OZ WORDS

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IN THIS ISSUE:

EDITORIAL

Our feature article for this edition is a fascinating look into the ways in which Aboriginal languages have incorporated unfamiliar concepts. Jutta Besold, a linguist who has recently been undertaking some etymological research at the Centre for the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*, examines this issue, and demonstrates its particular importance to those Aboriginal communities dealing with reviving or maintaining their languages.

Centre editors Mark Gwynn and Julia Robinson have written articles on two aspects of Australian English: Mark looks at the history of Australian words for currency, and Julia surveys the broad range of terms used during the Australian bushfire season. As with so many of our *Ozwords* articles, we find Aussie English alive and well, although, as our competition challenge for this edition suggests, we may need to work harder on our colloquialisms for currency!

On behalf of myself and the rest of the Centre's editorial team, I hope you enjoy this edition of *Ozwords* and, as ever, I encourage you to continue to send in your queries and alert us to new and fascinating words and phrases. We also wish you good luck with the next competition, and look forward to receiving and reading your entries.

Amanda Laugesen
Director

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'HOW DO YOU SAY COMPUTER IN ABORIGINAL?' FROM CALCULATING MACHINE TO LIGHTNING BRAIN

JUTTA BESOLD

Many people are curious about how languages incorporate unfamiliar concepts, especially our own Indigenous languages here in Australia. 'How do you say computer in Aboriginal?' is the kind of question that, as a linguist, I often get asked at social functions, and little does the unsuspecting enquirer know that my answer is likely to be lengthy and lecture-like.

We are all familiar with words like *kangaroo*, *galah*, and *kookaburra*; these are words that have long been established in Australian English, and we use them on a regular basis. We may not necessarily know which specific language the words have come from, but we do know that they originated from Australian Aboriginal languages. And there were a lot of these languages.

Recent research by linguist Claire Bowen (discussed on her blog, anggarrgoon.org, 23 December 2011) estimates that about 360 distinct Indigenous languages were once spoken in mainland Australia before European settlement. Some of the languages are closely related, very much in the same way that Swedish and Norwegian are mutually intelligible, but are still considered to be distinct languages. On top of that number, most of the languages had their own different dialects, just as English has many different dialects—such as Australian English, American English, Singapore English (Singlish), and the many different dialects of English in Britain. Most of these dialects are mutually intelligible, meaning that we have no problem following our favourite American soap operas, and a Geordie from Newcastle in England has no problem understanding when Karl and Susan argue on *Neighbours*. The same applies to dialects of Australian Aboriginal languages.

Today, only about 150 Australian Aboriginal languages remain spoken and out of these only a very small percentage are spoken by all generations in a community, by young children as well as older people.

In south-eastern Australia most languages have been lost, some as recently as the mid-twentieth century, following the death of the last fluent speakers. However, many of their descendants have become active in the pursuit of revitalising their languages; they are bringing back their 'sleeping languages' into everyday life. ('Sleeping language' is a common term used by Indigenous people when referring to a language that has not been spoken for a period of time.)

To bring back traditional languages that have not been spoken for a long time, Aboriginal communities and linguists often rely on the language material that was collected by individuals between the late 1780s and early 1900s. The early collectors of Aboriginal language material were often surveyors and explorers, who spent large amounts of time travelling through unknown country, as well as missionaries and early settlers. Early explorers and naturalists often included local Aboriginal words for animals and plants in their journals and records of the new country; some even used local Aboriginal words in the scientific names for the newly discovered plants and animals. Thomas Mitchell (1792–1855), for example, came across an eel-like freshwater fish in a river during his explorations of the Murray-Darling river system between 1831 and 1836, and called it *Tandanus tandanus* after the local Aboriginal word for this fish, *tandan*.

James Larmer (1808–1886), a surveyor who accompanied Mitchell on his explorations through south-eastern Australia, collected words from Aboriginal languages that he came into contact with during his journeys between 1835 and 1853. His 'Native Vocabulary'

