

WORD OF THE MONTH

OXFORD AUSTRALIA: THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH | OCTOBER 2014

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Kingswood country

- **noun:** Australian, especially working-class, suburbia; conservative suburban values.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

The Australian car manufacturer Holden recently announced the impending closure of its operations in 2016, after sixty years of producing some of Australia's favourite cars, including the original Holden sedan, the utility, the FJ series, the Monaro, the Commodore, and the Torana. Our attachment to the Holden brand is illustrated by the way one model, the Kingswood (a popular family sedan produced by Holden from 1968 to 1980), has become embedded in Australian English in the term **Kingswood country**, symbolising a particular way of life and a set of attitudes.

Kingswood country is a term that is used allusively to refer to suburban working-class life in Australia, and its stereotypical values. It derives from the television show *Kingswood Country* that aired in Australia from 1980 to 1984, and which satirised a conservative working-class family living in the western suburbs of Sydney. The principal character in the show was factory worker Ted Bullpit. He was a beer-swilling bigot: racist, sexist, homophobic, and anti-Catholic. His language was noteworthy for its political incorrectness. He railed against his son-in-law Bruno, a second-generation Italian migrant ('bloody wog!'), while his Protestant prejudices ('strike me Catholic!') and misogyny were regularly aired. Ted's one passion was his cherished Kingswood sedan, which no-one else was allowed to drive ('The Kingswood! You're not taking the Kingswood!').

The term **Kingswood country** evoked the social conservatism of Australian suburbia that the show satirised. The show ended in 1984, and the earliest record of the allusive use of the title appears the following year. The writer's snobbery is evident:

The first glance at the menu brought us back to **Kingswood country**. A plain printed list, without descriptions, of mostly unexciting dishes ranging from the conventional (scallops mornay, seafood crepe) to the eccentric (calamari with lobster sauce). (Melbourne Age, 27 August 1985)

On a more serious note, the following headline two years later, 'Death comes to **Kingswood country**', precedes an article about a suburban tragedy: 'The tranquility of a typical middle-class suburban street was shattered yesterday when a man shot his wife dead and then called police to say he was going to kill himself.' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April 1987) Here **Kingswood country** implies that the 'typical' suburban street is normally a peaceful place where nothing happens. A similar sense of an unchanging social world is evoked in this item about Australia's then Leader of the Opposition and soon-to-be Prime Minister, John Howard:

Mr Howard has, through his children, been exposed to a vastly different generation from his own deeply conservative, '**Kingswood country**' upbringing.

(Adelaide Advertiser, 25 January 1995)

Thirty years after the demise of the television show, **Kingswood country** continues to be used in Australian English. Social snobbery is never far from the use of this term, even when it refers to building styles rather than the people who live there, as in this description: '[T]he unit is small, and the brown brick architecture certainly has **Kingswood Country** undertones'. (Hobart *Mercury*, 5 February 2011)

Kingswood country will be included in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.



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