## EDITORIAL

We are delighted to announce that Dorothy Jauncey's book *Bardi Grubs and Frog Cakes: South Australian Words* is now available. There are seven chapters: (1) 'The People Before: Words from Aboriginal Languages'; (2) ' "No Convict Taint": The Early Days of the Colony'; (3) ' "The Copper Kingdom": The Cornish and the Copper Mines'; (4) ' "A Paradise of Dissent": The German Lutheran Influence'; (5) 'Wealth from the Land: Wheat, Wool, and Wine'; (6) 'The Outback: Opals, Camels, and Woomera'; (7) 'The "Lifestyle State": The Festival, Grange, and Stobie Poles'.

The Centre's first book on regional Australian English was *Words from the West: A Glossary of West Australian Terms* (1994). This was followed by *Tassie Terms: A Glossary of Tasmanian Words* (1995), and *Voices of Queensland: Words from the Sunshine State* (2001). As with all good lexicography, these books are based on the principles of historical lexicography. This means that the historical evidence, in written form, for the use of the words and meanings has been established by the researcher. At the Centre we often find that memory and oral tradition are useful starting points ('I remember hearing that in a pub fifty years ago'), but they are always potentially unreliable, and a good historical mapper of the language will then proceed to track down the evidence.

On p. 5 Bruce Moore reports on another publication from the Centre: *Aussie English for Beginners: Book 3*, produced in collaboration with the cartoonist David Pope and the Australian National Museum.

*Frederick Ludowyk*

Frederick Ludowyk
Editor, *Ozwords*

# SOUTH AUSTRALIA—'KIND OF DIFFERENT'?
## DOROTHY JAUNCEY

*An idiotic driver … ploughed into a* **stobie pole**.
*The track said 'bad luck matey', threw in a few* **pudels**, *and left him 18 short.*
**Pillar bashing** *is not an advisable practice.*
*We raise our funds by holding meat and* **echo** *draws.*
*Perpetual leases on the following* **hundreds** *cannot be made freehold.*

The words that South Australians use are mostly the same as those of their fellow Australians. But the quotations above, all found in publications of the last five years, are likely to leave most of us a little bemused. These words, and many others, give some indication that South Australia is 'kind of different', as the state's advertising slogan used to say. The argument for difference often relies on the fact that it is a state born with **no convict taint**. It was a 'planned' colony of free settlers with nary a felon to arrive on its shores. So it has always seemed a wonderful irony that this morally upright province was founded on a plan written in a British jail by a convicted felon. How did this quirk of history come about?

In the 1820s in Britain there was general concern about the fast-growing population, particularly of the poor. Colonisation had a certain appeal as a way of getting rid of some of the problem, and a number of paupers were exported to Canada at public expense in 1823. Around this time, conservatives were also concerned that the recent enemy, the French, were showing altogether too much interest in Australia for British comfort—French Captain Nicolas Baudin in *Le Géographe* had charted parts of the coast of southern Australia and given French names to the land he called *Terre Napoléon*. Radicals, also concerned about population increase and the French, were nevertheless appalled that the earlier colonies in Australia had been little more than dumping grounds for convicts. They had idealistic plans for any future colony to be an extension of the best of British civilisation, with none of the unemployment or religious discrimination that was then affecting England. Enter Edward Gibbon Wakefield.

Young Wakefield, born in 1796, came from a humanitarian Quaker background and looked set for a brilliant career in the British civil service. But Wakefield, as described by author Derek Whitelock, had a 'penchant for adolescent heiresses'. He abducted and married one underage heiress, but unfortunately she died. Not content with one error of judgment, Wakefield then managed to persuade another rich but underage lass to run away to Gretna Green with him. Her family had him arrested and sent to Newgate Prison. Rather than give in to despair at his fate, he became a prolific writer, and in 1830 published anonymously *A Letter from Sydney* (though he had never been to Australia), outlining what he called '**systematic colonization**'. The main ideas of this plan were that land in any new colony should be sold (on spec—unseen, unsurveyed) to those with capital who aspired to be settlers, and that the proceeds of such sales would fund the passage of the **free emigrants**, who would provide labour. For both conservatives and radicals alike it was an attractive package. It would alleviate the 'poor' problem and, at the same time, trump the French.

With Wakefield released from jail, a team of supporters was assembled, and succeeded in persuading the British government to pass the South Australian Colonization Act of 1834. The colony was to be open to settlement by British subjects and, importantly, to be **convict-free**. By the end of 1835 the British government's guarantees of land sales of **country sections** and **town sections** had been fulfilled, and settlement of the non-penal colony became possible. So began the settlement of what was to become the state of South Australia.

The early settlers borrowed many words into their vocabulary from the Aboriginal languages of South Australia. Such terms were almost always nouns, the names of things that were unfamiliar to the European settlers: terms for animals, fish, plants, and tools that were so very different from any the Europeans had seen. Although words such as **midla** ('spear-thrower') or **pirri**

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('engraving tool') have fallen out of use with the demise of the traditional ways of living which they represented, many words are still familiar. Some are to do with fishing, such as **mulloway** (first recorded in the language of the Ramindjeri people around the Coorong), and the popular bait **bardi** grubs (common in many southern and central languages). Others are names for outback fauna such as the **euro** (*not* a form of currency in South Australia), the reptiles **perentie** and **carney**, and of course **witchetty** grubs, which come from languages further north. Less well-known to coastal Europeans are the little nocturnal desert marsupials such as the **kowari** (from the Diyari language east of Lake Eyre), and **mulgara** (from Arabana and Wangkangrru, languages west and north of Lake Eyre). There are many plant terms, some of which are becoming more familiar with the popularity of bush tucker foods, such as the little purple berries **muntries**, first recorded in 1840 in Kaurna. The terms referring to Aboriginal people themselves are more recent additions to Australian English. As with Aboriginal people of eastern Australia identifying as 'Koori' or 'Murri', so now do South Australian Aboriginal people prefer to call themselves **Nungas** or **Yura** or **Anangu**, depending on where they live, and in turn are referred to by those names.

