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EDITORIAL

We have devoted this issue of *Ozwords* to a variety of articles on idioms. To celebrate the forthcoming publication of the second edition of our dictionary on historical principles, *The Australian National Dictionary*, I have written an article discussing some of the many new Australian English expressions and idioms we are including. The new edition includes many more idioms than the first edition, and highlights an important element of the Australian vernacular.

Dr Julia Miller has contributed an article outlining an aspect of her research into idioms. Her research looks at both British and Australian idioms, and in her article she discusses some of the various idioms relating to the forms 'as mad as' and 'as crazy as'. In his piece, Mark Gwynn focuses on just one idiom – but one with a fascinating story: *up in Annie's room*. The origins of this expression are unclear, but Mark reveals its likely beginnings in a military context.

Our competition, as ever, proved to be popular and we enjoyed reading the many entries that came in. There were also many fascinating contributions to our Mailbag. We look forward to receiving the next lot of competition entries, and contributions to Mailbag. We also hope you will send us some of the expressions you are familiar with, especially ones that are variants of those discussed in this issue.

Amanda Laugesen

Director



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STRAIGHT TO THE POOLROOM WITH THESE AUSTRALIAN IDIOMS

AMANDA LAUGESSEN

The second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* (hereafter referred to as *AND 2e*) will be published later this year. This new edition includes many new words and idioms. Some of these are words and expressions that have come into usage since the publication of the first edition in 1988; others are those we have since discovered or found more evidence for. Idioms are a highly colloquial aspect of our vocabulary, often reflecting Australian attitudes and values, and they have been given a greater emphasis in the dictionary this time around. In this article, I would like to highlight a selection of the idioms and expressions that we are including in the second edition of our dictionary on historical principles.

Over its history, Australian English has developed a variety of idioms, some of which we use a lot. *Chucking a sickie*, or describing someone as being *like a stunned mullet*, form part of our vernacular. Other idioms and expressions are now dated and either forgotten or only vaguely known: we rarely describe someone as being *as silly as a rabbit* or curse someone with *may your chooks turn into emus and kick your dunny down*. Yet all of these expressions make up the colourful and fascinating history of Australian English recorded in our forthcoming dictionary.

A number of the new expressions in *AND 2e* have links to politics, many being coined by a politician. For example, *keep the bastards honest* is a well-known slogan uttered by Don Chipp (1925–2006), leader of the Australian Democrats, in 1980. He was alluding to the party's role in holding the balance of power in the Senate. The phrase has since entered popular usage in a transferred sense, although it is still largely used in a political context. Another expression coined by a politician, in this case Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, is *life wasn't meant to be easy*. A different kind of contribution to Australian English comes from Prime Minister Harold Holt, whose mysterious disappearance in 1967 led to the development of the rhyming slang phrase *to do a Harold (Holt)*, 'to do a bolt', first recorded in 1984.

Popular culture and literature have also contributed to our range of Australian idioms. For example, the Australian film *The Castle* (1997) has given us the expression *straight to the pool room*, 'a catchphrase used to express the great value of a gift or prize'. The comic strip character Flash Gordon, published in Australia with the name Speed Gordon, is the origin of the expression *in more trouble than Speed Gordon*, first recorded in 1944. The chocolate bar *Violet Crumble* has given us the expression *that's the way the violet crumbles* (first recorded 1988). On a more literary note, Xavier Herbert's novel *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975) popularised the title as an expression of deprivation and loss. The phrase has its origins in Australian Pidgin. And the refrain in John O'Brien's poem 'Said Hanrahan' (1921)—*we'll all be rooned*—is surely the ultimate expression of pessimism.

Unsurprisingly, sport is the source of numerous Australian English expressions and idioms. *To do a Bradbury*, 'to be the unlikely winner of an event; to win an event coming from well behind', is one of the most recent sporting-derived idioms in Australian English. It refers to Steven Bradbury, an Australian speed skater who won a gold medal at the 2002 Winter Olympics after all his opponents were involved in a pile-up during the 1000

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

metres event. *Wally Grouit* is rhyming slang for ‘shout’; Wally Grouit was an Australian test wicketkeeper (1957–66). Although undoubtedly in use earlier, this bit of rhyming slang is first found in print only in 1988.

