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EDITORIAL

In this edition, writer Tim Bowden shares with us his reflections on Barry Humphries in an entertaining article that reminds us of how important Humphries has been in adding expressions to the rich lexicon of Australian English.

We also have two contributions to very different aspects of language in Australia. Bernadette Hince writes about the claret ash, a common feature of the Australian landscape, and Catherine Horne, a PhD candidate at the ANU, shares with us some of the findings from her examination of women and language in the early years of popular magazine *New Idea*.

Our competition, which required you to write a definition for a modern *Australian Comic Dictionary*, was indeed a challenge; we are once again challenging you with this edition's competition, which asks you to translate a famous quotation into Aussie English. We look forward to receiving your entries.

Amanda Laugesen

Director



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BARRY HUMPHRIES, SATIRIST OF SUBURBIA

TIM BOWDEN

Growing up in Hobart in the 1950s at the height of Prime Minister Robert Menzies' long reign can be described as comfortable enough, but not very exciting. Despite Menzies' exhortation that we were 'British to the bootstraps', we knew we weren't.

Immediate relief was provided by the advent of a young Barry Humphries' tilts at Melbourne's staid and stultifying suburbia ('where the cream brick veneers stay hygienic for years') which came to us in Taswegia in the form of two small, long-playing vinyl records, played at 33 1/3 rpm on our parents' turntables. I still have them. Titled 'Wild Life in Suburbia', these prized discs introduced us to Edna Everage and the moribund monotone of Sandy Stone. The back cover blurb, written by Robin Boyd (noted Australian architect and author of *The Great Australian Ugliness*), describes the audio treasures awaiting:

Barry Humphries is one of the funniest men you could find this side of hysteria. If this record presented only the funniness of his cracked, elastic voice, there'd be no cause for alarm. But he is also a satirist of Australiana who cuts too close to the awful truth to be considered simply funny. ... He has us taped in killing caricature: our accent, intonation, vocabulary ('had a bit of strife parking the vehicle'), the shattered syntax, the activities, accessories, diet—and through it all the ghastly proprieties, the crazy clumsy genteelness of brick-area suburbia.

(The records are marked: FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION ONLY. NOT TO BE EXPORTED ON ANY ACCOUNT.)

Like many Australians of my generation, I headed off to England on the mass transportation of the time, an ocean liner. In 1960 I arrived in London, where most expatriate Australians clustered in the suburb of Earl's Court, having sourced reliable supplies of cold, sparkling Fosters ale—a welcome alternative to the warm, flat camel's piss the Poms called beer.

Australians were barely tolerated by Londoners in those days, when Englishmen still wore bowler hats to work. I recall a couple of jokes that illustrate this ambivalence:

- A newly arrived Australian thought he saw a mate of his on the other side of the Strand, and raced across the road, and slapped him between the shoulder blades (he wasn't wearing a bowler hat), and shouted 'Gudday you old bastard'! An affronted Englishman turned around to investigate this assault. The Australian said, 'Geez mate, I'm sorry. You see in Australia we call our friends bastards'. The Englishman looked him up and down and said, 'And why not'?
- On another occasion in the Strand—Australia House was nearby—an Aussie stopped a bowler-hatted businessman and said, 'Excuse me mate, could you tell me where I can take a leak?' The Englishman said, 'Of course. If you walk down to the next street and turn left, you will see a public convenience, and a sign marked "Gentleman". Don't be deterred—walk straight in.'

Barry Humphries was also in London at that time, understudying actor Ron Moody in the role of Fagin in the musical 'Oliver'. He did this for several years, during which time Moody *never* took a sickie, doubtless well aware that Humphries' ferocious talent might rob him of the role. Barry never did play Fagin. I did not live in Earl's Court, nor did Humphries, but in 1961 I managed to interview him for the BBC's Pacific Service, and the ABC's weekly magazine radio program 'Scope'. He asked me if I knew any Australians

