

From the Back Verandah

The precious little — and mostly tedious — history I learned at school was at least enlivened by the sound of the words “Ethelred the Unready”. What a name!

In their 1930 classic *1066 and All That*, Sellar and Yeatman gave this sad King of England (he reigned from 978 to 1016) a suitably paltry 119 words (including chapter title). Here are 21 of them:

Ethelred the Unready was the first Weak King of England and was thus the cause of a fresh Wave of Danes.

Sellar and Yeatman might have added to their epic coverage that 1000 years later Ethelred’s unpreparedness would become Baden-Powell’s inspiration for the Boy Scouts. But how could they dare? It just isn’t correct. Nor is it a fact that Ethelred was “unready”.

You see, Ethelred’s nickname was actually “the Unredy”. Yes, another archaic bit of English that over time got misinterpreted. It meant “redeless”, i.e. without counsel. Ethelred’s mistake was to act without proper advice. In his *Heritage of Britain* (1977), A. L. Rowse described him as “a kind of Neville Chamberlain of the tenth century”.

Don’t confuse him with Etheldreda (c. 630-79). Refusing to consummate either of her marriages, this lady took the veil and founded a monastery. Revered as a virgin saint, she also became known as St. Audrey, unconsciously providing the origin for the word “tawdry”. But that’s another story.

Ain’t properly told history fantastic?

— Fizzgig

Colophon

Bikwil
18 Pembury Ave.
NORTH ROCKS. 2151.
trogers@zipworld.com.au

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Annual Subscription (Six Issues): \$5

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BIKWIL

The Newsletter of Quiet Enthusiasms

Editor: Tony Rogers

ISSN 1328-7842

No. 17

January 2000

Fin de Siècle?

As far as *Bikwil* is concerned, this January does not usher in some special new thousand-year period — despite the fact that the year starts with a “2” for the first time.

Not that the sensible readers of this magazine need any telling. And it doesn’t have anything to do with whether there was a Year Zero or not between 1 BC and 1 AD. That only compounds the problem.

No. Surely anyone under the age of death who can mentally step from one to ten knows the apocalyptic truth: anniversaries (e.g. birthdays) take place at the end of the year, not the beginning. In purely counting terms, then, we are

this month still a full gratification-postponing year away from the authentic moment. So there’s plenty of time yet before millenniumites need be rejoicing — or trembling at “the beginning of the end”, if that’s their chiliastic inclination.

And as we wait, perhaps we can find some quietly optimistic (and perverse) solace in these lines from Byron’s *Marino Faliero*:

But this day, black within the
calendar,
Shall be succeeded by a bright
millenium.

For all that, I trust your computers are going well.

What’s Inside?

From Virgil to Velikovsky (2)	2	A Word in Your Pink Shell-like	10
Summer Sketch	6	Quintessential Quirky Quotes	14
Postal Fever	7	Web Line	15
Interesting Origins	8	From the Back Verandah	16
Les Musiques Imbéciles	9		

From Virgil to Velikovsky

[*Stepping Stones* No. 1]

(This is part 2 of an essay which so far has glanced at the fascinating links between three celebrities —Virgil, Edmund Hillary and Jan Morris.)

When confronted with the story of a male-to-female transsexual, some men can be relied upon make scornful and uninformed remarks about "queers" and "transvestites". Even those more sympathetic to the psychological trauma involved getting to the surgery decision unconsciously cross their legs. This latter wry observation was made by another celebrated transsexual musician — Wendy **Carlos** (b. 1939 as Walter Carlos), whose secret story was revealed in a "surprise *Playboy* interview" in May 1979. She is our next port of call.

Walter Carlos had his surgery in the same year as James Morris, in New York, after just as much internal hell as a child, adolescent and young man. He began medical consultations in 1967, and a year later began the required period of hormone treatment that always precedes a sex-change operation. Another year on and he was living as a woman, though the

operation itself would not take place for a further three years. During those three years only a tiny handful of close friends were in the know; to all others Walter Carlos was incommunicado, some sort of eccentric recluse.