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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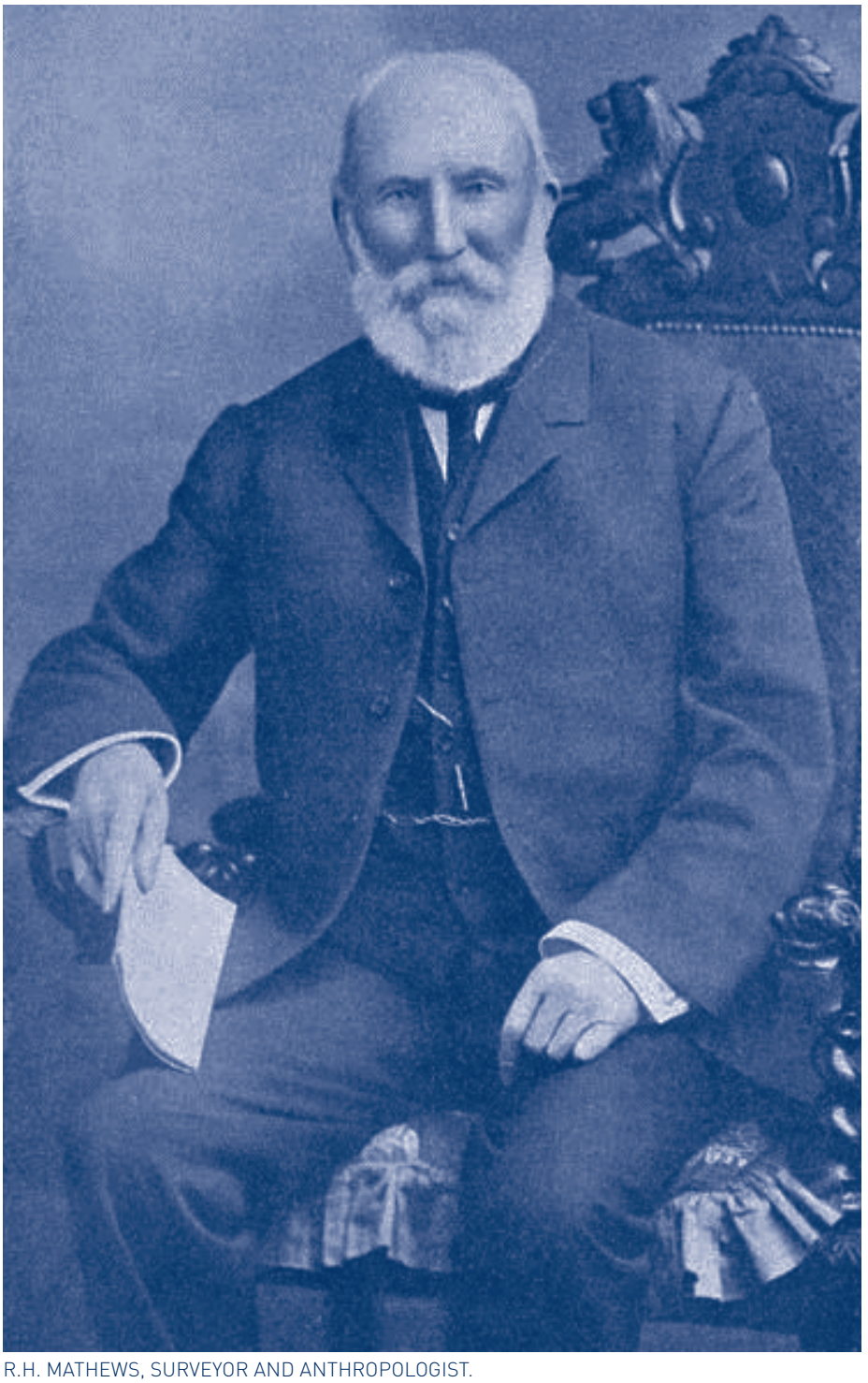

R.H. MATHEWS, SURVEYOR AND ANTHROPOLOGIST.
IMAGE SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS 'A PORTRAIT OF R.H. MATHEWS, FROM *SOME PECULIAR BURIAL CUSTOMS OF THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES*, 1909

included wordlists collected in various places in south-eastern Queensland and throughout New South Wales.

Another well-known surveyor was Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841–1918), who collected a large number of wordlists and sentences from Aboriginal languages in Victoria, southern Queensland, and New South Wales. Mathews grew up in country New South Wales and throughout his life had close relationships with Aboriginal people in different areas. (For more about this interesting individual, see Martin Thomas' 2011 biography, *The Many Worlds of R.H. Mathews*.) He collected cultural and linguistic information during his travels, and published basic grammatical descriptions of numerous south-eastern Australian Aboriginal languages. Many researchers from linguistic, historical or anthropological backgrounds have been fortunate to work closely with his archived material, including published articles in journals such as the *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia*, and especially with his handwritten field notes.

“... Mathews grew up in country New South Wales and throughout his life had close relationships with Aboriginal people in different areas.”

The quality of the archival material available for the different languages varies greatly, as does the quantity. In some cases, only short wordlists of about 35 words exist; for other languages we have sentences and, in a few lucky cases, additional cultural and mythological texts transcribed in the traditional languages. If the historical language material contains sentences and texts, it increases the possibility of working out a grammatical description, and subsequently teaching the language back to its 'traditional owners', so that they may communicate with each other again in their traditional language.

But one of the problems with bringing back these sleeping languages is the limitation of the available vocabularies, which are restricted to traditional concepts only. These wordlists may enable people to talk about hunting kangaroos, looking for berries, or how to cook the fish on a fire, but not about common non-traditional concepts. Daily activities like looking for the car keys or glasses, going to the fish and chip shop, sitting down at the dinner table for a pizza, or lying on the sofa reading a book, cannot easily be expressed with the words that were collected from Aboriginal people 100 to 180 years ago. Not being able to communicate in a contemporary setting, especially for younger generations, often leaves very little opportunity to use their traditional language and creates a need for what can be termed 'word building', which is part of language engineering. The aim of language engineering in this case is to extend the vocabulary to allow a language to be spoken in a contemporary context.

