EDITORIAL

In my lead article 'Boomerang, Boomerang, Thou Spirit of Australia!' I have drawn on some of David Nash's research on borrowings into Australian English of words from Aboriginal languages. David's work on the word *boomerang* appeared in 'Australian Aboriginal Words in English: A Reaction', in *International Journal of Lexicography*, 22 (2009), 179–88. This was a response to R.M.W. Dixon, 'Australian Aboriginal Words in English: A History', in *International Journal of Lexicography*, 21 (2008), 129–52.

There is further material on *boomerang* by David Nash at the University of Sydney's Linguistics Department's blog Transient Languages & Cultures. See <http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/elac/>. The article on *boomerang* is called 'An "unsaleable bent stick", boomerangs, and yardsticks' (posted 6 October 2008, <http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/elac/2008/10/an_unsaleable_bent_stick_boome.html>). On the same site, see also David's research on *dingo* 'Sydney Language -mb- ~ -m- and dingo' (posted 14 November 2008, <http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/elac/2008/11/sydney_language_mb_m_and_dingo.html>) and *wombat* 'The wombat trail' (posted 16 January 2009, <http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/elac/2009/01/the_wombat_trail_1.html>).

The fifth edition of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*, edited by Bruce Moore, will be published in October, and some of the new words in this edition are examined in From the Centre (p. 5). Mark Gwynn's editions of the *Oxford Australian Integrated School Dictionary & Thesaurus* and the *Oxford Australian Basic School Dictionary* have also been recently published.

Frederick Ludowyk

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Editor, Ozwords

BOOMERANG, BOOMERANG, THOU SPIRIT OF AUSTRALIA!

FREDERICK LUDOWYK

Barron Field arrived in Sydney in 1817 as judge of the Supreme Court of Civil Judicature in New South Wales, and left Australia in 1824 after some not entirely happy relationships with many of the major political players in the colony. Lexicographers, however, hold Field in high regard, since it was through his good offices that the convict James Hardy Vaux's *Memoirs*, which included *A Dictionary of the Flash Language* (the first dictionary produced in Australia), was published by the London publishing house John Murray in 1819. In the same year, Field himself published the first book of Australian poetry, a collection of his own poems called *First Fruits of Australian Poetry*. The collection includes a poem called 'The Kangaroo', which begins 'Kangaroo, Kangaroo, / Thou Spirit of Australia!', and is reported to have impressed both Wordsworth and Coleridge. On his return to Britain, Field edited *Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales* in 1825. This book includes an article titled 'The Maritime Geography of Australia' by Captain Phillip Parker King (that had been read before the Philosophical Society of Australia on 2 October 1822), and this article includes our first clear evidence of the word *boomerang*—perhaps second only in importance to *kangaroo* as a quintessential Australian word. P.P. King writes:

> Each tribe speaks a different language from the other; and in a comparative vocabulary of the languages of four different parts of the coast which I formed, the only one of forty words that is similar in all is that for *the eye*. Not thus dissimilar, however, are their weapons. The spear is universal, as is also the throwing-stick; the *boomerang* or *woodah*,—a short crescented weapon, which the natives of Port Jackson project with accurate aim into a rotatory motion, which gives precalculated bias to its forcible fall,—was also seen at Port Bowen on the east coast, and at Goulburn Island on the north.

The weapon described here is unquestionably what we now understand by the term *boomerang* (although it is not clear if this is a *returning boomerang*), and the word used to describe it is spelt in exactly the same way as we spell it today.

In his article on the word *kangaroo* in the April 2007 issue of *Ozwords*, Bruce Moore explained how the word *kangaroo* was collected by Joseph Banks and James Cook in 1770 from the Guugu Yimidhirr people in the area of present-day Cooktown. The origins of Australian words taken from indigenous languages have not always received good treatment from lexicographers, partly because of the lack of research into the languages in the past, partly because of the fact that white settlement had led to the extinction of many languages, and partly because of the common misunderstanding that only one Aboriginal language was spoken across the continent—a language that came to be called, in etymologies, simply 'Aboriginal'. We saw above that Captain P.P. King was aware in the 1820s of the large number of Aboriginal languages in Australia, but that kind of knowledge was often forgotten in dictionaries produced in the first seven decades of the twentieth century. Much research has been done on the etymologies of Aboriginal words in English in the past three decades, and many of the fruits of this research are evident in R.M.W. Dixon et al., *Australian Aboriginal Words in English* (OUP: 1st edn 1990; 2nd edn 2006).

In *Australian Aboriginal Words in English*, in the dictionaries produced by the Australian National Dictionary Centre, and indeed in all dictionaries on the worldwide market, the word *boomerang* is said to be a borrowing from the Dharuk language (or Dharug: Aboriginal languages make no distinction between voiced and voiceless sounds, so that k/g, p/b, and t/d are interchangeable). There has recently been some questioning of the use of the term Dharuk to describe the language that was spoken by Aborigines at Port Jackson, the site of the first convict settlement. The term Dharuk is not recorded until a century later, and some believe it is more appropriately used to describe the language of a people living slightly inland from Port Jackson. Eora is sometimes put forward as an alternative, but while Eora is recorded relatively early as a term for 'person', it is not recorded early as a term for the 'language of a people'. Given the uncertainty, it may well be safest to follow Jakelin Troy's lead in her 1994 book, and call the language that was spoken at Port Jackson 'the Sydney Language'. Whatever we call it, there are many words that were borrowed from this language by the administrators, convicts, and settlers. These words are generally taken to include *bettong, boobook, boomerang, cooee, dingo, gunyah, koala, nulla-nulla, potoroo, waddy, wallaby, waratah, wombat,* and *woomera*. These are some of the best-known words to have been borrowed from Aboriginal languages.

BOOMERANG, BOOMERANG, THOU SPIRIT OF AUSTRALIA!

