

# Blue Pencil

Newsletter of  
the Society  
of Editors  
(NSW)

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PO Box 254 Broadway NSW 2007

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February 1992

## **Next meeting 3 March 1992: Horizon International Photographic Library**

Horizon International Photographic Agency's Julia or Nick Brooke (or both if their four-month old daughter agrees) will talk about how photo libraries work, and where they obtain and how they distribute their material.

**When:** Tuesday, 3 March 1992 at 6.30 pm.

**Where:** The Bowlers Club, 95 York Street (across from the York Street Entrance to BBC Hardware). Parking is available under the Bowlers Club at a cost of \$5. The carpark entrance is in Clarence Street.

**Cost:** Wine, soft drinks and Chinese finger food will be served. \$5 for members; \$10 for non-members and members who do not book by 28 February.

**RSVP:** Friday, 28 February to the Society's answering service (phone 901 9033 —leave a message) or to Janine Flew (phone 887 0177).

The Society books and pays for catering for all those who say they are going; if you can't make it, please let us know! Thank you.

*Great job, Michael!*

*We would like to thank Michael Wyatt (past President) for all his conscientious hard work and unfailing good temper!*

*Thank goodness he stayed on the Committee that extra year!*

*Derek, Janine, Jo, Sharon,  
Shalom and Pamela*

## **President's Report**

In contrast to the previous year, 1991 began well and continued to improve. We had excellent attendances at general meetings, which covered a broad range of topics.

### **General meetings**

The new time, location and format of general meetings clearly suit more members. Traditionally, AGMs are poorly attended, but a large turnout heard Jacquie Kent speak of the Society's early days. A full committee was elected with surprisingly little difficulty. Meetings during the year included the following: the convener of the Macquarie University Graduate Diploma in Editing and Publishing spoke about the course; representatives from the AJA described the new award for book editors; an editor who is now a director outlined career paths open to editors; a panel provided hints on business management for freelance editors; a computer trainer pointed out what computers can do for editors; a designer explained the principles of good layout and design; we had a guided tour of a pre-press bureau; and finally, at our Christmas Party, the author Gail Morgan entertained us with her view of the author/editor/publisher conflict.

Because of the noise at the Bowlers' Club, the Committee continued to look at alternative venues, but found nothing as conveniently located or competitively priced.

### **Education**

The Working Writers' Exhibition being held with the ASA has been postponed, since we were unable to find a sponsor.

Negotiations began early in the year with the ABPA to hold a joint Seminar for editors in April 1992. Planning is nearing completion, and booking forms will be distributed shortly. Most of the work for this Seminar was carried out by Jo Avigdor.

## Register of Freelance Publishing Services

The Register of Freelance Publishing Services has suffered an unfortunate history. To cut a long and agonising story short, Hobson's Press, who had agreed to publish the Register as one of their own titles, went into receivership just as the publication was ready for typesetting. Although many of our members have paid money to appear in the Register, we are unable to get hold of the material for publication. The firm's buyer has undertaken to publish the register as a matter of urgency, but no takeover date has been set.

## Blue Pencil

The Society's newsletter *Blue Pencil* continues to provide notices and reports of meetings. It includes reports of related societies, and notices of events of interest to editors.

An annual list of members and their phone numbers was inaugurated midyear. Recently *Blue Pencil* began to report Committee activities.

The June issue carried two surveys: An AJA survey on education needs; and a survey on income and expenditure of freelance publishing service providers. We have heard little more from the AJA on the education survey; apparently they are negotiating with the ABPA.

The survey on income and expenditure was to enable us to assist the AJA in negotiating rates for freelance editors. However, since we received only six replies, we concluded that freelance editors are, on the whole, happy with their rates of pay and we have taken no further action.

## National body of editors

We were approached by the Society of Editors (Victoria) about the possibility of forming a national body of editors. The Committee responded with ideas on the purpose and structure such a body could have. We expect negotiations to continue in 1992.