In Australian Aboriginal languages, the expansion of vocabularies has been addressed in a number of different ways. In the languages that have not had fluent speakers for at least two generations, expanding the vocabulary involves careful planning to create words that are user-friendly enough to be used on a daily basis.

One approach is to extend the meaning of an existing word in the traditional Aboriginal language. The existing word is used for a new object or concept that has shared characteristics or meaning. In the coastal northern New South Wales language Gumbaynggirr spoken in Nambucca Heads and Coffs Harbour, for example, the word *waraa* for 'foam' or 'froth' (such as the kind left by surf on a beach) is used for 'beer', as in *wara-wara*; and the word *dirrirr* 'stick, twig, splinter' is now also used for 'pencil'.

Often an English word is adopted into an Aboriginal language. This is not an unfamiliar approach for English either. English has many words taken from other languages, from the morning *caffè latte* (Italian 'milk coffee') to dropping off the children at the *kindergarten* (German 'children's garden'). But the same way English speakers anglicise the pronunciation of *caffè latte*, so are English words appropriated into Aboriginal languages. Some Australian Aboriginal languages don't allow for consonant clusters. Words often have a *vowel-consonant-vowel* sequence, and may have to end in vowels rather than consonants. Australian Aboriginal languages also do not have the sounds f, v, s, or z. This means that the English word 'football', for example, may cause a problem for speakers of some Aboriginal languages, because of the 'f' at the beginning of the word and the 'tb' consonant cluster in the middle of the word. The Western Desert language dialect Pitjantjatjtara therefore calls 'football' *pututpala*; in the Western Australian language of the Murchison region, Wajarri, 'glasses' become *gilaji*; and in Pintupi, another Western Desert dialect, you would be looking for your *kiyi* to start the car.

A large number of Aboriginal languages have no, or very few, words that consist of only one syllable; most words have two or more syllables. So this is possibly the reason that 'key' is stretched out to two syllables to *kiyi* in Pintupi. To avoid a word-final consonant as in 'apple' (despite the spelling which ends in a vowel), the word is appropriated into *apula* in Pitjantjatjara.

Some lateral thinking is required to build new words by stringing together existing words. A good English example of this compounding is 'jet lag', a word for a concept that didn't exist 150 years ago. (Some languages, such as German, don't have a word for this concept.) This approach is also used by Aboriginal communities in order to expand the vocabulary of their traditional languages. In Kaurna, the Adelaide Plains language, the word for 'computer' is *mookakahnda* 'lightning brain', where *karnto/kahnda* is the word for 'lightning' and *moka/mooka* is 'brain'. A similar combination is used in Gumbaynggirr with *marlawgay-bangarr* 'strike brain' for 'computer'.

In one of the Arnhem Land languages, Burarra, spoken in Maningrida in the Top End of the Northern Territory, the word for 'lawyer' is *an-gugunggaja joborr*. This is a compound of *an*, which marks the object/person to be masculine or neutral, i.e. 'he' or 'it', *gugunggaja* 'helpful one/helpful person', and *joborr*, the word for 'rule' or 'moral code'.

In Bilinarra, another language from the Northern Territory in the Victoria River region, 'glasses' (as in spectacles) are *garrabgaji*, which is derived from *garrab* 'look at; watch; stare' and an added suffix/segment *gaji* that adds the meaning of 'a person or thing that does something'; this is like the ending *-er* on English words such as 'player'. Literally translated, *garrabgaji* is something like 'a see-er' or 'a seeing thing'. Back in Gumbaynggirr, glasses have become *nyaagu-niirany*, which is a combination of *nyaagu* 'to see' and *niirany*, the word for 'clear' which is now also used for 'glass'.

> "...expanding the vocabulary involves careful planning to create words that are user-friendly enough to be used on a daily basis."

But for so many Aboriginal sleeping languages that rely heavily on the language material that was collected more than a century ago, finding words for new concepts is not the only problem. Members of the Dhanggati community from the mid-north coast of New South Wales, who have been working on revitalising their language for a couple of decades, found that the names for some native animals and plants were also missing from the old wordlists. They wanted a word for 'platypus', for example, and had to work with the words and language grammar available to them. Their wordlists contained the name for 'duck', *guwali*, and they knew the suffix that means 'resemble' or 'looks like', *gawayi*. So the platypus that has parts that resemble a duck became *guwaligawayi*, which literally translated means 'like a duck'.

So what then is the answer to the question 'how do you say computer in Aboriginal'? It seems that the possibilities and options for finding a word for 'computer' in Australian Aboriginal languages are as broad and challenging as the history and evolution of the computer itself.

Jutta Besold completed her PhD in linguistics at the Australian National University after a colourful career as a chef in Melbourne and country Victoria. Her research focused on the reconstitution of some of the Aboriginal languages from south-eastern New South Wales from historical material that was collected between the 1830s and 1900.

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.

TICKETS ON ONESELF

I am trying to find out when 'tickets on yourself' became a popular saying. It has been suggested that it originated in Australia. Can you help with this query please?

