George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) in* Adam Bede *xxi (1859)*: 'He thought it [the letter Z] had only been put there to finish off th' alphabet like, though* ampusand *would ha' done as well.'* **ED.**

### ADVICE ON ADVISER

I have always written 'adviser' but many of my colleagues insist that the accepted spelling is 'advisor'. What do you advise?
**Stephen H.**, SA

*The correct spelling is 'adviser', since what we have is the verb 'advise' plus the agent suffix -er. The verb came into English from French in the late thirteenth century. The noun adviser was formed in the seventeenth century, and this is the only spelling recognised in the first and second editions of the* Oxford English Dictionary*. Yet the spelling* advisor *is certainly around. It is likely that this spelling was influenced by the form* **advisory***, although it is just possible that it changed by analogy with nouns formed from verbs with the -or agent suffix, like governor and educator. Many dictionaries suggest that advisor is the American spelling. Thus the* New Oxford Dictionary of English *explains: 'The spelling* **advisor** *is much less common than* **adviser** *(in the British National Corpus only around 10 per cent of citations are for the* **-or** *spelling) and is more common in North America than in Britain (in the Oxford Reading Programme, 7 out of*

*every 8 citations for* **advisor** *are from North American sources'. Even so the 1985 edition of the (American)* Random House Dictionary of the English Language *and the 1986 edition of* Webster *(also American) give 'adviser' as the headword and therefore the preferred spelling. The second edition of the* Random House Webster's College Dictionary *(1997), however, recognises the change in American usage, where under 'advise' it gives the derivatives in the order 'advisor, adviser'.*

*Internet evidence provides some interesting information about these spellings. ALL OF THE WEB:* **adviser** *26%* **advisor** *74%; UNITED KINGDOM ONLY:* **adviser** *56%* **advisor** *44%; AUSTRALIA ONLY:* **adviser** *70%* **advisor** *30%. ALL OF THE WEB:* **advisers** *34%* **advisors** *66%; UNITED KINGDOM ONLY:* **advisers** *65%* **advisors** *35%; AUSTRALIA ONLY:* **adviser** *80%* **advisor** *20%. Obviously the 'all of the web' figures favouring* **advisor** *are dominated by North American evidence. In the United Kingdom,* **adviser** *is certainly favoured, but not as strongly as the evidence of the British National Corpus suggests. Interestingly, the traditional spelling* **adviser** *is stronger in Australia than in Britain.* **ED.**

### DOG IN DOGGEREL

Dear Ed, the mind boggles to be told that 'doggerel' comes from 'dog'.
**C.J.** ACT

*Dear CJ, the buzz*
*is that it very likely does.*
*Congratulations on your execrably good doggerel, Clive. It isn't easy to churn out bad verse. As everyone and his aunt would have realised by now,* **doggerel** *is poor or shoddy verse. Our earliest citation comes from Chaucer's* The Canterbury Tales*, c.* **1386***. The pilgrims are on their way to Canterbury and it is Chaucer the pilgrim's turn to tell a tale. With delicious irony Chaucer the poet makes Chaucer the pilgrim mouth some atrocious verse in his* Tale of Sir Thopas*. Here is an example:*

Sire Thopas wax [grew up] a doghty swayn;
Whit was his face as payndemayn [fine white bread],
His lippes rede as rose;
His rode [complexion] is lyk scarlet in grayn,
And I yow telle in good certayn,
He hadde a semely [seemly] nose.

*After a while of stuff as horrible as this, the Host, a pub keeper, can't stand it any longer! He stops the tale, telling Chaucer that his verse is 'rym* **doggerel***' and 'nat worth a toord [turd]'.*

