

# The Dictionary of New Zealand English: *A beginning, middle and (sometime) an end*

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When I enrolled for a PhD in 1951 in the now defunct University of New Zealand, and at Professor I.A. Gordon's suggestion took up 'A History of New Zealand English' as a topic, I had no idea what I was about, nor what constituted 'NZ English'. My only two guides were Sidney J. Baker's *New Zealand Slang* and Dr Hocken's *A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to New Zealand* and the Turnbull and General Assembly Libraries catalogues such as they were then. I hit upon the idea of verifying Baker's collection and branching out from there. This I began to do, and by the kindness of early librarians (especially Bob Lamb then of the General Assembly Library) was allowed into the library bowels to read shelves full of good New Zealand stuff. I made a habit of reading from the top shelf down, probably from a desperate attempt to get some appearance of order or method into my research. I tested out newspapers by reading all the files of the *Evening Post* to 1940, but found this unproductive, probably because at this time I didn't know what I was looking for. My sights were then set too high on the obvious – the 'bush', 'boohai' words, or on the unconventional – on slang terms most of which proved to be general English in the end.

I would copy my quotations and notes on to sheets of usually scrounged paper (these were kept as a chronological index), then transcribe them on to 'slips' cut from reject cards and other materials from State Advances Corporation per kind favour of a mate who worked there. (Though the University of NZ Fellowship I had was generous for its time, there was little spare cash about.)

After collecting a few thousand cards, I was advised to do something with them. This meant (so I thought) checking entries against the *OED* and Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary*, Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang*, Craigie's *American Dialect Dictionary*, and so forth. It was the close reading of especially the *OED*, *EDD* and Partridge which really opened my eyes to lexicography, and I still recall this as an intensely happy and illuminating period of early life (for example, of discovering SHICK-SHACK still my favourite *OED* entry). And indeed this collecting and culling process in various forms has been the operational mode ever since.

But as the collection grew, so did the difficulty of dealing with it, especially on the usual part-time research basis, among many other competing activities. By

this time I had written draft entries with supporting quotations on to loose-leaf sheets, a ring-binder dictionary, but still without any realistic conception of a completed *The Dictionary of New Zealand English*, though I had a great deal of help and encouragement. The great break-through came with computerisation, combined at that time (early 1980s on) with the Government PEP unemployed training scheme which paid the wages of trainee computer operators, for example. This allowed the loose-leaf dictionary, and a great deal of other material, to be transferred to the computer, often pretty roughly and needing much correction time, but transferred all the same. The University's Computing Services Centre was most supportive. Cards and paper materials could then be relegated to wardrobes and other repositories. There was also opportunity to read through drafts of the *Australian National Dictionary* to supply any New Zealand predating of shared headwords (e.g. **Pavlova**). This was a most valuable and reassuring exercise which also allowed Australian first datings of shared entries to be incorporated in the *DNZE*. At this time I was working on the second edition of the *Heinemann NZ Dictionary*, a task which further clarified my notions of a New Zealand lexis.

The next break-through came in late 1990-91 with a substantial Lotteries Commission grant allowing the employment of highly qualified advisory editors to vet and order the plants and animals entries, a Science Editor (Dr D.E. Hurley) to coordinate this work, an expert to advise on Maori-derived entries, and an Executive Editor to oversee the work of transferring this output on to disk accurately according to a consistent style, and to manage the sizeable staff employed on this, on the extensive checking of the basic material collected, and on the further substantial culling of excess material needed to bring entries nearer their final form.

Since 1992 there have been only three of us working part-time on *The Dictionary of New Zealand English* finalising entries, discarding much material, filling obvious gaps, and lately responding to a 'peer-reading' by Dr W.S. Ramson (a Victoria graduate), Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre and editor of the *Australian National Dictionary*. Dr Ramson's detailed comments have been both valuable and supportive; his attitude to the *DNZE*, enthusiastic.

