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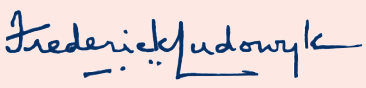
EDITORIAL

2008 is the 100th anniversary of Oxford University Press in Australia and the 20th anniversary of the publication of the *Australian National Dictionary* and the establishment of the Australian National Dictionary Centre. An *Ozwords* that is longer than usual is one of the ways in which we are marking these anniversaries.

The *Australian National Dictionary* sets out the history of Australian words and meanings, especially through its use of quotations from printed sources. Our lead article on the word *bunyip* explains how the various meanings of this word developed in Australian English. An article from one of our *Ozwords* readers, providing a new theory about the origin of the term *outback* in Australian English, is a good example of how a detailed analysis of early printed records can aid the understanding of our linguistic heritage. An article on the word *hoon* traces its journey from 'pimp' to 'lout'.

Two articles deal with the important evidence about Australian English that is provided in two highly unlikely (on the face of it) lexicographical sources—a newspaper word competition run by a hosiery company in 1924, and a dictionary, printed in the midst of salacious words and pictures, in the 1967 *Kings Cross Whisper*. Indeed, to misquote John Calvin, such sources as these are *thinges* [that] ... *bring gryst to the* [lexicographical] *mill (The sermons of J. Calvin upon Deuteronomie*, Arthur Golding's translation, 1583).



Frederick Ludowyk
Editor, *Ozwords*

There's a Bunyip Close Behind us and he's Treading on my Tail ...

Frederick Ludowyk

Settlers, explorers, and visitors marvelled at the perversity of nature revealed by the newly-discovered Antipodean realm: a swan that was jet black instead of a normal swanly white; a platypus so polymorphously perverse that it defied the laws of nature and presented itself as being reptilian, avian, and mammalian at one and the same time; a cherry with its stone stuck on the outside of the fruit instead of nestling inside the fruit (where, everyone knows, God-fearing cherry stones ought to be)—to name but three contrarieties out of a very great many. As if this weren't bad enough, there existed a parallel narrative about an even more strange and mysterious realm of monstrous and malevolent creatures that inhabited Terra Australis. If the platypus be polymorphously perverse, the bemused outsider might be told, wait till you hear about the bunyip!

In 1790 a handbill was printed in England that reported how English sailors had captured a giant at Botany Bay, and brought him back to England to be exhibited to the public at Plymouth. The handbill was headed: 'A DESCRIPTION OF A WONDERFUL LARGE WILD MAN OR MONSTROUS GIANT, BROUGHT FROM BOTANY BAY'. The creature described was '9 feet 7 inches high', had 'a long beard strong as black wire, body and limbs covered with strong black hair', and 'the nails of his fingers and toes' were like 'talons'. This is the first of a series of reports over the next two centuries claiming the existence in Australia of a 'hairy man' that rivals the American 'bigfoot', the Canadian 'sasquatch', and the Himalayan 'yeti'. Various indigenous names for such creatures were recorded in Australia, and the best-known of them is now the *yowie,* an ape-like monster that purportedly inhabits parts of eastern Australia. The yowie, of course, is a huge, shaggy, ape-like monster that out-Abominable-Snowmans the Abominable Snowman the while it cunningly lurks and prowls, just beside one's line of sight, in haunted eastern Oz. The name *yowie* comes from *yuwi* in the Yuwaalaraay language of northern New South Wales and means 'dream spirit'.

There were reports, beginning as far back as the 1820s, of other kinds of monsters, particularly creatures that inhabited rivers and lakes. These reports focused especially on newly colonised Victoria, and in 1845 the word *bunyip* first became part of the English language. In that year, the creature was 'represented as uniting the characteristics of a bird and an alligator' (as reported in the *Observer* newspaper from Hobart). The monster is also described as an amphibious man-(and especially *woman*-) eating monster inhabiting billabongs, swamps, lagoons, and various inland waterways. There is a more detailed description in 1847:

> It is described as being about as big as a six months old calf, of a dark brown colour, a long neck, a long pointed head, large ears, a thick mane of hair from the head down the neck, and two large tusks. It is said to be an amphibious animal, as it has been observed floundering in the rivers, as well as grazing on their banks *(Bell's Life in Sydney*, 19 June).

Ten years later, the *Moreton Bay Free Press* printed an account of bunyips that had been encountered on the Goulburn River in Victoria:

> Mr Stocqueler informs us that the bunyip is a large freshwater seal, having two small paddles or fins attached to the shoulders, a long swan-like neck, a head like a dog, and a curious bag hanging under the jaw, resembling the pouch of the pelican. The animal is covered with hair like the platypus, and the colour is a glossy black. Mr Stocqueler saw no less than six of the curious animals at different times; his boat was within thirty feet of one, near M'Guire's Point, on the Goulburn, and he fired at the bunyip, but did not succeed in capturing him. The smallest appeared to be about five feet in length, and the largest exceeded fifteen feet. The head of the largest was the size of a bullock's head and three feet out of the water.

The linguist Luise Hercus was the first to posit the probable origin of the term *bunyip* when she pointed out that the word *banib* (meaning *bunyip*) appeared in the Wergaia language of far north-western Victoria. More recently, the linguist Barry Blake has shown that *bunyip,* in the form *banjib*, also existed in the Wathawurung language. This language was spoken in an area that includes the present-day Geelong and Bacchus Marsh, and probably extended as far inland as Ballarat. Since this language was spoken close to the centre of settlement at Melbourne, Wathawurung emerges as more likely than Wergaia as the direct source for *bunyip*. The emergence

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THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE
A JOINT VENTURE BETWEEN
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY &
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

of Wathawurung as the source is especially interesting, not simply because I lived in Geelong for a quarter of a century after migrating thither from Sri Lanka in 1962, but because another very early 'migrant' to the Geelong district had an interesting connection with the Wathawurung people and their language as well as with the bunyip. I refer to that remarkable man William Buckley.

The Cheshire-born convict William Buckley was transported to Australia for theft in 1802. In 1803 he escaped from custody at Port Phillip, and lived with the Wathawurung people for thirty-two years until he was found by John Batman in 1835. (Buckley, of course, is one of the candidates for the origin of the phrase *Buckley's chance*.) The illiterate William Buckley's memoirs were written down and published by John Morgan in 1852. In these memoirs Buckley gives us an account of his bumping into the bunyip:

> They told me a story of a woman having been killed by one of them, stating that it happened in this way. A particular family one day was surprised at the great quantity of eels they caught; for as fast as the husband could carry them back to their hut, the woman pulled them out of the lagoon. This, they said, was a cunning manoeuvre of a Bunyip, to lull her into security—so that in her husband's absence he might seize her for food. However this was, after the husband had stayed away some time, he returned, but his wife was gone, and she was never seen after. So great is the dread the natives have of these creatures, that on discovering one, they throw themselves flat on their faces, muttering some gibberish, or flee away from the borders of the lake or river, as if pursued by a wild beast. When alone, I several times attempted to spear a Bunyip; but, had the natives seen me do so, it would have caused great displeasure. And again, if I had succeeded in killing, or even wounding one, my own life would probably have paid the forfeit—they considering the animal, as I have already said, something supernatural.

And so, the word *bunyip* made its way into Australian English. If you are interested in chasing up the history of bunyip-lore, I recommend three books: E. Wignell, *A Boggle of Bunyips* (1981); M. Smith, *Bunyips & Bigfoots: In Search of Australia's Mystery Animals* (1996); R. and N. Holden, *Bunyips: Australia's Folklore of Fear* (2001). Rather than focusing on bunyip-lore, however, I want to look at the way the word *bunyip* has been used in Australian English.

The name of the *fibulous* (a portmanteau of 'fabulous' and 'fib' that I rather like since I invented it in this particular sense) bunyip has been transferred to two other creatures: a bull and a bird. From 1875, it was used to describe a bull that had grown up wild in the bush and was therefore very difficult to capture: 'Now and then we have a combined muster. ... Sometimes we strike a few bunyips. A bunyip was a beast that had grown to full size without being branded' (A.C.C. Lock, *Travels Across Australia*, 1952). The transferred sense here derives from the notion that the wild bull of the bush is bunyip-like in strength and ferocity, and bunyip-like, too, in its elusiveness. The second transferred sense, this time to the Australian bittern, occurred by 1909, and derives from a different aspect of bunyip-lore, its reputation for booming. The Australian bittern is a swamp bird with a booming call, and for this reason it has been called a *boomer* and a *bull bird*; it has also been called a *bunyip bird*: 'When a booming call breaks the silence of a lonely swamp, it is the voice of the "Bunyip-bird", largest of the five kinds of bitterns found in Australia' (C. Barrett, *Wild Life in Australia and New Guinea*, 1954).

