From the Back Verandah

In keeping with our predisposition towards gentle enthusiasm, acute quirkiness and uncompromising obscurantism, I thought this column might start the new *Bikwil* year with a quiz.

There are no prizes offered — which may be just as well, since some questions are extraordinarily easier asked than answered. Nevertheless, as much correspondence, electronic or paper-based, will be entered into as you care to generate (e.g. appealing for clues).

All that said, see how many answers you can dig up.

Welcome to . . .

Kwizz Gig 1

1. What was the stage name of John Simon Ritchie?

2. Whose funeral took place in a medical school and consisted of a eulogy followed by the dissection of the corpse?

3. Which political exile lived for a short time with the painter Diego Rivera?

4. For what is Muhammed edh-Dibh best known?

5. Whose dead body was identified by a volume of Keats in his coat pocket?

6. Whom did Gandhi call "the highest moral authority" on account of his religious tracts promoting peace through non-resistance?

7. Which literary figure once arrived in America proclaiming, "I have come to continue my search for naked women in wet mackintoshes"?

8. Name the lawyer and unsuccessful U.S. Presidential candidate who was described by H.L. Mencken in these words: "He was born with a roaring voice, and it had the trick of inflaming half-wits."

9. Concerning his work it was asked, "Where are their feet?" Who was he?

10. Whose embalmed head was kept for 29 years by his widow in a red leather bag?

— Fizzgig

BIKWIL

The Newsletter of Quiet Enthusiasms

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Kwizz Gig 1

Birthday Honours List

Well, not quite. But I'll tell you this much: it *is* our fourth birthday, as well as the first anniversary of our arrival on the Internet.

Thanks to our Net presence, *Bikwil's* subscriber base continues to spread far beyond Australia — U.S.A., England, Scotland, Canada, Philippines . . . Indeed, our ever widening inclusion in search engines and directories grows by the week (nearly 130 of them to date). Particularly useful is the fact that we're listed with several powerful text indexing sites that allow us to be located, not only by the name *Bikwil*, but also by dozens of keywords relevant to our content. Just as significant are the 30-plus Internet awards *Bikwil* has been given. These have remarkable publicity value for our one-of-its-kind brand of quiet enthusiasms.

Even so, *Bikwil* can never hope to reach huge numbers of readers. What's important is that those who like us seem to like us a lot. But much as I would love to sound off about the dozens of unsolicited testimonials we continue to receive, I see I have room for just a couple:

A charmingly philosophical web site, . . . this is a quiet corner of substance.

Full of panache and with a character all its own.

Colophon

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Back Issues Are Still Available

William Gladstone has not a single redeeming defect.
Benjamin Disraeli

When my kids become wild and unruly, I use a nice, safe playpen. When they're finished, I climb out.
Erma Bombeck

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

The chief problem about death . . . is the fear that there may be no afterlife, a depressing thought, particularly for those who have bothered to shave . . . I do not believe in an afterlife, although I am bringing a change of underwear.
Woody Allen

I wasn't kissing her. I was whispering in her mouth.
Chico Marx

If I had my life to live over, I'd live it over a delicatessen.
Anonymous

Never Mind the Vowels, Prime Minister, Feel the Length

[Dreadful Doggerel No. 5]

On the Iberian Peninsular
it is over level tracts of terrain
that precipitation
principally presents itself.

— Translated from a Shavian misquote by Humpy Apples

Hymn to Dance

Red is the colour of the dance:
corporeal, vital, immediate.
The dancer puts on red shoes
and seizes the moment,
responsive to its call:
Take a chance.
Make something happen.
And like a flower opening
to the first light of the sun,
tender and explicit as the moment,
the dancer, vulnerable in the light
of a stage or a room or a street,
wherever the red shoes chance,
taps into life life's pain and joy,
with the beat of red feet
gives answer to the question:
What am I here for?
For love! For love is the dance!
And the dancer in the red shoes,
fearless in the heat
and the heart of the dance,
with every beat of the feet
taps an invitation,
calls all the dancers,
all the beautiful feet:

Dance for love,
for heartbreak and repair.
As we collide in our colours
let us connect, make harmony of contrast,
together stride into peace;
life is joy and pain, is loss and gain,
only love will sustain,
only love will repair
the broken trust, the heart undone
when it bruises and bleeds.
Dance for love and we dance for life.
The moment seized, the red shoes dance
and hearts beat like the feet
with joy and in praise.
Blessed are the feet in red shoes.

