



## IN THIS ISSUE:

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## EDITORIAL

In this edition, our various articles illustrate some of the range of areas that have contributed to Australian English over the years: war, sport, the beach, and popular culture.

In our lead article, Véronique Duché investigates the language of Australian trench journals from the First World War, and compares the language used to depict the enemy to that used in French trench journals. The words used, such as *Hun* and *Boche*, reflect the complex relationship soldiers had with their enemy, as well as the creative use of language and wordplay that is a feature of wartime.

We were alerted to the story of the *don't argue* by a PhD student, John Rice-Whetton, and further research by Julia Robinson revealed the term's fascinating history. Here is a good example of the close relationship between sports, advertising, and popular culture and how this relationship shapes our language.

Beach terms continue to be added to our list for future inclusion in the *Australian National Dictionary*. In this edition, Mark Gwynn writes about the evolution of the term *musical flags* and how it became *beach flags*.

We also include our regular Mailbag and From the Centre features. From the Centre recounts the controversial Word of the Year for 2017. We encourage you to continue to write in with queries and comments for future Mailbags. And, finally, we also encourage you all to enter our next competition, which has been inspired by the Crocodile Dundee 'reboot' advertising campaign recently launched by Tourism Australia.

**Amanda Laugesen**  
Director

# NAMING THE ENEMY IN FRENCH AND AUSTRALIAN TRENCH JOURNALS OF THE GREAT WAR

VÉRONIQUE DUCHÉ

When the Great War broke out in August 1914, the French were already familiar with their enemy. A strong heritage of hatred towards the Germans had existed since the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the Prussian and Austrian armies invading France after Napoleon's defeat (1814–15), followed by the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). The French had words to call on to depict their enemy, such as the diminutive *Prusko* (from *Prussian*), or *Teuton* (*Teutonic*), both reminders of the brutality of Prussian troops.

The Australians, however, had no history with the German empire. Furthermore, Australia had a strong German migrant community: by the mid-nineteenth century, Germans were the largest non-British group in Victoria (1861: 10,000). Nevertheless, the Australian volunteers who fought alongside the British Army were quick to use the lexicon of the European Allies, as shown by a study of the trench journal *Aussie: the Australian Soldiers' Magazine*.

In 1915, as military operations stabilised in the trenches, multiple unit papers were created by all the national armies. These magazines were produced under the most difficult front-line circumstances, sometimes literally 'in the trenches'. Many of these trench journals published a limited number of issues of only a few pages, handwritten or typed, and duplicated by makeshift means. Entertainment was their primary aim, in order to engage the bored soldiers during their unoccupied time. These trench publications were regarded benevolently by the French military authorities. Although there was an official *Bulletin des armées de la République*, this bulletin was considered propaganda. The *Poilus* (French soldiers) aspired therefore to more authentic and sincere newspapers, written by soldiers for soldiers, produced entirely for consumption by soldiers on active service, and taking into account their state of mind.

Australian troops arrived on the Western Front in 1916, two years after the French had begun fighting there. Soldiers had produced magazines on board troopships, and continued the practice in Europe. Many publications, some very ephemeral, were produced. *Aussie: the Australian Soldiers' Magazine*, born on 18 January 1918, was one of the most significant of these trench publications and continued on into the immediate postwar years.

Graham Seal has studied the multiple functions of trench newspapers and noted that 'these publications sometimes acted as a means of monitoring morale for the officers and as a safety-valve for the gripes and whinges of the ordinary soldier.' While these trench publications provide an unequalled insight into everyday life and death during the Great War, they are also an invaluable resource for linguists wanting to research

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language in a time of war. They were seen to capture the real language of the soldiers, as observed by *Aussie* editor (and former journalist) Phillip Harris: 'the success of *Aussie* [...] belongs to the Diggers. *Aussie* was not a paper done *for* the Diggers, but *by* them. That's why it reflects their spirit.' Harris was particularly adamant about the sincerity and originality of the texts he published in *Aussie*, as argued in the third issue of the magazine:

