OZ WORDS

EDITORIAL

In this edition we pay tribute to the founder of the Australian National Dictionary Centre and the editor of the *Australian National Dictionary*, W.S. (Bill) Ramson AM. Ian Donaldson, who knew him well, writes a moving obituary that highlights the many contributions Bill made to the study of Australian English and scholarship more generally.

As this year marks the 25th anniversary of the publication of the first edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*, we include a short piece about the dictionary and highlight some of our favourite words and quotations.

Our mention of meat-safe cots in the previous edition of *Ozwords* generated a huge amount of correspondence, with many readers having their own memories of these. We have therefore put together some of these memories and descriptions—and thank everybody for their wonderful contributions.

Amanda Laugesen
Director

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andc.anu.edu.au/webform/word-box

A TRIBUTE TO W. S. RAMSON (1933–2011)

IAN DONALDSON

Bill Ramson, future editor of the monumental *Australian National Dictionary*, was born in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, on 4 December 1933. The eldest of four children, he attended the Hutt Valley High School, where his father taught, before going on to study for a Master of Arts degree at Victoria University, Wellington. His passion for philological and late mediaeval study was kindled by his Edinburgh-born Professor of English, Ian Gordon, an inspirational mentor to successive generations of students at Victoria. Several of Gordon's more enterprising pupils would choose eventually to leave Wellington and work in other parts of the world, as Bill himself was to do, though all were to retain a strong affection for the institution at which they'd first been trained. They included Robert Burchfield, who settled in Oxford as Fellow of St Peter's College and became in due course an editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*; Grahame Johnston and George Turner, who moved to Australia and produced by turns the first two editions of the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*; George Russell, later Bill's mediaeval colleague and Head of Department at the Australian National University; and Bill's close contemporary at Victoria, D. F. McKenzie, who was later to exchange his chair at Victoria University for a Readership (later a Professorship) of Bibliography and Textual Studies at Oxford. After graduating in 1954 Bill elected likewise to leave New Zealand, moving to Australia and enrolling as the first-ever doctoral student in the Department of English at the University of Sydney. Here he worked on the historical evolution of the Australian vocabulary under the supervision of A. G. Mitchell, the country's leading authority on the pronunciation of Australian English. In 1963 he completed his dissertation, which was published three years later as *Australian English: An Historical Study of the Vocabulary 1788–1898*.

By that time Bill and his first wife, Belinda, who had married in Lower Hutt in 1956, were well settled in Canberra, together with their three daughters, Mary, Catherine, and Jennifer. Bill had been appointed in 1961 to a Lectureship in A. D. Hope's Department of English at the ANU, a small but lively oasis of scholarship and conviviality at that time in the still somewhat austere national capital. Teaching a variety of undergraduate courses on literature of the late mediaeval period, Bill developed a particular interest in Scottish court poetry of the early Renaissance. In 1967 he spent a period of leave as a Nuffield Foundation Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, studying the late sixteenth-century Bannatine manuscript of court poetry held in the National Library of Scotland. This work laid the foundation for his later critical anthology of Scottish poetry from the reign of James III to that of James VI and I, *The Poetry of the Stewart Court* (1982), a book he co-authored with Joan Hughes, his former research assistant who was by then his domestic as well as his scholarly partner.

Bill was greatly attracted by Edinburgh, a city to which he returned in 1972–73, this time as a Fellow in the University's Institute of Advanced Studies. While in the School of Scottish Studies he came upon a remarkable archive that was to affect the future direction of his work: the still-uncompleted files of *The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue.* This huge lexicographical project had been started in the early 1930s by Sir William Craigie, one of the original editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and would eventually reach its conclusion, as a mighty twelve-volume work, more than eighty years later, in 2002. As one sort of model as to how dictionaries may be built—laboriously, over many decades, by numerous successive editors—*The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* must have seemed to Bill both inspiring and dismaying. Dictionary-making, as the project's then-editor, Jack Aitken, enjoyed reminding him, was an exceedingly slow business, the editorial labour

ANDC @ozworders Is 'unico[...] ANDC *@ozworders* The term has been around since the early 1990s. *ANDC @ozworders* Tony Abbott has a 'daggy dad' moment. *ANDC @ozworders* PM accused of 'grandpa slang'.

being likely to take three times as long as that of the basic collecting. But like Samuel Johnson sardonically reviewing the glacial progress of the French Academy's team-driven dictionary of the French language, Bill must have felt that—in the case at least of Australian English—these tasks, though laborious, could surely be done more swiftly. Australian English was at least not an 'older tongue', and its history, in comparison with that of the Scots language, was relatively brief. Though the general character of the language spoken by white settlers in Australia had been vividly described by scholars such as Sidney Baker and G. A. Wilkes, its lexicon had never been fully collected, nor had its evolution been systematically linked to historical and local circumstance. The possibility of preparing a comprehensive dictionary of Australian English on historical principles—a project to which the Australian Academy of the Humanities had pledged its commitment and support soon after its establishment in 1969—must have seemed to Bill, as it did to others in Australia, a deeply attractive prospect, though one fraught with logistical, procedural, and financial difficulty.

