

Australian Rhyming Slang(I)

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Abstract

Informal expressions for many everyday things have been created by rhyming slang, and they lend variety to the all familiar. Contrary to general supposition, rhyming slang did not come down to us from our convict forbears and has no connection with the thieves' argot, flash talk, or vulgar tongue of the 18th and 19th century. Basically, rhyming slang consists of a couplet or short phrase of two, three, or more syllables, the last of which rhymes with the word for which the phrase is substituted.

Since rhyming slang obviously had its beginning in the music halls of East London, many of terms will be survivors from that source in the early part of the century. The amusement of most rhyming slang is its seeming irrelevance to what's being referred to, making it hard for the uninitiated to know what is meant.

History and Background

Its first arrival in this country is described by Sidney J. Baker in his book *The Australian Language*: However, in 1898, a writer points out: The Cockney rhyming slang is popular in Australia and the lion comiques and lydies[sic] of the variety stage are helping to make the hold the stronger. The following examples were added to show the type of rhymes used-*Arty Rolla*, a collar; *mince pies*, eyes; *cheese and kisses*, the missus; *Charlie Prescott*, waistcoat; *Joe Morgan*, street organ; *pot and pan*, the old man; *tiddley-wink*, a drink; *lamb's fry*, tie; *plates o'meat*, the feet.

In the *Australian Magazine* of November 1, 1908, J.H. Garth noted that rhyming slang "broke out a couple of years ago". Thus, it would seem that this sort of slang became popular at the turn of the century. Baker has an interesting theory, that rhyming slang has had brief vogues in Australia, and that its periods of popularity have coincided with the wars.

What Is It?

Basically, rhyming slang consists of a couplet or short phrase of two, three, or more syllables, the last of which rhymes with the word for which the phrase is substituted. Rhyming slang is

always explicit. There are words which in certain old fashioned or refined circles might be regarded as coarse, or even obscene. Other terms may even be interpreted as having racist connotations.

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An interesting feature is the use of disguise, or a contraction of the slang phrase, so that instead of saying *elephant's trunk* for drunk, one simply says *elephants*; or to indicate an intention of urinating, "I'm going for a *snakes*", by which it is understood that we are going for a *snake's hiss*, or a piss. There are of course varying levels of skill in its use.

The following quotation is Duke Tritton's letter. Examples are:

Dear *China Plate*,

No doubt you have wondered how your old *thief and robber* has been doing since you went back to the *steak and kidney*. I know you will find it hard to believe, but I am now a married man.

I think I had better tell you the *grim and gory* right from the *horse and cart*. When I saw you off on the *thunder and rain* at Weenia, I was feeling pretty lonely being left on my *Pat Malone*. So I rambled over to the *rubbity dub* and had a pint of *oh my dear*. In fact I had several and finished up in the dead house, broke to the wide. But they left me my *Willy Wag* and gave me a bit of tucker.

So I padded the hoof along the *frog and toad*, still feeling *butcher's hook*. I saw a lot of *Joe Blakes*, but don't know if they were dinkum or just the after effects of the grog. I came to a *bullock's liver* where I reckoned I'd have a *lemon squash* and liven up a bit. So I threw off my *barrel of fat*, *dicky dirt*, *rammy rousers* and *daisy roots*, and dived into the *mother and daughter*. It was *brave and bold*, and there were plenty of *cries and screeches*, but when I rubbed the *Cape of Good Hope* over myself, they went. I felt goodoh when I came out and dried myself with the *Baden Powell*. So I gathered some *do me good*, got out the *Jack Scratches* and lit the *Barney Maguire*, put on the *knock me silly* and made and made a brew of *Jimmy Lee*. Then I began to live again. The *hot cross burn* was down and the *silver spoon* was rising when I spread the *Wagga* and turned in. Next morning I was ready to move when a *pot and pan* driving a nice high stepping *tomato sauce* in a flash *big an' bulky* pulled up and asked if I was looking for *dodge an'shirk*. Being as flat as a goanna drinking at a Billabong I replied, "My blanky oath". "Well," he said, "I want a man that knows farm work and can shear blades or machine." I answered, "Mate, I know farm work backwards, and as for shearing I can blind Tom Power with wool with the *Wolseleys* and give Jacky Howe fifty start with the blades any day in the week. (You remember *China*, I was never backward in coming forward.)

