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EDITORIAL

Bill Ramson writes, asking to correct an error: 'Mea culpa! mea culpa! In my "Touch of the Blarney" [Ozwords, April 2005, p. 7] I make the claim that the *AND* entry for **bull** is "one of the small triumphs of modern historical lexicography". This is not so. The entry for **ball**, on the other hand, is, in that it draws on the records of three dialects of English and achieves a degree of certainty which has not hitherto been possible, and which is unfortunately absent in the entry for **bull**. This was a proofreading error and I would not want to claim that the proposed etymology of **bull** was more than speculative. See *OED* **bullshit** and *AND* **bullsh.**'

The Irish theme of Bill Ramson's article is followed this time by Dymphna Lonergan's speculations on the possible Irish origins of the Australian terms **cobber**, **hump**, and **grouse**. Mark Gwynn looks at the many Australian expressions that have come from people's names—**eponym** is the technical term for this, deriving from Greek **epi** 'upon' + **onoma** 'name'. Judith Robertson looks at the fate of political sayings.

Congratulations to Centre researcher Tony Alderman on the publication of his revised fourth year honours thesis in the series LINCOS Studies in Phonetics. It is titled *Forensic Speaker Identification: A Likelihood Ratio-based Approach Using Vowel Formants*. Congratulations also to Judith Robertson on the publication of the article 'Naming a New Society: The Significance of E.E. Morris's Australasian Words' in the British Australian Studies Association's journal *Australian Studies*.

Frederick Ludowyk
Editor, *Ozwords*

WHEN PEOPLE BECOME WORDS

MARK GWYNN

The Australian words **sanger**, **barry**, **lamington**, and **pavlova** have a common relationship by virtue of being derived from the names of real people—they are what we call eponyms. **Sanger**, abbreviation of international English **sandwich**, comes from that 'connoisseur' of fine food, the fourth Earl of Sandwich (d. 1792), who reputedly ate pieces of ham between two slices of bread for refreshment so that he could eat without leaving the gambling table. Similarly, **lamington** is probably derived from Baron Lamington, Governor of Queensland 1895–1901. The ruling elite have been quite productive in bequeathing their names to the English language—take the international English **cardigan** from the seventh Earl of Cardigan (d. 1868), or **boycott** from that infamous land agent Captain Boycott (d. 1897). Cardigan's troops were the first to wear this distinctive garment in the Crimean war. Boycott failed to listen to the Irish Land League in 1880 when they requested a reduction in rents after a bad harvest—he refused, so his tenants avoided any communication with him. Equally, the Australian words **pavlova** and **barry** are derived from once household names. The Australasian dessert delicacy, often simplified to **pav**, comes from the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova (d. 1931), who toured Australia and New Zealand in the 1920s, while **barry** is derived from rhyming slang **to have a Barry Crocker**, 'to have a shocker'. Barry Crocker was famous for his title role in the 1970s *Barry MacKenzie* films.

Australian English, by and large, has evolved like other Englishes—it has adapted and changed words from an already existing lexicon to meet the prevailing circumstances of time and place. While the majority of Australian words are derived from existing words in British English—often with morphological change or semantic shift—those words derived from the names of real people can still tell us something about cultural trends in Australian society. Many people of a younger generation wouldn't know who Barry Crocker is, but the evidence on the Internet suggests that **barry** has become quite popular with teenagers over the last two decades. It is one of the fascinating qualities of the English language that it can readily adapt a person's name to fulfil a semantic role that before was often filled by another term, while giving the concept an immediacy and novelty that it may not previously have had. As with **barry**, however, the real person often gets lost

in time, and new generations accept the word without the historical referent.

Occasionally the identity behind a word lies in the realm of legend and urban myth. Take the phrase **even Blind Freddy could see that** ('it's that obvious'). This initially looks like one of those generic terms—'not to know whether one is Arthur or Martha', 'Nigel no friends', 'bevan' etc.—where, if there ever was a real Arthur, Martha, Nigel or Bevan behind the words, they have all since been forgotten. But one of Australia's most famous lexicographers, Sidney Baker, writing in the 1950s, noted that:

According to Sydney legend, a blind hawker named Freddy operated in the area bordered by Market, King, Castlereagh and George Streets in the 1920s, selling ties, razor blades, hair oil and other items. Although blind, he is reputed to have been able to find his way around with great ease and to have recognised scores of customers by their voices. (*Australia Speaks*, 1953, p. 53)

There are similar problems with ascertaining the identity behind that classic Australian word **Buckley's chance**, 'no chance' (see *Ozwords*, October 2000). Was it the escaped convict William Buckley, who spent thirty-two years living with an Aboriginal tribe? Was it Mars Buckley, the part-owner of a store in Melbourne? Similar problems arise when we try to discover the identity of the Watson family in **to bet like the Watsons**, 'to bet large amounts'. Baker notes the confusion:

There were apparently two Watson brothers, but legend disagrees when they operated—it varies from the 1880s to about 1910. They are alleged to have been born at Bendigo, Victoria, and also to have been Sydney hotel-keepers and outback N.S.W. shearers. (*The Australian Language*, 2nd edn, 1966, p. 273)

We also had contributions from readers suggesting that the Watson brothers were teetotalers from Melbourne who never betted—an ironic use of their name perhaps (see *Ozwords*, April 2005). But as with Blind Freddy and Buckley, we may never know who the real Watsons were.