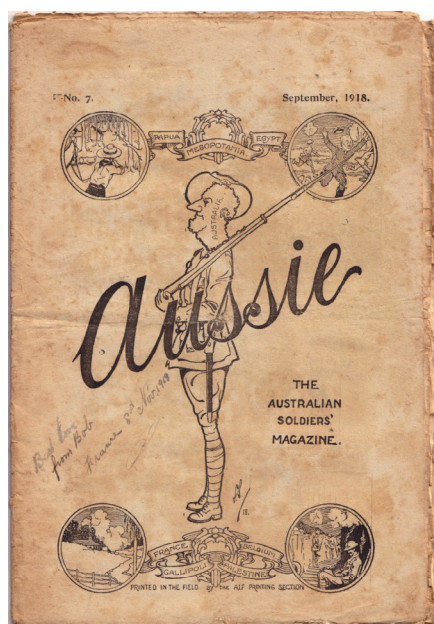
AUSSIE is a product of the battlefield, and he wants every item in him to be the work of his cobbers in the field and those in the field only. Should matter that is not original sneak in, it decreases the value of the work of those who go to the trouble to supply the dinkum goods. Therefore, he asks those to whom this is addressed to do the fair thing and send in their own work or none at all. (March 1918)

In my research, the thirteen issues of *Aussie* printed in France in 1918–19, first in Flêtre, then in Fauquembergues, were explored in order to look at the kinds of words used to describe the enemy. Naming the enemy was a challenging exercise for these amateur journalists, as they had to maintain a fine balance between hate and respect, reality and propaganda, especially in a journal that aimed to be humorous and entertaining.

As indicated by Amanda Laugesen in *Diggerspeak: The Language of Australians at War* (2005), *Fritz* was the word most commonly used by the diggers in naming the Germans. *Fritz* was 'first recorded in 1915, and in wide usage especially in the early years of the First World War among English-speaking troops, including the Australians. It was a diminutive of the common German male name Friedrich.' *Friedrich* was also one of the favorite names of the Hohenzollern dynasty, the emperors of Prussia. 'Fritz and Co.', the German enemy, we are told in *Aussie*, are 'Purveyors of Blighties to the British Army' (January 1918). *Blighy* was military slang for 'a wound suffered sufficiently serious to cause a soldier to be returned home to Britain or kept away from the front line'. The word *Fritz* could also be used as part of a collective: *Hans and Fritz*, as a counterpart to *Bill and Jim*, an affectionate name for Australian soldiers. Variants included *Fritzah*: 'The Billjims had something very painful to pay to the Fritzahs, a hostile tribe' (March 1918).

*Hun* was the second most commonly used word for Germans. While *Fritz* was a term more often used specifically to refer to German soldiers, *Hun* often referred to the German people collectively. The Huns were, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'a warlike Asiatic nomadic group of people who, under their king Attila, invaded and ravaged large parts of Europe in the late 4th and 5th centuries.' According to Laugesen, 'during the First World War, British, Australian, and other newspapers played directly on this, drawing a likeness between the Huns who invaded the Roman Empire and the Germans invading Belgium and France and, allegedly, destroying historic buildings.' In addition, we find in *Aussie* expressions using this short evocative name in compounds such as *Hun-hunter* and *Hun Plonker*: 'That clamorous and voracious animal, the Hun Plonker' (March 1918).

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COVERS OF FRENCH TRENCH JOURNAL *LE BOCHOFAGE* (LEFT) AND AUSTRALIAN TRENCH JOURNAL *AUSSIE: THE AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS' MAGAZINE*, BOTH FROM 1918.

The diggers were quick to naturalise a new word used by the French, *Boche*. *Boche* is the most common word used by French soldiers in their journals, displacing the commonly used words *Prussien* and *Prussco*. As early as August 1914, the word *Boche* was used in daily newspapers such as *Le Matin* and *Le Figaro*. This word was felt by the Germans to be strongly pejorative, as illustrated by the story of twenty-year-old Gabrielle Barthel, from Rombas in Mosel, who was condemned to five months' jail in June 1915 for having used the word *boche*.

The very productive suffix *-oche* was frequently used in French slang (and still is). According to the *Trésor de la Langue Française*, *boche* is a portmanteau word blending *Allemand* (German) and *Caboche* (slang for 'head'). This short word, with its evocative tone, provided a pretext for numerous wordplays, such as *boche/bouche* (mouth), *boche/poche* (pocket), etc. This is seen in the titles and subtitles of many French trench journals: *Le Mouchoir de boche* (227th infantry regiment; deformation of 'pocket handkerchief'); *Bochophage* (68th infantry regiment; 'German eater'); and *Rigolboche* (10th division; 'laughing about Germans').

The diggers also adopted the word *Teuton* (three occurrences) and domesticated the French *Allemand* into *Alleyman* by composing a phonetically similar word based on the English terms *alley* and *man*.

The enemy could also be alluded to through reference to figures who played an important part in triggering the war. Wilhelm II, Queen Victoria's grandson, the last German Emperor and King of Prussia, is found in both French and Australian trench journals, as *Wilhelm Hohenzollern* (advertisement, 1918) or more often the *Kaiser*. The German royal family is likewise often mentioned, in particular Rupprecht, *Kronprinz* of Bavaria (as *Crown Prince*, May 1918), also called 'prince Rupert, the kaiser's nephew' (May 1919).

