

OZWORDS

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EDITORIAL

The second half of 1997 is an exciting period for the publication of books on language by **Oxford University Press Australia and New Zealand**. In July, Harry Orsman's *Dictionary of New Zealand English* was published, and so great was the demand for it that a reprint was necessary after only one month. Julia Robinson reviews the dictionary on page 6. A new edition of *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* appears in October — 15 per cent or 220 pages longer than the previous edition. Bruce Moore discusses on page 5 how the **ANDC** went about preparing this new edition. An updated edition of Nick Hudson's *Modern Australian Usage* was published in September. A review will appear in the next number of *Ozwords*. Meanwhile, *The Australian National Dictionary*, which has sold 10,000 copies since publication in 1988, was reissued with new covers in September.

The **ANDC** has greatly increased the material on its home page, with discussions of some forty Australian words and idioms, and suggestions for dictionary topics which teachers can use in the classroom. If you have Internet access, visit us at <http://www.anu.edu.au/ANDC>.

Our lead article for this number of *Ozwords* is by Annie Warburton, radio presenter on **ABC Hobart**.

OZZYISMS

ANNIE WARBURTON

Some time ago a press release landed on my desk alerting me to the forthcoming annual conference of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. Such an august event would normally be spoken of by PR hacks in appropriately solemn tones, but in this case, to my delight, the pitch was: '**Take a geez at the amazing stories on offer here.**'

A geez! As in *gissa geez!* (the shorter version of *give us a geez* (or *geezer*) *at that!*). How long since I'd heard that unmistakable Australianism used in everyday speech? Not since my schooldays, I reckoned. Like many people, I sometimes fear that our unique vernacular is in danger of being swamped by American slang, and it cheers me no end to see and hear the indigenous usages revived.

How I cheered when the Queensland government declined the offer of '**Yo! Way to Go!**' as a slogan for its tourism industry. '**Ow I ongcored!**'

Barry Humphries did his bit for the cause a couple of decades ago when he resurrected moribund expressions such as **cobber** and **stone the crows**, and devised some new twists on old standards: **May your chooks turn to emus and kick your dunny down!**

Chook. Dunny. Bonzer words! It was sometimes said that Humphries was ridiculing the culture of his birthplace by putting these classic Australianisms into the mouth of that archetypal yobbo Bazza McKenzie. In fact, its colourful slang is one of the things Humphries most loves about Australia, and he has said so.

And I agree with him. Australian slang is wonderfully ironic and robust, and even if Humphries succeeded in reviving **bonzer**, **cobber**, and **stone the crows**

only fleetingly, **chook**, **dunny**, and **bloke** seem to have an enduring appeal.

For some words, alas, it may be too late. **Tucker** and **drongo** live on in the bush, but **clobber** is looking a bit dicey, and I call on all red-blooded patriots to use it whenever and wherever possible, and to educate ignorant youngsters as to its suitability for use as a jokey alternative to boring old 'clothes'.

Another perfectly good Aussie word has fallen foul of ideology. **Sheila**, it seems, is frowned on in certain feminist circles, but why it should be thought demeaning to women I have no idea. It is after all only the female equivalent of **bloke**, and you don't hear men complaining about that one, do you?

I say **sheila** is the perfect word for Aussie — well, sheilas. Sheilas aren't as prissy as ladies, they're not (necessarily) as sexy as babes and foxes, they're more savvy than chicks or skirts, not solely to be lusted after like crumpet, and, unlike dames and broads, they are definitely not American.

When my men-friends call me a **sheila** it invokes a certain matey, affectionate equality which at the same time preserves a note of what the French call *la différence* (as in *vive!*). Which is just the way I like it, but then I'm an old-fashioned sort of sheila.

I'm an old-fashioned **sort** too, I suppose. And don't tell me that's on the banned list too because, in my experience, **sorts** are almost invariably 'good'!

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE
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OZZYISMS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Australian slang is so endlessly inventive. Do you know what a **dickless tracy** is? A female detective, of course! And I love those topical similes that abound in Australian parlance. Example: before the Grim Reaper carried him off you would hear 'Busy? I'm as busy as Trimbole's travel agent.' Today you could substitute 'Mal Colston' for 'Trimbole', although you would lose that serendipitous alliteration.

'Busy as a one-armed brickie in Beirut' lost its punch when the Lebanese civil war ended, but we still had the old standby 'busy as a one-armed taxi-driver with crabs'. And there's a lingering topicality in 'busy as a doctor writing sickie notes for Skasie'.