A number of idioms refer to the harsh Australian environment, some of which have a long history in Australian English but weren’t included in the first edition of *AND*. They include *where the crows fly backwards (to keep the dust out of their eyes)* (first recorded 1899) and *wet enough to bog a duck* (first recorded 1948). Australian idioms also include a number that are derogatory or offensive, and that speak to some of the less flattering aspects of Australian society and history: *I must have killed a Chinaman*, used to refer to bad luck (first recorded 1893); *as full as a Pommy complaint box*, ‘very full; very drunk’ (first recorded 1985); and *wouldn’t serve it to a Jap on Anzac Day*, used to designate something that is unacceptable in the extreme (first recorded 1976).

A characteristic Australian bluntness is often in evidence. An ugly person might be described as having *a head like a robber’s dog* (first recorded 1946) or being *as ugly as a hatful of arseholes* (also US, but chiefly Australian, and first recorded in 1957). If you’re thirsty, you could describe yourself as being *as dry as a kookaburra’s Khyber* (first recorded 1971), and something unpopular or offensive might be described as being *off like a bucket of prawns* (first recorded 1981). Someone who is incompetent might be the target of the disparaging but inventive *couldn’t train a choko vine over a country dunny* (first recorded 1981).

A concern with laziness also seems to have prompted the creation of a number of idioms—whether this is indicative of a national propensity to avoid hard work is not for us to judge! These expressions include: *wouldn’t work in an iron lung* (first recorded 1971); Australia as the *land of the long weekend* (first recorded 1966); *to be on a good lurk*, ‘to have an easy job; to be engaged in a profitable enterprise’ (first recorded 1906); and of course Australians are notorious for their willingness to *chuck a sickie* (first recorded 1988).

Australian English also includes a range of idioms referring to people variously considered to be eccentric, stupid, or very angry. Julia Miller discusses some of these on p. 7 of this edition. In addition to the many expressions Julia has collected relating to the forms ‘as mad as’ and ‘as crazy as’, we include the following expressions in *AND 2e*: *to chuck a wobbly* (first recorded 1986); *to be a stubby short of a six-pack* (and variants); *mad as a gumtree full of galahs* (first recorded 1941); *to chuck a mental* (first recorded 1979); *short of a sheet of bark* (first recorded 1885); *to chuck a berko* (first recorded 1995); and to be *not the full dollar* (first recorded 1976). As can be seen from this list, which is not exhaustive, the form ‘to chuck a ...’ is also commonly found in Australian English.

A variety of animals inspire Australian idioms, most commonly dingos, crows, chooks, and dogs. But the most ‘productive’ animal for Australian English is surely the bandicoot, an insect-eating Australian marsupial. In *AND 2e*, we record that one can be as *bald, hungry, lonely, lousy, miserable, poor, silly*, and *crazy as a bandicoot*. What did the poor bandicoot do to deserve such a stigma? Perhaps the bandicoot’s long face suggested why he might be miserable or lonely, but some have speculated that we just like the sound of the word ‘bandicoot’. While these bandicoot idioms were recorded in the first edition of *AND*, they are still around, and attest to the resilience of some of these expressions to persist in our vernacular.

“
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bluntness is
often in evidence.
”



THE SOUTHERN BROWN BANDICOOT: SILLY, MISERABLE, LONELY?

Place names have also inspired a handful of Australian idioms. *As crook as Rookwood*, ‘very ill, out of sorts; corrupt, dishonest’, first recorded in 1971, alludes to the Sydney suburb of Rookwood, where there is a cemetery. The tough working class history of another Sydney suburb is reflected in the stoical expression *Balmain boys don’t cry*, first recorded in 1983, and coined by NSW Premier Neville Wran. *Things are crook in Tallarook* is a rhyming catchphrase used to indicate that things are bad or unpleasant.

Finally, here is a selection of colourful favourites. If you don’t already use them, perhaps you might like to!

- *so windy it would blow a blue (cattle) dog off its chain*, ‘extremely windy’. First recorded 1991.
- *not to know whether it’s Tuesday or Bourke Street*, ‘to be in a state of confusion; to be disoriented’. First recorded 1952.
- *to have a death adder in one’s pocket*, ‘to be extremely miserly; to be stingy’. First recorded 1948.
- *flash as a rat with a gold tooth*, ‘very showy but of dubious character’. First recorded 1978.
- *wouldn’t shout if a shark bit him*, used with reference to someone who wouldn’t buy (‘shout’) a round of drinks; a stingy person. First recorded 1963.
- *to have more arse than class*, ‘to be very cheeky; to be very lucky’. First recorded 1974.
- *stiffen the wombats*, an expression of surprise or exasperation. First recorded 1940.
- *like a seagull on a hot chip*, ‘very eagerly’. First recorded 1989.
- *go see a taxidermist*, euphemism for ‘get stuffed’. First recorded 1969.

