NOMEN EST OMINOUS

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There have been 23 Prime Ministers of Australia since Federation in 1901. Eighteen of their surnames (and twenty of their Christian names) satisfy Dmitri Borgmann's ultimate logological law, the requirement that "all designations...begin with letters in the first half of the English alphabet" ("History Reinterpreted", **Word Ways** February 1987).

What unites Australian Prime Ministers semantically, however, is the appropriateness of their surnames. Other nations can cite the odd example such as Thatcher (a name reflecting her band-aid solutions to social welfare) or Carter (the folksy conveyor of peanuts and bonhomie). But all 23 of Australia's Prime Ministers have names which are a portent of their political character and career.

BARTON, 1901-2 a farmyard or enclosure for poultry (OED)
"Toby Tosspot" transformed a gaggle of states into a Commonwealth and established that enclosure for cacklers, squawkers and gobblers known as the Australian Parliament.

DEAKIN, 1903-10 a homophone of DEACON "a master of his craft, a thoroughly capable man" (OED)
"Affable Al" was erudite, skilled at oratory and a masterly administrator.

REID, 1904-5 a homophone of REED, as in BROKEN REED "one who is too weak to be relied upon" (Macquarie)
When asked what he had done for the working classes, George replied "O, I outed hunger's ogre". Unimpressed by this anagram of his name (George Houstoun Reid), his Labour supporters helped to vote him out of office after eleven months.

WATSON, 1904-5 perhaps a variant of WATSONE, a whetstone (a stimulant, something that sharpens the wits (OED)
The world's first Labor Prime Minister, J.C. was a temporary tonic for working class hopes.

COOK, 1913-4 as in the phrase "chief cook and bottle-washer" "a person who, as well as being responsible for some enterprise, also does much of the work, esp. manual work, for it" (Macquarie)
The ex-coalminer was a hardworking administrator but enjoyed little political support or popularity.

FISHER, 1908-15 probably an abbreviation of KINGFISHER
Remembered for his promise to defend the British Empire "to the last man and the last shilling", he was named after the blue-

winged kookaburra of Northern Australia, sometimes called the barking jackass (Macquarie). His halcyon regime was known as "Andy Fisher's Golden Days".

HUGHES, 1915-25   possibly derived from the obsolete adjective HUGHE 'huge' (OED)

The "Little Digger" was anything but huge, a paradox which may account for his incessant paranoia (common in famous short people) which gave rise to the confession "I trust nobody but Jesus Christ and the Commonwealth Statistician -- and I'm not too sure about the former".

BRUCE, 1923-9   BRUCE (noun or adjective), an Australian (K. Hudson, A Dictionary of the Teenage Revolution and its Aftermath)

Viscount Bruce of Melbourne was the linguist father of all those expatriate Bruces who haunted the bed-sits of London in the 1960s and 1970s. He retired to England and became an eponym for ockerish behaviour later exemplified by Barry McKenzie and Sir Les Patterson. Bruce once admitted "My chief advantage as a politician was I didn't give a damn".

SCULLIN, 1929-32   possibly a variant of SCULLEN or SCULLION "Cook's boy, washer to dishes and pots" (Concise Oxford Dictionary)

Scullin was treated with disdain by the dominant Senate during his term of office as he pottered about in the soup kitchen of Depression economics.

LYONS, 1932-9   an obsolete form of LIONS (OED); LION "a man of great strength, courage, etc." (pl.) "a sight worth seeing" (Concise Oxford dictionary)

"Honest Joe" impressed by his political tenacity, his mane of hair, and his prodigious progeny (eleven cubs in the pride). Joseph Aloysius Lyons means "Yah increases, famous warrior, leonine offspring".

PAGE, 1939   "Man or boy employed to go on errands, etc." episode that might fill page in written history (Concise Oxford Dictionary)

Page's parents tried to make up for this nondescript surname by giving their son the moniker Earle Christmas Grafton. He fulfilled his first definition by becoming a country doctor, and his second by acting as a caretaker Prime Minister for 19 days.