By the early 1970s various lexicographical projects were mooted or under way in Australia. At Duntroon, Grahame Johnston was adapting the smallest of the Oxford dictionaries for Australian usage, while at Macquarie University Arthur Delbridge was preparing a more 'aggressively Australian' general reference dictionary for publication by Jacaranda Press. Delbridge persuaded Bill Ramson, along with David Blair and John Bernard, to join his editorial team, who worked cheerfully together for four years before a change of management at Jacaranda temporarily diverted the project (which was eventually to emerge years later as *The Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English*). Bill left the Jacaranda team at this moment to develop his own more ambitious plans for a historically-based dictionary of Australian English in the style of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Such a large scholarly undertaking might most effectively be based, so Bill believed, at the ANU, with ready access to the resources of the Research Schools, the National Library, and other major institutional archives. Members of Sydney University's Australian Language Research Centre, on the other hand, urged that such a work would be more profitably pursued in a larger city such as Sydney, where it could draw on the resources of several universities. To further complicate the picture, Peter Davies— an English publisher who'd been brought to Australia originally to advise on the Jacaranda project—was now at the ANU's Humanities Research Centre promoting the attractions of yet another kind of dictionary of Australian English: one that embraced the regional variations that his researches, contrary to received wisdom, were beginning to reveal. In the Atherton Tablelands, Davies observed, forestry workers didn't *fell* timber as their counterparts did in the southern states, but instead would speak of *falling* it. Hundreds of similar instances of small regional lexical variations, he was convinced, could be found by researchers with the time, energy, and resources to pursue them.

The larger story of these competing enterprises, and of his own ultimate success in obtaining institutional support and funding for the *Australian National Dictionary*, is told in part in Bill Ramson's *Lexical Images* (2002), yet the basic factors leading to his success are not wholly revealed in this account. From 1975 until 1981 Bill served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the ANU, and thus on a whole range of committees across the university. He was a remarkably effective and well-liked Dean: always ready to listen and to negotiate, always generous with his time, always quick to spot a creative opportunity. Through his various administrative roles he learnt moreover how even the largest and seemingly immobilised research projects can be helped forward through modest adjustments of schedules and of budgets: through a term's relief from teaching, or a small grant massaged out of some neglected fund, or the strategic redeployment of an under-employed research assistant.

By the late 1970s Bill was impatient to return to his own scholarly work, sharply conscious of a looming anniversary by which his own much-dreamed-of dictionary of Australian English might appropriately be delivered: the bicentenary in 1988 of the arrival of the first white settlers in Australia. In 1978, a bare ten years before this crucial date, he took off on a whirlwind trip to centres in Strasbourg, Oxford, and Vancouver to finalise his plan of attack. He still had another three years to run on his Deanship, but if the project were ever to be realised it had to begin at once. By the end of that year he had gathered together sufficient funding to employ a couple of research assistants in the Department of English to work alongside Joan Hughes, his trusted ally and co-designer of the project, who would oversee day-to-day progress on the dictionary. His strategy was strictly pragmatic. Regional variations would not be on the agenda. There were no funds available to pursue such an elusive quarry, and no time to spare on what might well prove ultimately to be a quite minimal return.

Released from other distracting duties in 1981, Bill was at last free to work full-time with Joan and other members of his small editorial team who were now busily assembling the materials for the new dictionary. The routines the team followed in the Kingsley Street Cottage on the edge of the ANU campus, their headquarters from the mid-1980s, did not differ much from those that Sir James Murray had devised a century or so earlier for work in his famous Scriptorium in the garden of his house in north Oxford. Sceptical of the value of digitisation and wary of its

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> **" Such a large scholarly undertaking might most effectively be based ... at the ANU. "**

cost, Bill believed, like Murray, in the usefulness of file cards or 'slips', on which historical citations illustrative of linguistic usage were written out carefully by hand by researchers working chiefly in the National Library. Those entering the Kingsley Street Cottage needed at times to step their way warily through a wide scatter of meticulously arranged file cards over which the Associate Editor, cross-legged on the floor, was thoughtfully brooding. Bill's decision to work manually rather than electronically with these citations was controversial at the time and may seem even more questionable in retrospect, but was thoroughly vindicated by the speed and efficiency with which the dictionary was actually put together, and published triumphantly to scholarly acclaim in the bicentenary year.

