OZ WORDS

EDITORIAL

In this edition of *Ozwords*, our lead article takes a look at the story of the larrikin, an Australian archetype. The author, Melissa Bellanta, recently published the fascinating book *Larrikins: A History* (University of Queensland Press, 2012), which comes highly recommended to those interested in the social and cultural life of urban Australia at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

We also celebrate the 100th anniversary of the foundation of Canberra as the nation's capital by taking a look at some of the words unique to Canberra, and some of the words with which the rest of Australia associates the bush capital. Mark Gwynn takes a brief look at two rhyming slang cricket terms that you might have heard in the broadcasts over the summer.

Our competition proved to be very popular, and we received many entries from around Australia. Because of the popularity of the competition and the great variety of entries that we received, we have devoted one of our articles in this edition to discussing some of them. We thank everyone for sharing their family words and language with us.

Amanda Laugesen
Director

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www.ozwords.org

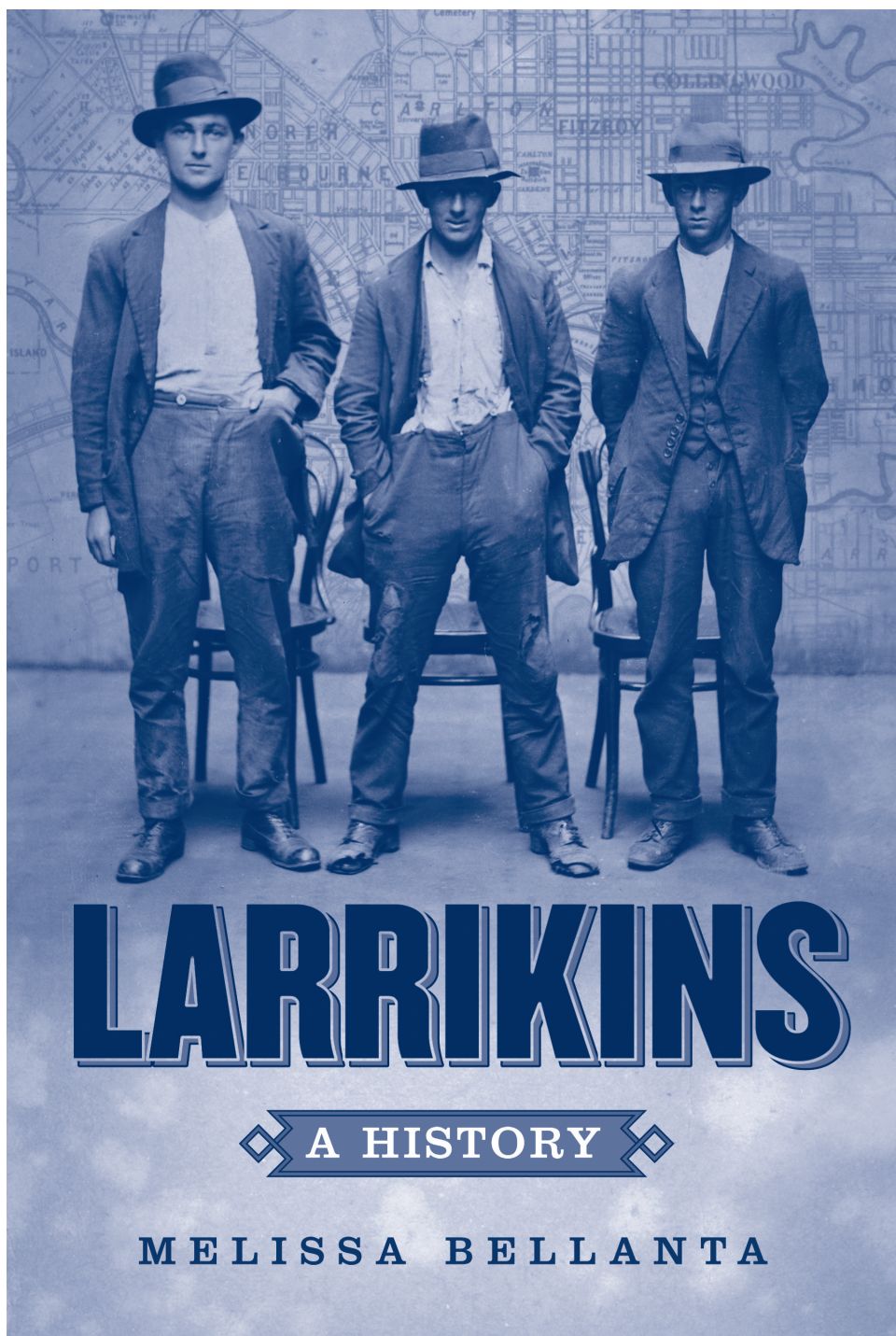**Like us on Facebook:**
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THE LEARY LARRIKIN
MELISSA BELLANTA

For a little more than a century now, larrikinism has played a key role in myths about what it means to be Australian. Few immigrants or visitors arrive in the country having heard the word. When they do, they are given to understand that it unlocks the secret to Australian national identity. It is because of their 'larrikin streak' that Australians refuse to stand on ceremony, they are told. To be a *larrikin* is to be sceptical and irreverent, to knock authority and mock pomposity, engaging in a practice known as 'taking the mickey'—or more often, 'taking the piss'. To call someone a *larrikin* is also to excuse their bad behaviour, their disrespect for social niceties, and raucous drunkenness with mates. Often, too, it refers to 'ockerness': to a broad Australian accent and facility with crude local slang.

