

## REVIEW

Burchfield, Robert. *The New Zealand Pocket Oxford Dictionary*.  
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Reviewed by Kendrick Smithyman,  
University of Auckland.

*The New Zealand Pocket* (a new definition of *pocket* is needed) is based on the seventh edition (1984) of *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, on Dr. Burchfield's Supplement of Australian and New Zealand words prepared originally for the fifth edition (1969) of the *Pocket Oxford*, and 'to some extent' on the second edition (1984) of *The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, plus (and a big plus it is) the files at the Oxford English Dictionary Department of New Zealand language which have been compiled over many years. With so many Pockets in play, let me say that the effect of 'pocket definition' is often unfortunate. Consider a couple of instances.

The NZPOD says of *belladonna* that it is 'deadly nightshade' and the 'drug obtained from this'. Nothing is entered under *deadly*, but under *nightshade* is found (a) nightshades are (wild) plants, (b) there are several of them, (c) some have poisonous berries. It is scarcely true that all nightshades are wild; the Paraguayan Nightshade is in New Zealand a cultivated plant, a *Solanum* resembling the native Poroporo which is another *Solanum*, and which is listed but as 'NZ flowering shrub with edible fruit'. The *deadly nightshade* is not of this family, which may or may not be indicated by talk of 'several wild plants'. The New Zealander is not well served by the NZPOD statement, nor by what is not there, that *belladonna* for many New Zealanders (and quite possibly more than know the *deadly nightshade*) is now primarily the *naked lady* (not listed) which is noticeably flowering as I write. But that particular *belladonna* is in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, and the statement there is more useful: '1. (Bot.) deadly nightshade, a poisonous plant (*Atropa belladonna*) with purple flowers and purple-black berries. 2. (Med.) drug prepared from this. 3. - *lily*, S.Afr. *smayyllis* with white or pink flowers ...' This serves the New Zealander as the NZPOD fails to do.

The second example is *whiting*, 'small white-fleshed food-fish'. This is a little boiled down from the COD statement, which adds *Merlangus merlangus*. The impression given is that there is one fish and one only. I used to have the impression that *whiting* was notably or peculiarly a North Sea or North Atlantic fish, and indeed I know travelled New Zealanders who are so attached to that notion they deny that there is any New Zealand *whiting*. Regrettably the NZPOD does nothing to set them right. If those fellows look around and see something labelled 'Whiting' in a fish shop (not likely in Auckland, but possible as far north as New Plymouth) or some packet so labelled in a supermarket, what will they make of it? Is the new dictionary helpful, what does *whiting* mean in a New Zealand context? Minimally, the reader should be told

that 'Whiting' is likely to be a true cod, *Southern Blue Whiting*, or Hake, either *Micromesistius australis* or *Merluccius australis*. Certainly more guidance is needed than the NZPOD gives. The *hake* entry of course needs clarifying as well.

A 'pocket definition' is bought at expense; a compounded expense when the book is of a size which defeats its seeming purpose, handiness or pocketability. If it is going to be this size, then entries like the examples taken should be enlarged and 'words and senses that are not often encountered outside the United Kingdom' should be more vigorously purged. Burchfield says 'About a thousand entries distinctive to New Zealand (or shared only with Australia) have been added' and we know that more will be added as the collecting does not stop.

In 1986 Robert Burchfield visiting New Zealand noticed that a shift of meaning has occurred with *feral* 'wild; uncultivated; in wild state after escape from captivity; brutal' to signify where it most occurs in this country, in application to goats 'animals which were running wild but are now cultivated, and their immediate progeny'. More attaches to this, and *feral* is a useful case for pointing up the fact that a dictionary which aims to cope with 'language in everyday use' (as is advertised for the NZPOD) is always out of date. As well as *feral*, *farmed feral(s)* is being used, of goats brought in from running wild or for those bred within such stock. But *feral does* (*does*, not *nannies*, one notices, just as one notices *bucks*, not *billies*) are likely to be mated with non-feral males. Apparently the wild goats are dominantly Cashmere (not *Kashmir* as the NZPOD suggests) which are likely to be bred to Angora (with capital, not the dictionary's lower case) bucks. The issue of the Cashmere and Angora are *Cashgora* and a sub-language is generated of *G4s* (Grade Fours) whose issue will rise as the Cashmere fraction is diminished, eventually to *G1s*. Although *doe* may sound to city ears like non-goat language it is traditionally acceptable, but where other shifts have occurred are with *hogget* and *wethen*, so much associated with sheep. (The NZPOD notes *wether* as possible of goats, but not *hogget*; the COD limits both to sheep.) A shift of emphasis more than shift of meaning appears with *kemp*, 'coarse hair in wool' which is very much a feature of goat language.