Although some of the new British settlers were learning about the new plants and animals, they still retained an undeniable Englishness in both customs and lexicon. When the first Episcopalian Bishop, Dr Short, arrived in Adelaide in 1847, he observed: 'We find civility and intelligence the characteristics of the population to more than an average degree. A more thoroughly English colony does not probably exist.' And British usage of some words continues today. For example, South Australians do not harvest their wheat, they **reap** (very Biblical, as one commentator has observed); toddlers are not taken for a walk in a stroller but a **pusher** (from British *pushchair*); children start school in **Reception** (*not* a hotel foyer, but the SA version of Kindergarten or Preparatory). Sparrows are **spoggies** (from Scots *sprowg* or *sprowgie*) and a **terrace** is a street. **Hundreds**, as in the quotation above, is a retention of an English term *hundred*, meaning 'a subdivision of a county or shire', and

dating back to the Anglo-Saxon period. Its origins are obscure, although it has been variously suggested over time that it denoted the district that furnished a hundred warriors, or a division of a hundred hides of land (a hide being the area considered adequate for the support of one free family, or as much land as could be ploughed with one plough in one year). In early South Australia, the hundred was intended to contain one hundred square miles, one-third more or one-third less, depending on the placement of creeks or hills, and the one hundred warriors seem not to have been required. The term is no longer in use in Britain—the last evidence in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is dated 1888, but in South Australia the subdivision term is still current in 2004.

The Cornish were early arrivals to the colony, bringing words from the Cornish mines as well as their Methodism with them. The **knockers** also accompanied them—small goblin creatures who were supposed to inhabit the mines, and who indicated their presence by repeating the blows of the miners' picks with a knocking sound, sometimes leading lucky miners to a productive lode. Some of the terms from Cornish dialect such as **sett** (a mining lease), and **sturt** (a great profit), lasted only as long as the copper mines of the new colony were viable, but others such as **skimps** (mine refuse), and working on **tribute** (payment according to the quality of ore mined), became familiar in other kinds of mines across Australia, as the Cornish themselves moved further afield. These days, the revival of Cornish customs in the largest Cornish festival in the world, the biennial **Kernewek Lowender** ('Cornish happiness') is held in the **Copper Coast** towns of Kadina, Moonta, and Wallaroo on the Yorke Peninsula. The celebrations not only make for great photo opportunities for Australian and overseas tourists, but substantially boost the local economy. The festival also ensures that visiting Cornish descendants from all over the world can inspect various **wheals** (mines), look through real **miners' cottages**, and become reacquainted with the joys of the **furry dance** and **Cornish wrestling**.

Shortly after the first Cornish arrived in South Australia came the first group of German Lutheran settlers. They made their farms in the Adelaide and Barossa areas, and were admired for their

courtesy, piety, and hard work. Their communities were united in their customs, their food, their faith, and their language (which became known as **Barossa Deutsch**). Some of their terms became familiar to other South Australians—events like the shooting competition **Schutzenfest** (now an annual summer festival) were enjoyed, and the choral music of the **Liedertafel** was highly regarded. But with some xenophobia never very far from the Australian consciousness, world events in the early twentieth century resulted in a ban on such activities and essentially on the words themselves. Even food items were not exempt from the xenophobic response: **Berliner** buns, the jam doughnuts, became **Kitchener buns**, and there was a determined and somewhat ludicrous effort to change the name of the sausage **fritz** to 'Austral'. Terms like **bockwurst** and **streusel cake** were representative of 'enemy aliens' around the time of the First World War and the Nomenclature Act of 1917 removed any trace of German place names in the state. Hahndorf became Ambleside, Hergott Springs became Marree, and so on. Over time some of the activities and words have come back, some not. But **tin kettling** (a noisy welcome-home party after a marriage) has spread out across Australia from its German beginnings as 'Polter Abend', and the **quark** (a kind of cottage cheese) of the early Barossa residents is even being produced commercially. The game of **kegel** (a kind of indoor bowls) is still alive and well in the Barossa region, and **pudel**, a direct borrowing from German for 'a blunder or bungle', is the term used when the ball rolls off the track. As for the buns, Berliners and Kitcheners now sit comfortably side by side on bakery shelves (but note that Kitcheners are the ones with the cream in the middle).

