

# Blue Pencil

Newsletter of  
the Society  
of Editors  
(NSW)

Patron: Hazel Hawke

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APRIL 1995

## MY FIRST MACQUARIE

I'm no lexicographer but I know what I like in a dictionary just as surely as the common man knows what he likes in art (here I'm allowing 'man' to be genderless since the 'common woman' seems to carry the wrong sort of baggage). All I demand of lexicographers is that they follow their avocation. A dictionary should be authoritative, and it should maintain standards. As a rule its pronunciation, spelling and usage will agree with mine; doubtless there will be some exceptions, but that's okay, an occasional disagreement is refreshing. One pronunciation and one spelling only will get the editors' nod. Flagrant dereliction in meaning, falling off from the straight and narrow path, will be denounced as unworthy of a great language. *Disinterested* for *uninterested*, *alternate* for *alternative*, *mitigate* for *militate*, *convince* for *persuade*, all, all will be unfrocked. *Hopefully* will burn at the stake. It is part of the function of a dictionary to arbitrate between right and wrong at the linguistic level, and to correct what needs correction. Not a tall order as orders go.

Dream on!

Dream on, yesterday's woman, the woman I was before I attended *The Macquarie Dictionary's* first open workshop, a discussion meeting held in February last at Macquarie University, as part of the preparations for a third edition.

Now I understand that arbitrary authority is more a dream of dictionary users than an ambition of dictionary makers. As soon as I saw Susan Butler, Arthur Delbridge, Alex Mitchell, and the rest of that team of fresh-faced enthusiasts -- there is something in the study of language that keeps its devotees marvellously young -- I knew they would not go to the barricades in the defence of the Queen's English. To hold out for standards of purity and correctness would be, in Pam Peters's words, 'to rather desert the linguistic liberal position'; while Sue Butler stated simply that 'the dictionary should be a complete and scientific account of the language at any particular moment -- the only test of inclusion is currency'. These lexicographers are like bird-watchers, welcoming every newcomer, every seasonal innovation or newfangled variant that sojourns upon our continent.

In fact, my change of heart (not yet a change of sides, but a definite softening of attitude towards the descriptive dictionary) had commenced before I attended the

workshop. I can trace its onset to reading something of the history of English dictionary-making.

In the eighteenth century, an Age of Reason par excellence, many educated people had felt the need of *A dictionary for fixing the English language, as the French and Italian*. In 1746 Dr Samuel Johnson undertook such a project, and the first edition of his great dictionary was published in 1755. But it did not bring the wished-for certainty. A true child of his time, Dr Johnson had been sympathetic to the desire of his age to 'fix' the language, but as he went ahead he realised such a task was an impossibility: *language is the work of man, of a being from whom permanence and stability cannot be derived*; at most, he felt that he might curb *the lust for innovation*.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (*Macropaedia*, article on 'Dictionary') pours cold water on the very idea that a dictionary should be authoritative, while observing that the word itself is ambiguous. *It can refer to the quality of scholarship, the*

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## Next Meeting

Tuesday 4 April, 6.30 pm

Rooftop Function Centre, Australian Museum

Rex Finch

***New Publishing Technologies***

More details on page 3

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*employment of the soundest information available, or it can describe a prescriptive demand for compliance to particular standards. The first demand can and should be met but not the second. Many people ask for arbitrary decisions in usage choices, but most linguists feel that, when a dictionary goes beyond its function of recording accurate information on the state of the language, it becomes a bad dictionary.*

*The Macquarie Dictionary*, published in its first edition in 1981, grew from the vision of Professors Alex Mitchell and Arthur Delbridge. Mitchell had done his doctoral studies in England under Daniel Jones, the notable author of *An English Pronouncing Dictionary*, which remained the standard for decades. Recalling Jones's book, many contemporary Australians might have wondered if the Macquarie would likewise set out to be prescriptive. Dr Jones had based his 'Received Pronunciation' upon *what is most usually heard in everyday speech in the families of Southern English persons whose men-folk have been educated at the great public boarding schools*; would the Macquarie be a Son of Dan ('You thrilled to the original; now, read the sequel...')? It would not. Its philosophical parents were a survey Mitchell and Delbridge had published in the sixties, *Speech of Australian adolescents*; and a series of radio talks that Mitchell, then a new professor at Sydney, had broadcast more than 20 years earlier. Throughout his talks, Mitchell urged that 'Australian English' was deserving of 'respectful consideration', that 'development does not necessarily imply degeneration', and he questioned the existence of 'accepted standards'. His views, regularly reported in the ABC program guide, aroused great opposition at the time, but eventually they exercised enormous

influence.

