

Next meeting
20 February

Treasures from the World's Great Libraries—the curator's tour

As advertised in January, the first meeting of the society for 2002 is on **20 February** (a week earlier than usual), and is a curator's tour of the Treasures from the World's Great Libraries exhibition.

Nibbles, drinks and chat will be on offer as usual between 6 p.m and 6.30 p.m. Then, starting promptly at 6.30 p.m., Margaret Dent, exhibition curator, will give an introductory talk before the tour moves into the gallery.

Places at this meeting are now fully booked. If you are attending, please note that the National Library Bookshop is staying open until 6.30 p.m. so you may buy the attractive catalogue if you wish. Why not arrive before 6 p.m. and browse? But remember—the meeting will begin at 6.30 sharp, to allow enough time both to hear Margaret and to tour the exhibition gallery.

An iterative process: the new print register

I have clear memories of my first encounter with the Canberra Society of Editors; the feeling of dismay at the first meeting when, after drinks and introductions, members repaired dutifully to the rows of seats to listen to an account of the development of the Antarctic Dictionary. 'How arcane', I thought, 'this will surely be really dry and dull—etymology just isn't my bag.' Forty minutes later, following a succinct account of how new words develop in a 'closed' society, a tough analysis of group dynamics and a rollicking demonstration of some of the problems posed by gender differences, I joined in the enthusiastic applause for the speaker.

A few years down the track, when asked to take over the task of compiling the next print version of the freelance register, I thought, 'Well, why not—it's just a series of administrative tasks—yes, of course I'll do it'.

Consultation with the previous editor, Sylvia Marchant, elicited a disc with the text of the previous edition, and Leonore Hardy, who had distributed the past few editions, provided advice about writing to everyone in the previous edition to see if they wished to be

included. 'A hand-written letter is nicer, I always think', said Leonore, and she offered to write some of them. Niceness gave way to a mail merge letter to them all. A final check of these before despatch produced a nagging memory of a funeral notice for one of them, and a belated phone call to Pete Martensz for a list of current financial members reduced the mail merge list quite a bit, and so the process continued.

Responses began to trickle in, including some polite letters from older members saying they had retired now, so no longer wished to be included. Quite a few people phoned asking what an entry looked like; they had not seen the previous edition, now out of print, so I referred them to the society's web page and posted copies to those without computers. One member with a very successful business told me that an entry in the register brought in much more work than an entry in the yellow pages.

Talking to members who phoned was interesting; some were amazingly diffident, modest about their achievements, not sure if they should really submit an entry. Then came a hitch—another diffident

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An iterative process: the new print register.....cont'd

one, twenty years writing and editing experience in the public service, now running his own small editing business. 'Well, one member said an entry brought in much more work than an entry in the yellow pages; why don't you consider it?' I said encouragingly. 'I'm not actually a full member though ...' 'I think you should apply for full membership, and make sure you write up your experience properly,' I admonished.

Reading the entries was a bit like reading applicants' résumés before job interviews. Often, the older, more experienced editors were brief and to the point, their entries quite short. A few entries were as if their writers had just left school, and included information like 'Head Prefect and Captain of Boats at St Efrida's, 1999'. But overall, there was an amazing wealth of experience and talent. Quite a few linguists, a lot of scientists, an amazing range of work experience, a very high level of academic achievement, and extensive computer skills, although one person, with brutal honesty, described his computer skills as 'Miniscule, but trying hard'.

By April, we had only 29 entries—not enough to make publication worthwhile. A number of members said there did not seem much point in an entry in a print version as they had done quite nicely through the web, thank you. Although unstated, it seemed that some people might not wish to pay \$40 for a print entry when they could have a web entry for free. The president, Lee Kirwan, seeking to end this anomaly, took an executive decision and declared that the print register would include all those on the web as well as those who had submitted entries for the print version, and the \$40 fee would be abolished.

The response of the treasurer, whose task was to return the cheques, is not recorded. The deadline for entries was extended.