Not surprisingly, given its connections to notions of Australianness, most people speculating about the origins of 'larrikin' over the years have assumed that it was home-grown. The most common story about its etymology concerns a Sergeant James Dalton, responsible for policing inner Melbourne in the 1860s. Another version fixes on Sergeant Jack Staunton, who worked the same beat in the 1850s. In each case, the officer was said to have habitually told magistrates 'they were larking, Your Worship' when asked why he had brought misbehaving youth to court. Whether because of an Irish accent or a speech impediment, the phrase came out sounding like 'they were lar-ra-kin, Your Worship'. This prompted wags in the court to take up 'lar-ra-kin' as a noun—so the story goes—using it as a comic reference to larking juveniles.

With its redolence of anti-authoritarian humour and Irish brogue, this story seems an apt way to account for the beginnings of the word *larrikin*. We have it on the authority of august lexicographers, however, that it is an urban myth. According to both Bruce Moore and G. A. Wilkes, *larrikin* originated in England rather than Australia. It was a dialect term meaning 'mischievous or frolicsome youth' hailing from Worcerstershire or Warwickshire. It was also related to the verb 'to larrack', meaning 'to lark about', in the Yorkshire dialect. *Larrikin* never had a large currency in its place of origin, and seems to have died out there in the late 1800s. While it fell into disuse in England, however, it took off on the streets of Melbourne towards the end of the 1860s. In early 1870, it was taken up by Melbourne journalists as a sign that they were abreast of the latest vocabulary. Once they incorporated it into their reports of Melbourne street life, *larrikin* spread to other localities across Australia (and New Zealand), and became entrenched as a colonial word.

The crucial thing to be said about the colonial use of *larrikin* is that it had a sharper edge than it had possessed in England. The first people who used it were the sort frequently found in the Melbourne Police Court—hence the appositeness of the Dalton/Staunton story. These people gave it connotations of streetwise brashness as well as frolicsome mischief. This point is also crucial to the differences between late-colonial and current usages of the term. Australia's first larrikins were a harder lot than the cheeky pranksters that we now associate with larrikinism. Unlike Steve Irwin ('the Crocodile Hunter') or the wealthy ad-man John Singleton, they were from poor backgrounds and earned a precarious living from low-status work—whether an unskilled job in a factory, or some kind of street-based enterprise. One couldn't be an ageing stirrer back then, either: the first larrikins were aged between about eleven years and their early twenties, and most in their mid-to-late teens.

The colloquial word *leary* was important to the way that larrikinism was understood in late-nineteenth-century Australia. The term *leary* had been in circulation since the settlement of the continent, being transported here on the first convict ships. It was synonymous with *flash*, another colloquial term, and meant 'street-smart' and 'not easily

Ozworders Are Briticisms crossing the Atlantic? Should Aussies be worried that liquor store is replacing bottle shop? **ANDC** *Ozworders* It's 210 years today since the first newspaper was

FRONT COVER OF *LARRIKINS: A HISTORY* (UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS, 2012)

> " ... the accretion of meanings that larrikinism had acquired in the colonies. "

duped'. As the concept of street-smartness suggests, *leariness* was also redolent of showiness in dress. To throw yet another colloquialism into the mix, *leary* was closely related to *lairy*, meaning 'aggressively rowdy'. As such, it helped give birth to the twentieth-century slang-word *lair*—although exactly where, when or how the latter term entered the Australian lexicon is unclear.

According to a Melbourne paper in 1882, the criminal classes of the city pronounced larrikin as 'learykin'. One can see, then, the accretion of meanings that larrikinism had acquired in the colonies. It was used of youth who talked up their streetwise credentials, and who also exhibited a tendency to a rowdy brashness of manner and flashy slickness in dress. This was certainly the case for the seventeen-year-old braggart Richard Turvey, who went about proclaiming himself 'King of the Richmond Larrikins' in 1871. He was an unskilled labourer, working for a local bootmaker, who had chalked up street-gambling offences and was wanted by police for assault. Ned Kelly had the same understanding of the term when he referred to the 'larrakin' [sic] as a weedy urban equivalent to himself and the rest of his gang.

Kelly noted the proficiency of the 'half-starved larrakin' in resisting arrest by Melbourne police in his Jerilderie letter of 1879.

The emphatic urbanness of the larrikin identity points to another difference between the colonial term and its usage today. If for no other reason than because he was from the bush, Ned Kelly did not consider himself a larrikin. True, he met up with a barmaid at a bush pub who was known as 'Mary the Larrikin'. Tellingly, however, this barmaid had just returned from a visit to Melbourne when she served Kelly a drink and sang him a song she had heard on the city's streets. Most likely Mary the Larrikin had earned her moniker because of close links to the city in addition to her sassiness. This urban orientation helps to explain why *larrikin* first came into currency in Melbourne rather than some other Australasian locale. Melbourne was, of course, the region's largest city on account of the influx of gold-rush immigrants to the colony of Victoria in the 1850s.