— Bet Briggs

moment of setback during the composition of *Belshazzar's Feast*.

Once more I quote from Kennedy's biography:

> . . . he developed a mental block after reading a joke by the humorist "Beachcomber" in the *Daily Express* that the Writing on the Wall was not "Mene, mene, tekel Upharsin" ["Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting"] but "Aimée, Aimée, Semple McPherson", who was an American evangelist much in the news at the time.

Walton's general slow method of working was such that towards the end of his life he could state that his most useful composition tool was an eraser:

> Without an india-rubber, I was absolutely sunk. So I surrounded myself with them, and I seem to have spent my entire life rubbing out what I've written.

As far as *Belshazzar's Feast* goes, then, William Walton is remembered today as the composer who painstakingly but successfully brought the influence of jazz to the oratorio. Not only did the work alter listeners' conception of what that sacred *genre* could be capable of (as well as liberate other English composers — their grand choral tradition would never be quite the same again), but it was also the single greatest factor in Walton's rise to fame as a major figure in music.

Yet a decade after the stunning and instantaneous acclaim of its premiére, few outside the dedicated music-going public seemed to be acquainted with him or his work — least of all the armed services, as our last memorable feast-won moment shows.

Composer Benjamin Britten, an ardent pacifist, spent the first three years of the Second World War in the United States. In 1942 he decided to return to England, and applied to the Tribunal of Conscientious Objectors to be exempted from military duty. Walton agreed to speak on his behalf.

When he asserted that Britten's gifts would be pointless on the battlefield, the panel asked him what his credentials were to be making such a claim. Walton came back with, "Well, if you don't know who I am, there is no point in going on."

To my perverse mind it seems superbly appropriate to hear such swift and unreserved self-assurance in the face of khaki Christian scepticism. Especially from a composer who had taken the best part of a frustrating year to set the word "Gold" in an exhilarating musical passage about pagan worship.

— TR

considered impossible to sing in tune, today's top-notch choirs have learned to take it in their stride, and while always challenged they will tell you they are no longer terrified.

The original choir at Leeds in 1931 can therefore be forgiven for having trouble, not only with this section, but also with other passages of the work — the harmony here, the irregular metres there, and at times both. If truth be told, they began rehearsing parts of the score as early as March 1931, over six months before its première.

It has been sometimes noted that, despite its obvious exuberance, Walton's music can leave you wondering whether he composed with difficulty. The *Collins Encyclopedia of Music* contends:

> His work, even when most successful, gives the impression of having been created with effort, though this often gives an extra edge of excitement . . .

As regards *Belshazzar*, progress was indeed slow at times. This was particularly the case (and this memorable moment was certainly no instant) when Walton came to set these lines:

> Praise ye the God of Gold
> Praise ye the God of Silver
> Praise ye the God of Iron
> Praise ye the God of Wood
> Praise ye the God of Stone
> Praise ye the God of Brass
> Praise ye the Gods!

Walton knew he had to separately adapt melody, harmony and orchestration to the meaning of each line, while keeping a sense of homogeneity and yet simultaneously building the intensity and passion of the passage.

The trouble was, he bogged down in the first line. The story goes that he cogitated and wrestled and agonised on what note to set the word "Gold" to — for eight long months. As he wrote in a letter,

> In *Belshazzar* I got landed on the word "gold" — I was there from May to December 1930, perched, unable to move either to right or left or up or down.