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ANU

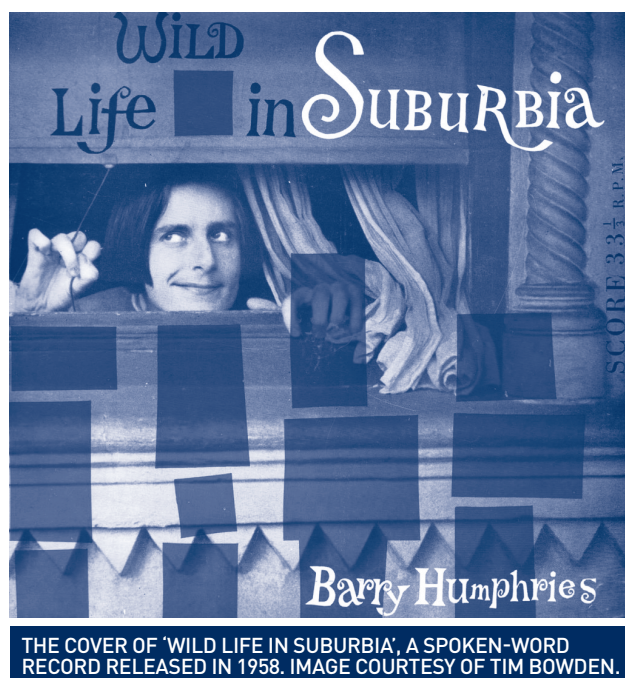
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living in Earl's Court, and I took him to meet 'a couple of young Australian lasses' who were sharing a flat there. Barry chatted amiably with them, and I could sense him sucking up their idioms and speech patterns like a supercharged vacuum cleaner.

By 1963 I was back in Australia, and Barry was busy making Edna Everage a superstar, improbably both in London and eventually New York. He also connived with the cartoonist Nicholas Garland to produce a monthly comic strip for *OZ* magazine relating the scatological adventures of Barry McKenzie, a naive Australian just arrived in London. These were compiled into three paperbacks and published by Sun Books (appropriately, in Melbourne): *The Wonderful World of Barry McKenzie* (1968), *Bazza Pulls It Off—More Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1971), and finally *Bazza Comes Into His Own* (1979).



THE COVER OF 'WILD LIFE IN SUBURBIA', A SPOKEN-WORD RECORD RELEASED IN 1958. IMAGE COURTESY OF TIM BOWDEN.

“
... I could sense
him sucking
up their idioms
and speech
patterns ...
”

Bazza's main preoccupations in the course of his bizarre adventures were to get pissed on tubes of ice-cold Fosters whenever possible, and get a root. He succeeded admirably in the first but failed totally in the latter.

It is my belief that the inventive mind of Barry Humphries made up a great deal of the ocker expressions in these books, some of which have now become part of the Australian lexicon. As micturition is a constant preoccupation of the beer-swilling Bazza, I suspect that that his expression 'point Percy at the porcelain' is one of these. In the interests of scatological scholarship, I have trawled through all three of the above books and picked out a range of colourful phrases. Some, like 'flat out like a lizard drinking', are older, traditional sayings, but I have put an asterisk beside others that I think may be Humphries' own contributions to the rich vernacular of Australiana. Perhaps *Ozwords* readers may like to comment further.

The Wonderful World of Barry McKenzie

- **all that Fosters has gone straight to the old feller—am I busting for a nice long snakes*
- **I was desirous to choke a darkie*
- **as fast as a tin of worms with an outboard motor*
- **some of the fellers went blind punishing Percy in the palm*
- **I'd be stiff cracking a fat in mixed company*
- *the kind of sheilah that went off like an alarm clock*
- *she looks as shifty as a shithouse rat*
- **to negotiate a coo-ee up the old snake gully (have sex)*
- **Kevin? Sounds like a flamin' freckle puncher*

Bazza Pulls It Off—More Adventures of Barry McKenzie

- **point Percy at the potables*
- **drain the dragon*
- **I'm as dry as a nun's nasty*
- *I could be up that like a rat up a drain*
- **nip into the dunny and syphon the python*