MENZIES, 1939-41, 1949-66   from the obsolete verb MENZIE 'to maim' (OED)

"Ming the Merciless" lived up to his name by decimating the opposition, political rivals and the odd friend by bloody-minded shrewdness and ambition.

FADDEN, 1941   familiarly known as FAD, "a weak or transient hobby, crotchet or craze" (Chambers)

"Big Artie" was Prime Minister for 40 days and 40 nights -- but to his supporters in the United Australia Party he was merely a passing fad.

CURTIN, 1941-5   a variant of CURTAIN (OED); "a protective barrier in general as the fire of many guns directed along a certain line to prevent the passage of an enemy" (Chambers)

Nicknamed "Hellfire Jack", he is remembered for his defence of the nation against the Japanese threat to the Darwin Line during World War II.

FORDE, 1945   a homonym of FORD "a place where water may be crossed by wading" (Chambers)

For 7 shallow days Forde served as a transition from the braes of Curtin to the banks of Chifley.

CHIFLEY, 1945-9   an anagram of CHIEFLY "pertaining to a leader" (OED)

"Chif" switched from driving locomotives to steering the nation and swapped a smokestack for a pipe. CHIF is an obsolete word for a chief, and LEY is a meadow (which Canberra was, back in 1945).

HOLT, 1966-7   "an otter's lair" (Concise Oxford Dictionary)

Could this etymological coincidence explain Harold's aquatic diving habit which led to his mysterious disappearance in the Portsea surf in 1967? Like all good otters, he lived in a Lodge (the Prime Minister's official residence), and he was known to be a bit of a "lair"--"a flashily dressed young man of brash and vulgar behaviour" (Macquarie).

McEWEN, 1967-8   EWEN, a conjectured Old English plural of EWE

"Black Jack" was caretaker Prime Minister after Holt the Prestidigitator. The Country Party Leader was aptly named "The Son of Female Sheep".

GORTON, 1968-71   affectionately known as GORT "a whirlpool" (OED)

His Liberal supporters found themselves in a maelstrom when Gort voted himself out of office, then campaigned for the opposition.

McMAHON, 1971-2   MAHON, another form of MAHOUND "the 'false' prophet Mahommed" (OED)

The "Son of Mahound" was venerated for his economic wisdom but lost credibility when, in a malapropism on the hustings, he advised his Liberal followers to vote for the Labor Party.

WHITLAM, 1972-5   WHIT, an old form of WHITE; LAM, an old form of LAMB (OED)

Gough's naive idealism and fleece of white hair focalised the aspirations of yippees, yuppies and two-uppies (swing voters). In November 1975 Whitlam was shorn, crutched and dagged by a Crazy Grazier and his Vice-Regal rouseabout. His reforms were later sacrificed on the altar of Realpolitik, and his dictum "Maintain the rage" was transliterated to "Maintain the wage".

FRASER, 1975-83   known to some as FRASE "to make a grating noise" (OED)

Famous for his grating rhetoric and monotonous physiognomy ("The stoniest face west of Easter Island"), the "Crazy Grazier" was

once mugged and debagged in Tennessee. He gave us the immortal quote "I wish I'd never been to bloody Memphis".

HAWKE, 1983–   a homonym of HAWK "a diurnal bird of prey",
                         "a politician who favours aggressive policies",
                         "a noisy effort to clear the throat of phlegm"
                         (Macquarie)

Fond of preying on fatuous reporters, Hawke speaks with a nasal twang in an effort to expectorate his phlegmatic opposition. His aggressive stance is typified by the confession "I find a fence an uncomfortable place to squat my bottom".

The nominal successor to Hawke (his opponent in the 1985 elections) is the strutting blue-necked Andrew PEACOCK. The logological candidates, however, are the first-halfers KEATING and HOWARD.