When he finally made his decision, things went easier for him, and the whole section is dazzling in its barbaric effect. Especially splendid is the "pomp and circumstance" march tune he eventually incorporated in this passage.

(Walton would compose 14 other fanfares and marches, including *Orb and Sceptre* — as well as the choral *Te Deum* — for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.)

Lay preachers among you may appreciate the next unanticipated

Web Line

What? Another handful of weird and wacky sites?

Yep, and let's start with *Where's My Pants?* What it is, in fact, is a dire warning. You see, "aliens are abducting our pants":

> This is an incendiary statement, a statement that will change the way humans perceive themselves in their relationship to the universe . . . It is my purpose to educate the masses, for a "society gone psychotic" is unavoidable, but perhaps I can save our pants.

Just thought I'd better alert you.

Next, let's carefully take a trip to the equally gorgeously entitled *Aluminum Foil Deflector Beanie*. This site gives you painstaking instructions on how to build an AFDB. Why would you need one? To combat mind control, silly. It's "an effective, low-cost solution" that's also "stylish and comfortable". Make yourself one immediately!

Over to Japan now, courtesy of the *Quirky Japan Home Page*.

Vending Machine Heaven, Pachinko ("the world's most mindless pastime"), Rubber Baseball Museum, Bean-Throwing Day — all these and more can be yours in the Land of the Rising Sun. But there's more: in particular, a list of Cheesy Tourist Attractions and Disappointments. Quick, let's go!

Can't tempt you? How about *CrankDotNet*? "Devoted to presenting Web sites by and about cranks, crankism, crankishness, and crankosity. All cranks, all the time."

> Every day at midnight, a new Crank o' the Day is chosen! . . . There is also a What's New page, which lists all the cranks added in the last month.

What more could a true Bikwilian need?

— TR

Internet sites referred to above:

http://www.sock-monkey.com/pants.html
http://zapatopi.net/afdb.html
http://www3.tky.3web.ne.jp/~edjacob/index.html
http://www.crank.net/

Where Three Ways Meet

The custom of wearing a wedding ring on the third finger of the left hand is very old, and has been traced back to at least the 12th century, and may even derive from betrothal rings given by the Romans as secular pledges. Yet until the end of the 16th century the practice in England was to wear the wedding ring on the right hand third finger. Right or left, why the third finger? Because since ancient Egyptian times it had been believed to contain either a special delicate nerve or a vein (*vena amoris*) that ran directly to the heart.

At age 72, physiologist Charles-Édouard Brown-Séquard (1817-94) pulverized pieces of dog testicles in water and injected himself with the filtered juice thereof. His hope of experiencing a return of vigour seems to have been realised, for he reported to the Société de Biologie in Paris, "Today I was able to 'pay a visit' to my young wife."

As was the case with vinyl LPs, on a 74-minute music CD and a 680 million byte CD-Rom there are actually no individual tracks. There is only a single spiral track that has a positioning index pointing to the other segments of music/data. It is nearly three miles long.

There was no system of street numbering in London (or, in some districts, street name signs either) until late in the 18th century. Until then, houses and shops made do with hanging boards, which of course in the case of shops served also an advertising purpose and/or signposts to other locations. It was in 1895 that the Common Council in the City directed that the wards must fasten name tablets to all streets, alleys, squares and courts. Two years later Parliament legislated for the numbering of houses.

Most computer users today, even PC owners, would acknowledge that the mouse device first appeared on the Apple Macintosh (1984). Others, slightly more knowledgeable, might assert that it was Apple's Lisa (1983) that first sported a mouse. "No," might cry those far better informed, "it was Xerox labs who invented it, in 1973 for their Alto computer." At which point the computing historian would have to retort smugly, "You're all wrong. It was actually invented by Douglas Englebart way back in 1964 at the Stanford Research Institute. He called it the X-Y Position Indicator for a Display System."