Other figures were taken to embody the German enemy, such as *Generalfeldmarschall* von Hindenburg ('an unpopular person named Hindenburg', December 1918) or Bertha Krupp ('I dreamt we'd really won the war and finished Bertha Krupp', March 1918), the proprietor of the Krupp industrial empire, famous for its production of artillery. Bertha also gave her name to the big gun that fired on the Allied troops, *Big Bertha*.

It has to be noted that despite the threat that these names could epitomise, the tone used by the Australian diggers is always humorous and the content kept at a distance. This was not always the case in French trench journals. Designated as the man primarily responsible for the war, Wilhelm crystallised the hatred of the French soldiers, whose loathing of the enemy was combined with a violent disenchantment with the elites. The Crown Prince (*Kronprinz*) was the subject of many puns in French – *Kron* being spelled *con*, a swear word meaning 'stupid'. Furthermore, cartoons representing the Kaiser as a laughable puppet and a bloodthirsty monster, or Germania, the allegory of Germany, as a pitiless deity, considerably darkened the tone.

However, as previously mentioned, entertainment was the primary goal of trench journals during the Great War. Key words and phrases of German propaganda were parodied, such as 'Deutschland uber Allies' for 'Deutschland über Alles' ('Germany above all else', *Aussie*, January 1918). The peculiar German accent is strongly mocked: 'Ach, mine friends. You can never sometimes tell vot you least expect der most—aint it?' (June 1918). German taste for music—'Ach-der-schumannisch-der-musikalgesellschaft!' (June 1918)—is also made fun of, as shown by this allusion to the German patriotic anthem, 'Die Wacht am Rhein', by Max Schneckenburger: 'As Fritz, in his trenches, singeths the Wacht am Rhein, a Mill's bomb hitteth him on his sauerkraut receptacle.' (September 1918)

An 'appetite for words' seems to be the distinctive feature of Australian amateur journalists, as demonstrated in this call for 'language rations' in the third issue of *Aussie*:

[AUSSIE'S] appetite for words has increased with his growth, and he now does the Oliver Twist and comes up for more. He likes best those laughable trench incidents of which all battalion messes have a good stock. [...] It is not necessary to be an experienced manufacturer of literary food to do this. Just send along the ingredients to him and he will do his best to make them into a palatable dish for general consumption. (March 1918)

The diggers on the Western Front excelled in blending new words into their *slanguage*, be it for the depiction of the enemy, or for the description of the world around them.

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Professor Véronique Duché is A.R. Chisholm Professor of French at the University of Melbourne.



## BULLSH! PIG'S EAR!

We enjoy receiving queries from writers of historical fiction about the use of slang and colloquial terms appropriate to a period. For instance, is *bullshit!* a historically accurate exclamation in the mouth of an Australian serviceman during the First World War? If not, is there a good substitute? This recent query sent us to our Australian soldier slang glossaries produced just after the end of the war. They tell us that *bullshit* was in use at the time as a noun, defined as: 'Insincerity; (something) incorrect; flattery.' (The politer version was *bullsh.*) There is British evidence too from the war, and it appears to have been a popular word with soldiers at the time. Evidence of *bullshit* as an exclamation does not appear in print until later, but it seems likely it was used this way during wartime. Alternative Australian exclamations of the period, used in a similar way, are *pig's ear* and *pigs to you*. Over to you, novelists.

## LATTER

A comment on something I noticed in the latest issue. In the 'From the Centre' comment about *Outreach and Media* there are three examples given [in a sentence]—'*wombat tail*', '*Dorothy Dixier*' and '*keeping the bastards honest*'—and reference is made to '*the latter*'. I am an ageing pedant; and was taught that '*latter*' refers to the second of two items, with '*last*' used if there are more than two. Has that changed?

R. Hay

We should know by now that not much gets past our educated readership. *Latter* (like *former*) is a comparative, and is correctly used in reference to two things. But usage is changing: it is now often used as a synonym for *last*, referring to the final item in a list of more than two things. We reflect this change in our most recent general dictionaries, and give two definitions for *latter*: 'the second-mentioned of two'; and 'the second or last-mentioned person or thing'. Although the *latter* definition is becoming more common, we caution that the use of *latter* to mean 'last-mentioned of three or more' is considered incorrect by some people. The British take a firmer line, with Oxford Dictionaries commenting that this is 'not acceptable in good English style'.