The third edition of the Macquarie, due to be published in late 1997, will follow the same principles as its predecessors while availing itself of ever more comprehensive written and spoken materials. It will be based, like its predecessors, upon counting heads -- on consulting extensive databases, Australian and international, of fiction and non-fiction, of newspapers, letters and other ephemera; and on surveys intended to cover the broad span of spoken usage. How could it be otherwise? In every other facet of our Australian society we cling to democracy, we welcome diversity and we strive to accommodate pluralism; are we to draw the line when it comes to language, insisting upon one 'Received Pronunciation', etc? Upon whose usage would it be based? Upon *what is most usually heard in everyday speech in the families of South-Eastern Australian persons whose men-folk have been educated at the Great Public Schools*? Get lost! Upon your usage, then? Or mine? Thanks, but no thanks.

If the great Dr Johnson had been given the opportunity to use the kind of resources now available to the Macquarie team, he would, I think, have accepted with relief and gratitude; and it's very likely he would have relied on them in similar fashion, to produce as exact a portrait as could be managed, warts and all, of the language of his age.

When my children and their friends were small I opened my heart and house to a degree of untidiness, of turmoil and clutter verging on chaos; only in my linen cupboard did I insist upon neatness, on 'a place for everything and everything in its place', not for any logical reason but because I needed to delight in some space, however small and contained, where stability

and order prevailed. For many people I suspect that language is their linen cupboard; let change and diversity reign everywhere else, so long as language is fixed, so long as here they can point to rules that should and must be kept.

I can sympathize, for I feel the same discomfort, the same pull in two directions, a dishonoured loyalty to some now-indefensible standard. I wouldn't be surprised if some of the Macquarie team felt it too. Heigh-ho. As Joh Bjelke-Peterson said, 'You can't walk along a barbed wire fence with a foot either side' (1988; cited Macquarie, 3rd ed.), or not without experiencing a little pain.

© Josephine Bastian

## TO TALK OF . . .

Where's the dictionary?

I regret to report I have an example of what happens when an editor assumes his or her knowledge to be perfect.

A typesetter asked me why an editor in a major publishing house would meticulously amend 'stationary' to 'stationery' throughout a large typescript without first checking the word. The appropriate word in the text is 'stationary'. The typesetter ignored the editor's incorrect letter placement of 'a' to 'e'. How does such an error happen, why, and how often?

On the other side of the typescript preparation, before the editor's reading, is the writer and/or keyboard operator. I report another regret. In one typescript I have worked on, the following words were misspelt, thus making nonsense of the text:

- \* 'affected' for 'effected'; 'affect' for 'effect'
- \* 'principal' for 'principle'
- \* 'its' for 'it's'.

You might say fair enough, these are regularly misspelt.

The keyboard operator might have misinterpreted the handwriting, or just not known the words were incorrect. I hope it is not the keyboard operator's error as many such people are left to prepare and to send out very important communiques at times, with no one to oversee the content. I do have to ask if the writer, a high school teacher, checked the print-out and if so, why the errors were still in place at the in-house stage. I am also left to wonder how the spelling exercises in his (yes, his) classes are conducted and marked. Then I further wonder what our 'stationary/ery' editor may have done with these errors, if anything, or if the astute typesetter would be forced to do global checks.

1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . let's all shudder together!

Editors are still letting a mix of acres and kilometres (km) go through the texts they edit. It seems from my reading of other subeditors' and copy-editors' work this is a matter which needs to be addressed. One slip is too many as metric measurement has been in Australia for almost 20 years now. Language changes daily and we have to keep up with these changes. Why can't we accept metric measurement and apply the conversions appropriately and correctly, as we do to implement non-discriminatory speech?

