EDITORIAL

Many thanks to all the readers who sent in comments on the hash sign, as discussed in the April Mailbag. I am now thoroughly confused! Following on from my discussion of **chuffed**, there were many suggestions of other words with opposing meanings, including **sanction** (with possibilities of approval and disapproval), **peer** (one of equal rank or one of noble rank), and **dust** (remove dust from or add dust to: 'dust with icing sugar').

My grateful thanks also to those many readers who wrote to me, some pityingly, some in high dudgeon, to point out that I had used **alternate** as an adjective in the last issue of *Ozwords* ('an alternate name'). You, dear readers, are quite correct and I am chastened. **Alternate** as an adjective is mainly US usage. English English and Australian English use **alternative** as an adjective and **alternate** as verb ('to **alternate** rhyme with reason'). My feeble excuse is that even Homer nods as he gazes tipsily across those wine-dark seas.

Congratulations to Judith Robertson, a researcher at the Centre, who was awarded a PhD in July. Her thesis was titled 'Australian Lexicography 1880–1910: An Evaluation'. It examined the anonymous *Sydney Slang Dictionary* (1882), K.A. Lentzner's *Colonial English* (1891), Cornelius Crowe's *Australian Slang Dictionary* (1895). E.E. Morris's *Austral English* (1898), J. Lake's *Dictionary of Australasian Words and Phrases* (1898), and an unpublished work: *Material for a Dictionary of Australian Slang* compiled by A.G. Stephens (the editor of the *Bulletin*) and S.E. O'Brien between 1900 and 1910.

Frederick Ludowyk
Editor, *Ozwords*

DICTIONARIES AND THE PUBLIC
SARAH OGILVIE

Great dictionaries depend on great contributions from the public. One of the greatest contributions in the past few decades has come from a Brisbane man, Mr Chris Collier.

When I first worked at the Australian National Dictionary Centre sixteen years ago, it was my job to open the bundles of quotations Mr Collier collected and faithfully sent each month. There was a veil of mystery surrounding these contributions: no one had ever met Mr Collier, nor heard his voice, so the only clues we had to his personal life were to be found in the hundreds of 4×6 inch slips of paper he sent. Eccentrically wrapped in old cornflake boxes, these quotations all had one thing in common: they were from the same source, Brisbane's main newspaper, *The Courier-Mail.*

There were no complaints about this at the Australian National Dictionary Centre, because lexicographers are all too aware of the importance of quotations for showing how a word is used in context. Without quotations, we have no written evidence of a word's use and no clues to a word's history. Quotations tell us important things like who first used the word, where in the world it was first used, where its usage spread, and how it has been used since. Quotations from one major Queensland newspaper allow us to observe usage in that region.

The year was 1990, and I vividly remember opening Mr Collier's packages, eager to see the words he had trawled that month: *comfort food, pooper scooper, environmentalism, fast-tracked, gurgler, maidenhair, mealy-mouthed, mesclun, microeconomic* ... there were hundreds of them! You can imagine my surprise when many years later I went to work as an editor on the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) in Oxford, to be greeted with the words— 'Oh you are from Australia, do you know Mr Collier?' Little did I know that Mr Collier of Paddington, Brisbane, had international renown from also sending his slips to Oxford. All the words listed above had made it to the pages of the esteemed twenty-volume OED. His reading of the *Courier-Mail* had provided first quotations for the words *seajack* (1975), *petrolhead* (1980), *off-the-plan* (1986), *Neutralysis* (1989), *kit-off* (1992), and *Mad Max* (1996).

Recently I returned to Australia to write a high school dictionary at the Australian National Dictionary Centre. Over morning coffee I asked about Mr Collier; I knew he was still sending quotations to Oxford, but was he still sending them to the Centre in Canberra? Oh yes, his collecting is as prolific as ever, I was told, and he has been casting his net much more widely than the *Courier-Mail.* As though he had heard my enquiry, the Centre received a phone call soon after this conversation from Mr Collier! For the first time we were able to hear his voice, which to the ear of this Brizzie girl reminded me of my childhood and Joh Bjelke-Petersen! Especially when I asked him if I could meet him. He said yes, but when I asked where we should meet, he replied 'Don't you worry about that!'

But worry I did, and in September 2006 I met Mr Collier at a place of his choosing: a park behind the Paddo Tavern in the suburbs of Brisbane, 'his office' as he put it. Now in his mid-seventies, Mr Collier's family had moved to Paddington from Victoria when he was three years old.

He was educated at the Milton State School, and spent most of his life working in the Queensland Patents Office. In 1975, he read an article in the *Courier-Mail* about the Oxford-based New Zealander, Bob Burchfield, who was calling for public contributions to his volumes of Supplements to the OED. 'Imagine if I could help get one word in the Dictionary', thought Mr Collier. And so began the obsession that has occupied him every day since. It is an obsession shared by a handful of other Australians. One worth noting is Mr Justus Angwin (aka 'Jut'), who lives in Tumbi Umbi, New South Wales. For over a decade, Jut has sent thousands of quotations and continues to fill gaps in material needed for new words in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary.* Jut has also provided very useful commentary on entries in the Centre's general dictionaries.