Sickie. Now there's a word for you! I can't imagine how workers in other countries get on when they have to describe those short absences of a day or so (often on the Monday before a Tuesday public holiday) by fellow workers who reappear on Wednesday looking surprisingly well and disinclined to talk about the cause or progress of their illness.

Unless, of course, they turn up limping, snuffling, or coughing, in which case they are genuinely **crook**, and we refrain from **chyacking** them. Chyacking is an Australian art form, and it reaches its zenith in the formation of nicknames.

Australians seem to have an irresistible urge to convert formal names into something more casual, and it's the great quest of all expectant Aussie parents to find a name for their offspring that can't be bastardised into something comical or rude.

I don't know why they bother really. The only personal names I can think of that have no known variants are Ian and Ray, but that doesn't leave much choice, especially if your newborn is a girl.

Besides, middle names and surnames are always there to be mucked around with if the forename is unavailable, and sooner or later some schoolyard or workplace wit will come up with a coinage that satisfies the collective nomenclatural aesthetic.

Australian slang is so endlessly inventive. Do you know what a **dickless tracy** is? A female detective, of course.



I have a friend who called her second son Scott. When her toddler started lisping the new baby's name as 'Sock' it immediately caught on among the grownups, except for his mother who, through sheer force of personality, demanded and got an end to the practice. In her presence, that is. Somehow I think 'Sock' will stick, but at the very least it'll be 'Scottie', whatever his mother has to say about it.

And if Sock — er — Scott knows what's good for him, he'll wear whatever moniker he's lumbered with without complaint, because to stand on one's

dignity in the matter of nicknames is to mark oneself out as a bit of a dag.

Besides, if you don't go along graciously with having your name 'nicked', you could do a whole lot worse. You might, for instance, get Stinky or Fatso or Foureyes in return for your recalcitrance.

I love the wry contrariness of a linguistic culture that calls a tall bloke 'Shorty', a short one 'Lofty', a bald fellow 'Curly', and a redhead 'Blue'. Why 'Blue'? Does anyone know where this comes from?

I'll be disappointed if it doesn't turn out to be an indigenous Australian coinage, but I suppose it may not be. I've read that people whose surname is

Clark/e are nicknamed 'Nobby' because of an early nineteenth-century word for 'well dressed'. As in: *He was a nobby clerk.* (The well-dressed clerk would have been a ready figure of fun in those days to the rural and industrial poor. To be 'got up like a pox-doctor's clerk' was a popular contemptuous epithet that still appeals.)

'Spud' Murphy is an easier connection to make, but why and how did potatoes become murphies? And who were the original 'Knocker' White, 'Tug' Wilson, 'Bungy' Williams, and 'Smudge' Smith, and why were they so dubbed?

These nicknames, which live on in those bastions of tradition, the British and Australian navies, are obviously English in origin and perhaps refer to famous, or infamous, characters from the popular folklore of their time. But if the names are obsolete, the procedure by which they're formed is as vigorous as ever in Australia.

An acquaintance tells the revealing story of how he came to be known by his workmates as 'Dooges', a nickname which has no resemblance whatsoever to any of his given names.

Shortly after starting at this workplace, my reader let on that his middle name was D'Arcy. So 'Darcy' he became for a while. This soon attracted the predictable 'Dugan', making him for a while 'Darcy Dugan'. This being a bit of a mouthful it was shortened to 'Dugan', which was of course too formal and had to be adjusted to 'Dooges'. The whole process took two years.

The last conversion, from 'Dugan' to 'Dooges', is an example of the operation of one of those rules of Australian nickname formation which are so clear-cut they've actually been the subject of academic study. At least, the Coodabeen Champions had a crack at codifying them once.

I can't recite them chapter and verse, but I know for example that monosyllabic names characterised by a long vowel

sound and ending in 's', such as Bates or Jones, will become Batesie and Jonesie. Bisyllabic first names ending in a consonant, such as David and Robert, will become Davo and Robbo.

Names whose syllables are divided by an 'r' will tend to attract an 'a' ending. Warwick to Wocka. Macnamara to Macca. Double 'r' followed by an 'ee' in names like Barry and Jerry will convert to a 'z' sound, as in Bazza and Jezza.

Just to confuse things, Smith will become Smithie, but John will become Johnno. Why not Smitho and Johnnie? I can't spot the underlying principle at work here, but I'm sure there is one. There's a PhD thesis just waiting to be written on this, mark my words.