Historian A.R. Hall has spoken of a 'kinked age distribution' throughout Victoria as a result of the gold rushes. By this he means that its population had a distorted age structure as a result of the numbers of gold-era immigrants who had married and had children. An astonishing proportion of Melbourne's population was in their teens by the census of 1871. In South Melbourne (a locality later renowned for its larrikinism), about 40 per cent of the inhabitants were less than 15 years old that year. This kinked age distribution also helps to explain why the word *larrikin* gained purchase in the Victorian capital. By the late 1860s, a yawning gap had opened up across the city between the older generations, many of which had been born elsewhere, and the gaggles of colonial youngsters who sought each other's company in the consciousness of being a new breed.

A thriving popular entertainment scene came with Melbourne's status as Australasia's largest city. In addition to its theatres, it had plenty of 'singing rooms' in the 1860s and 1870s. These colonial equivalents to early British music halls were attached to pubs in and around eastern Bourke Street. They were also scattered about inner-industrial locations such as Collingwood and Emerald Hill (South Melbourne): the sorts of districts in which larrikins lived. Other 'concert halls' offering theatrical acts followed by dancing could also be found in this period: venues that frequently lost their licence on account of their lairy patrons. The journalist calling himself the Vagabond went to one such 'concert hall' in the 1870s. Up in the gallery of the hall he found himself among 'a crowd of youth and boys'—larrikins and thieves all of them, he wrote—along with 'a sprinkling of girls of the very lowest class'.

Late nineteenth-century singing-rooms and variety-cum-dance venues were the incubators of the colonial larrikin identity. In the 1860s and 1870s they regularly featured lippy young women performing sassy 'serio-comic' acts, offering tips to girls such as Mary the Larrikin on how to model the feminine equivalent of larrikin style. They also starred 'lion *comiques*', swaggering comedians best known for impersonating leary Cockney characters on stage. One of these characters, 'The Chickaleary Bloke', was doing the rounds of venues such as Ellis' London Music Hall in Bourke Street and the Café Chantant in Sydney's York Street in the early 1870s. The performer who played him teamed a boastful manner with street-smart dress, step-dancing panache, and an aptitude for heavy slang—all qualities exhibited by male larrikins on the streets outside. There were even similarities between the dress worn by male larrikins and leary stage-Cockney figures at this time. Both had a penchant for lean jackets and tight trousers, the latter flared at the bottom and sometimes covered in checks. Both, too, sported natty scarves at the neck, and heeled boots for step-dancing routines.

Larrikinism really only started to lose its close connection to leariness in and around the time of the First World War. This was chiefly because diggers from the Australian Imperial Forces began to lay claim to a 'larrikin streak'. Having a larrikin streak, however, was different to being a larrikin *per se*. Being a larrikin still meant being a streetwise hoodlum in the Anzac era. Throughout the 1920s, in fact, there were plenty of members of inner-suburban *pushes*, or youth street gangs, who were referred to as larrikins in this classic sense. Once AIF servicemen began joking about their larrikin qualities, however, larrikinism was no longer linked exclusively to street-youth culture. In later decades these links disappeared entirely, as the concept of larrikinism acquired an affectionate, lovable-scallywag air. Eventually, too, the larrikin identity became virtually synonymous with Australianness. For the rest of the century, it was a sign of authentic Australian credentials—and in this sense persists to this day.

Melissa Bellanta is a writer and historian based at the University of Queensland. A former lawyer, she now teaches Australian social and cultural history. She has lived most of her adult life in the inner suburbs of the Australian cities she writes about in *Larrikins: A History*, and currently lives with her daughter and partner in Paddington, Brisbane.

> 66 ... diggers from the Australian Imperial Forces began to lay claim to a 'larrikin streak'. 99

MAILBAG

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.

JUMBUCK

This may sound like an enquiry from the lunatic fringe, but here goes: A suggested (additional) etymology for jumbuck is that it is a folk-etymological transformation-cum-translation of the Cape Dutch word springbok, the original merino sheep having been exported to New South Wales in the late 1790s from the Cape Colony.
M. Hacksley, South Africa

This is an interesting story to add to others about the mysterious origin of *jumbuck*. First, a potted history of the etymology of the word. Until relatively recently most dictionaries attributed the source of *jumbuck* to an Aboriginal language. Archibald Meston, journalist, explorer, and sometime Protector of Aborigines in Queensland, suggested it was derived from the Kamilaroi language of New South Wales and southern Queensland. According to his account in *The Bulletin* in April 1896, *jumbuck* means 'the white mist preceding a shower, to which a flock of sheep bore a strong resemblance. It seemed the only thing the aboriginal imagination could compare it to'. This theory lacks proof, and the idea that an Aboriginal language is the origin of *jumbuck* cannot be confirmed.

What we do know for certain about the word is that it was frequently associated with Australian Pidgin in the early years of the nineteenth century, including the first recorded evidence of *jumbuck* in 1824, which occurs in an Australian Pidgin context. It therefore makes sense to look here for an origin, and it is possible that it may be related to the Australian Pidgin term *jump up*, which means 'to come back to life' (*jump up whitefellow* means 'to be reincarnated as a white person'). Just how it is related is not clear, however, and since at present there is insufficient evidence, we can't be sure about the link between *jumbuck* and *jump up*.