So, as equity prevailed, letters were now sent to those on the web page but not on the print register. Notes began to come in from people who had changed their address, or phone number, or server. Other people asked crossly what had happened; when could we expect to see the register. I chased up people who had not responded to letters, and started thinking about the index. A few senior members of the society had been very specific about their index requirements. Others had been rather greedy, wanting far more, but this was because I had forgotten to set a limit when writing to them. Things began to drift a bit, and so the president declared an absolute deadline of 31 August.

By early September there were 61 entries. Surprisingly, a couple of people who had been very active in the society had not put in an entry. More emails. A few last minute phone calls. I started doing the index—back of book, because some people had such specific requirements. This took longer than expected. Finally, everything was just about ready to go to the new president, Ed Highley, for layout. Then came a phone call from a relatively new member asking to be included. I thought despondently about the pagination for the index, but said yes. Then a phone call from the man I had encouraged to apply for full membership, saying was it too late to be included in the register—he had just been made a full member. Now it was October. Another phone call ... and this time I said no, the deadline was the end of August and I could not take any more entries.

An iterative process: the new print register....cont'd

I sent the text to the new president, and copies went to the web minder, Peter Judge. Surely the end was in sight and we were nearly finished. The formatted version came back to me, and I started sending off individual copies to everyone for proofing. Emails came from Peter—these people no longer wished to be included; this person was no longer a financial member and should be deleted. Three people whose entries were on the web had not been included. Emails sent out to some entrants were returned, unable to be delivered, because their email address had changed. Other editors had had a change of heart and wanted substantive revisions. I became very despondent. The new president became impatient.

Finally, all the corrections were made, and the marked-up formatted version went back to the president. He was remarkably civil and made all the changes, sending it back for a final proof read. We sent it to another member, Louise Oliver, for an independent proof read.

The new edition of the freelance register will go to the printer very soon. Its preparation has been a long process but an interesting one. It has helped me to appreciate the work that Peter Judge does almost every day on the web site.

Margaret Pender

Packet warnings

Noted on a packet of Strepsils: 'Do not use if foil seal is broken'. Likewise, on a packet of Panadol tablets: 'Use only if all seals are intact'.

But you have to break these seals to use the contents. Could the warnings be better worded?

The President's column

As we drove by the front of the National Library at 7.30 a.m. on holiday Monday 28 January, on our way to take our incredibly personable and intelligent poodle Jack (his real name is Jacques, but we do not wish to appear pretentious) for a walk around the enchanting Lake Burley Griffin, we were astonished to see that there was already a long queue of people waiting to get into 'Treasures from the World's Great Libraries'. What a blockbuster this has been for the Library ... and how lucky are we to be having our own special viewing on 20 February? Every now and then, some misguided futurologist predicts the imminent demise of the book. The evidence against this seems plain for all to see, but perhaps just to be sure we should think about workshopping something along the lines of 'signs of moribundity of the book'.

I am pleased to report that it seems likely that the letter on thesis editing (see January 2002 newsletter) sent by the Council of Australian Societies of Editors (CASE) to the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) will be considered by the AVCC at its meeting in March. We await, with enlightened self-interest, the Committee's response. Coincidentally, at least some members of the society will have received a long email message from an agency called HDRhorizons, offering to broker work for them in thesis editing. I imagine that CASE might develop some opinion on the proposed service in due course but, in the interim, individual members will, if they wish, respond to it as they see fit. The important thing to keep in mind is that CASE is not against thesis editing, but rather is seeking to ensure that everyone involved

knows and agrees to a set of guidelines for ethical practice.

The fairly-long-awaited seventh edition of the freelance register is ready for printing. The new edition reflects yet again the galaxy of editorial talent to be found in our society—and keep in mind that it lists only the freelance members, and not all of *them*. The index is interesting too. The big entries in terms of type of publication are for reports and annual reports. Hardly surprising I suppose, for a city that could justifiably be renamed Reportopolis. The big subject entries in the index include environment, plain English, health and welfare, communication and communications, and really do seem to reflect contemporary economic and social issues. These things we hope to promote through some activities associated with the publication of the seventh edition.