- *strain the potatoes*
- *he's up shit creek in a barbed wire canoe without a paddle*
- *built like a brick shithouse*
- **a bloke like me risks going blind jerkin' the gherkin*
- **the throtlin' pit (toilet)*
- *I want a girl that goes off like an alarm clock*
- **exercise the ferret (have sex)*
- **don't come the uncooked crustacean with me (variation on the raw prawn)*
- *flat out like a lizard drinking*
- **flop your freckle on the grass (sit down)*
- **you're not going to see my beef bayonet in action (have sex)*
- *I might have to cry Ruth any second (vomit)*
- **the Pope's a Jew if that Jam Tart doesn't root like a rattlesnake*
- **once she's down to her birthday suit I'll be working her like a belt-fed mortar*
- *I'm that parched I could drink out of a Chinese wrestler's jockstrap*
- **choking a darkie (on the toilet)*
- *she's not worth a snatch full of cold water*
- **twang the wire (masturbate)*
- **he's had more sheilahs than you've had spaghetti breakfasts*
- **time to splash the boots (urinate)*
- *go where all the big nobs hang out (visit the urinal)*
- **I've gotta wring the rattlesnake (same)*
- *I've got to make do with Mrs Palm and her five daughters (masturbate)*
- **he's that mean he wouldn't give you a sniff of his fart*
- *as lonely as a bastard on Father's Day*
- *all over the place like a mad woman's shit*
- *smells like someone opened their lunch (fart)*
- **as cold as a nun's nasty*
- **as dry as a kookaburra's khyber*
- *just shooting through to the gents to shake hands with the unemployed*

Bazza Comes Into His Own

- **I'll bet she goes off like a tin of bad fish*
- *I hope your balls turn to bicycle wheels and back-pedal up your arse*
- **if you're that smart you could sell soap to the Poms*
- *I could pull you on like a Wellington boot*
- *you're a flamin' French letter on the prick of progress*
- **I'm as dry as Nullarbor Nellie's knickers*
- **I wouldn't put it up there if the prize was a cooked crayfish and a spare set of balls*
- *as full as a Catholic school*
- *all over the place like a mad moll at a plonk party*
- *she'd bang like a shithouse door in a gale*
- *dry as a dead dingo's donger*
- *red sails in the sunset, or, to have the painters in (that time of the month)*
- **date with a fur doughnut (self-explanatory)*
- **gnawing the 'nana, or, blowing the beef bugle (use your imagination)*
- **make love to the lav (to chunder)*

[Editor's note: In the new edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*, Barry Humphries is quoted an impressive 125 times. He supplies us with the earliest evidence for twenty-four entries—including *syphon the python*, *old fellow*, *freckle puncher*, *percy*, *bang like a shithouse door in a gale*, and *dry as a kookaburra's khyber*. We can't rule out the possibility that some of the twenty-four terms were coined by Humphries himself.]

“
as lonely as
a bastard on
Father's Day
”

Tim Bowden is a broadcaster, journalist, radio and television documentary maker, oral historian, and author of sixteen books. He has an Order of Australia for services to public broadcasting, and an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Tasmania.

A note to our subscribers: This is the penultimate print edition of *Ozwords*, with a final move towards digital after the *Ozwords* October 2017 newsletter. If you are currently a print subscriber, please email ozwords.au@oup.com to ensure that you remain subscribed to *Ozwords*.

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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.

BUSH WEEK

A country newspaperman wrote to us about his experience, during a boring meeting, of leafing through 1920s volumes of press association annual reports:

I was interested to read in one volume (can't remember which one) that the NSW association was a very keen backer of a festival in Sydney (which lasted about a week, I think) which was designed to highlight the links between the city and the ... er ... bush! Naturally, the festival was called Bush Week. I noted several photographs of elaborate triumphal arches in Martin Place, decorated with a proud cornucopia of produce of all sorts and stout rustic types, along with flags, etc. ... [I]t may have been of sufficient magnitude to leave a cultural imprint and I therefore offer it as a suggestion for the origin of the term Bush Week.

