

Editing matters

The magazine for editors and proofreaders

May/June 2009

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In this issue: **Penny Poole** is at home wherever she lays her hat; **Rod Cuff** searches out some searching issues; **Rob Sandall** ponders the utility of a straitjacket for editors; **Gillian Clarke**, veteran volunteer, discovers evolution; **Sylvia Sullivan** muses on the finer points of the comma; plus news, reviews, letters and all the regular features.

£4.00

By Duncan Poole



Penny Poole demonstrates remote working practices in the heart of the scenic Lake District.

A moving experience

Penny Poole exchanges her best (and worst) experiences of moving home, business and life. A tale of infinite adaptability.

Since launching my business in 1991 I've moved premises seven times and operated in three quite different parts of England. Attention deficit disorder? Not entirely – the location changes were down to my spouse's job moves: a career-risk manager, his skills are not industry-specific, and over the years he has applied them to everything from frozen food to relocation services. You might expect me to be a bit of a relocation expert myself by now, after all these upheavals. I wouldn't claim that dubious honour, but I'm pretty sure I could do better than the glossily packaged 'mobility management' organization that was supposedly masterminding our most recent upping of sticks.

I'm taking this opportunity to share some of the ups and downs of moving and how it has affected the way I and my business operate. I will also reflect on some of the implications of shifting from an urban location to one that is very beautiful but comparatively remote.

Keeping up appearances

Even though I'm a fanatical list-maker, the minutiae of planning and executing a move can really disrupt my sleep patterns; running a business while trying to conceal what's going on behind the scenes certainly takes its toll, with the result that profound fatigue and concentration lapses are almost inevitable. It was sod's law that our last move day coincided precisely with final proof corrections on a quarterly magazine that I edit. I found myself having to disappear up the garden (where mobile phone coverage is patchy – BT having let me down over the connection of the business line) to ensure that my client could not hear the removal team's melodramatic huffing, puffing, effing and blinding. In an ideal world, I would have put work on hold for a couple of weeks while everything shook down, but it just never seems to happen that way.

Settling in

Equilibrium restored, and change of address notification to clients and contacts under way, the priority is to update the website and business stationery. This provides a useful opportunity for a bit of a rethink. Revving up my networking persona (sometimes rather grudgingly!) forces me to take stock and challenge the way I describe what I do. Looking back, it's clear that my track record, matched with a new location, has kick-started new ways of doing things.

In London, the market for outsourced editorial support seemed wide

► 6

E D I T O R I A L

Editing matters

Don't stop me if you've heard this one before

Christina Thomas



When I was starting out, I landed a simple proofreading job with Collins (as it then was). I was delighted: I would be working for a 'proper publisher'.

While giving me a brief over the phone, the in-house editor said, 'Oh, and if you've got any queries, put them in a yellow note.' This really worried me – my only reference book was *Hart's Rules*, and I scoured it fruitlessly for mentions of 'yellow notes'. What could these things be? Were

they some arcane publishing practice, and was I going to show my complete and utter ignorance by asking the client what she meant?

This was the late 1980s, and although I had worked in-house in a publicity department, where I learnt the rudiments of proofreading, and had already done paid work for two publishing houses (neither of them so high-profile as Collins), I knew there was a lot I didn't know.

This lack of knowledge about 'yellow notes' caused me much anxiety: how could I find out what this term meant? Finally, I plucked up courage to ask a friend who was, coincidentally, a member of the SfEP (as it was then). She thought the editor meant a 'Post-it' note, which in those days were exclusively yellow and relative newcomers to the market. My friend was right: the proofs were duly returned covered in Post-it notes, and the client made no comment.

Oh the relief! I felt I had had a narrow escape, and only my friend knew just how green I was.

Nowadays I'm happier to reveal the gaps in my knowledge – I know I don't have to know it all, and I do consult SfEPLine. Some people are more self-conscious than others about the gaps in their knowledge, and may feel less keen to expose their ignorance; but it's acceptable not to know things: the important thing is that we continue to learn and to help each other. Apart from the warm glow that helping someone engenders, it helps to maintain editorial standards, which is in all our interests.