As we saw in our previous *Ozwords* article on family language (April 2013), many families will have their own variants of the kinds of idioms discussed here. We’d love you to tell us about some of these. Please write to us with variants of the above idioms and expressions, or others you know about, especially those that may now have passed from everyday usage. We look forward to your contributions.

“

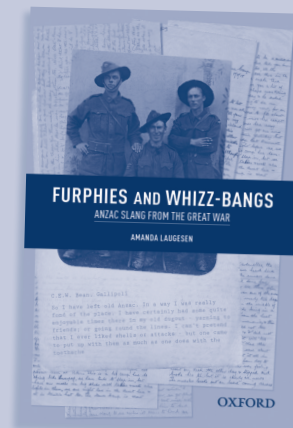
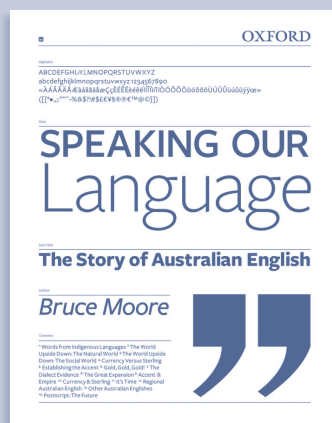
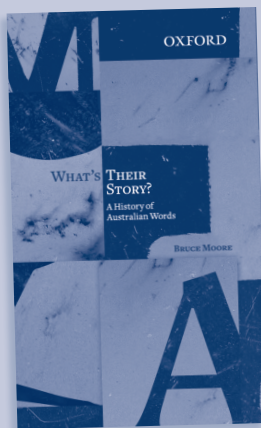
... many families will have their own variants of the kinds of idioms discussed here.

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Amanda Laugesen is Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

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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.

THE ORIGIN OF 'BLING'

I currently live in Bali, and recently I came across the Indonesian word 'bling'. It refers to broken pieces of glass, shards of porcelain and the like. It is not a new word, it has been around at least 50 years. I wonder if it has any connection to 'bling' in the modern western concept. Or just a coincidence.

B. Norman, Bali

The first evidence in English usage for the noun *bling*, meaning 'expensive, ostentatious clothing and jewellery', is found in the title of a 1999 song—'Bling Bling'—by B.G., a New Orleans rapper. The term *bling* is likely to have been a hip-hop slang term popularised as a result of the song. Other early evidence quoted by the *Oxford English Dictionary* hails from Dallas, Texas, and (as an adjective) from a Jamaican newspaper. The derivation is 'perhaps imitative of light reflecting off jewellery, or of jewellery clashing together'.

Scholar and Indonesian language teacher David Hill confirms there is an Indonesian word, *beling*, with the meaning B. Norman describes: 'shards or pieces of glass, porcelain or pottery'. The pronunciation of the 'e' sound in *beling* is short, and sometimes silent. It is an interesting coincidence, but we think it is no more than that. It's hard to imagine how *beling* might have made the geographical and contextual leap from Indonesia into African-American slang.

TROTTING THE RABBIT

Recently we had a contribution to our Word Box from J. Kovacic, New South Wales, who submitted the term *trotting the rabbit*. She noted that it had been found in the context of a police report from Wangaratta, in an unnamed newspaper. We found the article through the Trove website in a Beechworth paper, *The Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, in 1908:

'Wm. Chalmers, J. McLoughlin and P. Hardy, pleaded guilty to being drunk and disorderly, and had been arrested by Constable Mallon on Thursday. McLaughlan [sic] and Hardy stated to the Bench that they had been preparing for St. Patrick's Day, and were having a merry time under the Ovens bridge, 'trotting the rabbit'. Fined 5s. each, or 48 hours, the P[olice] M[agistrate] remarking that it was not wise to make preparations for such festivities in a public place.' (22 February)

We could find no other evidence for the expression *trotting the rabbit*. However there is an Australian English sense of *rabbit* that means 'alcoholic liquor, usually beer'. The origin of this sense is unknown, but it was often used in the phrase *to run the rabbit*, meaning 'to procure alcoholic liquor (especially beer) sometimes illegally'. The terms *rabbit* and *run the rabbit* were in use from 1895 until the middle of the 20th century. *Trotting the rabbit* is clearly related,

though with a slightly different meaning. In the article the defendants are engaging in a drinking session, rather than procuring alcohol. (It is unlikely the accused would boast to a magistrate that they had procured liquor if there was any hint of illegality about it.) We have made a note of *trot the rabbit* in our archive in case more evidence turns up.