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Some of our Australian eponyms come from those whose lives have been well documented. Our most famous bushranger **Ned Kelly** can be used allusively to designate someone who is unscrupulous in seeking personal gain, or someone who is resistant to authority, while to be **game as Ned Kelly** is to be fearless and courageous. Ned Kelly is also rhyming slang for 'belly'. To **do a Melba**—to make repeated farewells or comebacks—derives from Australia's legendary soprano Dame Nellie Melba (born Helen Porter Mitchell) who was noted for her protracted farewell performances in the 1920s. Melba's name itself comes from the city of Melbourne, named after Lord Melbourne, prime minister of England in the mid-1830s. In fact, some of our Australian identities have gained so much celebrity that their names have been used internationally. Dame Nellie Melba has bequeathed to the world **peach Melba** (ice cream with peaches and liqueur or sauce), **Melba toast** (small thin toast), and **Melba sauce** (raspberry sauce for desserts). To **be in like Flynn**, 'to get in quickly or seize an opportunity', is usually attributed to Australian-born American actor Errol Flynn. More recent evidence reveals that it may in fact refer to Edward J. Flynn, who was a successful campaign manager for the US Democratic Party in the 1940s. But certainly the association with Errol Flynn, who was noted for his sexual exploits and 'into the thick of it' swashbuckling bravado, has influenced the sexual connotations that have been associated with the term.

Rhyming slang provides quite a few examples of Australian eponyms. Common examples include **Captain Cook** for 'look', **Al Capone** for 'phone', and, if we take Noah to be a historical person, **Noah's Ark** or simply **Noah** for 'shark'. Some of the more enduring rhyming slang phrases refer to people who are not so well known today. Hence **Adrian Quist** for 'pissed'—Quist was a successful Australian doubles tennis player from the 1930s to the 1950s, but why he should be associated with the process of intoxication is anybody's guess. **Reg Grundies**, **grundies**, or simply **reggies** for 'undies' derives from Australian television producer Reginald Grundy (b. 1924)—who knows why? **Grundies** is a fine example of how the historical person conveniently lends the rhyme only to be discarded to the economy of language. There is often an ironic humour attached to some knowledge of the person referred to—hence **to do a Harold Holt**, to 'bolt', derived from Australia's hapless PM who disappeared while swimming in 1967. This can be simplified to **do a Harry**. Essentially what we have here is a microcosm of how

the language works—it can work on the formal level ('Holt' rhymes with 'bolt') or at the semantic level (Harold Holt was the PM who took his leave without even a goodbye).

While the semantic interpretation of these words is sometimes useful and can give the word certain nuances, it is the name's ability to rhyme that usually dictates who is chosen. In Australian English, sporting identities are often the victims of rhyming slang, perhaps indicating the social groups that use this form of slang—traditionally the working classes. From rugby league we have **Roy Bull** 'pull', **Jersey Flegg** 'keg', **Malcolm Clift** 'lift (in a car)', **Johnny Bliss** 'piss', **Ron Coote** 'root (sex)', **Frank Hyde** 'wide (in cricket)', and **Mal Meninga** 'finger'. Other sports have given us **Edgar Britt** 'shit' (Britt was a jockey who retired in 1959), **George Moore** 'four (in cricket)' (Moore was a jockey who retired in 1971), and **Wally Grout** 'a shout (of drinks at the bar)' (Grout was Australian wicketkeeper in the 1950s and 1960s). So if your name is in the public arena and it happens to rhyme with something, then it is a perfect candidate for becoming rhyming slang. We can only feel sorry for AFL commentator and fishing guru Rex Hunt!

While rhyming slang is a productive way in which real people end up as words in Australian English, there are other means to lexical apotheosis. We can't forget all the flora and fauna (**banksia**, **Leadbeater's possum**, etc.) nor the geographical names derived from a who's who list of famous explorers, politicians, and administrators. The list is extensive and includes a fair percentage of all topographical names in Australia. They carry historical information about how society slowly fashions the environment to reflect the historical concerns of the present. To have something named after you is a way of honouring some achievement into the future. It is also a reflection of patronage systems and the honouring of those who are powerful and wealthy—the names of our capital cities are good examples of this. But if we leave this rather extensive category aside we still have another avenue for the transformation of person into word. Inventing something gives one an immediate edge for eponymous immortality—hence **hills hoist** 'clothes line' (Lance Hill; d. 1986), **Owen gun** (Evelyn Owen; d. 1949), **Granny Smith** 'apple' (Maria Ann 'Granny' Smith; d. 1870), **Sarich engine** 'orbital engine' (Ralph Sarich; b. 1938), and **stobie pole** 'electricity pole in South Australia' (J.C. Stobie; d. 1953). The Australian sheep-raiser J.H.W. Mules has provided a range

of eponyms relating to the invention of a surgical procedure where the loose folds of skin in the crutch of a sheep are cut away for the purpose of reducing blowfly strike. Terms include **Mules operation**, the verb **mules** (to perform this operation), and the nominal senses **muleser** and **mulesing**.

But one doesn't have to be an Australian to enter the Australian lexicon—take **bowser** 'petrol pump' (in Australia), which is named after a company established by US inventor and entrepreneur S.F. Bowser (d. 1938). In international English **bowser** is a petrol tanker used for refuelling aircraft and tanks. A **Dorothy Dixer** is a pre-arranged question to a minister in parliamentary question time, and comes from the pseudonym of E.M. Gilmer (1870–1951), US journalist and writer of a popular question-and-answer column. Her columns appeared in Australian newspapers in the first half of the twentieth century, and it was widely assumed that Dorothy wrote the questions as well as the answers. **Dorothy Dix** is also rhyming slang for a six in cricket.