> **" ... the dictionary was ... published triumphantly to scholarly acclaim in the bicentenary year. "**

PROFESSOR PETER KARMEL (VICE-CHANCELLOR, ANU), BILL RAMSON, AND DAVID CUNNINGHAM (MANAGING DIRECTOR, OUPA), 12 JULY 1985. THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE TEXT OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY WAS BEING HANDED TO THE PUBLISHER.

The Kingsley Street Cottage had become during the 1980s a famously welcoming place, where coffee and cake were reliably to be found, and where at the close of the day you might hear the satisfying sound of a well-drawn cork and a buzz of vigorous talk about *bingles* or *barnies* or *bludgers* or *bundies*. Bill and his dictionary had friends from many corners of the ANU who enjoyed dropping in, and others who worked freely and regularly for him, advising on the quality of particular entries. Among the most active of his supporters were the Australian historians, who were quick to realise the extraordinary research potential of the vast bank of citations amassed within the Cottage's archives. Bill's skills in negotiation had been further proven by arrangements he deftly engineered between the ANU and Oxford University Press (Australia), whereby the publishers agreed to support not only the principal dictionary, but also the establishment of an Australian National Dictionary Centre at ANU, committed to producing a continuing series of revised and derivative Oxford dictionaries and language publications. Bill served as the first Director of the Centre from 1987 to 1994.

Bill and Joan were married in 1991. The early onset of Parkinson's disease made Bill's final years unusually arduous both for him and for his devoted wife, yet he maintained a keen and affectionate interest in scholarly matters and in the lives of all his friends. He was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1989, and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa,* by the ANU in 1996. He died on 5 October 2011.

Professor Ian Donaldson is Honorary Professorial Fellow in the University of Melbourne's School of Culture and Communication. He was Professor of English (1969–91) and Director of the Humanities Research Centre (1974–90; 2004–07) at the ANU, during which time he chaired the ANDC's Advisory Committee. This article has been reproduced with permission from the Australian Academy of the Humanities 2012 Annual Report.

ANDC *@ozwords* Have you heard the term 'Ned Kelly' applied to a fishing rig? • ANDC *@ozwords* Are you a 'phubber'? • ANDC *@ozwords* to the Duke & Duchess on the birth of their joey.

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.

UNDERSTANDING UNDERSTAND

I wonder if you can help me with a word origin. I would love to know how the word 'understand' came to mean what it does. I have searched through books and the internet, and while it's easy to find definitions of what 'understand' means, I have yet to find anything which clearly explains why it means it! I would be extremely grateful if you could shed some light on this for me.

M. Rogers, UK

Understand is an Old English word, first recorded in the late 9th century. Since variants of it occur in all the early Germanic languages (such as Old Frisian, Middle Swedish, Middle High German, and Middle Danish), it is likely to be a Germanic word that the Anglo-Saxons brought with them to Britain. It is probably a figurative use of the two words (*under* + (*to*) *stand*) in combination: if you 'stand under' something, you are very close to it and therefore in a position to see it clearly, to perceive it fully, and thus to know and understand it. In this explanation, *under* means 'beneath, below'. In Old English, *under* can also have the sense 'among, within', so the notion of 'standing within' something could also lead to the sense 'to perceive, to know'. But this is a relatively rare sense, and the explanation from a figurative use of 'standing under' is more in keeping with the evidence.

A SINGULAR PREMISE?

A recent query to our Facebook page asked about the word *premise* being used as the singular form of *premises*: 'I have heard people using it when referring to a single business premises. I have just heard Malcolm Turnbull on TV talk about the roll out of NBN from one premise to another'.

From the beginning *premises* had a plural form, but often a singular referent: for example, 'no pets allowed on these *premises*' could mean no pets in a single dwelling or no pets in a block of townhouses. The reason for this lies in its history. The word, ultimately derived from Latin via French, goes back to legal documents, especially those such as title deeds and wills. The *Oxford English Dictionary* explains that *premises* originally meant 'the matters or things stated or mentioned previously; the aforementioned, the foregoing'. It then came to mean what the 'aforementioned' was (or were) in a document: a house or houses, land or lands, and so on. Thus it came to mean: 'The subject of a conveyance or bequest, as specified in the opening part of a deed and referred to later in the document; the houses, lands, or tenements previously specified in a deed or conveyance'.

So in this sense *premises* was never the plural of a singular *premise*. But it certainly looks like one. The singular usage was always 'a proposition in logic', resulting from a reinterpretation of the word *premises* as a plural form. In the past people were accused of grammatical error when they said 'I will not allow pets on this premise', but the past decade has seen this use of *premise* become more common in Australia and elsewhere. It seems likely that it will eventually become an accepted usage.

