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EDITORIAL

The address of the Australian National Dictionary Centre webpage is <http://www.anu.edu.au/ANDC>. I mention this because we have been updating the site and adding new features.

The site is now divided into five sections. 'About the Centre' explains the kind of work we do, gives information on staff members, and provides links to other dictionary sites. 'Publications' gives information about the books the Centre has produced, including a series of linguistic monographs and the range of Oxford University Press Australian dictionaries. The section 'For Schools' provides a number of dictionary exercises for use in the classroom, including a detailed project 'A Guide to Making your own Dictionary'. The section 'Ozwords' includes back numbers of our newsletter from October 1996. 'Australian English' includes histories of a large number of Australian words, and has a selection of historical documents relating to Australian English during the nineteenth-century gold rushes.

There have been some important dictionary publications in the past few months. In August a new edition of the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* was published, as was Bill Ramson's *Lexical Images* (see page 5), and in September a new edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* appeared.

We were all saddened to learn of the death of Harry Orsman, editor of the *Dictionary of New Zealand English* (1997). His contribution to New Zealand lexicography was extraordinary, and he was a great supporter and friend of the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

Frederick Ludowyk

Frederick Ludowyk
Editor, *Ozwords*

BOTANY BAY ARGOT AMANDA LAUGSEN

The English and Irish convicts cast on the 'fatal shore' of Australia brought with them the cant of the criminal underworld. In the colonies, this brutal and depraved class continued to speak this 'language', allowing them to defy authority and continue their criminal ways. Or so many colonial commentators believed.

Watkin Tench, officer in the marines, commented not long after the arrival of the First Fleet, on the fact that the convicts were marked by their use 'of what is called the **flash**, or **kiddy** language', an 'unnatural jargon' that needed to be abolished in order to achieve reformation. The 'infatuating cant', he believed, was 'more deeply associated with depravity, and continuance in vice, than is generally supposed'. Tench reflected the views of the British elite of the eighteenth century, who associated the lower classes with criminality, and despite their concern with reformation exhibited a voyeuristic fascination with the habits and culture of the so-called criminal class.

This British fascination with underworld language dated back centuries but was especially strong from the seventeenth century. In 1699, the first separate dictionary of underworld slang was published, *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew, In Its several Tribes, of Gypsies, Beggars, Thieves, Cheats, &c.* Further editions of this, and numerous others appeared throughout the eighteenth century, and were widely circulated in England. Such dictionaries helped to establish an understanding of a distinct criminal underclass with its own peculiar language and culture—an understanding that carried over into the Australian colonies.

It is worth examining a couple of aspects of the history of the colonial 'convict cant'. To at least some extent, some convicts brought with them slang words from the London underworld. Some terms continued to be current in the colonies, took on new meanings and were added to the Australian English lexicon. New cant words were also formed in the colonies. An interesting feature of convict language in the colonies was a tendency to invert the meanings of words—many words came to be used with an ironic twist in the colonies, a language for a 'world turned upside down'.

James Hardy Vaux, a convict, compiled an early collection of the 'flash language', similar to the earlier British compilation. It was designed for a magistrate, Thomas

Skottowe, to whom the glossary was dedicated, so that the magistrate could better understand the convicts brought before him. Vaux's 1812 vocabulary contained many words of the London underworld. For a number of words there is no evidence of their being used in the colonies, although given the nature of the records for the first decades of Australian settlement, it is possible that they simply weren't recorded. Some of the more colourful terms include: **cly-faker** for 'a pickpocket', **joskin** for 'a country bumpkin', **spice gloak** for 'a footpad robber', and phrases such as **Oliver is in town**, explained by Vaux as being 'a phrase signifying that the nights are moonlight, and consequently unfavourable to depredation'. Obviously some terms were particular to life back in Britain, such as **dub at a knapping jigger**, 'a person who collected tolls at turnpike gates', and would not have had any currency in the new world of the Australian colonies.

Some of Vaux's terms were quite particular to the convict experience: **lag** is recorded in Vaux as both a noun, 'a convict under sentence of transportation', and a verb, 'to transport for seven years or upwards'. **Lag** and **bellowser**, 'a man transported for his natural life', had obvious relevance in the colonies. **Scrag** meaning 'to hang on the gallows' also can be traced in the colonies. A term like **double-slangs**, defined by Vaux as meaning 'double-irons' probably had currency in the colonies, even if we have no evidence for it.

An 1832 poem in the magazine *Hill's Life* played on the cant language, writing from the point of view of a repentant criminal looking back on his experiences:

Such thoughts as these, for years gone
past,
Oft on my fancy burst
I think on 'Moulsey Hurst,' [a place in
Britain where fights were held]
And all the SPORTING COVES then
there,
And all the risques I ran
Of LAGGING, SCRAGGING, and so
forth
To be a SWELL-MOB-MAN.

The **swell mob** (criminals whose dress reflected the success of their crimes) was alluded to by colonial commentators who feared the continuing existence of a criminal class in the colonies. James Mudie, a large property owner and fierce enemy of the convicts, was keen to attack transportation as bringing to the colonies ever more numbers

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THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE
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of 'desperate and practised burglars, habitual and experienced receivers of stolen goods, artful and designing swindlers ... and a sprinkling of all sorts of the villains denominated the *swell-mob*'.