— Bunty

According to a talk given by pianist Angus Morrison, reproduced in *RCM Magazine* (80/3, 1984), Sitwell had been reckless enough to end the libretto with an old nursery rhyme, which Walton very wisely expunged. Here is the text that prompted that barely remembered but highly memorable moment:

> How many miles to Babylon?
> Three score miles and ten.
> Can I get there by candlelight?
> Yes, and back again.

One is forced to wonder what possessed him to append this obscure old nonsense to his otherwise glorious wording. Perhaps he was trying to outdo his sister Edith's style in *Façade*, that earlier outrageous and highly successful Sitwell-Walton collaboration.

No less deliberate and daring was Walton's decision to give full rein in *Belshazzar's Feast* to "the fertilising influence of twenties jazz", as Edward Greenfield called it in the liner notes to the 1972 Previn EMI recording.

Of course, as Greenfield points out, while we still find its abrupt and violent rhythms utterly exhilarating, we millennial listeners are no longer disturbed by them. Jazz rhythms are by now so well integrated into "classical" music that today we tend to forget their origins.

And it was not only in the vigorous, jagged syncopations he employed in *Belshazzar's Feast* that Walton revealed his love of jazz. There are other signs, too, one being his use of a device heard in big-band jazz from time to time — the *sforzando-piano-crescendo* articulation. This effect is one of a suddenly loud chord which immediately drops in volume then gradually gets louder again. Except that here Walton didn't have the orchestra performing this way, but the choir — brand new for any choral group, let alone one singing "sacred" music.

Equally at home with the jazz rhythms of *Belshazzar's Feast* was Walton's harmonic language, which, while not so unfamiliar to orchestral players, in 1931 seemed very demanding in some passages for choralists. Take the first dozen or so bars of singing, for example

> Thus spake Isaiah:
> "Thy sons that thou shall beget
> They shall be taken away
> And be eunuchs
> In the palace of the King of
> Babylon . . ."

The taxing harmony here (for male voices only, but in multiple parts) is pungently dissonant and so very much in keeping with the portentous content of the words. While this passage was once

Such modern acceptance of its secular focus is at great variance with responses in certain quarters in 1931, however. In that year *The Times* critic wrote of the work that "it culminates in ecstatic gloating over the fallen enemy, the utter negation of Christianity", and this and similar contemporary views had an irresistible effect on the ecclesiastics associated with the Three Choirs Festival, who promptly barred *Belshazzar's Feast* from their cathedrals — a ban that lasted until 1957.

Now, readers knowledgeable about ancient history will be well aware that, notwithstanding claims in the Old Testament,

◊ Belshazzar was not the king of Babylon, but the crown prince;

◊ Belshazzar was not the son of Nebuchadnezzar — that was Amel-Marduk (Evil-merodach in the Bible), Belshazzar being the son of Nabonidus;

◊ Belshazzar was not slain at Babylon, but was killed on the western bank of the Tigris fighting the army of Cyrus the Persian.

Nonetheless, what a vivid tale the Biblical account makes! What a basis for an oratorio! What images! What superb language! (Try to forget that the text has given rise to household phrases that are now, alas, virtual clichés: "the writing on the wall", "the moving finger", "weighed in the balance and found wanting". In their original form the words are magnificent.)

Therefore, when his friend and patron Osbert Sitwell, who had actually been the person who suggested the subject to Walton in 1929, came to prepare the libretto, he knew instinctively what the source text should be. But how to assemble it? What passages to select?

Ultimately he chose and rearranged not only parts of the inevitable narrative in *Daniel* (Chapter 5), but also verses from the *Psalms* (137 and 81). Additionally, he adapted the description of Babylon to be found in *Revelation*, and prefaced the whole text with words which he based on the language of the Bible — that of *Isaiah*, for instance.

In these decisions he was moving consciously and audaciously against what had become trendy in oratorio (begun 30 years before with Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*), namely to avoid sacred texts and substitute secular, albeit religious, wording.

