Eggshell blonde

- noun: (also eggshell blond) a man with a bald head.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

_Three Polished Gentlemen_. Never before in the history of Sale have so many ‘egg-shell blonds’ graced the business side of a bar than when three perfect specimens dispensed good cheer at a Sale hostelry t’other afternoon. Two, up from Melbourne, were assisting the licensee. Said one when he saw the polished cranium of the local: ‘Take your wig off’. One customer, a billiards enthusiast, asked which was the spot ball. (_Gippsland Times_, 12 April 1951)

As this article in the _Gippsland Times_ illustrates, _eggshell blonde_ is used in Australian English as a humorous euphemism for a bald person. The _eggshell_ element is derived from the similarity of a bald head to the shape and smooth texture of a hen’s egg; the _blonde_ element is ironic, and is used in a similar way in other Australian terms such as _bushfire blonde_ for ‘a redhead’. The use of the term may have been influenced by the colloquial term _egghead_, originally American, denoting a ‘highbrow’, or person of intellect, which increased in frequency in the Australian media from the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The first evidence for _eggshell blonde_ comes from a newspaper report of a dinner held in honour of Tommy Dunn, retiring from a long career with the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission of New South Wales: ‘It was a very happy function, with many good humored references to the “Egg-Shell Blonde”—a sally at the guest’s bald pate.’ (_Murrumbidgee Irrigator_, 25 August 1944) Other early evidence occurs in a discussion of proper etiquette in the Women’s Section of a Brisbane newspaper:

> Until now it seemed impossible to reach agreement on the question whether a man should or should not remove his hat when travelling in a lift with a woman. Personally, I sat on the fence about it. Woman-like, I notice and appreciate the little courtesy. Yet I also feel sympathy towards those men whom Jack Davey calls ‘eggshell blondes’, who feel a chill when travelling hatless in a draught. (_Courier-Mail_, 10 September 1947)

Evidence for _eggshell blonde_ peaks in the 1950s, but tails off rapidly during the second half of the 20th century. A rare occurrence of the term in the 1970s appears in a description of the audience at a jazz convention:

> There are ruddy _egg-shell blondes_, the rotund and bearded ones and the lean, tanned and long-haired men, the busty wenches in granny skirts, the startling red-haired, slim girl in the multihued dress and the lithe and lissom chicks in a
variety of apparel, all of it eyecatching. (Canberra Times, 29 December 1973)

In 1992 Australian writer Kathy Lette used it in her novel Llama Parlour: ‘The only good thing was that, with his clean shaven head—an egg-shell blond we called it at home—nobody had recognised him.’ Despite this example, much of the evidence in recent years is only found in glossaries, or has a historical reference. However, there is the occasional bit of evidence suggesting that it is still used and remembered by some Australians:

Going bald has been one of my worst fears for decades. It began early, watching my father's thatch dwindle to almost nothing. By the time I was a teenager, he was what is euphemistically known as an eggshell blonde. He claimed his baldness was due to an expanding brain, and they do say you can't grow grass on a busy street. (Brisbane News, 18 January 2012)

Eggshell blonde will be included in the second edition of the Australian National Dictionary.

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