Other South Australian regionalisms have originated within the state rather than being British retentions or borrowings from other languages. Discovery of opal resulted in a whole lexicon in itself. And so there are terms like **pillar**, a vertical block of earth and rock left intact as support when a **tunnelling machine** hollows out a **dugout** (a preferred kind of residence in the opal town of Coober Pedy). And there are words that can have other senses elsewhere, such as **floater**, a bleached piece of opal, and the evocative **painted lady**, not a butterfly or a female, but a
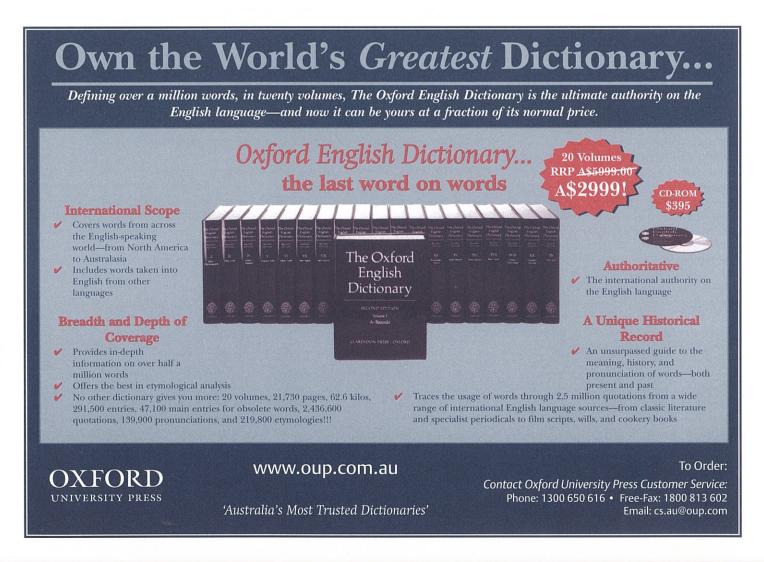
boulder that has broken and has a thin coating of opal across the fracture line. Labels were also coined to describe agricultural innovations, and so arose the **stump-jump plough** that opened up vast areas of mallee country for farming, and the Bull-Ridley **stripper** that revolutionised wheat farming. Some terms derived from names of places, such as the extraordinary little lizard known as the **Lake Eyre dragon**, the **Murray magpie** (a peewee or magpie lark elsewhere in Australia), and the tree disease **Mundulla yellows**. Others took on names of people, though the person's association with the word is often forgotten. Such words include the **Sturt's desert pea**, the state floral emblem, **mullenising**, a method of preparing scrub-covered land, named after settler Charles Mullen, and **Torrens title**, a form of land title introduced into parliament by Robert Richard Torrens. Of course, one of the best known is the iconic **Hills hoist**, devised in 1945 by Adelaide motor mechanic Lance Hill.

Present-day living in South Australia, as the avowedly 'lifestyle state', is a far cry from its early days. It used to hold to a reputation of stuffy respectability—'I went to South Australia and it was closed' was the criticism. Yet from the 1970s it has had some of the most socially progressive legislation in Australia, and hosts impressive cultural events in the form of the **Festival** and the **Fringe** and more recently **Womadelaide**. But what of the words that **Croweaters** themselves would regard as most quintessentially South Australian? These might include the ultimate Adelaide delicacy the **pie floater**, a meat pie floating upside down in a bowl of pea soup, and **stobie poles**, the distinctive tapered poles of concrete and steel that carry power and telephone lines across the state (invented in the 1920s by James Stobie, as an answer to the lack of hardwood in South Australia). And many South Australians still call a stubby an **echo**, although the capacity to return the bottle for a refund disappeared in the 1990s. Then there are the beloved **police greys**, the horses of the mounted police, and **Salvation Jane** ('Paterson's Curse' to the rest of us). And what of **frog cakes**, those cream-filled green-iced creations of Balfours' Bakery from the 1920s? They have been copied over the years in other states. They have appeared with chocolate or pink icing rather than green, and even in the **Crows**' colours of black and white. And the classic frog cake has appeared as an Easter Chick frog cake or a Father Christmas frog cake. But whatever their colour or form, they are still uniquely South Australian, still 'kind of different'.

[Dr Dorothy Jauncey is a researcher at the Australian National Dictionary Centre. She is the author of the book *Bardi Grubs and Frog Cakes: South Australian Words* (OUP 2004; ISBN 0 19 551770 9]

# ✉ MAILBAG

**Letters are welcome. Please address letters to: Frederick Ludowyk, Editor, Ozwords,**
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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.*

### IT ALL GOES WELL, DOES IT NOW?

On the Internet I came across the following scathing attack on ABC football commentators and one reference puzzled me. Here is the quotation: 'The ABC has also lost me with its introduction of the yobbo comments man, viz Danny (call me Daniel) Southern. Call me elitist, but I don't turn on the ABC to listen to "he run quick" (for "he ran quickly") and (said several times on Saturday) "them players". The old "It all goes well" can't be far away … and we all know that the plural of "you" is "youse" isn't it?' It's that 'all goes well' reference that puzzles me. As a notorious Queensland fish-and-chips madam continually put it, 'Please explain!'
**J. Glover**, Qld

*It all goes well is a crass solecism for **It augurs well** and it certainly does not 'all go well' (far less 'augur well') for the panjandrums of the ABC if they permit their footy commentators such illiteracies. It is worse by far than **youse** (for which I have a sneaking sympathy). Our verb **augur** comes from the noun **augur** meaning a 'foreteller'. As the OED has it: An **augur** is a religious official among the Romans (ancient, not modern: Catholics don't, as far as I know, cut up birds in order to inspect their innards for telltale marks) whose duty it was to predict future events … in accordance with omens derived from the flight, singing, and feeding of birds, the appearance of the entrails of sacrificial victims etc. Hence the entrails etc. could **augur well** or **augur badly**. 1819: Walter Scott: The Lady of the Lake: 'All augured ill for Alpines line'. The problem for the phrase it augurs well is that the verb **augur** really no longer exists in everyday English, and has become fossilised in the phrase it augurs well. Once something like this happens in English it is ripe for refashioning in the popular imagination. **Bride-guma** became **bride-groom** in the fourteenth century (when **guma**, meaning 'man', disappeared from the language), and in twentieth-century Australia a **whim-wham for a goose's bridle** became a **wigwam for a goose's bridle** when **whim-wham**, meaning 'trinket, ornament', disappeared from the language. So perhaps the footy commentators are augurs. **ED.***

