

# WORD OF THE MONTH SEPT 2012

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## Pot and Parma

– *noun*: A hotel or club meal of chicken or veal parmigiana served with a beer.

Forthcoming edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*

### THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

In 2007 the Melbourne *Herald Sun* included a report about the disappearance of the young British girl Madeleine McCann while holidaying in Portugal with her parents and twin siblings. In this Australian report of an overseas event we have one of the earliest records of the Australian term **pot and parma**:

If the McCanns were a couple of simpletons who'd left three kids on their own so they could go down the pub for a **pot and parma**, the press would've shredded them for their selfish conduct and demanded the twins be removed from their care.

The use of the term **pot and parma** in this article is quite deliberate. According to the article, if the parents of Madeleine had been not wealthy and well-educated, but working-class patrons of a local pub, then the media would have been severely critical of their apparent neglect. In this reporter's assessment of the media response to the McCann incident, the important point about the meal described as **pot and parma** is that it is something you would buy at an ordinary, probably working-class, pub or club, and that it is in no way to be associated with the cuisine of a classy resort or flash hotel. Indeed, nearly all the evidence that we have gathered at the Australian National Dictionary Centre for this term points to its use within the context of ordinary pubs and clubs.

So what is **pot and parma**? A **pot and parma** is a meal consisting of two main elements. The **parma** part is veal or chicken coated in breadcrumbs and fried, and topped with a tomato-based sauce and melted cheese. This is often served with chips and salad. The **pot** refers to a glass of beer, which accompanies the food.

The word **parma** is an abbreviation of *parmigiana*, an Italian word that designates a dish cooked with *parmesan* cheese. The meat or vegetable thus cooked is often indicated as the first element in a compound: *eggplant parmigiana*, *veal parmigiana*, and so on. The original southern Italian dish typically consisted of slices of eggplant or meat, shallow-fried, and topped with cheese and tomato sauce, and then baked. In Australia, the connection with the parmesan topping often seems to be lost in the local variants of the sauce, as illustrated by this advertisement on the Kinglake Pub website:

#### Nightly Specials

Monday (all day) – Pot and Parma \$13.90

Choose from 6 different chicken parmas

Traditional – Napoli Sauce, Ham & Cheese

Mexican – Capsicum, Onion & Mild Chilli Sauce

Aussie – Egg, Bacon & Cheese

Una Puna – Mushroom Sauce & Cheese

Greek – Spanish Onion, Feta & Olives

Hawaiian – Ham, Cheese & Pineapple

(All served with chips and salad)

*continued ...*

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The word **pot** has long been used in English to refer to a vessel used for drinking an alcoholic beverage such as beer, and such vessels are often the tankard kind. In Australia, however, **pot** has come to be used to describe a medium-sized glass of beer (usually 285ml). Evidence for this Australian term goes back to the late nineteenth century. Western Australia uses the term **pot** to refer to a very large 575ml glass of beer, rather than the 285ml size. It is especially in Victoria and Queensland that **pot** is used for the 285ml glass of beer. The equivalent of the Victorian and Queensland **pot** in New South Wales was the *middy*, and South Australia often uses the *schooner* for this size.

This regional distribution of the term **pot** gives the hint that the phrase **pot and parma** is likely to be regional too. Indeed, much of the evidence for **pot and parma** comes from Victorian sources, particularly from Melbourne, where it is part of the culinary repertoire of pubs and clubs: 'The Rose is a classic **pot-and-parma** pub, surrounded by terrace houses in once working class, but now highly desirable, Fitzroy.' (*The Age*). It is often associated with cheap dining and weekly specials: 'Years later, having shrugged off the tyranny of student poverty and the \$10 **pot and parma** deal, I resolved to make up for lost time.' (*The Age*)

The presence of **pot and parma** in a pub in once working class but now trendy Fitzroy suggests that **pot and parma** also has its trendy devotees, and that it is certainly a step up from the older pie and beer. Whatever the case, we are certainly claiming **pot and parma** as an Australianism, and it will appear in the new edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.