J. Dunnet, New South Wales

This type of festival is indeed the origin of the term *bush week*. The first Bush Week was held in Sydney in 1920, and the earliest evidence occurs in 1918, in reference to organising such an event. Triumphal arches, cornucopias, and shop window displays were a part of it. A caption from *The Farmer and Settler* following the first Bush Week mentions that these and other events such as 'a pageant in the city thoroughfares, a cyclorama of bush scenes at Sydney Town Hall, and rural festivals at the Sports Grounds, have this week strikingly illustrated and profoundly impressed the city man with the extraordinary natural resources of New South Wales'. (13 February 1920) It's not clear how often it was held, but *bush week* was a time when a large number of country people came to the city, and from this developed a figurative use of the term from mid-century onwards, especially in the phrase *what do you think this is—bush week?* This is a response to a request, implying that one is being unfairly imposed upon or taken for a (rustic) fool. Many readers will know another sense of *bush week* that derives from this—the annual *bush week* held by some Australian universities, which is a period of student festivity and pranks. The first evidence of this sense dates from the 1960s. For more information about *bush week*, see our blog post at: <http://ozwords.org/?p=7379#more-7379>

WHAT'S A BRICK WEIGH? TEN POUNDS!

I am a 74 year old that was brought up with knockabout terms for just about everything. ... I went to sea when I was 15 which was the birthplace of most of the slang. Regarding the 10 pound note & the term 'Brick'. A clinker brick of that era (... I actually have a couple) weighs about 9.5 pounds. Laid wet with cement mortar would have made it about 10 lbs (give or take). When kids asked the question 'What's a brick worth' the answer would be 'What's a brick weigh'.

W. Lynch, New South Wales

The *Australian National Dictionary* records *brick* as an obsolete term for a ten-pound note, and gives as the derivation the reddish-brown colour of the note. We stand by our research, but W. Lynch's explanation is a bottler, and we have noted it in our archive for future consideration.

METALLIC BOOKS AND PENCILS

In our last issue M. Collison asked about the obsolete term *metallician* for 'bookmaker', noting that dictionaries explain the origin by saying 'they used metallic books and pencils', with no explanation of what these are. We too were perplexed, but two readers came to our aid as did the resources of the Internet. Advertisements for 'metallic notebooks' can be found in Victorian times. These books were mass-marketed to the public as memorandum books, having paper prepared with a special, slightly abrasive coating. They were sold with a stylus that had a fine metal tip. The surface of the paper reacted with the metal of the stylus, creating marks on the paper that were virtually indelible; writing would not smudge and was not easily erased. One such book was said to be found with the body of a traveller in the outback, as reported in a Sydney newspaper in 1912: '... the remains were poorly clad, and there was only a ragged blanket, a battered pannikin, and a small, much-worn metallic memorandum book beside them'. (*World's News*, 1 June) Charles Darwin too is said to have used metallic books as his field notebooks. References to 'metallic betting books' are found in 19th century notices, and it is easy to see the utility of the metallic book and pencil to bookmakers; they provided an absolute record of transactions if these were disputed or checked.

DICKO SAYS

We received an email from S. Boy'e (Western Australia) lamenting the younger generation's ignorance of Aussie idioms: *I was an Australian soldier for 25 years and during that time I was bemused by the Americanisation of our language and instilled in the young soldiers the importance of maintaining our Australian terminology. In civilian life he works with people in mining and construction who are also unfamiliar with these terms. In his current job he rectifies this by providing Australian-themed health and safety advice to fly-in fly-out workers on a Western Australian construction project: We attach these statements to a life size cut out of a person called Dicko. The statements are called names such as Dicko Says, Dicko Reckons, or Dickoisms:*

- *Even if you are as ugly as a hat full of arseholes still use sunscreen!*
- *Don't go off like a bucket full of prawns in the hot sun! Have a shower on fly out day.*
- *Don't become dry as a dead dingo's donga – keep your bottle close, drink water regularly all day every 15 minutes or so!*

- *Don't be off like a bride's nightie – at the end of the day put all your shit away properly before you leave.*
- *Make sure she doesn't bang like a dunny door in a cyclone! Tie stuff down.*
- *Don't carry on like a tree full of galahs! Follow the procedures and processes.*

These are some of the more family-friendly Dickoisms. We applaud Dicko's one-man cultural education campaign.