## CENTRED ON, CENTRED AROUND

What a pity, no more hardcopy of *Ozwords!* And how mild the swearing was 100-odd years ago. Damn was still regarded as a swear-word when I was a child in the 1940s. You may have noticed, among increasingly rapid changes of language use (e.g. '*shift*' replacing '*move*', and '*multiple*' replacing '*many*' and '*several*'), that '*around*' is often used now instead of '*about*'. You have succumbed with two '*centred arounds*' in the first three paragraphs of your October issue. I would argue that to do that is impossible: everything is around the centre, so centred 'on', as was the case until a few years ago.

R. Solomon

Luckily we have history on our side here. *Centre on* and *centre [a]round* are both acceptable forms in the sense 'to focus on; to be based on a central theme or concern'. Indeed there is recorded evidence of *centre round* from the 1890s, and currently the use of this form is increasing. The usage note in our Australian general dictionaries is conciliatory, noting that although *centre round* is common, it is still considered incorrect by some people because *centre* designates a specific point—as our reader notes. The British are more lenient, with Oxford Dictionaries finding both *centre around* and *centre on* acceptable, without qualification. (And yes, we too mourn the hardcopy of *Ozwords*.)

## FAIR COW! WHAT THE - ?

You might like to add this to your collection of linguistic oddities. My old German teacher, Dr Steiniger, once told me how baffled he was when, as a new arrival in pre-war Australia, he was on a train going past the racecourse and heard one fellow passenger say to his mate: 'You know, that dark horse was a fair cow.' He said it puzzled him for weeks until some kindly soul explained. Ach, ja! J. Frederick

The Australian National Dictionary records a similar four-legged combination in its entry for *fair cow*, quoting Katherine Susannah Prichard's novel *Coonardoo* (1929): 'I had a fair cow of a horse called Grasshopper'. You've got to have sympathy for newcomers grappling with the Australian idiom: *spit the dummy*, *chuck a sickie*, *flat out like a lizard*, *carry on like a pork chop*, *have a Barry Crocker*, *bring a plate*. Not to mention the shop assistant's greeting: *you right?* Seriously!

## THE LETTER H

This issue is causing a lot of arguments between me and my Aussie friends. I know many, perhaps the majority, of Aussies pronounce the letter 'H' as '*haych*'. All I want to know is what is the preferred official pronunciation (if there is such a thing)?

C. Bodragon, United Kingdom

It's true that '*haych*'/'*haich*' for the letter H is often heard in Australia, and its use is unlikely to raise many eyebrows. In our latest *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (2017) we give the pronunciation as '*aych*', noting that the '*haych*' pronunciation, although widely heard in Australian English, is regarded as incorrect by many people. In future this may change, but currently our 'official' position is that the correct pronunciation of the letter H is '*aych*'. This stems from the etymological fact that the name of the letter comes from French, where the initial letter 'h' is not pronounced.

## SOCIAL MEDIA QUERIES

We have begun to post questions on our Twitter and Facebook sites about Australian names for common items, with the aim of discovering the full range of variants. Our first post asked 'what do you call this item?' with an image of the long-handled kitchen implement used to flip rissoles or fried eggs. The response was immediate and overwhelming;

that afternoon our Twitter handle was officially trending in Australia. Replies rolled in for weeks. We discovered the significant Australian terms are *spatula*, *egg flip*, *fish slice*, and *egg slice*, in that order. (Less common are *flipper*, *turner*, *egg slide*, and *egg lift*.) Since then we have also found a number of interesting Australian nicknames for the ibis, considered as an urban scavenger: *tip turkey*, *trash turkey*, *bin chicken*, *bin chook*, *bin rat*, *dump duck*, *flying rat*, and *council chook*. Our post on frozen flavoured water on a stick returned *icy pole*, *ice block*, *popsicle*, and *by jingo*, and sparked debate as to whether *paddle pop* is used generically to mean the same thing. We have further posts in mind, but we'd welcome your suggestions too. Are there any items (or objects, animals, etc.) you are aware of that are known by variant names in Australia? Please write, email, tweet, or Facebook.

## DODGY USAGE

I noticed the word '*dodgy*' used several times recently in news items about a fraud investigation into childcare centres—*dodgy providers*, *dodgy operators*. The word was used by a number of media outlets including the ABC news and Fairfax media, and I was surprised to see such an informal word in what I consider a fairly formal context. Am I hopelessly old-fashioned? Is '*dodgy*' now acceptable in formal contexts?