It is the general public, not the academic community, that responds most enthusiastically to calls for help. Bill Ramson found this in the 1970s when he made an appeal for help collecting materials for his great Australian historical dictionary, the *Australian National Dictionary* (AND, 1988). The academic community was slow to respond, even though today its members would be the first to go to Ramson's AND for the most authoritative historical resource on Australian English.

Dictionaries And The Public
Sarah Ogilvie

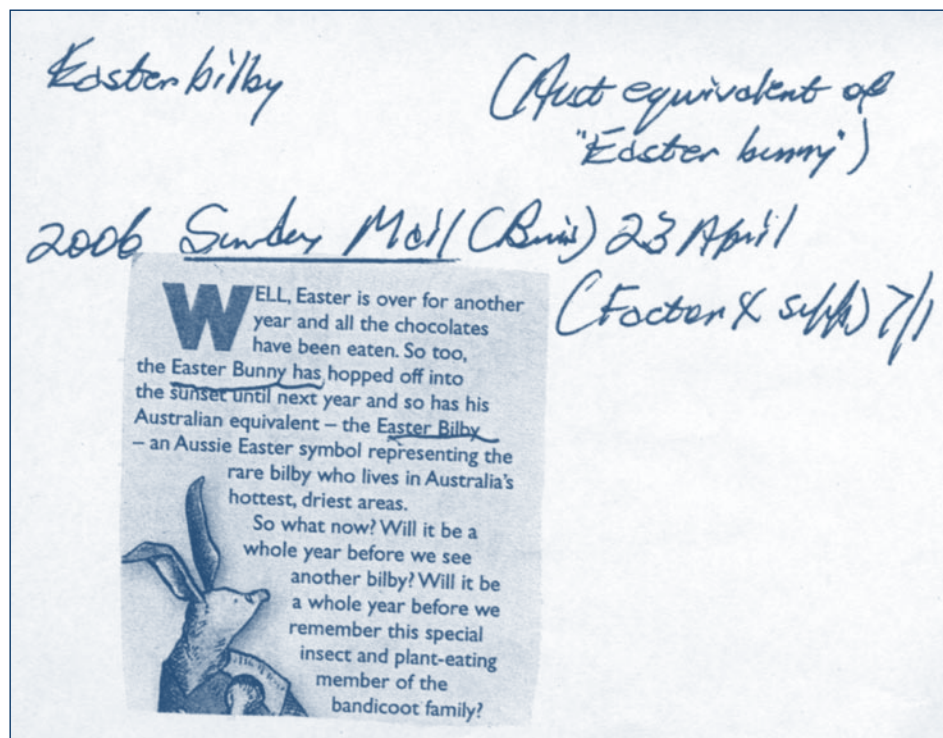**Mr Chris Collier, of Paddington, Brisbane, has contributed over 100,000 quotations**

Earlier this year, the OED appealed to the British public through a BBC television series called *Balderdash and Piffle.* Five thousand members of the general public responded to the call for antedatings of fifty words. Emails and letters poured in with spectacular evidence of earlier dates for words like *cool* (the jazz sense of 'playing it cool' was found in an African-American context antedating 1948 to 1884), *pass the parcel* (from 1967 to 1954), and *nit nurse* (from 1985 to 1942).

When the idea of the OED was first mooted one hundred and fifty years ago, it depended on the public to assist in collecting the raw material for the dictionary. The most famous nineteenth-century contributor to the OED is undoubtedly Dr W.C. Minor (1834–1920), whose prolific reading for the first edition prompted its editor, James Murray, to visit him—only to discover that Minor was an American who was imprisoned for murder in an English mental asylum. Many of you will be familiar with this story, re-told by Simon Winchester in his book *The Surgeon of Crowthorne* (1998). Minor took up two cells in Broadmoor Asylum: one for himself and one for his collection of rare sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books. Every day he read these books for Murray and every week he sent bundles of quotations to Oxford. Murray paid tribute to Minor: 'So enormous have been Dr Minor's contributions during the past 17 or 18 years, that we could easily illustrate the last four centuries from his quotations alone.'

Miss Janet Brown (d.1907) contributed 8000 quotations to the first volume and was engaged by Murray as a sub-editor from 1882. In Murray's words, Miss Brown was 'one of the most devoted and enthusiastic of our volunteer helpers'. They became good friends, and she left Murray £1000 in her will. The *Oxford English Dictionary* had engaged the intellect and skill of many such women for nearly sixty years, in a period when women were only just gaining access to Oxford University.

Other important public contributions came from two English women: the historian Miss Edith Thompson (1848–1929) and her sister, Miss Elizabeth Thompson. Accomplished authors themselves—Edith Thompson wrote *History of England* (1873) and Elizabeth Thompson wrote the romance novel *A Dragoon's Wife* (1907)—they read widely for Murray, contributing over 15,000 quotations for the first volume alone. Murray recognised their talent and, in 1888, he enlisted their skill in proof-reading his dictionary text, a task they continued to do until the end of the project in 1928. Edith died a few months after the OED's final publication, long enough to be present at a grand celebratory dinner with the Prime Minister at London's Goldsmith's Hall. The guests drank French Champagne and Chateau Margaux with their turtle soup and lamb. Sadly though, because of her sex, Edith Thompson was denied a seat at the banquet and had to sit on the balcony with two other women who also gave years of devoted service, Rosfrith Murray and Eleanor Bradley, daughters of the two deceased editors, James Murray and Henry Bradley. Recalling the dinner, Rosfrith Murray wrote in a letter to R.W. Chapman 'I always felt deeply that my Father would like one of his name to be "in on the finish" since this was denied to him himself'.