As P. S. Scott remarked in his thoughtful review in the *New Zealand Listener* (26 April 1986, p.51), many will find here that 'Farming words are a special source of strength', instancing *ball up*, *oast sheep*, *huntaway dog*, and *Drysdale* (type of sheep). While two of these are also (as the dictionary properly observes) Australianisms, the *huntaway* and the *Drysdale* are not. Of these, the statement about the *Drysdale* is just the kind that I want, as the statement about *belladonna* is not. If one is possible, why not the other? Heartened, I looked up *Perendale*. How far this falls short of the *Drysdale* entry, and should it not also notice that advertisements of sheep for sale list not only *Perendale* but *Peren*, and

account for this? As for *huntaway* 'dog trained to drive sheep forward', this all too simply will not do. *Handy dog* is listed, but not *strong eyed*. That *huntaway* (sometimes *hunterway*) is commonly treated as the name of a breed is not recognised, so it is hardly surprising that the refinement on this, the *Gisborne huntaway*, does not appear. While we are in this area, notice that *Alsatian* is listed but not *German Shepherd*, yet in a newspaper the other day where one *Alsatian* was offered for sale there were twenty-three advertisements for *German Shepherds*. *Dobermann pinscher* is in, although the *pinscher* has hardly figured in everyday reference to such dogs since some time back, but *Rottweiler* or *Rhodesian Ridgeback* which regularly appear in the newspapers along with *Dobermann* are omitted. *Fox terrier* is in as it should be, but not *foxy* in connection with this ... If there is shortfall with dogs, and cattle, and horses and so on, then this deficiency in everyday language points not only to the difficulty of keeping up with everyday language. It seems to indicate also that a difficulty exists with the 'historical' lexicon.

Dictionaries are of their nature historical, obviously. To try to hold in proportion the scope of 'English' at large, the general case, along with the particular, the New Zealand case into which are built historical considerations, that is not easy. It is not that the dictionary does not keep up - the multiplication of fish names in marketing places is going on at an unprecedented rate, to take one instance - it is not this that bothers me so much as the uneasy feeling that a more generous use of *obs.* and *obsolesc.* (with a query attached) is called for.

For example, what is the current status of *razoo* as in 'doesn't have a brass razoo'? (See also *stony-broke*. The two should be cross-referenced.) My feeling is that *razoo* is at least *obsolesc.* and probably *obs.* Some (probably older) people to whom anything about *razoo* is said will understand it, but how many younger people would ever use it, if they understood it at all? *Razoo* is by no means the only instance, but as I reflect on this I wonder if what I regard as a generational matter may be denied in some other language community in the country where *razoo* is still current. I don't know that there is one, I do know that there are regional differences, and I have to remember that words can get recycled. I had doubts about *bodgie* having any currency, then heard it used by one of the young performance poets only a couple of months ago. But, about the same time it curiously came into print (as *bodgery*) in a Court report in which the meaning was fused with *dodgy*: 'he knew import documents submitted to bring cars into the country were "bodgery"'.  
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The business of regional difference can be quite simply illustrated by way of one example. The NZPOD lists *pita* 'a flat bread eaten esp. in Greece and the Middle East'. It is marketed and eaten also in parts of New Zealand, but not noticeably in Auckland. There you eat *Lebanese bread*, which is not listed. The diversification in food language must go much wider than this, and, regional questions aside, probably relates more to urban and rural or provincial differences in styles. The changes in our available food lexicon are to some extent recognised. *Pizza* is in, but  
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*filo* (or its NZ variant, *fillo*) is not. *Fenugreek* is in, but the much more common *feta* (sometimes labelled as *fetta*) is not. In another register, *sauternes* is given but *sauvignon* is not, which scarcely reflects the relative frequency of the two.

When Professor Scott reviewed the Burchfield dictionary he speculated that 'Perhaps it will become a popular game to spot omissions, even if there aren't all that many'. True, the game was played when the *Heinemann New Zealand Dictionary* appeared in 1979, and I have commented on omissions above. I fear that Scott may have been optimistic. Take one line, which I do not pretend to have looked at thoroughly. The starting point was the headword *fibro* as in 'fibro-cement'. This is given as Australian and New Zealand. Australian it is, but New Zealand custom? I doubt it, as do people I have asked. *Fibrolite*? That's another matter, but *fibrolite* is not listed. As this has to do with building, I checked for some other building words: *dwang*, *stud*, *nogging/noggin* are not listed. *Home unit* is in, but the definition is questionable for New Zealand and may suit better for Australia. *Town house* is in, and uneasily acceptable as 'residence in town, esp. of person with house in the country' although 'in the country' could be better phrased; but 'house in (esp. terraced) group in town' is not apt, and increasingly the style for this type of dwelling is *townhouse*. That is, 'My town house in a townhouse' correctly distinguishes, on the page, and will be distinguished in speech: two stresses for the one, and one stress (TOWNhouse) for the other. There is as well a question of nuance to be noticed. A *townhouse* is emphatically upmarket from a *home unit*.