### SNUCK A SNEAK

I notice that in your *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* the reader is told that the form 'snuck' should not be used 'in formal contexts' for the past tense of the verb 'sneak' ('to go or convey furtively, slink'). It seems to me that this is a very common usage. How common does a usage have to be before it can be used 'in formal contexts'?
**J. Scott**, Tas.

*The verb **sneak** is an enigma. It is the only verb in the English language with an infinitive in -eek, -iek, or -eak that has a past tense form -uck. For example, the verb **peak**: we never say 'the thermometer **puck**'. Nor do we say 'the jug **luck**' or 'the mouse **squck**' or the frightened woman **shruck**' or 'the dirty socks **ruck**', or 'they **suck** him here, they **suck** him there, those Frenchies **suck** him everywhere!' But you are quite correct: people increasingly say **snuck**. A quick search of the Internet reveals that worldwide there are 165,000 **sneaked** and 275,000 **snuck**. And in Australia there are 3,330 **sneaked**, and 5,290 **snuck**. Fowler [H.W. Fowler: Modern English Usage, 3rd edition by R.W. Burchfield] quotes the following **snucks** among others: 1932, J.T. Farrell (US): 'They had all snuck in and were having a good time, making trouble'; 1969, Oz: 'So I snuck off to the park and had a good read'; 1986, New Yorker: 'This Crisp, he snuck over into the Blood's territory to make that mark'; 1988, Peter Carey: 'Happiness snuck up on her like a poacher in the night'. **Snuck** came originally from American dialect. Mark Twain was faithful to Huckleberry Finn's dialect when he tells us that the boy often **snuck** out of the house (Huck never **sneaked**). I'm afraid that snuck and its horrible ilk has sneaked up upon us while we weren't looking and is now quite respectable. For instance, the British author Emily Brightwell writes: 2004: '[The] assailant clutched Claypool and half-drug, half-carried him around to the side of the building' (Mrs Jeffries Sweeps the Chimney, p. 2). I do so wish she had said **dragged** instead of **drug!** **ED.***

### VERSING

It took me a while to work out that when my son talked about versing another sports team, he meant that he was 'playing against them'. This is obviously a corruption of 'versus', but is it acceptable English, and how long has it been around?
**J. Cahill**, NSW

*This is similar to the issue raised by **augur**. **Versus** is another Latin word, this time made even more difficult by the fact that it is a preposition. It is certainly much more widely used than **augur**, but it does occur in restricted contexts, almost exclusively in relation to sports and the law. In print it often appears in the abbreviated form **vs.**, and in speech adults sometimes say 'the Raiders **vee** the Melbourne Storm'. It is understandable that younger people became confused. And so they created a new verb 'to verse' meaning 'to be in opposition with'. The usage has been around for about a decade, and is widespread among teenagers and younger people. This from a Web Newsgroup: 'They were versing the top team and lost it in double overtime'. And it is being carried over into adult sports reporting: 'Ten players in the game have played for the Australian team, with Tasmanian captain, Australian One-Day captain and soon to be Test captain Ricky Ponting versing the captain of NSW and the player he will take the Test captaincy from in January, Steve Waugh'. It is certainly non-standard at the moment, but it is difficult to predict what its status will be a decade on. **ED.***

### RANDOMS

Members of our group (mainly 18 to 23 year-olds) often refer to people we don't know, or who are not known to the main group, as 'randoms'. Is this a new word or sense for the *Australian National Dictionary*?
**P. Jones**, ACT

*I must confess that I had never come across this sense, though the main dictionary editors at the Centre tell me that they recently added it to one of their larger dictionaries. I wonder if its origin lies in computing jargon? A number of computing dictionaries on the Web give a definition of a noun **random** along these lines: 'A **random** is anyone who is not a hacker' [in the sense 'a person whose serious hobby is computers or computer programming'] (or, sometimes, 'anyone not known to the hacker speaking'). Typical usage from the Web: 'I went to their talk, but the audience was full of **randoms** asking bogus questions'. In computerese a computing program can be described as **random** if some features of it are poorly executed or coded, and this probably explains the transfer to people who are not up to the expertise and knowledge of the true hacker. I suspect there was then a further transfer, when people outside any group (for example, outsiders at a bar, a party, etc.) were described as **randoms**. Typical usage (again from the Web): 'We met a few randoms at the party last night'; '[at a bar] I just met a random over there, and I think I like her'. **ED.***

## LETTERS

There were many interesting letters responding to different parts of the October 2003 *Ozwords*.

In the Mailbag section a contributor asked about **shoon** (the archaic plural of **shoe**), and also inquired after a poem about pixies which mentioned the word **shoon**. Frederick Ludowyk could not recall the pixie poem, but many readers did, pointing us to Walter de la Mare's poem 'Silver':

Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon:
This way and that she peers, and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees.