Now to your suggestion that *jumbuck* may be related to *springbok*. In order to prove this we would need evidence of the word *springbok* in early Australian sources, and evidence of a transfer of the meaning of *springbok* from 'antelope' to 'sheep'. There is no proof of such a shift in meaning, and indeed very little evidence of the word *springbok* appearing in Australian sources until around the 1840s and 1850s. It is thus significantly later than our first *jumbuck*, and this probably rules it out of contention as a source. The other factors to consider are the morphology and pronunciation of the word. For the word to transition from an initial 's' to the 'j' form would make it unusual, although not unheard of, in etymological terms.

Interestingly, there is another South Africa–related suggestion for the origin of *jumbuck*: the Malay word *domba*, which means 'sheep'. The story goes that because Malay was an important language of commerce in Cape Town and merinos were originally sourced from there, this word could be a possible candidate. Again, we haven't been able to confirm this. But your *springbok* suggestion is novel, and we have noted it in our *jumbuck* file—just in case something turns up later to bolster your theory!

WAX, BARLEYS, AND CRACKERS

Once again I return to the language of my childhood and the games we played; when kicking a footy from end to end we sometimes chose to 'wax' – i.e. take it in turns to have a kick rather than have the game dominated by the bigger kids; when playing chasey, or some other such game, we would call 'barleys' and cross the middle finger over the index finger if we wanted to be momentarily excused from being caught and made 'he'; on Guy Fawkes Night we would let off 'crackers'. Wax? barleys? crackers?
M. King, SA

We are aware of the term *wax* here at the Centre. In our dictionaries we define the verb *to wax* as 'to share a football, cricket ball, etc.; to go partner with a person in a game.' Often the word comes up in the phrase *to go wax with (someone)*. It seems very likely that this word is a corruption of *to whack* in the sense of 'to share or divide something'. This sense is recorded in 1812 in the first dictionary compiled in Australia, James Hardy Vaux's *A Vocabulary of the Flash Language*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* evidence does not yet include the sense related to games or sport. We have had a number of enquiries about this term before. In 1997 a caller mentioned this term to our former Director, Bruce Moore, on an ABC radio show hosted by James Valentine. It transpired that many listeners knew the term in the sense that you recall, and most believed the usual spelling was *wax*. We think this sense may be an Australianism.

The word *barley* meaning a 'parley, truce, or quarter' is found in Scottish and northern English dialects in the early 19th century. The evidence indicates that it was used primarily in children's games. It is probably an alteration of French *parlez* 'to parley'. We're not sure about the finger-crossing; when we played similar games as kids we would touch a tree to get the same result!

We know the word *cracker* for 'firework' well. It goes back to the 16th century in Britain, and is named for the noise it makes. The term *cracker night* is an Australian term dating from the 1920s. This is no longer part of the experience of Australian children, since safety concerns about fireworks have led to a ban on sales in most States. The only place left to celebrate *cracker night* now is the Northern Territory.

NED KELLY AND MUROO

We had a question via Twitter last year asking us what the word *muroo* means as it appears in Ned Kelly's famous Jerilderie letter. This 56-page document is Kelly's attempt to justify his actions, including the killing of three policemen. The letter was dictated by Kelly to fellow gang member Joe Byrne in 1879. Kelly attempted to have the letter printed in the New South Wales town of Jerilderie but it was not published in full until 1930.

The word *muroo* appears on page 19 of the letter: 'But as soon as I am dead they will be heels up in the muroo. there will be no more police required they will be sacked and supplanted by soldiers on low pay in the towns and special constables made of some of the farmers to make up for this double pay and expense.' We have followed a number of leads and asked several scholars about this, but as yet we have no answer. Suggestions include that it is a place name or that it is a misspelling of *morrow* meaning 'tomorrow'. If you think you know what *muroo* means in this context, please let us know. The full Jerilderie letter can be viewed online at the State Library of Victoria website: http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/our-collections/treasures-curios/jerilderie-letter.

MEAT-SAFE COT

Recently we were alerted to a curious item found for sale on an online auction site—a *meat-safe cot*: '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 little sleuthing has revealed that it is a child's cot fully enclosed with wire mesh (or similar) panels as protection from insects and animals. From the reference to the missing spoke in the advertisement above, this particular *meat-safe cot* may well have had wheels for ease of movement.

We believe that the term arises from the cot's similarity to an old-fashioned meat safe, the ventilated cupboard for storing meat and perishables in the days before household refrigeration. We think *meat-safe cot* is likely to be an Australian term, perhaps first coined in Western Australia. Are any readers familiar with them? If you have used one or slept in one, we'd be interested to hear from you.

Letters, emails and tweets are welcome.