Yet his original manuscript was not entirely sacred in tone.

Heart

The method of uneasiness, a wrath that does bring down.

Informal ties and helpless bonds, a sphere which clouds around.

A mesh-like quilt that covers most, an insight into meaning.

The worst to come and what prevail, to be most misconceiving.

— Scott Villarosa

[This poem has been previously published in *The International Journal of Poetry* (anthology entitled *The Hush of Moonlight*), plus online in about a dozen Webzines.]

A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

Reader interest in the question of English slang, perhaps reawakened in part by my piece on the word *Buckley's* (Issue 21, September 2000), has prompted me to introduce you to a few of my favourite dictionaries devoted to the subject.

First, a little on what slang might actually be, but let's forget the linguist's slippery quibbles about "slang" versus "colloquialism" — it just ain't worth the hassle. We all know what slang is, anyway, don't we?

Just in case you want a definition or two to be going on with, a nice short one can be extracted from R.L Trask's *Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics* (1999, ISBN 0 415 15742 0), namely "informal and often ephemeral . . . colourful words and expressions". That'll do us for now, provided we heed the admonition Trask is careful to append to his article:

> Priggish critics have for generations tried to dismiss slang as a kind of disease of the language, but it is nothing of the sort: its presence is evidence of the vitality of a language.

That point, of course, is most important, and over the years has been commented on in various ways. In 1872, in her *Middlemarch*, George Eliot ironically wrote:

> Correct English is the slang of prigs who write history and essays. And the strongest slang of all is the slang of poets.

A century later, Australian slang was receiving the respect in England it had so long been denied (*vide* on the latter score the belligerent comments in 1911 on the use of language in the Antipodes by Valerie Desmond in her *The Awful Australian*: "unintelligible . . . jarring . . . no humour . . . drawn from the lowliest sources . . . the imagery of primitive people"). The following affirmative 1976 quotation is from an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 30 April:

> In Australia, slang simply has a quite different status from slang in England. It is a *part* of "standard English" there, not outside "Standard English". Slang words are used informally, casually and naturally by all Australians regardless of class or education.

For myself, I'm especially partial to U.S. poet Carl Sandburg's description of slang as "language which takes off its

gave to the *Daily Mail* in 1972, Beecham had early in the proceedings become pessimistic about *Belshazzar's Feast's* future, and

> declared in his best seigneurial manner, "As you'll never hear the thing again, my boy, why not throw in a couple of brass bands?" So thrown in they were, and there they remain. (Quoted in Michael Kennedy's *Portrait of Walton*, 1989, ISBN 0 19 816705 9)

(Strictly speaking, the two "brass bands" are two additional brass sections — each of three trumpets, three trombones and tuba.)

Despite Beecham's cynical warning, Walton lived to hear his *Belshazzar* many times, both in the concert hall and on record. He also conducted it himself on several occasions, two of which performances were released on vinyl. The last live performance of the work he attended was for his 80th birthday celebrations in March 1982, about a year before he died, with André Previn conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus.

> The audience's reception for *Belshazzar* moved Walton to tears — and there were tears, too, in the eyes of those who saw the frail, white-haired, gaunt-faced old man and remembered the debonair figure of the "white hope of English music" when it seemed he would never grow old. (Kennedy)

Other composers of works about Belshazzar had included Handel, who wrote an oratorio *Belshazzar*, first performed in 1745, and Sibelius, whose orchestral suite was written in 1906.

Not even complete familiarity with both, however, could have prepared that Leeds audience for what they were about to experience as Malcolm Sargent, turning to face the enormous ensemble gathered before him, raised his baton for the opening bars of what is now a classic of choral music.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an oratorio as "a form of extended musical composition, of a semi-dramatic character, usually founded on a Scriptural theme, sung by solo voices and a chorus, to the accompaniment of a full orchestra, without the assistance of action, scenery, or dress".