Here's my all-time favourite Aussie nickname story, and it's a true one. A lawyer friend in Melbourne once knew a reformed crim who worked in the railway freightyards. One day a crate of goods fell off the back of a train, and the contents were revealed to be a number of brand-new and eminently saleable clocks.

My friend's client took them home to cool down, with a view to disposing of them at some later, less risky time. His wife, however, was determined that her husband should live by his marital promise to renounce his light-fingered ways, and gave him so much curry that he restored them to their rightful position on the back of the train, as it were.

He was known thereafter by his mates as *Daylight Saving*. Why? Because he put the clocks back.



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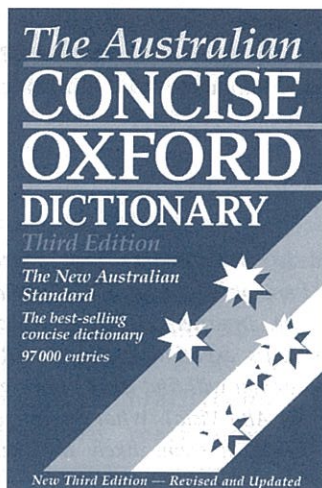
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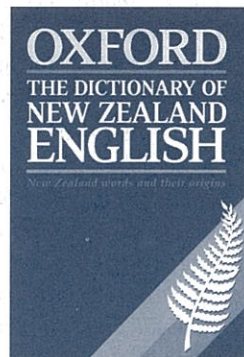
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MAILBAG

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.

SPLITTING THE IMAGE

I was interested to see that in your article 'All My Eye and Betty Martin' on the folk etymology of popular idioms (October 1996 *Ozwords*) you used the phrase 'spitting image'. Have you noticed that many people say 'splitting image'?

John Barby
ACT

Yes, indeed. *Spitting image* was the original formulation and is still occasionally to be heard. *Splitting image* is the ring-in. The process of folk etymology (or 'Betty Martinising', as I dubbed it in my article) has been responsible for the substitution.

The term *spitting image* comes from an earlier *spit and image*. Grose, in his Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue (1788), gives the verbal construction 'He is as like his father as if he was spit out of his mouth' and explains that 'it is said of a child much resembling his father'. The phrase *the very spit of meaning* 'the exact image, likeness, or counterpart of' appears early in the nineteenth century: 'A daughter ... the very spit of the old captain.' Shortly thereafter the phrase *spit and image* appears: 'She's like the poor lady that's dead and gone, the spit and image she is.' *Spit and image* soon blurs into *spitting image*.

Why the change from *spit* to *split*? Perhaps the notion of a person being so like another that he or she is the very spit out of the other's mouth is not congenial to the modern age. More likely — the original sense of the phrase is now all but lost. This is the age of the splitting of atoms and genes. In the world of science fiction, doubles are produced by 'cloning', a form of splitting. And everyone knows that a cell (somehow or other) splits into two and that the resultant two are identical. It is perfectly understandable, therefore, that puzzled users of the phrase should metamorphose *spitting image* into *splitting image* — for what possible connection can there be between similarity and saliva?

GRY IS ILLYWHACKERSOME

In our last issue we printed the following letter from John Bangsund:

This puzzle appeared in the Jan/Feb

issue of the [UK] Society of Freelance Editors and Proofreaders' Newsletter:

There are only three words in the English language that end in -gry

1. Angry
2. Hungry
3. ?

The word is something that everyone uses everyday and knows what it stands for. If you've listened very carefully I've already told you what it is. What is it?

The question perplexed John and vexed us most woefully, depriving us of much needed editorial sleep. Fortunately one of our readers came up with a satisfying solution:

In regard to John Bangsund's -gry puzzle, I believe rather than searching for a third common -gry word, which doesn't exist (*We vouch for that heartfully. Ed.*), you should be looking for a correct wording to the riddle. It is a riddle of the form "Auxiliary is a hard word to spell. Spell it", which all children love to trick their parents with (the answer being "it"). A more correct wording of the riddle would be "Think of words ending in -gry. One is 'angry'. A second is 'hungry'. There are three common words in the English language. The third word is something everyone uses every day and knows what it stands for. If you've listened very carefully I've already told you what it is. What is it?" The answer is "language", the third word in the phrase "the English language".

Ken Davis
ACT

The illywhacker who invented this puzzle has annoyed and obfuscated the entire world, it seems. The Internet is chock-a-block with home pages expatiating on the GRY conundrum (as you will find if, as I did, you call up *gry* on Alta Vista). What a waste of time and energy! It seems likely that this illywhacker was a seppo (a satisfyingly useless observation).

