by their round and ruddy cheeks. So we are told. Hence we gain, pomegranate, and hence Pommy. Let etymologists be appeased: it is the authorised derivation.”

As Bruce Steele, the CUP editor of Kangaroo, remarks: “DHL’s reported derivation is now generally accepted by lexicographers: see The Australian National Dictionary, ed. W.S. Ransome (Melbourne, 1988).”

Although there are many people who probably do use the term ‘pommy’ in anything but an affectionate manner, I had no intention of vilifying either DHL (to whom I’ve devoted 20 years of study) or Rachel Henning (to whom I hope to devote the next 20), by referring to them as whinging poms. It was simply a means of deflating the reputations of both writers so that I did not appear to readers of the Bulletin as if I was continually worshipping at the altars of Saint David and Saint Rachel.

I am fully aware that often my outspokenness on heritage matters will probably offend many of those who couldn’t care less about old buildings, but I would never have expected that my remarks on two writers whom I love would cause offence. This latter breach of etiquette was entirely unintentional, although I will certainly take issue with the view that Rachel Henning was ‘a fine pioneer’ if either my scholarly edition of her letters or my manuscript ‘Rachel Henning at Figtree’ ever see the light of day.

To those who remain unconvinced that the phrase ‘whingeing pom or even ‘pommy bastard’ can ever be used affectionately, I would recommend hunting out an obscure book by H.J. Rumsey, published at Dundas, N.S.W., in 1920, entitled The Pommies or New Chums in Australia, whose title and introduction both clearly show the non pejorative uses to which the word Pommy can be put:

“The Pommies is now a common name for recent arrivals from Britain. During the last few weeks, I have scores of times heard the Prince of Wales affectionately described as a ‘dear little pommy.’

I will be sad if the word ‘pommy’ loses whatever non pejorative connotations it might still possess. I will be even sadder if some anti-vilification law makes its use illegal, but I promise not to use the term in future Bulletins and hope that Joan Beswick can somehow overlook my indiscretions and see her way clear to maintaining her subscription.

JOSEPH DAVIS

A MARITIME ORIGIN FOR THE WORD ‘POMMY’

As readers will have no doubt gathered from my editorial rantings, both DHL and the origins of the word ‘pommy’ are personal hobbyhorses.

But my love of DH Lawrence does not extend to his knowledge of Australian etymology, so I would now like to foist upon readers an alternative derivation to that of DHL.
And you’ll all be relieved to know it is not my own. It’s my father’s. But as his name is also Joseph Davis, it’s probably not going to matter much anyway.

His belief is that the word ‘Pommy’ has nothing to do with Pomegranates and is actually of maritime origin. My father is a retired merchant seaman and wharf labourer of primarily English landlubbing stock, but his maternal grandfather was a Swedish seaman.

On my mother’s side I am descended from Peter Hibbs, a seaman on the ‘Sirius’ and reputedly the only first fleeter who’d sailed with Cook on the Endeavour.

Hibbs does not appear in the records of any of Cook’s voyages, so unless he was the unnamed cabin boy on the Endeavour (and this is not impossible) both this and his claim to be the second crew member (after Banks) to set foot on Australian soil at Botany Bay are probably fabrications.

More certainly, Hibbs was Master of the ‘Norfolk’ during Bass and Flinders famous circumnavigation of Tasmania. Bass and Flinders named Point Hibbs on Tasmania’s West Coast in his honour. So seafaring is in my parent’s blood.

None of this background can do much to support my father’s etymological theories but they do indicate that my family has had some experience of the sea and the language of sailors.

THE THEORY

According to my father, Portsmouth (England) was regularly referred to by sailors as ‘Pompey’ both this and last century. As the English settlers in Australia had often arrived directly from Portsmouth my father’s theory is that they were referred to as ‘Pompeys’. This, he feels, was eventually corrupted to ‘Pommies’ and gained a wider parlance in the Australian colonies once these English settlers disembarked and, having heard themselves referred to as such by the sailors, took the word into the wider community.

I make no claims as to the accuracy of my father’s theory but am virtually certain that it is a derivation that has not been canvassed previously.

The first recorded use of the word ‘Pommy’ by the Australian National Dictionary is in the Sydney Bulletin for November 14, 1912.

Joseph Davis Snr and Jnr.

LAST MEETING

A Change of venue and meeting time resulted in a very enjoyable July meeting. Thirty two members gathered at the Museum to her Penny Ferguson speak about author and illustrator May Gibbs.

Penny kept her audience enthralled as she spoke about May’s life and work. Born in