The poem was first published in the collection *Peacock Pie: A Book of Rhymes* in 1916. At that date I suspect that **shoon** was a conscious archaism, but it is interesting that many people still recall the poem and the archaic plural vividly. Another reader referred to Elizabeth Gould's poem 'Red in Autumn', which includes the line 'And red are my new little dancing shoon'. I have not been able to track down the date of composition, but the reader knew it from *The Victorian Readers: Second Book* (1930).

**Foreign order** produced many responses. **Foreign order** is a euphemism for using the resources of one's workplace to do private work. Many of the letters regarding this term reported its use, especially in engineering workshops, from the 1950s onwards. A few mentioned the variant **foreigner**, and further research has shown that this variant is used in Britain. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2002) gives as its fourth sense of **foreigner**: 'Something done or made at work by an employee for his or her own benefit'. It seems that **foreigner** is the original term, and perhaps that **foreign order** is an Australian variant.

A Melbourne reader reports, apropos Mark Gwynn's article on terms for men's bathing costumes, that while **dick pointers** may be common in New South Wales, she knows them as **dick poppers** in Victoria.

## BARBECUE STOPPER

In July 2002 Prime Minister John Howard used the term **barbecue stopper**. He was referring to the battle many people have in balancing work pressures against family responsibilities, and was suggesting this was an issue of such importance that mention of it could halt the fun of a barbecue. Many subsequent

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# 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.

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uses of the term are direct references to John Howard's use: 'One of the "barbecue stoppers" at my place is the fact that we have to pay back $3500 to the Government because their exceptionally bad family assistance policy led to us being overpaid by that amount last year'. The term was then applied to other issues, but still with allusion to John Howard: 'Mr President, the subject of natural resource management is not exactly a barbecue stopper, as the Prime Minister might put it'. Elsewhere, while still in a political context, we see the term moving away from its Howard-specific origin: 'Senate reform was never going to be a "barbecue stopper". But instead of firing up debate about constitutional reform, it looks destined for the backburner'; 'The machinery of government is hardly a barbecue-stopper of a subject'. It will be interesting to see if this term is a stayer in Australian English. Some respondents have also reported the use of the term **barbecue card** in the later 1980s and 1990s. Large corporations often made unpopular changes to structure, pricing, and so on, and the **barbecue card** provided employees with a short list of answers to potentially difficult questions from the public. Does anyone have any written evidence for this term?

## POLITICAL SWAGS

Bruce Simpson in *Packhorse Drover* (1996) uses an interesting idiom—'Ringers, by and large, were drifters and when a man spoke of greasing the swag straps he really meant he was thinking of moving on'. This is our only evidence of **greasing the swag straps**. No doubt the phrase is (or was) out there, but this is very difficult to prove. And this reminds me of another 'swag' idiom that has caused us many problems. When Bob Hawke was being advised to step down as prime minister, Gareth Evans is reported to

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have said to him: 'Pull out, digger, the dogs are pissing on your swag'. The story is often repeated—for example last December in the *Canberra Times*: 'But Hawke was fast losing support, and the end was nigh when a delegation of his senior ministers came visiting to tell him, in Gareth Evans's phrase, "Pull out, dig. The dogs are pissing on your swag!"' Was Gareth Evans drawing on an Australian idiom that existed out there in colloquial speech, or did he make it up? In 2000 the NSW country newspaper *The Land* reported that a senator who was making a long and boring speech was handed a note by a colleague that read 'Wake up digger, the dogs are peeing on your swag!' But this is clearly alluding to the phrase from Gareth Evans. A 1998 prose piece by the writer John Tranter is the only place where we have found the phrase divorced from its political context. Part of the final paragraph reads: 'It's time to move out, old mate. ... The dogs are pissing on your swag. If you permit me to offer a smidgen of advice, it's time to hit the trail, to hitch your star to that rotating Carousel'. We would be pleased to hear of any other evidence for these terms.

## TWO TREES THAT TELL A TALE

The **Dig Tree** is the coolibah tree in the Corner country that marks the last known camp (in 1861) of the explorers Burke and Wills, and which in turn was marked with the message 'DIG 3FT NW', indicating where a cache of supplies had been buried. The **Tree of Knowledge** is also in Queensland. It is the name given to a 150-year-old ghost gum at Barcaldine in central Queensland, the founding site of that great political movement now known as the Australian Labour Party. Political meetings were held beneath the tree during the Great Shearers' Strike of 1891. Our records for these two terms are surprisingly scanty, and we would be pleased to receive any printed evidence for them before 1980.

## AUSTRALEX

AUSTRALEX is the Australasian Association for Lexicography, an organisation that supports and encourages all aspects of lexicography in Australia and New Zealand. Its biennial conference will be held at the University of Sydney on 12 July 2004. Details of the conference are available on Australex's webpage <http://australex.anu.edu.au>. Membership of Australex costs only $10 a year. Again, details on how to join the association are available on the webpage.

**BRUCE MOORE**
DIRECTOR

*Aussie English for Beginners* is a series of books published by the National Library of Australia. The definitions and histories of words and phrases are provided by the Australian National Dictionary Centre, and the cartoons are by David Pope. The first two books in the series focused mainly on single words (such as **bludger**, **dob**, **ocker**, and **swag**), although there were some idioms (**bring a plate**, **full as a goog**, and **don't come the raw prawn with me!**). This third book focuses exclusively on idioms.