P. Louis

*Dodgy*, originally meaning 'evasive, tricky, artful', has been around since the 1860s. It derives from a 17th century sense of *dodge*, 'a shifty trick'. The current sense, 'dishonest or unreliable', dates from the 1960s and earns a 'colloquial' label in our dictionaries. We had a look at the reports you mention, and see that a couple of them also use the Australian colloquial term *shonky* as a synonym.

The use of colloquial words reflects a general trend towards informal usage in news reporting, presumably influenced in part by the online media environment and the rapid turnover of stories in a 24-hour news cycle. We can expect the trend towards informality to increase.



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## SYMPOSIUM AND BOOK LAUNCH

A two-day interdisciplinary symposium on 'Language in Times of War and Conflict', organised by the ANDC's Amanda Laugesen, was held at the ANU in November. It brought together scholars and researchers working on diverse aspects of this developing area of study. Papers ranged across different conflicts and different periods, from 18th-century Japan to 21st-century Iraq. Presenters addressed a wide range of topics such as language deployed in propaganda, the experiences of interpreters in war zones, the writing cultures of soldiers, and cross-cultural communication. As part of the symposium a book launch was held at Muse in Kingston for *Memory and the Wars on Terror: Australian and British Perspectives* (Palgrave Macmillan 2017). It is edited by Jessica Gildersleeve and Richard Gehrmann, and the book was launched by Professor Bruce Scates from the ANU School of History.

## WORD OF THE YEAR

Our Word of the Year 2017 was *Kwaussie*, a blend of *Kiwi* and *Aussie*, which means 'a person who is a dual citizen of Australia and New Zealand; a New Zealander living in Australia; a person of Australian and New Zealand descent'. It cropped up in relation to the dual citizenship crisis engulfing the Australian Parliament in 2017 (both Barnaby Joyce and Scott Ludlam were found to be Kwaussies). We found considerable use of it online throughout the last decade, although it is less visible in traditional print media. Our choice was met with some scepticism. 'Never heard of it' was the main complaint, with many doubting its authenticity (and our bona fides). However we persist in our view that *Kwaussie*—sometimes written as *Kwozzy* or *Kwozzie*—is an interesting term that reflects a political event of national significance; raises the issue of what it means to be Australian; and taps into our shared history of language and culture with New Zealand. It is also an example of the very 21st-century way words are entering our vocabulary via online sources.

Other words that made our shortlist:

- *juniper punch*: (chiefly in Australian Rules) an illegal punch disguised as the action of grabbing hold of the opponent's jumper.
- *makarrata*: (in traditional Yolngu culture) a ceremonial ritual that aims to restore peace after a dispute; a ceremony that symbolises such a restoration; an agreement.
- *postal survey*: a survey conducted by post; especially in Australia in 2017, the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey.
- *robodebt*: debt incurred as a result of the Department of Human Services automated data matching and debt recovery program.
- *WAXit*: a term for the potential or hypothetical departure of Western Australia from the Australian federation.

## ROUNDUP: OTHER WORDS OF THE YEAR

Oxford Dictionaries (UK and US) chose *youthquake*: 'a significant cultural, political, or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people', reflecting an upsurge in political engagement by the young, for example in the British election. The American Dialect Society selected *fake news*: 'disinformation or falsehoods presented as real news'. They note it now has a second meaning, 'actual news that is claimed to be untrue', largely due to Donald Trump's repeated use of the term to disparage reporting he doesn't care for. Collins too chose *fake news*. Merriam-Webster's word, based on lookup frequency, was *feminism*: 'the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes; organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests'. It coincided with the rise of the hashtag *#metoo* on social media, following the Harvey Weinstein scandal. Dictionary.com's most-viewed word was *complicit*: 'choosing to be involved in an illegal or questionable act, especially with others; having partnership or involvement in wrongdoing'. Lookups were driven by a satirical TV sketch in which Scarlett Johansson, impersonating Ivanka Trump, spruiked a perfume named 'Complicit'. Macquarie Dictionary Committee's Choice was *milkshake duck*: 'a person who is initially viewed positively by the media but is then discovered to have something questionable about them which causes a sharp decline in their popularity'. Their People's Choice award went to *framily*: 'a group of people who are not related by blood but who constitute an intimate network'.

## FANTASY FANS

A fantasy trilogy by the late Frederick Ludowyk, friend of the centre and a former editor of *Ozwords* (1996–2010), has recently been published. The novels that form the Ravensway trilogy (*The Vigil on Earth*, *The Raising of the Shield*, and *Lifmorth*) have a young Australian hero, with the Banksia Witch as his guide. Fred's love of words and his knowledge of Old English and Icelandic sagas are evident in his creation of the language and culture of a Tolkien-like fantasy world. His interest in Australian flora is also apparent in those parts of the trilogy that are set in Australia. The novels are available through [Lulu](#).

