CLADDIE AND BOB

K. Smithyman
(University of Auckland)

The New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation has at times produced documentary programmes valuable in different ways. For anyone interested in the language of New Zealanders such programmes afford not only locutions but referents set in a context of precise imaging.

An issue of *Looking at New Zealand* screened in 1968 (from AKTV2, 23 June) made use of two words which seemed to puzzle Auckland people. The words were *claddie* and *bob.*

The film showed enthusiasts obtaining crayfish in the neighbourhood of Dunedin. The fishing is done at night, along rocky ledges at the edge of the sea. For light, the crayfish gatherers use a dried flax stalk, the flower stalk of *Phormium tenax;* the stalk is part-way soaked in diesel oil. The crayfish are taken by means of a bag lowered into the water. The bag contains bait. Crayfish, attracted to the bag, cling to it and stay clinging to it as the bag is hauled out. A net is held below the bag to catch any crayfish which tries to fall back into the sea.

The bag is the *bob.* The dried flax stalk used as a torch is the *claddie.*

To get crayfish by using a sack or sugarbag with bait inside it is not new; a recent modification volunteered by an informant with experience in crayfishing is the use of a nylon stocking instead of a bag, but no lexical item specific to the adapted stocking appears yet to have developed. The technique of the bag is recognisably a modification of the old means of using a wickerwork (or latterly, a wire-netting) frame or pot as a trap which the crayfish may either enter or cling to. The technique of the Dunedin crayfish gatherers seems innovating most in calling the bag a *bob.* The suggestion that *bob* 'bag' is innovating is supported by the Otago writer Alexander Bathgate in the romance *Waitaruna* (1881).[1] Bathgate was painfully sensitive to colonial language and *bob* is a word which he seems to regard as vulgar i.e. colonial. He describes in Chapter XII bobbing for eels but the *bob* which he there describes is made of flax and worms and thus corresponds in a major fashion to the traditional English *bob.* While Bathgate is right about the vulgarity he is less so about the colonial aspect, but nonetheless shows us the *bob* in transition from the traditional (worsted and worms) to the newer *bob* 'bag'. Of wider provenance than the environs of Dunedin, bobbing as a means of getting eels remains known in the New Zealand community, and a writer of the 1960s, Flight Lieutenant B. Hildreth, R.N.Z.A.F., in the manual *How to Survive in the Bush, on the Coast, in the Mountains of New Zealand* (1962),[2] describes the use of a bag for taking eels as bobbing, the bag being made from loosely teased flax leaves or other fibrous materials, to be attached (traditionally) to the end of a pole. *Bob* 'bag' appears to have spread.

The traditional *bob,* for getting eels rather than crayfish, is a piece of bait or a bundle of worms lashed around with wool or worsted, used without a float or a hook, the idea being to entangle the teeth of the eel. If bobbing connotes fishing without float or hook, as the *English Dialect Dictionary*[3] says, and does not necessarily connote agitation (as of the idea of "bobbing" something up and down in the water) then it is not remarkable that a bag should be deemed a *bob.* The Dunedin custom is different, but not extravagantly so, yet to call a bag of whatever kind used in fishing a *bob* seems little known if known at all about Auckland. (One informant knew *bob* 'bag', but the source of this knowledge was apparently contact with the southern part of New Zealand.) But if *bob* connotes specifically a wool-wrapped bundle, then seemingly Dunedin people have made an innovation tending firmly away from normal metropolitan English usage. The *English Dialect Dictionary* associates that usage with East Anglia and with the North of England, and in view of North of England miners being among those who migrated to Otago in the heyday of Otago mining from c.1860, one would think that if any *bob* was brought it would have been orthodoxly provincial. However, miners did not come only from northern England. They came also from the west and even within England itself movement of miners (as of Cornish miners into Yorkshire fields) had previously mixed people from speech-regions.

---

[1] Bathgate 1881: Chap. XII.

[2] Hildreth 1962: 87.

[3] Wright 1898: I, 319.

The *English Dialect Dictionary* lists two terms from the west of England for a practice analogous to bobbing. Those terms are *clatter* 'fisherman' and *clatting,* the process.

