



# Bookworm

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

August 2008

## From the Chair

Hello members,

Looking out the window, it seems strange to be welcoming you all back *after* the winter break. Actually, I don't even need to do that, as the rain is so loud I can barely hear the telly. Yes, being the highly professional ... professional that I am, I'm typing this in front of the TV, with my laptop propped up against my knees as a compromise between getting this to *Bookworm* in a timely manner and avoiding the wounded puppy eyes of neglect my kids follow me around with when I disappear off into the study (they send sad portraits under the door if I tell them they can't come in). You would think that being on school holidays and spending all day with me would be enough, but obviously I'm such a good mother they just can't get enough. That or they know I've got Maltesers in my pocket.

I hope you've all had a satisfying break, and are chomping at the bit to get back to the wild and crazy lifestyle that is our monthly meetings. I also hope that if you revisited anything from your youth like, say, rollerskating, you were more successful than I was at impressing any nearby young 'uns with your moves.

We're getting straight back into it all with August's speed dating night, which promises to be something quite different from our other meetings in that it's more about the editors than the editing. After that we'll be getting close to the pointy end of Accreditation, so we'll be focusing on exam preparation and trying to make sure all members who are going to be sitting in the first batch of applicants are as ready as possible when they go in those doors, turn off their phone and slap their photo ID on the table.

So without further ado, I'm off. The kids've just remembered I have a couple of episodes of the *Justice League* on here, and the half-melted chocolate I've thrown over there to distract them will only last so long.

*Emma Pearmain*

President

PS Thanks to Polly Delany for taking over from Tanja Dusseldorp as our 'new member contact'. (And thanks to Tanja for her time in that role this year.)

## Editor's letter

Welcome back after a month off from *Bookworm*! You'll notice we include our first member profile for 'Spotlight on the Editor': meet Katie Lennerts. We'd like to hear from other members—simply send 350 words about yourself to [rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com) and we'll put you in the spotlight!

If you don't have time to scrawl 350 words right now but you'd like your month of fame, just send me your name and email address and I'll contact you further down the track. (If you are a member of Editors WA but you're not actually an editor, we'd like to hear your story too. We'll change the section's title for that month!)

Be sure to collect your official Editors WA membership card at the August meeting. See you there!

*Rebecca Newman* <[rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com)>

## Spotlight on the editor

*Katie Lennerts, Freelancer*

*Member of Editors WA since 2005, current moderator of the Yahoogroups mailing list and Bookworm's distributor*

My earliest inkling that this could be the career for me was when I made it into the state spelling championships in Year 9. Sadly my parents couldn't get me to the venue and my hopes for glory fizzled out.

My Arts degree in English, French and Latin was intended to send me on a path to journalism, an idea which should have been aided by two years at the *Pelican* student newspaper at UWA. Instead I happily whiled away those collegiate years correcting spelling errors, grammatical mistakes and incomprehensible paragraphs.

A job in desktop publishing honed my graphic design skills for a good few years, but feeling that there was something missing I enrolled in part time study. Completing the online requirements of the University of Southern Queensland's Graduate Certificate of Editing and Publishing—while simultaneously working full time—was a challenge I relished.

(In reality, it was a challenge I endured with much swearing, and survived only with the endless patience of my partner, my study buddy and my cat.)

I recently left my long-term desktop publishing job and entered the world of freelancing. I am currently working as a website useability editor, combining my editing skills with years of internet nerdiness which finally has a purpose. I rework web content mostly written by bureaucrats who don't always understand why you don't like what they wrote—and don't always appreciate the results.