A. Brown, UK

The first evidence we have for the phrase *to have tickets on oneself*, meaning 'to be conceited' or 'to be up oneself', comes from 1904. The evidence we have collected in our databases and a search of historical newspapers in Trove suggest that the phrase was becoming popular around the period of the First World War. It was certainly quite popular in the 1920s and 1930s. The evidence in our archives, and that of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), points to this phrase originating in Australia, and suggests that it is largely confined to Australian usage.

WOUND/SOUND

A German friend has asked me why, in a song with words by 16th century poet Robert Southwell, the words 'wound' and 'sound' rhyme. ('Wound' as in 'I suffered a wound in the fight'.) Is it because in his time they would have rhymed? If so, which word was changed to how we pronounce it today, please? Was that part of the great vowel change?

V. Lillington

I assume this is the Southwell poem you refer to:

> His camp is pitchèd in a stall,
> His bulwark but a broken wall,
> The crib his trench, hay stalks his stakes,
> Of shepherds he his muster makes;
> And thus, as sure his foe to wound,
> The angels' trumps alarum sound.

In the earlier period, *sound* did not have the '-d' spelling, but it became established in the 16th century. Before the effects of the Great Vowel Shift (from the mid-1300s to 1700), *wound* and *so(u)n(d)* would have rhymed in many dialects, including the London dialect. Although it seems late, this is one explanation for the song: for Southwell, the words *wound* and *sound* still rhyme with our 'tuned'.

By the time of the Great Vowel Shift, we might expect both *wound* and *sound* to follow such words as 'hound' and 'ground'. *Sound* does, but *wound* doesn't.

The *OED* explains that originally the *ŭ* sound was normally lengthened before *nd*, but that in the standard pronunciation the influence of the *w* has prevented the *ŭ* sound from developing into *ou* (as in 'hound' and 'ground'). However, the pronunciation of *wound* to rhyme with 'found' is given by some eighteenth-century dictionaries, and is also widely found in dialects.

Thus it could be argued (at a pinch!) that Southwell's dialect had the rare change in the pronunciation of *wound*, and that in the poem both *wound* and *sound* rhyme with 'found'. But this is most unlikely, and the best explanation is that the rhyme in Southwell reflects the older pronunciation of the two words.

BUTCHER

After perusing your webpage of 'Meanings and origins of Australian words and idioms', I came across the definition of 'butcher', in relation to the name and size of a beer glass in South Australia. Being South Australian, I quite enjoyed the theories behind the origin, but would like to convey what I and others believe to be the meaning. Quite simply, when abattoir workers went to the bar at lunch time, a smaller-sized beer glass was offered due to the nature of their profession, protecting them from harm when they went back to work.

B. Keddie, S.A.

It's an interesting theory, and one we've heard before with slightly different details. For instance, John O'Grady in his book *It's your shout, mate!* (1972) writes: 'There was at one time a pub near the abattoirs. Employees were accustomed to visit it in their lunch hour, and because of the Australian custom of "shouting", and the limited time available, they preferred to drink small beers. Six-ounce glasses were the smallest the publican had, and so a six-ounce glass became known as a butcher.'

However we still doubt that the beers bought by abattoir workers were the origin of this South Australian term. There is evidence in the early twentieth century (from two independent sources) that the butcher was originally a long beer, not a small one. And in a Gawler newspaper from 1887 we have recently discovered this reference: 'A "butcher" is a glass holding between a pint and a half pint.' Even the lower limit here, half a pint, is ten fluid ounces, significantly greater than six ounces. In the absence of new evidence to the contrary, we stand by our current theory that the name butcher is probably from the German word 'Becher', meaning 'cup, mug, or tumbler', especially given the history of German settlement in South Australia.

JUST DESERTS OR JUST DESSERTS?

A correspondent (J. Foster, ACT) wrote to us recently noting the frequent misspelling of the expression *just deserts* as *just desserts*, and illustrated the error with a clipping from the local newspaper: '2013: the year when politicians earned rich rewards or got their just desserts.' She asks if one wrote 'just deserts' nowadays, would it be considered pedantic?

If you get your *just deserts*, you get what you deserve—and *desert* in this expression is derived from the verb *to deserve*. It means 'that which is deserved; a due reward or recompense, whether good or evil', and is first recorded in William Langland's fourteenth-century allegorical poem *Piers Plowman*.

A *dessert* on the other hand is the sweet course following the main course of a meal. It is an early seventeenth-century word deriving from the French *desservir* 'to remove what has been served, to clear (the table)'. In 1666 Samuel Pepys comments in his diary: 'The Dessert coming with roses upon it, the Duchess bid him try.'

The common mistaken spelling *just desserts* in place of *just deserts* may result from a misinterpretation of the second word as the sweet course. In that case the politicians above who got their 'just desserts' instead of 'rich rewards' may figuratively have been forced to swallow a stodgy steamed pudding or cold banana custard. This interpretation of *just deserts* makes a kind of sense, and may have encouraged the continued misspelling. As well, both *desert* (the just reward) and *dessert* (the sweet) are pronounced the same way, and this is likely to be a contributing factor.

