

THE WORD



ROLY SUSSEX

The letter X is the 23rd most used letter in English, followed only by J, Q and Z. But it does have a function that isn't shared by other letters in English: abbreviations.

The X in Xmas, standing for "Christ", has been common for centuries. Xt for Christ is even older, and dates from the 11th century.

But X is having a resurgence in some recent specialised usages which are worth investigating. X is not dead. Yet.

In airline parlance, for people on the other side of the desk, "passengers" are "pax". There's a new I60-pax vessel being commissioned next week.

It's usually plural, though you can have "1 pax". By extension in the hospitality industry, it can mean a "guest" at a function. They also have "tix" for tickets. ("Pax" is also Latin for "peace". Let's leave that for another day.)

And for airline personnel, "pax" can even be a verb. If members of an aircrew have to fly to another location where they are due to start a shift, they "pax" to that location, flying in the cabin of a connecting flight like ordinary passengers.

Medical professionals have a wider variety of special words ending in "x", all abbreviations. In reports and communications to other professionals doctors will write:

Cx = complication(s), complaint(s)

Dx = diagnosis (es)

Fx = fracture (s)

Hx = history (ies)

Ix = investigation (s)

Mx = management (s) (eg ways of managing a medical condition)

Px = prognosis (es)

The forms written with "-x" are pronounced as if written out in full. These words all have two or more syllables, and are common in medical practice.

In pharmaceutical prescriptions, where language has to be precise, "Rx" (or "R" with a stroke through the descending diagonal) comes first, and tells the pharmacist what to dispense. This is the only one of these medical-x words that ordinary mortals will normally see.

Doctors are now having to adopt the eMR system of electronic medical records. I don't know whether the software accepts the -x abbreviations, or translates them electronically, or rejects them outright.

Oh, and "Mx" to neutralise the difference between "Mr" and "Ms"? That's an abbreviation of a kind. But that's another can of stories.

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GRAVE CONCERNS

A new book documents the fascinating lives of some of the colourful characters buried in Brisbane cemeteries

GRANTLEE KIEZA

George Witton (in an undated picture) was tried with Breaker Morant in 1901. He is buried in Lutwyche Cemetery.

He called them "scapegoats of an empire" and his book about what he saw as the unjust executions of his mates Breaker Morant and Peter Handcock still touches raw nerves more than 100 years later.

George Witton was tried alongside Morant and Handcock for murdering Boer prisoners in the war in South Africa in 1901. Morant and Handcock faced a firing squad but Witton escaped with a prison sentence and ticket home to Australia.

His ashes are buried in Brisbane's Lutwyche Cemetery near the grave of Whiskey Au Go Go mass murderer John Andrew Stuart and a man who may have killed as many as 300 others, the Gallipoli sniper Billy Sing.

Their intriguing lives and last resting places are documented in the fascinating *Grave Tales* by Brisbane husband-and-wife journalistic team Helen Goltz and Chris Adams.

"Our interest in the graves really has nothing to do with morbid curiosity," Goltz tells *Qweekend*. "It's all about the fascinating lives and histories of the characters involved and the fact their extraordinary stories often lie buried with them."

"The people we've written about were front page news once but over time their stories have often been forgotten and we hope to bring those stories to life again."

These remarkable echoes of time lie among us in our suburbs.

Grave Tales documents the last resting places of notable characters at cemeteries in Toowong, Lutwyche, South Brisbane, Balmoral and the little God's Acre Cemetery next to Archerfield Airport.

Among the graves the authors have uncovered are those of Ellen Thomson

Witton served two years in a British prison and returned to Australia in 1904, embittered

(also recorded as Thompson), the only woman hanged in Queensland, William Ware, the executioner who carried out the sentence, Peter Jackson, the mighty West Indian boxer regarded as one of the world's best at the turn of the 20th century, Joseph Marconi, the man behind Goanna Oil and Walter Porriott, a suspect in the Jack the Ripper murders.

It's a terrific read and just the start, Helen says, of similar volumes planned for around Australia.

Their next will document the seafaring tragedies of the migrant ships that made it all the way from England only to be dashed on the rocks of the coastline of what is now the Great Ocean Road outside Melbourne.

As for Harry Morant and Peter Handcock, they died in the early morning outside a prison in Pretoria. Together with George Witton they were lieutenants in the Bushveldt Carbineers, fighting an ugly war against the Boer guerillas.

Morant, Handcock and Witton admitted to shooting Boer prisoners but claimed they were following orders from the British. Witton, who grew up on a farm at Warrnambool, in Victoria, claimed that he only shot a prisoner who was trying to wrestle his rifle from him.

The three Australians faced several

trials and were finally sent to a prison in Pretoria to await their fate.

Just after 8am on February 26, 1902, they were marched separately into an office to be told of their sentences.

In his book *Scapegoats of the Empire*, Witton recalled that when Morant returned to his cell his face was deathly pale.

"He looked as though his heart had already ceased to beat. I exclaimed, 'Good God Morant, what's the matter?' 'Shot tomorrow morning,' was the reply."

Handcock was next and given the same sentence. When Witton faced the Provost Marshal he was also sentenced to death but was then told that British commander "Lord Kitchener has been pleased to commute your sentence to penal servitude for life."

Witton served two years in a British prison and returned to Australia in 1904, embittered. His book was released in 1907.

Witton settled in Queensland six years later and ran a dairy farm at Biggenden, 100km west of Maryborough.

He died in Melbourne in 1942, suffering a heart attack. His ashes were taken to Lutwyche Cemetery and interred in the grave of his first wife. To what would have been Witton's horror, Lutwyche

Cemetery is located on the corner of Gympie and Kitchener roads.

Grave Tales: Brisbane Volume 1
Helen Goltz and Chris Adams

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gravetales.com.au