There were volunteer readers for that first OED in Australia too. Edward Sugden (1854–1935), Shakespeare scholar and Master of Queen's College, University of Melbourne, read for the OED for over

An example of a Collier slip for the word Easter Bilby, (2006 23 Apr. Sunday Mail (Bris.) 7/1)

forty years and contributed thousands of quotations. Edward Morris (1843–1902) was Headmaster of Melbourne Church of England Grammar School when he started reading Australian books for Murray. In the 1890s Morris, by this time professor at the University of Melbourne with Sugden, realised that he had collected enough quotations to compile his own dictionary of Australian and New Zealand English. He published *Austral English* in 1898 and sent duplicates of all his quotations to the OED. He writes in its preface 'Dr Murray several years ago invited assistance from this end of the world for words and uses of words peculiarly to Australasia, or to parts of it. In answer to his call I began to collect ... The work took time, and when my parcel of quotations had grown into a considerable heap, it occurred to me that the collection, if a little further trouble were expended upon it, might first enjoy an independent existence'. These members of the public did not limit their help to the OED alone. Dr Minor contributed to the 1864 edition of *Webster's*, and Edward Morris contributed to the Funk and Wagnall *Standard Dictionary*

(1894). Without the public's collection of quotations, Murray and his fellow editors would not have been able to deduce and exhibit a proper history of each word. Today, the editors of the various Oxford dictionaries have access to millions of quotations in vast online databases, but we still rely on the public to draw our attention to new words and new senses of words.

In 1900 Murray gave a lecture in Oxford in which he wondered whether the art of dictionary-making could evolve beyond the system he had established so effectively at the OED. 'It is never possible to forecast the needs and notions of those who shall come after us; but with our present knowledge it is not easy to conceive what new feature can now be added to English Lexicography ... In the Oxford Dictionary, permeated as it is through and through with the scientific method of the century, Lexicography has for the present reached its supreme development.' Modern-day lexicographers wonder if technology and the vast collections of text available to us at the touch of a button might revolutionise lexicography forever. It has succeeded in revolutionising our ability to search

for words quickly, but the vital trigger of which word we should be searching for still remains the indispensable duty of volunteer readers around the globe. No computer can replace a contributor like Mr Collier.

He supplies an average of two hundred and fifty quotations every month, and has contributed more than 100,000 quotations. Is there any chance of him coming to Oxford to see first-hand the work of the editors of the OED? 'No way', he replied, 'I couldn't face all the *Courier-Mails* waiting for me on my return. I am going to be at Paddington for the rest of my days'. And the OED will be indebted to members of the public like Mr Collier for the rest of its days too.

[Sarah Ogilvie is a former editor on the OED. She has been Visiting Fellow at the Australian National Dictionary Centre for three months, writing an Oxford Dictionary for Australian high school students, and is now back at Trinity College, University of Oxford, writing her doctorate on lexicography and World Englishes.]

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.

ADVISER/ADVISOR

I have always used the spelling **adviser**, but increasingly I come across the spelling **advisor**. Is this because of the influence of the adjectival form **advisory**?

J. Eagan, Vic.

English has two main suffixes to form agent nouns, that is nouns denoting someone or something that performs the action of a verb. These are *–er* (worker) and *–or* (accelerator). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) points out: 'The distinction between *–er* and *–or* as the ending of agent-nouns is purely historical and orthographical … In received spelling, the choice between the two forms is often capricious, or determined by other than historical reasons.'

Nevertheless, there are some discernible patterns. Where the word has its origin in Old English, the English *–er* ending will be used. Thus, a **baker** is one who bakes, a **learner** is a person who learns, and so on. But where the English agent nouns have Latin origins (whether direct or via French), and had *–or* (or French *–our*) spellings, these may still have the *–or* endings, although some will transform into the 'English' form over time. Thus **supervisor** came directly into English from medieval Latin *supervisor*; **director** came directly into English from Anglo-French *directour* (although ultimately from Latin). Other examples include: **actor**, **confessor**, **conqueror**, **inventor**, **professor**, **surveyor**, and **translator**.

In many cases only the verb (and not the agent noun) was borrowed from French or Latin. This is the case with **advise**, which came into English as a verb from French in the thirteenth century. The agent noun **adviser** does not appear until 1611, and it was formed with the 'English' suffix *–er*. The OED points out that '*adviser* remains the usual spelling, but *advisor* is frequently used (esp. in the U.S.) in the titles of persons whose function it is to give advice'. The form **advisor** could be a refashioning by analogy with words such as **supervisor**, or it could be a back-formation from **advisory**. Similar confusion exists with the word **convener**. The verb **convene** came into English from French in the fifteenth century (it is first recorded in 1429). The agent noun **convener** was created in the sixteenth century (it is first recorded in 1572). Briefly in the sixteenth century the variant **convenor** appeared, but for most of its history it has behaved as a loyal English agent noun. Late in the twentieth century, the **convenor** form began to reappear. But if there is such a

thing as a 'historically correct' form, show your superior knowledge of the history of the English language, and stick to **adviser** and **convener**. **ED.**

THANK YOUR MOTHER

I'm mystified by the saying 'Thank your mother for the rabbits'. Can you tell me the derivation and meaning, please?