He laughed and said "Well I really don't want a man that good, but if twenty-five bob and tucker is any good to you, hope in." I hopped in. We drove about ten miles to his place and he introduced me to his *cheese and kisses* and four *tin lids*, two *mother's joys* and two *twist and twirls*. When I remarked he had a nice little family, he said "My eldest is inside. Come in and meet her." We went in and I met her. She put out her hand and said "How do you do?". My *grocer's cart* was racing like grandfather's clock when it slipped out of gear. After about ten seconds I managed to croak something that sounded like "Pleased to meetcha".

Straight wire, *China*, she is the most beautiful *ocean liner* I ever saw. her name is Mary. Her *Dublin fair* is sort of brown, her *mince pies* are blue, her *north and south* was made for kissing and from the top of her *lump of lead* to her *plates of meat* she is perfect. And six months ago she became my *trouble an' strife*. Sometimes I wonder why she married me, and when I asked her, she just smiles and says "It must have been because of your good looks".

I have tossed my *cherry ripe* into the *Barney Maguire* and I have given the *mud and ooze* right away. I can go into the *rubbity dub* and have a lemonade, breasting the *near and far* with booze hounds drinking *Tom thumb, young and frisky, oh my dear*, or *Huckleberry Finn*, and no one ever laughs at me or calls me sissy because I am drinking lolly water. I hope they don't ever forget themselves, because Mary doesn't like the idea of me fighting. She thinks it is brutal.

I go to *roll and lurch* every Sunday, and the *Wincombe Carson* reckons I've got a bosker *lets rejoice*, and often gets me to sing *hers an' hims* on my *Pat Malone*. And I like meeting the *spire and steeple*. They are all nice blokes and sheilas.

And I can come home now after a hard day's yakka, change into clean duds, shove my *Dutch pegs* under the *Cain and Abel*, wade through half a dozen dishes of scrán that we used to dream of when we were on the track, then finish up with *Uncle Ned and roll me in the gutter*. No doubt about it, my Mary is a bottling *babbling brook*.

And I am popular with the family, and the neighbours. So everything is jakalorum. I'm teaching Mary and all the *tin lids* in the district to *dark an'dim*, and they reckon I'm the bees knees, ants pants and nits tits all rolled into one. If I speak of Barney Keiran, Alick Wickham or the Cavells, they reckon I could give any one of them ten yards in a hundered.

My father-in-law built a nice cottage for Mary and me, so we are as snug as bugs in a rug, and it seems that the only troubles we are likely to have are little ones.

It is hard to believe that two years ago I was humpin' the drum with you, spending all my *Oscar Asche on mud and ooze*, and two-up, fighting and brawling, stoushing *John Hops*, getting run in and spending a few days in the cooler, pinching the squatter's lambs when we were out of meat, jumping the rattler and acting all round like a pair of half witted clowns.

I told Mary it would be nice to have you up here for a holiday, but she is not real keen on the idea because she thinks you have been a bad influence in my life, and you might lead me astray again. Which just goes to show how innocent she is.

Well *China*, this *don't forget her* is getting long and I am out *nails and screws*, and I have to catch the *Holy Ghost*, so will end off with all the best from,

Your old *thief and robber*,

Duke

And I found them in Duke's rhyming slang letter and instant conversations as follows:

1. In the Disco

S: What a *top sort*. (= an attractive young woman)

M: Where?

S: The one over there with the blonde hair and the big *norks*. (= breast)

- M: Wooden mine given that one. She's with some *turkey*. (= foolish person)
 S: The smooth bastard with the *mo*? (= a moustache?)
 M: Winecha go over see if ya can *white ant im*? (= interrupt him?)
 (Later.)
 M: Wossa matter? *Dip out*? (= not to meet with success)
 S: Yeah. Put the ard word onner an she told me ter *rack off*. (= make a proposition of a sexual nature)
 M: Proibly a *lezzo*. (= a lesbian)
 S: Think I'll *it the toe*. (= to leave)
 M: What about we try an *con up* those two tarts inner corner? (= to dazzle)
 S: Nar, I've *ad the bomb*. (= to be exhausted) You *kickin on*? (= to continue?)
 M: Not stayin ere *on me pat*, (= on my own), ya bloody piker. *Miteswell* come with ya. (= given the situation)
 S: This place is *up the shit*. (= not any good)