**Pet hate:** the word 'wellness'

**On my mp3 player:** 'Birds of Tokyo' and 'Foo Fighters'

**Five year plan:** to take my laptop and travel around Australia for a year

## Forthcoming meeting

### *August: 'Speed dating' (Meet your fellow editors)*

- Date:** Tuesday 5 August 2008
- Time:** 7.30 pm
- Venue:** CWA House, Boardroom (3rd Floor)  
1174 Hay Street, West Perth  
Parking at rear of building; enter via door from car park
- Cost:** \$2 members, \$5 non-members
- RSVP:** to <[emma007@amnet.net.au](mailto:emma007@amnet.net.au)>

Please don't panic and hide this from your partner and close friends! Come along to an evening where we can get to know each other in a relaxed and novel way. There will be wine and cheese, games (nothing difficult or embarrassing, we promise!) and other fabulous editors to get to know a little better.

**A tip: come prepared with your most infuriating/ amusing/ amazing story related to editing.**

## Report on June 2008 meeting

### *Editing the suits*

About 15 members attended 'Editing the suits' which was a discussion forum to 'develop low cost strategies that Editors WA can implement to increase the awareness of editing through the business community so as to increase the amount of work that members get from business clients.'

The ideas flew thick and fast with Emma as facilitator and hostess with the mostest. We know that we need more marketing and that most businesses don't know we exist. We know we have skills to sell that will add value to businesses and enhance the quality of their work. We are less clear about the Society's own knowledge base, who and where the documents in a business come from and, more importantly, who will pay for editing.

We had a long discussion about the routes we could take to market our work and came up with the following:

- talk to the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) to build a more transparent alliance. (We could also add to upcoming events schedules)
- build an Editing Roadshow (similar to the Antiques Roadshow) with editing as an available skill on the day
- put an advertisement in the Yellow Pages
- contact Business Enterprise Centres and offer to present at their meetings
- give members something in hard copy to hand out

- encourage internal branding (with Editors WA contact details and website on business cards, and at the end of emails)
- reciprocal URLs on our website (invite other websites to reciprocate URLs)
- collate information about our expertise and skills
- invite industry to come and present at our meetings
- list Editors WA with tertiary institutions (for marketing editing to students)
- build on accreditation (use as a media interest story to promote the society)
- promote the Practical Editing course (use as a media interest story to promote the society)
- make the most of our website.

We identified some members who may be interested in researching these areas. If you are interested in helping, organising, or could offer your skills in one of these areas, please contact Emma Pearmain so we can construct a Grand Plan. Stay tuned for further updates.

*Robin Bower*

### New members

Welcome to these new members who recently joined Editors WA:

Debra Mayrhofer  
 Kate McLeod  
 Olivier Breton  
 Linda Martin

### IPEd Notes

#### *News from the Institute of Professional Editors Limited*

*July 2008*

In 2007, a proposal put to the societies of editors to establish a representative national organisation was ratified. The objectives of the new body – IPEd – were to serve all professional editors, student and emerging editors, and those interested in editing, by:

- administering a national **system of accreditation**
- maintaining, updating and disseminating information on **professional standards**
- working to raise the public **profile of the editing profession** in Australia and elsewhere
- coordinating collaboration between the member organisations in **national initiatives** such as conferences

- encouraging the **growth and development of the profession** by exchanging ideas and establishing links with the educational and the publishing industry
- **liaising with educational institutions** for the establishment or extension or modification of educational and training provision for editors
- advising **individuals and member organisations** on issues relating to editing and matters of editing practice
- taking the lead in coordinating national **promotional initiatives** to support growth of the profession
- establishing **awards** for outstanding editors, and seeking grants and sponsorships to support the organisation and its mission
- acting as the **representative ‘voice’** of the profession in public statements or comments affecting editors or of interest to them
- forging **links** with related bodies here and abroad
- undertaking other activities as determined by its governing body.

Now that the first item on this list – a national accreditation system for editors – is no longer just a blip on the horizon, with the first accreditation exam scheduled for 18 October this year, IPed can begin to focus on some of its other objectives.