## CHILDREN'S WORD OF THE YEAR

Oxford Australia held its inaugural Children's Word of the Year competition in 2017. Primary school students of all ages were invited to submit a short piece of free writing, fiction or nonfiction, about a word that reflected their lives and interests at school, home, or in the community. Schools across Australia submitted over 700 entries, and from these a shortlist and the Australian Children's Word of the Year were selected. Judges representing the Australian National Dictionary Centre, Oxford University Press, teachers, and academics gave feedback on the most significant words used by the

children. The Children's Word of the Year 2017, announced in October, was *equality*. Students expressed concern about equality in a number of contexts, including sport, culture, race, gender, religion, disability, and marriage. As one student said: 'Equality can be as simple as siblings getting the same amount of ice-cream at the beach.' Other words on the shortlist were: *sport*, *adventure*, *friends*, *family*, and *space*. **Individual and class winners** are listed on OUP's website.

If your class or school is interested in entering the Children's Word of the Year 2018 competition, please contact [primaryeducation@oup.com](mailto:primaryeducation@oup.com) or visit [oup.com.au/cwoty](http://oup.com.au/cwoty) for details.

## PUBLICATIONS

We are pleased to tell you of the publication of a brand-new edition of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (6th edn), edited at the centre by Mark Gwynn and Amanda Laugesen, and published by Oxford University Press Australia & New Zealand. It is a major revision and update of the previous (5th) edition. We've added more than 2000 new words to the dictionary, reflecting the rapid expansion of international English. This is especially apparent in the areas of social media, digital technology, and the Internet, but new entries such as *cisgender*, *glamping*, and *superfood* are examples of other semantic fields adding to our vocabulary. Australian English is alive and kicking, as represented by new entries such as *schnitty*, *toolie*, *Anzackery*, *Fonzie flat*, *sistergirl*, and *captain's pick*.

## RHYMING SLANG RESEARCH

ANDC's Mark Gwynn is currently researching the history and usage of Australian rhyming slang, whether it's new (meat pie 'a try'), old (Dad and Dave 'a shave'), or obsolete (macaroni 'baloney'). Well over a hundred rhyming slang terms are recorded in the Australian National Dictionary, and we know there are more. Mark would like to hear about your knowledge and experience of these terms, so if you're the full bottle on rhyming Old Jack Lang, or know a John Dory or two, please get in touch. Contact details below.

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# DON'T ARGUE: HOW ADVERTISING GAVE US A SPORTING TERM

Julia Robinson

A 2017 article on the AFL Grand Final noted that the *don't argue* was 'one of Dustin Martin's signature moves, so expect to see the "don't argue" in full force when Richmond takes on Adelaide'. (Melbourne *Herald Sun*, 25 September 2017) For those who don't follow Aussie Rules, Rugby League, or Rugby Union, the classic *don't argue* is a straight-arm shove, often to an opponent's face or head, by the player with the ball. The name of the move expresses its intention perfectly: 'Get out of my way—and don't argue!' But what is the origin of this term?

The *Herald Sun* notes that the term has its origin in print-media advertisements for Hutton's ham and bacon that ran for decades. A former employee explains the brand's 'logo and labels showed a person shoving his hand into the face of another person, with the expression "don't argue"'. Some readers may know the image: a smiling man with a hat, bowtie, and cane pushes his hand at arm's length into the face of a bearded man with an ill-fitting coat and umbrella. They look like vaudeville figures, and the caption reads: *Don't argue! Hutton's ham is the best*. Over the years the caption varies, but the words 'don't argue' remain.

Further research has revealed more of the story. Hutton's image and slogan is first found in newspaper advertisements in 1911. The company was probably using it the year before (perhaps as a poster), since independent references to its popularity appear in 1910. It gained wide public recognition at the time. Newspaper items alluded to it in many contexts, such as surf lifesaving, banking, boxing, horseracing, politics, and religion. A musical quartet and a lawn tennis team both took the name 'The Don't Argues'.

There is early evidence of its sporting use: '... two bulky opponents were struggling together at a critical moment near the line, when a big, stentorian voice alongside me on the hill roared out: "Get the "don't argue" on to him!"' (Sydney *Sunday Times*, 16 July 1911) It's unclear if this means a straight-arm shove, but later evidence is plainer: 'There is no doubt that Harry Caples has the best 'don't argue' fend in Sydney...' (Sydney *Sportsman*, 9 July 1919) The *don't argue* became established in the Australian sporting lexicon around this time.