TSK-TSK AND TUT-TUT!

Re New Publications (Volume 3, Number 1): your writer says, 'March saw the publication of two important books'. I hope that March did not get sore eyes. What's wrong with saying 'Two important books

were published in March'? Surely 'March saw' is a no-no for all editors.

Mary Harber
VIC

I hasten to put pen to paper (fingers to keyboard, actually) to confess (shamefacedly) that you are dead right. Let me assure you that all of us here are fundamentalist anti-clichéists of a most fanatical ilk, and to be tasked at for using a cliché wrings our withers, whatever that may mean (I do know what it means, actually, and there's an old-fashioned cliché for you). However, even Homer nods, and there's many a slip, etc. etc.

ABC NOT ALWAYS CAPITAL

After reading the review on English language in the May 1997 *Ozwords*, I wrote to the manager of ABC TV, lodging the same complaint concerning capital letters. I said that the ABC hampered students and immigrants who were learning the English language. The absence of capitals for proper names etc. was not modern use at all. It irritated all educated Australians.

The letter was passed on to the person in charge of speech used by presenters and broadcasters of the ABC. She wrote that my concern was also hers and that she would pass my comments to SCOSE, whoever they are.

I think that if more people wrote complaining of this idiocy something would be done about it.

Dorothy Michell
NSW

I share your irritation and that of Professor Ralph Elliott who commented in our last issue that 'the current ABC practice of dispensing with capital letters ... in personal names, titles, geographical names, months and days of the week' was one of his pet aversions. He added: 'When I drew the attention of the Chairman of the ABC to this form of illiteracy, Mr Donald McDonald replied that "in recent years there has been a change in lettering styles ... and the Corporation ... needs to keep up with modern trends". Perhaps we should all write to Auntie and give her a hefty serve in this regard.

During the past eighteen months the Centre has been working on a new edition of *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*. This third edition draws on the most authoritative research into International and Australian English, including the databases of the **Australian National Dictionary Centre** and of the twenty-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*.

This new edition is much bigger than the second edition. The text is 15 per cent longer — an extra 220 pages. There are some 3500 new headwords, some 2500 new compounds, idioms, and phrasal verbs, and some 500 new derivatives.

We are clearly witnessing an extraordinary increase in the vocabulary of English, partly due to the advances in technology, science, and medicine, and partly due to the increasing internationalisation of English.

For example, teenage and popular culture provide terms such as **babelicious**, **bodacious**, **cyberpunk**, **fandom**, **fanzine**, **goth**, **grunge rock**, **himbo**, **homie**, **humungous**, **macarena**, **mosh**, **rave party**, **techno**, **unplugged**. Science and medicine produce terms such as **ACE inhibitor**, **acyclovir**, **adioxin**, **angioplasty**, **arbovirus**, **calicivirus**, **Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease**, **gene shears**, **lyssavirus**, **morbillivirus**. Computing produces terms such as **cyberspace**, **fire wall**, **flame**, **geek**, **home page**, **HTML**, **hypertext**, **Internet**, **netiquette**, **newbie**, **phreak**, **spam**, **surf the Internet**, **tweak**, **URL**, **webmaster**, **WIMP**, **World Wide Web**.

Our links with Oxford University Press in the UK mean that we have access to the various databases which produce the twenty-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*, without doubt the world's most authoritative dictionary. We use these databases as a major source for new words and meanings in International English.

While our dictionaries have behind them the authority of the UK-based *Oxford English Dictionary*, we are editing our dictionaries here for Australian users. The Centre has a massive database of potential Australianisms, all supported by evidence in citations collected from books, newspapers, magazines, etc. The



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.

editors worked systematically through this database, and constructed new Australian entries, directly on-screen. They also referred to the published research of the Centre, reconsidering the entries in *The Australian National Dictionary*, adding material from *The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (1993, 1996) and material from such publications as *Words from the West* (1994), *Tassie Terms* (1995), and *Aboriginal English* (1996).