For a couple of reasons, we've decided to change the title of the new edition. Previous editions were called *Freelance Editors in Canberra*. The new edition is entitled *Canberra Society of Editors' Register of Freelance Editors*. We've done this for two reasons. First, when we talk about the document, we invariably refer to it as the 'freelance register', so that term should surely be in the title. Second, 9 (i.e. 15 per cent) of the 58 editors in the register are not 'in Canberra'.

Also imminent is publication of the new edition of the Australian Government's *Style Manual*, which has been being laboured on by Loma Snooks and her team for some years. The word is that it will be appearing towards the end of

cont'd on page 4

President's column

...cont'd

this month. The Canberra Chapter of the Australian Graphic Design Association has asked if our members would like to join its members at a dinner to celebrate the great event, at which Loma (editor extraordinaire) and David Whitbread (graphic designer extraordinaire, and a member of the Snooks team) would speak. We said 'Yes, of course'. The dinner will be held on 29 May, the date of our normal May meeting. More details as they come to hand.

I mentioned in January that the accreditation working group of CASE would be beginning its labours this year and that we should try to help it overcome the high barriers it faces. Maybe one thing we could do is point up the high real or potential cost of errors, as against the much smaller cost of preventing them. As an example of this, I mention that on Adelaide Avenue there are two humungous road signs containing, among other things, directions to 'Calthorpes' House'. Let's assume for the moment that I am correct in thinking that this should more correctly be 'Calthorpe's House'. A friend of mine in the business tells me that such signs cost about \$5000 each to make and install, surely reason enough to check that they say things correctly.

I'm glad that the silly season is just about over and that the stand-in (surely they must be) headline writers for the local organ will return to their normal duties. A recent motoring column had a headline about a 'salivating sports car' [sic]. Good grief! Oil leaks we can deal with, but a car that slobbers?

Ed Highley

National notes

At least three surveys of interest to editors were run during 2001: the Society of Editors (NSW), Inc., surveyed its members; there was a survey at the joint national conference of editors and indexers in April; and in July, our own society surveyed our members' attitudes to several issues to be discussed by CASE. The NSW survey results were published in that society's newsletter, *Blue Pencil*, in November 2001; the conference survey results can be read on our web site, <www.editorscanberra.org>, and our Canberra society survey results were published in the August 2001 issue of the newsletter.

The NSW survey results come from approximately one-third (92) of the society's members. According to the newsletter report, the responders 'provide a reasonably good representative sample of the membership'. The conference survey received 49 responses from editors, and they were from all the states and territories. The Canberra survey collected 23 responses from about 160 members.

Comparing work characteristics, in the NSW survey 92% of responders work as editors and 72% work freelance (slightly more than in the society as a whole). Of the responders, 53% work in book publishing. For the conference survey, all responders were editors and 66% were freelance.

In training and experience, according to its 2001 database, 48% of the NSW Society editors have over 10 years of experience, and 21% have 6 to 10 years of experience. Very similar results were found in the conference survey: 48% and 23%, respectively. Training for NSW editors has been in-house (64%) and otherwise (64%), according to their survey results. Also, 29% of them have a degree or diploma in editing and publishing, and 32% trained on

the job. In the conference survey, 66% of responders had taken specialist professional courses, and all but one responder had at least a first degree in something.

Hourly rates vary but appear fairly comparable. In NSW, proofreading cost \$20 to \$80 at the time of survey, with 83% of responders charging \$20 to \$49, while in the conference survey, proofreading cost \$33 per hour on average. In NSW, the range of rates for copy-editing was \$12.50 to \$80, with 77% of responders charging \$30 to \$59, and for substantive editing the range was \$12.50 to \$200, with 74% of responders charging \$30 to \$69. The conference survey average for all editing tasks was \$49 per hour, ranging from \$15 to \$130. For project management, the NSW survey responders charged \$40 to \$200 per hour, while the conference survey average was \$58 per hour.