*Robin Appleton*

## MEETING DATES FOR 1995

All meetings are at 6.30 for 7.00 pm on the first Tuesday of each month:

4 April	2 May
6 June	4 July
1 August	5 September
3 October	7 November
5 December.	

## OUR 1995 COMMITTEE

### President and Publicity

Robin Appleton  
Phone and Fax: (02) 560 1017  
(w&h)

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Phone: (02) 360 9985 (h)

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Phone and Fax: (02) 357 1025 (h)

### Members

Josephine Bastian  
Phone: (02) 660 7107 (h)

### Jane Whisker

Phone: (043) 72 1499 (h)

## NEW PUBLISHING TECHNOLOGIES

At the next meeting of the society on Tuesday 4 April, Rex Finch will speak on the topic 'New publishing technologies and the role of the editor'. His talk will cover issues such as the impact of new technologies, the changing role of the editor, and the expanding skills base required of editors.

Rex's background has been predominantly on the editorial side, in both educational and general trade houses. Since entering book publishing in 1973, he has worked with McGraw-Hill as Editor, Ashton Scholastic as Senior Editor, and Bay Books as Managing Editor. He later became a publisher at Pitman Publishing and Transworld Publishers (Doubleday), and General Manager at LifeChange. He has now established Finch Publishing, a general publishing house which also provides publishers with project management services.

The meeting is at 6.30 for 7.00 pm in the Rooftop Function Centre, Australian Museum. Enter from William Street. Please come as close to 6.30 pm as you can.

Drinks and light food will be provided. We need to know the number of people who will attend, so **RSVP by 2 April** by phoning or faxing Robin Appleton on (02) 560 1017. Members \$10; visitors and those who forget to notify us before the RSVP date \$12.

## BOOK REVIEW

*Proofreading: The Complete Course* Willow Tree Press, 1994. 51pp. Softcover, RRP \$25.90 (includes shipping and handling). Available by sending your name, address and payment to the publisher.

### Background

Few members of the society can be unaware of the furore that surrounds an insignificant-looking little publication called *Proofreading: The Complete Guide*. In the February issue of this newsletter, Robin Appleton related how she had been inundated with calls from people seeking to be proofreaders as a result of reading a book on the subject released in late 1994. Amongst other things, Robin said, 'It [the book] has led to many untried people wishing to earn extra money with this craft, for craft it is. It is unfortunate that few callers had any understanding about what the work can entail: some believe that because they can read, they can proofread.'

Many of you will identify with the sudden wave of concentration that unexpectedly hit me as I noticed an ad in a magazine. 'Become a proofreader, improve your income easily and quickly.' Fortunately, I have low blood pressure, otherwise, by the time I'd read it all, I would have been incandescent. The sentence 'You can easily find yourself earning up to \$80.00 in a single hour just for reading and correcting a small piece of copy.' was particularly provocative.

The headline for the adjoining ad (inserted by the same advertiser) enquired solicitously in 18 point bold, 'Irritable Bowel Syndrome?' My response is unprintable. Funnily enough, I did not connect the offending ad with Robin's

comments. Now I know better. Although the book is superficial and misleading, and a trivialisation of our craft, it does not make the outrageous claims contained in the ad. Together, however, they are responsible for hundreds of telephone calls and letters from readers of the book (and of the ad only!) that are inundating not only Robin but also, it seems, every publisher in the country. And thereby causing huge disruptions and wasted time.

### Review

Although a book review should primarily concern itself with contents, the way in which a book is presented is, I think, relevant, and so I will start with appearances. The old adage 'You can't judge a book by its cover' is absolutely right -- except in publishing. The public *does* judge a book by its cover; how else to explain the enormous amount of time and energy publishers invest in book and cover design.

*Proofreading* has been printed on 13 A3-sized sheets inserted inside a sheet of medium-weight board and the whole thing then folded in half and saddle-stitched with two staples on the spine. This inexpensively produced A4-sized publication bears, on its blue cover, the title, the image of a willow tree, and the name of the publisher. There is no back cover blurb. Without even looking at the book's contents, one might wonder how all the information that the ad promised could possibly be held within its covers.