Thus in this new edition of *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* you will find Australian terms such as **absentee vote**, **blokey**, **blunnies**, **bushie**, **chardonnay socialist**, **chateau cardboard**, **dewog**, **gap insurance**, **grass castle**, **HECS**, **hockeyroos**, **Landcare**, **lawn cemetery**, **minkey**, **neenish tart**, **scab duty**, **schoolies' week**, **speccie**. You will also find Australian regionalisms, such as the Tasmanian **inchman**, **nointer**, and **yaffler**. Aboriginal concerns are represented by terms such as **Aboriginal embassy**, **Aboriginal site**, **acrylic art**, **keeping place**, **maban**, **Mabo**, **mindj**, **outstation movement**, **stolen generation**, **Wik**. Australian flora is represented by terms such as **albizia**, **berrigan**, **brachycome**, **goodenia**, **gungurru**, **macropidia**, **mint bush**, **myoporum**, **pandorea**, **platylobium**, **plectranthus**, **possum banksia**, **pterostylis**, **Wollemi pine**. Australian fauna is represented by terms such as **axebird**, **banjo frog**, **burrarmys**, **cacka**, **dargawarra**, **galaxias**, **gibber chat**, **green and golden bell frog**, **pobblebonk**.

In the previous edition, Australianisms were not given an *Aust.* label, but we have reversed that policy in the present edition, on the grounds that users of a dictionary want to know if a word or idiom is exclusively or mostly Australian. In this edition there are some 3500 words or meanings marked *Aust.*, and upwards of an additional 1500 terms which are Australian by reason of the definition.

How do we decide that a word or meaning is Australian? Some of them are obvious, such as the recently discovered **Wollemi pine**. When we are uncertain, we often seek information (invariably by email these days) from colleagues at similar dictionary centres around the world — in the UK, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, and the United States. Yet some Australianisms are surprising. We were asked whether the correct term for the recipient of a superannuation benefit is **superannuant** or **superannuitant**. Our US and UK colleagues had no contemporary evidence. We then searched for the terms on the Internet. We found forty documents containing the term **superannuitant** — all from New Zealand. We found twenty documents containing the term **superannuant** — all from Australia.

In previous editions some guidance was offered on matters of controversial or disputed usage, but usage notes were buried within entries. In the new edition the usage notes have been extracted, expanded, increased in number, and placed at the end of entries. There are more than 500 of these usage notes.

In the past decade there has been a worldwide move back to the teaching of traditional grammar. Other systems of grammar have been developed, but the terminology of traditional grammar (whatever its theoretical and practical problems) has not been replaced. In this edition, twenty-eight panels provide guidance on points of grammar (e.g. clause, conjunction, verb), punctuation (e.g. hyphen, quotation marks), and features of style (e.g. simile, metaphor).

After eighteen months of hard yakka, all members of the Centre look forward to the publication of this new edition of *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

Bruce Moore, Director.

THE DICTIONARY OF NEW ZEALAND ENGLISH: A Dictionary of New Zealandisms on Historical Principles

Edited by Harry Orsman, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1997, pp. xvi + 965.
A\$125.00/NZ\$150.00 for the plain edition or A\$395.00/NZ\$395.00 for the leatherbound edition.

'New Zilders speak slowly as if they were boring themselves into sleep.' So said a **Pommie** in 1972. The quotation appears in *The Dictionary of New Zealand English*, under the entry for **New Zilder**. (This is a local pronunciation of 'New Zealander', achieved by conflating syllables and keeping your teeth clenched.) As an expatriate **Kiwi**, I might be tempted to reply **up you for the rhubarb season**. However, pick up this dictionary and you will certainly be kept awake past bedtime. Harry Orsman has produced — after nearly half a century's gestation — a **wee beaut** of a book, a **wopcacker** of a read, an **All Black** among dictionaries.

It is the latest dictionary of a national English to be published by Oxford. Like its **cuzzy** *The Australian National Dictionary*, it is based on historical principles, and has an impressive 47,000 quotations to illustrate the meaning and history of the 6000 main entries. A **good keen man**, Harry Orsman has done for New Zealand English what James Murray did for British English: produced a unique historical record of the local lingo, and a rich resource for the wordsmith.

Imagine you are visiting **the land of the long white cloud** (or, more politically, **the land of the wrong white crowd**). Your friend says to you 'Has the **Zip** boiled yet?' or 'There's nothing **half-pie** about her' or 'My kid goes to a **kohanga reo**' or possibly even 'You won't need your **Groppi mocker** or the **chateau de cask** for the **demolition party**. Just grab your **swannndri** and a **half-g** and **she's jake**'.