Should editors develop an accreditation program? NSW responders appear to say 'No'—fewer than 10% of responders give this matter high priority and 17% rank it as 'unacceptable', although it also seems that 78 of the 92 responders are not opposed to accreditation. The Canberra survey response was 78% in favour of a system of accreditation. In the conference survey, 14% (7/49) commented on the importance of editors' societies developing accreditation.

Participation on CASE is also poorly supported by NSW survey respondents: fewer than 10% give it high priority for their society, and there is 'a small but significant core of opposition'. The Canberra survey, on the other hand, took it as read that our society would participate in CASE, and 86% of our responders agreed that CASE needs continuity of 'memory', in the form of either a paid coordinator or long-standing membership.

Ann Milligan

By the way...

'Oh, for an editor! There are many times when I read my newspaper, or the instructions on a form, or a textbook, or even a pamphlet from my bank or insurance company, and wish someone had bothered to edit what I read. Mind you, if they had, I wouldn't have had as many giggles as I get out of trying to make sense of public documents. Here are just a few examples.

First, an old one adapted from an advertisement in *The Canberra Times*, and quoted in my book *Effective Writing: Plain English at Work*:

'Account Statement' means a printed statement setting out the essential details of those transactions effected on a cardholder's account during the period to which the statement is expressed to refer and of which transactions the Company is aware, together with such adjustments (if any) as the Company believes are necessary to properly reflect transactions effected during a period prior to that to which the statement is expressed to refer and which were omitted or improperly recorded on the statement for that prior period and such further entries as the Company may pursuant to these Rules be authorised to make.

One sentence—99 words—grammatically correct—totally unreadable. Why? It's too long for one sentence, it uses too many passive verbs, there are many qualifications of the initial statement, and it uses unfamiliar words. Not very helpful as an 'explanation' to credit-card holders.

Another example came to light just recently in the emailed *Weekly update from the Plain English Campaign* (UK) <pecampaign@aol.com> and I am indebted to the folk there

(remember George Maher and John Wild and their wonderful double act at the July 2000 meeting?) for permission to quote this, which came originally from the Letters to the Editor page of *The Times*, London:

Having recently considered applying for a new credit card, I felt I should do the right thing and reacquaint myself with the Terms and Conditions under the Credit Act 1974. Where better to start than with the General Notes?

'18.1 Even if you have no right to cancel this Agreement under the Consumer Credit Act 1974, you will have the same right to cancel this Agreement, and the same responsibilities if you cancel this agreement, as if you have a right to cancel this Agreement under the Act.'

The comment from the writer of the letter is 'Is it just me?' and well might he ask!

Finally, in my capacity as a JP, I was asked to witness a statutory declaration the other day by a young couple from one of the embassies in Canberra. They arrived with the document already signed and I had to ask them to sign it again because the instruction in the document is 'Sign here before a Justice of the Peace'. Well, that's what they thought they had done—signed it 'before' turning up at my house to have it witnessed. But 'before' also means 'in the presence of', doesn't it! Nasty trap for people with English as a second language.

Moral: Write or edit down to shorter, understandable sentences that use unambiguous words.

Elizabeth Murphy

New members

This month the society welcomes **Denise Talent** as a new associate member, and the following six people as new full members.

Jodi Hughes is an in-house editor who has worked on reports, Internet content and guidelines, particularly about health and aged care.

Susan Hampton is a freelance writer and literary editor who has written seven books, taught university writing courses, been writer-in-residence at universities in Canberra, Wagga, Darwin and Armidale, and edited several books including *Stravinsky's Lunch* by Drusilla Modjeska.