IN A PICKAL

Can you help with the derivation, or validity, of the word 'Pickal'? A sketch of a gateway and parkland, marked 'B.T. Solly 1872', is purported to be of the 'pickal' of a Shoobridge property in Tasmania. On 28 November 1896 my Great Aunt Mary Garrett (who married Vincent Shoobridge in 1898) wrote: 'Mr. Vincent took B & me round House garden & through Pickal.' The following notes are on the brown paper at the back of the sketch: 'An extinct word spelt any of these ways Pychel Pightle Pykkyll Picle Pickell. A small field or enclosure about 1 rood/rod in area adjacent to house.' I hope you can give this a bit more certainty. I haven't found anything in my dictionaries. Perhaps it's local?

J. Atkinson, Tas.

Pickal is indeed a real word. It dates back to around 1200, and has various spelling variants as the note on the back of your picture suggests. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) this word is listed under the headword *pightle* but with variants that include your *pickal*. The word means 'a small field or enclosure; a paddock, a close'. In the US it can also mean a barnyard or cow pen. The OED suggests that, historically, the word was chiefly used in regional British English (in the east of England), and regional American English (in the state of New York). It is now rare. As for its pronunciation, the *pightle* form rhymes with 'title', and at least some of the 'c' or 'ck' forms, such as *pychel*, *pickal*, *pykkyll*, and *picle*, are likely to rhyme with 'Michael'.

FIBRO MAJESTIC

I noted in the Sydney Morning Herald … the use of the term 'fibro majestic'. I believe this is an ironic play on the name of the Blue Mountains hotel Hydro-Majestic. Can you tell me if 'fibro-majestic' is in your database and when it was first used?

J. Smith, NSW

This is a new one for us. The name is as you suggest a play on the name of the historic Blue Mountains hotel, the Hydro Majestic, in the town of Medlow Bath. The hotel was owned by wealthy retailer Mark Foy and frequented in its heyday (the early 20th century) by the rich and famous. The term *fibro majestic* ironically evokes the grandeur of this famous establishment, and alludes to the modest fibro-cement house—aka the *fibro*—so evocative of 20th-century Australian working-class suburbia. Here is the earliest evidence of *fibro majestic* in print, as a comically grand name for a small house:

> The bluestone cottage of the old days has become the Blue Chip Maisonette, and the weatherboard bungalow is now an Ambient Residence. It all sounds much less homely than it used to, but I have to applaud the Blue Mountains homeowner who has taken up the challenge. In the shadows of the legendary Hydro Majestic hotel, he has proudly christened his modest fibro cottage, the Fibro Majestic. (*Sun-Herald*, 16 April 1989)

There is later evidence of other homeowners in Australia (not in the Blue Mountains) giving their own house this name, but since 2000 there is also some interesting evidence that it is beginning to be used as a generic term for a fibro-cement house, and not just in New South Wales. The following quote is from a Melbourne newspaper:

> Another resident … says she was recently offered $350,000 for her 'fibro-majestic' in Flinders, bought for just $72,000 five years ago. (*Herald-Sun*, 12 January 2002)

Are any readers familiar with this sense of *fibro majestic*?

Australia has a number of terms to describe houses and house styles, such as *Californian bungalow*, *brick-and-tile*, *worker's cottage*, and the very recent *Fonzie flat*. Some are found in particular places: *Queenslanders*, *lowsets*, and *highsets* in northern Australia; *shacks*, *conjoined houses*, and *terrapin units* in Tasmania; and *Tocumwals* and *ex-guvvies* in the ACT. South Australia has several terms, such as *symmetrical cottages* and *row cottages*. Recently a news item reported that a well-known South Australian, former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, had purchased a house in Adelaide:

> Julia Gillard looks to be trading in her humble Melbourne brick-and-tile for a renovated bungalow in one of Adelaide's top beachside suburbs. The former prime minister and her partner Tim Mathieson are believed to have paid about $1.8 million for the four-bedroom, renovated house, not far from the beach. … [An] agent … described the style as a 'gentleman's residence'. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 2013)

This 'gentleman's residence' is also known as a *gentleman's bungalow*. This style of house, larger than the ordinary suburban bungalow, was built chiefly in the 1920s and 1930s. They were often distinguished from the average bungalow by the use of different building materials, such as freestone rather than brick for the front walls, and terracotta tiles rather than tin on the roof. *Gentleman's bungalows*, such as the one described above, were usually located in the wealthier parts of town.

Perhaps you know of other Australian terms for different kinds of houses, whether colloquial—such as *fibro majestic*—or otherwise. If so, we would be delighted to hear from you.