ZIE AND HIR

A reader emailed us about the Victorian government's 'Inclusive Language Guide', issued last year and intended to increase awareness among public servants of the importance of language use in regard to LGBTI communities. Former Premier Jeff Kennett criticised aspects of the guide, including its comments about the gender-neutral pronouns *zie* and *hir*. Our reader says:

I do not recognise zie or hir, I do not know what either means and I would not know how to pronounce either of them. In short, I do not know what he is talking about. Can Ozwords throw any light on it?

R. Byard, Victoria

Over the years people have proposed a number of gender-neutral pronouns such as *xe*, *ze*, and *zhe*. *Ze* and *hir* (pronounced 'zee' and 'here') first appeared in the 1990s, with American author Kate Bornstein advocating for their use as singular pronouns for people who identify as other than male or female. *Ze* (or *zie*) is the subjective pronoun, and *hir* is the corresponding objective and possessive form: *zie put hir book in hir bag; I told hir a story and zie laughed*. New pronouns are unlikely to find widespread acceptance in the short term. Even familiar pronouns used differently may have trouble. Last year a new use of *they* was recognised by the American Dialect Society for its emergence as a singular pronoun referring to 'a known person, often as a conscious choice by a person rejecting the traditional gender binary of *he* and *she*'. For example, *Charlee was the only person there and I asked them if they wanted coffee. 'Sure', they said.*



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LAUNCH AND PRESENTATION

In the last issue we announced the publication of our major new work, the *Australian National Dictionary* Second Edition. The launch was held in August in the Mural Room, Parliament House, Canberra. Speaking were publisher Peter van Noorden, Managing Director of Oxford University Press Australia and New Zealand, Margaret Harding, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) at ANU, and Chief Editor of the dictionary Bruce Moore. The book was launched by Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP, who accepted a copy on behalf of the Parliamentary Library. The launch was well attended and included many ANDC friends and former staff, among them Joan Ramson, associate editor of the first edition. It was a special event for us, marking not just the end of a herculean task, but also the dictionary's ongoing contribution to scholarly and public debate about Australian English. Many thanks to both the ANU and Oxford University Press Australia and New Zealand for supporting and helping to organise this launch. We later presented a copy of the dictionary to the Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull (see image).

ANU MEDIA AWARD

In December we attended the annual ANU Media and Outreach Awards event, which recognises ANU academics and researchers who have made a significant contribution to public debate, or generated particular media interest, throughout the year. We were delighted to receive the ANU Impact Award for Reach and Influence, thanks to the publicity we received following the launch of the *Australian National Dictionary*. The award has gone straight to the poolroom, of course.

WORD OF THE YEAR 2016

The Centre's Word of the Year was *democracy sausage*, 'a barbecued sausage served on

a slice of bread, bought at a polling booth sausage sizzle on election day'. Australian voters, fed up with the long federal election campaign, were pleased when election day arrived, and devoured *democracy sausages* with gusto at their local polling booth as they lined up to vote—with Opposition Leader Bill Shorten commenting that his sausage sandwich was 'the taste of democracy'. The term was first recorded in 2012, but its use increased significantly during the election, especially with the popularity of several websites set up to help voters find polling stations with sausage sizzles.

Other terms on our shortlist:

- *Ausexit*: the potential cutting of ties with the British monarchy (an Australian response to Brexit), or the departure of Australia from the United Nations.
- *census fail*: the failure of the Australian Bureau of Statistics website on census night. A majority of Australian households were unable to submit census data on August 9 when the online site was shut down for two days. The *census fail* resulted in a storm of public criticism.
- *deplorables*: people considered to be extremely conservative or reactionary, especially those who reject mainstream politics. Hillary Clinton was criticised for elitism after describing Trump supporters as *deplorables* during the US election. It has entered the Australian political lexicon too, referring to voters who feel disenfranchised.
- *shoey*: the act of drinking an alcoholic beverage out of a shoe, especially to celebrate a sporting victory. This Australian phenomenon shot to international fame in 2016, thanks to Australian racing driver Daniel Ricciardo, who celebrated his

wins by pouring champagne into his shoe and drinking it.

