



THE EDITORS

P.O. Box 567,
Neutral Bay Junction 2089

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 11

NEXT MEETING ... NEXT MEETING ... NEXT MEETING ... NEXT MEETING...

Medical and Legal Publishing

Guests are Dr Laurel Thomas, editor of the Medical Journal of Australia and Martin Shanahan, marketing manager of CCH.

Wednesday, 17 September, at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli, at 6.30 pm.

If you're coming, tell Narelle Konte - 888-2733
or Janet Champion - 977-3430

NO LATER THAN Monday, 15 September.

REPORT ON LAST MEETING

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, Wednesday, 6 August 1980.

Topic: Research

The speakers were Vere Dodds and Norma Cowper from Reader's Digest, and publisher and author Peter Taylor. The meeting was chaired by Barbara Ker Wilson. Vere Dodds was the first speaker and she discussed her work as a researcher for Digest books. She pointed out that the Digest organisation has considerable world-wide funds and can therefore afford to spend more time and money than most publishers in Australia. A Digest researcher is part of a service department: complete checking of detail and fact must be done, irrespective of deadlines.

A constant problem for any researcher is, of course, where to go for information. Academics are usually the best source but the level of presentation of the information must be watched closely. Vere mentioned the following reliable references of which researchers and editors should be aware:

- The Reader's Digest Almanac
- Chamber's Dictionary of Biography
- guides to government agencies and departments (e.g. CSIRO)
- Keesing's Contemporary Archives: this is a chronicle of modern events, which is usually no more than three months old
- the APAIS monthly from the National Library: an index to Australian periodicals
- Pinpointer: an index to Australian periodicals prepared by the State Library of South Australia
- the Australian National Bibliography

- newspaper files kept by State libraries
- art gallery libraries, the Qantas library and the Australian War Memorial library.

Some sources that look good are in fact limited. For instance, the new edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica is not very detailed, nor are their Australian and New Zealand yearbooks. The La Trobe Library is a limited source for historical data; the Australian National Library is good but its work is hamstrung through lack of funds. Generally, librarians as researchers provide little assistance.

All these sources must be referred to and checked. Statistics need to be approached with caution, particularly percentages, charts and graphs. It is not easy to gather statistics in Australia ... there's no central reference source.

Vere described the problems encountered in doing one particular Digest book, Australia's Yesterdays, a pictorial record of aspects of Australian history which was published a few years ago. The research department wrote to Don Bradman asking for a photograph, to be told that he never kept pictures of himself; it was very difficult to find a picture of a good old common or garden Aussie ice safe (people never photographed them, apparently); information on a tank invented in 1912 was still declared 'classified' by the Defence Department. Then there was the question of fashion -- records of fashion are very hard to trace because manufacturers tend to throw out their advertising material and photographs once a certain style of clothing is no longer popular. Vere said that David Jones' archives are probably the best fashion source. Generally, newspaper files are not very reliable because the information given is usually incomplete.

The best pictorial source is the Photographic Library of Australia, and Vere said it was usually her first port of call when she was chasing pictures. They charge from \$50-80 for the first use of a photograph as an inside illustration, and about \$110 for a jacket; this is pretty expensive for most publishers. As a warning to look after photos, Vere said that for a lost or damaged picture the PLA and most other sources ask for \$300-500!

The next speaker was Norma Cowper, head of the research department for the Digest magazine. She said that at least 3500 facts and 500 sources are checked for every issue. Because of the intensive editing that Digest pieces undergo, and condensation and translation for other editions, research is essential because small errors are apt to creep in at each stage. Every article must be read carefully and every single fact must be checked, marked and sourced. The average time given to research a completed Digest article is from two to six weeks and, though deadlines are important, if the research is not complete, the article is not printed.