Dorothy moves us on to politics, another productive area for turning people into dictionary entries. Politicians have often been apt at using and adapting existing Aussie English, but very few have ruffled enough feathers to have their own name applied to a brand of politics or a way of doing things. **Hansonism** and **Hansonite** are recent terms derived from Pauline Hanson's One Nation style of politics. More interesting are terms derived from the often unloved former premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett. His association with public spending cuts and privatisation led to his name being applied in the general sense of 'getting done over'. Hence **to do a Jeff**, **Jeffing**, and **Jeffed**: 'Well, he's as Jeffed as the rest of Victoria now' (*Australian*, 22 September 1999, p. 38). For a person's name to become a verb warrants particular merit. The late Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen certainly caused the ire of many in his role as Queensland Premier 1968–87. **Johspeak** was derogatorily applied to the premier's idiosyncratic way of speaking, which included beauties like 'Australia is bankrupt. It is even worse than that'. On the issue of uranium mining he proclaimed 'We won't be able to sit on uranium firstly because it would not be right and secondly because it would be wrong as far as we're concerned' (Hugh Lunn, *Joh*, 1978, pp. 3–4). There are also various examples of **to do a Joh**, which can mean anything from the rapacious clearing of land, to the demolishing of heritage buildings, or to fighting unions. There are **Johmander** and **Bjelkemander**, which

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mean a combination of a gerrymander and malapportionment—in other words, rigging electoral boundaries and the value of individual votes.

We have yet to see our current PM reach the heights of Jeff and Joh, although the phrase **not happy John** was given some prominence in the 2004 federal election. We also have **Howard's battlers**, a term perhaps as fleeting as Government promises, but filling a historical role like Menzies' **forgotten people** or Reagan's **silent majority**. Politicians at times attempt to create new terms, or at least to give them legs. Take the Federal Treasurer Peter Costello's use of **Kylie** on several occasions in the federal parliament. This is derived from Australian pop singer Kylie Minogue and refers ironically to her song 'I Should Be So Lucky'. Affronted by Labor's questioning over the buoyant state of the economy, Costello came out with the following rebuff:

You will have heard that sometimes there are questions asked in this place which are called dorothy dixers because it is alleged that people know they are coming. ... There is another category which is frequently asked by the opposition and it is called Kylies—referring to Kylie Minogue's 'I Should

Be So Lucky'. (*Hansard*, 17 November 2004, Question Time.)

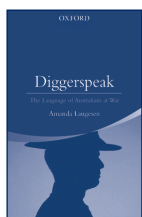
I have highlighted some of the more enduring terms, but historically there are numerous examples of eponyms that are now obsolete or rarely encountered. Take the republican sentiments of the nineteenth century which saw leading members of the royal family become useful terms for everyday things like toerags worn by swagmen (**Prince Alberts** or **Alfreds**), a heavy swag (**Royal Alfred**), or a large iron pot (**Royal George**). Indeed if we have the ill fortune to get a Charles the Third, he may very well follow the fate of Henry the Third, Richard the Third, and William the Third, with their inevitable transformation into rhyming slang—*turd*.

On the Internet today you have only to type 'Schapelle' (from the recently convicted Schapelle Corby) into a search engine to realise that when there is something or someone that captures the popular imagination, all manner of new words can appear. In chat room discussions across Australia the verb **to be Schapelled** is emerging with a similar sense to **Jeffed**—'done over, given a rough deal'. Hence 'David Hicks was Schapelled', 'Aussie battlers will be Schapelled by the Tories draconian IR thuggery', and so on.

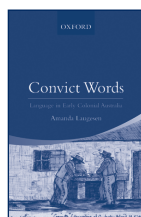
The word can also mean to be packed or crammed—'the train was Schapelled with people this morning'. Many of these words derived from the names of real people like Schapelle will have shorter lives than the people who bequeathed them. They speak of their time and of the people who were considered celebrities or worthy of attention. They also show that words can emerge from personal names when there is a rhyme or some association between meaning and the person referred to. Sometimes the word will continue to be used long after the person has died or been forgotten. It may be because the word represents something that is still a common part of the society—lamingtons and pavlova are still eaten, hills hoists and Mules operations are still used. But when it comes down to it, every generation will add something to the vocabulary that they have inherited. New words will filter into the vocabulary as older ones are discarded or lose their potency. Eponyms will continue to add verve and piquancy to the language—and while they may be the most ephemeral of neologisms, some will remain in the core lexicon when the eponymous person has been long forgotten.

[Mark Gwynn is a researcher at the Australian National Dictionary Centre.]

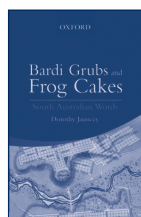
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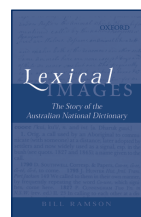
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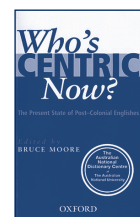
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We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those not easily answerable from the standard reference books.

RHYME AND RIME

Coleridge called his poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. I have noticed when reading many early texts that the spelling 'rime' rather than 'rhyme' occurs. Am I right about this? And when did the spelling change?

D. Burns, WA

You are certainly right. Shakespeare (in the early printings of his plays) uses the 'rime' spelling, as when in *Julius Caesar*, Cassio says of the poet 'Ha, ha, how vildely [i.e. vilely] does this Cynicke rime'. The word came into English from French **rime** in the thirteenth century. It was also borrowed into other Germanic languages from French, and the original spelling is evident in the modern German **Reim**. The early spellings in English are **rim**, **rym**, **rime**, and **ryme** (no **h**). The alternation of **i** and **y** is standard in early English texts, but the **rh-** spelling does not occur in English until after 1600. This is the period of the revival of classical learning, and a time when many Latin and Greek words are borrowed into English. It is also a time when pedants were rife (as evidenced by Shakespeare's *Holofernes* in *Love's Labour's Lost*). The French **rime** ultimately goes back to Latin **rhythmus**, so in the early seventeenth century pommy cultural cringers changed the English spelling from **rime** to **rhyme**. The Oxford English Dictionary points out that there was a revival of the older **h-less** spelling in the mid-nineteenth century, although the Coleridge example suggests an earlier date: 'The original rime, however, has never been quite discontinued, and in about 1870 its use was considerably revived, especially by writers upon the history of the English language or literature. To some extent this revival was due to the belief that the word was of native origin.' And this was the same period that was gaily Frenchifying program into programme! ED.