Please **address letters** to:
Ozwords,
The Australian National Dictionary Centre,
The Australian National University,
Canberra ACT 0200

Email: andc@anu.edu.au

FROM THE CENTRE

The Australian National Dictionary Centre

VISITING FELLOW

The Centre welcomed a distinguished Visiting Fellow earlier this year during a record-breaking summer heatwave in Canberra. Professor Peter K. Austin, an Australian-born Londoner, is Märit Rausing Chair in Field Linguistics in the Department of Linguistics at SOAS, University of London and Director of the Endangered Languages Academic Programme. Peter's research interests cover theoretical, typological, historical, and applied linguistics, with a particular interest in endangered languages. He has carried out fieldwork in twelve Australian Aboriginal languages as well as two languages of eastern Indonesia, Sasak (Lombok Island) and Samawa (Sumbawa Island). He is the author of a number of Aboriginal language dictionaries, and during his visit to the Centre he worked on developing dictionary materials for Dieri (or Diyari), a language spoken in northern South Australia. This included the production of a children's picture dictionary and a draft Diyari–English reference dictionary, as part of a language revitalisation project sponsored by an Indigenous Languages Support grant to the Dieri Aboriginal Corporation. While he was here Peter participated in two workshops for Dieri community members in Adelaide and Port Augusta, South Australia, that included creation of new songs, and discussion and use of materials for the revitalisation project, and a new language learning program at Wilsden Primary School in Port Augusta. Peter's work on Diyari, which began in 1974 as an undergraduate student (his PhD on the language was published as a book in 1981), was the subject of a paper ('And they still speak Diyari') given in the ANU's School of Language Studies seminar series. He also co-taught in a week-long fieldwork and language documentation training course in Tokyo for a group of Japanese and international students and researchers, an annual event at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies that Peter helped to establish in 2007. We are pleased to have hosted Peter here at the Centre and wish his dictionary projects every success.

CONFERENCE PAPER

The Centre's Director Amanda Laugesen presented a paper at the International Australian Studies Association conference, held at Monash University in December 2012. Her paper, 'Dictionaries and Australian national identity', discussed the history of Australian dictionaries from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as, among other things, a history of efforts to capture a sense of what Australia is and what it means to be Australian across time. It considered nineteenth-century collections of slang (such as the *Sydney Slang Dictionary*), E.E. Morris's scholarly *Austral English* (1899), Sidney Baker's popular glossaries of the mid-twentieth century, and the heavyweights of the 1970s and 1980s, Arthur Delbridge and the *Macquarie Dictionary*, and W.S. Ramson and the *Australian National Dictionary*. As

historical and literary texts, they have all reflected contemporary debates about Australian national identity.

ANDC'S WORD OF THE YEAR

Each year the Centre selects a Word of the Year from a shortlist drawn up by our research and editorial staff. The words chosen for the shortlist are selected on the basis of having come to some prominence in the Australian social and cultural landscape during the year. In December we announced our 2012 Word of the Year: *green-on-blue*, a word used in a military context to mean 'an attack made on one's own side by a force regarded as neutral'. We chose this term because it gained prominence last year in the Australian and international media due to Australia's ongoing military involvement in Afghanistan. Military conflict has historically generated many new terms; *green-on-blue* is yet another such product of war. The term comes from the use of *green* to indicate neutral forces (in Afghanistan, the local security forces are technically considered neutral) and *blue* to indicate friendly forces on some military maps. While this term is not exclusively Australian, it has come to have significance in Australia in 2012 as a number of Australian soldiers lost their lives in such attacks—sometimes also called *insider attacks*.

The Word of the Year shortlist included the following:

qubit The world of technology and science gives us *qubit*, 'a quantum bit or quantum piece of information', which is used in computing. While an American scientist theorised that a *qubit* might be built, this year a team of Australian engineers made the breakthrough that will lead to the construction of a quantum computer.

fourth age Australia's ageing demographic meant that *fourth age*, 'people aged 85 and over', began to be spoken about in the media.

brotox Celebrity and personal image motivate the appearance of *brotox*, 'botox used by a man'. It has been around since 2011, growing in popularity in 2012, and perhaps has increased relevance for Australians due to our fascination with the ongoing transformation of Shane Warne.

fossil farming Social issues brought a number of words to prominence. The ongoing issue of drugs—in particular, the abuse of prescription drugs—has led to the term *fossil farming*, 'the activity of buying prescription drugs from elderly people for personal use or illegal sale'.

Our announcement of our Word of the Year 2012 received some media attention. We also received several disgruntled queries asking why we announced a 'Word' of the Year when Blind Freddy could see that *green-on-blue* is actually three words. The reason is that *green-on-blue*, a compound term made of three separate words, is considered by dictionary-makers and linguists to be a single lexical item. Compound terms such as *sandwich generation* and *red tape* are greater

than the sum of their parts. Knowing what *sandwich* and *generation* mean separately will not lead you naturally to the correct definition of *sandwich generation*—'people who are responsible for bringing up children at the same time as caring for ageing parents'. As with *green-on-blue*, you have to consider the term as a single item to understand its meaning. This is why we consider these compound terms semantically to be single 'words'.

OED HISTORY

Words of the World: A Global History of the Oxford English Dictionary by Sarah Ogilvie, the Centre's former Director, was published recently by Cambridge University Press. It explores the history of non-European words included as entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), and discusses the associated attitudes and policies of the OED's editors throughout its 150-year existence. The history of OED's shifting editorial practice makes interesting reading. *Words of the World* has garnered significant media attention and is an important contribution to the history of English dictionary-making.