Aedeen Cremin is a freelance heritage consultant who has been the coordinating editor of, and a contributor to, eight books on aspects of Australian history and pre-history.

Ronald Hohenhaus is self-employed, but has previously edited *Wildlife Australia* magazine among other publications, and a web site.

Liz Crowley is a freelance editor and former public servant who has edited numerous government publications.

Lindy Shultz is a full-time editor and designer at ANU where she produces an academic journal, information bulletins and annual reports and looks after a web site.

Answers to quiz (see page 8)

1. A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable compiled by E.C. Brewer.
2. 90 cm.
3. eXtensible Markup Language.
4. (a) 10¹²; (b) 10¹⁷.
5. Republic of China. Formosa.

Nautical niceties

A list of words and phrases with their origins, that Shauna Ellis (of the Tasmanian society) found in the Tasmanian Fishing News.

Slush fund

A slushy slurry of fat was obtained by boiling or scraping the empty salted meat storage barrels. This stuff was often sold ashore by the ship's cook for the benefit of himself or the crew. The money so derived became known as a slush fund.

Footloose

The bottom portion of a sail is called the foot. If it is not secure, it is footloose and dances randomly in the wind.

No room to swing a cat

The entire ship's company was required to witness flogging at close hand. The crew might crowd around so that the Bosun's Mate might not have enough room to swing his cat-o'-nine-tails.

Garbled

Garbling was the prohibited practice of mixing rubbish with the cargo. A distorted, mixed up message was said to be garbled.

At loggerheads

An iron ball attached to a long handle was a loggerhead. When heated it was used to seal the pitch in deck seams. It was sometimes a handy weapon for quarrelling crewmen.

Gone by the board

Anything seen to have gone overboard or spotted floating past the ship (by the board) was considered lost at sea.

No great shakes

When casks became empty they were 'shaken' (taken apart) so the pieces, called shakes, could be

stored in a small space. Shakes had very little value.

Reproduced, with permission, from Catchword, the newsletter of the Society of Editors (Tasmania) Inc., December 2001–January 2002. Thank you also to Shauna Ellis, and to Mike Stevens of Tasmanian Fishing News.

A job

An editor is needed to produce a newsletter, an annual report, brochures and other publications for Australian Women in Agriculture Ltd (AWiA).

The job commences 1 April 2002, and applications close 28 February. For complete position description, terms of contract and selection criteria, contact Lou Rankin, Administration Manager rankins@winshop.com.au, phone (07) 5533 3537. This position is based in Queensland but the successful applicant can work remotely.

Time to smile

Voice recognition or otherwise

Michael Cook, his eagle eye ever on the press, sent in the following item from *The Weekend Australian* (4–5 August): 'Yesterday *The Canberra Times* ran this self-explanatory apology for a phrase in its Tuesday editorial. "Most One Nation supporters are 'average Australians', not 'average astray aliens' as the editorial on Tuesday quoted the Prime Minister as saying. The error began with voice-recognition technology and was missed by the author and the sub-editors.'"

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News and notes

Newsletter matters

We are grateful to new member Lindy Shultz for taking on the layout and production of the newsletter, starting with this issue. Many thanks to Pete Martensz who has stepped out of the production editor's shoes after two years. The newsletter's former editor, Ed Highley, and its current editors are indebted to Pete for his patience, care, persistence and good humour.

Style news

Many of our members receive the free newsletters *Australian Style* (from Dictionary Research Centre) and *Stylewise* ('communicating Commonwealth style and best practice'). However, new members don't automatically go on the mailing lists to receive them.

To add your name (or the name of a friend) to the mailing list for both *Australian Style* and *Stylewise* (hard copy), send your request and mailing address to:

Australian Style,
c/- The Editor, *Stylewise*,
Department of Communication,
Information Technology and the
Arts,
GPO Box 1920, Canberra ACT
2601; OR
email the mailing address to:
<subscribe.stylewise@finance.gov.au>.