As noted in last month’s notes, the area of communication, promotion and PR was accorded a high priority by Council at its latest meeting. We must raise the profile of editors, not only in publishing but also in the broader milieu of communication, which is, in reality, the business we are in. Education and training is another field to be targeted during IPed’s first full year of operations. This will initially involve the finalisation of an inventory of existing courses and programs, and the identification of new opportunities. Just one of the areas of great potential here is the specialist training activities currently run by the societies for their own members. IPed can open such professional development opportunities to a much wider catchment.

Two standing committees – Communication and Professional Development – have been established to carry forward this work. Full details are on the IPed website.

*Ed Highley*

IPED Secretary <[www.iped-editors.org](http://www.iped-editors.org)>

## 4<sup>th</sup> IPED National Editors Conference: 8-10 October 2009

### *Getting the message across*

The logo may represent an old-fashioned technology but the conference will showcase a myriad of ways in which editors and allied professionals have improved on the limitations of semaphore and even other more recent means of conveying and clarifying the message.



Here's a link to help you discover what the little figures are spelling out: <http://inter.scoutnet.org/semaphore/>. Also keep your eye out for Peter Judge's interesting and informative article on semaphore in the Canberra Society of Editors May newsletter. <http://www.editorscanberra.org/news.htm>.

We have some plans to extend our semaphore theme during the conference and will provide a cheat sheet for those of us who weren't brownies, girl guides or scouts. We'll keep this as a surprise for the event.

Additional details about the conference will be published in newsletters and via the websites below as they become available, so please stay tuned.

Conference details:

**Where:** Adelaide, South Australia

**When:** 8-10 October 2009

**Venue:** Adelaide Festival Centre

**Further information:** [SAPresident@editors-sa.org.au](mailto:SAPresident@editors-sa.org.au)

<http://www.editors-sa.org.au/conference09.html>

### *Australian English*

[Thanks to Sue Butler and the Society of Editors (NSW) for permission to reprint this report which originally appeared in the May 2008 issue of Blue Pencil.]

*Sue Butler is a former president [of the Society of Editors (NSW)] and was publisher of the second, third, and fourth editions of The Macquarie Dictionary. She now has a column in the Walkley Magazine and is a regular commentator on radio and television on aspects of Australian English. Material in the tables is from 'The History of the Colloquial Lexicon in Australian English' by Susan Butler.*

*Sue Butler provoked plenty of good-natured discussion at our April meeting with a fun and informative presentation on the role of slang in our culture. A regular commentator on aspects of Australian English, Sue revealed some fascinating details about how the language works.*

The reason we like slang is that it represents the youthful period of language, sometimes slick and sometimes crude, but always aiming at that moment of focused linguistic inspiration.

I don't mean to imply that slang is solely the province of the young, although there is a juxtaposition of creative urges that means that we often associate slang with the up and coming generation. But the old and the young can be equally confronted by the need to say things that are new, or to recycle the old ideas in a new and vivid way.

By comparison, standard and formal registers can be regarded as middle-aged respectability, the desire to shock replaced by the desire to conform, the linguistic equivalent of deciding that it is time to eat fibre for breakfast every day and take out private health insurance.

Slang is a response to a need to be innovative combined with the desire to live life dangerously, to flaunt the power of the word, to demonstrate a particular kind of style.

We worry about Australian English as a whole being swamped by American English, but when it comes to our slang that anxiety becomes acute. The old style slang of Barry Humphries and Paul Hogan seems somewhat dated these days, but what do we have to replace it? The language of Bart and Homer Simpson?

It is easy to see how our slang is so derivative. Much of it happens first in American English and filters through to us from that society. What happens, happens there first. There's really not much left for us to do.

Except that there is still the experience of being an Australian, of being in this place, in this society, in this culture for which we have to find the right words. It is an Australia heavily influenced by America, but not wholly overrun. We have to own the words we use. Even the hand-me-downs have to become integrated into discourse that is distinctively Australian. We follow, we copy, but every now and then we have to do our own thing because there is no one else who can name the names and set the style. Look at Aussie Rules, look at horseracing, look at the beach. Look at the words below, recorded by children in Alice Springs, in which local colour is evident. (See examples in Table A, An Alice Springs Dictionary prepared by Class 421, Alice Springs High School, 1972.)