*While no one is certain where the word* **doggerel** *comes from, the likeliest provenance is* **dog** *in a contemptuous sense = bad, spurious, bastard, mongrel. Hence* **dog-Latin** *(execrable Latin),* **dog-English** *(broken English),* **dog-Greek** *(mongrel Greek),* **dog-rhyme** *(atrocious rhyme, as is yours, Clive). To this sense of* **dog** *is added the diminutive and derogatory suffix* **-rel** *as in* **mongrel, scoundrel, wastrel***, etc. When I was about eight years old, I read Baroness Orczy's* The Scarlet Pimpernel *(1905). She herself uses the word* **doggerel** *to describe the verse all English aristocrats are declaiming about the anonymous English aristocrat who with the derringest of derring-do rescues French aristocrats from the dreaded guillotine (I quote from memory so I cannot vouch for accuracy): 'They seek him here/They seek him there/Those Frenchies seek him everywhere!/Is he in Heaven?/Is he in Hell?/That demmed elusive Pimpernel'.* **ED.**

### FIRST BREAK THE EGGS

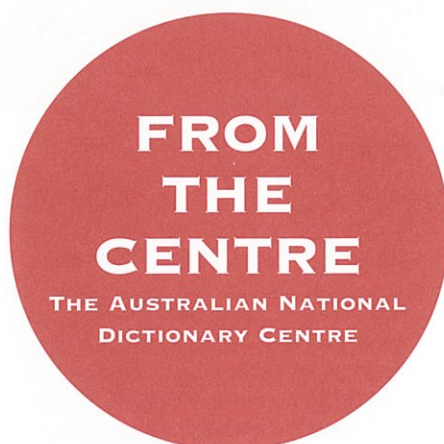Which spelling should I use—'omelet' or 'omelette'?
**N. Smith**, WA

*You breaks your eggs and you takes your pick. Some dictionaries prefer* **omelet** *and others* **omelette***, but all allow both spellings. The large* Oxford English Dictionary *prefers* **omelet***, and so does the American* Webster's*—and fair enough too as* **omelet** *antedates* **omelette** *by several centuries. The original French for omelette was* **alemette** *meaning 'a thin plate', probably because of the shape of the concoction before folding. By the process of metathesis (i.e. the transposition of sounds or letters in a word, as when early English* **brid** *became modern English* **bird***),* **alemette** *became* **amelette***. The earliest citation for the word in English is:* **1611***: 'Haumelette, an Omelet, or Pancake of egges' (Randle Cotgrave,* A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*).* Omelette*, haumelette, whatever, is French, of course, and is the original French form. Interestingly, for more than two centuries the English language was perfectly happy with the spelling* **omelet***. The spelling* **omelette** *did not enter English until the early nineteenth century (whether influenced by the French spelling, or as the result of an arty-farty Frenchifying of the now firmly English word, we do not know). So to your question: how should we spell the word? I strongly prefer the un-arty-farty form* **omelet***, but I think I am overruled by usage. Web evidence shows that worldwide* **omelet** *runs at 44% while* **omelette** *runs at 56%. In Australia, however, to my chagrin,* **omelette** *is even more clearly the winner, with 80% in contrast with* **omelet's** *20%. Some people never learn!* **ED.**

## BONDI TRAMS

We have recently been reading the magazine *Wild Life* that was published in Victoria by Sun-News Pictorial between 1938 and 1952. It contains much interesting information about popular names for plants and animals. A very common term used to describe the caterpillar of the cup moth is **Chinese junk**. In 1946 we find: 'Chinese junks are about again—not the quaint river craft of the Orient, but Doratifera vulnerans, the stinging caterpillar of the gum leaves whose quaint shape and unusual coloring make the school children's name seem the most appropriate. "Six-stingers" and "Tanks" are other names preferred in some districts'. The article goes on to explain that these common names 'are both very expressive since the eight bunches of erectile spines (only six in some species) force themselves strongly to the attention if they come into contact with a tender arm or cheek, or even with the back of the hand, while their legless type of progression has much in common with the caterpillar track of an Army tank'. Do children still talk of **Chinese junks**, **six-stingers**, and **tanks**? I thought not, until I came across the following sentence in a 1996 book on Australian insects: 'The caterpillars are sometimes also known by other names such as slug moths, Chinese junks or **Bondi trams**'. The Bondi tram appears in the Australian phrase 'to shoot through like a Bondi tram', but we have no other records of the Chinese junk caterpillar being called a Bondi tram. Do readers have any evidence for this, or memories of it being used?