No need to **get your tits in a tangle**. *The Dictionary of New Zealand English* will translate this for you. What's more, it will tell you — entertainingly — everything you ever wanted to know about **Kiwi** but were too Australian to ask. Many Aussies can tell you that New Zealanders say **jandals** for thongs, **tramping** for bushwalking, **chilly-bin** for esky, and **bach** for weekender. But how many will recognise **peggy square**, **Plunket book**, **chutty**, **gib board**, **puha**, **fonged**, or **DPB**? And, on the other hand, how many **Enzedders** know that **ranchslider**, **jetboat**, **swing-bridge**, **superannuitant**, and

solo mum are New Zealandisms? Even locals will find the surprising and unfamiliar here: **the battle of the Wazza**, **spang-weazling**, **throwing the ridgepole**.

Several things about this dictionary will strike the Australian reader. Firstly, the large number of loanwords from Maori, some 700 in all. Many of these are common names for flora and fauna (e.g. **takahe**, **weka**, **rimu**) but a significant number are words for Maori concepts, activities, and relationships (e.g. **marae**, **tangi**, **rangatira**) which are in common use or at least commonly recognised by both **Maori** and **Pakeha**.

In recognition of this achievement and the publication of the dictionary, the New Zealand Dictionary Centre has been established at Victoria University of Wellington in partnership with Oxford University Press.

Also noticeable are the 700 words shared with Australian English. (**GST**, currently recorded as a New Zealandism, looks set to be the 701st.) This is not surprising, given the common history of the two countries: British colonisation, goldmining, shearing, the Anzac experience, a reliance on primary production, mateship, a passion for sport, the DIY ethos — these shared aspects of **transtasman** economic and cultural history have ensured an overlapping lexis. Words like **squatter**, **digger**, **fossick**, **ringer**, **magnoon**, **six o'clock swill**, **caller**, **booze artist**, and **cattle dog** find a place in both *DNZE* and *AND*.

Readers will notice too that Scottish settlers have left their mark. There are sixty words of Scottish origin in *DNZE*. Visitors to New Zealand will hear the adjective **wee** in frequent everyday use (as in a 1971 quotation '*Melva gave birth to a lovely wee daughter named Dawn*'). Given the nod too are such Scotticisms as **beazer**, **dwang**, **thunderplump**, **tolly**. This last is a verb once used by Otago schoolchildren and illustrated by a single quotation from the editor's personal correspondence. It is one of those spoof verses to 'Mary had a little lamb': '*She took it up to school one day It tollied on the floor. Mary had to lick it up And*

hoick it out the door.' After this, any definition is unnecessary.

And herein lies one of the main joys of *The Dictionary of New Zealand English*: the editorial voice. Not only is the selection of illustrative quotations always pointed, informative, and frequently funny, but Harry Orsman writes a great definition. This, after all, is the **joker** who, in the *Heinemann New Zealand Dictionary*, famously defined a wanker as 'a person given to unproductive activity'. *DNZE* is full of equally satisfying definitions. It is also informed by editorial recollection spanning more than fifty years. Appearing in the entries are such comments as 'Also heard (Ed.) ... used by three men playing pitch and toss at Woodbourne Aerodrome, 17 April 1957', and 'known to Ed. by this name from before WW2', and 'c1940 ... wrestling hold in common use among Marlborough schoolboys (Ed.)'. Even as a schoolboy this was a lexicographer in the making.

A brief review cannot do justice to the full range of words in the dictionary, so the following is a smattering to whet your appetite. In politics *DNZE* records **black budget**, **Rogernomics**, **think big**, **informal vote**, and **Maori seat**. In culinary matters it offers **dominion pudding**, **paua steaks**, and **mock cream** (one writer testily comments: 'Why we needed to invent imitation cream when there was always so much of the real thing around is a mystery.'). In fashion, **walk shorts**, **easies**, and **grunds**. Early whaling gave **slumgullion**, **bride-cut**, and **glip**. Second World War slang labelled the first wave of enlisted men **debt-dodgers**; later ones were **deep thinkers** (gave it some thought beforehand). **Pommie-bashing** is gently represented by **English sunbathing**, the art of sunning oneself fully clothed.

This new dictionary is a great read for writers, historians, anyone interested in New Zealand or historical lexicography, and for the general New Zealand and Australian reader who loves words. From **A.&P.** to **zweideener**, it is an absolute corker. And you can put a ring around that.