HUMBUGGERY

I refer to the article 'A Touch of the Blarney' by Bill Ramson in the last *Ozwords*. I need to point out that the use of the word **humbug** is alive and well today in the Northern Territory, certainly in Darwin where I have lived on and off for the past nine years. It's used daily by and with regards to the Aboriginal people. **Humbug** still means to pester or bother, but usually in the form of begging either for cigarettes or money. ... **Humbug** is very much a part of the local language, to the point that the Aboriginal city elders decided that not only was it making their people unpopular, but it was also undignified. They started a 'No

humbugging' campaign. Posters appeared on the noticeboards outside local shops with those words on: 'No **Humbugging**' or 'Stop **Humbugging**'. The term doesn't appear to have slipped over into general usage but is almost exclusively reserved for an Aboriginal person's behaviour. It's not offensive either, just a statement of fact.

T. Vince, NT

In most Englishes **humbug** (in the sense 'to deceive, to trick') is somewhat old-fashioned. In Aboriginal English of northern Australia, however, it has been retained with a shift of meaning. Jay Arthur in *Aboriginal English: A Cultural Study* (OUP, 1996) points out that it means 'to annoy, to fool around, to cause trouble'. Arthur provides evidence of these senses from the 1920s. A 1984 quotation says that 'a child ... will be said to be **humbugging** if it doesn't obey its mother'. ED.

BUSH WEEK

At the Australian National University an annual week of student games and pranks (in other places a 'rag') is called 'bush week'. In 1980 Christopher Lee wrote a novel, called *Bush Week*, based on these activities. Is this perhaps the origin of the phrase 'What do you think this is—bush week or something?'

F. Price, Vic.

I'm afraid that the **bush week** of the Australian idiom is much older than the Australian National University's prankish brouhahas. In the idiom, **bush week** is a fictitious period when bushies—i.e. people from the bush (regarded as being as thick as a brick)—come to town in droves, there to be fleeced by (thin as Melba toast) city slickers, hence the derisive catchcry 'What do you think this is?—bush week?' given in response to a request etc., the catchcry meaning 'What do you take me for—a country bloody bumpkin?' The notion of bushies flocking to the city en masse, there to go on the town and/or sell their bush products, probably arose from a real occasion in the past. In 1919, for instance, we have the first recorded occurrence of the term: '**Bush week** ... An excellent movement was started some time ago in a quiet way to organise a Bush festival in the City of Sydney. It is proposed that it should last a week, and thoroughly represent every phase of primary and secondary production' (Lone Hand, February). Again, in 1923, we have a reference to the term: 'We go to Sydney, too, with all our produce, and put it in the windows in George Street every year. They call it **Bush Week**, mister' (J. Moses, *Beyond the City Gates*). Not any longer, mister. *Incursions into*

*the city of this kind are now called 'Agricultural Shows' and the term **bush week** is confined mainly to the derisive catchcry. By 1945 the catchcry was so well established that Sidney Baker could call it 'time-honoured': 'The time-honoured chant of derision What's this, **bush week**?' (The Australian Language). In 1949 we are given an instance of its application: 'I get smart alecks like you trying to put one over on me every minute of the day. What do you think this is? **Bush Week**?' (L. Glassop, Lucky Palmer). The student bush week still exists at the Australian National University. In 1981 the Canberra Times (14 August) reported: 'Mr Dobson recalled that in past **Bush Weeks** [at the ANU] a magistrate had been worth 100 points in the scavenger hunt.' I wonder whether any of the feisty undergrads actually managed to kidnap a magistrate and, if they did, what happened to them thereafter. ED.*

BURNED AND BURNT

There seems to be some confusion or uncertainty about whether the past tense of the verb 'to burn' is 'burned' or 'burnt'. People who are learning English as a second language find this a difficult area. Are there any rules to follow here?

G. Rodda, NSW

There are a number of verbs that raise similar questions: **learned** and **learnt**, **spelled** and **spelt**, **spilled** and **spilt**. In the New Fowler's *Modern English Usage* edited by R.W. Burchfield (OUP, 1996) the following explanation is given: 'Burnt is the usual form in the past participle (a thatched cottage was burnt down last week) and as adjective (burnt almond, burnt offering). In the past tense, burned is the dominant form (she burned her hands while preparing the barbecue), but burnt is permissible in all English-speaking areas.' While this is true, it is also true that the use of **burnt** in the past tense is not common in American English. But the question still remains—especially in the past tense, when do you use **burned** and when do you use **burnt**? The linguist David Crystal makes the interesting suggestion that we use the **-ed** form when 'the duration of an action is being emphasized' and the **-t** form when referring to 'something which has happened once, which has taken up very little time, or which focuses on the result of a process rather than on the process itself'. He gives a number of examples, including: 'The torturer slowly burned my arm; I burnt my arm against the stove' and 'The drink burned in my throat [it was whisky]; The drink burnt my throat [it was acid]'. ED.

FLUM

I had not come across the term **flum** until I read these passages in New South Wales newspapers: 'The win over the reigning premiers was no flum. The St Johns Park team was skipped by three of the biggest names in the business—Steve Anderson, Rex Johnston and Steve Glasson' (2005 *Daily Telegraph*); 'But if you believe the Windies might flum one Test, any Test, SportsTAB will give you a dividend of \$8' (2000 *Daily Telegraph*); 'It's still not enough to keep me awake, but that's more the result of a long day on the punt and a night at the washed-out trot meeting, where we manage to flum a nice little trifecta at Wenty Park to ease the pain of Shogun Lodge' (1999 *Newcastle Herald*); 'You can say 19 points were scored against us but one try was a flum off the posts and the other was scored in the 78th minute. If you look at that, the defence was acceptable' (1993 *Sydney Morning Herald*). Thus it seems to mean 'a fluke' or 'to fluke (something)'. And it is not a recent coinage. At the Centre we have a glossary of jail slang compiled at Parramatta Jail in 1972, and it includes the entry 'Flum: fluke it'. Where is it from? There is **flim-flam** meaning 'nonsense; idle talk' or 'to cheat, deceive'. Perhaps **flummox** in the sense 'to bewilder, confound' is another candidate. Is it used outside Sydney?