J. Atkinson, Tas.

In Australia this phrase is especially associated with Melbourne radio commentator and national TV fisherperson, Rex Hunt. He uses it as a kind of sign-off. I have often heard the argument put forward that the phrase arose in Australia during the Depression of the 1930s, when rabbits were a popular food because they were available free to those who could catch them. Although the term **underground mutton** as a description of the flesh of rabbit used as food first appears in 1919, and is attributed to the language of 'diggers', later writers associate it especially with the Depression years—a writer in the *Bulletin* in 1981 says: 'The rifle was for rabbits: we ate a lot of underground mutton in the 30s.' A woman who had a good supply of rabbits, so the story goes, might send a gift of rabbits to a needy neighbour via a child, who, on leaving the neighbour's house to return home, would be farewelled with the phrase 'and thank your mother for the rabbits'. And so, right across Australia, needy mothers uttered these words at back doors and front gates.

A potential snag to this story has always been the fact that the phrase occurs in chapter 15 of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). It is used in a scene where Bloom gives Zoe a chocolate: 'Bloom starts forward involuntarily and, half closing the door as he passes, takes the chocolate from his pocket and offers it nervously to Zoe.' This passage follows:

ZOE

(Sniffs his hair briskly.) Hmmm! Thank your mother for the rabbits. I'm very fond of what I like.

This literary allusion was mentioned in a discussion of the phrase in the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Column 8 in January this year. I was especially touched by the contributor who rejected the notion that *Ulysses* might be the origin 'because it is a well known fact that no one has ever actually read it'. Since Joyce was Irish, is it possible that this is another of those phrases that Australian English shares with the Irish? *Thank Your Mother for the Rabbits* is

also the title of the autobiography (1993) of the British-born Canadian novelist John Mills, although I have been unable to discover what part of Britain he came from. At least this second non-Australian use suggests that the phrase has had currency beyond Australia. The discussion in the *Sydney Morning Herald* indicated that in some people's minds the phrase blurs into others. First, there is the phrase *the rabbit died*, associated by some with the time when rabbits were used in pregnancy testing, and purportedly meaning that the test was positive (although, in point of fact, *all* the rabbits died in this exercise!). Secondly, there is the phrase used to express 'gratitude' for a meal: *thank you for the rabbit—even though it's bit narrow across the chest* (with the suggestion that perhaps it was a cat rather than a rabbit!).

The origin of **thank your mother for the rabbits** seems to be lost. It was probably not originally Australian, but now Australia is probably the only place where it is alive. **ED.**

BILL, JACK, HARRY, & UNCLE TOM COBLEIGH, AND ALL

Please tell me, Editor, how 'William' came to be shortened to 'Bill'. I hate 'Bill'.

William (not Bill) Silva, NSW

'Bill' was very likely a hypocoristic (i.e. affectionate) reduction originally. Unfortunately for you, it stuck. It is not known how the **W** came to be changed to **B**. The great law about name reductions is that no law of logic governs them. In the farce *He comes from Jaffna* by Dr E.F.C. Ludowyk (you being of Sri Lankan origin would at least know where Jaffna is), the shoemaker comments on his son's name in his own fractured English: 'Outside calling Frederick; at home calling Frakko.' (Be thankful that you're not called 'Frakko'!) Just as illogical is the affectionate dubbing of a red-haired mate 'Blue'. So 'John' becomes 'Jack' and 'Elizabeth' becomes 'Bess', and 'Henry' becomes … No, this name does not follow the pattern. 'Harry' is not a reduction. It's Welsh 'Harri' that coexists with 'Henry' as an alternative name, together with 'Harrhy', 'Hendry', 'Parry', 'Penry', and 'Pendry'. The name became popular in the fifteenth century because the English and Norman Kings had a penchant for it. So we have King 'Pendry' VIII, Defender of the Faith, Despoiler of Monasteries, Perplexer of Popes, Overfat Iconoclast, Swiver of women innumerable, and Beheader of inconvenient Wives. **ED.**