TO STIFFEN POLL

I am trying to decode a poem printed in an Australian newspaper and am having trouble with the term 'To stiffen Poll, if she whacks Tom In the mouth'. The poem appeared in The North Melbourne Courier and West Melbourne Advertiser on 20 December 1895. All the other terms I have managed to decode. The case in the Prahran Police court (South Melbourne) refers to Walter & Martha Todman. I am hoping to write up my findings in my blog and I am hoping that some kind person will be able to help. The poem:

*When mammy wants papa to shout,
 And bangs the blessed things about
 Unless he does, he'd best go out
 And get a blue prescription from
 The Doctor ruling at Prahran,
 Who, pitying the average man,
 Will always do the best he can
 To stiffen Poll, if she whacks Tom
 In the mouth,
 Down South. ...*

S. Williamson, Victoria

The meaning of *stiffen* in this piece is most likely to be 'punish', especially given the court context. *Green's Dictionary of Slang* (Jonathon Green, 2010) records this meaning, and quotes a piece from *The Bulletin* in 1890: 'she was further "stiffened" by a sentence of seven days' imprisonment and three years in Shaftsbury Reformatory.' According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *stiffen* can mean 'to become stiff or rigid; also, to die' (dating from the 18th century), and these senses are also used figuratively. In the poem *stiffen* is one such figurative use.

ON THE ORIGIN OF SMOKER

You wonder about the origin of the name 'Smoker' for the Regent Parrot Polittelis anthopeolis. The authority on such matters is Fraser, I. & Gray, J. 2013, Australian bird names: a complete guide, CSIRO Press, Collingwood, Vic.: 'Smoker, we suspect, for the yellow-black plumage like nicotine-stained fingers'. (p. 137)

D. McDonald, New South Wales

An evocative image! Thanks to our correspondent for the reference.

REAL BOSKER

A recent contributor to Word Box, O. Ronalds, Queensland, told us a family story, written

down in 1988 by his great aunt, about the word *bosker* (a synonym for *bonzer*). *It refers to Obadiah Watson who arrived from Wales in Rockhampton January 1884 and travelled straight away with family to Gympie. Obadiah and family went back to Wales after 11 years before returning to Qld in 1906 to Brisbane. It could be that the events happened later but as written it was in Gympie circa 1884. The great-aunt's story is as follows:*

'The hat my father was wearing when he arrived in this country was an English hard hat (called in Wales a "hard-hitter"). So when he was settled in Gympie he went to a hatter to buy a soft felt hat like the locals were wearing, to make himself look colonial. After trying on several hats, he put on one that was a good fit and suited him well. The assistant said "That's real bosker". ("Bosker"—a word used by Queenslanders to express something very good.) My father thought that bosker must be a new fur for making felt hats and proudly told all his friends that his hat was made of "real bosker".'

Bosker is one of several similar slang words with the same meaning ('an excellent thing or person') that appeared at the turn of the 20th century: *bosker*, *bonzer*, *bontosher*, *bonster*, and *boshter*, all with various spellings. Their use overlapped for a period, but eventually *bonzer* eclipsed the others. No evidence for any of these terms predates 1900, but the story is interesting as it suggests that *bosker* was in use some years earlier. It was not specific to Queensland, with much of the early evidence appearing in Sydney papers. One example is as follows: 'Liverpool Fire Brigade have been supplied with a new engine. ... The members term it a "real bosker".' (*Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, 16 August 1902). We are unable to find any evidence before 1902 but, thanks to Obadiah's hat, we will keep looking.



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SHARING ECONOMY: OUR WORD OF THE YEAR 2015

In December we selected *sharing economy* as our Word of the Year. It is defined as ‘an economic system based on sharing of access to goods, resources, and services, typically by means of the Internet’. The term was chosen for its increased prominence and frequency of use in Australia in 2015. This was partly due to the impact of debates around the introduction of ridesharing service Uber into Australia, which was seen as threatening the taxi industry. The *sharing economy* is facilitated by online technology, and while most often associated with ridesharing and accommodation sharing apps (such as Airbnb), it can also include collaborative efforts such as crowdfunding. Some regard the *sharing economy* as good for society, but others have pointed to its corporate dimensions and its potential to displace industries and businesses.