The electronic version of *Stylewise* is not available at present, because the group that produce it are in the middle of changing departments. They hope it will be up on the web again relatively soon. As yet there is no electronic version of *Australian Style*.

Maureen Wright

Literary events

from the ACT Writers Centre

Publishing Literary Lunch

13 February, 1–2 p.m.,
Self-Publishing Literary Lunch with Stephen Matthews of Ginninderra Press. Join Stephen for a one-hour lunchtime talk about his experiences and find out more about why people self-publish, and the distribution, storage and costs involved. Bookings are essential for catering purposes. Call 6262 9191. Cost: \$6 for members or \$10 for non-members, for the talk plus gourmet sandwiches and tea or coffee.

Publishing Talk and Printery Tour

23 February, 1–5 p.m.,
Self-Publishing Talk and Tour at Copytalk Printery, 34 Yass Rd, Queanbeyan. Are you thinking about self-publishing your autobiography, your family history or your collection of poetry? Knowing some basic information before you begin will save you many hours and dollars. Many examples will be shown and there will be time to ask questions of Copytalk's Ted and Lana, and the opportunity to look at both digital printing and off-set printing processes. Handout sheets will be given to participants, about International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) and how to obtain barcodes. Cost: \$33 members and concessions; \$77 non-members. Bookings essential on 6262 9191.

Training news

Project Management course reminder

A project management course, to be run by Karen Deighton-Smith on Saturday 23 March, will give members and others a great opportunity to improve or update their project management skills at an exceptionally good price. Karen has worked for a number of

publishers, overseeing the production of hundreds of books. She is currently managing projects for the National Archives of Australia.

The course will run from 9.30 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. at the Canberra Business Centre, Bradfield St, Downer. Please fill out and post the form (on this page) promptly if you want to attend. Karen welcomes questions about problems you have encountered. □

Project Management course Saturday 23 March, 9.30 a.m.–1.00 p.m.

I wish to attend this course.

Name

Phone Email

Address

.....

Fee enclosed (tick box):

Member of the Canberra Society of Editors \$50

Non-member \$90

Make cheques payable to: **The Canberra Society of Editors**

Mail this form and your cheque to: Ms Cathy Nicoll (Training),
Canberra Society of Editors, PO Box 3222, Manuka ACT 2603.

Society history

In May 1992, the Canberra Society of Editors had its inaugural meeting. Its first annual general meeting was held on 30 September 1992 and reported in newsletter volume 2, number 1, October 1992. By then, the society had more than 80 members, and 24 members had expressed interest in being in the first freelance register.

□ The newsletter name *The Canberra Editor* was chosen at that September meeting, scoring 31 votes compared to 16 votes for 'Canberra Editor', and nine votes

each for 'Capital Letter', 'Capital Editor', 'Edact' and 'Superscript'.

For 1992–93, the committee consisted of Loma Snooks, president, Nigel Harding, vice-president, Sandy Paine, treasurer, Maureen Wright, secretary, Roger Green, newsletter editor, Gregg Berry and Peter Judge, committee members.

Peter Judge compiled the first freelance register, 300 copies of which were being distributed by April–May 1993.

Quick quiz

1. Which reference book was first published in 1870 by Cassell?
2. How long are the petals of the world's largest orchid flower: (a) 30 cm, (b) 90 cm, or (c) 10 cm?
3. What does XML stand for, in the context of the Internet?
4. What magnitudes are represented by these prefixes: (a) pico, (b) tera?
5. What is the official name of Taiwan? What was it formerly called?

Advertisement

Dates for your diary

13 February 2002

Self-publishing literary lunch
(see p. 7)

20 February 2002

The Society's February meeting

23 February 2002

Self-publishing printery tour
(see p. 7)

23 March 2002

Project management course

27 March 2002

The Society's March meeting

29 March 2002

Good Friday

29 May 2002

Dinner to celebrate the new style manual

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The editors welcome contributions, by
1 March 2002

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