These two transferred senses are interesting, but they are also understandable and predictable, given the folklore of the bunyip. The major transferred sense, however, is quite unlike these, and is one of the most extraordinary of such transfers to have occurred in the history of Australian English. Although the legend of the bunyip has been long-lasting, the power of the legend, as with all such legends, derives very much from one salient fact: the bunyip does not exist. Of course, there have been many sightings of the bunyip, just as there have been sightings of the Loch Ness monster. However, as distinct from the Nessie legend, the bunyip legend has produced no grainy photographs that I know of: what it *has* produced over the years are various body parts, such as bones and skulls, that purport to be genus Bunyip but turn out to be various bits of bovines. Reported sightings of the bunyip no doubt derive from many causes: innocent credulity, mistaken viewings of lost seals and sea lions, ingrained fear of the Australian bush, excessive imbibing of colonial ale (a potent suasion), and of course frauds and hoaxes. Indeed, the bunyip of non-indigenous tradition is at core a fraud and a hoax, even if a very frightening one.

Enter, stage right, another breed of bunyips. In 1852 G.C. Mundy reports in his *Our Antipodes* that only seven years after the word *bunyip* first appeared in Australian English in Victoria, in Sydney it had come to mean an impostor or hoaxer, someone who pretends to be what he is ineluctably not: 'A new and strong word was adopted into the Australian vocabulary: Bunyip became, and remains, a Sydney synonym for *imposter*, *pretender*, *humbug*, and the like.' In the following year, 1853, the impostor-bunyip acquired a political dimension. A parliamentary committee on constitutional matters, chaired by W.C. Wentworth, developed the notion that Australia might have its own hereditary colonial peerage, in parallel with the British system of Sirs, Lords, Dukes, and whatnot. Those who might aspire to this colonial peerage were quintessentially the *pure merinos*, those wealthy British settlers and squatters who pretentiously saw themselves as socially superior to anyone with a whiff of convict ancestry (and no doubt to those who had somehow managed to erase the convict stain on their putative escutcheons by means of immense wealth).

Enter, stage left, Daniel Deniehy. Deniehy's parents had been convicts, he was trained as a lawyer, gained a reputation as an orator, lectured on literature, and was a member of the New South Wales parliament from 1857 to 1859. Deniehy attacked Wentworth's proposed colonial nobility, and coined the phrase b*unyip aristocracy* to castigate and marvellously mock the immodest proposal:

> He confessed he found extreme difficulty in the effort to classify this mushroom order of nobility. They could not aspire to the miserable and effete dignity of the worn-out grandees of continental Europe. There, even in rags, they had antiquity of birth to point to; here he would defy the most skilled naturalist to assign them a place in the great human family. But perhaps after all it was only a specimen of the remarkable contrariety which existed at the Antipodes. Here they all knew that the common water-mole was transformed into the duck-billed platypus; and in some distant emulation of this degeneracy, he supposed they were to be favoured with a bunyip aristocracy.

Wentworth's proposal could not and did not survive the venom of Deniehy's satire, but Deniehy's formulation has survived to the present as a description of those who aspire to hollow and undeserved honours, who are blown up with overweening humbug and pretentiousness. The imperial honours that were bestowed on Australians until the 1970s (and in some states much later) were often derided as a kind of pommy-bunyip aristocracy. When the Order of Australia replaced the imperial honours at the commonwealth level in 1975, it initially included the awards of

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Knight of the Order of Australia (AK) and Dame of the Order of Australia (AD), and some nationalists were understandably perturbed: 'Trade unions have attacked the decision to create knighthoods as the supreme Australian honour. They said the Prime Minister, Mr Fraser, is trying to create a "bunyip aristocracy"' (*Sun*, Sydney, 1 June, 1976). Recently, Sir John Kerr, the governor-general who sacked the Whitlam government in 1975, was described in 'bunyip aristocratic' terms by former Prime Minister Paul Keating: 'Mr Keating described governor-general John Kerr as a "pumped-up bunyip potentate" who was "hearing voices about his own self importance"' (*Age*, Melbourne, 10 November, 2005).

If the bunyip is a symbol of the impostor, and if the bunyip is also something that probably does not exist, the *search for the bunyip* can become an Australian version of the *wild goose chase*. In his infamous and unpardonable review of Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* in 1956, the poet and critic A.D. Hope used the fibulous bunyip as a symbol of the fibulous and unimaginable 'great Australian novel':

> From time to time that mythical Australian monster, the Bunyip, stirs in his swamps or mountain gullies. For a few weeks some little township is terrified by mysterious bellowings at night, by the tracks of some large beast discovered by day. Dogs howl. Cattle disappear. Men carry shotguns and women lock their bedroom doors. Then it is discovered that the Bunyip was just an outsize wild dog, a mad bull or, in one case, a sea-going crocodile that strayed too far south. The scare is over. But the legend of the Bunyip persists. Some day he really will appear and ravage Reedy Creek or Upper Coolangabooloo. The Bunyip of Australian literature is the mythical Great Australian Novel. From time to time we hear that it has appeared at last. Publishers hold a special corroboree. Rival novelists lock their doors and say their prayers. Critics reach for their shotguns. Very soon the excitement dies down as it perceived that this is, after all, just another novel. Mr Patrick White's publishers are therefore naturally cautious. 'The Tree of Man', they say, has many of the qualities of the great novel. But the word has got around that Mr White's book is, in fact, the genuine Bunyip.

Similarly, in 1984, in the midst of the build-up towards the bicentennial year, and in the context of renewed discussions about what was meant by 'national identity', one writer tapped into the new and lurking idiom (*the search for the bunyip*): 'Now the quest for national identity (our century-long pursuit of the bunyip) is on again' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 March, 1984).

A 1997 thesis on 'Australian and South Korean Business Encounters' suggested: 'The search for an Australian identity can be compared with the search for the Bunyip: it eternally eludes the tracker.' A Wikipedia article on the bunyip asserts: 'The idiom "why search for the bunyip?" emerged from repeated attempts by Australian adventurers to capture or sight the bunyip, the phrase indicating that a proposed course of action is fruitless or impossible.' We are searching for more evidence of this idiom, but it too is proving difficult to catch!

Does the Bunyip 'close behind us' and 'treading on [our] tail' (*pace* Lewis Carroll) veritably exist? Does global warming (*pace* all you climate change sceptics) veridically exist? Scepticism about climate change would seem to be the latest 'bunyip' to emerge from our vanishing old-growth forests or our desiccating billabongs. One sighs in exasperated Latin, *Mirabile dictu, nemo est quin sciat* ... It's an amazing thing to say, but all the world knows, just about everyone knows, that ... That *what*?

MAILBAG

Letters are welcome. Please address letters to: Frederick Ludowyk, Editor, *Ozwords*,
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We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those not easily answerable from the standard reference books.

-ING FORM OF A VERB

On 31 May 2008 the *Canberra Times*, under the headline 'Long goodbye finally over as family leaves home for good', had this paragraph: 'Retiring Greens MLA Deb Foskey suggested to Mr Barr in estimates yesterday that the case went beyond a black and white legal argument. "You might say we have a human right to be compassionate as well. I would be interested in you justifying beyond that legal right why it makes good sense to remove people who have actually improved that dwelling and saved it from fire," she said.' My question is: should the word 'you' be replaced by 'your' in 'I would be interested in you justifying'?

T. Lee (via email)

It boils down to a question of meaning. What does Foskey mean? The confusion arises because the *-ing* form of a verb denotes two quite separate things: 1. the present participle (adjectival), 2. the gerund (nominal, a verbal noun). In the sentence being queried, 'interested in' expects a noun or pronoun as answer to the question 'in *what*?' or 'in *whom*?' etc. ('interested in the *book*', 'interested in *him*'). What is Foskey really interested in here? If her interest is in Barr, then *you* followed by the present participle *justifying* could be justified, I suppose. But quite obviously Foskey has no interest in *Barr* here: her interest lies in Barr's *justification* of why... etc. Therefore she needs the gerund. And since the gerund is nominal in force, she must qualify it with the pronominal adjective *your*. By using *you* she is turning *justifying* into a present participle qualifying *you* (Barr), thus subverting the meaning she intends. **ED**.

SKEPTIC / SCEPTIC

The 'Australian Skeptics' have a website, and they publish a journal called *The Skeptic*, although on the webpage that advertises the journal, the following sentence appears: 'Since the first issue was published in 1981, the *Skeptic* has printed articles on a vast variety of sceptical subjects ranging from alien abduction to zombies.' Is it skeptic or sceptic, sceptical or skeptical? I always thought Australian usage had the c spelling: sceptic and sceptical.