FROM THE CENTRE

The Australian National Dictionary Centre

VISIT TO OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS UK

In June ANDC Director Amanda Laugesen and editor Mark Gwynn spent a week at Oxford University Press (OUP UK) headquarters in Oxford. The purpose of the visit was to establish closer relationships with our British colleagues and to receive training on dictionary-editing software. Amanda and Mark had meetings with a number of Oxford dictionaries staff, including Judy Pearsall (Editorial Director, Dictionaries), Michael Proffitt (incoming Chief Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*), Andrew Peerless (Manager, Content Management Systems Support), and Angus Stevenson (Head of Dictionary Projects). Amanda and Mark are grateful for the warm welcome and support provided. Thanks are also due to Richard Harms from OUP Australia for organising the visit and to Angus Stevenson from OUP UK for looking after Amanda and Mark while in Oxford.

NEW CHIEF EDITOR FOR THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

Oxford University Press recently announced the retirement of John Simpson as Chief Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the appointment of Michael Proffitt as new Chief Editor. John Simpson provided valuable advice and assistance to Bill Ramson when he was editing the first edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*, and is a long-standing friend of the Centre. We look forward to working with the new Chief Editor as we move towards new digital initiatives in dictionary publishing.

JILL KITSON

The Australian National Dictionary Centre (ANDC) pays respect to Jill Kitson, who died earlier this year. Jill would be well known to many of our readers as the former host and creator of ABC Radio National's *Lingua Franca* program. This program was unique in the Australian media landscape for its focus on language. Many staff members and associates of the ANDC appeared on *Lingua Franca* and appreciated Jill's depth of knowledge and the professionalism she brought to each show. As a tribute to Jill we have posted links on the ANDC's website to the many *Lingua Franca* programs in which our staff and associates appeared in the period 1999–2011.

NEW STAFF AND VISITORS AT THE ANDC

The ANDC welcomes Dr Judith Smyth to the Centre as a Visiting Fellow. Judith was awarded a PhD from ANU in 2006 for her research on Australian lexicography in the period 1880–1910. Her research was undertaken at the Centre under the supervision of former Director Bruce Moore. Judith worked at the Centre for several years and has published a number of articles relating to Australian lexicography. She will continue her research into Australian lexicography at the Centre, with the prospect of editing several early lexicons of Australian English.

The ANDC also welcomes Dr Jutta Besold, who will be researching etymologies for words derived from Aboriginal languages for the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*. Jutta was awarded a PhD from ANU in 2012 for her work on the reconstitution of Aboriginal languages of the New South Wales south coast region, derived from archival material collected between 1830 and the early 20th century. Jutta has worked as a consultant linguist with Aboriginal communities and schools as part of local language reclamation and revitalisation projects.

AUSTRALEX

ANDC Director Amanda Laugesen and editor Julia Robinson attended this year's Australasian Association for Lexicography (Australex) conference, which was held at the University of Adelaide in July. They accompanied ANU's Dr Luise Hercus who was a keynote speaker and honouree at the conference. Amanda presented a paper on the publishing history of Brophy and Partridge's *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier 1914–1918*, and Julia presented a paper on researching words for historical dictionaries. Amanda was also appointed to serve on the general committee of Australex. The next Australex conference will be held in Auckland in 2015.

OZWORDS ONLINE

On the suggestion of subscriber Manny Aston we now have PDF versions of all our *Ozwords* newsletters on the ANDC's website. *Ozwords* has gone through various transformations over the years since its inception as the *Australian National Dictionary Centre Newsletter* in 1989. For those subscribers interested in revisiting these early editions, or if you have missed any previous editions, please go to the ANDC homepage and follow the links. An index to *Ozwords* is also provided to make it easier for readers to find specific topics of interest.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

A new edition (the seventh) of the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* has recently been published, edited by Mark Gwynn, Amanda Laugesen, and Julia Robinson. The Pocket has an important place in Australian lexicography because it was the first truly Australian dictionary. In the preface to the first edition in 1976 editor Grahame Johnston wrote that 'Every entry has been scrutinised for its application to Australian conditions, with the result that the book contains a wealth of information about our way of life, political and cultural institutions, characteristic idioms, games, and flora and fauna'. The importance of Australian English has been maintained in the new edition with words including *apera, barrier blanket, Fonzie flat, parents' retreat, puggle, ranga*, and *ute muster*. New international English words in this edition include *cloud computing,* *crowdfunding, dramality, paywall, selfie, sexting, skype, 3-D printing,* and *YOLO.*

Three new editions of Oxford school dictionaries, edited by Mark Gwynn, have also recently been published: the fourth edition of the *Australian Basic School Oxford Dictionary,* the fifth edition of the *Australian Schoolmate Oxford Dictionary,* and the fifth edition of the *Australian Schoolmate Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus.* All these dictionaries reflect developments in the new national Australian Curriculum for schools.