Certainly, a criminal element persisted in the colonies, and continued to use a criminal language to mark themselves as a type of community. Using such language could be a way of defying authority and exerting a common convict identity. Joy Damousi, a historian who has examined the way convict women defied government administration, has argued this. Convict women might sing songs that employed cant language and mocked the authorities. The authorities seem to have been fairly well acquainted with this language and probably had some idea what the convicts were saying, yet perhaps it served an important psychological function.

Closed convict communities, such as the female factories and places of secondary punishment such as Norfolk Island and Port Arthur, probably allowed for a greater perpetuation of convict cant. Thomas Rodgers, a visiting missionary to Norfolk Island, made numerous observations on the use of 'flash language', and noted that when the commandant, a former convict himself, used this 'low burglar dialect' to them, he was met only with 'derision and contempt'.

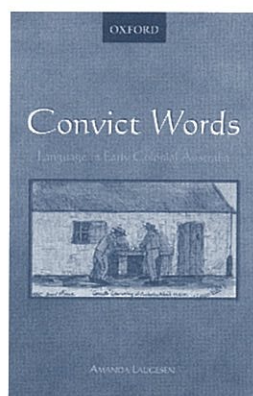
Another religious visitor to the convict establishments was William Ullathorne. He noted the inversion of meanings that convicts sometimes applied to standard words:

I was very much struck with the peculiar language used by the convicts at Norfolk Island. When a prisoner has been conversing with me respecting another individual, he has designated him as a good man. I suspected that he did not mean what he said, and on asking an explanation, he has apologised, and said, that it was the habitual language of the place, and that a bad man was called a good man; and that a man who was ready to perform his duty was generally called a bad man. There is quite a vocabulary of terms of that kind, which seems to have been invented to adapt themselves to the complete subversion of the human heart which I found subsisting.

While Ullathorne viewed such language as indicative of the convicts' incorrigibility, it was perhaps also a way of convicts inverting words often used to stigmatise them, and applying their own sense of morality or justice, and internal hierarchy of behaviour, to the situation. For example, in Van Diemen's Land's penal settlements, Governor John Franklin was very fond of addressing the convicts and telling them that they were

'bad' people. He intended to make them feel ashamed of themselves—but they might have found his admonitions more amusing than shame-inducing.

A similar inversion of meaning noted by Peter Cunningham and James O'Connell was the ironic use of **legitimate** and **illegitimate**. **Legitimates** as defined by Cunningham were those who had 'legal' reasons for coming to the colonies (i.e. convicts who had been sentenced to transportation), while **illegitimates** were those 'free from that stigma' (for example free settlers).



O'Connell observed that legitimacy, 'in all other parts of the world a coveted qualification' was in New South Wales 'a term of reproach'.

The term **flash** itself is worthy of examination. **Flash** in the sense of the language probably derived from the sense of **flash** defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'gaudy, showy, smart. Of persons: Dashing, ostentatious, swaggering, "swell"'. **Flash** was the language of the **flash-men**, but it was also known as **St-Giles' Greek**, **Billingsgate** or **Newgate** slang, and the **kiddy language**. The former labels referred to the (perceived) geographic origins of the cant. **Kiddy** was 'a thief of the lower order, who ... dresses in the extreme of vulgar gentility, and affects a knowingness in his air and conversation'.

The term **flash-man**, defined by Vaux as 'a pimp', was used widely in the colonies with a broader meaning, describing bushrangers as well as urban criminals, and often referring to their tendency to be 'flashily dressed'. John West described the Van Diemen's Land bushrangers as '“flash” robbers' but probably referred more to their membership of the criminal community than any flash dressing. The meanings of 'flash' in the sense of 'the criminal fraternity', 'flash' in the sense of 'flash dressing', and 'flash' in the sense of being 'in the know' or being 'fly' all had currency in the world of criminals and bushrangers. Often the **flash men** appear to

be the most experienced of any criminal group. The Report from the Select Committee on Penal Discipline in 1856, for example, observed that the 'flash-men' among the prisoners had been plotting something, and had been directing the 'crawlers' to work for them.

Crawler seems to be a cant word that had its origins in the colonies, possibly among convicts. While the above reference seems to allude to the 'sycophantic' sense of crawler (i.e. 'a person who "crawls up" to others, seeking favours'), it was often used among the convicts themselves for people who couldn't work, and was thus similar to another Australian sense of **crawler** 'a slow-moving animal, usually one enfeebled by age or disease'. This sense was recorded in reference to convicts in 1838: 'The cant name for these among the prisoners themselves was "the crawlers". They were scarcely able to work, people whom no settlers wished to employ.'

Some commentators seemed more concerned with swearing, a more relevant form of defiance by convicts in the open prison of the colonies. Convicts out on assignment were often accused of employing abusive language against their masters, using words such as **bugger** and **bloody**, rarely recorded in 'respectable sources' but turning up in transcripts of court cases. Indeed, it was indicative of the nature of power in the colonies that convicts could be charged for using 'foul' language. As in the military (the first type of administration established in New South Wales), insubordination was a serious offence and threatened to undermine the social hierarchy.

Despite the attempts of commentators to keep convicts and ex-convicts beyond the pale of respectable society, former convicts became important contributors to the development of the colonies and entered respectable society. Convict cant was thus unlikely to be employed by many of these former convicts. Some convict words took on broader meanings in the colonies, with no stigma attached to them.

Cove, 'a man, a bloke, a chap', has had a long history in Australian English. **Gammon**, defined by Vaux as 'flattery; deceit; pretence' was picked up in Australian pidgin and then continued on in Aboriginal English meaning 'nonsense, rubbish'. **Trap** for a policeman, recorded by Vaux, entered Australian English beyond its cant usage and has been current in Australian English through to the twentieth century.