The *OED* people note that, in their Oxford English Corpus, the two spellings are running neck and neck. Our initial research suggests the same is happening in Australian contexts. Perhaps soon the original spelling may well be considered pedantic!

TRIPLE-FRONTED BRICK VENEREALS

In our last Mailbag, in a discussion of *fibro majestic* and *gentleman's bungalow*, we asked if Ozworders knew any other Australian terms for houses. K. White (Tas.) recalled that in Geelong after the Second World War the *triple-fronted brick veneer*—'known disparagingly as the *triple fronted brick venereal*'—was all the rage. 'Up till then the traditionally standard suburban house had a six-pack configuration. A triple-fronted house was one that presented three rooms facing the street with the second set back a metre from the first and the third also set back about a metre from the second room.' At the Centre we have found evidence of *triple-fronted* houses as early as 1907, with a proliferation of evidence from the 1920s to the 1950s, especially in Adelaide, and especially in the term *triple-fronted bungalow*.

NED KELLY PIES – FAST FOOD FOR A BUSHRANGER?

An Ozworder (M. Ward, NSW) has discovered in her local bakery a delicacy called a Kelly pie. 'It looks like the usual Aussie meat pie, but it contains, for example, beef, ham, potato, maybe cheese and an egg. After Googling *Kelly Pie*, I discovered in other parts of NSW it is known by its full title, the *Ned Kelly Pie*.' Recipes found online usually contain egg, cheese, and bacon or ham. Do any other readers know of these pies, fit for a hungry bushranger, in their neck of the woods? Do let us know.

FROM THE CENTRE

The Australian National Dictionary Centre

On 28 November 2013, the Australian National Dictionary Centre hosted an event to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the publication of the *Australian National Dictionary*, edited by W.S. Ramson and published in 1988. A talk was given by Associate Professor Richard White entitled 'Adventures in Words Past'. This very enjoyable talk tracked the histories of a selection of Australian words including *coo-ee*, *bonzer*, *Australiana*, and *mate*. The talk was followed by a reception at the Centre, where speeches were given by the Director of the Centre, Amanda Laugesen, and Managing Director of Oxford University Press Australia, Peter van Noorden.

The ANDC has also produced a publication entitled *Celebrating 25 Years of the Australian National Dictionary* to mark the anniversary. This publication includes a selection of reminiscences from former staff who worked on the dictionary, and contributions from Bruce Moore (former Centre Director) and John Simpson (former Chief Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*).

VISITING FELLOW ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR RICHARD WHITE AND CENTRE DIRECTOR DR AMANDA LAUGESEN

NEWS FROM VISITORS AT THE ANDC

Associate Professor Richard White from the University of Sydney was a Visiting Fellow at the ANDC from the end of November through to early December 2013. He is the author of numerous books about Australian cultural history, including *Inventing Australia* (1981), *On Holidays: a History of Getting Away in Australia* (2005), and *Symbols of Australia* (2010). He is currently working on a book about the history of 'coo-ee', and a book about history tourism in Australia. Associate Professor White gave a talk for our 25th anniversary celebrations.

Dr Bernadette Hince, a Visitor at the ANDC, travelled to Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and the United States in October 2013 to undertake research for her book on Antarctic and Arctic words. She was the recipient of an Australia–Canada Research Grant from the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences, which helped fund the research.

STAFF ACTIVITIES AND NEW PUBLICATIONS

Centre Director Amanda Laugesen has several new publications, including 'Dictionaries for a Nation: the Making of *The Macquarie Dictionary* and the *Australian National Dictionary*' in the *Journal of Australian Studies*. This article examines the publication history of the two dictionaries and contextualises their production in relation to Australian cultural nationalism in the 1970s and 1980s. She also published articles in *Journal of War and Culture Studies* and *Library and Information History*, and has an article in Denise Rall (ed.), *Fashion and War in Popular Culture* (Intellect Books, 2014). She was recently awarded the Reese Fellowship in Bibliography and the History of the Book in the Americas by the Bibliographical Society of America to continue her research on Cold War book publishing in developing countries.

Amanda Laugesen and Julia Robinson attended the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand annual conference in Sydney in November 2013. They co-presented a paper, 'Historical Dictionaries in the Digital Age'. They looked at some of the challenges and opportunities involved in both researching and publishing historical dictionaries in the digital age.

BITCOIN: ANDC'S WORD OF THE YEAR 2013

In November 2013, Oxford Dictionaries announced that *selfie* was their International Word of the Year. *Selfie* is defined as 'a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone and uploaded to a social media website'. Oxford traced the first recorded evidence of the word to an Australian online forum in 2002. Much media interest was generated in Australia, and editor Mark Gwynn was interviewed for ABC television.