- *smashed avo*: a popular cafe breakfast, typically a thick slice of toast topped with mashed seasoned avocado. It became a hot topic in October when columnist Bernard Salt suggested that money spent by young people buying smashed avocado on toast would be better used in saving for a house.

OTHER WORDS OF THE YEAR

The 2016 crop of words reflects a highly political year. Oxford Dictionaries (UK and US) were first to announce their Word of the Year: *post-truth*, an adjective 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'. The word increased significantly in usage thanks to the Brexit referendum and the US presidential election.

Brexit, a word likely to have been on most shortlists thanks to Britain's shock decision to leave the European Union, was selected by Collins as their Word of the Year. Merriam-Webster chose *surreal*, their most frequently looked up word, with look-ups spiking in response to several of the year's events, in particular the US election. *Xenophobia* ('the fear or hatred of foreigners') was chosen by Dictionary.com, who noted that 2016 'saw fear rising to the surface of cultural discourse'. The American Dialect Society's choice was *dumpster fire*, a metaphorical use of the term meaning 'an exceedingly disastrous or chaotic situation'. The Society chose it as 'representing the public discourse and preoccupations of the past year'.

The last of the words of the year to be announced was Macquarie Dictionary's Committee Choice. They too chose a term that reflects politics and media in 2016: *fake news*, 'disinformation and hoaxes published on websites for political purposes or to drive web traffic, the incorrect information being passed along by social media'. The People's Choice was *halal snack pack*: 'a fast food comprising layers of hot chips, grated cheese, halal doner kebab meat, and various sauces.'



IN OCTOBER WE PRESENTED A COPY OF OUR NEW DICTIONARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER. LEFT TO RIGHT: AMANDA LAUGESSEN, PETER VAN NOORDEN, PRIME MINISTER MALCOLM TURNBULL, MARNIE HUGHES-WARRINGTON (DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR (ACADEMIC), ANU), BRUCE MOORE.

Letters, emails and tweets are welcome.

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THE NABES OF *NEW IDEA*

Catherine Horne

Despite often being dismissed as frivolous gossip rags, women's magazines provide a fascinating window into society, culture, and everyday life at the time of their publication. These magazines often adopt a characteristic linguistic style that gives individuality to each publication, and which is then also used by readers writing in to the magazine's letters pages. During the early research for my PhD thesis I came across a treasure trove of phrases in the letters pages of postwar Australian women's magazines, especially *New Idea*. The letters demonstrate an often overlooked source of colourful words and expressions used by women to represent their lives, dreams, and frustrations during Australia's long suburban boom of the 1950s and 1960s.

Founded in 1902, *New Idea* is Australia's oldest continually published women's magazine. Although it was renamed *Everylady's Journal* in 1911, *New Idea* was brought back as a weekly in 1928 to supplement the monthly *Everylady's Journal*, which eventually ceased publication in 1938.

The letters page of *New Idea*, titled 'Let's Talk It Over', had a somewhat different culture to the letters pages of other leading women's magazines such as the *Australian Women's Weekly* and *Woman's Day*. This section retained the title from the magazine's rebirth in 1928 (except for a brief change in 1945) and was usually illustrated with pictures of women, and sometimes men, talking together. *New Idea* positioned their letters page as a conversation amongst readers, and the use of the magazine's characteristic chatty style became an important part of fostering a community amongst readers.

In the 1920s and 1930s the magazine published paragraphs that comprised interesting facts about history and foreign cultures, snippets from other publications, or handy hints and tips of various kinds. This tone began to shift during the Second World War as complaints or humorous stories about neighbours, friends, husbands and children were published in increasing numbers. By the 1950s the letters page was dominated by stories from everyday life, and the use of colloquial language imbued these stories with greater authenticity and humour. The result was a light-hearted portrayal of the day-to-day realities of women's lives in middle-class suburbia.