Many convicts sent out to work on rural properties or on roads were far less likely to employ words relevant to the underworld

BOTANY BAY ARGOT

AMANDA LAUGESSEN

environment of London. Thus some cant words changed meaning as they entered Australian English. **Swag**, defined by Vaux as 'a term used in speaking of any booty you have lately obtained, be it of what kind it may' was transformed in the Australian colonies to mean, in the *Australian National Dictionary* definition, 'the collection of possessions and daily necessities carried by one travelling, usually on foot, in the bush; especially the blanket-wrapped roll carried, usually on the back or across the shoulders, by an itinerant worker' from 1841, and specifically as 'a bed-roll' from 1865. There were, of course, a number of terms that derived from swag, including **swag** as a verb, **swagger** and **swaggie** who was the same as a **swagman**, and **swagwoman**.

Another slang term **duffer** was adapted to life in the Australian colonies. First recorded in 1756 as meaning 'one who sells trashy goods as valuable, upon false pretences', it is often used in senses that suggest counterfeiting; as a verb **duff** means 'to dress or manipulate (a thing) fraudulently' and was

thus used in Australia in the sense of altering the brands on (stolen) cattle. A cattle **duffer** was someone who stole cattle and would often alter the brand mark. In 1849 *Bell's Life in Sydney* wrote: '“Duffers”, a title as expressive as could be found for those who live on the thick Fat of the land by cattle stealing.'

Few cant words survived for long in general Australian English, except for those that gained broader meanings and within the literary convict world of the historical novel. Yet a fascination with an underworld language continued. Marcus Clarke, in his 'Sketches of Melbourne Low Life' recorded long passages of Melbourne underworld slang:

A friend who watches while his 'pals' escape from prison is called a **phillipe**, to steal is to **pinch**, to **poll** is to rob an accomplice, a **ramp** is a burglar, stealing linen is **snow-dropping**, to cry '**shoe leather!**' is to give warning; the broth given on board the hulks is called **skilligolee**, **skilly**, and **smiggins**; to be

hanged is to be **topped**, **tucked up**, **turned up**, **stretched**.

Marcus Clarke employed much of this language in his popular historical novel of convict life *For the Term of His Natural Life*. A general fascination with not just the historical convict period, but with the criminal underworld persists and is reflected in popular culture. The distinct language that exists within prisons has been documented in Gary Simes' *A Dictionary of Australian Underworld Slang* (1993), while convict Australia was documented in the Robert Hughes' bestseller of 1986, evocatively titled *The Fatal Shore*. My attempt to capture some of the elusive 'Botany Bay Argot' is a contribution to understanding the world of the convicts.

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

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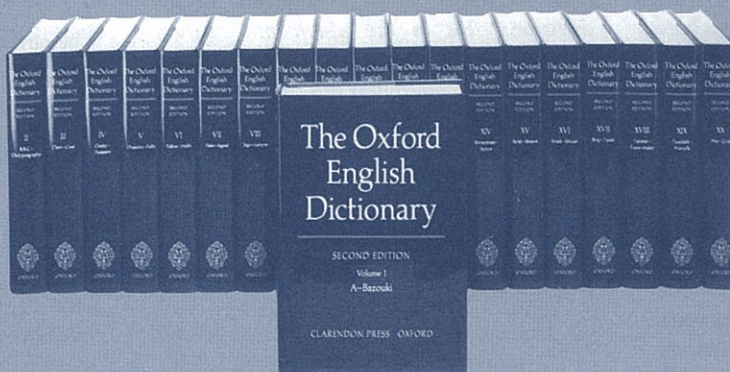
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We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those not easily answerable from the standard reference books.

I HATE MEECES TO PIECES

Is the plural of **mouse** (the computer instrument) **mice** or **mouses**. I have heard both. But **mouses** sounds very odd.

P. James, WA

Mouse belongs to an interesting group of nouns that form their plurals not by adding an inflection (as in what is now the standard English -s) but by changing their stem vowel. They were never large in number but they have held out against the hegemony of the -s mob. Like mouse/mice is louse/lice. Other members of this group are: tooth/teeth, goose/geese, foot/feet.

In the late fourteenth century the -s mob made a few inroads. Chaucer, in his Boethius, writes (slightly modernised): 'Now if you saw a mouse among other mouses that challenged to himself ... power of all other mices, you would have great scorn for it'. Note how even the plural form attempts to add the -s. But after the fourteenth century the rodent mouse remained s-less. In the eighteenth century the word started to be applied in technical senses to various things resembling a mouse in shape or appearance, and in these senses the plural was sometimes mouses. Thus in a nautical dictionary from 1769 we find a description of an object called a mouse: 'Mouse, a sort of knob, usually in the shape of a pear, wrought on the outside of a rope, by means of spun yarn parceling. ... These mouses are particularly used on the stays of the lower-mast, to prevent the eye from slipping up to the mast.' The computing mouses belong to this technical tradition. The earliest evidence for the computing sense (surprisingly early, I think) is 1965 in a book called Computer Aided-Display Control: 'Within comfortable reach of the user's right hand is a device called the 'mouse' which we developed for evaluation ... as a means for selecting those displayed text entities upon which the commands are to operate.' As the use of this word increased, two plurals developed, the standard mice and the 'technical' mouses. All dictionaries now allow both plurals. But if one thousand years of linguistic battling is anything to go by, the rebellious mice will perhaps eventually triumph over the bully-boy-s mob and their conservatively 'normal' and 'regular' mouses. ED.