Because the meanings of English idioms are not self-evident, they can prove especially difficult for people who are learning English. And in Australia, not only do the new English speakers have to learn the idioms of international English, but they also have to learn our own unique Australian idioms. For example, there are some international idioms that describe madness or eccentricity—**mad as a hatter**, **mad as a march hare**, and **mad as a wet hen**. But in Australia, we have many more. What would a non-Australian make of the idioms **silly as wheel**, **silly as a chook**, **silly as a two-bob watch**, to **have kangaroos in the top paddock**, **as mad as a gum tree full of galahs**, **not the full quid** and **short of a sheet of bark**? *Aussie English for Beginners Book 3* tries to make sense of some of the most common Australian idioms.

The process of the creation and loss of idioms is difficult to predict. Although the last trams ran on the Bondi line in Sydney in 1960 the idiom **to shoot through like a Bondi tram** has remained firmly part of Australian English. Some idioms, however, have become dated. For example, the idiom **full up to dolly's wax** means that you have eaten enough—it refers to the time before plastics were widely used, when children's dolls had wax heads attached to cloth bodies. Such dolls have disappeared, and the idiom has largely disappeared with them. **I heard it from the man outside Hoyts** is an idiom that was common in Australian English until the 1970s. It originally referred to the commissionaire outside a Hoyts picture theatre in Melbourne in the 1930s. He had the reputation for knowing everything that was going on,

so if you heard something from the man outside Hoyts it had to be true! This idiom has almost entirely disappeared from Australian English, as has the Sydney idiom **more hide than Jessie**—a reference to Jessie the elephant (who died in 1939) of Taronga Park Zoo.

Is Australian English continuing to produce new idioms? We toyed with the idea of including the idiom **straight to the poolroom**, a favourite of Darryl Kerrigan (Michael Caton) in the 1997 Australian movie *The Castle*. It is used to refer to something that is regarded as so special that it cannot be used, but must go on display—'Darl, this Chinese vase you've painted is beautiful—it's going straight to the poolroom'. We are not convinced, however, that the idiom will last. During the Winter Olympics at Salt Lake City in 2002 Australian Steven Bradbury won a gold medal in the short track speed skating competition, when all the other skaters fell before the finish line. In the following months the phrase **to do a Bradbury** was widely used to describe someone who came from behind to be the unlikely winner of a contest. But the idiom has now almost entirely disappeared.

A number of the words explored in *Aussie English for Beginners Books 1 and 2* came from Australian indigenous languages or from British dialects—both historically important sources for Australian words. But in this collection of idioms there are no indigenous words, and there are very few that have a dialect origin. What we find with idioms is a truly home-grown product. Some of the idioms carry the memory of important Australian historical figures (Dame Nellie Melba in **do a Melba** and Ned Kelly in **such is life**) or events (**your blood's worth bottling** comes from the First World War, whereas **go troppo** comes from the Second World War), but most of them are timeless expressions of quintessential Australian values and attitudes. The typical Australian is prepared to **stir the possum** if necessary, but is more content to live in a world characterised by **no worries** and **she's apples**. The same Australian has a strong sense of injustice—**fair suck of the sauce bottle**—and

sympathy for anyone who **gets the rough end of the pineapple**. But there is no sympathy for those who **have tickets on themselves**, are **as flash as a rat with a gold tooth**, or who **wouldn't work in an iron lung**. And there is absolutely no sympathy for those who dare to take you for a fool—**I didn't come down in the last shower** or **what do you think this is, bush week?**

These and many more idioms are explained in *Aussie English for Beginners Book 3* and delightfully illustrated with cartoons by David Pope.

[This is a revised version of Bruce Moore's introduction to the book. The cartoon illustrating **a stubbie short of a sixpack** is also from the book, although the black-and-white reproduction cannot do justice to the colour original.]



**A STUBBY SHORT OF A SIXPACK**

Not very bright or clever, not quite 'with it'. This is an Australian variation of a common international idiom, typically represented by 'a sandwich short of a picnic'. It combines the Australian 'stubby' (a small squat 375 ml bottle of beer) with the borrowed American 'sixpack' (a pack of six cans of beer), demonstrating how readily Australian English naturalises Americanisms.

The word **battler** has graced the English language for centuries, if 'grace' be the *mot most juste*. It was borrowed in the Middle English period from Old French and meant, literally, 'a person who battles or fights; a warrior'. In international English the word **battler**, although having possible figurative uses, has very much retained its literal sense. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* (2003) simply gives for the international sense: 'a person who battles or fights'.

In Australia towards the end of the nineteenth century the word **battler** began to acquire some distinctively Aussie connotations. The meaning most familiar to us is listed in the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (2002), and labelled *Australia/New Zealand*: 'a person who refuses to admit defeat in the face of difficulty'. What is odd about the historical development of the word is that for some time positive and pejorative senses co-existed.

One of the readers for the *Australian National Dictionary* project took a quotation from the *Bulletin*, December **1898**: 'A bludger is about the lowest form of human thing, and is a brothel bully ... A battler is the feminine'. As I explained in the April 2001 edition of *Ozwords*, the original 'bludger' or 'bludgeoner' was a pimp who carried a 'bludgeon', and the term **bludger** expanded in meaning from 'the pimp who lives off the earnings of a prostitute' to 'anyone who lives off the efforts of others'. **Bludger** has always been a pejorative word. The reader who took down this annotation from the *Bulletin* added a comment: 'Probably short-lived because of clash with non-pejorative struggling worker'. But the reader was wrong. The pejorative sense of 'prostitute' for **battler** lasted for a long time in Australian English.