Walton's oratorio certainly meets those dramatic and scriptural criteria, telling as it does the Biblical story of King Belshazzar's banquet during which a ghostly hand writes on the palace wall condemning the Babylonian King and his realm to destruction.

Yet *Belshazzar's Feast* isn't a religious work at all. Michael Kennedy, who describes Walton's compositions based on religious subjects as "secular in mood", characterises it as "a human drama, not a religious experience".

Writ Large

[*Memorable Moments in Music* No. 3]

As far as I'm concerned, each incident in the following series (slight and even apocryphal though it might appear at first glance) is quite worthy of being remembered on its own merits. Even more so, therefore, when taken together, since all of them played behind-the-scenes roles in the preparation for and the consequences of a truly significant event in 20th century music history.

In 1929 William Turner Walton (1902-83) was invited by the BBC to compose, for a fee of 50 guineas, a choral work for small chorus, small orchestra of no more than 15 players, and a vocal soloist. Walton accepted the commission, but having worked on it for some months came to realise that his subject demanded a much larger work.

A large work it became, though too massive apparently for a work written specifically for broadcasting, so Walton and the BBC agreed that he would later write something else for them. In actual fact, he never did, the success of his big choral composition perhaps sweeping away from all minds any thought of a radio commission.

We call it a large work, not because of its length, for it runs for a mere 35 minutes, but for the reason that it is massive in the forces it uses. It is, of course, *Belshazzar's Feast*, an oratorio for double mixed choir, baritone voice and greatly enlarged orchestra.

Early in 1931 it was announced that it would have its first performance at the Leeds Festival later that year. No doubt it became part of the Festival because the programme already included Berlioz' *Requiem*, a large scale work requiring vast choral and orchestral resources — ideally 210 voices and an immense orchestra, including at one point four additional brass bands. And it was this last fact that almost certainly gave rise to the following memorable moment in the progress of *Belshazzar's Feast's* composition.

Thomas Beecham was the Festival's director, although instead of conducting it himself he allocated the Walton piece to Malcolm Sargent. Nevertheless Beecham had several discussions on the work with the composer during 1931. According to an interview Walton

coat, spits on its hands — and goes to work".

So, having ascertained that we know where we are and that it's a healthy, democratic and hard-working neighbourhood, let's get cracking.

My subject today is not slang itself, however, but dictionaries of slang. You will have gathered long ago that I love dictionaries — be they general ones like the *OED*, or specialised volumes of catchphrases, clichés, foreign phrases, idioms, insults, obscure words, place names, quotations . . . Well let me tell you now: as far as slang goes, there has been quite a spate of information published over the last 70 years, and some of these books, the dictionaries especially, are definitely well worth owning by word enthusiasts.

(Speaking of the *OED*, a not disagreeable duty we must regularly observe in this column, if only so as to avoid losing the faith, did you know that even this heroic work hasn't yet pinned down the source of that word "slang"? The oldest use it records in English goes back a quarter of a millennium, so I dare say on age grounds alone the concept has a venerable pedigree, even if it lacks a definite derivation. "A word of cant origin", suggests the *OED* quietly, "the ultimate source of which is not apparent". In other words, "slang" itself is a word of jargon-ish slang origin.)

Dictionaries of slang, then, but where to begin?

I suppose the granddaddy of modern slang dictionaries (and probably the greatest) is Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, a work whose first edition Partridge worked on for 13 years. The author of numerous works on language, Eric Honeywood Partridge is most famous for his still helpful *Usage and Abusage, a Guide to Good English* (1947) and hardly known at all for his delightfully subtitled *The "Shaggy Dog" Story, Its Origin, Development and Nature, with Many Seemly Examples* (1953).

Born in 1894 in New Zealand, Partridge and his family moved to Australia in 1907. After seeing service in World War I both at Gallipoli and the Somme, he acquired a B.A. in Australia, followed by an M.A. at Oxford. Having settled in England, first as a teacher, then as a book publisher, in which capacity he founded the ill-fated Scholartis Press in 1927, finally in 1931 he

decided to spend his life as a free-lance man-of-letters, compiling dictionaries and other books on language. He died in 1979.