BLACK SNAKE

Here is a question from a listener that you (or an Ozwords reader) may be able to help with. A visiting tradesman remarked 'O mate, I was so tired last night I black snaked it'. My listener had no idea what this means, and neither do I. ... And here's another: as he was

leaving this same bloke said, 'Your burn needs mowing' indicating the front lawn. This expression also baffled my listener (as it baffles me). Any thoughts?

Kel Richards

ABC NewsRadio WordWatch

Black snake: I am nonplussed, Kel. All that occurs to me is that black snake is possibly rhyming slang for flake as in 'she flaked on the sofa' or as your listener almost put 'I was so tired last night I flaked'. As for burn, I am completely stumped. Readers, please help. ED.

OBLIVIOUS

This is what I read in a fantasy novel (published 2001): 'He was oblivious to their shrieks and shouts even though they were all around him.' I understand that 'oblivious' means 'forgetful'. How can one be forgetful of shouts coming from people all around you?

K. Johnson, NSW

Perhaps he was in a state of supernormal shock caused by some magical irradiation of his cerebrum causing a lasting cerebral anaemia, the antithesis of hyperacusis. The only cure for this condition is vast quantities of gotu kola harvested and eaten under the full moon while one's feet are in pure mountain water in which elves have copulated. (See Kywodul, F: Magical Synopses, their Diagnosis and Cure, Presley & Elvis 1909). Oblivious originally meant 'forgetful' and was construed with 'of'. It is first used in the fifteenth-century morality play Mankind: 'Ye were obliuious of my doctrine.' But in the nineteenth century another sense developed, and this was 'unaware or unconscious (of)', and while this was sometimes construed with 'of', it was more commonly construed with 'to'. The first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary marked the construction with to as 'erroneous' but the second edition (1989) was obliged to comment 'formerly regarded as erroneous'. ED.

BEE'S DICK

Re: Statement under heading of *Roaring Horn*, Mailbag Ozwords December 2001: Despite Partridge's statement that a **bee's dick** is a measure of the shortest possible distance, I suggest that he's never seen a **gnat's diddle** or he would agree that this is a measure of a considerably shorter distance. This term had a fairly wide usage in some circles a few years ago.

J.H. Giddins, NSW

The phrase within a bee's dick has the

distinct advantage, for our purposes, of being Australian. But your gnat's diddle, I agree, is of a different order. I haven't been able to track down other examples of the precise term, but Jonathon Green in his Dictionary of Slang gives a gnat's eyebrow/balls/bristle/eye/hair/heel/prick as (US, twentieth century) for 'something very small', especially in the phrases down to a gnat's eyebrow 'down to the finest detail', and sharp enough to split the hair on a gnat's arse 'extremely sharp'. ED.

QUEER BLUDGER

The first time I heard the word 'bludger' was when I was an apprentice working in a Brisbane factory in the early 1940s—during the war. The term at that time referred to homosexuals. I recall using it in front of my guardian sister to describe a neighbour I considered to be 'one of them'. I was severely reprimanded by my sister as it was considered an extremely rude word never to be used in public. I also recall in later years being surprised to hear it used in reference to a loafer—its now current meaning.

Rhys Watkins, Qld

Many thanks for this information. We have no evidence for bludger in this sense, although given the earlier Australian sense 'one who lives on the earnings of a prostitute' (current from the 1880s to the 1950s), it is possible that a transfer took place. Can anyone guide us to written evidence for bludger in the sense 'homosexual'? ED.

REGARDING REGARDS

The now common expression **with regards to** grates on older ears such as mine, and, I hope, on many young ears too. Perhaps it's due to thoughtlessness—a mistaken assumption that there should be audible and visible consistency between 'with regard to' and 'as regards' (and possibly even with 'kind regards'). Maybe we all should opt for **regarding**, to the exclusion of the other two. That would quash 'without regards to' before it could catch on.

John Flower, Vic.

I am sure that you are right about the process of analogy that is going on with the corruption of with regard to. Internet evidence shows that in worldwide use of the idiom about twenty per cent of examples use the corrupt form. In Australia the figure is lower than the worldwide figure, running at about ten per cent. The further corruption into without regards to has not really taken off, with the odds of its appearance being about 250/1. ED

Dr W.S. Ramson's *Australian National Dictionary: A Dictionary of Australianisms on Historical Principles* (Oxford University Press, 1988) is one of the monumental achievements in Australian scholarship. It was partly in recognition of this achievement that the Australian National Dictionary Centre was established in 1988.

Since his retirement Bill Ramson has been working on a book that deals with the nature and significance of the Australian National Dictionary project. The book, called *Lexical Images: The Story of the Australian National Dictionary*, was published by Oxford University Press in August 2002. It weaves together two major stories: the first story is the story of the historical development of the Australian National Dictionary project; the second story is the story of the historical development of Australian English.

The dictionary story is one that began in the 1960s, especially when the dictionary project received the endorsement of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. But it was not until the late 1970s that the project really got off the ground. In 1983 the Australian National University decided to award the tender for publication to Oxford University Press, and there was a fascinating public stoush over this decision. The tensions came to a climax. Kevin Weldon, of the losing Jacaranda/Macquarie bid, blasted off a fourteen-page telex to the Vice-Chancellor of ANU, lamenting the fact that this great Australian dictionary would end up with a 'true-blue British name [Oxford] and true blue British ownership'. In reading this passage now, one is reminded just how quickly language changes. Does anyone remember a telex? And 'true blue' has developed such distinctive Australian meanings, that 'true blue British name' now means 'Australian British name'.