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If the name of the language to which these words belonged is problematic, some further problems have been raised through the work of the linguist David Nash, who has recently questioned whether all the words in the above list, especially *boomerang*, can be attributed to the Sydney language. The linking of the *word* 'boomerang' to a description of an *object* that is unequivocally a boomerang comes surprisingly late—in the passage quoted above from Captain P.P. King, 37 years after the arrival of the First Fleet. The boomerang is a very distinctive object, so distinctive that it has become one of Australia's major icons. So where were all the boomerangs in the early years of settlement? Why didn't Governors Phillip, Hunter, et al. write in their diaries: 'Today Bennelong showed me a curious weapon called a boomerang. ... The boomerang is curved and made of wood, is thrown and can return to its sender. ... Today I wrote a poem that begins: "Boomerang, Boomerang, / Thou Spirit of Australia".' And so on. But no, not a whisper! The early settlers can be excused for taking their time in spotting a shy and retiring platypus, but it surely wouldn't have been difficult to spot a booming boomerang!

So let us go back over some of the history. When did Europeans first spot the objects that at some stage would come to be called 'boomerangs'? This takes us back to our old mates Joseph Banks and James Cook, at Botany Bay in April 1770, a few months before the *Endeavour* is damaged on coral reefs and beached for repairs near present-day Cooktown—and where Banks and Cook pick up the word *kangaroo*. On 28 April 1770 Banks records in his journal an incident at Botany Bay (the bay into which the Georges River flows). He sees some people on the shore, and describes their weapons:

> All however were armd with long pikes and a wooden weapon made something like a short scymetar. ... [Two of them] held in his hand a wooden weapon about 2½ feet long, in shape much resembling a scymeter; the blades of these lookd whitish and some though[t] shining insomuch that they were almost of opinion that they were made of some kind of metal, but myself thought they were no more than wood smeard over with the same white pigment with which they paint their bodies. These two seemd to talk earnestly together, at times brandishing their crooked weapons at us as in token of defiance.

Since this encounter was at Botany Bay, south of Port Jackson, we should not assume that these indigenous people belonged to the same tribal or language grouping of the people that Governor Phillip would encounter at Port Jackson eighteen years later. The weapon that Banks mentions on two occasions is described as resembling a *scimitar*, a weapon defined by the OED as 'a short, curved, single-edged sword, used among Orientals, esp. Turks and Persians'. If the weapons noted by Banks are what would later be described as boomerangs, they certainly fulfil the condition of being curved (i.e. by being compared to the scimitar, and being called 'crooked'), but there is no evidence about how they were used. From our perspective, we might jump to the conclusion that they were to be thrown, but Banks' comparison with the scimitar suggests that he saw them as sword-like or club-like weapons.

The term *scimitar* is often used in the early records to describe Aboriginal weapons, and it appears as part of the first putative evidence for the word *boomerang*. This is in a manuscript, by an anonymous author writing circa 1790–92, called 'Vocabulary of the language of N.S. Wales in the neighbourhood of Sydney'. The original is held in the Marsden Collection in the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. The entry reads: 'Boo-mer-rit the Scimeter'. Many believe that this is the word *boomerang*, but as David Nash points out, there are a number of problems with this assumption. First, while *boomerit* resembles *boomerang*, the final syllable with its 't' sound is very un-boomerang-like. Second, it is not entirely clear from the manuscript evidence if this is a word from the Port Jackson area. Third, we do not know what the item was used for, although the use of *scimitar* again suggests some kind of curved fighting weapon.

What is even more surprising is that there is such a huge gap between this piece of ambiguous evidence for *boomerang*, and the next piece of evidence in the passage from Captain P.P. King in 1825 (or 1822 if we take the date of the reading of his paper to the Philosophical Society). Where, oh where, are all the boomerangs?

There are some early commentators on the fledgling colony who are regarded as being especially observant. David Collins is one of these. He was a marine officer who came to Sydney on the First Fleet to be Deputy Judge Advocate. He returned to Britain in 1797, and the following year published *An Account of the English Colony of New South Wales*. This book has proved to be an important source for evidence about new words in Australia. In one section of the book Collins gives a list of Aboriginal words for weapons, which includes words for spears, shields, a stone hatchet, and a throwing stick (using the term 'Wo-mer-ra' which is our *woomera*), but there is no mention of boomerangs unless they are concealed in his list of 'names of clubs': Wood-dah, Can-na tal-ling, Doo-win nul, Can-ni-cull, Car-ru-wang, Wo-mur rang, Gnal-lung ul-la, Tar-ril-ber-re. It is unlikely that 'Wo-mur rang' is a version of *boomerang*, and Collins' evidence enforces the suspicion that the word 'boomerang' was not used in the early colony, and that the object was not used by the indigenous people in the immediate vicinity of Port Jackson. Collins' 'Wood-dah' seems to be the same word as Captain P.P. King's 'woodah' (and King clearly identifies this as meaning 'boomerang' in 1822), but to Collins these weapons are all clubs, and to him there is not a boomerang in sight.

There are two other important pieces in this puzzle that need to be considered. Francis Barrallier was a French-born engineer who came to Sydney in 1800 with the colony's third governor Philip Gidley King. Barrallier engaged in some journeys of exploration, and in 1802 produced a *Journal of the Expedition into the Interior of New South Wales*. He comments on some of the weapons used by the indigenous people in mountain areas to the west of Sydney:

> The natives of this part of the country make use of a weapon which is not employed by, and is even unknown to, the natives of Sydney. It is composed of a piece of wood in the form of half a circle, which they make as sharp as a sabre on both edges, and pointed at each end. They throw it on the ground or in the air, making it revolve on itself, and with such velocity that one cannot see it returning towards the ground; only the whizzing of it is heard. When they throw it along the ground it is exactly like a cannon-ball, knocking down everything on its passage.

There is no doubt that what is being described is the boomerang as we know it, and Barrallier makes the telling observation that this is not a weapon that is used by the Aborigines in the immediate vicinity of Sydney.