Trouble was, from 1968 his music was becoming world famous. That was the year Columbia Records released *Switched-On Bach* — for a long time the best selling classical album ever made (over a million copies). Other Carlos releases quickly followed: *The Well-Tempered Synthesizer*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Sonic Seasonings* — all recorded before the sex-change operation.

With all the publicity, including requests to appear on stage and on TV, Carlos became very anxious. How do you drop out of sight when the world is trying to beat a path to your home studio door? With great difficulty, and in Carlos' case always on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Well protected by her closest friend Rachel Elkind, she resorted to all sorts of subterfuges, pretending to be out

Web

So you're keen on the Weird and Wacky Web, are you? And you wish you could enjoy it forever?

Well, perhaps we can arrange it.

Meet Alex Chiu, who, despite his fractured English, has managed to make an offer that beggars — nay, buggers — the imagination. He calls it *Alex Chiu's Eternal Life Device*.

Eternal Life Device is believed to allow humans to stay physically young forever. Magnetic device strengthens metabolism and frees blood circulation generating a super human body. Patent pending. The most important invention in human history . . . Please believe me. Everything you read is true and is important. Now people do not have to age anymore.

As I understand him, there are really two devices — The Eternal Life Rings and The Eternal Life Foot Braces. The Rings you have to wear on the little finger of each hand, the Braces on all ten toes, "as long as you wear the rings or foot braces every night during sleep".



Line

It would seem that the Rings and Braces are alternatives: you don't need both, provided you put the device of your choice on the right and left limbs —

positive and negative terminals, don't you know?

Sensible fellow that he is, Alex fully expects a bit of scepticism, scrutiny and ridicule:

I am not one of those stupid moron who don't know what I am doing. I know about FDA . . . One phone call to the FDA by an unsatisfied customer then I'm in BIG trouble . . . [but] I have no choice but be brave and face the danger and laughter! . . . There is a good reason why I am doing all this. BECAUSE IT WORKS!!! Isn't that cool? I'm selling eternal life right off of internet . . . All statements are my true beliefs. There are not at this time yet medical claims. The devices are for private experimentation of the buyers, not to be as medical treatment on other's body.

Wow! I feel younger already. How about yourself?

— TR

Internet site referred to above:



<http://www.alexchiu.com/>



You can go a long way with a smile. You can go a lot farther with a smile and a gun.

Al Capone

Chorus, when we sing 'All we like sheep have gone astray', could we have a little more regret and a little less satisfaction?

Sir Thomas Beecham

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

Queen Victoria was like a great paper-weight that for half a century sat upon men's minds, and when she was removed their ideas began to blow all over the place baphazardly.

H.G. Wells

Alan Ladd had only two expressions: hat on and hat off.

Anonymous

When it's three o'clock in New York, it's still 1938 in London.

Bette Midler

of town on a visit to her parents or on tour, or overseas. She appeared as Walter on TV once or twice, very reluctantly — complete with pasted-on sideburns, a wig and simulated five o'clock shadow.

For seven years after her operation the pretence was kept up, with Walter Carlos in early 1979 still being referred to in the music press with cryptic phrases like "he died for us in a very underground way . . . without publicity." Finally, on Valentine's Day 1979 Walter Carlos became Wendy Carlos in law, and waited in trepidation for the publication of the "coming-out" interview.

Nevertheless, despite the fears she expressed in *Playboy* that she might never again be taken seriously as a musician, Wendy Carlos' career has prospered. This year it's 30 years since *Switched-On Bach* appeared, and she already has over 14 meticulously crafted albums to her name. And with today's general acceptance of the music synthesizer in its many forms, I find it quite salutary sometimes to cast the mind back and remember what a watershed that one LP was.