C.W. Chandler in *Darkest Adelaide and Sidelights of City Life* (**1907**) writes: 'Prostitution though most terrible and degrading in any shape or form reaches its most forbidding form when married women are found out **battling** for cash' (p. 32). And further: **1956**: 'A **battler** is Sydneyese for prostitute' (R. Park & D. Niland *The Drums Go Bang*, p. 142); **1978**: 'A **battler** was also the name given a woman who earned a few extra quid for her old man by sleeping around' (R.J. Roddewig *Green Bans*, p. 7). The prostitute is someone who has to 'battle' for a living, but there is no suggestion whatsoever that even grudging admiration is directed at her.

How could the positive and negative senses have co-existed for so long? In my view, we need to look more closely at the evidence of a range of senses between the old negative sense and the continuing positive sense. One of these is the use of **battler** to describe an unemployed or irregularly employed person. In the country, **battler** was used to describe a swagman or itinerant worker seeking to subsist while looking for employment. This sense is first recorded in the *Bulletin* in **1898**: 'I found patch after patch destroyed. Almost everyone I met blamed the unfortunate "**battler**", and I put it down to some of the Sydney "talent" until ... I caught two Chows vigorously destroying melon-vines' (2 April p. 14). The battler here is not culpable, but he is certainly not someone to be admired—he is 'unfortunate'. In an urban context, **battler** was used to describe an unemployed person who lived by opportunism and his wits. **1946**: 'George was a great **battler**. His technique was to get us into a crowded tram, and wait until "Mrs Fares-please" came. Then ... look pathetic and tell the truth—"We haven't any money." ' (F. Clune *Try Nothing Twice*, p. 7). In a slightly different sense **battler** is also used to describe a person who frequents racecourses in precarious search of a living from punting. Banjo Paterson writes: **1914**: 'A **battler** is a turf hanger-on who has not capital enough to be a backer, not personal magnetism enough to be a whisperer, and not sense enough to get work'.

Of course all of these battlers are morally superior to the prostitute. They struggle to make a living as a result of circumstances (interestingly, many or most of them seem to be unemployed) or of class, and while not receiving the disapprobation directed at the prostitute, there is no admiration.

If we already have a gradation in the pantheon of **battlers**, the way is therefore open for there to be a battler of a very superior kind. And this, of course, is the battler of Aussie icon status. He has always co-existed with the others. This is the person with few natural advantages, who works doggedly and with little reward, who struggles hard for a livelihood, and who displays enormous courage in so doing. Our first citation for this, not surprisingly, comes from Henry Lawson: **1896**: 'I sat on him pretty hard for his pretensions, and paid him out for all the patronage he'd worked off on me ... and told him never to pretend to me again he was a **battler**' (*While the Billy Boils*, p. 26). The **battler** who lies behind Lawson's attack on pseudo-battlers is still alive: **1986**: ' "You bloody trendies," he shouted, "you move ... and the housing prices go bloody berserk. And what happens to your poor Aussie **battler**. ... One day this whole place'll be just like Balmain—a refuge for the terminally

smug" ' (*National Times*, Sydney, 10 January p. 18). The main feature of the **battler** is that he or she 'is one who is always prepared to have a go, regardless of the odds' (*Age* (Melbourne) 9 August 1989 p. 27). 'The **battler**—a working-class underdog who struggles to survive, the salt of the earth' [I. Sharp *Culture Shock* 1992 p. 18]. It is this kind of **battler** who became the **little Aussie battler** of the later 1970s.

I think there is no doubt that **battler** is also a class term, although in egalitarian Australia the term 'lower class' is taboo: **1965**: 'Everybody in Australia has his position. Roughly speaking, there are three kinds of people in this country: the rich, the middle class and the **battlers**' (K. Smith *OGF: Being the Private Papers of George Cockburn, Bus Conductor, a Resident of Hurstfield, a Suburb of Sydney, Australia*, p. 58). These **battlers** were also no doubt bastions of Labor party support, although there were some shifts of allegiance in the later 1980s: 'The battlers who make up Labor's traditional support have shouldered the burden of restructuring our economy' (*Age* (Melbourne) 9 April, 1988, 'Saturday Extra' p. 1).

In a common reading of recent Australian political history, the battlers have switched political allegiance, and are now 'Howard's battlers': 'Come in, Howard's battlers. Peter Costello's eighth budget is both economically responsible and politically responsive. It is aimed squarely at the battlers, some of whom were traditional Labor voters and who have underwritten the Government's electoral success since 1996' (*Age* (Melbourne) 14 May 2003). 'Unless Labor can make significant inroads into the ranks of Howard's battlers, it will have no hope of returning to the Treasury benches' (*Bulletin* 16 July 2003). Unless, perhaps, they become Mark Latham's 'aspirational voters' climbing their latter-day Jacob's ladder.

At the Centre we have collected evidence over recent years of the phrase **little Aussie battler** being used in many new figurative ways—of a small Australian-owned nutritional supplements company that won the Premier's Food Victoria Award for Innovation over the 'big boys' (2003), of the Australian dollar (or 'Pacific peso') as it struggled against the mighty greenback (2002), and of the green and golden bell frog as it struggled against the threat of extinction (2004). In all of these uses the core iconic sense remains—especially the person, company, currency, or frog 'that struggles hard for a livelihood, and who displays enormous courage in so doing'!

## OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 20: RESULTS

The task set for this competition was to choose an Australian place name and give it an apposite definition. You were permitted to add, subtract, or change one letter if so desired. The competition again attracted many hundreds of entries. The following are honourable mentions in the much put-upon and bebothered judges' often querulous opinion and include the first and second prizewinning entries:

**Bandiana** let Princess Di rest in peace (M. Davis)

**Barakula** fisherman's ice box (D. Mockford)

**Barragate** a really fishy scandal (B. Bufi)

**Blaxland** Australia pre-1788 (G. Case)

**Bringarooma** BYO accommodation (A. Heazlewood)

**Bullabulling** a bull doing what bulls do (B. Rothwell)

**Caniambo** very intelligent ambulance driver (G. Witts)

**Cantberra** habitat of bearers of sanctimonious and insincere speech (B. Turvey)

**Cedusa** but not before a feed of oysters (L. Evans)

**Chillingham** a frigid pig (A. Wornes)

**Cignet** a device to catch baby swans smoking (K. Hodgkinson)

**Crookwell** How are you really? (P. Harley)

**Damboring** Is it really that bad? (P. Harley)

**Deddick** impotence (P. Harley)

**Gundaroo** I'm a conservationist (J. Ferguson)

**Gundaroo** a less serious crime than Gundagai (J. Peterson)

**Ilbilbie** a small, poorly marsupial (J. Ferguson)

**Iona** boast of the male chauvinist (D. Leadbetter)

**Jeedamya** an expletive for use when somebody nearly hits your car (B. Rothwell)

**Koolyanobbing** the cure resort after visiting Cockburn (G. Witts)

**Liaweenee** the tall story you tell about the big one that got away when it was really a very small one you had to throw back (D. Briggs)

**Maitland** Oz (P. Harley)

**Mangalore** a surfeit of males (E. O'Brien)

**Mangalore** overpopulation (P. Harley)

**Mengalore** nympho's paradise (A. Heazlewood)

**Meribah** like a gay bar but cheerier (J. Ferguson)

**Millicent** the new ten-dollar coin (R. Brown)

**Mundiwindi** Sunday's weather forecast (J. Ferguson)

**Noondoo** long lunch (L. Berck)

**Nagga Nagga** a bigamist's worst nightmare (L. Evans)

**Nhudenboy** young male naturist (T. Hosking)

**No Rooma** sign outside Italian motel (B. Bufi)

**Numbugga** a member of the winter swimming team (S. Robson)

**Numbugga** a worn-out sodomist (P. Harley)

**Pundagai** where the sog dits on the bucker tox (apologies to Dr Spooner!) (S. Robson)

**Quinns Racks** a device to castrate the fathers of quins, only to be used by the bearer of the quins (G. Sear)

**Quluru** lineup of tourists at the Rock (A. Heazlewood)

**Toowong** not right (G. Case)

**Totterham** a drunk pig (J. Thomson)

**Tuggeralong** (Tuggeranong) what a cave man does after initial contact with a female (C. Stiller)

**Tullamarine** Try fooling someone else! (J. Ferguson)

**Tumbarumba** a belly-dance to South American music (M. Davis)

**Tumbledown dick** male menopause (D. Tribe)

**Warrawee** asked by many a lost tourist (A. Wornes)

**Warrawee** the anguished perennial call of the migrating Glaswegians lost in the northern suburbs of Sydney (J. Peterson)

**Yass** an affected affirmative (R. Brown).

Second prize (books worth $50 from the OUP catalogue) goes to **Peter Harley** of South Australia for his collection that included **Maitland**. First prize (books worth $100 from the OUP catalogue) goes to **John Peterson** of Victoria for his definition of **Gundaroo**.

## OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 21

### Collectives

People like me are fascinated by collective nouns. Many English collectives came from the Book of St Albans compiled by that brilliantly eccentric nun Dame Juliana Barnes (1486) to whom I have referred in earlier issues of *Ozwords*. Here are some examples of Dame Juliana's remarkable fancy: *a shrewdness of apes, a sloth of bears, a dissimulation of (small) birds, a blush of boys, a glaring of cats, a chattering of choughs, a hastiness of cooks, a business of ferrets, a skulk of foxes, a cowardice of curs, an observance of hermits, an exaltation of larks, a leap of leopards, a tiding of magpies, a superfluity of nuns, a malapertness of pedlars, a pity of prisoners, a gaggle of women, a host of sparrows, a murmuration of starlings.* Can there be anything more startlingly witty and apposite than a *blush of boys* or a *hastiness of cooks*? Or more wicked than a *superfluity of nuns*?

British fauna has been remarkably well treated (by Dame Juliana and others). But Australian fauna has received scant attention by anyone. There is, of course, **a mob of kangaroos**. But what about our poor **currawongs, dingoes, galahs, koalas, magpies, wallabies, kookaburras, quokkas, bardi grubs,** and **wombats**, to name but a few? Well, here's your chance to out-Juliana Dame Juliana and do Oz a favour. Your task for this competition is to pick one (or many) from the above list and, with the holy nun Juliana as your inspiration, devise a witty collective or collectives for your choice. Wit wins as always. **ED.**

**Entries close 31 August 2004.**

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