NEW DICTIONARIES

Since the last newsletter a number of new dictionaries and thesauruses edited at the Centre have been published by Oxford University Press. Tony Alderman and Mark Gwynn have produced the *Australian Integrated Mini Dictionary and Thesaurus.* This book has the dictionary entries in the top half of the page and the thesaurus entries in the bottom half. Mark Gwynn and Tony Alderman also worked together to produce the *First Australian Thesaurus.* Fred Ludowyk and Bruce Moore have edited the fourth edition of the *Australian Oxford Paperback Dictionary.* This is a dictionary that has encyclopedic entries, including biographical entries. The new words come from a variety of areas. Some are responses to post 11 September 2001 political realities: Al Qaeda, Bali bombing, cyberterrorism, Jemaah Islamiah, 9/11, Osama bin Laden, profiling, sky marshal, and suicide bomber. Some are reflections of continuing technological change: ADSL, blog, CD-video, google, MP3 (player), palmtop, podcast, SIM (card), SMS, weblog, USB, and wiki. Some reflect the fact that English continues to borrow words from other languages and cultures: arhat, ashrama, azan, bardo, bismillah, burka, hijab, kalpa, lavash, madrasa, maulana, pide, ronin, shahid, siddha, ulema, and zakat. Australian English continues to be productive, with terms such as budgie smugglers, chop chop, B&S ball, irukandji, sea change, and tree change. New biographical entries include those for Lance Armstrong, Cecilia Bartoli, Layne Beachley, Pope Benedict XVI, Johnny Depp, Lauren Jackson, Brad Pitt, and Tim Winton.

ABORIGINAL WORDS

A new edition of *Australian Aboriginal Words in English*, edited by R.M.W. Dixon, Bruce Moore, W.S. Ramson, and Mandy Thomas, will be published by Oxford University Press in December. Australian English has taken about 450 words from some 80 separate Aboriginal languages. Most of the words come from the languages of the areas that were first settled. The words that come from the language of the Sydney area include: bettong, dingo, koala, pademelon, potoroo, wallaroo, wombat, boobook (owl), currawong, waratah, corroboree, boomerang, nulla-nulla, waddy, woomera, bombora, gibber, and gunyah. When settlement reached south-western Western Australia, there was a similar proliferation of borrowings from Nyungar, the language of the Perth area, especially to describe the new flora and fauna. These include: boodie, chuditch, dalgite (WA name for the bilby), dunnart (WA pouched mouse), noolbenger (the honey-possum), quokka, jarrah, and kylie (WA name for a boomerang).

The new edition adds about three dozen loan words that have general currency, and for which it has been possible to discover

etymologies. The text of the previous edition has been extensively revised and rewritten, and illustrative quotations are provided for all words. There are new names for marsupials from central and north-western Australia, such as **kaluta** (from the Nyamal language), **mingkiri** (from the Western Desert language), and **monjon** (from Wunambal). In the Kimberley a freshwater crustacean is called a **cherabin** (from Walmatjari or Gooniyandi). **Gwarda** (from Nyungar) is a name for the western brown snake in Western Australia. One of the names for the Murray cod in South Australia is **pondi** (from Yaralde). There are many plant names, a sign that in some parts of Australia indigenous names continue to be taken up: **amulla** (from Darambal), **bullich** (Nyungar)**, burgan** (Woiwurrung)**, illyarrie** (Watjanti dialect of Nhanta), **maloga** (Mayi-Thakurti and Mayi Mayi-Kutuna), **midyim** (Yagara), and **millaa-millaa** (Ngajan dialect of Dyirbal). There are terms for features of the environment, such as **birrida** (Nhanta) in Western Australia for a gypsum claypan.

COPSPEAK

David Nash alerted us to a book that we had missed in our reading program: Bruce Swanton's *Copspeak: A Glossary of Terms, Abbreviations and Phrases Employed by Police Officers Throughout Australasia* (1988). It provided evidence of the continuing use of some of the terms already in the *Australian National Dictionary* (AND). AND reports ironic uses of the terms **good** and **bad** in the convict era. The Molesworth *Report of the Select Committee on Transportation* (1838) found that on Norfolk Island the convicts used a 'peculiar language': 'A prisoner said, that it was the habitual language of the place … 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.' *Copspeak* reports a similar ironic use in New South Wales: '**A good man**, an intractable criminal, one who will never

break faith with his criminal companions.' AND has evidence for **clock** in the sense 'a prison sentence of twelve months' (from the number of hours on a clock face) only from 1950 and 1968, but *Copspeak* shows that the term was still alive in the 1980s. There is useful information about some of the words we will be adding to the new edition. The verb **brick** is one of the terms to be added, and it is defined in *Copspeak* as 'to place falsely incriminating evidence upon or in the vicinity of suspect(s); to set up for blame'. AND has the verb **to ginger** meaning '(especially of a prostitute) to steal from a man's person or clothing'. *Copspeak* has this sense, but adds a second sense: 'A ploy used by female prostitutes in which a client is confronted by an apparently irate male claiming to be the woman's husband. Money is then extorted from the client who believes he is about to be assaulted by an outraged spouse.' The editor points out that this is also called the **badger game** (a term used here and in the USA), but it is interesting to see evidence of the alternative term.