AUSTRALEX 2013

Australex, the Australasian Association for Lexicography, is holding its conference this year at the University of Adelaide, 25–27 July. Australex members are an eclectic bunch: dictionary-makers, linguists, teachers, publishers, students of lexicography, researchers, and lovers of dictionaries. The theme for this year's conference is 'Endangered words, and signs of revival'. Keynote speakers are eminent linguist Dr Luise Hercus (ANU), who will speak on 'A fifty-year perspective on endangered words and revival', and Professor Christopher Hutton (University of Hong Kong), who will speak on 'Reclaiming socio-cultural memory: creating a reference dictionary of Hong Kong Cantonese slogans and quotations'. Australex 2013 will also celebrate two special landmarks: Luise Hercus's fifty years of work on Aboriginal languages, and Peter Mühlhäusler's twenty years of scholarship at the University of Adelaide. If you'd like more information about the conference or the organisation, you can find the Australex website by googling 'Australex 2013'.

WORD BOX

Thank you Ozworders! We are enjoying the response to Word Box, our new way of gathering information from the public on our website. This is a feature that allows you to tell us of any new or unusual words you come across by noting them briefly in an online submission form—it's quick and simple. We've had a steady stream of words and phrases you think we need to know about—see our blog for regular updates on some of the words submitted. Word Box is a great way to alert us to the new words and usages you are hearing and reading. Please keep posting in our Word Box.

FAMILY LANGUAGE Julia Robinson

We had such an enthusiastic response to our family language competition (see page 8) that in recognition of the interest it generated, we'd like to share with you some more of the great variety of entries you sent in. Special thanks to all of those contributors, too numerous to name individually, who will recognise their special words and expressions here.

A significant number of entries were words based on the (mis)pronunciations of young children. This was hardly a surprise; a baby's first words are an important domestic event, and the language acquisition of toddlers is fascinating to witness. Examples we received included *picpic* (picnic), *shick-a-look* (chocolate), *meanish tart* (neenish tart), *windscreepers* (windscreen wipers), *binoclears* (binoculars), *wobbellies* (wallabies), and *hollerable* (horrible). *Eye-togs* (swimming goggles) is a nice example of a child's logic, as is the variation of the noun *cardigan*, according to its state: *cardig-on* or *cardig-off*. Many competition entrants reported that a childhood coinage became an established 'familyism' lasting long after the child in question had grown up.

Within a family, euphemisms are often used to soften the impact of something unacceptable. Swearwords and bodily functions are high on the list. We liked this 1960s father's heartfelt curse: *jam and butter!* (damn and bugger!), or when pushed to his limit, *jam and butter the muddy bucket of pitch!* There is some evidence of the form *jam and butter* being used elsewhere. Children too use euphemisms for taboo words, as in this case to avoid punishment for blasphemy: *oh cheeeeese!* (oh Jesus!). *Combuggerlypleted* (completely buggered) is not so much a euphemism as a misdirection (and an example of tmesis, to get technical): 'my Mother … couldn't put her finger on what it was in that word that upset her'. One family exclusively uses *to quokka* (to fart), following a holiday on Rottnest Island. ('The question: "Was that you?" was met with the response, "No it was a quokka". Thus a tradition was born.') A child in the 1930s was asked *have you done your duty?* (have you been to the toilet?). And in the same era, reflecting the irresistible lure of Hollywood, a family who lived next door to the local picture theatre named their outhouse *the Backlot*.

While mothers in particular appear to be the guardians of what is proper, sometimes the men in the family—especially uncles—have other ideas, preferring a bit of spice in their linguistic diet. *Stuff me up a roan goat's arse* was the exclamation favoured by one writer's uncle, 'especially when Bundied up'. *A stroke of Jeannie's arse* (a stroke of genius), and *wank your merry crutch* (thank you very much) must have had mum glaring and the kids in stitches.

Malapropisms featured too. These are the mistaken use of one word for another, where the words are similar in sound but different in meaning: *amphibious* instead of *ambidextrous*, and *flower derangement* for *flower arrangement*. Perhaps such a derangement might include *dragonsnaps* (snapdragons) and *Aggie's panthers* (agapanthus)? *Dragonsnap* was one of the large number of entries with transposed syllables or sounds. These ones hardly need explanation: *washdisher, flutterby, cumbercue, unindated, the thot plickens*. But what is the rakishly named *buggery jar*? (Hint—popular cagebird.)

Puns and other forms of wordplay were rife in the entries, such as *outsect* (insect), *cup of chino* (cappuccino), and *serve you right* (serviette)—but how many families use these anymore? Some of you will recall question-and-response games like this one: *Are you Hungary? Yes, Siam. Then Russia to the table and I will Fiji.* And in farewell: *Abyssinia Samoa. Ceylon.* More than one entrant mentioned the mysterious *Ron*. 'We'd best save these *for Ron*' says a father of the last few chocolates: 'for later on' is what he meant. A kind of family shorthand is illustrated by *scooz mooz* (excuse me, an example of rhyming reduplication), and *sneaker* (thank you, derived from *sandshoe* as a partial rhyme for 'thank you'). *Horse piddle* (hospital) will surely be known to others, as will *edumicated* (educated—a deliberate mispronunciation to prove the opposite).