In December, the ANDC announced its Word of the Year as *bitcoin*, 'a type of digital crypto-currency in which transactions can be performed without the need for a central bank; a unit of this currency'. The Word of the Year shortlist included the following:

- *twerk* to dance to popular music in a sexually provocative manner involving thrusting hip movements and a low, squatting stance.
- *snapchat* a photo messaging application that allows users to share photos, videos, and text which disappear after 10 seconds.
- *captain's pick* a decision made by a political party leader without consultation with their party,
- *FOMO* fear of missing out; the anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media.
- *microparty* a small political party whose policy platform is often related to a single issue.

The announcement of our Word of the Year for 2013 received some media attention, including on social media. One enterprising broadcaster, no doubt hoping for a scoop, interviewed our Director in January about her predictions for the Word of the Year for 2014. It was too soon to say, unfortunately.

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BUSHFIRE SEASON Julia Robinson

> The long continuance of hot weather enforces attention to the fact that the *bush fire season* is well advanced. … The heat has necessarily brought all vegetation into a highly combustible state, and a little carelessness might without a moment's notice lead to widespread disaster. (*South Australian Register*, 17 January 1872)

As this issue of *Ozwords* goes to press, the *bushfire season* should be nearly over in south-eastern Australia. It is usually regarded as occurring chiefly from December to March, but in recent years it appears to be extending back into spring and forward into autumn. It had an especially early start in 2013. Major fires took off in New South Wales in mid-October, notably in the Blue Mountains, where more than 200 houses were destroyed. The fires were not officially deemed to be out until nearly mid-November. In the midst of them, John, a Blue Mountains resident, emailed us with a couple of topical terms that he couldn't find in his dictionary: *backburn* and *containment line*.* He also suggested *water-bombing* as a candidate for our 2013 Word of the Year. It got us thinking about bushfire terms in Australian English.

Bushfire itself ('a fire that burns through frequently extensive areas of natural vegetation') is an Australian term first recorded in 1832. Based on the Australian meaning of the word *bush*, *bushfires* are known in other parts of the fire-prone English-speaking world, such as North America, as *forest fires* or *wildfires*. The fact that *bushfires* are a regular feature of the Australian environment is recognised in the compound *bushfire season* (for the earliest written evidence of the term, see the quotation above).

Fire began to make its mark on the vocabulary of the colonists, in both negative and positive contexts, before the term *bushfire* was coined. The verb *to burn off* ('to clear land for agricultural purposes by burning the vegetation') is recorded from 1793, and expressed the settlers' desire to shape the landscape to their purpose. In 1803 the destructive effect of fire is recorded in the adjective *burnt out* ('destroyed by fire, especially bushfire; of people, afflicted by the loss of property so caused'): 'Mrs Wright who was *burnt out* under circumstances so truly distressing, has already received such relief as was immediately requisite to her present circumstances.' (*Sydney Gazette*, 4 December).

Compounds based on *bushfire* proliferate, especially in the twentieth century: *bushfire legislation* (1891), *bushfire risk* (1892), *bushfire threat* (1895), *bushfire country* (1901), *bushfire menace* (1906), *bushfire alert* (1948). There is a militaristic tone to the way we respond to fire, illustrated in the use of such terms as *bushfire brigade* (1904) and *bushfire fighter* (1929). Australians in towns and in the bush are encouraged to become *bushfire-conscious* (1934), and to have a *bushfire survival plan* (1985). Those in *bushfire-prone areas* (1976) may attend *bushfire safety forums* (2003).

Not all fire-related terms are bureaucratic, however; *bushfire* has a poetic synonym in *red steer* (1936): 'Some sundowners acquired a sinister reputation for allegedly using veiled threats of 'letting the red steer loose' to station owners who refused them rations.' (W.G. Howcroft, *Sand in the Stew*, 1974)

Bushfire behaviour (1994) is referred to in the verbs *to crown* (1972: 'of a bushfire, to move rapidly through the tops of trees') and *to spot* (1978: 'of a bushfire, to break out in patches ahead of the main fire'). They derive from the North American terms *crown fire* and *spot-fire*. A *firestorm*—known to us in the ACT from bitter experience in January 2003—is a fire so fierce that it creates its own cyclonic winds. The word does not originate in Australia, but elsewhere it normally refers to the effect of intense bombing. Here it is most commonly used in a bushfire context.

Firestorms were experienced in the Victorian *Black Saturday* fires on 7 February 2009. A terrible toll was exacted that day: 173 people died and several towns were largely destroyed. Drought conditions and a severe heatwave preceded and exacerbated the fires. Conditions were so extreme that, in the aftermath, an extra category was added to the *fire danger index* (1977) or *fire danger rating* (1946). The index previously ranged from 'moderate' to 'extreme', but the new category *catastrophic*—*Code Red* in Victoria—topped this ('homes are not designed to withstand fires in catastrophic conditions so you should leave early'). Conditions approaching a *Code Red day* were experienced in Victoria on 9 February 2014, in the worst *fire weather* since *Black Saturday*. Like *Black Saturday*, other major *bushfire events* have been similarly named: *Black Thursday* (6 February 1851, Victoria), *Black Friday* (13 January 1939, Victoria), *Black Tuesday* (7 February 1967, Tasmania), and *Ash Wednesday* (16 February 1983, South Australia and Victoria).

