

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)! ■

Australian English is relatively homogenous when compared to British English. There is, however, some regional variation between the states, particularly in regards to South Australia, Victoria, and Western Australia. One of the first publications on Australian English was issued in 1892 under the title *The Slang-English of Australia and Some Mixed Languages*. The first dictionary on historical principles was E.E. Morris's *Austral English: A Dictionary of Australian Words, Phrases and Usages* (1898). The intonation of the Australian variant of English is characterized by not so sharp rises and falls of the intonation in one and the same statement. Thus the intonation of the British variant of the language seems to be more emotional and bright. Arriving into Australia with little knowledge of Australian slang may get you into a few awkward situations. So read our Aussie slang guide with video. Australian slang is certainly "interesting"! Whether you're dreaming of visiting Australia, have just arrived or have been in this gigantic island of paradise for a while, there are a few Australian slang words that you should learn to help you get through day to day life. Although Australia is an English speaking country, arriving into the country with little knowledge of the most popular Aussie slang words may just get you into a few awkward situations. Under the then British honours system and the present Australian Honours System permission can be sought to accept and wear foreign awards but such permission does not come with the right to use titles and post nominals. Keith Payne, the last Australian awarded the Victoria Cross was also awarded the US Distinguished Service Cross and sometimes his name is listed as Keith Payne VC OAM DSC (US). This is not an example of the preceding sentence, unless the author thought that McIntosh was not an Australian. In fact he was an Australian who spent some years in the UK and was knighted by the UK government in 1995. According to the first sentence, this means his award should be included.