CONNIE

The word **connie** has a number of senses. It can mean a tram or bus conductor (thus an abbreviation of **conductor**) or a marble (an abbreviation of **cornelian**, a variety of chalcedony). But in 1999 the magazine *Ralph* had an article about the Australian **sharpies** of the 1960s and early 1970s: 'Sharpies wore chisel-toed shoes with Cuban heels ... and hand-made Conti cardigans (originally made by an Italian, Mr Conti, which is why they became known as "connies")'. The term is repeated in a 2004 novel *Glory This* by Michelle Moo: 'Tight high cut pants. Tight short connies, sleeves just below the elbow, with stripes, buttons and a thing on the back like an old man's vest.' This evidence is very late, and we have no contemporary evidence of the term. Can anyone point us towards some earlier printed evidence for this purported eponym?

FLAT-CHAT

In the first edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* (1988) the phrases **flat as a strap**, **flat as a tack**, and **flat to the boards** were included, all in the sense 'at the limit of one's powers or resources'. Now that we are working on the new edition, it has been interesting to note that in recent examples the 'as' of the simile has almost invariably disappeared: 'We were mustering a large area and going flat strap'; 'The car was travelling flat strap'; 'He scooped the ball



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up on the half-volley, flat tack, and kept running'. The surprise is that much more common than either of these is a new phrase, **flat-chat**: 'If there was a radio we'd have it going flat-chat'; 'Hewitt went flat chat to gain peak condition'; 'At the last council meeting councillor Thomson was going at it flat chat like a lizard drinking about some issue'; 'We've just been flat-chat. It's maybe been like a week off in the last 12 months'. Evidence for this new term starts in 1986. Where does it come from? It is possibly a variant of **flat strap** or **flat tack**, since the origin of these terms could be misunderstood or forgotten once the 'as' disappeared. We would welcome any suggestions.

CON ON TO

The following two quotations are examples of a colloquialism that is very difficult to track down in the written records: 'When they want sex though it's a different matter. The guys con on to you as if you are the only chick in the world' (1975 *Tracks*); 'There was one very attractive girl he tried persistently to con on to' (1999 *Sunday Telegraph*). This is the only printed evidence we have for this very common Australian phrase, **to con on to**. Again, we would appreciate any other evidence.

BEATING THE BOUNDS

The beating of the bounds is an ancient British custom, where annually the parish priest, later the parson, would lead a procession around the parish boundaries. The major boundary markers were ritually struck with branches. In a time before the widespread use of maps, people had to remember the parish boundaries. This was especially important to the Church, since the parish received tithes from the people who lived within its boundaries. We have been surprised to discover that the term **beating the bounds** is used in some parts of Australia. The context is

local council rather than local parish. In 1983 the *Advertiser* (Adelaide) reports: 'The site for a proposed \$320,000 child-care centre in Berri may be decided on Monday during the council's "beating of the bounds" inspection of the town.' In 1988 we have this from the *Sunraysia* (Mildura) newspaper: 'Mildura Shire Councillors will venture into the sensitive Hattah Kulkyne National Park during council's annual "beating of the bounds" next month. The tour is arranged each year to allow the outgoing president and councillors to see what work has been done in the shire during the previous 12 months.' This evidence is coming from the Riverina area, so it is possibly a regional use. Does anyone know this term from other parts of Australia?

MRS KERFOOPS

Partridge's *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* lists **Mrs Gafoops** as an Australianism with the sense 'any woman not specifically named', and gives the example: 'Are you going to make that dress yourself, or will you get Mrs Gafoops to run it up for you?' Perhaps the woman was originally Mrs Gafoops but these days it is **Mrs Kerfoops** (or Karfoops or Kafoops). L. Johanssen in *The Dinkum Dictionary* labels the word derogatory, and describes it as a 'pseudonym for a disliked woman whether the real name is known or not, especially for a woman who affects airs and graces'. Partridge's neutral sense is reflected in this quotation from a speech in the Northern Territory Parliament: 'For many people, \$12 000 is a lot of money. If Mr and Mrs Kerfoops had been saving up for a long time to get enough money for a new roof only to find themselves out of pocket because the trade contractor did a shonky job and the government did not require the contractor to be registered, they are not going to be too happy with the government's promise that the primary issue was consumer protection.' The derogatory sense is evident in this passage from the *Courier Mail* (1992): 'We all remember Lady Kafoops, don't we? She lived in my district when I was a kid, and she was the one who scared the living daylights out of me. If we were giggling too loudly during a game of tiggy down the back of the CWA Hall, you could bet that the booming voice which rattled the windows telling you to "Quieten down, please" belonged to Lady Kafoops. If you were having a food fight in the middle of serving jelly and custard at the shire hall during the Governor's visit, it was always Lady Kafoops who walked in and caught you red-handed.' We would be interested in any pre-1980 evidence for Mrs Kerfoops.

Bruce Moore
Director

HUMPING A GROUSE COBBER

DYMPHNA LONERGAN

When I arrived in Adelaide in the 1970s, they were called **cobbers**—those small, chocolate-covered squares of hard caramel that now go by the name **mates**. The word **mate** has nudged ahead of **cobber** in popularity, probably since the republican debate in the 1990s when **mateship** was widely discussed as a proposed term for inclusion in the preamble to the Constitution of Australia.