## AUSSIE ENGLISH FOR BEGINNERS

In January the National Museum of Australia published its second book of *Aussie English for Beginners*. The first was launched on Australia Day 2001. The books result from the collaboration of the Museum, the Australian National Dictionary Centre, and Canberra-based cartoonist David Pope. In this second book there are 50 Australian words and expressions. The meanings and origins of the words are explained, and each word is illustrated by a marvellous cartoon from David Pope. The words and expressions chosen for this second book include: big note, bring a plate, Buckley's chance, chunder, dob, dunny, full as a goog, hoon, put the moz on, quoll, sickie, spit the dummy, stubby, trackie daks, ute, and yowie. The book is a very handy gift for overseas friends and visitors, although most copies appear to be bought by Australians for themselves. Details on how to purchase the book are available at the Museum's website: <http://www.nma.gov.au/aboutus/museum _publications>. Alternatively, you can ring the Museum Shop on (02) 6208 5222.

## 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.

## CRAWBOBS etc.

Australians have many names for freshwater crayfish of the genus *Cherax*. Standard terms such as **crayfish** and **lobster** are used in transferred senses. In south-eastern Australia the term **yabby** is commonly used, a borrowing from the Wemba wemba Aboriginal language of Victoria. South-western Western Australia has its **marron**, a borrowing from the local Nyungar language. And from the same language comes the synonymous **jilgie**. In parts of New South Wales and Queensland crayfish is altered to **crawchie**. And, especially in inland New South Wales, the forms **crawbob**, **craybob**, and **craydab** are reported. We do not have much printed evidence for these three inland terms. Can readers help us?

## BURN or BERM

In the Mailbag section of the last *Ozwords*, reader Kel Richards asked for an explanation of the term **burn** as used in the following: 'As he was leaving this same bloke said, "Your burn needs mowing" indicating the front lawn'. We received a number of letters on the topic, but perhaps the most instructive came from Meredith Austin of Canberra. She wondered if in fact the listener had misheard the word, and that perhaps the item that needed mowing was a **berm** rather than a **burn**. She noted that whodunnit writer Sue Grafton often has her private investigator heroine Kinsey Milhone parking 'on the berm' (i.e. 'on the shoulder') of various Californian roads. Meredith also advised us to have a look at what the 'Oxford' says about the word **berm**. The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1997) gives the primary sense of **berm** as 'a flat strip of land, raised bank, or terrace bordering a river or canal', and among its secondary meanings 'a path or grass strip beside a road'. An Internet site from Maine in the US headed 'Scythe Mowing' announces: 'We'll gather about 6:30 am at the Amphitheater to mow the berm'. Many thanks, Meredith.

## CONCISE

A new edition of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* will appear in October this year, with some 2000 new words and meanings. It is extraordinary how quickly language now changes. Five years ago most of us were still struggling with working out how to program a **VCR**; now the **DVD** has taken over! New International words include: asylum seeker, asymmetrical warfare, barista, carbon credit, carbon sink, cattle class, claymation, criterium, cybercafe, datacasting, deep vein thrombosis, DVD, e-book, economic migrant, economy class syndrome, erythropoietin, extreme sport, fire ant, 9/11, SMS, text message, transgenic, webcam, and webcast. New Australian words include: aspirational voter, bevan, budgie smugglers, chop chop, clog wog, drop bear, goose club, mates rates, mugachino, secret men's business, and stolen generation(s).

## OF FLOATS AND CORONIALS

When the imaginative **budgie smugglers** appeared recently as a term for a male speedo-like swimming costume it was relatively easy to pick it as an Australianism. It is much more difficult to pick Australianisms when they give all the appearance of belonging to standard English. For example, it took some time for people to realise that **economic rationalism** is Australian. Another interesting example is the term **float** (or, in full, **horse float**). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) gives 'a low-bodied, crankle-axed cart, used for carrying heavy vehicles, live stock etc.', and the 'platform on wheels, having a spectacular display arranged upon it, used in a procession', but these are not quite what we mean in Australia by a horse float. The *OED* also says that **float** is elliptical for **milk float**, which is an 'open-sided van, typically powered by electricity, that is used for delivering milk to houses', but again this is not our Australian **float**. Elsewhere the standard term for such an object appears to be **horse trailer**. Similarly, I do not think that many people would recognise **coronial** as Australian. But it does not appear in the large *OED* and it does not appear in the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1997). The *OED* lists **coroner's inquest**, but in Australia this would be **coronial inquest** or **coronial inquiry**.