So at present, about 20,000 metres of computer paper later, *The Dictionary of New Zealand English* is left with about a third of its original collections extant, but is still (rather to the publisher's dismay) at 1.5 million running words double the originally expected size. There are approximately 9,000 headwords (including 2,300 cross-references) supported by 49,000 quotations (18th cent. – 400, 19th – 13,000, 20th – 35,600), and a list of printed sources used of 4,000 items. Under way is a final culling of 'encyclopedic' entries such as TRAINING COLLEGE, and of 'excess' quotations (especially those instancing early non-standard spellings of Maori borrowings – we'll now merely give a list at the head of an entry without trying to validate each with a separate quotation) to try to reduce the wordage. We hope to have a disk and proof-read hard copy with the publisher by the end of June, 1993.

And, after a decent interval, it should be possible for any literate person to read this passage from a 1971 *Listener* with some understanding: 'They cooeed out, and while he skinned a spiker they found a possie in a bit of a trog and boiled-up'.

#### WHAT TO EXPECT FROM *THE DICTIONARY*

In brief, a lexical anthology of New Zealand history and natural history, attitudes and prejudices which will include: AUTHORITY definitions of distinctive New Zealand words with their combinations and derivatives, including historical, obsolete and regional uses, and with the various meanings set out to indicate an historical sequence of development; ACCURATE information about etymology, variant spellings, pronunciation, grammar, social and regional status, and comparative Australian datings for shared words; COMPREHENSIVE Maori references; DATED AND REFERENCED quotations from a wide range of mainly published written sources (especially literary and historical but also trade, technical, business, etc., and for plants and animals, scientific sources) to define meaning and use, and to indicate the time a word has entered into and remained in New Zealand English; FULL coverage of the popular names of plants and animals, linked to their scientific identities; COMPATIBILITY of method, layout, etc. with the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *The Australian National Dictionary* in the style exemplified below:

#### **boohai** /bu:hai/.

Also **boo-ai**, **boo-ay**, **boo-ey**, **booeye**, **boo-hai**, **boohoy**, **bouai**, **Buhoi**, **buwai**, **Puhoi**. [Prob. an alteration of the place-name *Puhoi*, a township and district north of Auckland, once remote and difficult of access, orig. settled by German-speaking Bohemian immigrants.] **1.** Often *loc.* A remote place or district. See also BACKBLOCKS, BUSH, CACTUS, WOOP-WOOPS, WOP-WOPS. **a.** Esp. in the phr. **in (up) the boohai**. **1922** p.c. R. Mason (1955). *boohai* heard and used in Pukekohe, Auckland, c1922 **1946** SIMPSON *If You'd Care to Know* 101 Another New Zealand expression is 'Up the Bouai' (pronounced boo-eye). There was

a place near Auckland city which many years ago was somewhat isolated, and it was called the Bouai... To go 'up the Bouai' has become fairly general in use. Today, if a person comes to town from any lonely place in the forests or mountains, and a friend asks him where he has been, most likely the answer will be, 'Oh, I've been up the Bouai.' It is a general word for an isolated region. **1959** SINCLAIR *Hist. NZ* 97 The Bohemians...founded Puhoi (the name of which, corrupted, is apparently the origin of the slang term 'the Boo-ay', a synonym for 'the out-backs'). **1963** CASEY *As Short a Spring* 244 You fancy them up here in the boo-eye. **1966** *Encycl. NZ* II. 678 (Professor Arnold Wall) An example [of local slang terms] is the Auckland term *up the Puhoi* or *Boohoy* (its form varies a good deal) meaning 'gone somewhere or other' and this is a genuine local product referring to an old German settlement on the coast north of Auckland and little, if at all, in use elsewhere in New Zealand. **1969** A. U.T.C. *Song Book 3rd edn.* Song No. 36 It's a long drive up from the buwai By Woodcocks and Kairpara [sic] flats. **1971** *Listener* [etc, etc.]