## Macquarie University

Maureen Colman has served as the Society's representative on the Steering Committee of the Macquarie University's Graduate Course on Editing and Publishing since its inception. Unfortunately, the Society's Committee has neglected to keep itself informed of activities. Maureen has retired from the Steering Committee, and we are negotiating for a new representative.

## Library

We have continued with the problem of a library collection with nowhere to house it and no way of making it accessible to members. We are presently negotiating with the NSW Writers' Centre, who have agreed to house and maintain the collection, and to make the whole collection of the Centre available to our members.

## Telephone

The Society now subscribes to a telephone voice-mail service. This enables us to advertise a permanent telephone number, and protects Committee members from being telephoned at busy times by inquirers from outside the Society.

## Committee

Initially, I agreed to take on the Presidency for a second term provided that everyone else on the Committee did the work, and that I stand down after six months. However, the Committee members were so dedicated that I was left with only the lightest of tasks and was able to see the year out. I thank every member of the Committee, some of whom are standing again. After serving on the Committee for four years, two of them as President, it's time to stand down. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve the society.

### **Representative needed for Macquarie University**

We need a volunteer to represent the Society at the Steering Committee of the Macquarie University's Graduate Course on Editing & Publishing.

We are looking for someone reasonably new to publishing who appreciates what is needed in the editorial training of new editors.

The representative would only have to attend two or three meetings a year and report back to our Committee afterwards.

Please call a member if interested.

## **November meeting: The Day my Publisher Turned Into a Corporation**

Members attending the Society's Christmas Dinner last November were addressed by best selling author of *The Day my Publisher Turned into a Dog* and book publisher Gail Morgan.

Gail made a spirited plea to editors to pursue a broader and more influential role within the book industry in order to defend the integrity of books against what she sees as the prevailing philistinism in the industry.

According to Gail, books have been corporatised into titles and publishers have been corporatised into inefficient bureaucracies.

'Gone are the days of the publisher who read the books and knew the authors. What has happened to the gentleman publisher? They are sitting on the boards of companies discussing "group restructuring".

'Corporatisation is dire for the future of writing. It has meant the rampant commercialisation of a few titles, massive overproduction and book remaindering.

'It has also meant books are stereotyped into "mass market" or "literary". It's the package that counts. But so much of the best writing from authors such as Hawthorne, Melville, George Eliot and Conrad has fallen between these modern stools. The Greeks called it the "Golden Mean".

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*Why can't we have our own junk?  
Why is it I find most Australian  
fiction boring, passionless and  
starved for ideas?*

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'Conrad's writing, for example, had appeal in his own time for the man on the Clapham omnibus or the woman on the Bondi tram. The corporatisation of the book has led to this market being ignored in fiction.

'In Australia, the mass market junk comes from overseas and the literary fiction is Australian, doesn't sell and gets the imprimatur of the Australia Council.

'Why can't we have our own junk? Why is it I find most Australian fiction boring, passionless and starved for ideas?

'I do not believe it is the fault of writers. I do believe it has something to do with literary stereotyping, corporatisation, building people into tasteful literary lists and having the Australia Council committees decide what has literary merit.

'But the greatest casualty of current corporatisation trends is the Great Australian Novel, that mythical Yowie beast that needs to have real power over our emotions and brings the closet readers out into the streets.'

Gail spoke about her experiences as a publisher of such titles as *The Mean Australian* by Richard Eldershaw, *Burning Spear* by Kit Denton and *The Weather and Other Gods* by Robyn Ferrel under the imprint Frances Allen.

'I started Frances Allen motivated by powerlessness, curiosity and a willingness to defy the role of author as financial buffoon.

'What happened?

'1. We made a reasonable sum of money during a period of recession, while publishing two first novels.

'2. I worked far too hard having to act as salesperson, publicist, accounts clerk, customer services officer and author.

'3. I published my satire on corporate publishing *The Day my Publisher Turned into a Dog* and I did it without their help.

'4. I wanted to prove the stuff Australian writers are made of.