Our whole history of slang has been a mixture of the derivative and the original. The first record of Australian English was an account of convict language, brought to the colony by the thieves of London and generally referred to as 'the Flash Language'. James Hardy Vaux, a convict himself, defined flash as the cant language used by the 'family'. To speak good flash is to be well versed in cant terms. Although there is no clear knowledge of the origin of the term flash, the suggestion is that it referred to a specific district between Buxton Leek and Macclesford in northern England.

A 'flash man', to quote Vaux again, was 'a favourite or fancy man; but this term is generally applied to those dissolute characters upon the town, who subsist upon

the liberality of unfortunate women; and who, in return, are generally at hand during their nocturnal perambulations, to protect them should any brawl occur, or should they be detected in robbing those whom they have picked up.' A flash man was a pimp, in other words.

Vaux (or his editor) italicises 'picked up' to show that this is a flash term also. So we turn to the entry in Vaux's dictionary to discover that 'to pick someone up' has a broader sense than we are used to and means 'to accost, or enter into conversation with any person for the purpose of executing some design upon his personal property; thus, among gamblers, it is called picking up a flat [honest man], or a mouth [foolish person]: sharpers [swindlers], who are daily on the look out for some unwary country man or stranger, use the same phrase; and among drop-coves, and others who act in concert, this task is allotted to one of the gang, duly qualified, who is thence termed the picker-up; and he having performed his part, his associates proceed systematically in cleaning out the flat. To pick up a cull, is a term used by blowens [prostitutes] in their vocation of street walking. To pick a person up, in a general sense, is to impose upon, or take advantage of him, in a contract or bargain.'

While we have lost that general sense of taking advantage, we are left with picking someone up for the purpose of sex. The phrase for us has become more limited in context.

The above are words which Vaux records as 'Flash Language' which we would be familiar with today (see examples in Table B).

It is not surprising that colonial society in Australia remained attuned to the colloquialisms of British English throughout the 1800s. London was the centre of our colonial universe. British English was our model, our aspiration then, as American English is now, at least for the young.

It comes as a bit of a shock to realise that some of the key items of Australian English are hand-me-downs from elsewhere. Iconic terms such as the bush and bushranger are in fact borrowings from American English. And a colloquialism that we think of as being central to our culture—fair dinkum—is in fact a borrowing from British dialect.

Following are some common items in Australian English for which we have to acknowledge our debt to British English (see Table C). It is true, however, that in some cases we have made more of these words than the British have done. Some of them are still limited to British dialect, the word 'chook' (a chicken) being a notable case in point. Others have died out of British colloquialism while remaining strong here. 'Mongrel' in the sense of 'despicable' was a colloquialism of the 1700s in British English but is alive and well in Australian English, particularly in the expression 'a mongrel act'. So what is the added value that Australia has given this rich heritage? Our special areas of creativity would seem to be sport, in particular Aussie Rules—'boundary rider' (the sports reporter who comments from the side of the football field), 'desperation football' (extremely



hard-fought football), 'fresh air shot' (a kick that misses), 'mongrel kick' (a very bad shot), 'rainmaker' (a kick that goes up into the air).

From sport it is a short distance to politics. Older colloquialisms like 'dorothy dixer' (a question asked in parliament specifically to allow a propagandist reply by a minister) and 'donkey vote' (in a compulsory preferential system of voting, a vote in which the voter's apparent order of preference among the candidates listed on the ballot paper corresponds with the order in which the names appear in the list, so that the voter is probably not expressing any preference at all) have now become standard terms. Others are: 'duchess' (to treat as if a duchess), 'lavish largesse on', 'free kick' (a transfer from the football use to mean 'an easy opportunity to score off the opposition'), 'rort' (as in 'rorting or stacking the branches').