**b.** In the phr. **way to boohai**, intensifying remoteness or distance. Cf. WAY TO BLAZES.

**1981** [etc.]

**2.** In the phr. **up the boohai**, completely awry, astray. Cf. *in the cactus* CACTUS 1). **1955** BJ Cameron Collection (TS July) bouai up the bouai (adv.) Up the spout. **1959** SLATTER *Gun in My Hand* 91 Got the prickler with me. Slinging off at me he was. You're up the boo-ay he told me. **1960** [etc.]

#### **grass.**

**1.** Any plant belonging to the family Poaceae (formerly Gramineae), or resembling members of that family in general appearance. See also ENGLISH GRASS, NATIVE GRASS; and BAYONET GRASS, COTTON GRASS (*Celmisia* sp.), CUTTING OF CUTTY GRASS, *eel-grass* (EEL n. 4), HOOK GRASS, KARETU, PAMPAS GRASS, PEPPER GRASS, PORCUPINE GRASS, PURUA GRASS, SCURVY GRASS, SILK GRASS, SPEARGRASS, SWORD-GRASS, TOETOE, TUSSOCK.

**2.** Of the almost 200 common names of grasses collected, the following 45, mainly native grasses, are considered to have significant New Zealand reference (see further **1880** BUCHANAN *Manual of Indigenous Grasses*). Their common names are usu. formed from *modifier + grass(-name)*: **avalanche**, **bastard**-, **bay**, **blue**-, **New Zealand browntop**, **buffalo**, **bunch**, **bunny**, **carpet**, **Chilean** (Chilian, Chili), **coast**, **curly** (curly snow), **danthonia**, **elephant** (or vasey), **feathery**, **fescue** (Chewings, tall, etc.), **fortune**, **hair**, **hassock**, **hedgehog**, **holy**, **love**, **matua**, **mercier**, **needle** (Chilian needle), **oat**, **pincushion**, **plume**, **poa** (common field, desert, tussock poa), **rice** (bush or meadow or New Zealand rice), **rolling**, **salt**, **sand** (sand-fescue), **snow**, **snow patch**, **swamp**, **tinker**, **tree**-, **tuft** (tufted), **tumble**, **wheat** (blue wheat), **white man's**, **wind**.

(1) **avalanche grass** *Poa cockayneana*. a sward-forming grass of South Island alpine regions.

Each of these names grasses have a sub-entry with definition and quotes. This is the pattern of such entries where many separate common names and species are involved: e.g. COD, FERN, PETREL.

#### **korari**. /k@elra:ri:/, /k@elr@aedi:/, /k@ell@aedi:/, /kl@aedi:/.

Also with much variety of form, esp. in the South Island, poss. partly from Ma. dialectal variation, but mainly from various non-Maori perceptions of Ma. /k/ as English [k] often spelt c; Ma. /o:/ as [ə], [e], [zero]; Ma. /r/ as [r] or [l] or [d]:

**clad(d)y, co(o)rad(d)i(e), craddie, kaladi(e), kaladdy, kauradi, koladdy, kolladie, koraddee, korad(d)i(e), koraddy, korali, korafi, korori, kraddy.** Other forms collected but not illustrated include **colladdy, colladie, courad, gladdy, kladdy, kouradi.** [Ma. /kɔ:rari/: Williams 140 *Koorari...* 3... *flower stem of flax...* 4. The plant itself (in the north).] 1. *Mainly North Island. flax-plant* (FLAX I 5 b). 1814 [etc.]

Unlike **boohai** which illustrates the uncertainty of spelling of a word of uncertain origin, **korari** illustrates the variety of early and not so early non-standard spellings of words derived from Maori: BIDDY-BID from PIRIPIRI is another. Usually only the original Maori pronunciation is indicated (phonemically – we obviously await a usable phonetic alphabet) and there will be a guide in the general introduction indicating the general directions of common anglicisations: in this case however there is sufficient evidence to indicate anglicised pronunciations.