2. How to Bullshit

- G: You look *rooted*. (= exhausted) Ard night? (= hard)
 S: Yeah, been *on the nest* all night. (= performing acts of a sexual nature)
 G: Lucky bastard.
 S: Just some blond tart I conned up at Selina's. Top sort.
 G: *Shit eh?* (= a meaning less expression)
 S: Yeah, *all over me like a rash*, she was. (= She was unable to keep her hands off someone)
 G: *Dead set?* (= Is that right?)
 S: Got a flat in Googee. Raced *me off* soon as we got in the door. (= ready to receive sexual favours) Oastie with *Qantas*. (= an air hostess) *Rooted er silly* all night. (= have frequent sexual intercourse with someone over a short period)
 G: Owsyerotten form?
 S: That's not all. Whenner mate comes ome she godder *gear off* (= clothes) and jumped in *the cot* too. (= bed) Shoulda seen *the bod* on it! (= the female form)
 (M enters)
 G: Eh, Macka Shane reckons egod is *end in larse* night. (= to succeed in seducing a female)
 M: *Pig's arse!* (= standard response to any form of bullshit) E was with me an egot what I got. *Sweet bugger all!* (= nothing)
 G: Eh?
 M: *Wise up*, (= raise the level of one's intelligence) Gazza. E *sucked ya in* (= duped) again, *dinty?* (= is that not correct?) E *coulden lie straight in bed*, (= pathologically dishonest) the bastard!

3. Compo (= worker's compensation)

- M: I'm looking for a Mr. Foster.
 L: E's not in.

D: Oo's this *joker*, (= Who is this stranger) Les?
L: *God Botherer* (= One who touts religion) by the looks of it.
M: I'm from the insurance company. I'm looking into a worker's compensation claim.
L: Aaaagh!
D: You orright, Les?
L: *Me back!* (= My back) It's gone again!
M: Wodyer think this is - Bush Week?
L: Holy shit. I'm *in strife* (= in big trouble) now.

4. The Family Meal

L: *Wosser tea?* (= What's for tea?) *I could eat an orse an chase the jockey.* (= I'm very very hungry)
M: *Spag bog.* (= spaghetti bolognaise)
L: Jeez, not *ding* (= Italian) food again. Woss wrong with *chook* (= chicken)?
M: Had chook larse night. You doan like it, there's Vegemite inner cupboard. Make yourself a *sammie.* (= sandwich)
L: *Woss er problem?* (= What is ailing our delightful daughter?) *Got a face like a wet week.* (= to look miserable)
M: *Ardunno.* (= I have no idea) Asker.
D: I think I'm pregnant.
There is a *pregnant pause.* (= a long silence)
L: Oo is it? *I'll go the bastard.* (= I'll fight him) Not that *no-woper* (= a person with a restricted financial future) you brought *rownere* (= this place) larse week?
D: Doan *do yer block.* (= get extremely angry) It were nim.

5. In the Fish and Chippie (= chip shop)

N: Yes *mite.* (= mate)
S: Four *flake* (= shark meat) an eighty of chips. An two *Chiko Rolls.* (= Australian fast food)
N: (calling) Maria! We needa more flike!
N: Ow! Bloody thing!
(He goes out. S is left in the shop with M.)
S: G'day.
S: I'm Shane. I live downer road. Hey er feel like comin to the drives (= the drive-in theatre) tomorra night?
(Maraia giggles and blushes. N comes back.)
N: Maria! You toucha ma Maria, I *brike you fice.* (= break your face)
S: Well jeez orright then. *Up you the for rent!* (= I no longer care to patronise)
(Shane walks out)
N: (to his wife, in Greek) Bloody foreigners!

6. Getting a Job

D: Remember-doan *go off arf-cocked* (= to express opinions without the facts) like yer always do.
E's a bit *niggly* (= irritable) inner mornins.

(The foreman appears. He's *bulit like a brick shithouse.*) (= of strong and sturdy physical build)

F: Oo's this *peanut*? (= an idiot) Not another *blow - in*? (= a newcomer)?

D: It's the mate I told yer about. I need another *offsider* (= a personal assistant)

F: Not a *choom* (= an English person), *izzy*?

D: No, no. E's dinky - di.

F: Long as e's not like that larse useless bastard. *Went walkabout* (= to disappear) after two days.
Better be up to it. (les) it's *ard yakka*, (= hard physically work) ya know.

D: E'll *keep is end up*. (= to pull his weight)

F: Long as the two of youse doan stan roun *yabber in* (= to chatter) all day. E can *front up* (= appear) Mundy, firs thing.

D: Oh, *ripper*. (= excellent)

(The foreman walks off.)

D: See, I said yer'd be sweet.

L: Cheeky bastard. Lucky I dint drop im.

D: Yairs, lucky orright. For you!

7. *Smoke-oh* (= Morning Tea)

D: Darlene *dropped the kid* (= to give birth) yet?

L: Any day now. She's too young *dava* (= top have a) *bub*. (= baby) Should've adder *boiler scraped* (= to have an abortion) when she adder chance.

D: She'll be right. Ow's shane? *Eary* (= it has come to my attention that he) landed onnis feet with this new job.