OZCLO

On 26 March the ACT regional final of the Australian Computational and Linguistics Olympiad (OzCLO) was held at the Australian National University. OzCLO is a contest for secondary school students that challenges them to develop their own strategies for solving problems involving various languages. ANDC's director Amanda Laugesen presented the winners and runners-up with copies of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

WORD OF THE YEAR

In December research and editorial staff at the Centre will be choosing a Word of the Year. The word is selected from a shortlist of words that have had some prominence in the Australian social and cultural landscape during the year. The word does not have to be Australian, but should have some relevance to Australia. Last year we chose *green-on-blue* because of its prominence in the Australian media due to Australia's ongoing military involvement in Afghanistan. We welcome suggestions from *Ozwords* readers for words to be considered in our shortlist. Please submit your suggestions to Word Box on our website, email or write to us. We look forward to your contributions.

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at whites, mugaccinos: Australia's names for espresso-based coffee.

MEAT-SAFE COTS

In the April edition of *Ozwords* we asked readers if they were familiar with the term *meat-safe cot*, and if they had ever used one. We had an extraordinary response to our request with many readers sending letters, emails, and photographs. The information helped us to write an Oxford Word of the Month featuring *meat-safe cot* (see our website for more details), and has led to this term being considered for inclusion in the forthcoming second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*. We would like to thank all the readers who shared their memories, stories, and photographs with us.

Our draft dictionary entry for *meat-safe cot* defines the term as 'a child's cot enclosed with mesh as protection from insects and animals'. The first written evidence for the term appears in a 1939 article in the *West Australian*, although we know anecdotally that it was used in the 1920s. Evidence confirmed by our readers suggests that *meat-safe cots* were most commonly used in regional and rural areas, and particularly in West Australia and South Australia. The similarity of the cot to an old-fashioned meat safe, in both design and function, is what gives the cot its name; both are simple box-like constructions using mesh or flywire to keep out insects and animals. Several readers mentioned that they looked like the traditional Coolgardie safe. The cots varied in design, but they usually had a hinged lid that lifted up or folded back, and could be closed with a latch. Some were on casters for mobility. It seems they were often larger than ordinary cots, and a number of readers' cots were home-made. Some readers knew them as *safe cots*, *safety cots*, or *flywire cots*.

Nearly all our readers' responses were positive and many have fond memories of the cot. The following excerpts from our correspondence represent only a small fraction of the mail we received.

> I just felt I had to respond, with a flood of memories of nearly 60 years ago when our meat-safe cot was the important nursery furnishing. These cots were the greatest invention for a country mother with a small child and a great protection from flies and night attacks of mosquitoes. It also was very easy to wheel out onto the verandah, so both child and I could watch the trees and birds in the garden. The timber framed wire top folded back neatly onto the main frame top, and could not be pulled down by the growing child as it practiced standing. While the bottom sides were covered with a fine wire mesh, there was also an outer surround of spaced fine timber dowels, serving as a protection from the wire being pushed out of shape as the child grew more practiced in exercising kicks. The whole was of solid but medium-weight construction, stood up well to our family of three energetic boys, and was then passed on to another family. (Noelle, SA)

> The guides for using one are: 1. Put your baby in it when about 6 months old, before they can stand up and throw things out, and leave the lid up so they don't feel shut in. 2. Gradually lower and latch lid. By then they are quite used to the environment—they can crawl around and play happily with their toys or lie down and have a sleep in comfort. (Barbara, SA)

> I have attached a photograph from my childhood photo album (I am now 73 years of age) showing me in my meat-safe cot. My mother's caption under the photo 'Elizabeth in her meat-safe cot aged 4 months.' (Elizabeth, SA)

> Born in 1926 and raised in Adelaide I slept in a meat-safe cot from then until c.1931. It stood in my parents' bedroom at the foot of the bed. On birthdays and at Christmas I awoke to see the silhouettes of presents piled on the wire mesh above my head, and puzzled what could be inside each of those oddly-shaped parcels. My first toddling experiences took place in the cot, flooring having been fitted for that purpose. (Harry, SA)

> I was born in Perth in August 1961. Mum and Dad bought the cot new for me. Mum can't remember where, but thinks it may have been bought at Boans. Mum was from Sydney and had never seen a cot like that there, but in Perth they were very common. If you bought a metal cot, you got a drop-side cot like the ones she was familiar with from NSW, but all wooden cots in WA at that time were safe cots. (Jancy, WA)

> I was born in 1948. Very hot NSW town and my father built a meat safe cot and I was put in it on the verandah of the home where I slept day and night for two years. The flies were bad and the foxes would come up to the house of a night but never harmed me. (Leo, NSW)