**Premier. Hist.**

[Spec. use of *Premier* head of government.] In the 19th century formally, and since c1900 informally and less frequently, the title of the first or chief minister of the Government party in the New Zealand parliament, now formally PRIME MINISTER; see esp. quotes. 1966, 1982.

1854-55 [etc.]

This introduces a typical entry where the headword is one used elsewhere but has a specific application in NZ English. Also, an entry for **Premier** is getting close to the 'encyclopedic', that is, matter which would be better placed in an encyclopedia (or encyclopedic dictionary) than in a predominantly 'lexical' dictionary. Much useful but encyclopedic material has been put aside in the interests of space.

**willie-waw. Mainly Marlborough Sounds.**

Also **willey waugh, willie-wa, willi-waw, willy waugh.** [Origin uncertain: recorded also from the south Atlantic (1836), and from the Straits of Magellan 1842, 1863 by authors with a NZ connection, J.D. Hooker and Robert Fitzroy, and later used by Kipling in *Kim* (see OED *williwaw*). The first element (perh. a

var. of *whirly*) is poss. the *willy* 'a violent coastal whirlwind or squall from or near cliff faces' recorded (1832, 1941) from the Atlantic (Tristan da Cunha) (see OED *n.*<sup>3</sup>), in 1832 by Augustus Earle, Robert Fitzroy's draughtsman during the voyage of the *Beagle*, who had resided in Tristan as well as in early New Zealand, writing an account of both places; and also from Wellington in 1840. (Austral. *willy-willy* is not relevant, being from a north-western Aborig. dial. and unrecorded before 1894.) The *-waw* element is perh. a variant of Brit. dial. *waft, waff* (cf. *waft, whiff*, a whalers' signal flag, recorded on the NZ coast from the 1830s) 'a puff of air, a blast', used as an alliterative suffix and poss. altered under the influence of a rhyme with the nautical *cat's paw* 'a light variable breeze' (see Bowen's definition of *willi-waw*); or with *flaw* recorded from NZ in 1857 (see OED *flaw n.*<sup>2</sup> 1, and the introductory quotes. below which describe a 'willie-waw' phenomenon under different names). The evidence strongly indicates a nautical (prob. whaling) provenance; the Marlborough Sounds and Cook Strait have since early times been heavily involved with shore whaling.] A sudden violent coastal squall or whirling gust of wind which comes off land, esp. from steep coastal faces or cliffs. See also WILLY.

An example of a local or regional word, possibly part of early shore-based contact, certainly one dear to a Marlborough person's heart and none the less curious for that. It generates more discussion than most. Originally most probably a whalers' word, poss. from some Caribbean or North American Indian language – a speculation for which there is no evidence, thus unbecoming of a lexicographer to even mention it. Like *BARBER*, the cutting wind of Greymouth, and *CATAMARAN* the log-hauling wheeled sledge of North Auckland, both shared with the Atlantic coast of Canada and Newfoundland (the Nova Scotian connection is plain), an illustration of the variety of the sources for locally significant words.

*From a Stout Centre seminar on 31st March 1993.*

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*Jewish Childhood (cont from page 20)*

not to go to prayers', one recalled. It meant being able to go off to the back room and 'have quite a lot of fun for ten or fifteen minutes', said another. Neither had felt like an outsider but 'special' or 'cool' because they did not have to be there for prayers or religious instruction.

CONCLUSION

The people discussed in this paper grew up with considerable pressure from their families to maintain the Jewish religion. At the same time they were by and large left unprovided with the Jewish upbringing or religious education (except in a small number of the more Orthodox families) either to make sense of their parents' urgings or to counteract the assimilative pressures of

New Zealand society. The exception was the youth movement which taught that emigration was the only option for those who wanted to stay Jewish.

Children in New Zealand have not on the whole had to cope with anti-Semitism. Instead they have had to live with the ignorance of their peers about Judaism and about the lives of Jewish people.

*Based on a talk given at the Stout Centre on 15 July 1992.*

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