L: In with some *arty farty* (= having pretensions to artistic) advertisin mob. E's only a gopher, but.

D: Still. *Better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick*, (= better than nothing) eh? Owdy jag (= to procure by fortunate means) that?

L: Buggeded if I know. Still, e ain't bludgin off me any more. Sharin a flat in *Paddo* (= Paddington) with wunnervis mates.

D: Paddo? Better watch it - doan wannim turnin inter an *orse's oof*. (= a homosexual)

L: Jeas, orready? This is *ard yakka*. Think I'll ava *sickie* (= sickness) tomorra.

D: *Ripper* (= Great) idea. Get some tickets for the one-dayer, eh?

8. At the Cricket

L: *Strewth*, (= once common ocker oath) that the score?

D: Yeah, we're *gettin creamed*. (= annihilated)

L: Oo's on strike?

D: Yewsie.

- L : That bastard's *not worth feedin*. (= of inferior talent or ability) Jeez, look at that-he shoulda *oiked* (= hit something into the air with great force) that over the fence.
- D : *Givim a go*. (= give that person a fair chance) E nearly wore that round the ear.
- L : Eh, there's a big *blue* (= a fight) started *on the Ill*. (= the hill, Sydney Cricket Ground) Least we'll see some action - this is a right *fizzogg*. (= a disappointingly uncompetitive game (fizzer))
- D : Reckon the Windies are *omen osed*. (= home and hosed)
- L : Yeah, we got Buckley's. Wanna *shoot through?* (= to depart with great haste)
- D : No way. I'm stayin *to the death*. (= till the end of the game) I'm gettin me seven bucks worth outta Kerry Packer. Richards'll start ittin sixes takin some stick.
- L : Hoggie's really *takin some stick*. (= to take a beating verbally)
- D : Yeah - dropped is bundle after Richards it that last bandry. *Reckon eorta* (= he ought to) give it away.
- L : Wanna *dog's eye?* (= a meat pie)
- D : Yeah, orright,Eh - an remember the *tom sauce* (= tomato ketchup) this time.
- L : Orright, save me *pozzie*. (= position or seat)
- D : Eh Les - watch yerself !
- D : Poor bastard. Toldim Richards'd start ittin sixes soon.

9. Going on a Barbie

- D : *Ckeck it out* (= look at that) - *coulden organise a piss-up in a brewery*. (= useless) *Ace it up* (= a request to improve his performance) son-yerburnin the snags!
- J : *Doan go crook at me!* (= don't get upset with me) You cook the bastards!
- D : Wossgowinon?
- S : Little Darryl lost is *thong* (= a sort of rubber sandal) an there's bindis right through the grass.
- D : I told imter wear sanshoes! Little *sook* (= a crybaby) - tell imter stop *blubbin* (= crying) or e'll get a right-ander.
- S : No bloody wonder. She was firin er *ging* (= a child's cartapult) attem.
- L : She's bleedin. Anyone got a Band-aid?

10. Buying a Pre-Loved Car (= Pre-owned car)

- S : Wodya reckon? *Micky mouse*, (= really good) eh?
- M : These things *suck up the juice*, (= to consume large quantities of petrol) mate. Owmuch duzzy want?
- S : Three narf.
- M : Sounds a bit *shonky* (= of dubious quality) ter me. Reckon enmusta *flogged* (= to steal) it.
- S : It's *in good nick*. (= in good condition) Check the *duco*. (= paintwork) Six months reggo too.
- M : It's ad a re-spray. Reckon it's been in a *prang*. (= an accident)
(The owner emerges from the house.)
- M : This is joker? Looks like a rule lair ter me.
- L : G'day gents. Wanna take it roun the block?

(Macka and Shane get in. A few minutes later.)

S: Well?

M: It's cactus. (= of no further value) Reckon it's been round the clock a few times. Engine's clapped out, (= worn out from overuse) and it needs a new muffler. (= a silencer)

S: Yeah, but check the stereo, mate.

(He turns up the sound full blast.)

S: Mint, eh?

(They get back to the lair's house. Shane gets out.)

S: I'll take it.

M: Jeez mate - yer got *rocks in yer ed*! (= to be unwise)

11. Visiting the Family

L: I dint know ewas lobbin *sarvo*. (= this afternoon)

M: I told ya yesterdie.

L: Wossat e's drivin? Musta *knocked it off* (= to steal) from somewhere.

L: Where ja get that? *Wodid that set ya back?* (= how much did that cost you)

S: We're not all *on the bones of our arse*. (= destitute)

L: If that's paid for, I'll stand the season.