J. Mills (via email)

The standard account of these words says that British usage has the **-c-** and American usage the **-k-** spelling, and that Australians follow British usage. There is general truth in these propositions. A Google search on sceptic/skeptic shows the UK with *sceptic* (70%) and *skeptic* (30%), while Australia has *sceptic* (62%) and *skeptic* (38%). The **-k-** spelling is more common in Australia than in Britain, but *sceptic* is clearly the winner in both countries. I was surprised to discover, however, that the great English lexicographer Samuel Johnson, in his *Dictionary* of 1755, gave only *skeptick* for the noun and *skeptical* for the adjective, without even so much as a desultory gesture towards *sceptic* and *sceptical*. In America, the equally famous lexicographer Noah Webster published his *American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828. It is widely accepted that Webster was responsible for many of the spellings that distinguish American English from British English: *color* for *colour*, *center for centre*, *traveler for traveller*, and so forth. So surely Webster must have been responsible for the American spelling *skeptic*? Not so. Webster attacked Johnson for his **sk-** spellings: 'Johnson often committed errors, but seldom gave his sanction to innovations, unauthorized by any good principle. Yet in a few instances he has departed from his usual caution. An instance occurs in his change of *sceptic to skeptic*.' Webster's argument is that whatever the spelling and pronunciation of this word in Greek and Latin (it was spelled **skeptik-** in Greek, and the **k**s were ks in pronunciation, and became **scepticus** in Latin) it came into English via French, as did a number of other similar words. Webster points out that we have *scene*, *sceptre*, and *science*, not *skene*, *skeptre*, and *skience*. Webster, therefore, is recommending not only the **-c-** spelling, but also the **-s-** pronunciation. He concludes: 'Fortunately, the corrupt pronunciation of *sceptic*, has made little progress in this country [i.e. in the USA]; and in this, as in many other words, if we can be permitted to think and reason for ourselves, we may still preserve the purity of our language.' It is true that in French, the language from which *sceptic* was borrowed directly into English, the **sc-** was pronounced as in *sceptre*, and no doubt this is how it was first pronounced in English. English scholars attempted to remodel the word according to its Greek origin, and so the spelling *skeptik* is common in the sixteenth century. The Greek pronunciation (**sk-**) was also adopted, but for some reason that can be explained only by recourse to the irrational unpredictability of language, the **sc-** spelling took over and existed alongside the **sk-** pronunciation—except in America, where the **sk-** spelling won out. Interestingly, the community of speakers took absolutely no notice of their adored lexicographers, Johnson and Webster. **ED**.

FORWARD SLASH

Especially in Internet addresses, people use the term f*orward slash* for the sign /. While this is perfectly understandable, I was brought up with the terms virgule and solidus. Have these terms now disappeared?

C.J. NSW

In an Internet address such as <http://www.anu.edu.au/andc> we would all use the term *forward slash* or simply *slash* for the sloping lines (since there are no back slashes in URL addresses, the 'forward' in *forward slash* is really redundant in this context). Those familiar with computer jargon might use the term *whack* (//www.anu = *whack whack www dot anu*), but we, since we are confirmed non-jargonists, shall stick with *slash*. Synonymous terms are: *oblique* (*dash* or *stroke*), *diagonal*, *solidus*, and *virgule*. All can be used to describe the sloping line that is used in printing and writing for a number of functions, including: vulgar fractions (*2/3*: two thirds); ratios (*km/h*: kilometres per hour); some abbreviations and symbols, such as *c/-* (care of) and % (the percentage sign); alternatives (*and/or*, *s/he*); line breaks when poetry is set off as prose ('*There was movement at the station, for the word had passed around / That the colt from Old Regret had got away*'); to mark off the phonemic pronunciations of words (*/kæt/* for 'cat'). Strictly speaking, the solidus is used when you have a fraction with a superior and inferior digit, as in ¼ , and the angle is not as steep as in other slashes, for which the term virgule is the more appropriate technical term. The word *virgule*, which comes into English via French, ultimately goes back to Latin *virgula* meaning 'rod'. It was originally a thin sloping line in medieval manuscripts, used to mark a caesura or used as a punctuation mark that was roughly equivalent to the modern comma. *Solidus* too comes from Latin: it had the same meaning as 'solid' in present-day English, and it was also used for a gold coin worth 25 denars (or denarii) of the later Roman Empire, first issued by Constantine I in 312 AD. In pre-decimal days, when we had pounds, shillings, and pence, the standard abbreviation of the currency terms was *£sd*, with *£* standing for Latin *libra* 'pound', *s* standing for Latin *solidus* (and coincidentally matching the first letter of the English *shilling*), and *d* standing for Latin *denarius*. Thus £5 2s 6d. The s symbol was often written with a long tail (ſ), and this developed into the solidus (/). Thus £5 2/6 as an abbreviation of £5 2s 6d. **ED**.

Oxford University Press published its first book in 1478, just two years after William Caxton had set up the first printing press in England at Winchester. 430 years later, in 1908, Oxford University Press opened a branch in Australia. Most of the books it sold were English products, although an early Australian school textbook, Earnest Scott's *A Short History of Australia*, was on its list in 1916. By the 1950s, the press in Australia was publishing important Australian texts, including Russel Ward's T*he Australian Legend* (1958) and Judith Wright's *The Generations of Men* (1959). In this period, Professor Grahame Johnston became the Press's adviser on Australian literature.

The 1960s were especially significant for the history of Australian English. In *Speaking Our Language* I point out that in 1966, after half a century of scholarly neglect, there were three major publications on the Australian vocabulary: W.S. Ramson's *Australian English: An Historical Study of the Vocabulary 1788-1898*; the second edition of Sidney Baker's *The Australian Language*; and G.W. Turner's *The English Language in Australia and New Zealand*. Baker's *The Australian Language* perhaps sits uneasily here. Baker did much work on Australian English from the early 1940s, and the first edition of *The Australian Language* appeared in 1945, but his work on Australian English is generally regarded as belonging to a 'popular' (as distinct from a 'scholarly' or 'academic') tradition of the mapping of the Australian idiom. Even so, Baker's work is extraordinarily important, precisely because of the neglect or denigration of Australian English in the 'official' public sphere. Baker's work belongs to a popular tradition that is invaluable in the charting of the history of Australian English. It is a tradition that is illustrated by many writers in the *Bulletin* of the 1890s and later, and in this issue of *Ozwords* Julia Robinson and Mark Gwynn examine other evidence for the popular tradition in newspapers in the 1920s and 1960s.

The academic and scholarly books by Ramson and Turner in 1966 signalled that attitudes towards Australian English were changing. Similarly, the Australian Language Research Centre had been established at Sydney University in 1964, and over the next decade it published a series of pamphlets on various aspects of Australian English. The idea of a historical dictionary of Australian English was put forward as an important project by the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1969. Even so, the first general Australian dictionary edited in Australia, and giving appropriate coverage to Australian English, did not appear until 1976. This was Grahame Johnston's *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*. I was interested to read in the recently-published booklet *Oxford University Press Australia: Celebrating 100 Years of Publishing in Australia 1908–2008*, that the plans for this dictionary had been cemented in 1969: 'Also in 1969, after many years of debate, permission was finally granted for the branch to produce an Australian edition of the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary*.' This new information, that OUP Australia planned the dictionary in 1969, serves to enforce my point that the period 1966 to 1969 was a crucial turning point in attitudes towards Australian English.

FROM THE CENTRE

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE

The Australian National Dictionary Centre is jointly funded by **Oxford University Press Australia** and **The Australian National University** to research all aspects of Australian English and to publish Australian dictionaries and other works.

Dictionaries usually take editors much longer to produce than their publishers would hope. OUP's formal role in the editing of the *Oxford English Dictionary* began in 1879, and it was intended that the project would take about ten years, but it was not completed until 1928. Grahame Johnston's edition of the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* took seven years from 'permission' to publication. In the 1976 Preface, Johnston spelled out some of his editorial principles:

> Every entry has been scrutinized 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, flora and fauna.

These principles are repeated in the Introduction:

> The distinctive feature of this book is its attempt to cover as informatively and comprehensively as possible within limited space the vocabulary, idioms, and pronunciation of Australian English. The material presented has been drawn from a wide range of printed sources of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and from the aural experience of the editor and those he has consulted.

Thirty years later, when we expect that the dictionaries available in Australia will be edited from an Australian point of view, it is difficult to understand just how radical and groundbreaking Grahame Johnston's work was. In this 100th anniversary year for OUP Australia, it is worth reminding ourselves of the role that OUP Australia has played in the history of Australian lexicography.

Other dictionaries followed the first edition of the *Pocket*: George Turner edited the second edition of the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* in 1984 and the first edition of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* in 1987. Being worked on 'in the wings', however, was the *Australian National Dictionary*. The history of this dictionary goes back to that moment in 1969 when the Australian Academy of the Humanities identified such a dictionary as an Australian project that would parallel the *OED* project. In the 1980s the team that produced this dictionary was led by Dr W.S. Ramson at the Australian National University (ANU). OUP was awarded the contract to publish the dictionary in 1983. The *Australian National Dictionary* was published in 1988, and it includes some 10,000 Australian words, idioms, and meanings, illustrated by more than 60,000 quotations. In the same year, 1988, an agreement was signed between OUP Australia and ANU to establish the Australian National Dictionary Centre (ANDC), and for the past twenty years the ANDC has conducted research into Australian English and edited OUP's range of Australian dictionaries. Some 4000 new entries have been prepared for the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.