Apprehension grows as further inspection reveals that the type is set in at least 14 points, with generous leading, and the last 19 pages are devoted entirely to

material such as recommended reading and lists of names of publishers. An exciting line from the ad, 'Start earning even before you have read the whole book!' sits oddly with the fact that the entire text of this slim volume can be read in less than half-an-hour anyway (if you exclude the four pages of proof correction symbols and the six pages of exercises).

So much for a cursory first inspection -- now to the components. On the inside front cover appears the 'All rights reserved' paragraph, including the fact that the copyright is held by the publisher. The very first right-hand page, neither half-title nor title, bears the full title of the book, with the rest of the page taken up with graphics. The reverse of this page, which is numbered '1', bears the title of the book, the heading 'Proofreading: Its Place in the Publishing Process' and then the text starts, right away.

Before I turn to a review of the contents of this book, a very strong negative criticism of it is that its overall presentation sets a very poor example of how a book should look. All right-hand pages in the book bear even numbers and, after the first page, all headings throughout the text are ranged left with an identical weighting. There are no chapters, no prelims whatsoever, no table of contents, no illustrations, no glossary of terms and no index.

And nowhere in the entire publication does the name of the author appear -- or does it? The very last page carries two ads for further publications from Willow Tree Press. One is for '...a remarkable guide that sets out in clear and completely understandable language how anyone who likes

writing can earn \$150.00 for just ten minutes work! The author, one gathers, is a Joan Hartwell. Perhaps she is the same person, the well known business writer who uses the pen-name 'Joan Harwell', who wrote *Proofreading*.

Even if this book were given its proper title, *Proofreading: An Introduction*, instead of masquerading as *The Complete Course*, it would not attract a favourable review in any respect; it just skims the surface of the craft of proofreading; for example, the subject of punctuation is covered in two and a half pages. It is also inappropriate for Australia.

Informed readers of the ad who noticed it said the book used the BSI system would immediately have felt their mental antennae vibrate. Below the heading 'Introduction to Proof Correction Symbols', is the following: 'Marks used by editors and proofreaders are those recommended by the British Standards Institution...Other major systems include American and European. The BSI system is in widest use, and universally accepted.'

Then follow the four pages of symbols. Unfortunately, I cannot reproduce the symbols here but many differ from those that appear in the *AGPS Style Manual*. Among the symbols that differ are the ones indicating delete, insert space, start new paragraph, and change to Roman type.

Exercises commence on page 26. The same piece of copy is presented in several versions: as sent to the typesetter, as received by the proofreader from the typesetter, and as marked up by the proofreader. All well and good. A pity that an example of incorrect punctuation sailed through all versions.

Even without the 'BSI system' as a clue, it seems likely that an original version of the book was

written for the UK market and, perhaps, the USA. There are five and a half pages of names and addresses of 'Major British Book Publishers' and one and a half pages of 'Major US Publishers'. (Why an Australian proofreader would need such information, I can't imagine: I suspect it's just padding.)

The list, going over six pages, of 'Major Australian Book Publishers', complete with phone numbers, would be useful to a qualified proofreader. I would think that it is this list that, more than anything, sparked the flood of letters and phone calls to publishers. The promise in the ad '...you'll be amazed at the warm welcome you will receive when contacting the thousands of printers and publishers who need your help' is, to say the least, misleading.

However, the ad did promise a 'list of books, societies and publishers'. Taking them in that order (and reproducing style and punctuation), the first list includes *The Complete Plain Words* by E Gowers (poor Sir Ernest) and *Elements of Style* by W Strunk [sic], revised by E B White. No book titles are italicised. The second list features eight bodies, five in this country, including the Australian [sic] Council. No editors' society is mentioned, but the Federation of European Publishers in Brussels is.

As mentioned, the list of Australian publishers is lengthy. In spite of an exhortation in the book to 'Always check the accuracy of the publisher' [sic] address', no such tip is given for the name. Thus, we have 'Allen and Unwin' and 'Wild and Wooley' [sic] (both company names have ampersands).

Turning now to some specifics in the ad 'How to obtain work in many countries (The world is your oyster)'. This remote possibility is covered in two sentences '...write

direct to publishers in this country and overseas, indicating your interest and including a CV with experience and professional qualifications included. If necessary, offer to carry out a few trial assignments in return for feedback on your work.'