Two years later, the *Sydney Gazette* newspaper, 23 December 1804, reports a fight between Aborigines at Farm Cove, the inlet that is now surrounded by the Botanic Gardens, just down from the Opera House:

> The *white* spectators were justly astonished at the dexterity and incredible force with which a bent, edged waddy resembling slightly a turkish scymetar, was thrown by *Bungary*, a native distinguished by his remarkable

courtesy. The weapon, thrown at 20 or 30 yards distance, twirled round in the air with astonishing velocity, and alighting on the right arm of one of his opponents, actually rebounded to a distance not less than 70 or 80 yards, leaving a horrible contusion behind, and exciting universal admiration.

Bungaree was from the Broken Bay area, about 50 km north of Sydney, and came to Sydney in the 1790s. He travelled widely with explorers, and had accompanied Matthew Flinders on his circumnavigation of Australia in 1801 to 1802. It is possible that his Broken Bay people used the boomerang, or he may have gained both the weapon and the knowledge of how to use it on his journeyings. What is significant, however, is the clear impression that this was the first time the 'white spectators' at Sydney had seen such a weapon.

In the light of evidence such as this, David Nash puts forward the theory that the weapon and its *boomerang* name may have been an object and a word from another area, and were 'imported' into the Sydney region well after the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. One potential source for both object and word is the Dharawal people (variously also spelt as Turawal, Tharawal, etc.), who lived to the south of the Port Jackson area. F.D. McCarthy, writing in the 1958 *Australian Encyclopaedia*, claimed that the word 'boomerang' is from Dharawal: 'From the language of the Turawal tribe of the Georges River, near Sydney, the word was originally recorded as *bou-mar-rang*.' Unfortunately, we do not

know McCarthy's source for this claim, but the Georges River features in another piece of information that David Nash discovered in the files at the Australian National Dictionary Centre, bundled up with the 'surplus' cards for the first edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* (and therefore not used in the printed entry for *boomerang*). Charles Throsby was a surgeon who arrived in the colony in 1802 and worked as a medical officer. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* reports that he was granted land at Minto: 'He built Glenfield, named after his birthplace, at Upper Minto and for the next few years concentrated there on pastoral activities.' This area is on the Georges River, and at that time would have been part of the country of the Dharawal people. Throsby also made many journeys of exploration, including further south from his property, deeper into Dharawal country. In an article in the *Australian Magazine* in 1821, Throsby describes the burial of an Aborigine on his property Glenfield:

> The corpse having been let down into the grave, they proceeded, as is their custom, to place his spears, waddie, booncooring, net, tin-pot, and in short, all his worldly riches by his side, the whole of which was then covered up with him.
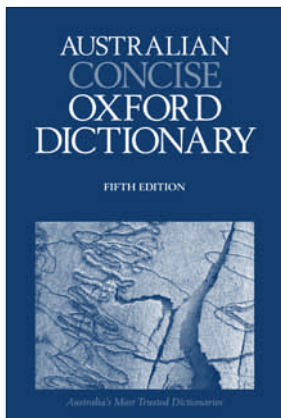
Nash focuses on the unusual-looking word 'booncooring', and wonders if the printer might have misread a handwritten 'mo' as 'nco', and printed 'booncooring' rather than 'boomooring', which would bring us very close to the missing word *boomerang*. Even so, the truth of this speculation is not

necessary to Nash's basic argument, which in essence is this: there is no evidence that the object we call boomerang, or the word *boomerang* itself, were in existence at Port Jackson when the First Fleet arrived in 1788; both object and word must have been imported to the Sydney area at a later date (the object by the early 1800s and the word by the 1820s); the Dharawal language to the south of Sydney is a likely source for the word *boomerang*. Moreover, even if a wordlist of the Sydney language were to appear magically from lost archives with the word *boomerang* in it, there is no evidence that *boomerang* became part of Australian English before the 1820s.

When the great lexicographer James Murray came to write the etymology for *boomerang* in the 1890s for the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, he did not have as much evidence to work with as we have now, but he did have a fair bit. He canvasses the evidence of Collins and others, points to the Bungaree passage from the *Sydney Gazette* in 1804 where the weapon is described but not named, and concludes his etymology with this acute observation: 'the name *boomerang* has not been found in that paper up to 1823.' James Murray clearly suspected that if there had been no mention of *boomerang* in this Sydney paper up to 1823, it was highly unlikely that it came from the Sydney area. David Nash has clearly demonstrated that Murray's suspicions were well founded.

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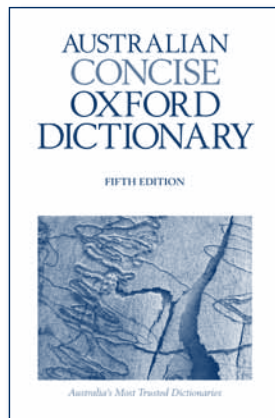
We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those not easily answerable from the standard reference books.

FEED

[We were delighted to receive a long email from Dr Jean Branford in South Africa. Dr Branford edited the *Dictionary of South African English* (OUP 1978), an important forerunner to *A Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* (OUP 1996), on which she also worked. In part of her email, Dr Branford comments on the word *feed*, and that part of her email is printed here.]

I have during the last few weeks with enormous enjoyment been revisiting my Austral material—S.J. Baker, E.E. Morris, C.J. Dennis, W.S. Ramson, John O'Grady, Bill Hornadge, and of course the AND itself, which I use almost every day. In this positive orgy, I have found what I think may be a lacuna in the AND. About the first Australian word to burst upon me—discounting swagman, billabong, *and* jumbuck *of course—was in the seventies when the father of a student of mine, at Rhodes from Sydney, invited us to 'come and have a* feed*', hastily changed for our benefit to 'a meal'. He was a highly educated man, not a Nino Culotta brickie, and it was evidently a usual term in his vocabulary. ... Feed … is used extensively in* They're a Weird Mob *(1957) and even more in* Cop This Lot *(1960), [but] does not appear in the AND. ... I should be most interested to know if any of the Australian English team have views on 'my first Australian word' and its omission.*