**BRUCE MOORE**
DIRECTOR

Since there is some dispute as to the number and extent of Australian words that have their origins in Irish, and as the words involved are comparatively few, the question arises as to why this subject matter should be of interest to linguists, lexicographers and other academics? David Crystal (in *Language Death*, Cambridge 2000, p. 35) provides a possible answer to this question when he says that language contains our history: 'it provides us with clues about the earlier states of mind of its speakers, and about the kinds of cultural contact they had'.

This is evident, for example in a comment by William Kelly (in *Life in Victoria*, p. 220) on emerging from a gold mineshaft in Victoria 1859: 'When I attained the surface I procured some water to wash in, for my head, face, beard, and hand were coated with clauber, made up of dirt and perspiration'. Kelly provides a footnote for the word *clauber* which he says is 'a sort of consistent paste made of mud and moisture, unknown to Johnson'. The 'Johnson' referred to is undoubtedly Samuel Johnson, England's famous lexicographer at the time. The word *clauber* is most certainly Irish *clábar*, the word for 'mud'. Here we can see the educated mindset of the time which looks to England for origins, and with good reason. Significantly William Kelly was an Irishman whose family owned a large flax dyeing factory in Sligo. Like many of his class, he was probably educated in England. He became a magistrate in Sligo before he took up the life of a traveller and observer in the colonies. Kelly's comment tells us that he has an interest in unusual words and that his presumption is that *clauber* is an unknown English word. Had Samuel Johnson been familiar with the word *clauber* it is unlikely that he would have included it in his dictionary as in English it would have been a slang word. In the Irish language, however, it is a standard word. The word *clauber* may be indicative of the use of Irish language in use in the Victorian minefields. We can imagine discussions at the end of the day of the difficulty in removing the *clábar*. For newcomers, perhaps from other non-English speaking backgrounds, the word *clábar* would have assisted in breaking down communication barriers, all sharing at least this one word. For Kelly to make mention of this new word, when he described how he washed off the *clauber*, we can presume that it was more than his

lexicographical ear that was intrigued. His new friends have clearly enjoyed introducing him to their special world:

> after performing my ablutions, one of my friends shouted out, "Look here, mates! look here, I say!" and there, sure enough, in the bottom of the bucket was a good half-ounce of fine gold, which all swore was washed out of my hair, but which I had my strong suspicions was slyly slipped in while I was engaged in the operation of scrubbing. *Life in Victoria* p. 220

There is nothing particularly Irish about the dialogue in this passage which tells us that the word *clauber* was not confined to mines in which there were Irish speakers. It had apparently become a universally accepted word to describe the dirty condition of both body and clothing after a day fossicking or gold digging.

There are only three known occurrences of this word *clauber* in Australian literature. The next occurrence of the word after its use by William Kelly is in Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* where it again refers to the mud and dirt that clings to the skin after a day at the 'diggings'. The third occurrence is in 1965 where, if the same word is in question, there has been a shift in meaning: 'I don't want to shovel up great clabbers of horse dung in the mornin' (Leslie Haylen, *Big Red*, Sydney 1965, p. 30). This would appear to be a reference to manure in a wet state, and perhaps in the Irish-Australian setting the word *clábar* became applied to a similar substance when the English word was not known. For the Irish the word *clábar*, meaning 'mud', would have been an everyday word in Ireland's wet climate. The suitability of the word for Irish conditions is evident in its retention in the English of Ireland. Diarmaid Ó Muirithe in his *A Dictionary of Anglo-Irish* includes the word *clábar*, anglicised as *clabber* and *clauber*. One of Ó Muirithe's citations is a line from one of Seamus Heaney's poems: 'Or in the sucking clabber I would splash'. The word *clábar* may also have been retained because mud was a common building material in Ireland:

> The Census of 1841 estimated that nearly half the families of the rural population of Ireland, then some 85 per cent of the total, were living in the

lowest state, in one-roomed mud cabins. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folk Ways*, London 1957, p. 47

The Irish who came to the Australian goldfields had a word to describe the new experience for many of living and working in wet and sticky conditions. As a 'new' word it would have been suitable for the entrepreneurial nature of life on the goldfields. The word *clábar* as an Australian goldfields term does not appear to have lasted. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) finds *clobber* and *clabber* in Lowland Scots as a word for 'mud, clay, dirt'. The *OED* acknowledges Ir. *clábar* as being similar but then states 'this is hardly likely to be the word'. This hesitation may come from the difficulty in seeing a link with the word *clábar*, 'mud' and this word *clobber* or *clabber* that refers to a paste used by shoemakers to patch holes. However, if we consider the word *clábar* 'mud' in the light of a substance that hardens sufficiently to be used to build a structure, the connection does not seem difficult. It is also possible that the *OED* is once again seeking a social connection to account for the prevalence of an Irish language word in a Scots environment.

The word *clábar* may be connected with the word *clobber*, 'old clothes'. The first *OED* quote for *clobber* meaning 'old clothes', is from 1879. We have seen the possibility for Ir. *clábar* 'mud' being used in a new setting, the goldfields. Could the word have been transferred to describe the clothes the miners would have worn? It is unlikely that this clothing would have been washed every day, and so would have been constantly covered in *clábar*. It is a short step then to imagine a generic description of such clothes as *clobber*, and in turn that the word would be applied to old clothes in general. Admittedly this is not a speculation that the *OED* or lexicographers in general would favour. However, it is offered in the context of a discussion on the influence of Irish words on English. Because the possibility of this influence has not been considered to any extent, in theory, speculation is permitted in order to place the topic in the public arena for discussion and analysis.

[Dr Dymphna Lonergan was awarded a PhD for her thesis on the Irish language in Australia, undertaken in the English Department at Flinders University.]

# WAR WORDS ON THE WEB
## A.G PRETTY'S GLOSSARY OF A.I.F SLANG OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR
### AMANDA LAUGESEN

The Australian National Dictionary Centre was awarded an Australian Research Council grant to work on an unpublished typescript kept in the Australian War Memorial archives. This typescript was entitled 'A Glossary of Slang and Peculiar Terms in Use in the A.I.F.' and it is a rich source of Australian English as used and invented during one of the most defining events in Australian history, the First World War.

The existence of this typescript had been known when the first edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* was compiled. It was also used when Bill Ramson and Jay Arthur worked on a new edition of the classic compilation of Australian First World War slang, W.H. Downing's *Digger Dialects* (first published 1919; the Arthur and Ramson edition was published in 1990). For both these books, the authorship of the glossary was attributed to Arthur Bazley, one of the founders of the Australian War Memorial. One of the first jobs to do in investigating the typescript was to correct this. Some detective work revealed that the authorship of the Glossary was in fact Albert George Pretty, the Memorial's chief librarian, and that the compilation of the Glossary's 900+ terms had been a collaborative exercise between the librarians and archivists of the Memorial, and the contributions of soldiers and veterans (including Bazley, who read the draft of the Glossary and made handwritten additions, hence why he was probably assumed to be the compiler).

The next task was to investigate the relationship between *Digger Dialects* and the Glossary. It became clear that the compilers of the Glossary, who undertook their task in the period 1921 to 1924, relied heavily on Downing's book. Interestingly, though, in a number of instances, while they borrowed a term and its definition, they would include further commentary. This suggests a process whereby they included terms that they recognised (most, if not all, of the Memorial's staff would have been veterans of the Great War) and to which they then added their own information. For example, Downing's definition for 'Machonochie' is 'A meat and vegetable ration; stomach (e.g. Knocked in the Maconochie)'. Pretty's definition reads 'The meat and vegetable ration, *so highly esteemed by the troops the bulk of which was prepared by the Aberdeen firm Messrs. Maconochie*; Stomach (eg Knocked in the Maconochie)'.