'5. Most of all, I wanted to throw down the gauntlet to the publishing industry warning them not to take authors for granted. I believe this was a world first. There has been lots of bitching, suicide and occasional authors shooting their publishers, but never a calculated, simultaneous business and literary onslaught.'

Just as the transformation from author to publisher gave Gail new confidence and insight, she

suggests a similar change in roles could equally benefit editors.

'If corporations are making you who love books feel inadequate, you may wish to do one of the following:

'1. Hit the road. Soon you'll hate booksellers more than authors. Selling will take you up the corporate ladder and if you can keep your integrity along the way then you'll be publishing the books that change the world.

'2. Become a better editor. Unfortunately, marketing people have stolen the fire from the editorial gods—only to extinguish the flames with reports, survey samples, pie graphs and projections.

'Will you be able to talk to these people? Try to. Get access to sales figures. Educate, listen and try to establish a rapport. Rapprochement is important.

'3. If the marketing people are hardened philistines, go to the publicist (who will be overworked) with profuse apologies and a list of suggestions.

'If the publicist is neurotic, anorexic, or is only interested in self-help manuals, then become an old fashioned editor. This means finding time to take the author to lunch and to show this person some humanity and concern.'

Gail's final suggestion to editors:

'Try to make global editorial suggestions. Don't get bogged down. Spend some editorial time with the publicist and sales manager. Be that dogged editor who sees something first and then with tenacity keeps it alive until it reaches the mind of the reader.'

Jo Avigdor

**Help needed!**  
**Extra volunteers for special projects and/or general help would be greatly appreciated!**

**Please give a Committee member a call if you think you could help in some small way...**

### **February meeting: Guest speaker from *The Macquarie Dictionary***

The guest speaker at our February meeting was Susan Butler, General Editor of the second edition of *The Macquarie Dictionary*, responsible for the inclusion of new words. Sue began by telling us some of the funny things that happened on the way to the second edition. They were, in fact, very similar to those that happened on the way to the first edition; for example, a contributor sent in a definition of an elk as 'closely related to the mouse'—rather puzzling until it was realised it should be 'moose'!

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### *Is Marlene Dietrich still alive?*

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The major difference from the first edition is that the second is encyclopaedic. It includes entries for people, places and events, entries that will be very useful but that posed many problems for the editors. Is Marlene Dietrich still alive? (Yes, but it took some detective work to find out.) As Sue said, it is irritating that the world doesn't stay put.

New words included in the second edition came mostly from the fields of economics, computers, medicine, music and fashion. Some are more widely used than others: several people present had heard 'agreeance' but only one admitted knowing what 'stage diving' is.

Usage during the 1980s tended to eliminate unnecessary hyphenation and punctuation and showed more tolerance of American spellings and pronunciation. There was also more recognition of the feminist language perspective, although forms such as 'chair' (for the person) are still not accepted by everyone.

A split between city and country usage was observable, with old forms such as 'sheila' and 'bonzer' persisting in rural areas. This split is only one of the difficulties encountered when trying to establish 'Australian usage'. Others include the fact that written language (the easiest to document) has often been cleaned-up by editors or by using spell checkers and the fact that language is always changing. Sue suggested a solution might be to appoint an Australian Speaker of the Year, but how would such a person be chosen?

Finally, Sue spoke about Singaporean English. (She has just spent four months setting up a lexicography course at Singapore University.) Singaporeans do not recognise Australian English as a distinct form, and they believe they speak British English with some colloquial expressions (Singlish), much as we used to believe we spoke British English with some local slang (Strine). Sue, however, thinks there is a distinct Singaporean English. It contains words not known elsewhere and words with meanings peculiar to Singapore, for example, 'alphabet' used to mean 'letter of the alphabet'. Singaporean English displays some strong American influence, but there has been no inclusion of non-sexist forms.

The talk finished with questions from the audience and some lively discussion.

