

# WORD OF THE MONTH

OXFORD AUSTRALIA: THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH | FEBRUARY 2015

[Contact Us](#) | [Visit our website](#) | [ANDC](#) | [Send to friend](#)

## Eggshell blonde

- **noun:** (also eggshell blond) a man with a bald head.

### THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

*Three Polished Gentlemen.* Never before in the history of Sale have so many 'egg-shell blonds' graced the business side of a bar than when three perfect specimens dispensed good cheer at a Sale hostelry t'other afternoon. Two, up from Melbourne, were assisting the licensee. Said one when he saw the polished cranium of the local: 'Take your wig off'. One customer, a billiards enthusiast, asked which was the spot ball. (*Gippsland Times*, 12 April 1951)

As this article in the *Gippsland Times* illustrates, **eggshell blonde** is used in Australian English as a humorous euphemism for a bald person. The *eggshell* element is derived from the similarity of a bald head to the shape and smooth texture of a hen's egg; the *blonde* element is ironic, and is used in a similar way in other Australian terms such as *bushfire blonde* for 'a redhead'. The use of the term may have been influenced by the colloquial term *egghead*, originally American, denoting a 'highbrow', or person of intellect, which increased in frequency in the Australian media from the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The first evidence for **eggshell blonde** comes from a newspaper report of a dinner held in honour of Tommy Dunn, retiring from a long career with the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission of New South Wales: 'It was a very happy function, with many good humored references to the "**Egg-Shell Blonde**"—a sally at the guest's bald pate.' (*Murrumbidgee Irrigator*, 25 August 1944) Other early evidence occurs in a discussion of proper etiquette in the Women's Section of a Brisbane newspaper:

Until now it seemed impossible to reach agreement on the question whether a man should or should not remove his hat when travelling in a lift with a woman. Personally, I sat on the fence about it. Woman-like, I notice and appreciate the little courtesy. Yet I also feel sympathy towards those men whom Jack Davey calls 'eggshell blondes', who feel a chill when travelling hatless in a draught. (*Courier-Mail*, 10 September 1947)

Evidence for **eggshell blonde** peaks in the 1950s, but tails off rapidly during the second half of the 20th century. A rare occurrence of the term in the 1970s appears in a description of the audience at a jazz convention:

There are ruddy **egg-shell blondes**, the rotund and bearded ones and the lean, tanned and long-haired men, the busty wenches in granny skirts, the startling red-haired, slim girl in the multihued dress and the lithe and lissom chicks in a

variety of apparel, all of it eyecatching. (*Canberra Times*, 29 December 1973)

In 1992 Australian writer Kathy Lette used it in her novel *Llama Parlour*: 'The only good thing was that, with his clean shaven head—an **egg-shell blond** we called it at home—nobody had recognised him.' Despite this example, much of the evidence in recent years is only found in glossaries, or has a historical reference. However, there is the occasional bit of evidence suggesting that it is still used and remembered by some Australians:

Going bald has been one of my worst fears for decades. It began early, watching my father's thatch dwindle to almost nothing. By the time I was a teenager, he was what is euphemistically known as an **eggshell blonde**. He claimed his baldness was due to an expanding brain, and they do say you can't grow grass on a busy street. (*Brisbane News*, 18 January 2012)

**Eggshell blonde** will be included in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.



You are receiving this email because you are a valued customer of Oxford University Press. If you wish to unsubscribe from future mailings, please click the unsubscribe link below.

[Unsubscribe](#)