Clearly, the Glossary is an important source for Australian English and an understanding of its development during the First World War. Soldiers travelled overseas, many for the first time, and their exposure to various cultures and places helped to shape their language. The Australian soldiers picked up words from Arabic while serving in the Middle East, and many French terms from their service on the Western Front. Some of those borrowed from Arabic include 'Andy Macnoon' (variation of Arabic 'magnoon', 'crazy'), 'imshee' ('go away') and 'igaree' (already used by the British army, and meaning 'quick'). French lent words such as 'gas-gong' ('garçon', 'boy'), 'common-tally-plunk' ('comment allez vous','how are you'), and 'napoo' ('finished', from 'il n'y en a plus', 'there is none left'). Most were corrupted pronunciations of French. The soldiers' exposure to the terrible conditions of Gallipoli and the Western Front and a new technology and type of warfare resulted in many words being invented that helped them to cope with and structure their experiences. Lexical innovations included words like 'Anzac soup', defined as 'shell-hole water polluted by a corpse', 'belly-ache', defined as 'a mortal wound', and 'fresh faces in hell', a 'phrase used after a successful attack to indicate that many Germans had been killed'. All these terms reveal the horror of the war and the way in which soldiers tried to normalise the experience. They also made the technology of warfare familiar through their many nicknames for guns and weaponry (most of which were the potential means of death or injury). 'Beachy Bill' was a nickname for the Turkish gun that fired on the Aussie soldiers at Gallipoli; various grenades and shells on the Western Front were known as 'mouth-organs', 'whiz-bangs', 'flying pigs', and 'Jack Johnsons'.

The slang of the Australian soldiers helped to define their sense of Australian identity. While serving in the Great War to show their loyalty to the British Empire, the Australians asserted their own distinctive identity. Many distinctively Australian words, and also the exaggeration of the Australian accent, helped to reinforce and assert this sense of identity. Here is a verse from a typical poem in a trench newspaper, which uses slang and a representation of the Australian accent to assert a distinctive identity (the author is pleading with a man in War Office to obtain some leave):

We've barked and bent our skinny
    shins on Judah's stony rocks,
And wept compassion's bitter tears
    on ribs of bony crocks.
We've drunk from Jordan waters, with
    sad, colicky results,
And prayed for something stronger
    for us frolicky adults.
We're fed up seeing dusky bints and
    toothless Arab hags,
And picture maids of fairer tints in
    smoke of issue fags.
We'd like to see some 'Blighty' girls
    when time is running slack,
And spin 'em yarns of Palestine –
    they've 'eard about Anzac.
We'd like to tell yer typist in yer
    office, Mister Mac!
(*Kia Ora Coo-ee* June 1918, p.18)

The meanings attached to 'cobber', 'digger', and the new 'Anzac' and 'Aussie' (in the sense of both 'Australia' and 'an Australian') are examples of important words of the war which helped to shape the nature of Australia's national identity. The war also contributed a number of words to Australian English. Obviously 'Anzac' and 'Aussie' are the most widely known, but words such as 'dinki-di', 'the good oil', and 'furphy' were all first recorded during the war, or gained prominence through the soldiers' use of them.

The Glossary of AIF Slang remained unpublished after a final draft was put together in 1924. There is no clear evidence to suggest why this should be so, but some speculations can be made. Firstly, the slang represented in the glossary did not match the formal language that marked many post-war publications. Most notably, C.E.W. Bean's *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* was written in a formal style, and Bean emphasised an Anzac legend that glossed over the 'larrikinism' of the Digger. The slang of the soldiers was sometimes crude, often reflected contempt towards authority (and the British), and also reflected the horrors of war even as it tried to turn that horror into humour. Soldiers' slang was the language of the trenches, it was a language of male camaraderie—it was not the language of post-war Australia where soldiers needed to be integrated into society without any problems, and it was not a language to be found in formal publications. It is also possible that in the early 1920s, public interest in the war had slumped as people tried to put the events of the war behind them.