### Christine Eslick

### Blue Pencil

This is the last *Blue Pencil* I will be preparing for this year as Margaret Foster will bravely take over the reins next month.

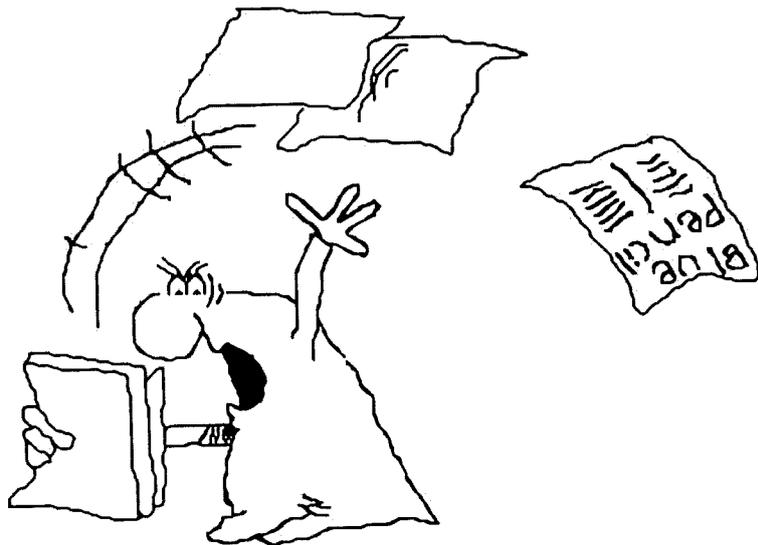
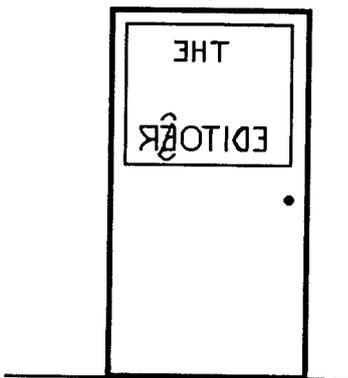
Thank you to all those people who have contributed to the newsletter by sending news items and by writing book reviews and summaries of talks. I would like to give a **big** thank you to those who managed to provide me with copy on disk ... What bliss!

I have enjoyed producing *Blue Pencil* and hope that you have found it to be interesting and useful. I had hoped to have received more correspondence from readers and often considered starting an 'agony column'—but somehow the time slipped by (well, actually 'raced by' is more precise!).

The past year has been very busy for me, running a desktop publishing and editing business as well as studying for a graduate diploma. Needless to say, I am very pleased (relieved?) that Margaret has offered her skills and precious time to produce *Blue Pencil*.

Good luck, Margaret!

### Sharon Paul



## Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (held on 4 February 1992)

Present: 23 members

### Minutes of previous AGM

These were read and accepted as being a true and accurate account of the meeting.

### President's Report

The President's Report was passed by the meeting and is printed in this issue of *Blue Pencil* (see pages 1–2).

### Treasurer's Report

The Society prospered in 1991 because the number of 'no shows' at meetings had been minimal—the cost of venue and catering is not funded wholly from the takings at the door. Member Anne Sahlin queried that the Society appeared to have lost money (approximately \$1400). The President assured members that the accounts would be duly audited but there was insufficient time to have them audited before the AGM.

### Election of officers

Nominations were called for from the floor. The new Committee for 1992 comprises: Sharon Paull, Pamela Smith, Janine Flew, Shalom Paul, Margaret Foster, Derek Barton and Margaret McPhee.

Michael Wyatt stood down as President and Shalom Paul was elected as the new President for 1992.

Both Jo Avigdor and Michael Wyatt will be co-opted to participate on isolated projects throughout the year.

### Other business

None.

The business of the AGM was completed and the meeting ended at 9.15 pm.

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**Newsletter**  
Foster Communications

News items, newsletters, correspondence and adverts to be included in *Blue Pencil* should be sent to the Newsletter Editor. Copy deadline for the March issue is 6 March 1992.

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