Other terms that made our shortlist were:

- *dark web*: the part of the World Wide Web that is intentionally hidden from search engines, uses masked IP addresses, and is accessible only with a special web browser, thus allowing website operators to remain anonymous or untraceable.
- *lawfare*: the use of the legal system to effect a political or social outcome. The term rose to prominence in Australia in 2015 after Attorney-General George Brandis accused environmental groups of using *lawfare* to try to stop particular development projects going ahead.
- *marriage equality*: the situation in which same-sex couples have the same legal right to marry as opposite-sex couples. *Marriage equality* was much debated in Australia through 2015, as there were significant campaigns here and elsewhere to introduce *marriage equality* legislation.
- *periscope*: a live streaming app that allows a mobile phone to be used to record and broadcast video in real time. The term is starting to be used as a verb: for example, ‘I’m going to *periscope* my family this Christmas’.

OTHER WORDS OF THE YEAR

Last April in our 2014 Words of the Year roundup, we noted that for the first time a graphic symbol (the heart-shaped emoji) and a hashtag (#*blacklivesmatter*) had been accorded Word of the Year status. The American Dialect Society chose the hashtag, and the heart emoji was the controversial choice of Global Language Monitor. We commented that ‘the field is now wide open for 2015’, and how right we were; the crop this year includes another emoji, a suffix, and a pronoun. In an unexpected move for such a long-established publisher, Oxford Dictionaries (UK and US) chose an emoji (👉) as their ‘word’, acknowledging the

fact that emoji have become a significant way to communicate thoughts and emotions in our digital world. The particular emoji, known as ‘face with tears of joy’, was the most-used emoji globally in 2015.

The American Dialect Society chose the pronoun *they* as a gender-neutral alternative to *he* and *she*. *They* has long been used in a generic way (as in *if anyone wishes to leave, they should go now*), but the Society notes its emerging use as a singular pronoun to refer to a known person, ‘often as a conscious choice by a person rejecting the traditional gender binary of *he* and *she*’. The American dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster chose the suffix *-ism* as their word of 2015. Their choice is based on the words most frequently looked up in their online dictionary, and in 2015 seven words that end in *-ism* ‘triggered both high volume and significant year-over-year increase in lookups’. These were *socialism*, *fascism*, *racism*, *feminism*, *communism*, *capitalism*, and *terrorism*. These ‘-isms’ are explained by Merriam-Webster as reflecting the political and cultural concerns of US society.

Dictionary.com chose *identity* as their Word of the Year. (‘Wow, an actual word!! I’m proud of you, dictionary.com’ commented one reader.) They note that *identity* was the prominent theme of 2015, covering the topical issues of gender, sexuality, and race. *Microaggression*, defined as ‘the brief, everyday exchanges that send mostly unintended derogatory messages to members of various minority groups’, was chosen by Global Language Monitor as the top word for 2015. Collins chose a word with an impact on our domestic lives: *binge-watch*, ‘to watch a large number of television programmes (especially all the shows from one series) in succession’.

Closer to home, and last cab off the rank, the Macquarie Dictionary chose *captain’s call* as both their Committee and People’s Choice, defining it as ‘a decision made by a political or business leader without consultation with colleagues’. They noted its change in usage, from sporting jargon to politics and beyond, commenting that it encapsulated Australian events of 2015. Other shortlisted terms voted as popular by Australia in the ‘People’s Choice’ category were *wombat gate*, ‘a swing gate installed in a ditch going underneath a fence, so that wombats, who follow very predictable patterns at night, can come and go without destroying the fence’, and *keyboard warrior*, ‘a person who adopts an excessively aggressive style in online discussions which they would not normally adopt in person-to-person communication, often in support of a cause, theory, world view, etc.’

RESOURCES

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) online, at www.oed.com, has added three new features to its website: audio pronunciations, word frequency marking, and short etymological summaries. The scale of the *OED* means that these features are being progressively added to the entries. Audio pronunciations, typically

a British and an American pronunciation, will be added to words that are not obsolete. *OED* already had access to an archive of sound recordings, but needed to create about a quarter of a million more. They considered speech synthesis as an option before deciding that recording human speakers would give the best result. You can find examples of British and American pronunciations for many Australian terms in *OED*, for instance at entries for *platypus*, *quoll*, and *bonzer*. No Australian accents yet!

