

WORD OF THE MONTH

JUNE 2013

WHY HAVE I RECEIVED OXFORD AUSTRALIA WORD OF THE MONTH?

You are receiving this email because you are a valued customer of Oxford University Press. You can unsubscribe at any time by sending an email to wordofthemonth.au@oup.com with 'Unsubscribe WOTM' in the subject line.

HOW DO I SUBSCRIBE?

If you have a colleague or a friend who you think would like to receive Oxford Australia Word of the Month, all they need to do is email wordofthemonth.au@oup.com with 'Subscribe WOTM' in the subject line.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE:

www.anu.edu.au/ANDC

<http://andc.anu.edu.au/publications/oxford-word-month>

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS:

www.oup.com.au/wotm

PLEASE DIRECT ALL MEDIA ENQUIRIES TO:

Alyce Crosbie
Sales Support & Promotions Coordinator
General Division
Oxford University Press
03 9934 9171
alyce.crosbie@oup.com



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

meat-safe cot

noun a child's cot enclosed with mesh as protection from insects and animals.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

A 2013 posting on the Australian online auction site *Gumtree* advertised a curious item for sale:

Gorgeous old style **meat safe cot**. Has some fly wire broken and a missing spoke, but easily replaced. Perfect if cats are in the family, as well as keeping mosquitoes and other insects away.

A number of these cots can be found for sale on the Internet but for many people the term is quite baffling, as these comments on an Internet forum demonstrate:

Is a **meat safe cot** a cot made from a meat safe, or a cot that's safe to put meat in?

Is that when you put your bub to sleep in their cot and say 'goodnight little sausage'? (*The Bub Hub*, 27 October 2005)

A meat safe is a cupboard for storing meat, usually ventilated with a covering of wire gauze to protect the meat from flies and other insects. It was often suspended both to add to the cooling effect and to keep the meat out of reach of animals. In the past, the meat safe was a common item in Australian households where heat and flies made the storage of perishable foodstuffs a challenge. It was often small and simple to construct at home as these instructions reveal:

Take a kerosene tin and cut out each side leaving only the corner pieces, which should be bent over and hammered round so that no rough edges are left. Make a bag of net or butter muslin to fit over the safe, leaving both ends open. Hem the edges. The safe hangs from its original handle on top of the tin and a hole is made in the top from which a wire hook is suspended.... Meat may be placed on plate on the floor of the safe and on the hanger. The safe can be placed in any cool place. (*Perth Western Mail*, 9 January 1936)

Meat safes could be constructed out of a range of materials including tea chests and small cupboards. But how did 'meat safe' come to be used in the name for a child's cot?

The earliest evidence for **meat-safe cot** dates from 1939: 'The Infant Health Association recommends the safety cots (commonly known as the '**meat safe cot**') which are stocked by all the large shops' (*West Australian*, 17 February 1939). It is clear that **meat-safe cots** are related to meat safes in that they both use some kind of meshing or wire to keep out insects and animals. What is not initially clear is if the cots were originally or sometimes constructed from meat safes. Evidence from the 1930s indicates that the majority of meat safes of the period were relatively small and lightly constructed, and therefore not suitable for building a baby's cot. Further evidence suggests that it is probably the function and design that provides this cot with its peculiar name:

Up to the age of five the young child may sleep in a cot designed rather like a large meat safe, completely wired in with drop panels. This is

continued ...

WORD OF THE MONTH

JUNE 2013

WHY HAVE I RECEIVED OXFORD AUSTRALIA WORD OF THE MONTH?

You are receiving this email because you are a valued customer of Oxford University Press. You can unsubscribe at any time by sending an email to wordofthemonth.au@oup.com with 'Unsubscribe WOTM' in the subject line.

HOW DO I SUBSCRIBE?

If you have a colleague or a friend who you think would like to receive Oxford Australia Word of the Month, all they need to do is email wordofthemonth.au@oup.com with 'Subscribe WOTM' in the subject line.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE:

www.anu.edu.au/ANDC

<http://andc.anu.edu.au/publications/oxford-word-month>

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS:

www.oup.com.au/wotm

PLEASE DIRECT ALL MEDIA ENQUIRIES TO:

Alyce Crosbie
Sales Support & Promotions Coordinator
General Division
Oxford University Press
03 9934 9171
alyce.crosbie@oup.com



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

meat-safe cot

noun a child's cot enclosed with mesh as protection from insects and animals.

light, easily moved, and being collapsible, can be taken when the family is on holiday. (*Adelaide Mail*, 9 December 1939)

The term is now often found in the context of online auction sales. Many of the people selling these cots live in rural or regional areas. This may have something to do with the longevity of such items in the outback. Perhaps habits of thrift meant that cots were passed on to be reused, and continue to be used in these areas. They are now highly collectable as pieces of Australiana:

Pauline has a remarkable sense of the history of the Outback she has grown to love. In the backyard of the family home in Winton she has established a collection of Australiana comparable with many a town museum's. It includes an item familiar to many a grateful outback mother, a **meat-safe cot**. (Marion Houldsworth, *From the Gulf to God Knows Where*, 2006)

Meat-safe cot will be included in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.