The 100th anniversary of OUP in Australia therefore coincides with the 20th anniversary of the publication of the *Australian National Dictionary* and the establishment of the Australian National Dictionary Centre. A significant marker of both anniversaries is the free online version of the *Australian National Dictionary*, which is available at <www.oup.com.au/and>. A second marker of the anniversaries is the publication of Bruce Moore's *Speaking Our Language: The Story of Australian English*. This book traces the development of Australian English from the time Joseph Banks and James Cook collected the word *kangaroo* from the Guugu Yimidhirr people of northern Queensland in 1770, up to the present when Australian English positions itself in the complex realm of Global English. It is divided into fourteen chapters that deal with such topics as: words from Aboriginal languages; the creation of the accent; the legacy of the convict era; the gold rushes; the great expansion of vocabulary in the second half of the nineteenth century; the development of cultivated and broad versions of the Australian accent; the denigration of Australian English in the first half of the twentieth century; the triumph of Australian English in the second half of the twentieth century; regional varieties of Australian English; migrant and Aboriginal varieties of Australian English.

An Early Meaning of 'Out Back'

Evidence from the Riverina Region of New South Wales

Ian Beissel

'Outback' is a widely-used Australian word describing and denoting remote and sparsely-populated parts of inland Australia (often used in a generic and romanticised sense). In early citations, the word 'outback' is rendered in two words as the phrase 'out back'. The *Australian National Dictionary* gives definitions for 'outback' as adverb, adjective, and noun; the attributed meanings essentially correspond to the modern sense of the word, pertaining to 'sparsely inhabited country which is remote from a major centre of population' or 'characteristic of remote parts of the country'.

The purpose of this article is to articulate an older meaning of the phrase 'out back' (from which the word 'outback' derived). It is proposed that during the mid- to late-nineteenth century 'out back' referred specifically to land away or distant from the frontages of permanent watercourses. Its usage, as exemplified in this article, can be associated with the historical pattern of European settlement on the saltbush plains of New South Wales. The case for an earlier meaning of the phrase 'out back' relies on the evidence of a batch of quotations, most of which antedate the citations published in the *Australian National Dictionary*. The quotations are extracted from passages relating to the western Riverina region of New South Wales, obtained from newspapers, journals, and government publications (the product of historical research undertaken by the Hay Historical Society).

The earliest of the passages is from the *New South Wales Government Gazette* of 27 September, 1848 (No. 109). The following description of the 'Geramy' pastoral run, estimated to have an area of 22,400 acres, was written by the prospective lessees, James and William Tyson. The description is from a list of 'Claims to Leases of Crown Land Beyond the Settled Districts' for the Lachlan squatting district:

> The land occupied by us is barren in the extreme, out a short distance from the river neither is there any water out back. The water at the hut is called Gerarmy or Wanthirm by the Blacks. We have the Commissioner's authority to claim 7 miles frontage to the Lachlan River; and we are bounded on the east or upper side by a line running nearly north and south, coming on the river at the established old hut or waterhole, boundary about 3 miles east of our hut; we are bounded on the lower or west by a line running nearly north and south, which divides us from the land occupied by a Mr. Tooth, and comes in on the river at a plain 4 miles below our hut, at the lower end of the marsh of the Lachlan; north by the river; and south by the plains.

The first sentence, in which the phrase 'out back' appears, probably suffers from a misplaced comma. It could perhaps be paraphrased as: 'Apart from the river frontage the land we occupy is extremely barren and waterless.' In any case 'out back' in this sentence evidently refers to the dry plains beyond the river frontage. The Tyson brothers use the phrase to describe a specific part of their run. In 1848 there is no doubt that the *whole* of the 'Geramy' run could have been described as 'sparsely inhabited country remote from a major centre of population'. The township of Oxley was established much later (in the mid-1860s) on the north bank of the Lachlan River, opposite the north-east corner of the 'Geramy' run.

Pastoral runs began to be taken up in the Riverina region of New South Wales during the late 1830s and 1840s. Stockholders began edging along the Lachlan, Murrumbidgee, Billabong, and Murray systems, where they occupied the valuable river frontages. The pastoral runs selected by the squatters were typically of an elongated shape, extending back from the river into the dry back-blocks where stock could be grazed during wet winters. The vegetation on the land beyond the river corridors was dominated by saltbush species that could provide fodder for stock, even during drought years. The limiting factor for the exploitation of this resource was the availability of water.

By the time of the gold discoveries of the early 1850s the whole of the Riverina river-frontages had been taken up and their occupation consolidated. The expanding population on the Victorian diggings provided a growing market for stock to be slaughtered. The Riverina was the prime fattening country closest to the market and became a sort of holding centre, from where the Victorian market could be supplied as required. Until the early 1860s cattle were the predominant stock grazed on the undeveloped Riverina stations. Cattle could feed further from water and so utilised more land; they were allowed to wander freely over the runs until it was time for the yearly or half-yearly muster.

With rising wool prices during the late 1850s the squatters on the Riverina pastoral holdings began to shift from cattle to sheep. This process required increased capital investment and more intensive management techniques. Wire-fencing began to replace post-and-rail in the early 1860s, which facilitated the extensive subdivision of pastoral runs into paddocks. There was a parallel increase in the development of watering facilities, such as wells and constructed water-storages, to allow for the enclosure of stock within large paddocks. These changes caused a phasing out of the shepherd on the inland stations, to be replaced by the boundary rider. With the sheep thus enclosed, a man on a horse was a cheaper alternative to the shepherd, able to effectively manage larger flocks than his predecessor. These developments led to the formation of new stations away from permanent watercourses (known as 'back stations'), and also enabled squatters on river-fronted stations to graze stock at the back of their runs on a long-term basis.

The passage below is extracted from a report on the results of heavy rainfall in the districts surrounding Hay; it was written by the 'Hay correspondent' to the *Pastoral Times* newspaper (printed in Deniliquin) and published on 22 December, 1866. It begins:

> With respect to the great fall of rain which we had last Sunday week, we have received accounts confirming the truth of our statements of last week. At Groongal on the frontage two inches fell, but out back four and a-half inches were registered.

'Groongal', located between Narrandera and Hay, had been taken up by 1839 and was one of the earliest of the lower Murrumbidgee runs. In 1866 the lease was held by the Learmonth brothers. This passage plainly differentiates between the rainfall that had occurred on the river frontage at 'Groongal' and that which had fallen 'out back'.

The 'Boolegal' run on the lower Lachlan River, opposite the present township of Booligal, was taken up by the Tom brothers in the mid to late 1840s. In the 1860s this extensive run was subdivided, with stations such as 'Alma', 'Tom's Lake', and 'Culpataro' being formed from the low-lying country at the back of the run. The following report was written by the 'Lachlan correspondent' to the *Pastoral Times*, published on 13 February, 1869. The correspondent was writing from Booligal township:

> On Thursday, the 29th ult., we were visited by the hurricane which passed over Victoria with such disastrous results. Such a dust storm has never been known on this river. At Alma, sixteen miles out back, a heavy fall of enormous hailstones was experienced during the thunderstorms which succeeded. I have not heard of any harm being done, or life lost.

Here again a distinction is made between events at different geographical locations, specifically between the dust storm

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experienced on the river at Booligal and the hailstorm sixteen miles 'out back' at 'Alma' station.

The following sentence is from a report written by the 'Hay correspondent' to the *Town and Country Journal*, published on 9 March, 1878. Here the phrase 'out back' describes the pastoral land distant from the river, where wells were the only secure facilities for the provision of water:

> It is gratifying to report that this district has been favoured with a good downpour of rain, but still in some parts not in sufficient quantity to be of any value—as out back on some stations the wells are again at work to water stock.

In its nineteenth century usage 'out back' has an obvious affinity with the word 'back' as used in the phrase 'at the back of', which, in its earliest meaning, the *Australian National Dictionary* defines as 'the part of a station most distant from the homestead or from permanent water'. This meaning can be demonstrated in the following quotation, published in the *Pastoral Times* on 12 October, 1867 (reprinted from the Echuca *Riverine Herald*):

> … we are informed that Mr. Currie, of Karimba station, has been driven from his homestead by the flood, and has had to retreat with the whole of his establishment to some sandhills at the back of his station.