Idioms were well-represented, some well-known, as *it came with the cornflakes*, or *I got it in the weetbix* (or *coco-pops*) *packet* (in answer to the query 'where did you get …?'). Some idioms are less common: *you need an old dog for a hard road* (the advantage of experience over youth), and *a blind man on a galloping horse could see that* (a version of Australia's Blind Freddy). Variations on common idioms were plentiful too: *go like a greased weasel* (like greased lightning), *faint heart never won fat turkey* (never won fair lady), *best thing since sliced cheese* (sliced bread), *up in Nannie's room behind the clock* (up in Annie's room), and *I'm all ears—but nobody's perfect*. More idiosyncratic idioms were *will there be cake?* (are you expecting a party/food?—asked of family member about to go out), *behave yourself or I'll bat your eyelid* (a mock reproof), and *choke, chicken, there are plenty more hatching* (said by a mother to a child having a coughing fit).

Two people wondered if their words were of Scottish origin. *Clarting* (playing with food on your plate, or making a mess) and *plutterer* (someone who takes forever to do something) do indeed have Scottish connections. The verb *to clart* is found in Scottish and northern dialects, and means 'to smear with dirt; to make (something) dirty'. It has its roots in the thirteenth century as the verb *beclart*. It's

not hard to see how *clart* in the sense of 'make something dirty' might easily come to mean 'make a mess', and specifically 'make a mess of food on your plate'. To *plutter* (or *plouter*) is a nineteenth-century Scottish and northern English dialect word meaning 'to move or work ineffectually or aimlessly; to potter about'. *Plutterer* is an agent noun formed on *plutter*.

At the Centre we have enjoyed receiving your competition entries, which enlivened our tea breaks for several months. You're an inventive lot. For this we sprinkle all of you metaphorically with *woofle dust* (a useful magic powder that may be applied to achieve a desired result) to ensure your inventiveness does not flag for our next competition.

Julia Robinson is an editor and researcher at the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

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DOROTHIES AND MICHELLES Mark Gywnn

Another Australian summer of cricket has come and gone but has once again left its indelible mark on the language. One of the last bastions of Australian rhyming slang can be heard in cricket commentary—particularly ABC radio coverage. *Cricket tragics* had to wait patiently this summer to hear the word *Dorothy* leave the lips of Jim Maxwell, AM. A *Dorothy* is a score of six runs in cricket, and the word comes from rhyming slang *Dorothy Dix*. As is often the case with rhyming slang, the rhyming element ('Dix' in this case) is omitted. Many readers will be familiar with *Dorothy Dix* in a political context. A *Dorothy Dix* or *Dorothy Dixer* is a pre-arranged parliamentary question asked to allow a minister to deliver a prepared speech. The term comes from Dorothy Dix, the name of a US writer of a question-and-answer column. Her column was a common fixture in Australian newspapers in the first half of the twentieth century.

A number of Australian bowlers got *Michelles* this summer. In cricket a *Michelle* is a five-wicket haul taken in one innings. The word comes from rhyming slang *Michelle Pfeiffer*.

The rhyme is based on 'five fer', i.e. 'five wickets for only 63 runs'. A *Michelle* is considered a very good result for a bowler; some would say that it's the equivalent of a batter getting a century (100 runs). Michelle Pfeiffer is a US movie actress who came to prominence in the 1980s in films such as *Scarface*, *Ladyhawke*, and *The Witches of Eastwick*. For those who follow the cricket, let's hope that the Aussies don't have a *Barry Crocker* in the Ashes this year.

Mark Gwynn is an editor and researcher at the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

WORDS FROM THE BUSH CAPITAL Amanda Laugesen

2013 marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of Canberra as Australia's capital. Over the past one hundred years of Canberra life, a number of 'Canberra words' have evolved. Some of these words are local inventions—familiar to those of us who have lived here for some time, but less familiar to the outsider; other terms are not uniquely Canberran but are closely associated with the city in the Australian imagination.

Canberra as the nation's capital and seat of Federal Government and the Australian Public Service has generated a number of terms with which the city is associated. Although not originally or exclusively Canberra words, for the rest of Australia Canberra is surely identified with *public servants* and *pollies*. *Public servant* had its origins back in the convict era in Australia to refer to prisoners of the Crown; another popular Australianism for a *public servant* is a *shiny bum*—while a *shiny bum* in a higher pay bracket is sometimes referred to as a *fat cat*. Canberra has created its own unique and derogatory term for a public servant: *pube*. *Pube* is first found in the written evidence in the 1980s.

Pollies have contributed many terms to Australian English from Menzies' *forgotten people* to *Howard's battlers* but they are perhaps most responsible for *Canberra* coming to be equated with 'Federal Government'—an association Canberrans are not always happy about—and the subsequent *Canberra bashing*. While the organisers of the Canberra Centenary celebrations are hoping to dispel the negative associations that *Canberra* conjures up for the rest of Australia, it remains to be seen whether this will happen. In an election year (and with cuts to the federal public service being discussed), it is likely that *Canberra bashing* will continue for a while yet.