Mind you, people who do not like electronic music of any kind would no doubt like someone to blame for today's bleeps and

wows, so for them Carlos and her Moog synthesizer would fit the scapegoat bill perfectly. But even if they've heard of *SOB* (as it is affectionately called, even by Carlos herself), I'll bet you that few such grouches will remember the name Walter, let alone Wendy Carlos. After all, the reason for *SOB's* success was obviously the Moog that played the Bach pieces, wasn't it? Who cares about the musician involved? Quick! Let's make fun of those weird sounds.

If you're going to blame anyone, you can sheet home the culpability to the cash-in-quick mentality exhibited by those imitators who tried (and failed) with their dozens of inferior synthesizer albums to recapture the incontestable success of *Switched-On Bach*.

What they were looking for of course was the material success. Not only did they pay little heed to *Switched-On Bach's* creator, they also ignored that minor issue of musicality.

Those readers who know me and my tastes, from time to time will have heard me say that there are two groups of electronic musicians, the first group consisting of Carlos alone, the other all the rest. Every album she's released, whether of transcriptions of other people's works or of her own

compositions, has added something extraordinary to my musical enjoyment, and in some cases to my understanding of the great composers. Here is not the place to wax too eloquent upon all I love about Wendy Carlos, but I may be persuaded — it won't take much — to prepare a dedicated article on my electronic hero-become-heroine in a separate *Bikwil* article at some future date.

And *Bikwil* could well do something on the next extraordinary person we're about to visit, too.

This man's oddities, as numerous and well documented as they've been, have thankfully failed to overshadow his purely musical reputation. Of interest to us here is the fact that he was one of Wendy Carlos' greatest fans:

. . . with Carlos, there is a sense of musicality that so overrides the techniques involved that I find myself sitting there and laughing which I mean as the highest compliment I could pay. There's a sense of humor about Carlos's work that appeals to me very much. A lot of other records done on synthesizer . . . have sounded as though they were intended to amaze you — and they do — by the sheer virtuosity of the effects that can be achieved. But the really welcome thing about the Carlos recordings . . . is that they go beyond amazing you. They don't even set out to amaze you, it seems to me; they set out to move you. And that, over and above the

virtuosity, is what makes them so remarkable.

Ok, here we are in Canada, dropping in on keyboard prodigy, music philosopher, eccentric and cult hero Glenn **Gould** (1932-82).

Firstly, let's get those idiosyncrasies pinned down. This is *Bikwil*, after all.

Who else but Glenn Gould would have

- ◇ worn heavy pullovers or overcoats, plus fingerless gloves, even in warm weather?
- ◇ regularly invigorated himself with a variety of pills?
- ◇ soaked his hands before and during recording sessions?
- ◇ hummed along ecstatically as he played, on stage and recordings alike?
- ◇ conducted with one hand when the other was playing unaccompanied?
- ◇ sat on a battered, squeaky kitchen-type chair, hunched over the keyboard, to perform on the concert platform?

Gould began displaying perfect pitch and reading music by the age of three, and two years later he began composing. At the age of 12 he graduated from the Toronto Royal Conservatory, and by 14 was giving recitals, first on the

Lists, which contain words or phrases (often colloquial) for which only incomplete evidence so far exists, and for which the *OED* team are seeking further documented instances.

Some diverting examples on recent Lists include:

- cark it (pre-1977 evidence?)
- grandkid (pre-1948 evidence?)
- have a problem with = "*object to*" (pre-1989 evidence?)
- have been, *i.e. to the toilet*, *e.g. "Have you been?"* (any evidence?)
- off-switch (pre-1897 evidence?)
- orphan *in reference to things, not people* (interdate 1697-1936?)
- perfect timing (pre-1976?)
- shitload (pre-1972 evidence?)
- something for the weekend, *i.e. a condom* (pre-1990?)

Plans are also afoot to make future editions of the *OED* available on-line via the Internet from March 2000. In this way users will have access to the latest information on every word/meaning/usage as soon as it is added to the database. No doubt this will incur a fee.