The most common colloquial phrases used were those related to neighbours, such as *nabe*, *Mrs Nextdoor*, *Mrs Down-a-bit*, and *Mrs Neighbour*. *Nabe*, in particular, was a frequently used term that demonstrated the social and cultural importance of suburbia at the time. *Nabe* had connotations beyond simply being a shortened form of *neighbour*. A *nabe* was usually a housewife who was part of a close community of women living in the same suburban street or neighbourhood. *Nabes* were often a source of friendship and support, but could also prove to be a severe annoyance through being too talkative, selfish, or behaving in bizarre ways. A letter published in September 1960 demonstrated the complexities of suburban *nabe* relationships, as the letter writer noted that 'Mrs. New Nabe has already got a bad name with Ma Gossip' because the new arrival had yet to make friends with the other women on the street, instead preferring to work on her house and garden. The letter writer joked that 'Mrs. New Nabe is a worker and not a gossip'.

Other common phrases included:

- terms that described personalities or characteristics, such as *Mrs Tall Poppy*, *Mrs Haughty*, *Mrs Poor*, or *Mrs Pest*.
- terms that referred to children by their ages, for example *Miss Ten* or *Master Eleven*, or gendered terms such as *girlie*, *Teena*, or *laddie*.
- *hub/hubby* and *M.M.* (Mere Male), which were often used in reference to a husband. *M.M.* was taken from *New Idea*'s popular 'Mere Male' section, in which women wrote in with amusing stories about their clueless husbands' domestic errors.

The following letter published in December 1959 provides an example of how these kinds of terms were casually used in reader correspondence:

Nabe confided in me that she and her M.M. usually took it in turns to get up to her four little's in the night. She was extra tired one night, so each time there was a wail she just nudged her M.M. and said, 'Your turn this time. I was up last time.' It worked, too. No hope of me trying it out, though, as my M.M. is a very light sleeper.

These letters are a wonderful example of creative language use by Australian women and remind us that even the most seemingly trivial sources have value for historical research.

“

... the use of colloquial language imbued these stories with greater authenticity ...

”

Catherine Horne is a PhD Candidate in the School of History at the Australian National University. Her thesis focuses on Australian women's radio speech from 1923–1956. This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship.

THE CLARET ASH—A DINKY-DI EXOTIC

Bernadette Hince

claret ash *n.* An ornamental ash tree, *Fraxinus angustifolia* subsp. *oxycarpa* cultivar Raywood (fam. Oleaceae), with purplish-red autumn leaves, originally cultivated in South Australia. (*Australian National Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 2016)

Just over a hundred years ago an interesting sapling came to the notice of a South Australian horticulturist. Some details of the cultivar's early life are vague, but we know that in about 1910 native plant enthusiast Tullie Wollaston, a land developer and opal dealer, bought a colourful seedling at Sewell's Nursery at Aldgate in the Adelaide Hills. Ashes with good autumn tones were not astonishing—trees with this characteristic were already known from China, Japan, and North America—but the South Australian tree was particularly eye-catching.

Wollaston's gardener Mr J. Gates propagated the ash on *Fraxinus ornus* and *F. excelsior* at Wollaston's Bridgewater property 'Raywood', a garden which featured both exotic and native trees and shrubs.

In the early and mid-20th century in Australia, before winemakers became more specific about the grape varieties they used for their wines (and before other parts of the world began to hold their own regional names more closely), names like 'burgundy' and 'claret' were common. So the shapely deciduous tree *Fraxinus oxycarpa* 'Raywood', with its wine-red to plum-purple autumn leaves, became known as the *claret ash*. In about 1925 Wollaston set up Ray Nursery, from which most of the early claret ashes were distributed. The nursery closed in the 1940s, but the plant is still widely available.

It became a popular landscape tree in southern Australia. In his 1934 book *Flowering trees and shrubs*, Harold Sargeant ('Anthos') of the Melbourne *Herald* wrote that the 'purple or claret Ash [is] a beautiful specimen when successfully grown'. This was about the time that the common name is first recorded.

The Land wrote on 22 April 1949 that Messrs Anderson and Co. were displaying the claret ash at the Royal Show in Sydney. 'How I wish I had a pen adequate to do justice to the beauties of this tree with its finely shaped leaves of a deep rich tone that is neither red nor yet maroon', wrote the somewhat purple-prosed reporter.