> They were indeed 'safe' from flies and mosquitoes when the hinged side/top was lowered and locked into place. Safe as well (if locked) from a toddler climbing out. However, they fell out of favour when there were to my knowledge at least two fatalities, caused by the hinged top either being left unlocked or left up over the top of the cot. Thus a child could either lift the unlocked hinged side over themselves, or pull the top down on their head, both causing death. (Betty, NSW)

> I'm familiar with meat-safe cots as I had two of them for my twins in early 1971. Mosquitoes were rife so the kids were free of mozzie bites when they woke in the mornings. Later, as they became more mobile, they couldn't escape nor were they exposed to the possibility of the side coming down and catching fingers. I must admit they looked a bit like rabbits in their hutches when I went to get them up. (Marnie, Vic.)

> I seem to recall that it was bigger than an average cot and that it also had slide bolts where the hinged top met the bottom, so it could be locked shut. Which sounds a bit sinister, but it never seemed that way to me—I was something of an escapologist, and my mother had four young children (I was the youngest), so locking me in just seemed a sensible precaution at the time. (Corrie, Qld)

> We were assured this type of cot was essential in North Queensland to keep tropical insects at bay. In 1962 we were transferred to Melbourne and Melburnians were astounded at this piece of baby equipment. When we were transferred to Perth there was no doubt the cot would go with us. In 1966 our daughter was born, and there were many WA visitors oohing and aahing over what they considered to be a modern Eastern States phenomenon. (Gwen, WA)

25 YEARS OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY Amanda Laugesen

When Robert W. Burchfield, then Chief Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and John Simpson, future Chief Editor, read the completed manuscript of Bill Ramson's *Australian National Dictionary*, they declared that the dictionary was 'going to be a triumph'. The *Australian National Dictionary* (AND) was a significant achievement in Australian and English lexicography, and it, along with the work that has gone into the second edition (which is forthcoming), has formed the core of the work that the Australian National Dictionary Centre undertakes.

The year 2013 marks twenty-five years since the publication of the *Australian National Dictionary* and the formal establishment of the Australian National Dictionary Centre. The making of the first edition of the AND was a major achievement and took years of effort by a dedicated group of lexicographers and researchers. The seeds for the making of 'Australia's own OED' were planted in the 1970s; Ramson recognised the need for a dictionary of Australian English based on the rich print sources that illuminated the distinctive language and cultural life of Australia. The Australian National University, Ramson's academic home, provided support for the project. Later, when Oxford University Press Australia became the publisher of the dictionary, it too provided invaluable support and has continued to work with the Australian National Dictionary Centre in producing Australian dictionaries.

While Bill Ramson was the guiding light of the AND project, Joan Hughes, as Associate Editor, played an enormously important role in shaping the dictionary. Further, many people worked on the dictionary as editors, researchers, and readers: they include Jay Arthur, Nona Bennett, Joan Birnie, Maureen Brooks, Dallas de Brabander, Pauline Fanning, Bernadette Hince, Joan Ritchie, Julia Robinson, John Seymour, Kay Walsh, Camilla Webster, Janet Hadley Williams, and Susan Mary Withycombe. Some continued to work for the Centre after the publication of AND and made their own individual contributions to the study of Australian English.

AND not only captured the distinctive lexicon of Australian English, it also stands as an important cultural document telling stories about Australia, its history and its people. The process of making the dictionary involved the reading of innumerable newspapers, books, and other documents by a small army of readers: they collected thousands of quotations. These quotations reveal much about our literature and language, especially its irreverence. Here is a small handful of our favourite words and quotations from AND:

Anzac wafers

1929 *Aussie* (Sydney) Apr. 33/1 Wafers—Anzac Wafers … /Makes me smile to think about 'em; /They were made of bricks and mortar, and a little dash of flour … /And they exercised our molars, bitin' at 'em by the hour.

Australia

1770 J. Cook *Jrnls.*14 Aug. (1955) I. 376 The Islands discover'd by *Quiros* call'd by him Astralia [*sic*] del Espiritu Santo lays in this parallel.

bandicoot

1980 Ansell & Percy *To fight Wild* 110, I remember the way they had of putting things, like if a bit of country was hard country, they'd say: 'Aw, she's bad, that end of the place. Saw a bandicoot with a cut lunch round his neck out there.'

banksia man

1918 M. Gibbs *Snugglepot & Cuddlepie* 74 She could see the glistening, wicked eyes of Mrs. Snake and the bushy heads of the bad Banksia men.

bonzer

1959 H. Drake-Brockman *West Coast Stories* 2 Hail, beauteous land! hail, bonzer West Australia; /Compared with you, all others are a failure.