The image of physical confrontation in the advertisement undoubtedly influenced the adoption of the slogan *don't argue* as a name for the straight-arm shove. But the image and slogan have an older story—the Hutton company were not the first to use them.

In 1903 and 1904 a London society entertainer, Mel B. Spurr, toured Australia with a one-man show of comic monologues and songs. It was a huge success. One of his advertising handbills, reproduced here, shows a smiling man with his hand in the face of another man. The caption reads: *Don't argue! Go and see Mel. B. Spurr*. There is no record of when the handbill was used, but circumstantial evidence suggests it was here in Australia: Harry Spurr's memoir of his brother includes it in a chapter on the Australian tour, and a copy of the handbill exists in the State Library of Victoria. The image is unmistakably the same as Hutton's.

Spurr died in 1904; Hutton's *don't argue* advertisements appeared around 1910. There's no doubt Hutton used Spurr's image, and this shows in the Hutton artist's crude copying of the elegant handbill, down to the style of lettering. The origin of the image as a handbill for a variety theatre act explains its vaudevillian style.

Why did Spurr use the caption *don't argue*? As far as we can tell, it is not a catchphrase associated with Spurr, his act, or his published songs and monologues. If the handbill was designed to attract an Australian audience, did *don't argue* have a meaning for local audiences? It doesn't seem so. Spurr first performed in Melbourne, but nothing suggests a Melbourne connection with the term—not even in Melbourne's love of football. At this time *don't argue* doesn't appear to be associated with any football code, except as advice to players not to argue with the referee.

The phrase does appear in some contemporary advertisements, and perhaps Spurr or the handbill artist knew this. In the years just prior to Spurr's tour it occurs in Australian newspapers spruiking things such as soap (*don't argue with dirt*) and cough mixture (*don't argue the point ... but get a bottle*). Whatever the inspiration, the handbill was a happy marriage of words and picture, creating an arresting image that, with Hutton's help, has resonated across a century. According to contemporary reports, Mel B. Spurr died in Melbourne on 24 September 1904 after a short illness, and was buried in St Kilda Cemetery. A trace of him remains in the Australian lexicon.



HANDBILL FOR MEL B. SPURR WITH ILLUSTRATION MADE FAMOUS BY HUTTONS SMALLGOODS. W.G. ALMA CONJURING COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA.

“  
... the classic  
*don't argue* is  
a straight-arm  
shove ...  
”

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

Thanks to Dr Clay Djubal, an expert on Australian variety theatre, for his comments on Mel B. Spurr and for drawing my attention to the Spurr handbill, and to John Rice-Whetton for alerting us to the term.

# FROM MUSICAL FLAGS TO BEACH FLAGS

Mark Gwynn

In the early 1980s as a surf lifesaving nipper (a junior) I always looked forward to the *beach flags* event at my local surf lifesaving club. The event started with us lying on our stomachs before scrambling to our feet on the starting gun, turning around, and sprinting some 20 metres to grab one of the ‘flags’ set into the sand. *Beach flags* is an elimination event so there are always fewer flags (in my day 30cm lengths of hosepipe) than competitors – if you miss out on a flag you are eliminated. The eventual winner beats the runner-up to the last flag. As part of a surf lifesaving carnival the event demonstrates important lifesaver skills including running on sand, hand-eye coordination, and aerobic fitness. However, *beach flags* had a somewhat less serious origin in the early 20th century when it was known as *musical flags*.

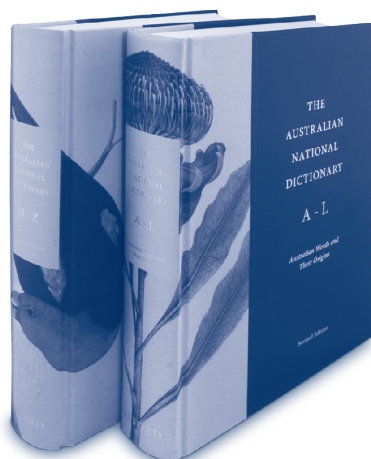
There is some evidence for the term *musical flags* in the late 19th century in the context of a school sports carnival, but no details are provided. In 1903 a cycling carnival included a *musical flags* event, described as ‘an amusing novelty race’ (*Australian Star*, 7 October). There are frequent references to *musical flags* as a cycling (and sometimes motorcycling) novelty event up to, and throughout, the First World War period. Like the later *beach flags*, it was an elimination race; competitors on bikes had to sprint to grab a flag once the music had stopped playing. It is more than likely that the concept for *musical flags* derived from the older party game ‘musical chairs’ in which a number of players compete in successive rounds for a decreasing number of chairs.