Only about 18 per cent of the material in each issue of the Digest originates in Australia; the worldwide Digest organisation screens the rest. A standard rule is that originating agencies must provide two primary sources and a secondary source for each fact, whether the sources are people or books. The most authoritative secondary sources are newspapers and magazines; these provide background and attitudes, but not fact. Encyclopedias can be used as leads to primary sources -- they often provide useful bibliographies. Standard

agencies (UN, UNESCO and other international sources) are important for verification. Any quote from a speaker must be personally checked with him or her, and also checked independently.

Both Vere and Norma stressed that their work was an extension of the editors' job. Both consult with in-house editors and answer their queries, but the editor is responsible for the final form of the Digest article or part of a book.

Norma concluded by saying that a researcher's motto is: Never trust anyone! With the best will in the world, people do make mistakes, and this is why checking is so important.

The final speaker was Peter Taylor, who spoke about his new book An End to Silence, the story of the building of the Overland Telegraph from Adelaide to Darwin in 1870-72. Peter did all his own research and writing for this and gave us a personal account of the problems facing the writer who is also his own research assistant.

He said that with a historical subject a writer is unlikely to get much information from people in interviews and therefore he must look for printed material and archive material (manuscript diaries, unpublished record books, etc.). Most of this is in libraries and archives, but it may be elsewhere. The author has to find it.

Fact is elusive in history, and it may not be possible to find out exactly what happened. It's possible to find out what somebody recorded as having happened, but there are traps. The person most able to give an accurate account may have left no record, and even if he did, it may be coloured to show himself in the best possible light. If his account can be compared with others' records, you can apply your own judgment, but this is not always possible; in any case, historical truth is not absolute.

With the Overland Telegraph, only one book had been published: Frank Clune's Overland Telegraph (Angus & Robertson, 1955). Although the structure was not good, it did have a very useful bibliography. The first rule of research, of course, is to read everything you can find to form an opinion about those sources that are useful and those that can be discarded. In this case Peter found that Clune was not accurate, and that it would be necessary to check out every one of his sources. In any case his book was out of date as much material had been written since, particularly during the centenary of the line in 1972.

Peter said that at this stage he became almost like a human vacuum cleaner, sucking up information without thinking very much about its relevance. Often the importance of a piece of information only becomes clear later when it is set alongside other information; it's not possible to decide this in a library.

Peter went through the South Australian Parliamentary papers from about 1869 to 1874 -- fortunately these were in the Mitchell Library. Then he read newspapers, which are treated with suspicion by academic historians as an unreliable source, but which contain all the trivia that does not appear elsewhere and which were essential for this kind of book. Over a period of weeks he read about a thousand issues of the Adelaide Advertiser, which provided a good deal of very useful material...and a lot of hard work as well.

He used a cassette recorder in the library and dictated material straight onto tape. The advantage of this is it is quicker and easier and so one is more likely to collect everything than if one wrote it out in longhand. The tapes were typed up into transcripts at frequent intervals, but nothing else was done with them at this stage.

Another source of information was the Telecom library in Sydney which employs an historical officer and which goes to a great deal of trouble to provide archive material. However the bulk of the archive material was held in the State Archives and Telecom Archives in Adelaide, which also had a very good collection of photographs. By now Peter wasn't looking for facts as much as impressions -- What was it like? How did the protagonists feel? Practically everybody had kept a diary of some sort, so Peter did more reading, more taping and ordered large amounts of photographs and xeroxes.

From Adelaide he went to Alice Springs to have another look at the telegraph station and to remind himself of the feel of the place. The senior ranger produced a copy of a letter that Charles Todd had written to England just after his arrival in Australia in 1855, which threw a lot of light on his voyage out. Only the ranger had known of the existence of the letter!

By the time he returned to Sydney and typed up all this material, he knew he had enough information to write the book. It was not complete, but within reason it didn't have to be; one of the traps in researching is not knowing when to stop. In his case a deadline made a cut-off point necessary, but there must always be a deadline or the author will drown in information. The point is telling a story in readable form, not bewildering people with endless bits of information that are of little or no importance. This needs a strong mind and a firm hand.