Word frequency marking is given as an interactive graphic, showing the relative frequency of a particular word in modern English from 1970 to the present. Future developments will include a longer historical view that will show changes in frequency over time. The third new feature, the short etymological summary, is aimed at clarifying the often complex information needed to show a word’s history. An introductory summary presents the word history in brief and lets the user decide whether or not to delve into the full etymology. Work continues on adding these useful features to the dictionary.

The wordlist feature on our own website (andc.anu.edu.au) is being updated and revised. It is by far the most frequently accessed part of our website, and has not had any significant revision in some time. Editor Mark Gwynn is progressively updating the entries and, where possible, is adding links to our blogs and newsletter archives where the wordlist user will find further research and information on the entries.

PUBLICATIONS

Two new school dictionaries edited at the ANDC have been published. The *Australian Primary Oxford Dictionary* (fourth edition) has been comprehensively updated by Amanda Laugesen and Mark Gwynn for middle and upper primary students. Many of the illustrative sentences are drawn from Australian and international children’s books, and the feature boxes provide handy hints for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and usage. Another completely revised and updated school reference work that has just appeared combines a dictionary and thesaurus in one volume: *The Australian Integrated School Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus* (third edition), edited by Mark Gwynn.

Letters, emails and tweets are welcome.

Please **address letters** to:
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WHERE IS ANNIE'S ROOM?

Mark Gwynn

In Australian English the term *Annie's room* refers to an unknown, mythical, or unspecified place. It is chiefly used in the phrase *up in Annie's room*, a facetious reply you may give to a question asking the whereabouts of someone or something, especially when you don't know the answer. 'Where are the car keys?' 'Up in Annie's room', you might reply, or even (in a later, extended form): 'Up in Annie's room behind the clock', as recorded by Nancy Keesing:

Had Christopher Robin been an Australian child the answer to his plaintive query, 'Has anybody seen my mouse?' might have been 'It's up in Annie's room behind the clock'.
(*Lily on the Dustbin*, 1982)

As an answer to a question, *up in Annie's room* seems to have its origin in military slang. It is first recorded in W.H. Downing's *Digger Dialects* (1919), a glossary of words used by Australian soldiers in the First World War. Downing defines *in Annie's room* as 'an answer to questions as to the whereabouts of someone who cannot be found'. After the war Australian Private Edward Lynch wrote about his wartime experiences (published much later in 2006 as *Somme Mud*). In his account he comments: 'When I enquire of the O.C.'s whereabouts someone replies, "Up in Annie's room"'. And an entry for *up in Annie's room* is included in the *Glossary of Slang and Peculiar Terms in Use in the A.I.F.*, compiled during the early 1920s at the Australian War Museum by chief librarian A.G. Pretty. He defines it as a 'facetious answer to questions as to the whereabouts of someone who cannot be found'.

A couple of earlier references to *Annie's room* have a military context but a different meaning, and are likely precursors of the idiom *up in Annie's room*. Private Garnet Rundle's account of his experiences on board a transport carrying Australian troops to Egypt includes this comment about soldiers who jumped ship: 'The — deserters returned early this morning, and report having a great time. They're in "Annie's Room" now (otherwise the Detention Room), so they shall repent at leisure.' (*Terang Express*, 15 January 1915) In 1916 a New South Wales newspaper published a letter from Sergeant-Major Norman Pinkstone, who was at Gallipoli. He heads his letter with a fictionalised location: "'Annie's Room", "Coota Alley", Somewhere in Gallipoli. 11 December, 1915.' (*Cootamundra Herald*, 29 February)

Both these instances of *Annie's room* refer to a specific place of privation or hardship. A sense of privation (in its ultimate form—death) is expressed in another military reference to *Annie's room*, this time in the familiar form of a response to a question: 'Baldy Evans, the cook, went up in the shell burst. ... "Where's Baldy?" ... "Up in Annie's room."' (*Anzac Memoirs: Humorous Sketches by a Returned Soldier*, 1920) The location of *Annie's room* here is not specific, as in the two previous examples, but euphemistic and ironic.

Despite the evidence that *up in Annie's room* was clearly used in soldier slang during the First World War, it does not fully explain the origin of the expression. But Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (1937) may provide a clue. He notes that '(up) in Annie's room' was in military use slightly before the First World War. He defines it as 'a military c.p. [catchphrase] reply to a query concerning someone's whereabouts', and says that it originally implied the missing person was 'a bit of a lad'; that is, he was with a woman (Annie).

