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Oxford Word of the Month – August: bush bride

noun: 1. a bride who lives and is married in a country area, in early use with the implication that her wedding lacks the external trappings of a city wedding. 2. a British woman who married an Australian serviceman in the UK during or immediately after the Second World War, and who migrated to Australia.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

The original meaning of **bush bride** is a woman who marries and lives in rural Australia. The term is first recorded in 1852, and much of the early evidence shows it was often used disparagingly to suggest that the bride and her wedding lacked sophistication:

*The **bush bride** is a familiar study in Melbourne and Sydney ... The clothes are fearfully and wonderfully made, the fashions of 30 years ago, raked out of Fosselman's mercery, at Wantabadgery. (Sydney Bulletin, 25 March 1893)*

Worse, the bride herself might be considered a social handicap:

*Rex is ambitious, and fears that a **bush bride** might fetter his career. (Sydney Morning Herald, 8 November 1913)*

In later use this kind of snobbery is less evident, and a **bush bride** might even be proud to own the title. For instance, in 1932 a letter was published in the women's page of the Adelaide *Chronicle* wanting to know a 'simple reliable way of keeping mutton', and 'how to keep clothes a good color when dam water has to be used for washing'. (21 April) The letter was signed '**Bush Bride**'.

A quite different sense of **bush bride** is found in the 1940s. During the Second World War when Australian troops were stationed overseas, a large number of foreign women married or became engaged to Australian servicemen. After the war, when wives, children, and fiancées were offered free passage to Australia, thousands made the journey to a new home on the other side of the world. Most of the war brides were British, and were sometimes called **bush brides**—regardless of whether their final destination was rural or urban.

*The Australian Minister in London (Mr Beasley) is so dissatisfied with the partial failure of arrangements for bringing '**bush brides**' to Australia that he is writing to*

the Prime Minister (Mr Attlee) on the subject. (Brisbane Telegraph, 18 April 1946)

These **bush brides** were happy to claim the title:

*A 'Kangaroo Club for **Bush Brides**' has been formed in Brighton (Sussex) by 10 determined wives who met in a teashop to campaign against shipping delays. The club's emblem is a kangaroo with a joey peering out of the pouch and saying, 'What, no ships?'* (Adelaide Mail, 23 February 1946)

The 1940s term is now used only in a historical context; the earlier sense of **bush bride**, although still found occasionally, has largely fallen out of use today.

Bush bride is included in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* (2016).

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