Jean Branford, South Africa

Feed is listed in OED as meaning 'a meal; a sumptuous meal; a feast', with supporting quotations ranging from 1808 to 1875. This part of the entry was not revised for the second edition (1989) of OED, and was therefore put together between 1893 and 1897 when the letter F was edited for the first edition. We should therefore not place much significance on the fact that the last illustrative quotation is from 1875: to the editors of OED, 1875 was only yesterday! In 1997 Harry Orsman's *Dictionary of New Zealand English* was published. Orsman included *feed* in the sense 'a solid, heavy or satisfying meal', with quotations from 1840 to 1985. Orsman was aware of the entry in the OED, but obviously felt that this sense of *feed* had become a New Zealandism. Three years before the publication of the *Dictionary of New Zealand English,* the first volume of J.E. Lighter's *Historical Dictionary of American Slang* appeared. This also included an entry for *feed* with the definition 'a meal, especially if big or lavish'. Lighter's illustrative quotations range from 1846 to 1968, and it is surprising, if the sense is still strongly evident in American English,

that he gives no evidence later than 1968. Newspaper searches show that this sense is not current in the UK since, apart from animals, the only recipients of *feeds* are babies. *Feeds* on American sites were also similar when they were not part of the world of baseball. A search on the string *had a good feed* brought up no 'big or solid' meals in the US, but there were many in Australian newspapers. So it may well be that although Lighter's US usage was once common in the US, it has faded there, just as it had faded in the UK at a much earlier date. And so there may well be a case for the inclusion of *feed* as an Australianism in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*. **ED.**

GINGER MEGGS

[B. Smillie of the ACT wrote regarding the reference to Ginger Meggs in Bruce Moore's article 'What's In a Name?' in the previous issue of *Ozwords*: 'Ginger Meggs' is used allusively to refer to a mischievous child, and also as rhyming slang for "legs".'] *Kids 60 years ago came home reciting the following: Ginger Meggs, with bandy legs and a pocket full of crackers. One went off between his legs and blew off both his —.*

EARNT OR EARNED

There has been an argument recently about the past tense of the verb earn. *Is it correct to write* 'the man earnt $20,000'*? Or should it be* 'earned $20,000'*? What are your views?*
JGEL, ACT

There are a number of verbs that, in Australian and British English, can form their past tenses with either –*ed* or –*t.* These include: *burn, dream, lean, leap, learn, smell, spell,* and *spoil.* In American English, however, the –*ed* forms predominate. With some of these verbs, there is a tendency in Australian and British English to use the –*t* forms when the past participle is used adjectivally—thus, we might say *'the milk spilled'* but *'It's no use crying over spilt milk', 'the toast burned'* but *'I hate burnt toast'. Earn,* however, does not belong to this group of verbs, and its simple past tense and past participle have always been *earned.* Dictionaries do not allow the form *earnt.* No doubt many of you will respond—'but I hear *earnt* all the time!' A search of Australian newspapers over the past fifteen or so years revealed that only 2.1% of examples used *earnt* in preference to *earned.* This might perhaps be attributed to the influence of newspaper style guides, but a web search of sites with the .au domain (i.e. Australian sites) resulted in an increase to only 2.6%. This suggests that while *earnt* is often heard

in colloquial speech (no doubt influenced by *learnt*), it is still relatively uncommon in writing. **ED.**

DISSECTING DOOVERS

When I was young we used to have a dish called doovers. *They were small cakes of rice and mince that looked like rissoles. I have not seen this use of the word elsewhere, though I am very familiar with* doover *in the sense 'thingummy', used for anything whose name you can't remember. Are they all the same* doover*?*
L. Waterhouse, Qld

When I first read your letter, I wondered if this culinary use of *doover* was a version of the very common alteration of 'hors d'oeuvres' into 'horses' doovers', but on reflection I think this is not the case. *Doover* in the sense 'a thingummy' is an Australianism. The word appeared during the Second World War in military contexts. In addition to the 'what's-its-name' sense, there is evidence for a specific use of the word—to refer to a dugout or tent as a place of shelter. This will be a new sense in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*. We have also been collecting evidence for another sense of *doover*, almost exactly the same as your sense of 'small cakes of rice that looked like rissoles'. All our evidence for this sense is from the Second World War, especially from prisoner-of-war camps. Later evidence takes the form of reminiscences of the Second World War.

The earliest evidence is from the Sydney *Sun* of 1945 where we are told: 'Doovers are cakes or pasties made from rice.' Rohan Rivett, in his 1946 war memoir *Behind Bamboo*, includes the word with the spelling *doovah* in a Prisoner of War Glossary, with the definition: 'a rice cake'. In 2005 the Hobart *Mercury* published some extracts from Arch and Martin Flanagan's book *The Line*, which deals with the Thai–Burma railway. Arch Flanagan recalls his experience in a POW camp: 'For this task we received some additional ration such as an extra dixie of rice or a doover. Doovers were rice rissoles that also contained vegetables and any available meat. The Queenslanders had named them with this word of theirs which meant "something or other".'

We have no evidence of the word moving out from the war situation to civilian life, but perhaps someone in your family remembered the term from the Second World War. **ED.**

A new edition (the fifth) of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* will be published in October. It includes hundreds of new words.

SEXY WORDS

Sexy in the non-sexual sense 'exciting, trendy' first appeared in international English in the 1950s, and has of course been in our dictionaries for some time. When a new edition of a dictionary appears, the 'sexy' ones receive most attention, since these are the features of the new edition that are often picked up by the popular press. This time, one of the sexy words contains the word 'sex': **sexting** 'the sending of sexually explicit material by mobile phone.' Among the new words, perhaps the most recent to make a worldwide impact is **swine flu** 'a form of influenza in humans caused by a virus that occurs in pigs'. Until recently, only birds twittered and tweeted, but advances in technology have produced a new **twitter** ('a social networking site on the Internet') that has made its way into the dictionary, along with **tweet** as both verb ('send a message to') and noun ('a posting on the twitter social networking site'). The metrosexualisation of the world of men has generated the term **bromance** (a blend of *bro* and *romance*) to describe 'an intimate non-sexual relationship between two men'. The term **weblog**, 'a personal website, on which an individual or groups of users record opinions, links to other sites, etc., on a regular basis', was first recorded in 1997, and found its way into the 2004 edition of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Soon after, the abbreviated form **blog** began to be used widely, and this form now appears in this new edition. **Blog** is joined by its numerous derivatives, including: **blogosphere** 'personal websites and weblogs collectively'; **blogroll** 'a list of links to other blogs or websites'; **moblog** 'a weblog that consists of pictures and other content posted from mobile devices such as mobile phones, PDAs, etc.' (a blend of *mobile* + *blog*); **vlog** 'a blog with most of the content in the form of video clips' (a blend of *video* + *blog*).