POM

At the Centre we are often pressured by external groups to alter our labelling of the words **pom** and **pommy**. We label them simply as *colloquial* and do not add the labels *derogatory* or *offensive*. Of course, it is possible that the words might be used offensively or in a derogatory way, but they can also be used in a good-humoured and even affectionate way. Cricket authorities have recently had to decide on their attitude towards the terms in the context of a clampdown on racial abuse at cricket matches. Newspaper reports at the end of September indicated that the authorities had referred or deferred to a 1997 ruling by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). As reported by the newspapers, Cricket Australia was advised that '**pom** was not hurtful when used in isolation, but said using the word with others could be deemed racist'. Although it was not stated explicitly, most took this to mean that **pommy bastard** or **whingeing pom** might get you into trouble at the cricket. Britain's *Daily Telegraph*, however, took umbrage, and declared that the poms did not need such protection from the word police: 'But the word pom shorn of any suitably earthy antipodean qualifier is a feeble little thing. Surely our Barmy Army is tough enough to endure whatever emerges from that fecund repository of invective that is the Australian cricket fan. Let's face it: if we retain the Ashes this winter, we won't give a XXXX what they call us.' And a writer to the newspaper's Letters column declared: 'SIR—Having lived and worked in Australia and been a regular visitor, I regard the expression "Pommy bastard" as a term of endearment.'

Bruce Moore

Director

The word **poofter** is primarily an Australian variant of the British **poof**, a derogatory and usually offensive term for 'a homosexual male'. It appears in the first edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* (AND), and the earliest evidence is from about 1910, in an unpublished dictionary of Australian slang put together by A.G. Stephens and S.E. O'Brien: '*Pouf or poufter*, a sodomite or effeminate man.' In addition to **poufter**, the spelling variants **poofta**, **pooftah**, and **pufter** have existed, although the standard spelling is now **poofter**. The British form **poof** also continued to be used in Australian English.

Earlier this year, Peter de Waal of Sydney, as part of his research into cases before the NSW Supreme Court involving homosexuality in the period 1796–1930, was examining some photographic description books from Darlinghurst Gaol. One particular record he found is dated 1889, and it records the fact that a George Harrison pleaded guilty and received a sentence of twelve months at Goulburn Gaol because of an 'attempt to break out of lockup'. Harrison had four previous convictions for vagrancy, and had received sentences of three months (twice) and six

months (twice). In addition, the document records the fact that Harrison was also known as 'Carrie Swann, the female impersonator'. A notation to the sentencing states: 'To be kept apart from the other prisoners as much as possible.' For our purposes, the most interesting annotation is at the top left of the document: 'Said to be a Pouftah.' This is another spelling variant, and, most significantly, twenty years earlier than our previous evidence. Its appearance on an official document suggests a longer history in colloquial speech. Peter de Waal sent a photocopy of this document to the OED project in England, and they passed it on to the Australian National Dictionary Centre. (With regard to the directive 'to be kept apart from the other prisoners', one wonders whether the criminals are meant to be protected from the importunities of poor 'Carrie Swann' or whether Carrie is meant to be protected from the criminals.)

Although the Australian **poofter** is always described as a variant of the British **poof**, it is worth bearing in mind that the early evidence for the British **poof** is fairly thin. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) has a quotation that is dated from between 1850

and 1860: 'These monsters in the shape of men, commonly designated Margeries, Pooffs, etc.' It seems likely that the 1850–60 quotation refers to homosexuals, since female forenames are commonly used to denote effeminacy or homosexuality (compare *nancy*). But it is interesting that the next piece of evidence for **poof** is very much later, from the gay poet W.H. Auden's *Orators* in 1932: 'Poofs and ponces, All of them dunces.'

The OED derives the British **poof** from one of the senses of the noun **puff**. The core sense of **puff** is 'an act of puffing; a short impulsive blast of breath or wind'. Sense 6 is a figurative development: 'an inflated speech or piece of display; an empty or vain boast.' Sense 7 is a further, and logical, development of this pejorative sense: 'undue or inflated praise or commendation.' Sense 8 applies these negative connotations to people, and this is the crucial development in the claim that the homosexual **poof** might derive from **puff**. There are four sub-senses of sense 8. Sub-sense 8a shows a shift from the *act* of bragging to the *person* who brags: 'one who brags or behaves insolently, or who is puffed up or swollen with pride or vanity;

a boaster, a braggart.' A quotation from 1661 suggests that Sir John Falstaff is the epitome of this 'puff': 'John Fastolfe … The stage hath been overbold with his memory, making him a Thrasonical Puff, and emblem of Mock-valour.' ('Thrasonical' meaning 'bragging, boastful' goes back to the name Thraso, a bragging soldier in the play *Eunuchus* by the Roman comic dramatist Terence.) The final quotation in OED for this sense of **puff** is from 1850: 'The age groaned under a company of lewd, shallow-brained puffs, wretches who seemed to have sinned themselves into another kind of species.' The 1850 date, however, is perhaps misleading, since the passage quoted is from one of the sermons of the Reverend Robert South, writing at the end of the seventeenth century, and railing against the court of Charles the Second. There is therefore no evidence for **puff** being applied to an insolent braggart (i.e. to a *person* who brags) after 1700. The second sub-sense of **puff** applied to a person is 'one who praises extravagantly' but this was also obsolete by 1700. The third sub-sense, 'a decoy in a gambling house', has evidence from only 1731 and 1755; in any case, this sense is so removed from the others that it perhaps has a different origin.