Another related phrase is 'back block(s)', indicating 'land behind that with a water frontage; land on which there is no permanent watercourse'. The following passage was published in the *Pastoral Times* on 26 May, 1859, on the subject of efforts by residents of Lang's Crossing-place (later to become the township of Hay) to sink a well on the Old Man Plain, the stretch of country between the Murrumbidgee River and the Billabong Creek:

> Some at Lang's Crossing-Place, on the Murrumbidgee, have subscribed upwards of one hundred pounds towards sinking a well on the centre of the much-dreaded Old Man Plain. The distance across this extensive plain is about fifty miles, and several months in the year there is not a drop of water to be had. Many lives have been lost travelling over these plains, from time to time, and those who are combining to carry out the project of supplying these arid wastes are to be commended. People are beginning to appreciate these 'back blocks', as they are termed, if they succeed, as no doubt they will, in obtaining water by sinking, a very large amount of stock can be depastured on lands now useless solitudes.

The usage of 'back' in its various forms—'back blocks', 'back run, 'back station', 'at the back of' and 'out back'—to describe or denote land that is apart from the river *frontage* seems logical and self-evident in a linguistic sense. In addition there is little doubt that the psychological focus of squatters who leased river-fronted runs was strongly directed towards the river. The length of frontage was an important factor in the value of the pastoral lease and the permanent stream was the prime source of water for the station, for both stock and humans. The river-bank and its environs were almost invariably selected as the most comfortable and practical location for the homestead and many of the subsidiary station buildings. The river was often associated with commercial and personal contact with the outside world: roads and tracks often ran parallel to the river and, when water levels were high, steamers were the preferred means of delivering supplies and transporting wool to market (for example, on the Murrumbidgee from the late 1850s onwards). A similar psychological focus could be attributed to the residents of townships located along the river corridors of inland Australia.

The following quotations provide further illustrations of the usage of 'out back' in describing land away from the river frontages. Bathurst burr (*Xanthium spinosum*) was accidentally introduced into Australia in the early nineteenth century from South America. The pervasive weed gradually spread along the stock-routes and river corridors of inland Australia. The report below, regarding Bathurst burr, was written by the 'Hay correspondent' to the *Pastoral Times* newspaper and was published on 10 March, 1866:

> Too much attention cannot be drawn to this growing pest. It is as yet confined to the roads and rivers, but the crop is most extraordinarily prolific this season. It may appear to some paltry, and that it never can overspread the country. The frontages are literally stocked, and it will take but a few years to find its way out back.

The next passage, describing the Murrumbidgee River flooding its banks during October 1867, was written by the 'Hay correspondent' to the *Pastoral Times* (published on 26 October, 1867):

> The river has been higher here than since the township was formed. There is still a great swamp in front of Murphy's Restaurant, which indeed is surrounded. The water is gone out back through the Mark Tree Scrub, and is said to be swimmable in places. No one here remembers such a volume of water, and its extending so far out on the plains.

The earliest citation for 'outback' in the *Australian National Dictionary* is from the *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* (17 April, 1869):

> Grass will be abundant out back, and those pleasant and welcome visitors the travelling sheep will have comfortable quarters all the way down the river.

This quotation is used to illustrate the meaning 'Out in or to country which is remote from a major centre of population'. However, the alternate meaning explored in this article—of land beyond the river frontage—cannot be precluded, and could also be applied to the phrase 'out back' within this passage. This applies also to other early citations for 'outback' in the *Australian National Dictionary*.

In *Australian English: An Historical Study of the Vocabulary 1788–1898*, W.S. Ramson discusses the Australian use of particularisers such as 'back', 'head' and 'out':

> *Out-* had a more general application in British English, and words like *outsettler* and *outsettlement* are recorded from the eighteenth century. Both of these were in use in Australia shortly after 1800, and words like *out-squatter*, which had a fairly short life, and *out-station* were presumably modelled on them. The use of *back-*, as in *back-blocks*, *back station*, and, further out still, *outback*, seems to replace *out-*, in its more general application, in the latter part of the century.

Ramson seems to suggest here that the combination of two particularisers in the case of 'out back' has a sort of magnifying effect, leading to a meaning with associations of 'remote parts of the country'. This may apply to the meaning of 'outback' as it was used in the late-nineteenth century, during the period of romanticisation of Australian English epitomised by the writers at the *Bulletin*. However, to residents of the stations and townships of the Riverina in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the phrase 'out back' was probably just an elliptical construction, shortening phrases such as '*out* to the *back* of the run' or '*out* in the *back* blocks'.

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Buy a Pair of Socks and a Dictionary–Win £351

Julia Robinson

'GREAT ALL-AUSTRALIAN PICTURE CONTEST. REAL MONEY EARNED EASILY' shout the headlines in *Smith's Weekly*, a Sydney newspaper. The date is 12 April, 1924. Beneath the headline is a large illustration by Percy Lindsay (brother of Norman and Lionel) containing 72 small pictures of objects, people, animals, and birds. Each picture is numbered. To enter the contest you must write the numbers 1–72 on a sheet of paper and, beside each number, the name 'by which the object represented is known in Australia'. The rules are very firm on this point: 'Example: the Australian term for a person in military dress is 'Digger', not soldier... you must use THE AUSTRALIAN TERM to describe each object.'

The contest was an advertising promotion by the Direct Hosiery Company of Sydney to 'stimulate the sale of useful articles which one has to purchase at frequent intervals', such as socks, hats, stockings, hair tonic, fountain pens, and Australian books. The more you buy when you send in your entry, the more cash you can win. If you buy nothing, you are eligible for a first prize of £1; a bottle of hair restorer or a pair of socks will qualify you for a first prize of £20, and if you go mad and buy seven items you are in the running for £351.

As an aid to contestants, one of the items on offer was Gilbert H. Lawson's *A Dictionary of Australian Words and Terms*, containing all the answers for the contest: 'should you use ... a term not contained in Lawson's Dictionary, you will know at once that you are in the wrong.' This little dictionary has some 850 entries. It was printed in Balmain, presumably circa 1924, and 'compiled specially for the Direct Hosiery Company ... to aid those competing in its series of Australian Picture Puzzle Contests'. (You can see it online at <http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Dictionary_of_Australian_Words_And_Terms>)

A fortnight after the contest was published in *Smith's Weekly*, it appeared in the *Sydney Truth*, which helpfully printed the whole text of Lawson's dictionary on the same page. The *Truth* word list gave the editors of the *Australian National Dictionary* ten quotations—four of them the first evidence for entries. Later, James Lambert drew our attention to the standalone dictionary and to further significant quotations.

But who is Gilbert H. Lawson, and why did he compile a word list for the Direct Hosiery Company? Was he commissioned by the company? Was he a company employee? Was he already an amateur lexicographer collecting Australianisms, or did he start from scratch with a list of 72 picture puzzle words? We don't know. All we do know is that Lawson has given us some useful evidence of Australianisms at a period—the 1920s—in which interest in the Australian lexicon was at a low ebb. It falls between two landmarks of Australian lexicography: E.E. Morris's *A Dictionary of Austral English* in 1898, and Sydney J. Baker's *A Popular Dictionary of Australian Slang* in 1941.

Lawson's 850 entries cover a wide semantic range. There are well-established Australianisms (*dinkum*, *larrikin*), recently coined terms from the early twentieth century (*bosker* 'bonzer', *squiz* 'a look'), words coined during the First World War (*furphy*, *Anzac*), words reflecting life in the bush (*homestead*, *jackaroo*), Aboriginal words (*baal* 'no', *gibber-gunyah* 'rock shelter'), names for plants and animals (*brumby*, *wattle*), occupations (*bookie*, *pastoralist*), and phrases and idioms (*spare me days* 'an exclamation', *up to putty* 'worthless'). The list includes a number of non-Australianisms. Slang terms such as *crikey*, *blim'my* (blimey), *O.K.*, *'struth*, *fed up*, *buzz off*, and, rather quaintly, *oh! I say*, give us a flavour of contemporary Australian speech. Lawson also records several pronunciations considered substandard: *ain't*, *dunno*, *'eading* ('heading', in two-up). Their inclusion suggests these pronunciations were widespread.

The most interesting items for the Centre are those providing quotations for the second edition of *AND*. Lawson has earlier and later evidence for existing headwords, evidence that fills chronological gaps, and evidence for new entries. For example, *magsman* ('a talker') predates our earliest quotation by fourteen years, and *nobblerise* (to drink 'nobblers', or glasses, of spirits) updates our evidence by twenty-five years. He gives us the first evidence for four new entries: *stop one* ('have a drink'), *go him* ('to attack'), *duds* ('trousers'), and *lousy* ('tight-fisted').

Some significant gaps in *AND* entries can be filled thanks to Lawson. An example is *quoll*, now the preferred term for what was once called *native cat*. *AND*'s evidence begins in 1770 with a quotation from the journal of Joseph Banks, Captain Cook's naturalist on the *Endeavour*. The evidence then skips forward to 1898 when E.E. Morris records it, and leaps again to the 1960s. Lawson is the first person in the twentieth century to mention it. Since his definition parrots Morris, we can assume he found it there.