Julia Robinson is a researcher at the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

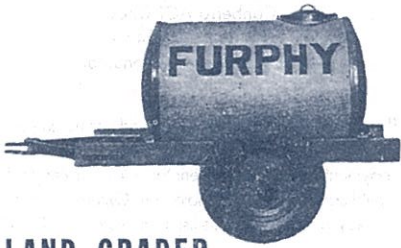


FURPHY

In the latest edition of *The Australian Oxford Paperback Dictionary* (1996) I entered **furphy** as a noun and an adjective, and defined it as follows:

furphy *n.* (pl. **furphies**) **1** a false report or rumour. **2** an absurd story.
•adj. (**furphier**, **furphiest**) absurdly false, unbelievable: *that's the furphiest bit of news I ever heard.*

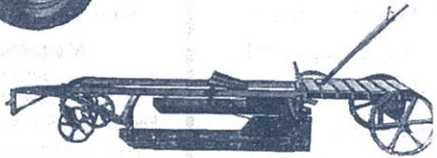
This Ozword comes from the name of John Furphy, a blacksmith and general engineer, who went to Shepparton from Kyneton in 1871 and set up a foundry. Furphy designed a galvanised iron water-cart on wheels and his firm, J. Furphy & Sons, manufactured them. Each cart had the name **FURPHY** written large on the body. So successful were these carts that during World War I the Department of the Army bought many Furphy carts to supply water to camps in Australia and especially to camps in Palestine and Egypt.



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Fine — but how did John Furphy's name come to be associated with rumours and lies? As far as I know, John Furphy was a most respectable and upright man, a Methodist lay preacher, and not in the least bit given to rumour mongering or telling tall tales. As a matter of fact, he often used the cast-iron ends of his carts to carry a variety of engraved moral advertisements, the following being typical:

WATER IS A GIFT OF GOD
 BEER AND WHISKY OF THE DEVIL
 COME AND HAVE A DRINK OF WATER

The standard account has it that the term **furphy** arose among Australian soldiers overseas during World War I. It seems that when soldiers gathered around these water-carts, they became sites for gossip and rumour. Another story has it that the drivers of these water-carts carried gossip and rumour from camp to camp, no doubt making a good story better as they proceeded. Whatever the reason for the nexus, the nexus was soon established between the name on the cart and the rumour-mongering associated with the cart's arrival: the **furphy** was born as soldier slang. Shortly thereafter **furphy** (also spelled **furfy** and **furphey**) left the confines of the camps and established itself firmly as part of the general Australian language, a position it holds securely to this day.

The following quotations trace the word's spread:

1915 R. Graves *On Gallipoli*: 'To cheer us then a "furphy" passed around ...

"They're fighting now on Achi Baba's mound";

1918 *Kia-ora coo-ee*: official magazine of the Australian and New Zealand forces,

Cairo: 'Every time he told a tale, the boys said, "It's a furfy";

1918 *Aussie*: the

Australian soldiers' magazine: 'A Tassie indignantly urges us to deny the furphy that Tasmania is seeking a separate peace'; **1931** *Bulletin* 12 August: 'Adelaide's morning paper has revived the furphy of frogs being found alive after having been hermetically sealed up in rocks for thousands of years'; **1964** G. Johnston *My Brother Jack*: 'You go barmy trying to sort out the furphies that go around'; **1986** *Sydney Morning Herald* 8 March: 'The Premier described the rumours of changes to the legislation as a great furphy that had got out of control'.

Although this is the standard account of the origin of the term, two early writers claim that the term arose (among Australian soldiers) not on overseas battlefields but at the Broadmeadows Army Camp near Melbourne in 1914. In this account the Furphy tanks were being used as sanitary carts rather than as water-carts. In the first volume of his *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18* (1921), C.E.W. Bean argues that rumours were rife at Broadmeadows Camp about when the men would leave for overseas duty: 'The wildest rumours, of the kind to which every army is subject, flew through both the people and the troops. In the Broadmeadows Camp, near Melbourne, the sanitary carts which went scavenging through the lines were marked on the back with the name of a manufacturer at Shepparton who made them — Furphy. These rumours of the camp came to be called "furphies", and subsequently in Egypt the word spread through the force.' A similar account is given by a writer (the editor?) in *Two Blues: Magazine of the 13th Battalion A.I.F.*, December 1918: 'We were asked by a reader the derivation of the word "furphy". In our Australian camps all we now call "Furphies" were called "Latrine Wireless Messages" and later "Latrines". In Victorian camps, water-carts made by Furphy were used as sanitary carts — hence "Latrines" became "Furphies".'