"All very exhilarating," you are asking, "but what we *Bikwil* readers want to know is this: does

having his own *OED* put Mr. Harlish Goop in seventh heaven? Is a single concise CD-Rom superior to 20 handsomely bound volumes? More to the point, has he paid it off yet?"

Always bearing in mind that I will love till I die the look of books on the shelf, their feel in the hand, their smell, new or old, I have succumbed to the temptation of answering the first question by reminding you of a piece of dialogue near the very end of the 1973 movie *The Sting*.

You'll recall that from the start Henry Gondorff (Paul Newman) has warned Johnny Hooker (Robert Redford) that no revenge for the murder of Hooker's friend by Doyle Lonnegan (Robert Shaw) is ever going to bring full satisfaction. Nevertheless they and their con-game buddies go ahead with their elaborate operation to make a bankrupt fool of Lonnegan, and they succeed.

As all evidence of the sting is being packed up and removed, Gondorff says to Hooker, "You beat him". To which, after a pause, Hooker replies,

"You're right. It's not enough . . . [smile] . . . it's close."

— Harlish Goop

successors just grows and grows.

Admittedly, a few standard features of Windows and Macintosh software are missing from current version, though for me this in no way detracts from its usefulness. No need to fret, anyhow, for I understand that within a couple of years a completely fresh edition will become available that will be compatible with MS Office and have many other welcome new features.

Here a few recent prices for the courageous dictionary explorers among you:

Compact *OED*, 2nd ed., one photo-reduced vol. in slip case with reading glass: \$A595 (Dymocks)

OED 2nd ed., on CD-Rom (PC or Mac): \$A950 (Dymocks)

OED 2nd ed., 20 vols: \$US995 (retail price) — Oz price around \$A3,000 — in March 1999 A&R was selling it for less than \$1,900

I have little doubt that prices will come down as the publication of the Third Edition draws nearer.

Speaking of which, here's a digest of what's happening as OUP move towards *OED3*. According to my latest information, the approved budget is £34m, while the permanent staff com-

prises 42 editors plus 50 research assistants, keyboarders, proof-readers, etc. As well, there are over 200 specialist language consultants on call.

On that perhaps unexpected figure of £34m, incidentally, I should point out that no edition of the *OED* has ever come in under its estimated budget. Furthermore, OUP has never in its history made a profit from the Dictionary. Given these unfavourable commercial circumstances (such being the lot of so many University Presses), we must be profoundly grateful to them for their continuing commitment.

In addition to the preparation of entries for new words (an ongoing endeavour, of course, for any team of lexicographers), current work chiefly consists of revision of each and every word — the first full revision since 1928 — to improve accuracy in definition, etymology, pronunciation, quotations, etc. At last count, for example, more than one in four revised definitions have been expanded substantially with data on earlier usage.

Indeed, antedating, as it is called, is a vital part of the *Oxford Dictionary* revision process. Likewise postdating and interdating. Hence the growing Appeals

organ in Canada then as a pianist there and in the U.S.A.

He made his first record at the age of 22. Overnight it became a best seller and Gould world famous. The main feature of the disc was his performance of the long-ignored *Goldberg Variations* of Bach, a work he would return to in an even more satisfying recording he made 18 months before he died.

In his early thirties, he suddenly and permanently withdrew from live performances, and for the rest of his short life concentrated on making records, doing offbeat TV, radio and video projects and writing incisive magazine articles on musical matters.

If there's one composer whose name will forever be associated with the work of Glenn Gould it's J.S. Bach. But Bach on the piano? Hadn't dear old Wanda Landowska worked hard and long since early in the twentieth century to revive the harpsichord and its music? Surely, railed her purist followers, she hadn't laboured in vain? What would this iconoclastic Canadian upstart know?

In fact, Glenn Gould knew a lot, and made a good case for performing Bach "unauthentically" on the piano, so his eccentric interpretations were always taken seriously

even by those who disagreed with them, like Leonard Bernstein.