An interesting group of words are those coined during the First World War. They include *furphy* ('rumour'), *dizzy limit* ('intolerable'), *Anzac button* ('a nail used as a makeshift button'), *onkus* ('disagreeable'), and *stonkered* ('exhausted', 'drunk'). They are first recorded in war diaries and armed services magazines published in the field. Lawson provides the first evidence of these words in a non-military context within six years of the end of the war. Did he hear these as a soldier himself, or was he reflecting the rapid spread of soldier slang into everyday Australian speech?

Many questions remain about Gilbert Lawson, but all we know for certain comes from his dictionary. As a lexicographer, he is at best a keen amateur. Many of the entries are poorly defined, and many are not Australian. But he has a good ear for the informal, for many recent coinages (such as *trawler* 'police van', first evidence 1923), and he shows an interest in usage, noting, for instance, that a particular word is 'now obsolete'. We think he was familiar with Morris's dictionary. We suspect he was no zoologist—his definition of platypus is '[a] remarkable indigenous animal forming a link between bird and beast'. However, collecting and defining 850 terms is no small thing, and whatever prompted his efforts, we are grateful he did so.

Postscript

The Great All-Australian Picture Contest can be seen on our website at <http://www.anu.edu.au/andc/pubs/ozwords/index.php>, for those who wish to try their hand at the contest. We are not offering a prize, but then neither do you have to buy socks, a dictionary, or hair restorer. Staff at the Centre tried their collective hand at the contest recently, and were humbled to find it harder than expected.

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Sydney Whispers

Mark Gwynn

The *Australian National Dictionary* (*AND*) is a dictionary based on historical principles. As is the practice with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *AND* uses quotations from written sources to illustrate the meanings and uses of words. While this principle works well for standard words, with colloquial words the written evidence is sometimes hard to find. Through much of the twentieth century many Australian colloquialisms were often used in speech, but they rarely appeared in print. The early *Bulletin* at the end of the nineteenth century, and *Truth* in the early twentieth century, are notable exceptions to the usual omission of colloquialisms—these publications provided the *AND* with hundreds of quotations that help to tell the story of early Australian English in its more informal settings. Following in this tradition came Sidney Baker's *Popular Dictionary of Australian Slang* in 1941, one of the first attempts in the twentieth century to list and define the more common colloquial expressions heard in Australia. Baker followed this with *The Australian Language* in 1945. Newspapers continued to be a source of evidence for some colloquialisms, but a significant shift occurred in the 1960s when various cultural norms and taboos were being challenged—at this time new publications, such as the *Kings Cross Whisper*, emerge that do not shy away from using colloquialisms, and thus provide lexicographers with a wealth of evidence about Australian colloquial English.

The Sydney *Kings Cross Whisper* began its life as a spoof newspaper marketed to the thousands of New Year's Eve revellers descending on the infamous and bohemian Kings Cross in 1964. Sold on street corners and outside pubs and clubs throughout Kings Cross and beyond, it gained a reputation for its salacious and satirical articles and photographs, until its demise in about 1977. Writing under various pseudonyms, the contributors to this newspaper, many of whom also wrote for mainstream publications, had the licence to be provocative, irreverent, and just downright cheeky. While lexicography is rarely a dangerous occupation, it can be a somewhat daunting experience to sit in the main reading room of the Australian National Library looking for words in a newspaper such as the *Kings Cross Whisper*, while the observer passing your desk sees only photographs of naked women (increasingly more naked as the years go by) who are liberally flaunted across the pages. Although the *Kings Cross Whisper* was the soft porn of its day, its parodies of current and topical events in the form of 'fake' news can be compared with the *Mavis Bramston Show* of the same period, with later university newspapers, and with later television shows such as *Good News Week*. While the *Mavis Bramston Show* introduced the character *Ocker* in about 1965—a symbol of Australian larrikinism and nationalism—it is the *Kings Cross Whisper* of 1968 that provides the first printed evidence of this term, as it does for many other Australian colloquialisms.

The *AND* contains more than 200 quotations from the *Kings Cross Whisper*, with more than 50 constituting the first evidence for a word. It is therefore an extraordinarily rich source for Australianisms. The criminal underworld and the prostitution industry, long associated with Kings Cross, are well represented in this evidence. There is *pound* ('solitary confinement'), *trac* ('refractory prisoner'), *necking* ('a method of pick pocketing'), and *grey death* ('prison stew'). Rhyming slang is well represented: *ducks and drakes* ('shakes, i.e. delirium tremens'), *pork and bean* ('queen'), *Molly the monk* ('drunk'), *septic tank* ('Yank'), *John Bull* ('full'), and *steak and kidney* ('Sydney'). The first evidence for *chuck* as a noun meaning 'an act of vomiting' is found in a 1966 issue: 'He sat down in the gutter to have a bit of a chuck and flaked out.' Similarly, the first evidence for the adjective *scungy*, meaning 'disagreeable' or 'sordid', is found in an issue of the same year: 'This is a week for good relations. Unfortunately you don't have any, because they are all a bunch of scungie cruds.' The first evidence for *bikkies*, meaning 'money', is also found in a 1966 issue: 'Here in Kings Cross cabbage means money, and so does ... lolly, bikkies and fat.' Other quotations used by the *AND* as the first evidence for a word include those for the entries *ratshit*, *grog artist*, and *cocky cage* (as in the idiom 'a mouth like the bottom of a cocky's cage').

A culmination of the kinds of Australian colloquialism found in the *Kings Cross Whisper* appeared in 'The Whisper All-Aussie Dictionary', the first part of which was published in issue 32 of the newspaper in 1967, and continued to issue 43 of that year. The introduction to this dictionary ran:

> For the first time the real drum on Aussie Jack Lang. So get off the blurter and have a bridge at this lot. A lot of mugs have had a go before at this, but 'Whisper' has cracked it for the ridgey didge Australian dictionary.

The words used in this introduction are representative of the dictionary as a whole, containing colloquialisms from international English—*mug* ('a simpleton') and *have a go at* ('attempt')—and Australianisms: *drum* ('the news'), *Jack Lang* ('slang'), *blurter* ('posterior'), *cracked it* ('succeeded'), and *ridgey didge* ('genuine'). The term *bridge* (later defined in the dictionary as 'a look') is a mystery: it will, perhaps, turn out to be another Australianism. Although the dictionary is quite brief (for example only eleven words are listed under 'A'), at least half of the words could be described as Australian. This may not sound entirely 'ridgey didge', but many later dictionaries, and especially many present-day word sites found on the Web, purportedly containing Australian content, have far fewer Australian words as a proportion. The 'Whisper All-Aussie Dictionary' contains a mixture of 'classic' Australianisms such as *sheila*, *jackaroo*, *chook*, *crook*, and *damper*, with more recent words that were likely heard on the streets of Kings Cross and beyond.

The list below shows a selection of words from the dictionary that have been used by the *AND* as the first evidence (i.e. 1967) for that word:

Cluey: A cluey person is one who has many ideas of ways and means of getting money.

Daggy: To be dirty. Same as warby and scungy.

Freckle: The anus. Also blot.

Had the richard: Tired, weary, same as frigged.

Spunky: A young female.

The 'Whisper All-Aussie Dictionary' is not attributed to an author and there is no evidence that the material has been taken from another dictionary or word list. Its significance as a source of Australian colloquialisms has continued in the preparation of the second edition of the *AND*—evidence from the *Kings Cross Whisper* is used in some 50 of the new entries. The following entries from the 'Whisper All-Aussie Dictionary' provide the earliest evidence for new entries in *AND*:

Clacker: The posterior.

Daks: Trousers. Same as terrace houses.

Flum: A fluke, a lucky chance.

Optic: A pervert, from optic nerve, perve.

Squatter's daughter: Water. Sometimes shortened to squatters.

In a period when there were no general dictionaries of Australian English, it was in the popular tradition of newspapers such as the *Truth*, and in books written by Sidney Baker, that Australian colloquialisms were used, defined, and celebrated. The *Kings Cross Whisper* is part of this popular tradition and has become a valuable source of quotations for the historical lexicographer.

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A Hoon by any Other Name...

Bruce Moore

The *Newcastle Herald* pointed to 1997 as the year 'in which the NSW government introduced its infamous "hoon" laws, allowing police to impound cars for three months for drivers caught doing "donuts" or spinning their wheels for prolonged periods' (3 January 1998). By 2008, most States and Territories had their own *hoon laws* or *anti-hoon laws*. South Australia: 'The Government broadened hoon laws last year to allow police to immediately home-clamp or impound an offender's vehicle for up to seven days (Adelaide *Advertiser*, 23 July, 2008); Northern Territory: 'Transport Minister Delia Lawrie will wait to hear from an expert group before strengthening anti-hoon laws' (*Northern Territory News*, 9 April, 2008); Western Australia: 'The Holden SS ute he was driving was seized temporarily for 48 hours under WA's anti-hoon laws' (*West Australian*, 16 April, 2008); Tasmania: 'Mr Goodman said current hoon laws where cars are impounded for 48 hours for a first offence had a greater impact' (Hobart *Mercury*, 22 January, 2008). And so on. *Hoon* laws exist in some form right across Australia. Who are these *hoons* for whom such laws have been specially made? What exactly does the term *hoon* mean in Australia in 2008?

