

life sentences

In the wake of the announcement of the Queen's Birthday Honours List for 2011, postdoctoral fellow **KAREN FOX** explores the intersections between the Australian honours system and the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

The Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB) and the Australian honours system, administered by the Honours Secretariat in the Governor-General's Office, have a lot more in common than might at first be imagined.

Both are national institutions recognising the lives of significant Australians, both comprise galleries of characters who have had an impact on the nation, and both are select companies (more than 200,000 people have been honoured since 1901, while just over 12,000 biographies will be included in the ADB by the end of 2012).

There are some considerable points of difference, too. For one, appointments to the Order of Australia are not made posthumously, whereas death is a prerequisite for inclusion in the ADB. Though honours systems have often been a target of criticisms over process and outcome, an honour is given for high achievement or important service to the community, and can be revoked if the recipient commits an offence or brings 'disrepute' on the Order. The ADB, as part of its mission to depict Australian life in all its varieties, includes not only people selected as representative of particular social groups, but also several people who might best be described as notorious – among them convicted murderer Eugenia Falleni (c.1875–1938) and bushranger Captain Thunderbolt (1835–1870). And finally, while one has to be an Australian citizen to be nominated for appointment to the Order of Australia, inclusion in

the ADB does not require Australian birth, but only that one has made a significant contribution to the nation.

The ADB began its life in 1959, with its first volume published in 1966; the Order of Australia was established by the Whitlam Government in 1975. Gough Whitlam was attracted to the model of national honours adopted in Canada, based around the Order of Canada, which had been created in 1967, the centenary of Canadian Confederation. Australians remained eligible for imperial honours for some time, as Malcolm Fraser's government reinstated the practice of making recommendations for British honours and some state governments also continued to make such recommendations. Though Paul Keating announced in 1992 that no further recommendations would be made for British awards, Australians may still receive honours in the Queen's personal gift, such as the Royal Victorian Order.

Today, the Australian Government website *It's An Honour* provides a record of the many thousands of Australians honoured since Federation in 1901, while the ADB offers over 11,000 biographies of those who have shaped Australia. Many honoured individuals appear in the ADB, especially those appointed to the upper levels of an order of chivalry like the Order of the Bath or the Order of St Michael and St George. A search of the ADB Online yields 1068 Sirs and 23 Dames – the imbalance a reflection of the small number of women who received such high honours.



Eugenia Falleni, also known as Harry Crawford, was one of early Australia's most notorious criminals. PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTICE & POLICE MUSEUM, HISTORIC HOUSES TRUST, SYDNEY.

The National Centre of Biography's new initiative, *Obituaries Australia*, includes links to honours that individuals received during their lives, which will eventually allow researchers to track cohorts of honoured people.

In a new project located in the NCB, I am investigating the history of honours in Australia, from the early bestowal of imperial honours on colonial administrators, through to the democratisation of honours that began with the establishment of the Order of the British Empire in 1917 (the first order open to women in their own right), and the creation of Australia's own national system of honours. A collection of essays telling the history of the ADB is also due to be published soon. Together, the two projects will give these national institutions recording the lives of significant Australians life-histories of their own. ■

word watch

The Australian National Dictionary Centre is a joint venture between Oxford University Press and ANU. Director **BRUCE MOORE** takes a look at Australian rhyming slang.

Have you, or a member of your family, ever complained about being relegated to the magoos or the scooby doos? These are recent examples of Australian rhyming slang for 'twos', referring to the 'reserve or seconds team of a sporting club'. Magoos alludes to the nearsighted Mr Magoo, an animated cartoon character created in 1949 by United Productions of America, and scooby doos alludes to Scooby-Doo, another American animated cartoon character, this time a dog.

A surprising feature of the history of rhyming slang is that it appears very late. The slang books of the 18th Century and the first half of the 19th Century know nothing of rhyming slang. In Britain, rhyming slang is first mentioned in JC Hotten's *The Slang Dictionary* (1859). The first evidence of rhyming slang in Australia occurs two years earlier, in 1857, when jimmygrant appears as rhyming slang for

'immigrant'. But rhyming slang does not become common in Australia until the beginning of the 20th Century, no doubt influenced by London or Cockney rhyming slang. It was at this stage (about 1910) that pomegranate became a rhyming slang synonym for jimmygrant the 'immigrant', on its way to truncation into pom and pommy.

The most productive period for Australian rhyming slang was the Second World War. Examples include: she's apples (abbreviated from apples and spice = 'nice'), billy lid 'kid', comic cuts 'guts', dead horse 'sauce', fiddly-did 'quid', Joe Blakes 'the shakes', charlie (abbreviated form of Charley Wheeler, a painter of nude women) 'sheila', Dad and Dave 'shave', on someone's hammer (abbreviated form of hammer and tack) 'back', mallee root 'prostitute', Ned Kelly 'belly', Noah's ark 'shark', and Warwick Farm 'arm'. Characters, real and fictional, live on in rhyming slang:

Adrian Quist (the tennis player) 'pissed', Captain Cook 'look', Ginger Meggs 'legs', Harold Holt (or, simply, Harry) 'a bolt, a disappearing act', Lionel Rose 'nose', and Wally Grout 'a shout (of drinks)'. ■

At first glance, it might seem surprising that Australian rhyming slang has recently fastened on to two American cartoon characters, Mr Magoo and Scooby-Doo, to create new terms. But long before that, Australian English picked up the name of an American gangster, and turned Al Capone into Australian rhyming slang for 'phone'. And Mickey Mouse has been rhyming slang for 'grouse'. Rhyming slang is no longer a major feature of Australian English, but there is still some life in the Old Jack Lang (Australian rhyming slang for 'slang', from the name of the Premier of New South Wales 1925–27, 1930–32)! ■

thumb|300px|right thumb|300px|right thumb|300px|right thumb|300px|right thumb|300px|right New Zealand English is close to Australian English in the pronunciation; but there are several differences. The New Zealand accent is practically impossible to differentiate from Australian accent. There are differences in history that marked the relations of these two different nations. Australia was possibly settled by humans over 50,000 years ago, contrary to New Zealand that was the last habitable part in the The Australian Accent is renowned for its lack of regional differences. This is perhaps not surprising given that Britain settled the country fairly late in the history of the Empire (New South Wales was discovered over a decade after America's Declaration of Independence). But it isn't quite right to say Australian Accents exhibit no variation: those differences just aren't particularly regional. So if Australian accents don't really vary by region, what kind of accent differences do exist? I'd refer you to the loose classification system developed by linguists Arthur Delbridge and A.G. Mitch A recent project to encourage South Australian prisoners to write provides insights into how prisoners may benefit from written expression. The project, Life Sentences, gave more than 70 contributors professional feedback, certificates of merit and publication in a booklet produced annually from 2017 to 2019. The submissions revealed a surprising diversity of topics, considerable talent and self-awareness. The back story. Life Sentences began as an offshoot of Art by Prisoners, a visual arts competition organised by Jeremy Ryder, who wanted to showcase art from prisoners across South Australia. We wondered if prisoners may also want to express themselves through writing. Australians are known their laid-back and relaxed attitude to life, and this is true to an extent at least. You'll likely meet quite a few locals who are chilled out, and take the time to enjoy life. This is particularly true in "the bush" the rural areas of the country and in surfing communities like Byron Bay or Noosa. However Australia is also a highly developed, modern country, with strong professional, corporate and business sectors. The Australian sense of humour is self-deprecating, cheeky and can be a little dark. Sometimes it can take a little bit of getting used to, especially when a local makes a joke in this vein with a completely straight face, and you're not sure if they're joking or not!