The other part of this story is the actual labour and joy of making the dictionary. With Oxford established as publisher, Bill notes how at the end of 1983 he received a letter from Robert Burchfield, the OED editor, asking for a timetable of completed material. Bill writes:

Not very graciously, we found a tape-measure and Julia Robinson, who was a very pragmatic woman, ran it over the contents of our filing cabinets, and did some abstruse calculations to reveal that we had to get through four metres of cards every three months for the three years until December 1986—that is, about 9000 cards per month. To mark the points of arrival and departure we selected words to aim at, and our lives became regulated by the knowledge that we had to go from *Abbot's booby* to *bluestone* by the end of March 1984,



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

from *blue swimmer* to *Cape Barren goose* by 30 June 1984, and so on ...

The extraordinary thing is that they kept to their timetable, and the dictionary was published in the year of Australia's bicentenary.

The second story that the book tells is introduced by Bill in this way:

The lexicographer records ... word histories, but the mass of information is such that, for most users, consulting a dictionary is a little like surfing the Net: one looks up the odd word specifically, as one visits the odd site, but otherwise browses, visiting occasionally and randomly. Yet to see the patterns of the language, and to realise the potential it has for the interpretation of the society that uses it, one needs some sort of guidance, some charting of the ways, the paths that lead between groupings of words like walking tracks between villages on a map that highlights motorways.

And, indeed, the bulk of the book is made up of this 'charting of the ways', as Bill guides us through the *Australian National Dictionary*, showing what it reveals about Australian culture and history, in chapters which are partly thematic—exploration, occupation, and utilisation of the land; the relationship between the indigenous inhabitants and the immigrant settlers; the gold rushes; the convicts; and so on.

Typical of the analysis is the chapter 'Waste Land to Wonderland'. This chapter deals with European perceptions of the land and with the utilisation of the land by settlers and colonists. Bill divides the 200 years of settlement into four segments of roughly fifty years. In the first fifty years, 1788 to 1838, many of the new terms have to do with occupation and use of the land. The land is divided into *Crown land* and *waste land*, 'the one proclaiming British

sovereignty and the other tacitly endorsing the view that the land was "terra nullius"'. *Crown land* generates a set that includes *government land*, *government ground*, *government reserve*, *government run*, and so on. *Waste land* generates a set that includes *unlocated*, *unoccupied*, *unsettled*, and *wild*. As the settlers imposed themselves on the landscape, the new lexicon reveals a tension between the old world and the new, between resemblance and difference. They saw a similarity between some of the new plants and plants of the old world, and so with the addition of 'wild' or 'native' they created another term that tried to make the new familiar. Thus: *wild geranium* and *wild parsnip*, *native apple* and *native grass*. Occasionally they borrowed indigenous names, as with *kurrajong* and *waratah*. It soon became clear that the English term *woods* was not adequate for the Australian landscape and it was replaced by *bush*. The word *plain* is redefined so that it includes undulating as well as flat land, and allows trees, as long as the major impression is one of openness.

In the second period, 1838 to 1888, words associated with the opening up of the country to settlement continue, with exploitation of the land's resources, including pasture, gold, and timber. More significantly there is a growing sense of identification and familiarity with the country. Queensland became *Bananaland* in 1880, South Australia became the home of the *croweaters* in 1881, Melbourne became *Marvellous Melbourne* in 1885, and Adelaide became the *city of churches* in 1873. *Barcoo* gave us *Barcoo rot* for a form of scurvy and the Darling River gave us *Darling shower* for a dust storm. Flora and fauna are now often named after established and now familiar places: *Bathurst burr*, *Burdekin duck*, *Moreton Bay fig*, *Murray cod*, and *Swan River mahogany*. Whereas in the first period the emphasis was on a kind of utilitarian occupation, Bill sums up the second period with these words: 'A map of associations established by explorers, settlers, and travellers is being drawn.'

Bill argues, in his final chapter, that in the twenty-first century Australian English 'is going to be both less significant and increasingly a regional handmaid of American English', and that the *Australian National Dictionary* 'is a monument to a nation at a particular phase in its history'. In reading this new book, what struck me again and again is what an extraordinary work of scholarship the dictionary is, and what an amazing contribution Bill has made to Australia's cultural history in his many lexicographical works.

This would make an ideal Christmas present for any lover of words.

BRUCE MOORE
DIRECTOR

'The Didgeridoo is the sound of Australia'. Few would argue with this claim made on the Aboriginal Art and Culture Internet web page ('Aboriginal Art and Culture': <<http://www.aboriginalart.com.au>>, date accessed 4 May, 2002). The sound of the didgeridoo is distinctive in the world of musical instruments. The difficulty in creating the sound may be one of the reasons why the playing of the didgeridoo is still not commonplace in Australia outside of traditional Aboriginal communities. The sound of the didgeridoo is definitively Australian; however, what is not so definite is the *origin* of the name.