Interestingly and quite coincidentally, the equivalent American term **scuttlebutt** originated in remarkably similar a fashion, but among sailors, not soldiers. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*: '**scuttlebutt** *n.* **1** A water-butt kept on a ship's deck for drinking from; a drinking-fountain; *fig.* a source of rumour or gossip. **2** Rumour, idle gossip, unfounded report. *colloq.* (orig. *US*).' Interestingly, too, the term **Tom Collins** ('a rumour-monger'), the quasi-precursor of **furphy** at the end of the nineteenth century, was adopted as a pseudonym by John Furphy's brother, the writer Joseph Furphy, long before **furphy** came into being. Soon young **furphy** had killed old **Tom Collins** dead, as they tautologically say, and this ain't no furphy — the use of 'Tom Collins' seems to have died out in the 1950s.

Fred Ludowyk

BARLEY, NOODLE BENDERS, AND WAX

More on Aussie regionalisms

Many thanks to those who responded to our questions about Australian words. Responses confirmed our notion that the children's truce term is regionally distributed: **barley** in Victoria, **bar** or **bars** in New South Wales and Queensland, and **barlies** in South Australia and Western Australia. A reader who grew up in Gundagai knew both **barley** and **bar**.

We asked about the term **ranch**, reported to us as a hut in road construction camps, where the men received their meals, usually from the foreman's wife. David Burke sent us some pages from his book *Road Through the Wilderness* (UNSW Press, 1991), which deals with the construction of the Trans-Australian Railway in 1912-17, and includes the following passage: 'For the two bewildered naturalists, the next revelation awaited them in the government-operated "ranch" where, in a hessian bag structure with long deal tables and forms, meals

were served by a woman familiarly known as "Auntie" to those who laboured in this wilderness.' There are two excellent photographs of these **ranches**.

We received some good descriptions of the children's game **puddocks**, and two readers gave us detailed accounts of a game which was called **kitkat** in Geelong and **cat** in Queensland. **Kit-cat** is an English dialect term for a game known elsewhere as **tip-cat**, which the *OED* defines as 'a game in which the wooden cat or tip-cat is struck or "tipped" at one end with a stick so as to spring up, and then knocked to a distance by the same player'. 'Cat' in this context is a transferred use of 'furry cat' which appears in various games as a term for a stick. It is interesting that in Geelong the name of the game was in its British dialect form.

We received one confirmation of the term **noodle benders** for men's speedos. Other respondents reported that the most

common terms among teenagers for this tight-fitting swimming costume are **dick stickers** and **dick togs**.

A few weeks ago a caller to James Valentine's ABC morning show in Canberra asked about the term **wax**. He recalled that in children's games of, say, kick-to-kick football, two players might decide to work together to obtain the ball. One child would say: 'Do you want to wax?' or 'I'll wax you' or 'Do you want to go waxy?' The idiom means 'do you want to share or go partner with me?' Many callers said that they knew the term, and all agreed it was spelt with an **-x**. It seems likely that **wax** is a corruption of **whack**, which as a noun can mean 'a portion, a share' (as in 'get one's whack') and as a verb can mean 'to share or divide (something)'. Two of the three citations in the *OED* for the verb are Australian, but all citations refer to the sharing of something (such as money). The children's use of **wax** is unusual therefore. Is it still used?

OZWORDS COMPETITIONS

Ozwords Competition No. 7: Results

Competitors were asked to come up with a new simile or metaphor. Entries included 'As sharp as a handful of wet leather', 'As sick as a dead dingo on a chain', 'S/he is as much use as a made-to-measure crochet condom', 'He's got a loose sheet in the galvo', 'Time-for-drinking music: 8 quaffers to the bar'. **Honourable mention:** Keith S. Goulston for 'As cold as a penguin's penis'. **2nd prize** (\$50 worth of books from the OUP catalogue): Gavin Byrne for 'We call him "Harpic": he's clean around the bend'. **1st prize** (\$100 worth of books from the OUP catalogue): William Hurrey for 'He's as horny as a road train full of mallee bulls'.

Ozwords Competition No. 8

The *Sydney Morning Herald* in its edition of 26 April 1988 announced a 'Prize for the best Swiftie' in these terms: 'Tom Swift became immortalised in a tautological construction called a Tom Swiftie in which the verb and/or adverb said much the same thing as the quote preceding it. An example: "I bought the drinks," Tom shouted.' A more complex form is the double-barrel: "I let them in for nothing," Tom admitted freely" or "I forged the cheque," Tom uttered fraudulently."

The wittiest Tom Swiftie we receive gets our prize.

Entries close 31 January 1998.



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