A nice definition of slang has appeared in Jonathon Green's latest dictionary, Cassell's Dictionary of Slang. He gives the origin of the word as the Scandinavian 'sleng', which also renders standard English's 'sling', and means 'a slinging', 'a device', 'a strategy'. Thus slang is both literally and figuratively a 'slung' or 'thrown' language, tossed cunningly, as it were, into the hearer's face and ears.

Green also maintains that slang is above all 'the language of the city – urgent, pointed, witty, cruel, capable of both excluding and including, of mocking and confirming'. This may be true of this day and age, but slang is an aspect of a fully functioning variety of English wherever it occurs, flourishing perhaps where the centre of gravity of a community might be and therefore as often as not flourishing in the city. But in colonial times, where the city/bush equation was more equally balanced, slang was as much a part of bush life as of city life. It is also true to say that city slang is more often recorded, and the slang of marginal communities more often than not, ignored.

But this leads us to some of the defining features of Australian slang which in popular belief is recognised for two attributes, the first being its black humour and pervasive irony, its constant downplaying of events and downsizing of people. The second is its reportedly huge range and vast lexicon.

The black humour comes from Australian English's colonial origins, when grim humour was a strategy for coping with grim situations. It is particularly evident in phrases allowing for an allusive surprise, such as the following found at the headword 'useful' in the Macquarie Book of Slang:

- useful as a bucket under a bull
- useful as a dead dingo's donger
- useful as a dry thunderstorm
- useful as a glass door on a dunny
- useful as an arsehole on a broom
- useful as an ashtray on a motorbike

- useful as a piss in a shower
- useful as a pocket on a singlet
- useful as a roo-bar on a skateboard
- useful as a sore arse to a boundary rider
- useful as a spare dick at a wedding
- useful as a submarine with screen doors
- useful as a third armpit
- useful as a wart on the hip
- useful as a wether at a ram sale
- useful as a witch's tit
- useful as the bottom half of a mermaid
- useful as tits on a bull
- useful as two knobs of billy-goat poop.

The belief that Australians have more slang at their disposal than any other English language community I think springs from the Australian habit of using slang in situations where other cultures would stick to a formal register. This has the effect of making Australian slang more notable and noted. A moment's reflection on the wealth of American slang would make one query the pre-eminence of Aussie slang. There is no scientific measurement of language varieties in these terms, but it would seem that we are all equally gifted in both the formal and informal registers.

There is plenty of evidence in the *Macquarie Book of Slang* of our reliance on American slang, as for example in such catchphrases as *HeLLO* with a heavy emphasis on the second syllable, and *Don't go there!* as an attempt to avoid an undesirable topic of conversation. But there is still an awful lot of American slang that we don't touch, because it doesn't come our way or it seems irrelevant to our circumstances or it just doesn't take our fancy.

Australian English is still building on its heritage, with, for example, 'tucker fucker', a term used initially for a cook, particularly the kind of second rate cook who churned out meals in institutions and economically run boarding schools, anywhere where cheap food in bulk was required and no one asked too many questions about the standard of cooking. The meaning has been extended in two directions. It has become another name for tomato sauce, and it is now another term for the microwave. Both for obvious reasons.

We borrow, we adapt, we interpret, we bend things to our use. It's a skill that we should be proud of. It's probably Australian culture. The end result is still a unique Australian blend and a unique Australian view.

The question and answer session that followed Sue Butler's talk was very entertaining. Ever the professional, Sue has tracked down these answers to some questions raised on the night:

- The colloquialism *ditzy* is American English from about the early 1970s. The best guess is that it is a blend of *dotty* and *dizzy*.
- Regarding *couldn't organise a one-woman brothel*, it seems it is an individual variation. The more traditional expression is *couldn't organise sex in a brothel*.