The word *hoon* has a fascinating history in Australian English. Its first appearance is in Xavier Herbert's novel *Capricornia* (1938):

> 'You flash hoon', he went on. 'Kiddin' you're white, eh? But you aint no whiter than Peter Pan, and no better. You only had the luck to be taken out of a niggers' camp, you son of a gin.

The term is clearly derogatory, although its precise connotations are not clear. Gary Simes in *A Dictionary of Australian Underworld Slang* (1993), quotes a 1941 letter from Xavier Herbert to Sidney Baker (the letter is in the Baker Papers at the Mitchell Library in Sydney), obviously Herbert's reply to a query from Baker about his use of the term *hoon* in *Capricornia*. Herbert wrote:

> 'Hoon' is ancient Australian—West Australian at least, heard in my youth. Yes, it means a worthless person.

There is no other evidence that *hoon* is an 'ancient' Australian word, and there is no other evidence to link it specifically to Western Australia. The definition 'a worthless person', however, is very useful information about the early connotations of the term.

The sense 'a worthless person' continues in the published evidence, and the first part of the *Australian National Dictionary's* definition of *hoon* extends this to 'a lout, an exhibitionist', an interpretation of what is occurring in some early derogatory uses: '"You're a witty hoon." The sergeant dismissed Dixon with a glare' (R. Tullipan, *March into Morning*, 1962); 'Bugger me dead if the little hoon of a landlord didn't turn up with two coppers' (*Swag* (Sydney), no. 4, 1968). In these two early uses, and in the Herbert use, the connotations of loutishness are not strongly to the fore, and if we substitute 'fool' or 'prick' the derogatory connotations come across as clearly intended. The 'loutish' associations are present in later uses of the term. It seems that *hoon* was initially a general term of abuse, and that the connotations of loutishness came later.

We have seen that Baker gathered the definition 'worthless person' from Herbert in 1941. In his 1945 book *The Australian Language*, Baker lists Herbert's use of *hoon* in *Capricornia* (p. 312), although without giving a definition, and in a section on 'good and bad' terms in 'the city' Baker lists *hoon* as a term for 'fool', along with such terms as *tonk*, *twit*, and *drip*. By 1953, however, when he published *Australia Speaks*, Baker knew a new sense: '*hoon* or (by rhyme) *silver spoon*, a procurer of prostitutes' (p. 124). Later, on the same page, Baker adds: 'Women whose activities are not organised by hoons, and who, accordingly, work lone-handed or in pairs, are called battlers.' Here, too, is the older Australian sense 'prostitute' for *battler* (see *Ozwords*, May 2004), with the information that the battler is a prostitute without the 'protection' of a pimp. The prostitute's pimp, of course, was also called a *bludger* (see *Ozwords*, December 2001), because he was originally a lout who would not hesitate to use a bludgeon. Thus three key Australian words—*battler*, *bludger*, and *hoon*—at one stage existed side by side in the murky world of pimps and prostitution. *Hoon* and *bludger* are brought together in the following passage from a 1980 text that looks back to wartime Sydney: 'The Yanks were still there but the girls had a whisper that the American Army was shifting to Brisbane. The brothels would go with them. Bill thought we should follow the girls. "We can be hoons, mate!" he laughed. "A couple of Terry toons." I didn't say much, there was a stigma to being a bludger, to living off the proceeds' (M. Williams, *Dingo*!).

The earliest evidence for the 'pimp' sense of *hoon* occurs (just a few years before Baker's *Australia Speaks*) in the Sydney *Sun* in 1949: 'The Vice Squad ... had in large measure stamped out the evils of young male procurers (the trade name is "hoons")' (14 June). It certainly seems that this is the same word as *hoon* in the sense 'worthless person', or a general term of abuse, rather than an independent formulation. This is enforced from a string of abuse in G. Wyatt's *Strip Jack Naked* (1966): 'Fanny the Fourpeny was no mean tonguelasher, either. "Snake!" she hissed. "Worm! Seducer! Bludger! Hoon! Poonce!"'. Here, too, is the standard English *ponce* 'pimp' transformed into its Australian variant *poonce*, where it is both specifically a term for 'a homosexual' and a general term of abuse for a man. Here, *poonce*, *bludger*, and *hoon* are general terms of abuse, although all still carry something of their sexual allusions.

Most Australians will be unaware of this 'pimp' sense of *hoon*, since it has now disappeared from Australian English. It is mentioned in the 1967 *King's Cross Whisper* glossary of Australian English (discussed by Mark Gwynn on p. 9), where it is defined as 'a male living partly or fully on the earnings of prostitution' and 'a taker of the red bob' (where *red bob* or 'red shilling' must be a reference to money gained by illicit means). The term was still around in the 1980s, as illustrated by this passage from the magazine *Cleo*:

> I know girls who choose to support a pimp. I think a lot of street girls have hoons. It's mostly one hoon to a girl, but some hoons have two or three, even six girls working for them. Often the hoons get girls when they're very young and from out of town, who don't know their way around. I don't know how common it is but a lot of girls choose to support a man. God knows why. (*Cleo*, March 1989).

The relationship between the two senses of *hoon* so far delineated is not entirely clear. The hoon-pimp does not fit into the specific category of 'fool', although Xavier Herbert's definition 'worthless person' would certainly fit—perhaps what they share is the fact that they are targets of general abuse. The traditional association of the pimp with criminal behaviour and standover tactics, however, perhaps explains two closely-related strands of meaning for the term *hoon* in the sense 'lout'. One kind of hoon-lout engages in various kinds of antisocial behaviour:

> A father, taking his son to his new high school after the holidays, couldn't figure out what the untidy and badly dressed group was doing in the grounds. The shock came when he discovered they were members of the staff—teachers and teachers' aides. 'I thought they were hoons', he said. (*Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 8 February, 1981)

A Hoon by any Other Name...

Bruce Moore

> Over the past 10 years these particular lights have been replaced with the same flimsy glass and metal-capped contraptions after countless assaults by bottle- and stone-throwing hoons'. (*Canberra Times*, 4 March, 1998)

In these passages the *hoon* is the *larrikin* of the 1890s, the *bodgie* of the 1950s, and the *bogan* of the 1990s. The antisocial behaviour of the lout sometimes appears as the threats of the standover thug, and it is here that the connection with the hoon-pimp is very evident: 'Why not try Luther Huck, he'd frighten the daylights out of any developers' hoons' (S. Geason, *Dogfish*, 1991). 'Chopper' Read in his book *Chopper* (1993) similarly describes standover-merchants: 'A group of the hoons decided to get into me and give me the big needle.'

The next development in the history of *hoon* is one that brings us to its present meaning in Australian English. At some stage, the connotations of loutish behaviour narrowed to a specific kind of loutish behaviour—the antics of young men driving fast cars, especially in a very 'flashy' manner. While the car hoon is often an ostentatious performer, it is the illegal loutishness that links him to the touting pimp, rather than popular stereotypes of the flashily-dressed spiv, as *flash as a rat with a gold tooth*. The fact that this specific sense of the car hoon does not appear in the *Australian National Dictionary* (1988) indicates that its appearance is relatively recent, even if most of us think that such hoons have been around forever. The sense belongs to the mid 1980s: 'Hoons drive past with bare bums hanging out of the window fairly frequently' (*Age* (Melbourne), 14 March, 1988). Most of our recent evidence for the term *hoon* derives from the antisocial, young, and almost invariably male driver of fast or souped-up cars:

> Traffic-calming devices in a Balgowlah street will be removed after reports that speeding hoons are using the hillside stretch as an obstacle course. (*Manly Daily*, 10 July, 1998)

> Many suburbs have them—the hoon street, where Sydney's wheel-spinning communities gather to rev their engines, smoke their tyres and race their mates. Speedy as they are behind the steering wheel, however, hoons aren't that quick at getting the message. Visitors to The Rocks (a prime hoon zone) in recent years would have noticed the not-infrequent appearance of police anti-hoon squads, checking car specifications and taking dodgy vehicles off the road. That should have been enough to warn the hoons away, but no. They keep returning to The Rocks, like petrol-scented moths drawn to flame. (*Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 1 August, 2008)