By the time of the republican debate, the word **cobber** had been in print for just over one hundred years. Appearing first in the *Worker* in Sydney in 1893, it points to a rural origin. The *Australian National Dictionary* suggests the British dialectal word **cob**, ‘to take a liking to’, as a probable origin of **cobber**, and the use of the word seems to support the need for friendship in the harsh environment of the Australian bush. If we no longer hear **cobber** used much, it is because it may simply have outlived its usefulness now that the social conditions that created it have changed (and because **mate** is shorter, and more suited to these downsized and core business times).

The *English Dialect Dictionary* cautions that **cob** ‘to like’ is not widely known. It certainly seems curious that this apparently rare verb could evolve quickly into an Australian noun widely used in the 1890s. Perhaps **cobber**’s origin lies elsewhere. For instance, Amanda Laugesen in *Diggerspeak* (OUP, 2005) suggests an origin in Yiddish **khaber** meaning ‘comrade’, which is closer in meaning and sound to **cobber** than it is to **cob**. The problem with this proposal is identifying social conditions in late nineteenth-century Australia that would make the appearance of this Yiddish word plausible.

Loquacious Irish-speaking migrants, however, and those who spoke an Irish English dialect, were a significant presence in nineteenth-century Australia. The Irish word **cabaire** may be a worthwhile consideration for the origin of the Australian **cobber**. A **cabaire** (pronounced *cobbereh*) is a mildly derogatory term for a ‘chatterbox’. The Irish magpie is a **cabaire breac**, ‘a speckled prattler’. The word **cabaire** is even found in Irish English, notably in County Clare, in the form **cabairlín** ‘a small saucy-mouthed person or animal’. Emigrants came from Clare in the nineteenth century when it was still largely an Irish-speaking district. The Irish MP Michael Davitt, on a visit to Australia in 1898, noted hearing ‘many a Clare tongue in celtic’ in Toowoomba. No doubt other ‘celtic’ speaking Irish people took to the roads as itinerant workers.

The Australian term **cobber** is never anything but positive, while the **cabaire** could get under your skin. It is not unusual, however, for derisive words to evolve into endearments over time: the Australian endearment word **bastard** is a clear example of this. In a sparsely populated rural Australia, the advantages of a **cabaire** may have outweighed the disadvantages. A **cabaire** would shorten anyone’s road, and excessive talking is something that good friends do together.

Australianisms of unknown or uncertain etymology should be worried over more than they are. As we know more and more about the social conditions of colonial Australia, we may profitably reconsider Australian English words that claim dubious or unsustainable etymology. Another such word is **hump**, ‘carry’. Arguably, a revisionist approach to Australian English should not apply to the word **hump**, because it is plausible that the verb **to hump** could have derived from the noun **hump**, especially when what we usually think of as being **humped** in nineteenth-century Australia is a traveller’s **bluey** or a **swag**. In the distance, the approaching traveller carrying a swag on his bag could indeed suggest a humpbacked person; however, the origin of the Australian verb **to hump** is probably to be found on the more hectic and active goldfields. The *Empire* (Sydney) has our first entry for **hump** ‘to carry’. In 1851 the word appeared a number of times as a goldfield term, with diggers humping cradles or swags. The noun **humper** referred to a worker at the diggings who **humped** the clay away. Once the diggings era was over, the **humper** was a swagman and what he **humped** was his bluey.

Many Irish speakers worked on the diggings in the 1850s, and their word for ‘to carry’ was **iompar** (pronounced ‘ummp’). This Irish verb serves many purposes, from conveying and transporting: **earraí a iompar** ‘to carry goods’; to transmitting: **fuaim a iompar** ‘to carry a sound’; supporting and sustaining: **cosa ag iompar boird** ‘legs supporting a table’; through to wearing: **cóta mór a iompar** ‘to wear an overcoat’, and behaving: **tú féin a iompar go maith** ‘to behave yourself well’. Diarmaid Ó Muirthe (*A Dictionary of Anglo-Irish*, Four Courts Press, 1996) has found the Irish word **iompar** in use in the English of Kilkenny today to mean ‘a lift’ (in a car etc.). The word acquires an initial *h* after the preposition *le*, e.g. **trom le hiompar** ‘heavy to carry’ and **éadrom le hiompar** ‘light to carry’. An Adelaide woman claims that her mother used the term **humpin’** in Kilkenny, Ireland, sixty

years ago. She understood it to mean carrying a heavy load with the danger of hurting your back. However, as Ó Muirthe has not recorded this term in his Anglo-Irish words collection, and as I have not found it in any other Irish sources, it is not certain that the word **humpin’** is Irish English. The Irish language word **iompar**, however, may have played a part in the development of Australian English **hump** ‘to carry’.

First recorded in 1924, the Australian word **grouse** may not be so popular today, but it is included on an *urbandictionary* website as Australian slang. Ulster Scots has **groosh** ‘excellent’, and that meaning matches Australian **grouse**. **Groosh**, in turn, may be the Scots word **grush**, ‘thriving, healthy’ (*OED*). Could Ulster Scots **groosh** have developed into **grouse** in Australia? It seems unlikely that the sound would change from ‘oo’ to ‘ow’ and that the *sh* would drop out in such a short time. To Australian-born Irish-language learners, the word **grouse** suggests the Irish approbation and adjective **ar fheabhas**, ‘excellent’. The noun **feabhas**, meaning ‘excellence’ and pronounced ‘fyowss’, becomes the adjective ‘excellent’ with the addition of the preposition **ar**. Following lenition, **feabhas** becomes **fheabhas**, pronounced as ‘yowss’ (‘ow’ as in *cow*). The entire approbatory phrase **ar fheabhas** sounds like ‘ryowss’. A person could be **ar fheabhas**, meaning in excellent health, or a thing could be **ar fheabhas**, meaning ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’. The Australian English word **grouse** is similarly used as an approbation and as an adjective. The *urbandictionary* website offers as approbation: “How was the footy?” “Grouse”, along with the adjectival ‘I had a grouse day’. Australian **grouse**, meaning ‘excellent’, may be another Irish-influenced Australian word.