**Table A: An Alice Springs Dictionary**

biggest mobs	a lot
Comical Railways	Commonwealth Railways
galah session	a radio talkback session
muchanic	a person who is a bush mechanic who knows a lot about nothing and a little bit about something of engines
snotty gobbles	red, white and black fruit of some acacia bushes
Charlie Queenie Queenie	a small bug, lives in soft sands (ant-lion)
donkey beetles	hard-shelled beetles common in Alice Springs district

**Table B: Flash language**

awake to something	aware of what's going on
old chum/new chum	fellow prisoners in a jail or hulk
conk	nose
do the trick	to carry out a robbery
fence	receiver of stolen goods
frisk	search
gammon	deceit, pretence, plausible language
grub	food

kid	young child, especially a boy who thieves at an early age, perhaps explaining the opprobrium in which this word is still held by many
lark	fun
lush	beer or liquor; to drink such liquor
plant	to hide or conceal
queer	unwell
quod	jail
racket	particular kind of fraud
scotty	irritable
shake someone down	to rob someone
sharp	swindler
on the sly	secretly
snitch on someone	tell on someone
snooze	to sleep
square	honest, fair, upright
stake	booty acquired by robbery
sting	swindle
swag	bundle
swell	gentleman
toddler	small child

**Table C: British English words and their meanings.**

chook	chicken
chuffed	pleased
have a derry on someone	to have a grudge against someone
cobber	friend
dink	double on a bicycle
duffer	cattle thief
dunny	toilet
flummox	to astonish
a fluke	a lucky success
fossick	to rummage around
a geek	a look
give someone gip	to annoy someone
golly	mucus
josh	tease
nick	steal
nincompoop	idiot
ning nong	idiot
purler	an excellent one of its kind
Rafferty's rules	mayhem
a punt	a kick
the rozzers	the police
skerrick	a trace
skite	to boast

slummocky	bedraggled
smidgin	a tiny amount
smoodge	to kiss and cuddle
sook	a coward
little tackers	small children
tiddler	a tiny fish
tootsy	a toe
waffle	talk at length
wonky	unstable

Deadline for next *Bookworm*:  
Tuesday 19 August 2008

### Contacting Editors WA

**President:** Emma Pearmain <[emma007@amnet.net.au](mailto:emma007@amnet.net.au)>

**Vice-President:** Wendy Bulgin <[wendybulgin@iprimus.com.au](mailto:wendybulgin@iprimus.com.au)>

**Treasurer:** Carla Morris <[carlamorris@ozemail.com.au](mailto:carlamorris@ozemail.com.au)>

**Secretary:** Penny Springthorpe <[penny.springthorpe@westnet.com.au](mailto:penny.springthorpe@westnet.com.au)>

#### **General committee members:**

Polly Delany (new member contact) <[pollyevans@iinet.net.au](mailto:pollyevans@iinet.net.au)>

Anne Surma <[a.surma@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:a.surma@murdoch.edu.au)>

Tanya Marwood <[tanya.m@globaldial.com](mailto:tanya.m@globaldial.com)>

Robin Bower <[robinb@westnet.com.au](mailto:robinb@westnet.com.au)>

Amanda Curtin <[acurtin@highway1.com.au](mailto:acurtin@highway1.com.au)>

Jo Smith <[josmith@wordsmithwa.com.au](mailto:josmith@wordsmithwa.com.au)>

**IPED delegate:** Anne Surma <[a.surma@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:a.surma@murdoch.edu.au)>

**IPED Accreditation Board delegate:** Amanda Curtin <[acurtin@highway1.com.au](mailto:acurtin@highway1.com.au)>

**Newsletter editor:** Rebecca Newman <[rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com)>

**Proofreader:** Michele Drouart <[drouart@webace.com.au](mailto:drouart@webace.com.au)>

**Editors WA Web Site:** <[www.editorswa.com](http://www.editorswa.com)>