A sexual connotation is also associated with another sense of the term (recorded from the 1930s, and likely to derive from the earlier military use). In a supplement to a later edition of his dictionary (1974), Partridge records a meaning specific to the game of darts, where *up in Annie's room* denotes a throw of a double one: 'With a pun on *double room*, or a room being used as one.' This implication has been lost in general Australian English use.

In post-war Australia, *up in Annie's room* was used in a more general way to suggest a person or thing was missing:

My little girl aged 4 is always asking where her doll and other toys are, and I always say, 'Oh, up in Annie's room'. The other night we had visitors, and I happened to be out when they came, and my wife said to our little girl, 'Where is your father, Elaine?' You can imagine her surprise when Elaine said: 'Oh, I s'pose he's up in Annie's room!' (Sydney *Arrow*, 11 March 1932)

In the absence of further evidence, we cannot claim to know with absolute certainty the origin of *up in Annie's room*. However, the implication of sexual hanky-panky that Partridge associates with both the military and the darts usages of *Annie's room* provides us with an interesting clue.

“
As an answer
to a question,
*up in Annie's
room* seems to
have its origin in
military slang.
”

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

MAD AS A BOX OF SPANNERS

Julia Miller

Readers of *Ozwords* may remember that several years ago I invited people to participate in a questionnaire about idiom use in Australia and the UK. Many people took part and I was able to build a large collection of expressions. Some of these were variations on a theme, and the largest number of these variations centred around the similes ‘as mad as’ or ‘as crazy as’.

Some of these are based on the theme of craziness; others are based on anger; some could be both. The idioms that prompted these suggestions were *as mad as a hatter* and *mad as a March hare*, both found in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), though Carroll didn’t invent the expressions himself. Most people recognised those two idioms and added their own variations to the collection.

The following list is based on contributions from the UK and Australia. I wonder how many you recognise, and how you would divide the list into expressions meaning either ‘crazy’ or ‘angry’?

- *as crazy as a bag of spanners*
- *as crazy as a kettle*
- *as crazy as clown-shit*
- *as crazy as Larry*
- *as crazy/silly as a loon*
- *as crazy as a cupcake*
- *as mad as a brush*
- *as mad/funny/silly as a two-bob watch*
- *as mad as a bull in a china shop*
- *as mad as a cut snake*
- *as mad as a rattlesnake*
- *as mad as a hornet*
- *as mad as a wet weasel*
- *as mad as an adder*
- *as mad as Hell*
- *as mad as a badger*
- *as mad as a bag of spanners*
- *as mad as a box of squirrels*
- *as mad as a box of ferrets*
- *as mad as a box of frogs*
- *as mad as a bucket of frogs*
- *as mad as a meat axe*
- *as mad as a rabbit*
- *as mad as underpants*
- *as nutty as a fruitcake*
- *as nutty as a squirrel’s larder*
- *as nutty as squirrel-shit*

Some of the contributions are fairly self-explanatory. A cut snake, for example, would be more than cantankerous, and ferrets fettered in a box would be furious. But how can an inanimate spanner be angry or crazy? Is the comparison here influenced by phonology, with the ‘a’ sound in ‘mad’ repeated in the word ‘spanner’? If repeated sounds are important, why do we not find *as mad as a monkey wrench*?

There is alliteration between initial letters in many other cases, as in *as crazy as a cupcake* and *as mad as a meat axe*. Some comparisons defy explanation, however: *as mad as underpants* seems to have no logic to it, even though Google indicates at least seven different examples of its use. *A face like a bag of spanners* is perhaps easier to understand, since it is more descriptive.

Some of the ‘crazy’ similes are based on puns around the synonymous word ‘nutty’. Fruitcakes and squirrels’ dreys are supposed to be full of nuts, hence the double meanings in *as nutty as a fruitcake* and *as nutty as a squirrel’s larder*.

Receptacles vary. Sometimes we have a box (*as mad as a box of frogs*); sometimes a bag (*as mad as a bag of spanners*; *as crazy as a bag of spanners*); sometimes a bucket (*as mad as a bucket of frogs*). In each case, though, the container starts with a ‘b’, suggesting that the original simile also used a vessel that started with that letter.