The possible connection between **hump** and the Irish word **iompar** was raised with me by an Australian-born learner at this year’s Irish language **daonscoil** ‘folkschool’ in Sydney. Other learners have mentioned the similarity between **ar fheabhas** and **grouse**. These Australian-English and Irish-language mindsets have a unique perspective. Just as it took Australian native-born eyes to capture the Australian landscape (early colonial landscape painting often suggested Europe rather than Australia), Australian mindsets that embrace languages other than English may bring new ways to unpack more worrisome Australian English words.

[Dr Dymphna Lonergan lectures in the English Department of Flinders University.]

PASSING PARADE OF POPULAR POLITICAL PHRASES

JUDITH ROBERTSON

Many words and phrases originating from politics are ephemeral, but they illustrate the inventiveness of Australians' use of language. Politicians and journalists invent most political language. There are undoubtedly words that originate from a moment of heightened political passion, but surely most are calculated to become embedded in the minds of the voting public in order to influence their thinking.

Australian politicians and journalists have created some memorable expressions, but in looking over some that have been generated since the Second World War, it is interesting to see which have been stayers and which have faded into near oblivion.

Pig iron Bob had great and powerful friends, but who remembers the first horror budget? **Ming** moved closer to his beloved and **did but see her passing** by more often. We rejected being **British to the boot heels** and went **all the way with LBJ**. Unfortunately the Prime Minister did a **Holt**. Gorton **did it his way**, but there were plenty of **billygoats**, **possums** and **donkeys** waiting in line. **Tiberius with a telephone** rose and fell. **It's time for the light on the hill** to shine again (briefly) when the **true believers** backed the **waterboy** and treated us to a few years of **Whitlamisms**, **multiculturalism**, **femocrats**, and **faceless men**. After Whitlam **crashed through** (and crashed) because he played with **funny money**, the people forgot to **maintain the rage** and **nothing saved the Governor General**.

Oh well, whatever **the truth of the matter**, **life wasn't meant to be easy**. **Honest John's prefect** took over and **got sport back on the front page**. Post **Kerr's cur**, after the **razor gang** took over and **one man's pay rise was another man's job**, the **politics of the inner glow** emerged with the help of Don Chipp. The **numbers men** supported the new kid on the block and the reign of **the drover's dog** began. **I tell you what, any boss who sacks anyone for not turning up today is a bum**. The **silver bodgie** was truly a man for the worker. The **green election** extended his reign but the period of **the accord** ended. **The soufflé didn't rise twice** and Hewson became opposition leader. The **number crunchers** made sure **One Nation** was too strong for **fightback** and won the **unlosable election**. The **undertaker** led the **banana republic** for a short time. **Keatingesque** language made an interesting contribution to the language of the eighties and nineties. The term **scumbag** will bring the **pig farmer's** name to mind for a considerable time.

Speaking of **the bush**, let's go on the **wombat trail** with the **pumpkin scone brigade** and visit **the men and women of Australia**, **the mums and dads**, and **the battlers**. Whatever happened to **blackjack** and his mob? The standout surely has to be **the peanut farmer**, **hillbilly dictator**, **bible-bashing bastard**, and his mate **top level Ted**. But the **Bjelkemander** was just a story put about by the **Labor government**. **Joh for Canberra** looked beyond **God's own country** and spelt the end of an interesting career. But the **Joh and Flo** wagon rolled on into the **states house** via **Flo**, the queen of the **pumpkin scone**.

New South Wales is tough—they **run over the bastards** and have been known to **apply a blowtorch to the belly**; just as well **Balmain boys don't cry**. Don't forget Victoria with **Henry the hangman**, and what about when **Victoria on the move** **Jeffed** many of the voters?

drover's dog, one who earns no respect, a drudge; the dog itself, applied in similes.

1947 F. CLUNE *Roaming around Aust.* 30 Taxi-cabs were scarce in Perth. I was told they had been 'Yanked' by the Yanks. In consequence I got as poor as a **drover's dog**, chasing around on foot. 1983 *Age* (Melbourne) 4 Feb. 4/6, I am not convinced the Labor Party would not win under my leadership. I believe that a drover's dog could lead the Labor Party to victory the way the country is. 1984 *Canberra Times* 2 Dec. 1/5 Mr Hayden would not comment on whether Labor would have done any better with him as leader. He did, however, make reference to a comment he made early last year when he was replaced as leader by the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke. 'The drover's dog will win again but it looks a bit clapped out this time,' he said.

[From *The Australian National Dictionary*]

Oh dear, I have become a little confused, but it is politics we are discussing and I don't want to make it too easy for **the chooks**. Speaking of animals, the **donkey vote** is alive and kicking and even the **unrepresentative swill** have generated some political language. The **fairies from the bottom of the garden** have gone off to reside with the **tweedle-dee** and **tweedle-dum**. The **Hansonites** created **One Nation** (*déjà vu*) and **stirred the possum** in an attempt to win the **protest vote** and replace those who would **keep the bastards honest**. Pauline attempted to change **the lucky country** to **Fortress Australia**, but the sheila from the **fish and chip shop** is still fresh in our memories. Of course we

are reminded of **reds under the bed**, the **domino effect**, and **queue jumpers**. **Please explain!** After the **never, never** GST a breath of youth swept through the senate in her Docs—**Natasha spot destroyer** also faded into the background.

Tasmania and the ACT lead the way with the democratic **Hare-Clark system** of voting which provides them with more than their share of **greenies** and **chardonnay socialists**. After recovery from **the recession Australia had to have**, from **out of the pool of unemployment** came the current crop. **It's the same pile of manure, only the flies are different**.

