

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE

Newsletter No. 2, 1989

The end of the kitchen-table era

The OED records *kitchen-table* in 1738, as evidenced in the tantalisingly truncated quotation, 'Like a turtle on its back upon the kitchen-table of an alderman'. There is no notice of an attributive use and certainly no hint of the figurative use so memorably applied when George Story, one of the editors of the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, described himself, in 1988 and unrepentantly, as a 'kitchen-table lexicographer'. Editors of general reference dictionaries like the *Collins* or the *Macquarie* have been quick to seize on the advantages of the computer's ability to update repeatedly in a world that grows increasingly competitive; editors of small historical dictionaries are less concerned with these crude commercial imperatives. One inhibiting factor has been the cost of converting citation archives, another a certain lack of inclination to depart from the tried and the true - what advantages are there in manoeuvring fragments of evidence in a window environment when one can do it more comfortably, and arguably more creatively, on the kitchen-table, or even the floor?

The AND editors have been singular in their struthonianism but now have the equipment and the will to become WordPerfect. Even they eventually realised that a multi-strand citation file like the burgeoning regionalisms file requires the flexibility of movement which the computer so effortlessly provides.

A brush with the artificial intelligentsia

The AND editors built on this blinding revelation when they attended the fifth annual conference of the University of Waterloo's Centre for the New Oxford English Dictionary, entitled 'Dictionaries in the Electronic Age', in Oxford in September. Here, in the company of other 'electronically retarded' (the phrase was Edmund Weiner's) lexicographers, they were exposed to the marvels of modern computer science, and reprogrammed to recognise the *kitchen-table* as 'a multifunctional workstation' and the *kiwi* as 'a knowledge integrator at the workstation interface'. The conference was the focal point, but around it there was time to meet others involved in the making of dictionaries, from Oxford principally but also from other publishing houses like Chambers and Collins. Refreshingly these not so harmless drudges met as fellow practitioners, had a healthy respect for the variety of experience gained at the coal-face, and collectively showed none of the rancour that sometimes surfaces when 'scholarly' and 'commercial' editors meet.

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Ozlex?

A number of Australians interested in lexicography are members of the European Association for Lexicography (Euralex) or the older Dictionary Society of North America, or both, and have benefited from attending their meetings. The lexicographer knows something of the loneliness of the long distance runner and it is some comfort to find that there are others running the same race. David Blair (Macquarie), Rod McConchie (Wollongong), and Bill Ramson (ANU) have several times aired the possibility of forming an Australian (or Australasian, or Pacific) association, and over breakfast one morning at the Oxford conference David Nash raised the matter again. An insatiable conferencier, Nash then flew to Melbourne in time to seek and find support for the idea at the Australian Linguistic Society conference, also in September, and subsequently goaded Ramson into convening a meeting of interested parties in Canberra in November. Present at this were David Blair (Macquarie), Tamsin Donaldson (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies), Joan Hughes (ANU), Rod McConchie (Wollongong), David Nash (AIAS), and Richard Tardif (Macquarie Library). This group felt that the number of people in Australasia engaged in lexicographical pursuits was considerable, and that there would be interest and value in the formation of an association. It agreed on the establishment of a steering committee (David Blair, Tamsin Donaldson, Bill Ramson, Roland Sussex, and Darrell Tryon as representing various Australian and Pacific language interests) to canvass interest and engage in preliminary planning. A draft constitution has been drawn up and it is hoped that the association will be launched in conjunction with the end-on conferences of the Australian Linguistic Society and the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia, to be held at Macquarie in September.

In at the birth

Roger McDonald's recently launched novel is entitled *Rough Wallaby*. In an interview reported in the *Canberra Times* on 7 January 1990, McDonald explained that he had come across the expression in 'an old Australian cowboy novel' and had redefined it. 'It's not your wishes come true and you live in paradise, but your wishes come true and you get what you want - but there's a slightly bittersweet aftertaste. It seems to me that a lot of experience on this continent is summed up in that kind of feeling.' Says McDonald, 'I hope it sticks': we watch, and wait, and wonder if *rough wallaby* is fair comment if it doesn't.

In with a chance

'Fairy-wrens Fancy Furgling' is the title of an article by Bob Beale in the Spring 1989 issue of *Australian Natural History*. And spring-like indeed is the furtive feathering to which the word refers. But is the word itself a phantom? It seems, on inquiry, to have led an under-cover life, cropping up in bird-watchers' bed-time stories but never making the printed page until Bob Beale coaxed it out. It needs help if it is to make an entry.

In like Flynn

It is through no fault of his own that the former tennis player, Adrian Quist, ten times winner of the Australian mens' doubles title, is one of our eponymous heroes (see AND under *Adrian*). Nor is it likely that the former jockey, *Edgar Britt*, or the former American-born boxer, *Jimmy Britt*, relish or have in any way deserved the lexical immortality conferred upon them. Again, while there is some reason behind the choice of *Bishop Barker* as a name for a tall glass of beer, there is more rhyme than reason in the choice of *Charlie*, a shortening of *Charlie Wheeler*, for 'sheila' - despite the fact that the painter Charles Wheeler was known for his nudes (see AND in all instances).