The global financial crisis of the past eighteen months has generated a new interest in financial terminology, and new financial terms have found their way into the dictionary: thus **hedge fund** 'an investment fund, typically formed as a private limited partnership, often using credit or borrowed capital and various hedging strategies to limit the effect of market movements on returns'; **Ponzi scheme** 'a form of fraud in which belief in the success of a non-existent enterprise is fostered by payment of quick returns to first investors using money invested by others' (from the name of Charles Ponzi (1882–1949), who perpetrated such a fraud in 1919–20); and **subprime** 'of or relating to credit or loan arrangements

for borrowers with a poor credit history, typically having unfavourable conditions such as high interest rates since the borrowers do not qualify for prime rates or conditions'. Popular culture provides **w00t** (usually written with two zeros rather than two o's), an expression of triumph or excitement, originally used in Internet gaming and role-playing sites, **va-va-voom** ('the quality of being exciting, vigorous, or sexually attractive'), and the acronym **wag** ('a **w**ife **a**nd/or **g**irlfriend of a sports player'). Closer to home lexically, **hornbag** ('a sexually attractive person') finally gets a guernsey, as does the more recent **not happy Jan!**

WEB WORDS

In the previous two editions of this dictionary the new words were often associated with computing and electronic communication, and these areas continue to generate many new terms. In addition to the terms mentioned above, these include: **cloud computing** 'the use of Internet-based servers rather than local servers'; **cyberchondriac** 'a person who excessively self-diagnoses their state of health with reference to Internet medical sites'; **data smog** 'an overwhelming excess of information, esp. that obtained as the result of an Internet search'; **defriend** 'delete (someone) from a list of friends or contacts associated with a weblog or electronic list'; **wiki** 'a website or database developed collaboratively by a community of users, allowing any user to add and edit content' (probably from Hawaiian *wiki* 'fast, quick').

WARM WORDS

In this edition, one of the striking aspects of the new words is the number of them that derive from environmental and ecological concerns, especially the effects of global warming. These include: **agroterrorism** 'terrorist attacks aimed at disrupting or damaging a country's agriculture'; **biocentrism** 'the view or

belief that the rights and needs of humans are not more important than those of other living things'; **carbon footprint** 'the amount of carbon dioxide produced as the result of the activities of a particular person, group, etc.'; **climate canary** 'a small negative change in the natural world that portends a greater catastrophe'; **food mile** 'a unit of measurement of the amount of fuel required to transport foodstuff from producer to consumer' (and note that *food kilometre* has not taken hold in Australia); **freegan** 'a person who seeks to help the environment by reducing waste, esp. by retrieving and using discarded food and other goods' (a blend of *free* + *vegan*); **geosequestration** 'the underground storage of carbon dioxide'; **locavore** 'a person who mainly eats food grown or produced locally' (on the pattern of *carnivore*, *herbivore*, etc.).

AUSSIE WORDS

Some of the Australian words that have been added will cause surprise because few would suspect that they are in fact Australian: **bolar** (often as **bolar blade** or **bolar roast**) 'a cut of beef adjacent to the blade' (perhaps from its roll-like shape); **Boston bun** 'a large yeast bun topped with white or pink icing and coconut' (perhaps through association with the American city of Boston, but the connection is unclear); **bunny rug** 'a baby's blanket' (bunny rugs exist in other countries, but they all have pictures of bunnies on them; in Australia, a bunny rug no longer needs to have such a picture); **Disneyland** '(esp. in sports after a blow to the head) a state of dizziness or unconsciousness' (from the notion of Disneyland as an unreal place, enforced by the similarity of sound between 'Disney' and 'dizzy'); **display home** 'a newly-built home that is available for inspection to encourage viewers to sign a contract for the building of a similar home'; **the duck's guts** 'something extremely impressive; the best of its kind' (like standard English *the cat's whiskers*); **parents' retreat** 'a section of a house where parents can have privacy from their children'.

Other Australian terms include: **babychino**, **barbecue stopper**, **boganism**, **bowlo**, **chook chaser**, **chroming**, **dividend imputation**, **dunny budgie**, **flum**, **hoon laws**, **jeff**, **mortgage stress**, **mungo**, **mystery bag**, **Ozmas**, **pizzling**, **schmick**, **spunk bubble**, **tradie**, **tree change**, **welcome to country**, **wogspeak**. There are also many new terms for flora and fauna from Aboriginal languages, such as: **ampurta**, **antina**, **djoongari**, **goodoo**, **itjaritjari**, **karak**, **magabala**, **moort**, **pombah**, **pondi**, **rakali**, **ulcardo**, **walpurti**, **yolla**. If you don't know some of these terms, you clearly need a new edition of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

Bruce Moore
Director

In some quarters there was dismay and even derision when Prime Minister Rudd used the expression *fair shake of the sauce bottle* in June this year. Some accused the prime minister of not being *the full bottle* on Australian idioms, and of mixing up the Australian *fair suck of the sauce bottle* with the international *fair roll of the dice* and the like. If the idiom is mistaken, however, it is a fairly well-entrenched mistake, first noted by the Australian National Dictionary Centre in a speech by Senator Kemp at a Senate Estimates Committee in 1995: 'Mr Chairman, just so that all of us feel that we have had a fair shake of the sauce bottle, my colleague also has quite a number of environmental questions.'