Truly, he may be said to have been a bit of an obsessive when it came to slang, for he authored, edited or published no less than eight books relevant to the subject that I'm aware of (the *Dictionary of Slang* running in his lifetime to seven editions, and is still being revised, the latest I know coming out in 1984) — a type of fixation for which, predictably, the dictionary-making world has long been grateful:

◊ *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier* (edited by Partridge and John Brophy in 1930)

◊ Godfrey Irwin's *American Tramp and Underworld Slang* (British edition published by Partridge's Scholartis Press in 1930)

◊ Francis Grose's 1785 *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (edited by Partridge in 1931)

◊ *Slang Today and Yesterday, a History and a Study* (1933)

◊ *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (1937)

◊ *Shakespeare's Bawdy, a Study and a Glossary* (1947)

◊ *A Dictionary of the Underworld, British and American* (1949)

◊ *Chamber of Horrors, a Glossary of Official Jargon* (1952, under the pseudonym Vigilans")

Partridge's principle with regard to the difficult matter of the derivation of a slang word was simple and direct: when none can be determined, make a guess. This approach contrasts unmistakably with that of James Murray, who usually wrote something like "etymology unknown". On the other hand, Murray & Co. had paid limited regard to slang anyway, so despite some of its suspect etymologies Partridge's book filled a large lexicographical gap. Responding to the increasing worldwide interest in slang that his work had generated, Partridge in later editions added hundreds of thousands of words, all annotated with meticulous care with regard to their social, historical and geographical applicability.

As for the question of vulgarisms, Partridge included them all, despite his own distaste:

> My rule, in the matter of unpleasant terms, has been to deal with them as briefly, as astringently, as aseptically as was consistent with clarity and adequacy; in a few instances, I had to force myself to overcome an instinctive repugnance.

Partridge's sensitivity was echoed in many libraries, where for many years the *Dictionary of Slang* was relegated to the restricted access category.

Attitudes of this sort are not surprising, nor, given the social milieu of the 1930s, is the fact that Partridge showed no such prudishness towards racist language. Thus insulting words like *nigger* and *kike* were given meanings by him without comment.

According to dictionary maker and historian of dictionary making Jonathon Green, Partridge was "the Platonic lexicographer: outside mainstream academe, . . . prolific, dedicated, above all an *enthusiast*".

Here at *Bikwil* we can't say fairer than that.

I want now to move to Australian slang books. The ones with which I am most familiar were all published by Australians in Australia — a decided advantage, I hear you say.

Except for Partridge's own efforts in this direction, the detailed study of Australian slang is recent. The one most often cited is Gerald Alfred Wilkes' *Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (my own copy — ISBN 0 00 635719 9 — is a 1985 reprint of 1978), although earlier lists had certainly appeared, those of the 19th century being mainly devoted to the language of the underworld. (In fact, the earliest dictionary of any sort to surface in Australia was one of such slang: convict James Hardy Vaux' *Vocabulary of the Flash Language*, 1819). In the 20th century the most notable precursors of Wilkes' work were the various books by Sidney J. Baker (1941, 1943, 1953, 1959, 1966).

Like Partridge, Wilkes was educated at Sydney and Oxford Unis. But unlike Partridge, Wilkes was a career academic — at one time Foundation Professor of Australian Literature at Sydney University, then Challis Professor of English Literature at the same institution. His approach in his *Dictionary* was scholarly and well researched, but nevertheless cautious. So, like the *OED*, Wilkes' book was, in his own words, "planned, in a modest way, on historical principles", where "[t]he citations are the most important part of the dictionary, as the evidence on which it rests". At the same time he was careful to write: "All dictionaries are tentative, and a colloquial dictionary is most tentative of all".

— Harlish Goop

(This article will be concluded in the next issue.)