boomerang *v.*

1891 *Worker* (Brisbane) 16 May 8 Australia's a big country / An' Freedom's humping bluey / And Freedom's on the wallaby / Oh don't you hear her Cooee, / She's just begun to boomerang / She'll knock the tyrants silly.

diddy

1963 D. Robert *Look at me Now* 84 The use of 'baby' and 'dainty' language is common. While the men are referring to a spade as a bloody shovel, the women are calling lavatories 'diddies'.

dip one's lid

1915 C.J. Dennis *Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* 21 'This 'ere's Doreen,' 'e sez. 'This 'ere's the Kid.' I dips me lid.

up to dolly's wax

1965 B. Humphries *Nice Night's Entertainment* (1981) 85 Everyone was full up to dolly's wax and I was absolutely stonkered.

mate

1983 *Bulletin* (Sydney) 13 Sept. 60/1 When they call you 'mate' in the N.S.W. Labor Party it is like getting a kiss from the Mafia.

wowser

1962 Marshall & Drysdale *Journey among Men* 195 A wowser is a gentleman who uses a contraceptive as a book-mark for his Bible.

We are now looking forward to the completion of the second edition of AND, edited by Bruce Moore, which will include some 3000 new headwords and many updated entries and new quotations. Building on the first edition, this second edition will be another milestone in Australian lexicography and an illuminating look into our language and culture.

The first edition of the Australian National Dictionary *can be accessed online at http://australiannationaldictionary.com.au. The story of its making is recounted by Bill Ramson in his book* Lexical Images: The Story of the Australian National Dictionary *(Oxford University Press, 2002).*

OZWORDS COMPETITION

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 40: RESULTS

For this competition you were asked to come up with an alternative name for Australia's capital city. As expected, the majority of respondents engaged in a bit of 'Canberra bashing'. There were many examples using *pollie* (politician) as a prefix: *Policity* (J. Vertigan, Vic.), *Polliewannacracker, Polymyalgia* (J. McGahey, NSW), *Pollyopolis* (F. Fisk, NSW), and *Pollywood* (P. Williamson, Tas.). There were also a number of examples alluding to the empty rhetoric or *polliewaffle* of some of our Commonwealth politicians: *Harangall* (G. Keith, Vic.), *Hot Ayr* (J. Dennett, NSW), *North Clattertrap* (R. Byard), *Windy Hill* (M. Fitzsimons, Vic.), and *Yabba* (M. Ladd, SA). A literary theme provided a welcome contrast to politics and Canberra bashing with the entries *Middlemarsh* and *Vosstralia* (D. Tribe, NSW).

1st Prize (books to the value of $100 from the OUP catalogue):
The winning entrant gets full marks for setting the scene on that fateful day when the name of the capital of the Commonwealth of Australia was announced.

It has been reported that the silver case with the name of the Australian capital written on a card inside was in fact a cigarette case, because Lady Denman was a clandestine smoker. So when she withdrew a card from the case, she inadvertently took a cigarette card, and pronounced with great solemnity that the name of our capital would be 'Lucky Strike'.

This name has now come down in history as fortunate news for workers who have gone on strike for better pay and conditions, and have been rewarded for their efforts.
(P. Harley, SA)

2nd Prize (books to the value of $50 from the OUP catalogue):
Deficity
(S. Robson, Qld)
Some honourable mentions:
Furphyville
(M. Paynter, Vic.)
Centrelink
(G. Case, Qld)
Taxus
(J. Murphy, NSW)
This Ozwords comp. is very tricky
As we're induced to 'take the mickey'.
Pollypatchplus-hangerson
Won't win because it's far too long.
Oztown is a different sort

But then again, a trifle short.
So what about a combat call?
I name this city Freeforall.
(L. Evans, WA)

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 41

The idea for this competition came from Alan Horsfield in Queensland. Here is what he suggested:

'We have all heard the old saying: "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away". [According to Eric Partridge, it comes from a British Army parody of the song "Kind Thoughts Can Never Die".] There have been numerous variations of this line:

Old golfers never die, they just lose their balls.

Old teachers never die, they just lose their class.

I often use my quiet thinking time to add to my personal list.

Old musicians never die, they simply refrain.

Old jockeys never die, they simply enjoy stable relationships.

Old chefs never die, they just forget the thyme.

It could be given an Oz flavour: "Old Holdens never die, they just get retired."'

So, as Alan suggests, your task for this competition is to come up with your own version of the phrase 'Old soldiers never die, they just fade away'. The most interesting and amusing entries will be in the running for a prize. We will look favourably upon entries that show a bit of Australian flair!

Entries close 31 January 2014

Entries sent by email should also contain a snail mail address (in order to receive the prize). All entries should be sent to the ANDC at one of the addresses at the top of the next column.

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