Our response to *bushfires*, as noted above, is often couched in terms of a battle: *ember attack*, *containment line*, *water-bombing*, *fire front*, *fire ground* (formed by analogy with *battle ground*), and *fire-fighter*—though in Australia the colloquial form *firie* (1993) is now common. *Helitac* (from *helicopter* and *attack*) is used in reference to the practice of *water-bombing* by helicopter. It is also used in Australia as a synonym for this type of helicopter, also known as *helitanker*, *sky crane*, or *air crane*. Other terms referring to fire prevention, control, and minimisation include *hazard reduction*, *fire trail*, *firebreak*, *back-burning*, and *controlled burn* (tending to replace the older term *burn-off*). Many of these terms are not exclusively Australian; we share them with other countries, such as the United States, Canada, and New Zealand, in the context of fire prevention and fire-fighting.

> "… Mrs Wright who was *burnt out* under circumstances so truly distressing, has already received such relief as was immediately requisite to her present circumstances."

Over summer many of us will have been aware of the *bushfire alert levels* (2009) such as *watch and act* ('conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family'). Many too will be aware of the dilemma of the householder facing the threat of bushfire: whether to *leave early* or *stay and defend* (2000). The experience of *Black Saturday* cast doubt on the accepted wisdom that your home is likely to provide protection from a *bushfire* if it is well-prepared, and you are willing and able to defend your property. There has been much debate since on the merits of *stay and defend*.

As we move into winter in the south-east and the threat of fire recedes, meteorologists will no longer be broadcasting *fire weather warnings* (1924) and local authorities will stop declaring *fire danger days* (1935). But spare a thought for those in northern Australia, for whom the cooler dry months bring their own *bushfire season*. We hope it is an uneventful one.

* In response to our Blue Mountains correspondent, we are pleased to say the terms *backburn* and *containment line* have been in our Australian Oxford dictionaries for some time, and that *water-bombing*, although it has escaped inclusion in our general dictionaries to date, will be included in future editions.

Julia Robinson is an editor and researcher at the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

HOLEY DOLLARS TO GREY NURSES Mark Gwynn

If you had a pineapple, added a lobster, two blue swimmers, and two prawns, what would you get? A grey nurse, of course! While this equation may look like a seafood recipe, these are actually Australian slang terms for banknotes. There is a good chance that you have not heard of them because they don't appear to be in common use, although we have some evidence for them from the 1980s. The terms allude to the colour of the banknotes: the $50 note is yellow (a *pineapple*), the $20 note is red (a *lobster*), the $10 note is blue (a *blue swimmer,* a type of crab), and the $5 note is pink (a *prawn*). The $100 note is currently green, but between 1984 and 1996 it was grey, and was called a *grey nurse* (a type of shark). While terms for our decimal banknotes have not taken much hold in the Australian vernacular, the pre-decimal currency did produce words and idioms that were well known in Australian English in years past.

The earliest nickname for an Australian coin was *holey dollar*—a modified Spanish coin used in New South Wales between 1814 and 1828, when there was a shortage of currency in the colony. The *holey dollar* was what remained of a Spanish dollar when the centre of the coin (the *dump*) had been struck out of it. The *holey dollar* was worth five shillings, and the *dump* fifteen pence. The words *caser* ('five shillings or a crown'), and *deener* ('a shilling'), were used in Britain but were also widely used in Australia from the early colonial period. *Caser* derives from the Yiddish and Hebrew 'silver', and *deener* probably derives from Latin 'denarius' for a silver coin. *Thrummer* in the colonial period referred to a threepence. It derived from the British slang *thrums* or *thrum,* a colloquial or dialect pronunciation of *thruppence* mainly evident in the British underworld. *Thrum* also generated the Australian rhyming slang *scrum* for the same coin, recorded from the late nineteenth century. Other Australian terms for a threepenny bit from this time include *trey* and *trey-bit. Trey* was used in Britain for many centuries to mean 'three', and derives from *trois* (French for 'three'). *Trey* was also altered in Australian English to *trizzie* in the twentieth century. From the late nineteenth century the sixpenny coin was often called a *zac,* and probably derives from Scottish 'saxpence'. *Zac* was also used to refer to a 'trifling sum of money'; some of our Ozwords readers might remember, and perhaps still use, the phrase *not worth a zac* ('worth very little').

Australian pre-decimal banknotes also had nicknames. The ten-shilling note was a *half* (half a pound), the one-pound note was a *flag* (perhaps from a resemblance in shape), the five-pound note was a *spinnaker* or a *spin* (origin unknown), and the ten-pound note was a *brick* (from its reddish-brown colour).This sense of *brick* is still occasionally heard in the expression *London to a brick on.* It was originally a gambling term (recorded in the mid-twentieth century) that meant 'an absolutely certain result': you are so certain of the winner that you would stake the whole of London in a bet to win ten pounds. In more recent years the gambling context is often missing and the expression just means 'absolutely certain'. The British slang word *flimsy* was also used in Australia from the mid-nineteenth century as a general term for banknote.