The first evidence for the term *musical flags* in a beach context is from 1919, although the event is not described. In the 1920s novelty events were quite common in all sporting carnivals, including surf carnivals: ‘A new series of beach events for which entries close ... has been arranged. These will consist of march past, beach relay, beach sprint, sack race, pillow fight and musical flags.’ (*Newcastle Sun*, 26 March 1929) Confirmation that the musical flags event was similar to the one I remember from my childhood comes from a **spectacular photograph** that shows more than a dozen men sprinting to grab one of several real flags (such as the Australian flag, the Union Jack, etc.) set into the sand. The image captures several men diving, or about to dive, for the flags, and some pushing and shoving. The caption reads: ‘A unique photograph illustrative of the life and virile strength to be seen on Australia’s beaches, taken at Cronulla during a surf carnival. The contest is one known as “Musical Flags”.’ (*Sydney Mail*, 11 January 1928) It is difficult to pinpoint when music ceased to be played for this event, but it was certainly an element in the early years.

There is some evidence from the 1920s of *musical flags* also being described as the *flag race*. Certainly by the 1950s *flag race* was in common use, although it wasn’t until the early 1960s that the term *musical flags* became obsolete. The term *beach flags* is found from the 1970s and is now the official and common name for the event. While *beach flags* has been in the annual Australian Surf Life Saving Championships since 1947, sadly the **pillow fight event** was scratched in 1979.

“  
In the 1920s  
novelty events  
were quite  
common in  
all sporting  
carnivals,  
including surf  
carnivals ...  
”

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



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# OZWORDS COMPETITION

## OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 49 RESULTS

For this competition we asked you to suggest a good name for the Australian men's cricket team, since it doesn't have one. (Except, of course, the *Australian men's cricket team*.)

Not that Cricket Australia is likely to take up your ideas. It has recently demoted the name of the women's team (*Southern Stars*) to the status of a nickname, and in the cause of gravitas and gender equality they are now known as the *Australian women's cricket team*. Under the circumstances cricket officials are unlikely to consider renaming the men's team *Mum's Backyarders* or the *Possum Tossers*, especially since they won back the Ashes this year.

Competition entries rolled in from cricket fans and, we suspect, some non-cricket people too. Entries fell into three piles: the heroic, the patriotic, and the disheartening. Terrible puns crossed the categories.

Names in the heroic vein made our hearts swell with Antipodean pride: *Southern Suns*, *Mighty Mulgas*, *No Flamin' Warriors*, and *Boundary Striders* had us up on our feet cheering in the stands. We donned the green and gold and stood to attention for these especially Aussie entries: *Vegemighties*, *Jolly Slogmen*, *Blue Heelers*, and *Never Never Losers*. Australian fauna featured in one entry that had a bet each way: *Cassowaries* for a flamboyant and aggressive team, or *Echidnas* for a prickly team with their heads in the sand.

The doubters and naysayers are never far away. They sent us *Braggy Greens*, *Pudgy Strugglers*, and *Buckley's Chancers*, proving that the tall-poppy syndrome is entrenched in our sporting culture. One entry had a matched pair of derogatory names for the men's and women's teams: *Bounders* and *Bouncers* respectively. Enough said.

Finally, bats were a theme, especially as found in the names of local fauna. Among the entries for *Numbats*, *Fruit Batters*, and

*Wombats*, two helpful competition entrants sent us *WomBATS*, in case we missed the point. *Combat Wombats* went the extra mile.

We like the winning entry for its simplicity and the quiet nod to our cricketing history, and the runner-up for its cheery optimism.

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

*The Dons* (J. White)

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

*The Howzats* (G. Allemand)

**Honourable mention:**

*The Okka Quokkas* (J. Ferguson)

## OZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 50

This year Tourism Australia paid an eye-watering sum for a commercial to be broadcast during America's Super Bowl, an event with a massive television audience. The ad was a playful reference to the Paul Hogan *Crocodile Dundee* movies. Hogan himself was the face of a very successful Australian tourism campaign in the 1980s. Remember *I'll slip an extra shrimp on the barbie for you?* Twenty years later, Tourism Australia's *so where the bloody hell are you?* campaign was memorable for the wrong reasons, causing international controversy over its profanity. For this competition we invite you to extend yourselves on behalf of your nation—or your State, Territory, or town—and write a witty tourism slogan to draw the crowds. The best entries will win a prize.

### Entries close 31 July 2018.

Send entries to the ANDC at our address at the top of the next column, and please include a postal address, so we know where to send the prizes. You can also submit via Twitter @ozworders, or on our Facebook page.

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