And so we come to the fourth sub-sense, 8d, 'an effeminate man; a homosexual'. The earliest evidence is in Farmer & Henley's *Slang and Its Analogues*, in a volume published in 1902. **Puff** is given the meaning 'sodomist' and this sense is attributed to the slang of tramps. Partridge copies this in his 1937 edition of *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. The next evidence is in 1961 in Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot*: 'It was that puf Mortimer would not let me alone.' It seems to me that these are just as likely to be spelling variants of the word **poof** (first recorded 1850–60) as developments of **puff**. The crucial point is this: the use of the noun **puff** to apply to *people* involved in various kinds of 'puffery' seems to be dead by 1700. The real origin of **poof** is therefore thrown completely into doubt.

Thus the evidence for **poof**/**poofter** is: 1850–60 (**pooff** Britain), 1889 (**pouftah** Australian), 1902 (**puff**, perhaps a spelling variant of **poof**, British tramps' cant), 1910 (**pouf**, **poufter**, Australian), 1932 (**poof**, Britain). The Australian evidence is therefore more significant than hitherto recognised, although it does not help us with the origin of the term.

Poofter often has the literal sense 'homosexual'. Thus in 1967 in C. Ruhen's *Wild Beat*: 'A poofter? What'd he do? Make a grab for you in the park?' Or, in the *Bulletin* in 1972: 'If it was raining sheilas … I'd be washed down the drain with a poofter.' Sometimes it gestures playfully to stereotypes, as in this account of the botanist Sir Joseph Banks, who travelled with Captain Cook in 1770: '"Banks was a pooftah." "Have you got any proof of that?" "He was a botanist and a Pommy—what more proof do you want?"' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1985). Very often it is just a general term of abuse: 'Don't forget to tell that little poofter what I said' (1992); 'Poofta bastards cracked open me mum's head' (1996); 'Hudson told them they were a bunch of useless poofters with cowshit for brains' (2000).

A number of derivatives have developed. **Poofterish** first appears in 1969: '"Oh, yes", he said in a poofterish voice.' **Poofterism** first appears in Frank Hardy's *The Outcasts of Foolgarah* in 1971: 'He had never fallen into the hands of two human monstrosities like Sodomy and Gomorrah, so called by the wags of Tailboard Alley in Penbay Jail because of their propensity to poofterism and leadership of the queer quarter of the prison staff.' **Poofteroo** first appears in Patrick White's *Solid Mandala* in 1966: 'You ought to move in with that pair of poofteroos across the road.'

There have also been a number of compounds. The term **poofter rorter** has been recorded, but it is not widely attested. It first appears in Sidney Baker's *The Australian Language* in 1945, where it is defined as 'a procurer for homosexuals', a kind of gay pimp. Gary Simes in *Gay Perspectives* (1992) give a similar definition: 'an underworld term for one who makes it his business to procure male partners for either himself or others.' In support, he quotes Patrick White's 1961 *Riders in the Chariot*: '"You are a proper pufter rorter, Hannah!" Reen had to remark, because she was a cow.' However, in the *King's Cross Whisper* in 1969, the definition 'one who preys on homosexuals' is given. Similarly the 1972 *Parramatta Jail Glossary* gives the term **poof rorter** and defines it as a 'man who takes money off homosexuals'. The **rorter** part of the compound must be the Australian term meaning 'one who in engages in acts of fraud or sharp practice', and this would apply to either sense.

Another compound is **poofter bashing**. This first appears in Australia's first gay magazine, *Camp Ink*, in 1972, and it refers to the drowning murder of Dr George Duncan in the Torrens River, Adelaide, on 10 May 1972: 'Such people … obdurately fail to recognise the chain of social causation behind the death of Dr Duncan and other homosexual murders, the whole "poofter bashing" syndrome, and the social discrimination against homosexuals.' The term is still alive, as in this text-message-like 'poofter bashing' from the *Cairns Post* in June 2006: 'I abhor poofter bashing but straight men shldn't hv 2 put up wth gays groping & hitting on us. If Proud hd bn a woman, he'd hv walked free frm court & his accuser wld b up on charges.' The term is now often used to refer to kinds of violence and abuse that are other than physical: 'As we have seen, what Patrick White called the Great Australian Sport of Poofter Bashing is alive and thriving. It takes many forms, from bloody physical violence to the subtle, often invisible application of laws which consign gays and lesbians to second-class citizenship' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2006).

If there is **poofter bashing** there must be **poofter bashers**, and the earliest instance of the term occurs in 1974: 'The sergeant had that sort of look about him. The look of a confirmed poofter-basher.' Both the term and the practice continue in the gross world of ockerdom, as indicated by this passage from the *Australian* in 2003: 'Most of the members of our club are heterosexual … Not that this prevents them from being poofter-bashed. Ironically, straight cross-dressers are often targeted by poofter-bashers, more than gay people are, because they are so visibly different.'

This passage also provides evidence of a verb **to poofter bash**. The form **poofter bashing**, with its *–ing* ending, makes it look like a verbal noun, but the evidence suggests that the actual verb is a recent development. Similarly in the *Australian Financial Review* in 2004: 'He was also routinely "poofter-bashed" at his Bargo high school, as much for his love of music as his fairly early-established sexual preference.' The earliest use of the verb we have been able to find occurs in issue 7 of *Cargo Magazine*, published by Black Wattle Press in November 1989: 'The last time I was poofta bashed'.