However, the advice on 'How to charge your time so that you get the biggest dollar' is even more of a treasure. 'If payment isn't received by the expected date, send a polite note to the publisher with another copy of the invoice. If a further delay occurs, follow this with another polite reminder. If this too is ignored, it's time to be a little tougher with the offender, in which case a further copy of the invoice with a short note requesting payment in order to prevent legal action should do the trick!'

Which puts me in mind of the famous editorial that appeared in October 1917 in a provincial newspaper (I believe it was *Wagga Wagga*). It commenced with the words: 'We have often warned the Tsar of Russia...'

Liz Goodman

## BLUE PENCIL

Copy for *Blue Pencil* and letters to the editor should be posted direct to The Editor, *Blue Pencil*, 49 Evans Street, Sans Souci NSW 2219. It should carry the author's name in the form preferred for publication, telephone number, and fax number, if any.

Letters and submissions are printed at the editor's discretion and may be edited to satisfy space restrictions.

The deadlines for 1995 issues are:

11 April	9 May
13 June	11 July
8 August	12 September
10 October	14 November.

# Bulletin Board

## Canberra

### Editing Workshop

The Canberra Centre for Writing, University of Canberra, ACT will hold an editing workshop on Friday 8, Saturday 9, and Sunday 10 July 1995. The workshop will be run by the Centre for Writing and the Canberra Society of Editors in association with Publishing Studies RMIT. The main aim of the workshop is to review the principles and techniques of preparing material for publication. It will cover the role and responsibilities of the editor, readership and readability, and publication and production techniques and has been designed to meet the requirements for a structured training program as provided under the Training Guarantee (Administration) Act 1990.

The presenters are John Curtain, Associate Professor of Publishing in the Faculty of Social Science and Communication RMIT Melbourne, and Ruth Siems, current president of the Society of Editors (Victoria) and teacher of editing in the Graduate Diploma in Editing and Publishing and in the TAFE Associate Diploma in Professional Writing and Editing at RMIT.

For further details contact Ron Miller, Ph: (06) 201 2651 or (06) 201 5105, Fax: (06) 201 5300.

### WiP Training Program for 1995

Women in Publishing welcomes all women working in publishing or related fields to its training program for 1995. Topics that will be dealt with are:

Stress Management 11 April  
Electronic Publishing 10 May  
Design Briefs 24 July  
Publishing for the Young Adults 8 August  
Freelancing 18 September  
Negotiation in Publishing 10 Oct  
Finance 8 November

For details of times, locations and costs, write to:

Women in Publishing  
PO Box 1515  
North Sydney NSW 2059.

### ABPA Training Seminars

The 1995 calendar of Australian Book Publishers Association one-day and twilight training seminars can be obtained by ringing Robyn Lowe on (02) 281 9788.

The Sydney seminars for April and May are:

Wednesday 5 April, 4pm - 8pm:  
Design for Designers  
Monday 10 April, 5pm - 8pm:  
Electronic Data Interchange  
Friday 26 May, 8.30am - 5.30pm:  
Australia's New Age Economy  
and Business Environment

For further details contact Robyn on the above number.

### Proofreading

The next Robyn Appleton proofreading course will be held on 3 June. Enquiries about time, location and cost should be made to Robyn by phoning her on 560 1017 on 19 May only.

### Appointment

Society member Joshua Dowse has recently been appointed publisher for business and related books at Allen & Unwin.

Congratulations Josh, and best wishes to you in your new position.

### Indexing Rate

The Australian Society of indexers advises that its rate for indexing is \$35 per hour.

### Publishing and Editing

Robyn Appleton will again be presenting a course for writers, trainee editors, and would-be if they could-be editors on the publishing process and principles of editing at the NSW Writers' Centre in April/May.

Enquiries should be made to the Writers' Centre, (02) 555 9757

### A Very Special Offer

Early in 1995, the Novell organisation wrote to its registered WordPerfect users with a special offer for upgrading to Version 6.1. If you bought by the end of January, the special price would be only \$179.

Those who missed out, and enquired about the price after 31 January found that the 'non-special' cost was \$139 plus \$10 for postage.

At Last! A reward for those of us who just can't meet deadlines.