M: *Give it a break* (= let us not continue with this discussion), Les. Lettim get inner door.

L: E's flogged it. *Sticks out like dog's ball*. (= to be quite obvious) (sniffs) Jeez, somethin's on the nose.

S: It's aftershave.

L: Ker-ist. Ya smell like a Turkish brothel.

S: *I'm jacka this*. (= I'm tired of this.) larse time I come row rownere.

L: Typical. Bastard never comes to see us, *anwenny does* (- and then when he does) e only stays five minutes.

12. In the Pub (= rubbedy dub)

L: What appened to the *dead cert*, (= a sure thing) ya galah?

D: Doan get snakeywith me. Thought I was doin the right thing.

L: Oh yeah. I'm right *in the noo-er* (= in trouble) when *the missus* (= my missus) fines out. *Ain't got a cracker* (= to be without money) for the resta the week.

D: *Yer not Robinson Crusoe*. (= you're not the only one) *Carn* (= come on), doan perform. I'll *shout yer a beer*. (= I'll buy a beer)

L: Larse bleedin time I listen to you, *fair dinkum*. (= honest)

D: Ya know what they say: Life wasn't menda be easy. Yer gunna be *quids in*. (= prosperous)

L: Oh you little bewdy.

13. Going to Show

S: Top *show*. (= party) Real *rage*. (= a good time)

A: It's orright. Wodyer thinka the decor. Really *kitsch*, (= in poor taste) eh?
S: Cop the tart over there with the red air. Top sort.
A: Wait'll she opens er mouth. *Rough as guts*. (= vulgar or uncouth) Anyway, *the moll* (= a tart with no class)'s on with some bloke oo runs a porno shop.
S: *Woss the mail on* (= to have information about) the joker with the leather pants? Looks like a bit of a *bumjumper* (= a homosexual) ter me.
A: Jeez, you're really passe sometimes Shane. Bein gay's *all the go* (= fashionable) these days.
S: I'll still keep me *freckle* (= anus) to the wall, thanks.
A: Suit yerself. I'm gunna go over an *ava mag with* im. (= to talk to) Is name's Enzo.
S: Bloody dings.
A: E's *stinkin*. (= extremely rich) Drives a Roller.
S: (interested) *Zat* right?

14. Waking up

A: Cop the eyes on it. They're like pissholes in the snow.
S: I musta *knocked back a few*. (= to imbibe large quantities of alcoholic liquor)
A: Ya were *paraletic*. (= drunk) (offering him a glass of warm beer) Wanna *heart starter*? (= the first alcoholic drink the morning after a heavy night's drinking)
S: Jeez no. I'd *heave*. (= vomit)
A: Well ya better go an *ava tub*. (= a shower) We're meetin this joker at 10.
S: What joker?
A: The bloke we said we'd do the job for. You know - Enzo. We gotta pick up a parcel from the airport for im.
S: A parcel? That's a bit of a worry. We don't know *the bloke from a bar soap*. (= that fellow is a complete stranger to us)
A: Nothin to it. Miteswell *give it a punt*. (= give it a try) We're both *shorta the readies*. (= short of money)
S: Wait on. E's not a crim, izzy?
A: Jeez, ya know me Shane. Would I *give ya a bum steer*? (= to mislead)
S: Ardunno. Think I'll *take a rain check*. (= postpone indefinitely) Reckon e's bit of a *flake*. (= a person of suspect moral character)
A: It's worth a coupla undred each.
S: On the other and, e is a mate a yaws.
A: *That's the shot*. (= That's the spirit)

15. Getting Busted

A: Doan stan there *like a stunned mullet*. (= with an unintelligent expression on the face) Get inner car.
S: I doan *wanna barra this*. (= want nothing to do with) There could be arfa tunna smack in there.
A: Yer not gunna *cop out* (= to take the easy way out) now. Come on - we're late.

S: What iffy is a crime?

A: Iffy is, we ain't got time to stan ere an *argue the toss*. (= to debate the finer detail) Now stop fartarsin aroun an drive the car! (= to fail to get on with the job in hand)

S: Orright, doan get *ostile!* (= angry)

A: (mutters) Pissweak!

E: Ya getta the stuff off the *pline?* (= aeroplane)

A: No worries. Earyah. Now then - what about our *cop?* (= profit or share)

S: Talkina cops wossat comin up the drive?

E: Bloody thing! We *uppa shit crick* (= in big trouble) boys!

P: I'd like a look in that bag, thanks.

S: It's muesli.

P: Turn it up. *I dint come down inner larse share.* (= another expression of derision) Yer all *busted.* (= arrested)

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