Perhaps the most enduring pre-decimal currency slang terms in Australian English are *bob* and *quid. Bob* is British slang for a shilling. *Two bob* (two shillings) has generated a number of idioms in Australian English, alluding to something that is 'cheap, of poor quality', or 'of little consequence'. The expression *silly* (or *mad*) *as a two-bob watch* is still encountered, as is *to have two bob each way* 'to hedge your bets; to be uncommitted', and *to have your two bob's worth* 'to have your say'. *Quid* in British English originally referred to a guinea (the sum of one pound and one shilling) and subsequently to a pound note. *Quid* was widely used in Australia to refer to a pound note, and is still encountered in the idiom *not the full quid,* meaning 'not in full possession of one's mental faculties'.

If you remember or use any other terms referring to Australian currency, please let us know so we can share them with other Ozworders. And if, like me, you feel we need some new terms for our decimal currency coins and banknotes, enter our competition and let us know what you think they should be (see back page).

> "The British slang word *flimsy* was also used in Australia from the mid-nineteenth century as a general term for banknote."

Mark Gwynn is an editor and researcher at the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

OZWORDS COMPETITION

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 41: RESULTS

As suggested by reader Alan Horsfield, we asked you to give us your take, preferably original and with an Australian flavour, on the saying *old soldiers never die, they just fade away*. It resulted in an outpouring of entertaining entries full of bad puns, worse puns, and some so clever we didn't understand them. Is there an Ozworder out there who *didn't* send in a competition entry? No, we didn't think so.

Some readers, unable to resist a challenge, sent us multiple entries. One intrepid Blue Mountains reader emailed us in the middle of the October bushfires threatening her town: 'My final entry … the fires are getting a bit too close for comfort!' You can't keep a good Ozworder down.

There were several recurrent themes—swaggies, drovers, politicians, cricketers, and assorted wildlife. Some were variations on well-known forms such as *old fishermen never die, they just smell that way*, but many were original. Political and social comment was well-represented: *old Australian newspapers never die, they just dumb down* (M. Lever, SA); *old LABOR never dies, it's just a buggered RABOL* (G. Watson, NSW); *old politicians never die, they go to weddings* (J. Zimmerman, NSW). Fictional characters were popular: Banjo Paterson's Clancy, who *just overflows* (several entries), and the swagman of Waltzing Matilda: *the jolly swagman never dies, he just learns to swim* (H. Bond). We enjoyed this 1970s cultural reference too: *Countdown hosts never die, they just Ah no more* (A. Heazlewood, Tas.).

Enduring Australian icons featured: *old gum-trees never die, unless they block the view* (G. Watson, NSW); *old Holdens never die, they just shut shop* (P. Wippell, Qld.). We pass over the dispiriting references to lexicographers and editors (*just lose their words/meaning* etc.), but we liked this wordy one: *old platypuses never die, they just get lost burrowing into their etymological roots in search of their correct plural form* (P. Sainsbury, NSW).

And finally a touching memory from S. Thomson, NSW: 'In the winter of 1939 my mother and I were waving goodbye to my Dad (who was a returned soldier of World War I) as he walked to work in thick fog. As he disappeared out of sight my Mum sang "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away".'

1st Prize (books to the value of $100 from the OUP catalogue):

The winning entry charmed us with a poignant allusion to our favourite Aussie larrikin:

> Old cockatoos never die, they just become crestfallen.
> (J. Ferguson, SA)

2nd Prize (books to the value of $50 from the OUP catalogue):

Another classic Aussie larrikin features in the runner-up:

> Old Warnies never die, they just take Hurley retirement.
> (S. McCarthy, NSW)

Some honourable mentions:

> Old Hills hoists never die; they just slowly wind down.
> (J. Whyte, WA)

> Old wowsers never die, it's a prerequisite to have lived.
> (A. Heazlewood, Tas.)

> Old cricket umpires never die, but by the time they've checked the bowler's run-up, wandered across to have a chat to each other, signalled to the scorers, waited for the replays, listened to the Channel 9 commentators tell them what to do, adjusted their ear-pieces, smiled knowingly, and cancelled their previous decision, they might as well have.
> (G. Case, Qld.)

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 42

On page 7 Mark Gwynn looks at some of the words that have been used in Australian English for coins and banknotes. He notes that the more recent terms for decimal currency are not widely used. The most widespread term in Australian English is the *Aus* or *Oz* for the Australian dollar, usually in the context of currency markets and the stock exchange. Surely we can do better than this! Your task is to come up with new and better terms for our coins and/or banknotes. (Please, less stuffy than Sir Robert Menzies' 1965 suggestion of *royal* for the dollar.) The most interesting and entertaining entries are in the running for a *grey nurse* or *pineapple* prize courtesy of OUP.

Entries close 31 July 2014

Send entries to the ANDC at one of the addresses in the next column, and please include a postal address, so we know where to send the prizes.

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