As we mentioned earlier, we do not know if the notation 'to be kept apart from the other prisoners as much as possible' on George Harrison's sentencing document was part of the authorities' attempt to protect him from poofter bashing. Given the time, it seems more likely, perhaps, that the authorities felt that the other prisoners needed to be protected from poor George Harrison! Whatever George Harrison's fate, unless other lexical evidence comes to light, this document, with its engaging photograph of the man 'Said to be a Pouftah', presents to us the earliest evidence of the Australian **poofter**.

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 26: RESULTS

1. What is your favourite Australian word? 2. What Australian word best sums up Australian values? You were asked to choose a word in either or in both categories, and in no more than 25 words explain the reason(s) for your choice.

Honourable Mentions (in no particular order): (a) R. Shooter, Qld: **Bulldust**: 'Expresses Australia's present superficial values. Australia worships talentless celebrities. We forgive misbehaving sporting stars. As Henry Lawson said: "Make a hero of a clod".' (b) L. Evans, WA: **Bunyip**: 'Bunyip is my favourite word / Mysterious, yet quite absurd. / A figment of imagination?/ Or viewed by some with trepidation.' (c) B. Buisson, Qld: **Corroboree**: 'It sounds like a song, and could be a celebration of our country, with minds and philosophies gathering and growing together in harmony.' (d) E. Castle, SA: **Digger**: 'Connotations, of course, but the sound! Ictus on "di" crashes into the brutal "gg" and dies into the neutral vowel. Life's like that, mate!' (e) W. Wetherell, NSW: **Dinkum**: 'It has a ring of honesty and decency and friendship. It is ours; it is Aussie through and through.' (f) R. Ruhle, Qld: **Dinkum**: 'Australians, frank and sincere, despise bullshit, demand a fair go for all, call a spade a spade and make dinki-di friends.' (g) W. Edwards, Vic.: **Larrikin**: 'No matter what the subject and the importance of our values, Australians can always inject that sense of irreverence in resolving our problems.' (h) G. Case, Qld: **Lino**: 'Memories of childhood; lack of pretension; coolness against sunburn; little fingers playing with broken edges; cat in disgrace; homework at kitchen table; family sanctuary.' (i) R. Calitz, Tas.: **Mate**: 'So many ways to say it : Maa/aat, Matey, Heymate, Bloodoathmate, Struthmate, Sh..mate, Comheremate, C'monmate, ma/hate, Matey-Matey, Justarminutemate, OKmate, Crikeymate, Bestmate, Goalmate, Kickthebloodythingmate, Loveyermate, Livelongmate, liestillmate!' (j) D. Alexander, Tas.: **Melaleuca**: 'A word with a musical sound, evoking the silence of the bush. Ranging from small hardy shrubs to tall, graceful trees.'

2nd Prize (books to the value of $50 from the OUP Catalogue): A. Maley, WA for: Arvo: 'What wonderful memories this word conjures up, when children were free to be children, and could roam together at will. "See ya Satdy arvo" was our mantra!'

1st Prize (books to the value of $100 from the OUP Catalogue): G. Hurle, WA for: Billabong: 'It evokes tranquillity and beauty; it possesses poetic resonance; it harbours Australia's most precious resource; and it originates from the traditional caretakers of this continent.'

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 27

HOLOLITS

The idea for this competition was sent in by Dr Malcolm Ronan of Victoria who has another inventive *Ozwords* competition to his credit (October 2003) and who receives my heartfelt thanks. Here is Dr Ronan's letter explaining the competition:

'Are you tired of the quick brown fox jumping over the lazy dog? (Putative typists have surely overstrained that poor animal by now.) You may know some of the following alternatives—that is, sentences using all 26 letters of the English alphabet. How about these:

Sample: A quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. (33 letters)

1 Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs. (32 letters); **2** Jackdaws love my big sphinx of quartz. (30); **3** Waltz, bad nymph, for quick jigs vex. (28); **4** How can piqued gymnasts level six jumping razorback frogs? (49); **5** Fix your judge's gaze on the queer vamp's black wig (40).

All of the above have been collected by me, but only one (No 5) was composed by me. I call them **hololits**—short for hololiterals. I suggest a **hololit** as a competition for a future *Ozwords.* The task: Compose a sentence that contains all 26 letters of the English alphabet. (Note that none of the samples given above includes Proper Nouns, so to give it an Oz flavour there should be a requirement that at least one Australian place-name be included in the sentence.) The prizewinner would be the sentence with the fewest number of letters, provided of course that the sentence is cogent enough. I had a shot at it for a sample—and apologies for the trespass on your privacy and for sending you on holiday to an outback place in Queensland! *Fred Ludowyk juggles his Ozwords program to relax on vacation in Qunaba.* (60 letters)'.

So that is the competition: Compose a sentence that contains all 26 letters of the English alphabet. The sentence must include an Australian place-name. The prizewinner will be the sentence with the fewest number of letters, with bonus points for cogency and wit.

ENTRIES CLOSE 28 FEBRUARY 2007.

Entries sent by email should also contain a snail mail address. All entries should be sent to the editor.