The list here is of course not exhaustive. These were the expressions that most readily sprang to mind for the survey participants. They are indicative of a wide range of colloquial expressions, however, and show how language changes and develops, branching out from an original expression to produce a huge range of innovative forms.

If you would like to contribute similar examples that you have heard, or that you use yourself, I would love to hear from you at: julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au

“
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”

Dr Julia Miller is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Adelaide, and has a special research interest in the use of idioms in English learners’ dictionaries for students in Australia.



OZWORDS COMPETITION

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 45 RESULTS

For this competition you were asked to translate the title of a well-known or classic Hollywood movie into Australianese. This was a slow-burner, with few entries trickling in before November and a late rush in December and January. Very few of you could stop at one, with many entries filling a page. Some translations were straightforward. Few people will fail to guess that *A Series of Confetti Booze-ups Followed by a Cemetery Send-Off* translates as *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and you might pick *Hughie* as *Rain Man*, but some entries were more imaginative. Who, for instance, would guess that *You Bewdy in the Blue Bush* refers to *Splendor in the Grass*, or that *Sloshed and Unhitched* means *The Merry Widow*?

Several movies proved especially popular. These included *Twelve Angry Men* (*A Few Coves going Bananas, A Dozen Ropeable Geezers*); *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (*The Bonzer, the Ratshit, and the Daggy, and The Bonzer, the Crook, and the Robber's Dog*); and *My Fair Lady* (*Me Bonzer Sheila, My Cliner looks Bonzer*). It's interesting to note in these latter titles the incidence of the term 'bonzer', still recognised by many of us as quintessentially Australian despite the fact that it is falling out of use these days.

Australian fauna made a strong showing. Entries included: *Knees-up with Dingoes* (*Dances with Wolves*); *Wombat Wensdee* (*Groundhog Day*); *Stone the Crows* (*To Kill a Mockingbird*); *Of Bandicoots and Balls of Muscle* (*Of Mice and Men*); and *Kangaroos Loose in the Top Paddock* (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*). We especially liked the Tasmania-centric *Crouching Thylacine, Hidden Tassie Devil* (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). Mel Gibson movies had fans and foes: *Ticker with Ticker* (*Braveheart*), *The Galah* (*Mad Max*).

It's odd how political comment creeps into the most innocuous competition. This time we received, among others, *Tony and Peter Meet Bill* (*Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man*); *Rudd's Return—Not on Our Selection* (*Back to the Future II*); *Federal Treasurer's Budget Surplus* (*Fantasia*); *Another Reshuffle!* (*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*); and *Another Reshuffle!!* (*It Happened One Night*). Thanks to all readers who took part. Till

next time, we wish you *Hooroo Me Bewdy* (*Farewell My Lovely*).

1st prize (books to the value of \$150 from the OUP catalogue):

Sandgroper Yarn (*West Side Story*) (J. Ferguson)

2nd prize (books to the value of \$100 from the OUP catalogue):

Clever Bastard (*The Graduate*) (K. Graham)

Honourable mentions:

Goanna Oil (*Grease*) (J. Foster)

Dizzy Limits (*Wuthering Heights*) (B. McPherson)

Dust-up at the Saleyards (*Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*) (P. Higgins)

Shazza and Raylene Shoot Through (*Thelma and Louise*) (P. Mitchell)

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 46

Many of us are familiar with these stirring words: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* and *In God We Trust*—the national mottoes of France and the United States respectively. Unlike these countries, Australia has no national motto. We ask you to come up with one that best expresses our national hopes, dreams, or character. Extra points if it includes an Australianism. It may be poetic, like Portugal's *Of the Islands, the Most Beautiful and Free*; hopeful, like Lesotho's *Peace, Rain, Prosperity*; culturally aware, like Moldova's *Our Language is a Treasure*; inclusive, like Jamaica's *Out of Many, One People*; or assertive, like *Wales Forever*. Conservatives may prefer a Luxembourg-style motto: *We Wish to Remain What We Are*; radicals may prefer a more political slogan, like the former Soviet Union's *Proletarians of All Countries, Unite*. You may even prefer a hint of mystery, like the Isle of Man's *Whithersoever You Throw It, It Will Stand*. However we do expect you to show more imagination than Mozambique's *Republic of Mozambique*. In the words of the Kingdom of Sarawak, *While I Breathe, I Hope*.

Entries close 31 July 2016.

Send entries to the ANDC at one of the addresses in the next column, and please include a postal or email address, so we know where to send the prizes.

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