One of the best-known words of local invention is *govie* (or *guvvie*) for a house that was originally built by and owned by government; such houses are now often referred to as *ex-govies*, because they have been sold into the private market. In the past, *ex-govies* were often cheaper and smaller than other houses, and usually bought for the purposes of renovation and extension—they are now highly desirable properties. Both terms seem to have become popular in the 1980s, which is when the first written evidence appears, and were commonly mentioned in real estate advertising.

Two unique Canberra words for phenomena found elsewhere are *booner* and *Civic*. *Booner* is a term used in Canberra for a *bogan* or *Westie*—'a person regarded as being uncultured and unsophisticated', although it seems to have been superseded by *bogan* in recent popular usage. *Civic* refers to the central business and shopping district of Canberra, which in other parts of Australia is more likely to be referred to as 'the city' or 'the CBD'.

The number of Canberra words is relatively small. Bruce Moore in *What's Their Story? A History of Australian Words* (OUP, 2010) points out that perhaps one of the reasons Canberra has produced so few distinctive terms is the transient population, many of whom grew up in places other than Canberra. With a growing and more settled population, it will be interesting to see if more Canberra words develop in the future.

Do you know any Canberra words? We encourage you to use the Australian National Dictionary Centre's Word Box: http://andc.anu.edu.au/webform/word-box to let us know about them. We will also be blogging about Canberra words through 2013, so keep checking our blog at http://ozwords.org/ for more.

Amanda Laugesen is Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

OZWORDS COMPETITION

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 39: RESULTS

For this competition you were asked to provide interesting examples of words or expressions used within the domestic circle and understood by family members.

The response to this competition has been overwhelming—we received more entries for this than for any previous competition. Turn to page 6 for more examples and a discussion about the kinds of entries that were submitted.

1st Prize (books to the value of $100 from the OUP catalogue):

> Well, back to the cactus! = it's time to get back to work
> (L. Bowen, Vic.)

The winning entrant knows this phrase from her husband, who picked it up from a colleague in North Queensland. At the end of a tea break the man would say: 'Well, back to the cactus!' Our entrant's husband thinks this unusual saying may have originated with the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century workforce employed to eradicate prickly pear, an introduced pest which invaded large areas of farmland in Queensland and New South Wales. 'It was cut by hand with a machete, often in extreme heat and horrible conditions, while dodging prickles and being squirted with juices that could cause blindness if they got in your eyes.' The judges liked the idea that this expression may reflect a piece of uniquely Australian history.

2nd Prize (books to the value of $50 from the OUP catalogue):

> fiona = 1. the weekly shopping list (written on a piece of A6 paper from a promotional message pad). 2. a blank piece of this paper.
> (G. Case, Qld)

The entrant tells us that after collecting handouts at an 'Ageing Expo' in Brisbane he came home with a lot of A6 message pads issued as promotional material by Brisbane City Councillor Fiona King. These pads were used by the family to write the weekly shopping list which was called a *fiona* in her honour. Examples of its use: 'Did you bring the fiona?', 'Have we got milk and bananas on the fiona?', and 'I'll start a list. Pass me a fiona, please.' The judges were impressed with the examples of *fionas* provided, which can now be from pads issued by people other than the original Fiona.

Some honourable mentions:

> Presbyterian crossing = pedestrian crossing (from a child's first attempt to say this). 'I am famous in my family for mispronouncing words'.
> (J. van Os, NT)

> bring out your dead = give me your dirty washing. 'My mother, to draw our attention, walked up and down our long passage banging on a large tin can, calling out 'bring out your dead'.
> (M. Gordon, ACT)

> moange = to moan and whinge simultaneously. A six-year-old's useful creation.
> (P. Williamson, NSW)

> OBE = Over Bloody Eighty. As Dame Edna did, this entrant's Uncle Len gave himself a gong.
> (S. Walsh, NSW)

> dust is a noun, not a verb = favourite saying of a former teacher of English who is averse to housework.
> (P. Barnett, NSW)

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 40

To continue our celebration of the Centenary of Canberra (see p. 7) we thought it would be appropriate to have a centennial theme for this competition. Leading up to the official naming of Australia's capital city in 1913 many names were proposed by officials and the public alike. Some of the more interesting suggestions included Climax, Paradise, Myola, Shakespeare, Captain Cook, and Regina. Perhaps fortunately, the officials chose a local Aboriginal word that may mean either 'meeting place' or 'hollow between a woman's breasts'—the latter referring to the plain between Mount Ainslie and Black Mountain. On 12 March 1913 the Governor-General's wife Lady Denman officially proclaimed: 'I name the capital of Australia, Canberra'. Lady Denman put the stress on the first syllable, 'can', thus ensuring it as the preferred pronunciation to this day.

Your task for this competition is to come up with your own name for Australia's capital city. 'I name the capital of Australia, …'. The most interesting and amusing entries will be in the running for a prize.

Entries Close 31 July 2013

Entries sent by email should also contain a snail mail address (in order to receive the prize). All entries should be sent to the ANDC at one of the addresses at the top of the next column.

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