In 2003, however, the slang of Australia's soldiers of the Great War provides a fascinating insight into the culture of those soldiers. It is important, therefore, that this Glossary be made available to the general public. Therefore,

the ANDC has turned it into an online publication. There is both an annotated edition and a version of the original typescript, which retains all original spelling and typographical errors. For each term in the annotated edition, information is added that indicates whether the word is Australian, or whether it was a word shared with the other English-speaking troops. Some words were current in Australian English, but were taken with the troops to the battlefield. Additional information is provided on the word, its meaning and its usage. Where appropriate, cross references have been provided: for example, links to relevant websites on technical aspects of terms, or to a series of pages on groups of words (for example, all those words borrowed from French, or Arabic, or all two-up terms).

While the Glossary was not likely to make a viable book, not least because of its borrowing from Downing, the World Wide Web provides the perfect means by which this important document for both Australian English and the culture of Australia's Great War could be made available. The web also offers the advantage of allowing us to place the original version of the manuscript online as well, and to provide links to sites for the reader who wants to pursue further research on aspects of the War. It also allows us to make corrections and additions as new information about words comes to light. We hope that users of the ANDC website will enjoy reading the Glossary and any feedback will be most welcome.

[Dr Amanda Laugesen is a researcher at the Australian National Dictionary Centre. Her recent book *Convict Words: Language in Early Colonial Australia*, was published by Oxford University Press in January 2003.]

# OZWORDS COMPETITIONS

## OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 18: RESULTS

In 2001 the Melbourne Writers' Festival held a competition for the writing of the Great Australian Novel. *Ozwords* readers were asked to provide a title and a brief summary of the plot of such a novel in no more than 100 words, using as many Australian words as possible.

Honourable mentions to **Lianwe Evans**, WA, and **Sydney Robson**, Qld. Second prize (books worth $50 from the OUP catalogue) to **Gloria Anderlini** of Cairns. First prize (books worth $100 from the OUP catalogue) to **Peter Harley** of SA for the following:

### THE REPUBLIC OF OZ

A dekko at how Bazza, a larrikin pollie, becomes the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Oz. Bazza almost comes a gutzer. When he and his bonzer sheila Ockerina, girl Friday to the wowserish incumbent prime minister, try to do the dirty on that Royalist ratbag boss cocky, it seems to have Buckley's of making him shoot through like a Bondi tram in favour of Bazza. But hard yakka white ants the Royalists, and at last Oz becomes a republic. To celebrate, Bazza shouts his dinkum Aussie cobbers a liquid amber at the local rubbedy.

*****

## OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 19

Each year the *Washington Post*'s Style Invitational asks readers to take any word from the dictionary, alter it by adding, subtracting, or changing only one letter and supply a new definition. Here are the 2002 runners up:

**Intaxication**: Euphoria at getting a tax refund, which lasts until you realise it was your money to start with.

**Reintarnation**: Coming back to life as a hillbilly.

**Foreploy**: Any misrepresentation about yourself for the purpose of getting laid.

**Giraffiti**: Vandalism painted very, very high.

**Sarchasm**: The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person who doesn't get it.

**Inoculatte**: To take coffee intravenously when you are running late.

**Hipatitis**: Terminal coolness.

**Osteopornosis**: A degenerate disease. (This one got extra credit).

**Karmageddon**: It's like, when everybody is sending off all these really bad vibes, right? And then, like, the Earth explodes and it's like, a serious bummer.

**Glibido**: All talk and no action.

**Dopeler Effect**: The tendency of stupid ideas to seem smarter when they come at you rapidly.

Aussie example: **moggie**: an iconic black-and-white cat that gets a lot of fun swooping on posties, kids on bikes, etc. and giving them a hell of a fright. [Sorry, that's the best your Ed. can do.]

The winner of the *Washington Post*'s Style Invitational was:

**Ignoranus**: A person who's both stupid and an asshole.

Your task, dear logophiles, is to take an Australian word, or a word with an especially Australian flavour, to alter it by adding, subtracting, or changing only *one* letter, and to supply a new and witty definition.

ED.

> **Entries close 31 July 2003.**
>
> **Entries sent by email should also contain a snail mail address.**