The underlying idiom is the old and well-established *fair go*, which was first recorded in Australian English in 1904. As an interjection, this means 'steady on!; be reasonable!; give us a go!' By 1924, an expanded variant of *fair go* had appeared: *fair crack of the whip*. From the late 1960s and early 1970s more variants appeared: *fair suck of the sauce bottle* (sometimes abbreviated to *fair suck*), *fair suck of the saveloy* (sometimes abbreviated to *fair suck of the sav*), *fair suck of the sausage*, and finally *fair shake of the sauce bottle*. The tricky element in this process of expansion and change is the precise meaning of *sauce bottle*. Mark Juddery, in his column in the *Canberra Times* on 22 June 2009, expressed his puzzlement at the original phrase ('Sucking the sauce bottle is not only pointless, but also unhygienic') and pointed to the aptness of the 'fair shake' that is so necessary in dealing with sauce bottles in cold weather: 'The sauce is usually so congealed by the cold weather that shaking the bottle conjured the sense of frustration that usually inspires the phrase.' This brings to mind the quatrain by the American poet Richard Willard Armour (1906–89) on the recalcitrant tomato sauce bottle:

> Shake and shake
> the catsup bottle—
> first none'll come
> And then a lot'll.

It is very likely, however, that the *original* 'sauce bottle' contained not reddish stuff made from tomatoes but cheap plonk or beer. *Sauce* in the sense 'alcoholic liquor' is an Americanism, but it had spread to other Englishes by the 1950s. The notion that all members of a group should be treated to their fair swig or 'suck' of the grog bottle (especially a bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag) extends the milieu of the Australian *fair go* to the realm of the down-and-outs—sharing their paper-bagged bottles of grog on the city's park benches.

To those not familiar with the *sauce bottle* of plonk, the idiom *fair suck of the sauce bottle* must have sounded puzzling. Once an idiom becomes befuddled by puzzlement, it is often refashioned or remodelled by the 'folk' (the technical term is 'folk etymology') to make sense. Thus, *one fell swoop* is now very often *one foul swoop*: the word *fell* in the idiom meant 'terrible, destructive', but this word became extinct in standard English and so existed only in the idiom *one fell swoop*. The 'folk' remodelled *fell* so that the idiom made more sense to them, thus transforming *one fell swoop* into *one foul swoop*. The Australian idiom *a wigwam for a goose's bridle* (which functions as a dismissive answer to an unwelcome question, especially one from an inquisitive child) is the product of a similar folk refashioning. The phrase was *a whim-wham for a goose's bridle*, where a *whim-wham* was 'a trifling ornament of dress, a trinket'. *Whim-wham* by itself became obsolete and disappeared from the language, but remained 'fossilised' in the idiom *a whim-wham for a goose's bridle*. Australians refashioned the idiom by replacing *whim-wham* with something more familiar—a *wigwam*.

This process of folk refashioning can take place with compound words as well as with idioms. The Old English (pre-1066) compound *bride-gome* meant *bride's man*, but by the fourteenth century *gome* meaning 'man' had disappeared from the language. The 'folk' got to work on the compound *bride-gome*, and decided that the element *gome* was really a version of the recently-borrowed French word *groom* meaning 'servant': so *bridegome* became *bridegroom*. A similar process can also take place with single words. In the fifteenth century the word *crevice* (also spelt *crevisse*) came into English from French, and was applied to various kinds of freshwater crustaceans. In southern England the word *fish* was *vish* (sometimes written as *viss*), and the folk tradition arose that this *crevice*-creature that lived in the water was a 'fish', as indicated by the *viss* part of it—and so the folk produced the word *crayfish* for a creature that was never a fish (and, indeed, the French word *crevice* is ultimately the same word as our *crab*).

This is the process of folk etymology that lies behind our Prime Minister's *fair shake of the sauce bottle*. Once the sauce bottle became detached from its grog sense, the idiom needed to be refashioned, and it moved from bottles of cheap plonk on park benches to the domesticated world of the backyard barbecue. The literalised barbecue associations of the bottle of congealed sauce perhaps generated the *saveloy* and *sausage* variations. The latest version, *fair shake of the sauce bottle*, shows that for most people, all contact with the original *sauce bottle* has been lost.

INDIGENOUS WORDS

A number of words borrowed from Australian Aboriginal languages were remodelled on existing English words, by the process of folk etymology, no doubt in attempts to make sense of them according to the structures and expectations of the dominant language—English. Some examples are discussed in *Australian Aboriginal Words in English*, ed. R.M.W. Dixon, Bruce Moore, W.S. Ramson, and Mandy Thomas (OUP: 2nd edn 2006), p. 215. The word *budinba* was the name for a marine fish in the Yagara language of the Brisbane region, probably the sea mullet *Mugil cephalus*. This was taken into English, and immediately Anglicised to *pudding-ball*, a fact that many of the early writers comment on. J.D. Lang, in *Cooksland in North-eastern Australia* (1847), writes: 'The species of fish that are commonest in the Bay are mullet, bream, puddinba (a native name, corrupted by the colonists into pudding-ball).' At a later date, from the 1890s onwards, the young of this fish, *Mugil cephalus*, are called *poddy mullet* or simply *poddies*. The term is still widely used, as in this passage from the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* (6 August 2009): 'The Entrance is fishing well for flathead on live poddy mullet.' This seems to be a further alteration of the original word, towards the more familiar *poddy* (as in *poddy calf*), often used to describe hand-fed young animals, and used more generally to describe young animals. Similarly, the Wiradjuri name *wijagula* for the cockatiel was borrowed at the end of the nineteenth century, and immediately 'naturalised' into the more familiar-sounding *wee juggler*. Such 'folk' changes have been evident in the historical development of other indigenous words that have become part of Australian English idioms.