In the evidence set out so far, *hoon* has been a noun (although it was also used adjectivally in the last quotation). *Hoon* appears as a verb too. In the 'pimp' sense, the printed evidence for the verb is late, but the reference is usually to earlier Sydney days (suggesting that it was used then), as in Billy Thorpe's 1996 reminiscence *Sex and Thugs and Rock 'n' roll: a year in Kings Cross 1963–1964*: 'She's been hawking it upstairs all week and this young mug's hooning for her.' Most of the evidence for *hoon* as a verb, however, is for the lout driving the car, and while *hoon* can appear by itself, it is usually followed by *around* or *along*:

> He hoons around Melbourne at dangerously high speeds in search of cabbies to harass. (R.T. Hoser, *Taxi*, 2000)

> If road safety is the speed cameras' main purpose, then Urban Sevices should locate them in streets such as Julia Flynn Avenue in Isaacs—a 60 km/h zone—used by motorists of both genders to hoon along, often in excess of 100 km/h. (*Canberra Times*, 10 June, 2002)

Other senses and forms of *hoon* have been generated by the noun and verb. A *hoon* can also be the fast ride itself: 'Jackson has already gone for two 4 am hoons around Sydney' (*Herald Sun*, 21 November, 1996). *Hoonery* alludes to the behaviour of hoons of many kinds: 'The dull mumblings and intermittent hoonery of the bear pit of the House of Representatives' (P. Garrett, *Political Blues*, 1987); 'There proves to be sufficient grip when a corner is taken with some gusto, not that such hoonery is likely from typical owners of the save-the-planet car' (*Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 28 December, 2003). The verbal noun *hooning* is well established as a description of the car-hoon's activities. The adjective *hooney* refers to loutish behaviour. *Hoondom* refers to the general world of hoons or their behaviour. A *hoonmobile* is the kind of car you would expect a hoon to be driving.

Where does the word *hoon* come from? New Zealand also has the word *hoon*, but there is no evidence there of the Australian 'pimp' sense. The fool, the lout, and the car-obsessed hooligan, however, are variants of the *hoons* who exist in their *hoonery* on both sides of 'The Ditch'. Just as the hoon-pimp is exclusive to Australia, New Zealand has also had its own sense of *hoon*. During the Second World War, people who were in detention camps because they objected to military service on political or humanitarian grounds were called *hoons*, in contrast to those who objected to military service on religious grounds. There is no evidence of this sense being used in Australia, and it does not help us in the search for the possible origins of *hoon*.

In his Dictionary of *Australian Underworld Slang*, Gary Simes puts together the prison glossaries of Ted Hartley, who had spent time in prison in 1943 and 1944 as a conscientious objector, and of a prisoner known only as 'Thirty-five' (the last two digits of his prison number), a former school teacher who was in prison on a life sentence. Hartley's glossary is dated 1945, and he does not include the term *hoon* at all (confirmation that the New Zealand conscientious objector sense did not exist in Australia). 'Thirty-five' includes *hoon* in his 1950 glossary, and defines it as 'one who lives on the proceeds of prostitution'. 'Thirty-five' had access to some of Sidney Baker's books, and he comments that Baker lists *hoon* in the sense 'fool'. 'Thirty-five' goes on to suggest that *hoon* might be a contraction of Swift's *Houyhnhnm(s)* in *Gulliver's Travels*, but the *Houyhnhnms* are the wise and civilised horses, and it is the *Yahoos* who are the deformed louts. Again, this does not lead us to a possible origin.

When dealing with *hoon*, all dictionary makers have come to the conclusion: 'origin unknown'. Eric Partridge in his *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (1937) pointed out that the word *whore* was often altered in pronunciation to forms that were written down as *hoor*, *hooer*, *hooa*, and *hoa*, and that these terms could be used figuratively of men as a general term of insult and abuse. The form *hooer* was very common in Australian English from the 1950s, used as a general term of abuse and applied to either sex (the form *hoor* continues to be used in this sense in Irish English). In 1952 T. A. G. Hungerford writes: 'Cranky old hooer. Always on the bloody job' (*The Ridge and the River*). In 1955 D'Arcy Niland in *The Shiralee* writes: 'Get out of here, you drunken *hooer*.' Is it possible that *hooer* was somehow altered to *hoon*, to describe the procurers of the literal hooers?

Such a transformation does not seem very convincing linguistically, and so we are left with the realisation that while these yahoo-like hoons will continue to disturb the peace of our cities and suburbs, just as their bludging forerunners hooned the moral tranquillity of Australian society from the 1940s to the 1980s, we, the disturbed, cannot have the satisfaction of knowing the origin of the term by which we disparage and condemn them.

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 30: RESULTS

Readers were asked to clerihew (poke witty fun at, in four lines of verse) prominent Australians. There was some uncertainty about who qualified as an 'Australian' in the 18th and 19th centuries, but we decided that if a clerihewee appeared in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, that was good enough for us. **ED**.

Honourable Mentions (Space will allow only a very small selection of these here. However, a complete list of (publishable) entries is available at <http://www.anu.edu.au/andc/pubs/ozwords/index.php>);

Ms Daisy Bates/Had lots of Aborigines for mates/While domiciled/In the wild. — **George Bezzera** (Vic)

Archbishop Pell/Won't go to hell/Because (I know it's scary)/The devil is a fairy. — **Mona Black** (Qld)

The legendary Buckley/Became famous unluckily./When asked, 'Did you have much fun?'/He replied 'Nunn.' — **Gilbert Case** (Qld)

Governor Macquarie/Would one day feel sorry/That his good lady's chair/Became a thoroughfare. — **Jim Dewar** (NSW)

Peter Cundall, Tassie devil,/Gives advice that's on the level/'Plant some vegies in a plot/And snails will eat the bloomin' lot.' — **Lee Evans** (WA)

Menzies, Sir Bob,/An inveterate snob,/Made sure that the Queen/Did not pass by unseen. — **Peter Harley** (SA)

(*To be read aloud, with a 'Julia Gillard' accent*): Kevin 07/The brightest in heaven/With the moon for his dial/And the sun from his tail! — **Hans Hogerheyde** (Qld)

Mr Michael ('fish') Klim/Trim and slim from the gym/Poses medallioned with gold/As prize pin-up centrefold. — **Frank Leishman** (Qld)

Dame Edna Everage/Has considerable leverage,/Considering that she/Is really a he. — **Marie Mahood** (Qld)

Ms Germaine Greer/Explained with a sneer,/'Who needs Adam's rib/When you've got Women's Lib!' — **Sue McCarthy** (NSW)

Melba, Dame Nellie/Was never on telly/But was quite contented/That it hadn't been invented. — **David Mercer** (SA)

Shane Warne/To the game of cricket born/He'll bamboozle and amaze/With his wicket, wicket ways. — **Sydney Robson** (Qld)

Jackie Howe/Sheared sheep ... like wow!/His name was synonymous/With an undergarment eponymous. — **Sydney Robson** (Qld)

Cecilia May Gibbs/Never told fibs/Save when she took pen/To the Banksia Men. — **David Tribe** (NSW)

Sir Gustav Nossal/Was quite colossal:/He proved superior/To most bacteria. — **Peter Williams** (NSW)

EQUAL 2ND PRIZE (BOOKS TO THE VALUE OF $50 FROM THE OUP CATALOGUE):

Lachlan Macquarie/Declined to say 'Sorry'./He thought that could wait/Until twenty-oh-eight. — **Edgar Castle** (SA)

Sir Gustav Nossal/(The dear old fossil)/Wrote a big papyrus/About a tiny virus. — **Verity Praed** (WA)

1ST PRIZE (BOOKS TO THE VALUE OF $100 FROM THE OUP CATALOGUE):

Said Captain Cook,/'I came to look./I'm not a failure./I found Australia.' — **Paul Drakeford** (Vic)

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 31

In my article on the bunyip I quoted the Australian poet and critic A.D. Hope referring to the 'mythical Great Australian Novel' and suggesting that the search for it is akin to the search for the bunyip. How long does the bunyippy Great Australian novel have to be? It is reported that the novelist Ernest Hemingway, when challenged to write a novel in six words, came up with: 'For Sale. Baby Shoes. Never Worn.' He is said to have claimed this to be the best novel he'd written. Many have tried to emulate Hemingway's triumph of brevity and pathos, and writing the six-word novel has become a favourite literary game of wordsmiths. A 2006 competition in *Wired* magazine came up with gems such as these: 'Longed for him. Got him. Shit.'—*Margaret Atwood*; 'We kissed. She melted. Mop please!'—*James Patrick Kelly*; '1940: Young Hitler! Such a cantor!'—*Michael Moorcock*; 'Easy. Just touch the match to'—*Ursula Le Guin*; 'Bush told the truth. Hell froze.'—*William Gibson*; 'Metrosexuals notwithstanding, quiche still lacks something.'—*David Brin*. Your task is to catch the bunyip: write the six-word Great *AUSTRALIAN* Novel (emphasis intended). ED.

ENTRIES CLOSE 1 MARCH 2009.

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

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