Incidentally, in 1972 he did make one harpsichord record, literally by accident, of some Handel and Bach, saying typically, "I'll pretend that I'm not playing the harpsichord at all."

Almost as detrimental for his reputation was his failure to include any Chopin, Liszt or Rachmaninov in his repertoire. Who ever heard of a pianist who wouldn't play the Romantics? Couldn't he play difficult music? Had he no soul?

Well, there's no doubt he could play with feeling, and his records prove that. That second *Goldberg Variations* recording of 1981 is pure genius, and for me one of the most special interpretations of any music ever preserved on disk.

And in addition to J.S. Bach, Gould performed composers as diverse and challenging as Gibbons, Sweelinck, Handel, Scarlatti, C.P.E. Bach, Brahms, Beethoven, Strauss, Scriabin, Schoenberg, Wagner, Webern, Sibelius and Hindemith.

— TR

(In the next issue of *Bikwil* we will present the conclusion to this discourse of associations.)

Summer Sketch

Quick now! Note that green
 high on the tree: its first
 subtle greening, leaf-fine
 brushstrokes in a mist
 of jacaranda blue;
 behind, beyond, all round
 Infinity, a sun-charged blur,
 much more than background,
 a medium so huge
 the subject could be lost,
 its colour go as fast
 as the moment of one's seeing
 it; so too, mind's image,
 pure and delicate
 as the morning's offering.
 How, then, to retain it?
 How to receive and celebrate
 life in the making?

Get it down, quick!
 that tender image,
 while still fresh,
 stroke by stroke
 of pen or brush,
 so eager mind
 swift to engage
 eyes and hand,
 may bring it back
 still life on the page.

— Bet Briggs

at a personal copy of the photo-reduced *OED*.

All, one assumes, with no adverse impact on the eyesight.

Squiz, incidentally, according to the *OED* itself, is antipodean slang deriving from *quiz*, “prob. blended with *squint*”. “Squint”, yeah — oh, thrice accursed lens!

But then . . . but then . . . in 1992 OUP issued the work in an even more reduced format.

When in 1984 plans were being laid for the Second Edition, a decision had been taken that would have far-reaching implications for the *OED*, namely that all material (including all entries of the First Edition) be keyed electronically.

The benefits of computerisation of a dictionary as big as the *OED*, with its 292 thousand entries, are obvious.

They include more convenient entry compilation (and, more particularly, revision), more flexible and simpler searching opportunities, not only for spelling, pronunciation, meaning or etymology, but also for dated usage as embodied in its two and a half million quotations — to say nothing of the space saving

offered by a slim disc weighing a few grams.

Despite its initially prohibitive price, the CD-Rom version has from the start been an incontestable success — so much so that the *OED* team today still use some of the media praise of 1992 for advertising purposes. Originally selling in 1989 for around \$A2,000, it was out of reach of all but libraries and a handful of dedicated language scholars.

Since then, however, a new, less academic, market has emerged, prompting a decision in 1996 to cut the price in half. This has given the opportunity for personal ownership to such diverse types as freelance journalists, authors, translators, crossword fiends, and writers of magazine columns on language.

Yes, the truth must out.

I bought my own copy in 1997, when I found it on special in a Barnes and Noble mail order catalogue. I upped my Mastercard limit, bit the bullet of lexicographical indebtedness and haven't regretted the expense one bit. I use it every day for something, and my awe-struck admiration for James Murray and his

A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

Since they were published, my pieces on James Murray and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*Bikwil* Nos. 8-9 and 14, 1998 July & September and 1999 July) have elicited sundry positive observations from our readers and restrained clamour for further articles on the *OED*.

Accordingly, let me discharge an undertaking I gave in the first article, and add some more to the ongoing saga of the *OED* in respect of its presentation in more contemporary formats.

