



## When Old Bucky hits, megamunted, rooted or stuffed fits the bill



**N**EW ZEALANDERS who have lived for most of their lives in the Quaky Isles (also, in European pioneering times, the Shaky Isles) are accustomed to listening to predictions about “the big one” and to automatically understanding the significance of references to places and dates such as “1931 in the Bay” and “Wairarapa in 42”.

There’s a lexical chronology associated with earthquakes; an earthquake put even Inangahua on the map in 1968. We use terms

like the active Wellington Fault, without as much as a shiver. It’s an interesting usage, fault.

So is plate. The term “Pacific plate” might conjure up an image of a sports award or an appetising combination of fresh seafood, pineapples and bananas, but the connotations of the related terms “plate motion” and “plate deformation” are all too obvious.

We have to accept the fact that we are earthquake-prone, with 15,000 earthquakes recorded in and around New Zealand each year. We occupy a no-man’s-land, a marginal little country sitting right on the boundary of the Australian and Pacific plates.

It might appear a little tasteless to be interested in the terms that have risen to prominence after the February 22 Christchurch disaster, or Old Bucky, as Jane Bowron aptly dubbed it.

But new words are generated, and existing or recycled ones come to be closely associated with dire events, as exemplified by “nine-eleven”.

At the New Zealand Dictionary Centre, the database entries for muntage and megamunt will always be associated with the 2011

quake. And Gerry Brownlee’s name will long be associated with “old dunger”. While dunger has been used in New Zealand for decades, it is normally for an old vehicle, not a precious heritage building.

It’s a usage we share with Australia, for in Britain, a dunger is an animal that produces dung. We also have local citations for dungery, an adjective used for a decrepit item, something material rather than animate like a politician.

**R**EADERS have commented on the frequently occurring munted and muntage, followed by phonetic bedfellows bung, buggered, dunger and stuffed.

Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker described munted as a technical term in the context of the earthquake, and on March 6 his coinage megamunt was recorded in the *Sunday Star-Times*.

Munted is expressive with overtones that might not be polite. While New Zealanders have used it as a synonym for damaged or ruined, elsewhere in the world it is a vulgar term. A munt was once an insulting term for a Black African. It is also associated with rape and drunkenness.

Munter, on the other hand, was a standard term for a watch or timekeeper. In Britain, it means a particularly nasty or ugly person. Definitely not complimentary, but the connotation is perhaps more gentle in our New Zealand usage.

And with reference to gentle, Jane Bowron’s gentle senses of humour and acceptance have doubtless enhanced the sympathy we feel for the Canterbury victims.

Telling us that the collapsed

landmark Shag Rock is now known as Shag Pile took some beating.

Trashed, it seems, is neither sufficiently evocative nor descriptive in the Christchurch experience. Pakaru or puckerood has also been surprisingly absent from news reports.

The people in the eastern suburbs, lacking power, water, and chemical toilets or Port-A-Loos, were reported “to have had a gutsful”. The mayor said that he was “guttled” that the 2011 Rugby World Cup would not be played in Christchurch.

Jane Bowron is not the only *DomPost* writer to provide us with clear images of the devastation. John Hartevelt wrote of Christchurch on March 5 that “Plainly the place is stuffed”. Giles Brown (March 7) cited a resident who said “the central city’s rooted”.

There is an obvious theme in the use of buggered, munted, stuffed and rooted.

It has been interesting to note that the term liquefaction is extended in use for the product (silt) in addition to the process. The Farmy Army and the SVA (Student Volunteer Army) are two new terms that have left their mark on the lexis, together with lunar loony, the unfortunate reference to the no-doubt-sincere Moon man, Ken Ring.

It will be some time before these terms disappear from the daily discourse of Christchurch residents.

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