The *Australian National Dictionary* records the first citations for the word *didgeridoo* as appearing in 1919, surprisingly late in the history of European Australia. In that year the *Huon Times* (Franklin) refers to the instrument as a **Diridgery doo**. The magazine *Smith's Weekly* (Sydney) in the same year, describes the sound of the instrument: **didjerry, didjerry, didjerry**. In 1924 the *Bulletin* (Sydney) provides **Didjeridoo—didgeredoo!** A 1967 entry quotes F.T. Macartney who suggested that the name *didgeridoo* is not an Aboriginal word and argued that it 'was very likely invented in imitation of the sound the instrument makes'. This view was repeated in 1990 in the discussion of the word in *Australian Aboriginal Words in English* (R.M.W. Dixon, W.S. Ramson, and Mandy Thomas, Melbourne: Oxford University Press). The didgeridoo instrument is found mainly in the upper half of Australia. As there are many Aboriginal languages in Australia, so there are numerous Aboriginal words for this musical instrument. Some examples are: **bambi, bombo, ilpera, and yidali**. None of these words, however, resembles the word **didgeridoo**.

Even if the word *didgeridoo* is not from an Australian language, it still sounds 'Australian'. It resembles other familiar Australian names, such as *cockatoo, jackaroo, kangaroo, socceroo*, and place names such as *Woolloomooloo*. It may, indeed, have been coined under that influence. The claim that the word *didgeridoo* is 'imitative' is a curious one in retrospect. The sound of the word *didgeridoo* hardly represents the repetitive 'drone' or 'hum' that we associate with the instrument. In order to test this theory, I

conducted a small survey in which I asked participants to 'write in letters the sound of the didgeridoo'. The results are as follows:

Derrrr
Mwaaahhh Briheehe Mawawworr
Mwoooowwoowoopwoopwoooooomm
mnoop wooooowwoooooow
Blum-to-to-to
Mmmberrrrrr
wahaawaa
ooooomm
brrr-ri!
Ngnn! nya nya
Nynn!
boing
ooowahooyeeooowoo
wurr! wurr! woww!
Doo ooo ooo Dooo oo Dooooom ooom
Dooo
Browwwwwwhewheerrouw
oo aa oo aa
mmm...
waaaaaaaaaaaaaanrm
bwarrarra cucucubwrww
Baarooooowooooowooooowawooo
mmmwoobwoob woob wah woo woo
woo
mmmmmmn,
mirbooh
mooonarau
erranamabraera
mmrrrmrrrmrrmr
Mowowerrmowromdoodoodoodooowm
owerrm

Most respondents represented the sound of the *didgeridoo* in a series of letters starting with the letter 'm'. The next popular choice was the letter 'b'. None of these respondents produced letters similar to the word *didgeridoo*. I suggest that those who produced the letters *Derrrr* and *Doo ooo ooo* etc. may have been influenced by the word *didgeridoo*. It could be argued that the word *didgeridoo* does not appear to represent the sound of the instrument and so is not 'imitative'. If the word *didgeridoo* is not really imitative of the sound of the instrument and is not a word from an Australian language, where does it come from?

Both Irish and Scots Gaelic have the word *dúdaire* which cognates with the word *dúid*, 'a pipe'. The word *dúdaire* is used in the English of Ireland today to

mean 'an incessant pipe smoker' or 'an inquisitive person' (Diarmaid Ó Muirthe, *A Dictionary of Anglo-Irish*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996). Niall Ó Dónaill's (1977) *Irish English Dictionary (Foclóir Gaelige-Béarla, Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1977)* refers to 'a long-nosed person' and the sound of 'crooning' or 'droning'. Dineen's 1904 Irish-English dictionary provides as a translation of *dúdaire* 'a trumpeter or horn-blower, blowing of a horn, act of crooning or humming' (Rev. Patrick S. Dineen, *Foclóir Gaelige*, Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son Ltd). Malcolm MacLennan's *Gaelic Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Acair Press, 1979) provides the translation 'trumpeter'. The word *dúdaire* is a tri-syllabic word, pronounced, roughly, **dooderreh** or **doodjerreh**. Irish and Scots Gaelic also have the words *dubh* 'black', pronounced **dub** or **doo** and the word *dúth* 'native or hereditary', also pronounced **doo**. It may be that Irish or Scots Gaelic speakers gave the name *dúdaire dubh* or *dúdaire dúth* (pronounced **dooderreh doo** or **doodjerreh doo**) to the person playing the native instrument and that the word became associated with the instrument. This theory would explain the curious incompatibility between the word *didgeridoo* and the sound of the instrument. It would also explain why this Australian-sounding name has been denied that origin by linguists.

Finally, the Irish Aboriginal *didgeridoo* connection has been reciprocal, in that Aboriginal Australia has assisted the Irish in solving one of the mysteries of their ancient instruments. The Bronze Age horns of Ireland had been silent for hundreds of years until a London professor saw a comparison with other ethnic instruments, including the didgeridoo. Subsequently, Simon O'Dwyer in Ireland took the challenge up and was successful in bringing the sound of the Bronze Age horns out using the technique for playing the didgeridoo (Prehistoric Music Ireland. <<http://homepage.tinet.ie>>). So, in a sense the wheel has come full circle. The Irish may be credited with giving to Australia a universal name for a native instrument, but Australia has given back to Ireland an historically lost sound.

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

GET TO GO

THIS (PREPOSITIONAL) LIFE!

EDEL WIGNELL

We used to say, 'I hope to go to the football'. Now I hear, 'I hope I get to go...' In the past ten years our language has become cluttered with unnecessary words.