If detailed scrutiny turns out to justify my suspicion that omissions are more significant than seems to be the case at first, what is to be done about rectifying this? To fill the gaps will obviously mean enlarging the present size, in number of entries. But, entries such as those for *belladonna* or *whiting* need expanding, which is to enlarge further. As I browse over the columns of the present edition I am rarely struck by words which I think I can do without, like *Lassa fever*, or some of those names which physicists seem to be able to get into print at the drop of a *quark* (ex *Finnegans Wake*, in itself a comment) which is not usefully defined. One may more readily propose what to put in than what to take out, such as one coinage which turned up some years ago and which I thought was a nonce word. It turned up again recently: *calfeteria*, a bowl with several teats from which a number of calves may feed at the same time.

To enlarge, yes, even to diversify. Let's be frank. This *Pocket Oxford* has outgrown virtually all pockets. Grant the need for more entries, grant the necessity for increasing the size of definitions, and the 'pocket' character of the book becomes even more remote. Moreover, Dr. Burchfield is eager to make a serviceable gesture towards representing Maori as a component of everyday language in New Zealand,

and recognises the Polynesian presence too. (Even if he overestimates the extent of this at present, it is predictably doing to become more evident fairly soon.) If this sort of Pocket Dictionary has outlived its style, what may be prospected as a replacement? I doubt that one 'pocket' book will do, a dictionary of General English with localised supplement. Perhaps, a dictionary of everyday languages of the Old Dominions, for a starter? Yet however those everyday languages may (and will) interrelate, they also keep their distinctive features which are going to be more than kept. They are going to increase.

The obvious factor in New Zealand language is Maori, more than it has been, and Burchfield is anxious to deal with this. Again, I am not happy with what is set out. I cannot claim any expertise, but even so it strikes me that there are debatable entries. For example, do the definitions for *pa*, *marae* and *kaiinga* adequately distinguish? Agreed, distinction may be difficult because of regional variation; the change from *pa* to *marae* in place-naming is not uniform, or should one say, not as yet? And regional variation may enter, has entered already, in another respect which is likely to become more marked before long.

That is, in Maori writing. Publication is increasing. A Maori writer uses a vocabulary as a Pakeha writer does; to take a longstanding example, a *tui* is a *tui* for both. But where a Pakeha writer has someone fish for *snapper*, a Maori writer may have people fishing for *tamare*. The Pakeha writer (and the publisher) is unlikely these days to provide a glossary. Increasingly, in the existing climate of opinion and attitudes, Maori writers are resisting glossaries. It is increasingly assumed by newspapers that terms like *hui*, *Maoritanga* and *taha Maori* no longer need to be glossed. *Mauri* and *taonga* may or may not be. If both Pakeha and Maori writers present the language of New Zealand, then any dictionary has to treat with this, especially in the absence of an adequate, convenient, English-Maori Maori-English dictionary. The complication comes with regional effect, when a Maori writer uses regional dialect.

The Maori entries in the *NZPOD* should be looked at again. Take *poaka*, 'long-legged black and white NZ shore bird; pied or black stilt'. This is confusing. There are two stilts, and one of them seldom has any white at all, and very little of that at best. Both stilts (we are told) may be called *poaka*, whereas *kati* (not listed) applies only to the rare black stilt. Regardless of what is said in the standard Williams *A Dictionary of the Maori Language* about *poaka* serving for both, the different ornithology books I have consulted do not give *poaka* 'black stilt'. I should be surprised to learn that Pakeha use *poaka* for 'stilt' at all commonly. The *poaka* of common use is not listed, that is, 'porker, pig'.

There is no question about the good intentions of this

dictionary, but I fear I am far from satisfied with it. I have too many niggles. Why, except for words of Maori origin, should the pronunciation given be that which 'is normally that in use in the educated speech of southern English'? The pronunciation is indicated by IPA ... realistically, how many users of this dictionary can handle IPA or will make the effort to do so? I open at random, at pp.806-7. *Ti-tree*, an erroneous spelling for *tea-tree*. *Ti* is the cabbage tree; *tea-tree* is a New Zealandism, for various shrubs including *manuka*. It is not as straightforward as that, it involves a matter of North Island and South Island practice, which may or may not be out of date. *Titoki*: can I work out how to pronounce this from the guide on p.xi? I am not confident that I can. *Tin-canning*, which is also *tin-kettling*, 'serenading of newly-married couple by beating cans'. Possibly this occurs somewhere in the country. For years I have asked students about the custom. They do not all come from Auckland city. Occasionally I get a faint response, of something distantly remembered, from an older student. A case for *obs.*? Both *tin-canning/kettling* and *tea-tree* are marked NZ, and the *Macquarie Dictionary* marks *tin-kettle* (verb) likewise, but *tin-kettling* was in Australia in the last century. (It was outlawed in Victoria in 1896.) *Tea-tree* is also longstandingly Aust., for (as in New Zealand) *Leptospermums*.

You see what I mean? Turn but a stone, and start a ... as the poet says.