

CHOOK:

Chook is now the common Australian expression for a chicken, a domestic fowl. The only citations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* come from Australia and New Zealand, and they start from the 19th century. Although we spell the word with a double 'o' today, it used to be spelled with a 'u'.

The earliest citations in the *Australian National Dictionary* have the 'chuck' spelling. But because it began life as a north of England dialect word, it might even with the 'u', have been pronounced as we pronounce **chook**. Dr Johnson, in his dictionary, says that chuck or chook was a familiar term of endearment applied to husbands, wives, children and close companions. This makes sense, since it would be the equivalent of calling a child 'my little chicken'.Dr Johnson also says that chuck or chook was a dialectal corruption of chick (the abbreviation of chicken). The word chuck is used this way by Shakespeare in *Loves Labour's Lost*. It seems never to have caught on in the south of England, and to have largely died out in the late 19th century. But by that time the word had been carried to Australia and New Zealand – where we have kept the word alive by calling our chickens not chicks but chooks.

© Richards, Kel, ABC Classic FM's word of the day, Australia, 2004