POKING BORAK

The word *borak* is from the Wathawarung language in the Geelong region of Victoria, where it meant 'no, not'. It was borrowed into nineteenth-century pidgin with the same meaning, and then found its way into Australian English in the extended sense 'nonsense, rubbish'. This sense largely died out, but it remained in the phrase *to poke borak at (a person)*, meaning 'to make fun of a person, to deride a person, rubbish a person', first appearing in J.C.F. Johnson's *Christmas at Carringa* (1873): 'Oh! He's a[n] awful cove for to poke borack at a feller.' This phrase is now rare in

Australian English, but it is still occasionally encountered. At some stage there was clearly uncertainty about what *borak* meant in the phrase *to poke borak at*, and Australians searched around for certainty. They came across the very similar word *borax*, the mineral salt used in glassmaking, and as an antiseptic and cleaning agent. It must have made more sense to deride someone by poking *borax* at them, than by poking the now unknown *borak* at them. This change occurs very early, being recorded first in Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl* (1890): 'I don't think it's fair for you always to poke borax at me. Why don't you be serious?' A variant of the idiom occurs more recently in W. Anderson's *Warrigal's Way* (1996): 'As the boys came out, she was kissing me goodnight and as we rode back to camp, I got a heap of borax off them, but good natured.' In nineteenth-century Australia, the mining sense of *mullock* meaning 'mining refuse' (especially in *mullock heap*) developed a more general meaning of 'rubbish, nonsense'. This was identical with the sense of *borak*, and *mullock* was also similar in sound to *borak*. By 1916 the phrase *to poke mullock*, meaning exactly the same as *to poke borak*, had appeared, suggesting a folk etymology shift from *borak* to the more familiar *mullock*.

BUTCHER

As well as words from Aboriginal languages, words from other non-English languages were subject in Australia to the process of folk etymology. South Australia has a size of beer glass called a *butcher*. The term first appears in W.R. Thomas's *In the Early Days* (1889): 'Over a good fat "butcher" of beer, he told me how he was getting on.' Soon after, there is the beginning of an elaborate folk etymology that attempts to offer an account of the origin of the term. In 1916 the *Bulletin* reports: '"Butcher". A long beer. Local to S. Aust., I think. Said to refer to the habit of journeymen butchers always wanting a long one.' By the 1950s the story has taken off, as in S. Hope's *Digger's Paradise* (1956): '[The butcher] originated in bygone days when workers from the abattoirs came unwashed to the pubs after their day's toil. A proportion of drinking mugs was kept separate for them, and a mob of slaughtermen would announce themselves as "butchers" and be given those mugs.' The 1916 account suggests that the *butcher* was a very large glass, but over the years it seems to have become smaller. The folk etymologists, quite unfazed, take this change in their stride, as in this account from J. O'Grady's *It's Your Shout, Mate* (1972): 'There was at one time a pub near the abattoirs. Employees were accustomed to visit it in their lunch hour, and because of the Australian custom, of "shouting",

and the limited time available, they preferred to drink small beers. Six-ounce glasses were the smallest the publican had, and so a six-ounce glass became known as a butcher.' It is now clear, however, that the name for the glass has nothing to do with butchers and abattoirs, and that it goes back to South Australia's strong German traditions. The word is an alteration of German *Becher* 'drinking vessel'. Two aspects of folk etymology have been at work here. First, the unfamiliar German word *Becher* was 'folk-etymologised' into the more familiar *butcher*. But then it was not entirely clear why a glass of beer should be called a *butcher*, and so an elaborate folk etymology story about its origins needed to be generated.

BEGGARS OR BUGGERS

Euphemism can also play a role in the process of folk etymology. The compound *beggars on the coals* appears in the 1988 edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*, and this passage from G. Cozens' *Adventures of a Guardsman* (1848) illustrates how the term was used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: 'There is another sort of bread made when in a hurry, called "beggars on the coal", which is made very thin like our girdle-bread, and merely placed on the hot ashes, and afterwards turned.' *Beggars on the coals* are typically described as *johnny-cakes*, suggesting that they were small versions of damper.

But why were they called *beggars on the coals*? In J. Furphy's *Such is Life* (1903) the following passage occurs: '"I didn't have any breakfast this morning", replied the stranger, picking up a johnny-cake (which liberal shepherds give a grosser name), and eating it with relish, while the interior lamina of dough spued out from between the charred crusts under the pressure of his strong teeth.' The literary allusion is to Gertrude's account of Ophelia's death in *Hamlet*: 'Therewith fantastic garlands did she make / Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies and long purples, / That liberal shepherds give a grosser name.' The 'grosser' popular name was something like 'dogstones' or 'fool's bollocks', referring to the testicle-shaped tubers of the orchids, those 'long purples'. So what was Furphy referring to when he tells us that *johnny-cakes* (synonymous with *beggars on the coals*) have a grosser name? A search has revealed that the original term was in fact *buggers on the coals*. The earliest record is in W. Kelly's *Life in Victoria* (1859), where the taboo word is suppressed by dashes: 'B—r on the coals is a thinnish cake speckled with currants, and baked hastily on the glowing embers.' *Little beggar* was a common term for 'a small child', and it seems that *(little) beggar on the coals* became a convenient euphemistic

substitute for the *(little) buggers on the coals*. Since they were cooked on coals, it is not surprising that the variant *devils on the coals* also appeared. The original expression, however, was not entirely lost, and made a return in Australian English in the second half of the twentieth century, as illustrated by this passage from the magazine *Outback* (February 2000): 'With luck, someone might bake some buggers-on-the-coals. These flour, salt and water Johnny-cakes were served with tinned plum jam.'

GONE TO GOWINGS

The New South Wales phrase *gone to Gowings* arose from its use as an advertising slogan by the Sydney department store Gowings in the 1940s. Advertisements showed people rushing away from important social events to go to a Gowings sale—in one, a bride is left abandoned at the altar because the groom has gone to the sale. The phrase came to mean 'has made a sudden disappearance'. One story has it that a notorious criminal and jail-escape artist, in one of his escapes, scrawled on the wall 'Gone to Gowings'. Over the years the original sense of why people had *gone to Gowings* was lost, and the phrase has been reinterpreted with reference to three colloquial meanings of *gone*. S.J. Baker did not include *gone to Gowings* in the 1945 edition of *The Australian Language*, but he includes it in the 1966 edition, where it is defined simply as 'drunk'. This indicates that *gone* has been redefined in the colloquial sense of 'drunk, inebriated'. Another sense of *gone* is 'insane, mad', and this sense becomes built into the phrase *gone to Gowings* by the 1980s. Nancy Keesing writes in *Lily on the Dustbin* (1982): 'being astray as to wits she has "gone to Gowings".' A third sense of *gone* is 'doomed, beaten, failed, beyond all hope', and this has been built into what is now the most common use of the phrase *gone to Gowings*: 'Kennedy scored his third try to make it 32–12 three minutes after half-time. ... The Tigers were gone to Gowings, left without a stripe, looking at impossible dreams in the sky' (*Australian*, 13 August 2001); 'The admitted non-gambler is watching voter support banish before his eyes. ... He has already lost 7 per cent because of this crisis. If that keeps up, Mr McBride will be gone to Gowings at the next election' (*Central Coast Express*, 8 October 2003).

