

life sentences

The Australian Dictionary of Biography sits in the history program at the Research School of Social Sciences. Research Editor **RANI KERIN** investigates Indigenous place names in Canberra.

I vividly recall the first *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB) entry I ever read – it was a biography of the Aboriginal leader William Cooper, who sought direct representation for Aboriginal people in Federal Parliament. The first ADB entry I authored was on Anna Vroland, a white campaigner for Aboriginal rights. Last year I published a book on another white campaigner for Aboriginal rights, Charles Duguid, who is also in the ADB. Quite by chance, in a few months' time, I will be moving to Bonner, where all the streets are named after Indigenous leaders and their non-Indigenous supporters: William Cooper Avenue, Vroland Lane and Duguid Street can all be found there.

My new house is in Mobourne Street, named after Ernest Mobourne, an Aboriginal leader from rural Victoria who fought against injustice and oppression in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Mabo Boulevard (commemorating Eddie Koiki Mabo, a Torres Strait Islander whose fight for land rights helped to change Australia's history), Bill Fergusson Circuit (honouring the Indigenous leader who, together with William Cooper, organised the 'Day of Mourning' protest on

26 January 1938 – Australia's sesquicentenary), and Ben Blakeney Street (paying tribute to the first Indigenous person to join the Commonwealth Police) all intersect my street. Threlkeld Lane (named after the Rev Lancelot Threlkeld, a nineteenth century missionary whose language studies are now regarded as landmarks in Aboriginal studies) and Horner Lane (commemorating Jean Horner who, with her husband Jack, was a cornerstone of the Aboriginal advancement movement) are nearby. Each tells an important story of the struggle for Aboriginal rights.

With the exception of people who died in the recent past, all the people for whom streets are named in Bonner can be found in the ADB, and the rest will be there soon. To get in the ADB, a subject has to have been significant, or representative, and have been dead for at least twenty years. We are currently commissioning entries for people who died in the period 1991–2000. It is significant that more than fifty of the 1,400 names listed for inclusion in the ADB in the next period are Indigenous. Neville Bonner, the first Indigenous Australian elected to Federal



Charles Duguid, aged 95, and Jackie Tjupuru in 1980. ADELAIDE ADVERTISER.

Parliament, is on our list. Bob Maza, Margaret Tucker, Rita Huggins, Charles Perkins and Isabel Flick – all Aboriginal activists with streets named after them in Bonner – are likewise listed for inclusion, and there are many more.

The ACT Place Names Committee is to be congratulated for the extent of historical research undertaken in selecting Bonner's street names. Walking the streets of Bonner, like many other Canberra suburbs, will be a lesson in Australian history: I can't wait to go exploring. ■

- Visit the ADB online at adb.anu.edu.au

word watch

The Australian National Dictionary Centre is a joint venture between Oxford University Press and ANU. In her inaugural column for *ANU Reporter*, incoming Director **SARAH OGILVIE** talks true blue.

Australian words have intrigued the rest of the world ever since the first Europeans set foot on our land. This contact came too late for Australian words to be included in most early English dictionaries, such as Samuel Johnson's famous *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). But they have been included ever since, and the large 20-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* contains about 3,000 words that originated in Australia, many from Aboriginal languages.

Dr Johnson was a good friend of Sir Joseph Banks, who returned to England with news of the Guugu Yimidjirr word *kangaroo*, which he had collected while the *Endeavour* was stranded at Cooktown for seven weeks in 1770. Johnson, the gregarious lexicographer, couldn't put the word in his dictionary, but he introduced the word to British high society by impersonating the animal at a dinner party. 'Nothing could be more ludicrous', wrote Boswell, 'than the appearance of a tall, heavy, grave-looking man like Dr Johnson, standing up to mimic the shape and motions of a kangaroo. He stood erect, put out his hands like feelers, and, gathering up the tails of his huge brown coat so as to resemble the pouch

of the animal, made two or three vigorous bounds across the room'.

How many words in general international English started out as Australianisms? Words from our unique indigenous flora and fauna are obvious of course, as are exports that are taken as symbolic of Aussie culture, like *barbie*, *fair go*, *tall poppy*, and *no worries*. But less well known as Australian in origin are terms of abuse and colloquial expressions such as *feral*, *fugly*, *perv*, *poofter*, *ratbag*, and *up the duff*. Additionally, there are linguistic features such as the rising intonation at the end of sentences ('high rise terminal') that linguists have observed creeping into British English via the popularity of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. Other words are in fact localised to Australia, even though they may have an 'international feel' to Australians: *a big ask*, *body corporate*, *eye fillet*, *glad wrap*, *milk bar*, and *reading brick*. Alternatively, many people are surprised that some words do not have an Australian provenance at all: emu comes from the Portuguese word *ema* 'cassowary'; possum is a shortened form of *opossum* from the North American Indian language Virginia Algonquian; *bandicoot* is from the Dravidian language Telugu; and goanna is based on



iguana from the South American language Taino, via Spanish.

I look forward over the coming months to sharing more of the word knowledge that we explore and research at the Australian National Dictionary Centre, in my role as the new Director. In the meantime, check out our new blog www.ozwords.org, twitter @ozworders and facebook/ozwords. ■

Sarah Ogilvie has an MA from ANU and a DPhil from Oxford. She comes to ANU from the Linguistics Department at Cambridge University and prior to that she was editor of the Oxford English Dictionary.