Claret ashes have been used in suburban plantings, as windbreaks on farms and in public plantings, such as the avenue of honour in Byaduk, western Victoria. This was planted in 1918, using forty silky oaks to commemorate those who served in the First World War. In 1963 the avenue was replanted with claret ashes. Like some other members of the olive family, the claret ash has become naturalised in parts of southeastern and possibly also southwestern Australia, and is now seen as a weed in some places.

Because its parent stock originated elsewhere, you won't find *claret ash* in many books about Australian plants. But with its history, it's as Australian as a blue heeler.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Dr Suzanne Eggins for her helpful comments.

“
... it's as
Australian as a
blue heeler.
”

Bernadette Hince is the author of *The Antarctic Dictionary: A Complete Guide to Antarctic English* (2000). She was the Science Editor for the first edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* (1988), and contributed to the second edition (2016). She is currently a Visiting Fellow at the ANDC and the editor of *Australian Garden History*. This article is an edited version of one that first appeared in *Australian Garden History* (Vol. 28, No. 1) in 2016.



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OZWORDS COMPETITION

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 47 RESULTS

Inspired by the centenary of Mary Fullerton's *Australian Comic Dictionary of Words and Phrases*, we asked you to write a comic definition of an Australian word or phrase in current use. After a year when elections were never out of the news, we weren't surprised that some of your entries had a political flavour, and not in a complimentary way: *behind the black stump* 'where the NBN will never go'; *Jobson Growth* 'a mirage'; *verandah over the toolshed* 'the Australian Senate. Several layers to this, not least that of casting a large shadow'; and *pollie* 'a species whose members are renowned for their strong bills and are highly talkative despite giving the appearance of not having ears'. Local government was a target too: *drawing a line under the sand* 'coastal councils' planning consent—unofficial departmental strategy'. One entry redefined our Word of the Year: *democracy sausage* 'when voters' wishes are squeezed between two opposing policy layers or are otherwise sauced or snagged'. Thankfully, body parts and functions provided some good old-fashioned fun: *clacker* 'like a fire cracker with a rear-end explosion'; and *amber fluid* 'the result of a driver's overexcitement when trying to beat a red light'. There is always a place for toilet humour (*long drop* 'the view from Sydney Harbour Bridge'; and *dunny* 'a receptacle for political promises'). Sport was another productive theme: *footy* 'a Victorian State religion'; and *Aussie Rules* 'the belief that Australians are best at all sports'. One cricket fan, no doubt glued to the telly over summer, sent us a hat trick: *test cricket* 'outdoor chess'; *one day international cricket* 'outdoor draughts'; *twenty/20* 'outdoor snap'. We were entertained by the clever (*legless* 'but 'armless') and appreciated a groan-worthy dad joke too (*Uluru* 'exclamation of French tourist upon encountering a kangaroo in the wild'). The judges chose the winning entry because it deftly encompassed both Australian meanings of *tinnie*, and because it had a dash of Mary Fullerton about it.

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

tinnie 'a metal container holding either cold beer or fishermen and cold beer' (G. Duffell)

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

dickhead 'no match for a redhead' (K. Allison)

Honourable mentions:

XXXX 'the inability to spell after a session at the pub' (A. Jones)

not the full two bob 'the Australian Senate after the resignation of Senator Bob Day (Family First), but still with Senator M. Roberts (One Nation)' (L. Pattison)

OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 48

For this competition we invite you to send us a famous quote and turn it into Australian English. It may be from a novel (*reader, I married him*), a historical figure (*we are not amused*), or a modern sporting hero (*I am the greatest!*). Famous scientific, religious, or political quotes may inspire you, or a line from a song, movie, or play. You may like to get your teeth into Shakespeare's *how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child*; Dickens' *it was the best of times, it was the worst of times*; or John and Paul's *love, love me do, you know I love you*. Below are some examples we dreamed up to get you going.

- *Let them eat cake*. Let them order smashed avo on five-grain toast with crumbled feta at \$22 a pop.
- *Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn*. Stone the crows, darl, I don't give a brass razoo, and you can shove that up against your duckhouse.
- *A lie told often enough becomes the truth*. A furphy told often enough becomes fair dinkum.

The best entries will receive a prize.

Entries close 31 July 2017.

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

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