'Up' is a favoured addition: winds 'strengthen up' or 'stiffen up' and rain 'eases up'. Managers 'head up' a team or a company; actors 'act up'. Once we 'dialled' a phone number; now we 'dial up'. Teachers 'prove up' a new literacy program. Women who work outside their homes have always had to juggle work and family responsibilities. Lately they have had to 'juggle up'. To do this, they have to 'skill up'. Sometimes there is a second addition as in: James 'met up with' Ann. Is there a difference between meeting a woman and meeting up with her?

'In', 'out', 'off', and 'on' also vie for popularity. Once, at birth a baby weighed, for example, three kilograms. Now it 'weighs in at'. We have always given attention by looking at an item. A few years ago, we 'focused on it'. Now we 'focus in on' it. In the past, champion tennis players simply won. Now they 'close out' the match as they 'beat out' their opponents with spectators 'watching on', their numbers

being 'calculated out'. Sometimes sports people are tested for drug use, and results may 'test out' positive. Harking back to the weather: a low pressure never weakens—it 'weakens out' or 'weakens away' and skiers can be 'guaranteed of' regular snow reports. People don't cancel appointments; they 'cancel out'. They don't listen to the radio; they 'listen out' or 'listen out for'.

If police need to search an area it is 'secured off'. Indian and Pakistani armies on the Kashmir border 'face off against' one another. Once we signed a contract. Later we 'signed off' a contract. Now, in an ugly contradiction, we 'sign off on'. Politicians quickly learnt this verbiage from the media. Recently the kids took a day 'off from' school, so we could make a trip. After driving for two hours, we 'stopped off' for coffee and then 'proceeded on'. Letters are 'forwarded on', and we 'progress on' in our endeavours, hoping to 'achieve on' our goals. A ship which went to Townsville to 'load on' stores was delayed when several boxes 'caught on' fire. Once you grabbed a rail to steady yourself on a ship; now you 'grab onto'.

When I was a kid, prisoners were locked

in or locked up; now they are 'locked down'. A gate, also, is 'locked down'. In the past, doctors prescribed drugs; now people are 'prescribed with' drugs. This example and some of the above are the result of change from active to passive voice. We are 'warned in advance' that tickets must be 'prepaid for', and we 'try to endeavour to do' this. If the perpetrators of 'abseiling down', 'descending down', and 'ascending up' had learnt Latin, they would know these sound as silly as 'round circle'.

We know that English is a growing, dynamic language and mourning change is futile. But I'm sorry for migrants who are keen to learn it, and I wonder how they make sense of recent add-ons and verbal diarrhoea. The English language is rich in strong, precise verbs—a powerhouse for writers and speakers. The addition of unnecessary prepositions and other verbiage has weakened its impact in recent years.

[Edel Wignell's freelance articles have been published in 100 newspapers and magazines. Her latest title is *Tricking the Tiger: Plays Based on Asian Folk Tales* (Phoenix Education).]

AUSSIE WORDS: BODGIE

FREDERICK LUDOWYK

BODGIE: *noun*, **1.** something (or occasionally someone) fake, false, worthless. Frequently as *adjective*. **2.** an Australian male youth, especially of the 1950s, distinguished by his conformity to certain fashions of dress and loutish behaviour; analogous to the British 'teddy boy'. Female of the species, **WIDGIE**.

Both senses of the word **bodgie** in Australian English probably derive from an earlier (now obsolete) Australian noun **bodger**, meaning 'something or someone false or unreliable, dodgy; something badly made or shoddy'. Thus in 1945 (our earliest citation) we have reference to some dodgy and unreliable Australian airforce maintenance men: 'This when the **Bodgers**, or sly guys place themselves in the most concealed ... places in the line' (*Biscuit Bomber Weekly: Magazine of the 1st Australian Air Maintenance Co.*, 18 February, p. 3).

The obsolete Aussie **bodger** probably derives from the British dialect verb **to bodge** 'to make or put together clumsily, to botch (something) up'. (In fact **bodger** is an altered form of **botch**.) Thus in 1578 we had: 'To **bodge** up a house which will never abide the trial' (T. White, *Sermon St. Paulus Cross*, p. 33). In Australian English in the 1940s and 1950s a **bodger** therefore was

'something badly made or put together' (like T. White's botched up house which will fall apart when put to the test), 'something (or occasionally someone) counterfeit, unreliable, or worthless'. (The noun was also used adjectivally.) Thus in 1950 Frank Hardy used **bodger** to denote false or counterfeit votes: 'This entailed the addition of as many more "**bodger**" votes as possible' (*Power without Glory*, p. 383). In 1954 the word was used to denote false names: 'Well, we stuck together all through the war—we was in under **bodger** names' (*Coast to Coast: Australian Short Stories 1953–54*, p. 76). In 1966 S.J. Baker in his *The Australian Language* (ed. 2) pointed out that the term **bodgie** for an Aussie larrikin was not an Americanism (as had been assumed) but 'was derived from an earlier underworld and Army use of **bodger** for something faked, worthless or shoddy. For example, a faked receipt or false name ... is a **bodger**; so is a shoddy piece of material

sold by a door-to-door hawker' (p. 292). By 1950 the word **bodger** was altered to **bodgie**, and this is now the standard form.