First a chronology:

- 1857: First ideas for *New English Dictionary* at Philological Society of London
- 1884-1928: *NED* Fascicles 1-128 published by Oxford University Press
- 1928: Re-issue of *NED* (10 vols)
- 1933: Corrected re-issue (12 vols) as *Oxford English Dictionary*
- 1933: Publication of *Supplement* (one vol)
- 1972-86: Replacement *Supplement* (four vols)
- 1984: Policies formulated regarding 2nd Ed.

1989: Publication of 2nd Ed. (20 Vols)

1991: Micrographic version of 2nd Ed. published (one vol)

1992: 2nd Ed. published on CD-Rom

1993: Revision begun for 3rd Ed.

2010: Current estimated publication date of 3rd Ed.

Let's talk a bit about the 1991 micrographic version.

Impossible to read without the supplied magnifying glass (and mighty troublesome with it), the "compact" edition has had limited acceptance. Its main selling point is its price advantage over the full-size 2nd Ed. I once had a squiz at it in a shop, but quickly decided that I'd get a headache using it on a regular basis.

Other Sydneysiders, however, have made it their bible. I have it on good authority, for example, that not so long ago no less prominent a figure than a certain Professor of English, now retired from a major Australian university (well, in that capacity, anyhow), could often be observed peering through the reading glass

Postal Fever

As the editor warned in our very first issue (May 1997), free periodicals are rare. Strange it is, therefore, that our third such mag should be another language-oriented one. Where are all the gratis environmental ones? Or the ones on art? Or music? (On the Internet probably.)

Anyway, thank you to the two readers who let *Bikwil* know of the existence of *Ozwords*, a twice-a-year publication of Australian National Dictionary Centre (a joint venture of the Australian National University and Oxford University Press). To subscribe, write to

Debra Burgess
The Subscription Manager
Ozwords
GPO Box 2784Y
Melbourne, 3001.
(db@oupanz.com.au)

Like *Australian Style* (*Bikwil* Issue 9, September 1998), *Ozwords* looks at aspects of Aussie English. It consists of eight A4 pages and over recent years has covered such diverse topics as

- ◇ Racing slang in Australia
- ◇ Is "true blue" an Ozzyism?
- ◇ Regionalisms
- ◇ Folk etymology ("the process by which a word whose

origin has been 'lost', or which has been borrowed from a foreign language, is remodelled to conform to more familiar words in the language")

- ◇ Recent words
- ◇ The ab(h)ominable haitch
- ◇ The Australian nasal twang
- ◇ The word "larrikin"
- ◇ American accent and syntax for Aussies
- ◇ Why did Matilda waltz?
- ◇ The word "lamington"
- ◇ "Send her down, Hughie!"

Each issue also contains a Mailbag page, news from OUP and/or the Australian National Dictionary Centre, and a competition. Speaking of the latter, I was particularly taken with the one in the October 1999 issue. Here you were invited to invent a word and its definition, following the examples given, some recently gleaned from the Net, like "lactomangulation" (the process of manhandling the 'open here' spout on a milk carton so badly that one has to resort to the *illegal* side).

By the way, there is also a New Zealand equivalent called *Nzwords* (pattersd@oupcom.au).

— Harlish Goop

Interesting Origins

The word “tennis” comes from the French word *tenez* meaning “Hold it!” or “See what you can do with that!”

Tennis revolves around us trying to do something with the shots of our opponent.

Because tennis originated in France, some of our tennis words are French in origin. Who would believe that “love” came from the French *l'oeuf*, meaning “egg”?

If you have a nil score, your score of 0 looks like an egg.

— R. K. Sadler

Les Musiques Imbéciles

[Dreadful Doggerel No. 4]

I

To play a Chopin Polonaise
Would not be awfully easy,
Specially on a keyboard greasy
With a coat of mayonnaise.

II

Nor can cheap and punctured vellum
Help a novice drummer's nerves;
I'm sure, however, whisky serves
To quickly, smartly, nicely quell 'em.

III

And lugging harps and basses round
Is sure to very promptly learn ya;
Otherwise your painful hernya
Finds you surgically gowned.

— Henri Dandin