The **fishnet stockings** had to be changed, so **Lazarus with a triple bypass** made a **headland speech** and with the help of **dad's army** took over to save the country from the **blackhole**. Of course John Howard's embrace of the vernacular does not mean that the words **mateship** and **battlers** will fade, although the use of the phrase **Howard's battlers** may not last. When the **little rodent** no longer has the **ticker** to resist the word **sorry** or to lead this section of the **coalition of the willing** (hey, **my little mate** could be revived) the phrase **not happy** may continue to be used, but **not happy John** will disappear into the archives. When **bomber** offered us **knowledge nation** his position looked in danger, but the **kids** were thrown **overboard** and the **khaki election** resulted in another victory. The **ladder of opportunity** appears to have been made from a non-renewable resource, and **ease the squeeze** may well be confused with tight shoes. The **arse lick**er has joined the **conga line of suckholes** and the **bomber** is back again. There have been whispers of **rats in the ranks**, but **hello, hello**, there are only a couple of years until the **pork barrelling** starts again. Who will be the leaders? The **bomber** and **honest John** or the **crown prince** and one of **the roosters**? We have slipped back to the farmyard again.

Hmmmm, I don't really have an **exit strategy**. How many have you identified? **Well don't you worry about that**, you would have to be a **silly old bugger** with a **whiteboard** to have a mental record of the popularity of all these words and phrases. But most of you will be able to recall most of these, so I suppose this proves my point that the language is carefully chosen to create an impact or a perception. The result is a lasting impression and an instant recall when the word or phrase is repeated.

[Judith Robertson is a researcher at the Australian National Dictionary Centre.]

Like the bunyip and the Loch Ness monster, the fabulous animal called the **Tantanoola Tiger** captured public imagination in the late nineteenth century. In 1883 it is said that a tiger and her cub escaped from a circus caravan camped midway between Robe and Mt Gambier, but they were never found. Two years later a respected citizen of Tantanoola (in the far south-eastern corner of South Australia) claimed that he had seen a tiger on his property, but no more sightings were reported until 1893. By 1895 there were many reports of sheep disappearances or signs of bloody kills. Mounted police were dispatched on a search for the 'Tiger' in the hundred of Kongorong, and it also 'appeared' frequently over the border in Victoria. Nervous communities around Tantanoola offered rewards for the monster dead or alive; settlers carried rifles and took their children to school under guard. In August 1895 Victorian bushman Tom Donovan shot a huge shaggy dog that was savaging sheep in the Mt Salt area, and people celebrated the demise of the monster 'tiger'. It was variously 'identified' as a common European wolf, a crossbred wolf, or an Assyrian wolf that had escaped from a shipwreck off the coast nearby.

But the sheep disappearances continued for another fifteen years, until two men, Charlie Edmonson and David Bald, were convicted of stealing some thousands of sheep. In the meantime the 'tiger' had been stuffed, and was later installed on the roof of the local hotel in Tantanoola. One ninety-year-old Adelaide man, who saw it there decades later, claimed that it was his long-lost dog—the offspring of a European deerhound and a bloodhound. These days the Tantanoola Tiger, whatever its true origins, is housed in a glass case in the Tantanoola Tiger Hotel.

1989 The paddock was littered with ripped carcasses, and there were clear impressions of huge clawed feet leading to the fence. There was blood on the wires and more blood where the beast had landed on the other side. The scare began to snowball. The 'Tantanoola Tiger' made newspaper headlines far and wide. *Daily Mirror* (Sydney) 15 March p. 38

[Extract from *Bardi Grubs and Frog Cakes: South Australian Words* by Dorothy Jauncey (OUP, 2004). Dr Jauncey is a researcher at the ANDC.]

OZWORDS COMPETITIONS

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 24: RESULTS

You were asked to take the name of any prominent Australian politician, sportsperson, entertainer, ecclesiastic, etc., and provide a witty example of rhyming slang derived from that name. As Mark Gwynn points out in the lead article, the link often derives simply from the similarity of the name to the word with which it rhymes: thus Justin **Langer** produced **clanger** and Michael **Kasprovicz** produced **shits**. Even so, the better entries in our competition managed to forge some kind of link. Many entries linked John **Howard** with **coward** and Kim **Beazley** with **measly**, but somehow these did not entirely convince. More convincing were the many entries that rhymed **Warney** with **horny**. Some gave extended examples, as in **his Manning Clarke is worse than his Patrick White** (a bit too learned?), or an **Ian Chappell every Norman May** as a method of keeping the doctor away.

Second Prize (books to the value of \$50 from the OUP catalogue) to Ian **Nowak** of Subiaco, WA, for **Fred Nile = pile**, as in 'Hafta give it a miss today, mate—the ol' freddies are playin' up again'. **First Prize** (books to the value of \$100 from the OUP

catalogue) to Meryl **Manoy** of Osborne Park, WA, for a **Christopher Skase = a wild goose chase**.

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 25

There are many Australian similes that derive, fairly or unfairly, from observations of Australian fauna: **as miserable as a bandicoot** (with variants that make the bandicoot the saddest of Australian mammals: **as barmy as a bandicoot, as poor as a bandicoot, as blind as a bandicoot, as lousy as a bandicoot, like a bandicoot on a burnt-out ridge, as bald as a bandicoot**); **as mad as a cut snake; as mad as a gumtree full of galahs; as dry as a dead dingo's donger; like a stunned mullet**.

Your task is to choose any Australian animal (fish, flesh, or fowl) and create a simile that provides a needed and/or witty addition to the Australian lexicon—**as cunning as a currawong** is the kind of example that comes to mind. **ED**.

ENTRIES CLOSE 28 FEBRUARY 2006.

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

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