How dodgy is **bodgie**? A few citations should make it clear. In 1952 it was given the sense 'neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring': 'An office in town has a mail file marked **bodgies**. It's for letters that don't seem to come under any of the regular classifications. The misfits, in other words' (*Sun* (Sydney), 6 March, p. 1). In 1964 it was used for a bung instrument: '“I've had that bloody altimeter!” shouted Ern. “It's a **bodgie**. I'll throw it in the bloody river”' (J. Iggulden, *The Clouded Sky*, p. 10). In 1967 it was a boomerang that refused to behave itself and bloody-well boomerang: 'The Boss reckoned he could throw a boomerang. ... The Boss argued that he was getting all the **bodgie** ones, and that Jacky was using the only “come-back” ones' (G. Jenkin, *Two Years on Bardunyah Station*, p. 27). One suspects that it was the Boss's technique that

AUSSIE WORDS: BODGIE

FREDERICK LUDOWYK

was **bodgie** and not the boomerangs he used. In 1975 it was a false receipt: 'To avoid any suspicions in case they were picked up by the Transport Regulation Board, it was decided ... to take a "**bodgy**" receipt for the tyres with them' (B. Latch & B. Hitchings, *Mr X: Police Informer*, p. 200). In 1978 it was fraudulent number plates: 'This heap is hot—else why did they give it a one-coat spray job over the original white duco and fix it with **bodgie** number plates?' (O. White, *Silent Reach*, p. 173). In 1984 the bodgies were probably ghosts: 'Allegations ... of branch-stacking and the use of hundreds of "**bodgie**" members in the electorate' (*Canberra Times*, 27 August, p.1).

In the 1950s another sense of **bodgie** arose. The word was used to describe a young Aussie male, distinguished by his complete conformity to certain fashions of dress (described below) and loutish or rowdy behaviour—the antipodean counterpart of the pommie 'teddy boy'. In 1950 the *Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney, 7 May, p. 47) obliged us with a description of his heraldic accoutrements, 'the badge' (as 'twere) 'of all [his] tribe': 'The bizarre uniform of the "**bodgie**"—belted velvet cord jacket, bright blue sports shirt without a tie, brown trousers narrowed at the ankle, shaggy Cornel Wilde haircut.' Apropos that shaggy hair, in 1951 the *Sydney Morning Herald* (1 February, p.1) grouched: 'What with "**bodgies**" growing their hair long and getting around in satin shirts, and "weegies" [i.e. **widgies**] cutting their hair short and wearing jeans, confusion seems to be arising about the sex of some Australian adolescents.' Apropos **bodgie** behaviour, *Truth* (Sydney, 1 January, p. 38) grumped: 'The current outbreak of vicious crimes by teenage louts who glory in the tag "Teddy Boy" or "**Bodgie**" is causing

widespread concern.' In 1979 K.R. Mackenzie laughed: 'There was a bonzer **bodgie**,/He was a lovely male,/He whipped his widgie so humanely,/She didn't even quail' (*Cosmic Fun*, p. 14).

'What's a bodgie, Connie?'

'A drongo who's younger than a grub but thinks he's old enough to have a widgie.'

(P. Radley, *Jack Rivers and Me*, 1981, p. 25)

This sense of **bodgie** seems to be an abbreviation of the word **bodger** with the addition of the ubiquitous Aussie **-ie** suffix. One explanation for the development of the sense 'teenage lout' was offered in the *Age* (Melbourne) in 1983: 'Mr Hewett says his research indicates that the term "**bodgie**" arose around the Darlinghurst area in Sydney. It was just after the end of World War II and rationing had caused a flourishing black market in American-made cloth. "People used to try and pass off inferior cloth as American-made when in fact it was not: so it was called bodgie", he says. "When some of the young guys started talking with American accents to big-note themselves they were called bodgies"' (12 August, p.2). In other words, they were fakes, counterfeit Americans, not the dinkum article.

This particular sense of **bodgie** (also in the formulation **bodgie boy**) belongs to the 1950s. The bodgie boy has long since gone where good bodgie boys go (he probably wound up as a staid, shiny bum and is now, as an old age pensioner, happily planting vegies). His place has been usurped these days by **westies** and **bogans** and **chiggas** and **bevans** and **boons**. But, I am glad to say, **bodgie** in the sense 'fake, false, inferior, worthless' is alive and flourishing still in Australian English. *Floreat semper!*

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OZWORDS COMPETITION

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 17: RESULTS

In 2001 the Washington Post ran a competition in which readers were asked to supply alternative meanings for various words. Two of the winning entries were: **abdicate** 'to give up hope of ever having a flat stomach'; and **willy-nilly** 'impotent'. You were asked to choose an Australian word and supply an alternative meaning, or choose any word and give it an alternative meaning with an especially Australian flavour.

Honourable mentions to: L. Green for **billabong** 'to charge your pot to a credit

card' and **digger** 'one who is always infra'; P. Harley for **furphy** 'entry fee at a brothel'; G. Watson for **boomerang** 'Skippy called'; H. Hogerheyde for **auspiced** 'an inebriated Australian (especially abroad)' and **felspar** 'in agreement with ACCC guidelines'. The judges could not split the winners, so there are two first prizes (books worth \$100 from the OUP catalogue): J. Birch for **coolibah** 'Australian border protection policy' and **boobialla** 'trainee suicide-bomber'; C. Schumaker for **nobility** 'a thirsty swagman's lament' and **Kuala Lumpur** 'transport for marsupial bears'.

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 18

In 2001 the Melbourne Writers' Festival held a competition for the writing of the Great Australian Novel. Writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Louise Adler suggested that 'The Great Australian Novel, like Australia, is a work in progress'. Perhaps so, but we feel that our Ozwords readers are up to the task. You should provide a title and a brief summary of the plot in no more than 100 words (definite limit!), using as many Australian words as possible.

ED.

Entries close 31 January 2003 • Entries sent by email should also contain a snail mail address.