To arrive at the Dunedin *bob* there had to be a semantic shift. Does the possibility now arise that *bobbing* is involved with *clatting?* And a second possibility, that *clatting/clatter* is corrupted to *clatty/clattie* in an area where dialects and accents were mixed in the mining days? This is not farfetched. Is there a movement from *bobbing*-cum-*clatting,* the process, to the fishers, as "clatty fishers" – today's "claddie fishers" – in which the *bob* remains (but materially changes) and the *clatter/clatty/claddie* remains, but is displaced to the other material requirements, the torch or flare which gives light in the night? But there is still another material consideration, the place where this fishing is practised which is the edge of the sea and its rocky ledges, or a beach, or (for eels) the edge of a river.

Given the process, the fishing-device (the bag) and the aid (the torch), one would seem to have enough in play without the question of the location as well, but there is still more to be taken into account. The English after all were not the only migrants to Otago. The apparent lack of familarity with *bob* (in the Dunedin sense) and with *claddie* in the north of New Zealand seems to weigh against likely English influence. Otago is well known as a Scots settlement area. Since *bob* 'bag' can be treated as an innovation, attention can be shifted to *claddie.* How does this figure in relation to Scots?

A search of the usual standard sources of present or past Scots language was barren. Nothing was found on the line of *claddie* 'torch, flare, flame, fire'. What Scottish sources provide are *cladach* or *claddach* 'a bank, a shore, a gravelly or pebbly beach', with examples which associate *cladach* with fishing. Macalpine's *Gaelic Dictionary*[4] gives a verb *cladhach* or *cladaich* which means to delve, as 'to poke under the bank of a river', able to be adapted to getting eels in fresh water or crayfish in fresh or salt water. The "claddie fishers" begin to move in a more varied light.

But, one recalls, not only English and Scots went into Otago and Southland, there were also Irish migrants. In the 1870s the railway contractors for the Provincial Government brought in Irish labourers. O'Reilly's *Irish English Dictionary* (1817)[5] gives what Macalpine's *Gaelic Dictionary* fails to provide, *cladh* 'a flame, a flash'.

So here we have an extraordinary richness of possibilities for *claddie.* The claddie 'torch' seems likelier to come from the Irish fraction, supplemented by the Scottish contribution that the torches are used to help *cladhach* (v.) eels or crayfish from a *cladach/claddach* (sb.) and to complement the hypothetically corrupted *clatting* 'bobbing' from the Western English.

Though all these may have contributed and variously fused, the source of *claddie* is credibly elsewhere, in Maori, in *korari*, which has to do with flax. If this is so, one wonders why *claddie* is apparently unknown to people of Auckland. If it is known at all, it cannot be widely known or used. If it was ever used, it seems to have died out. Those who know but would hardly now use the word either acquired it from living in Southern New Zealand or were one in a line of transmission which traced back to the south. From the larger line of New Zealand language three strands have to disentangled, *flax, korari,* and *harakeke.*

---

[4] Macalpine 1832: 75-6.

[5] O'Reilly 1817: n.p. 110.

The first difficulty hitherto lay with the New Zealand *flax* 'phormium'. As late as 1889 it might be regarded as peculiarly "colonial"; G.P. Williams and W.P. Reeves in a verse skit 'An Idyll of the Canterbury Plains' built up their skittishness on local terms like "crooked Irishman", and "Spaniard", as colonials' names for plants and thus as oddities, and along with these include "flax".[6] By 1889 a good deal of language had been spent on flax, flax-stripping, and flax-processing. There must have been many people to whom the word offered no difficulties at all just as, equally, in the continual disturbance of the speech community, there were the newly arrived who had still to command the new *flax.* Williams and Reeves give "flax" a footnote, but do not use *claddie* although in another of their pieces occurs the line 'The graceful korari stick rears up its bloom'.[7] The context is a skit on the New Zealand "creek" and the absence of *claddie* 'korari stick' here suggests not a refusal of the opportunity to add to the joke but a lack of awareness of *claddie* itself.