Peter then discussed the editorial responsibilities in a book of this kind. The first rule is to check with the author: some of the decisions an editor might normally make could be wrong. For example, the northern part of South Australia was known as the Far North, caps and lower case; an editor might normally make this all lower case, which would be incorrect.

It is impossible to edit one's own work, and somebody must check to pick up the occasional mistake. But in the end, the author is responsible for the book and if there are any mistakes, the author will be publicly blamed for them. When the book goes into the shops all the supporters - editors, designers, proof readers and so on - all fall away and the author is left face to face with his public and his critics. Authors know this instinctively, but a publisher's staff sometimes overlook it, and this can have a real bearing on the relationship between them. Not that the author should have complete control; that would be stupid - but since he is primarily responsible, he can't be entirely ignored.

Peter concluded by saying that he regarded the writing and production of An End to Silence as a very happy experience and was very conscious of his debt to all the people involved with it.

FROM THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS

John Bangsund, newsletter editor extraordinaire, wrote to tell us what's been going on in the southern capital. For a start, SocEd has a new committee: Chris Nicol (President), Ros Price (Treasurer), Roger Seddon (Secretary), Fae Taylor (newsletter editor), Alison Forbes (freelance register); other members are Sally Moss, Matthew Kelly, Anne Norton and Peter Buckmaster. At the Annual General Meeting, the idea of reciprocal membership between the Editors and the Society was - quoting John - 'debated endlessly and with maximum confusion; ...certainly we passed a motion that A Letter Be Written'. So it seems as though the general feeling was in favour of co-operation. OK... now what?

THE FREELANCE REGISTER QUESTIONNAIRE

Christine Astley-Boden reports that of the 115 questionnaires sent out, 26 were returned. Most people who completed the questionnaire wanted the entry to note the availability of references, either named in the register itself or obtainable from the freelancer; the entry to state hours per week available, or whether the freelancer is available for full or part-time work; to include interstate editors in the register; to pay for an entry; to exclude non-members, except members of the Society of Editors. The register should be sent to publishers, advertisers, business houses and government bodies, it should be advertised in the Australian Bookseller and Publisher, and it should be printed and stapled.

After consultation with the Society of Editors, some of these preferences were slightly modified with the end result as follows:

THE FREELANCE REGISTER

We will be issuing the Freelance Register of Publishing Services in November, in conjunction with the Society of Editors in Melbourne. This will produce a vastly superior product for a minimum cost (we hope), and the voluntary efforts from both committees should be halved as a result of sharing the work load.

The Register will initially be distributed to all ABPA members. Advertisements will be then placed in the Australian Bookseller and Publisher and in B & T Weekly. Negotiations will also be made with the Society of Industrial Editors in the hope of our Register reaching as many business houses as possible.

You will note that as a result of this combined effort, other publishing services besides editing/indexing/research (such as design and illustration) will be able to be incorporated into the register.

Remember, the deadline for returning your completed entry is 10 October. So fill it in now and send it back now and then you won't have to worry about remembering the deadline....

FOR YOUR FREELANCE LIST

ANNE BOWER INGRAM, 10/6 Boronia Street, Woostonecraft, 2065,
Tele: 439 6301

Previous experience: Editor, Children's Book News, London, 2 years;
Editor, Reading Time, Sydney, 8 years; Assistant Editor, Children's
Books, Constable Young Books, London; Senior Editor, Children's
Books, William Collins (Australia), 9 years.

Duties: Creating a children's book list, editing, commissioning, and
design and production.

Specialities: Children's literature.

Freelance experience: Wentworth Books, Ashton Scholastic and Penguin.
Writer and critic for Courier Mail, Brisbane; Sydney Morning Herald,
Woman's Day and Pol.

WINSOME BYRNE, 7/19 Murray Street, Lane Cove 2066,
Tele: after 10 a.m., 20924, ext. 287.

Previous experience: extensive experience in editing, rewriting
and production on a major national newspaper.