Frequently, of course, names were conferred by way of compliment - as *banksia*, *boronia*, *dillwynia*, *dryandra*, *grevillea*, *hakea*, *hardenbergia*, *leschenaultia*, *macadamia*, and *pisonia* testify. The same may be true of *Bruce*, as in *bruce auction*, and of *lamington*. It would explain the use of *Major Mitchell* in the name of the cockatoo *Cacatua leadbeater*, though perhaps not the use of *Major Mitchell* as a verb, in which case the eponymy would appear to give recognition to an attribute of or an action associated with the eponym. Such a naming process also explains *doing a Melba*, *Ned Kelly*, *Paterson's curse* and, on the gentleman's own admission (see the first quotation in AND), *in like Flynn*.

But in all too many instances the eponym cannot be identified and there is *Buckley's chance* of explaining the eponymy. Was there ever a *Pat Malone*? Was *Jimmy Woods* anything more than a figment of Barcroft Boake's imagination? Was there ever, as Sidney J. Baker avers, a pugilist named *Dinny Hayes*? Does *maginnis* commemorate a wrestler named *McGinnis*? Who was *Mrs Potts*? And why is it *Hughie* who is invoked in *send it (or her) down Hughie*?

An inquiry into Australian place-names

The review committee which recommended the establishment of the Australian National Dictionary Centre recommended also that the Centre interest itself in Australian toponymy and, in particular, that it undertake a study of the feasibility of establishing a place-names project. In doing so the committee recognised the long-standing interest in the subject of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the pioneering work of J.F. Atchison, undertaken at the instigation of the Academy, in drawing up guidelines and attempting to co-ordinate interest around the country. Ian Donaldson, Director of the Humanities Research Centre, John Atchison, and Bill Ramson met on 11 and 13 December to consider both a long-term strategy for a comprehensive study of Australian place-names and a short-term plan to publish a dictionary of 10,000 place-names in 2001, the anniversary of Federation. (As an indication of the dimension of the longer-term study, Atchison has estimated, in the latest edition of *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, that there are 4,000,000 Australian place-names, 70% of which are of Aboriginal origin.) It was agreed that, as a first step, the Humanities Research Centre and the Australian National Dictionary Centre would together host a one-day seminar later in the year, on a date tentatively set as Friday 12 October 1990.

Neenish tart

Notice of our interest in *neenish tart* pushed the date back to 1928 and elicited the older spellings *nienish* and *ninish*. It also drew the following quotation, from Leo Schofield writing in the August 1989 issue of the *Australian Gourmet Traveller*:

Mum is truly famous for her neenish tarts ... I tell her that when she snuffs it, I'm going to have her buried at Rookwood with the rest of the family, and I am going to erect this very simple, post-modern tombstone, with a section of brown marble and a section of white marble all surrounded by cream marble, like a huge neenish tart.

But still no derivation.

In whose judgement?

The OED prefers *judgement* to *judgment* and the smaller Oxford dictionaries follow suit. A range of other dictionaries, American, Australian, and English - Random House and Websters, Macquarie, Chambers and Collins (but not Cobuild) - prefer *judgment*. *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*, however makes a distinction, preferring *judgement* generally, 'but *judgment* in legal works', advice which is also offered by Joyce Hawkins' *Oxford Reference Dictionary* and *Oxford Paperback Dictionary* (recently issued in an Australian edition edited by George and Beryl Turner). In whose *judgement*? Fowler provides the clue:

There are some who would differentiate by using *judgment* for the judicial pronouncement and *judgement* for all other purposes. This may be too subtle for popular taste, but authority for some such distinction can be found in the rules of the OUP, which favours *judgment* in legal works and *judgement* in all others.

And this leads us to *Hart's Rules*:

The ending *-ment* is added to the complete verbal form, e.g. develop/development, excite/excitement. When the verb ends in *-dge*, the final *e* should be retained,¹ e.g. acknowledge/acknowledgement, judge/judgement (judgment is used as an exception in legal works).

¹ 'I protest against the unscholarly habit of omitting it from "abridgement", acknowledgement, "judgement", lodgement", - which is against all analogy, etymology, and orthoepy, since elsewhere *g* is hard in English when not followed by *e* or *i*. I think the University Press ought to set a scholarly example, instead of following the ignorant to do ill, for the sake of saving four *e*'s. The word "judgement" has been spelt in the Revised Version correctly.' (Sir James Murray.)

One of our corresponding members, George Witynski, reports that a computer search of Commonwealth Acts revealed that, in 597 of the 603 instances in which the word occurs, the e was omitted. But one has to ask whether this is a reflection of the Oxford convention or an indication of prevailing Australian practice, regardless of context.

An embroidery circle?

Twice, in Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl* (1890, Pandora ed. 1988), the expression *right of tambour at Government House* is used: 'nothing is so costly as the only form of simplicity open to you if you have the right of tambour at Government House' (p. 29); '[the new Governor's connections with her husband's family] gave her at one stroke that right of tambour at Government House which had been her cherished dream from early girlhood' (p. 147). The OED doesn't help. Can you?

1989 publications

Hughes, Joan (ed.) *Australian Words and their Origins* (Melbourne 1989), pp. xv, 662

Ramson, W.S. 'Regionalism in Australian English: the value of newspaper evidence', *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 9 (1989), 73-83

Turner, George and Turner, Beryl (ed.) *The Australian Oxford Paperback Dictionary* (Melbourne 1989), pp. x, 950