One gets the impression that in more northerly New Zealand the whole flax plant has come to be called *harakeke,* supplanting *korari.* Kendall and Lee (1820) give *Koradi* 'The flax plant'[8] and Nicholas (1817), *Kora'ddee* 'Flax-plant'[9]. (As *koraddee* the growing flax figures in Kendall's letter to Josiah Pratt, 3 July 1814.[10])

The sixth edition of Williams cites Grey (1853) as a source for *korari* 'flower stem of flax'[11], and Hochstetter (1863) yields *korari* 'flower stalk'.[12] What one judges is a shift in northern usage in which *korari* becomes 'stalk' with or without flowers, tending further and as the area moves further south, to emphasise the 'stalk' or 'stick' aspect. Note that Williams and Reeves talk of 'korari stick'; so does Canon J.W. Stack ('....the young men collected a quantity of korari sticks and made a raft with them....') in a work written in his old age[13]. The botanical part is being devalued perhaps, the emphasis passing to a kind of stick or to use, for Hochstetter described the 'flower stalk' and its use as a 'slow-match'.

Judge F.D. Fenton (1885), of the Native Land Court remarked in passing on Maori delivery: 'There seems to be a mysterious feebleness of character in the consonant *r.* It is interchanged for *d,* and apparently *ad libitum* for *l.* Even in some dialects of New Zealand the *r* is displaced by *l,* and sometimes by *d.*'[14] Kendall and Lee transcribe the second *r* as a *d.* In the southern South Island an *l* for the first *r* would not be untoward, so the emerging of *koladi* or [kʌlæˈdi:] or [klædi:] from korari/kolari/koladi/koradi is nothing spectacular. An informant who spent his childhood and youth in South Canterbury offered a variant, [kɹædi:] and a botanist, Lucy B. Moore (1949)[15], located a survival as a trade-term in the southern North Island: 'Manawatu flaxcutters call the tall stalk and flower head a "claddy".'

---

6. Williams and Reeves 1889: 26.
7. Williams and Reeves 1889: 44.
8. Kendall and Lee 1820: 167.
9. Nicholas 1817: II, 334.
10. Elder 1934: 64.
11. Williams 1957: 140.
12. Hochstetter 1863: 150-1.
13. Stack 1936: 133.
14. Fenton 1885: 56.
15. Moore 1949: 90.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bathgate, A., 1881. *Waitaruna.* London, Sampson Low.

Elder, J.R. (ed), 1934. *Marsden's Lieutenants.* Dunedin, University of Otago.

Fenton, F.D., 1885. *Suggestions for a History of the Origins and Migrations of the Maori People.* Auckland, Brett.

Hildreth, B., 1962. *How to Survive in the Bush, on the Coast, in the Mountains of New Zealand.* Wellington, Government Printer.

Hochstetter, F., 1863. *New Zealand.* Stuttgart; trans. 1867.

Kendall, T. and Lee, S., 1820. *A Grammar of the Vocabulary of the Language of New Zealand.* London Church Missionary Society.

Macalpine, N., 1832. *A Pronouncing Gaelic-English Dictionary.* Glasgow, MacLaren; repr. 1962.

Moore, L.B., 1949. *Sand-Dune Plants.* Wellington, School Publications Branch, Department of Education, Post-Primary Schools Bulletins, Vol. 3, No.4.

Nicholas, J.L., 1817. *Narrative of a Voyage to New Zealand...* London, Black. 2 Vols.

O'Reilly, E., 1817. *An Irish-English Dictionary.* Dublin, O'Neil: repr. 1821.

Stack, J.W., 1936. Ed. Reed, A.H., *More Maoriland Adventures of J.W. Stack.* Dunedin, Reed.

Williams, G.P. and Reeves, W.P., 1889. *Colonial Couplets.* Christchurch, Simpson and Williams.

Williams, H.W., 1957. *A Dictionary of the Maori Language.* 6th edn. Wellington, Government Printer.

Wright, J., 1898. *English Dialect Dictionary,* Vol. I. London, Frowde.