The origin of the idiom has been long lost, and now the Gowings department store has closed too—*gone to Gowings!*—but the idiom itself has managed to survive, given new life by the processes of folk etymology. And so might we all well say: *fair shake of the sauce bottle!*

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 32: RESULTS

Readers were told that Australia and all its States have *floral* emblems and *faunal* emblems. But for some reason Australia and all its States are sadly lacking in *verbal* emblems (outrageously nicknamed *emblematologoi* by your Humpty-Dumptyish editor). This was not always the case: the country was once *emblematologoi*-enriched to the eyeteeth—witness the emblematic word *yaffler* ('a loud, obnoxious person') that still enriches Tasmania, or *Bananabender*, the emblematic word that some people think sums up the inhabitants of our Prime Minister's State. You, dear readers, were asked to choose an *emblematologos* either for Australia or for any of the States and Territories, and to energise us with a brief explanation as to why you made that choice. **ED.**

Honourable Mentions (alphabetical by surname of entrant): 'South Australians: *chardonnfreude*. My emblematologos refers to the attitude of South Australians, when in a certain frame of mind, loudly to decry actions of famous people when they fall short of perfection (sometimes called tall poppy syndrome)' (**D. Butler**, SA). 'Surfers Paradise: *Wedgieland: bathers and brains a trifle too small*' (**R & L Calitz**, Tas.). 'An Australian: *drinkydri: reflecting the stereotypical Aussie's beer-drinking reputation;* New South Welshman: *fornstock: an update of "cornstalk", to reflect the multicultural make-up of present-day NSW*' (**J. Dewar**, NSW). 'ACT-ers: **No hoppers, out of bounders:** *after the recent controversial cull of eastern grey kangaroos*' (**J. Foster**, ACT). 'Australians: *Aussouis: emblematic word to describe the spirited Australian barrackers at international sporting competitions and by inference all true-blue Australians. Aussie Aussie Aussie, Oui, Oui, Oui!*' (**L. Grosse**, ACT). 'Northern Territorians: *tree dwellers in the Far North, in what newsreaders call the "Northern Terror Tree",* become accurately described as **Terrorarborants'** (**H. Hogerheyde**, Qld). 'South Australia: *Ranndom: describing the nature of political events in SA*' (**D. Mercer**, SA). 'Australians: *Carnivores. This tag illustrates Australia's lust for hosting global carnivals of all kinds (especially sports) as well as our pre-eminence in flogging mountains of ores (coal, iron, uranium, bauxite) to foreign markets. Hence carniv-ores*' (**S. Robson**, Qld). 'Australians: *Striners: because that is the language they speak*' (**A. Wilson**, NSW).

2nd Prize (books to the value of $50 from the OUP catalogue): **G.A. Case**, Qld, for this entry: 'Victoria: *vice-versa—where the underbelly is on top.*'

1st Prize (books to the value of $100 from the OUP catalogue): **J. McGahey**, NSW, for a number of entries, including: 'Queensland: **The Migrating Esseffar (SFR) or Wrinkled Sunbird**. *Found in large groups on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts. In its original habitat it is also known as the Self-Funded Retiree. Males are dull-coloured but may be recognised by their long white "sock", females by their multi-coloured plumage. Often nest in high-rise developments. But in spite of the excessive care taken in the nesting process and the choice of expensive, even opulent, lining materials, all eggs are sterile. Wrinkled Sunbirds, sometimes called MT-nesters, were once common on the coast, but since the Geeeffsee (GFC) Great Financial Crisis, the Esseffars or Wrinkled Sunbirds are becoming rather rare creatures, possibly even an endangered species.*' 'Tasmania: **The Red-necked Gunns Bird** *is noted for its full-throated and persistent call of* waddabouttheworkers. *Plumage is nondescript. Preferred habitat is old-growth natïve forests. Not a lot is known about this bird's feeding, nesting or breeding habits but it does contest territory with the* **Lesser Green Tree Climber**, *an introduced species, whose plaintive call of* savetheoldgrowthforests, *may be heard whenever* **The Red-necked Gunns Bird** *makes an appearance.*'

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 33

In his article in this issue of *Ozwords*, Bruce Moore has explained some of the processes of folk etymology, and how folk etymology has changed the form and meaning of some Australian idioms. For this competition you are asked to choose an Australian idiom and predict how it might change in form or meaning over the next fifty or so years. For example, will *stone the crows* become *stone the cats* because the Geelong Cats AFL team wins the premiership ten years in a row? Will *I didn't come down in the last shower* become *I didn't come down in the last dust shower* as a result of climate change? Some typical idioms might include: *as happy as Larry; I don't know if I'm Arthur or Martha; even blind Freddie …; couldn't train a choko vine over a country dunny; full as a state school hat rack; do a Harold Holt* (i.e. rhyming slang for 'bolt')*; mad as a meat axe; don't come the raw prawn; Rafferty's rules; getting off at Redfern* (for coitus interruptus)*; more front than Myers; on the sheep's back; further behind than Walla Walla* (see *Ozwords* April 2009). These are merely suggestions; you may choose any Australian idiom you like. Thus: choose your idiom; show *how* it changes; and then briefly explain *why* it changes. As usual, the best answers will be the wittiest and wisest. **ED.**

ENTRIES CLOSE 31 JANUARY 2010.

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