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Editor: Christina Thomas (020 7610 0006, em@sfep.org.uk).
Copy-editor and typesetter: Rich Cutler, Helius.
Proofreaders: Rod Cuff, Word & Web (UK) Ltd.

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Chair: Sarah Price (chair@sfep.org.uk)
Vice-chair: Wendy Toole (profdev@sfep.org.uk)
Company secretary: Justina Amenu (secretary@sfep.org.uk)
Membership committee:
Gillian Clarke (publications@sfep.org.uk)
John Marsden (liaison@sfep.org.uk)
Sarah Patey (membership@sfep.org.uk)
Lawrence Osborn (regdev@sfep.org.uk)
Training and professional development committee:
Wendy Toole (profdev@sfep.org.uk)
Gerard Hill (mentoring@sfep.org.uk)
Caroline Landon (training@sfep.org.uk)
Lotika Singha (conference@sfep.org.uk)
Communications committee:
Nancy Duin (internet@sfep.org.uk)
Gillian Clarke (publications@sfep.org.uk)
Katharine Timberlake (marketingpr@sfep.org.uk)

Contacting the SfEP

Information exchange: Chris Shaw (information_exchange@sfep.org.uk)
Online *Directory* changes: Rod Cuff (online-directory@sfep.org.uk)
General and training enquiries: Helen Martin (020 8785 5617, admin@sfep.org.uk)
Accounts: Bridget Buckle (020 8785 5619, accounts@sfep.org.uk)
Executive secretary: Justina Amenu (020 8785 5616, executive@sfep.org.uk)

SfEP, Erico House, 93–99 Upper Richmond Road, London SW15 2TG. Fax: 020 8785 5618

www.sfep.org.uk

Editorial freedom

Rob Sandall muses on the amount of leeway that magazine editors enjoy and whether rigid systems really contribute to the success or quality of a project.

As editors, I think we like to pride ourselves on individuality, in terms of both technique and the publications we produce. No two of us are alike, and only when the right editor is paired with the right title does a perfect publication appear. Being left to our own devices would be a perfect scenario: however, the second a publisher becomes involved, it gets a little tricky.

I've heard the process of organizing multiple editors and magazines within a company referred to as 'herding cats', and that's about fair. There's a natural inclination, then, to try to standardize procedures and have everyone singing off the same similarly published hymn sheet. This is nowhere near as easy as it sounds, and it doesn't sound very easy in the first place.

From the ground up

There's less of a difficulty within the major publishing houses, of course – many editors have been trained in the company's strict procedure from their initial employment as staff writers all the way up, and I don't think I'd be too far off the mark asserting that movement up the ranks is two-thirds talent, one-third willingness to follow the rules.

Having worked under editors trained by EMAP and Future, I could certainly argue that each month's rigours come together efficiently. This benefits not only the title itself but also the people working under its well-organized captain.

All well and good, then, but independents don't fit quite so well to this template. Many editors working in an independent publishing house have been handed their roles because of their knowledge of the subject matter – hobbyists and experts who happen to be able to push a well-balanced issue out of the door.

Whether these editors do this in quite such an efficient way as is managed in a huge corporation is the contentious point, but, since being shackled with an Issue Progress Flowchart Checklist, I can't help but feel a little neutered.

Click 'OK' to proceed

The idea is to have every individual checkpoint across the length of a title ticked off, and for everything to follow a set order. Not until every piece of copy is in and the pictures are collated does the design process begin, and not until the advertising/editorial pow-wow takes place can any sort of forward feature planning take place. Common sense, right?

Right. But I'm pretty sure I did that anyway. Anyone who has spent 30 seconds working on a magazine can tell you that, yes, in *theory* we need all the copy in, but there'll always be someone getting their copy through at last orders. Advertising also does a wonderful line in nonchalance and subsequent last-second deals, so for all the planning we put together based around potential sales, you can guarantee there'll be a sudden, sponsored-article iceberg drifting out of the mists just as the harbour's in sight.

This can be handled, but it means that the checklists won't be ticked off in strict order, and whatever the reasons for this, a stern telling-off awaits as a penalty. Inevitably, we've done what you'd expect – started to tick off everything day by day, regardless of how much progress on the title we've actually made. This renders the checklist even more useless, and no one gains any honest insight at all. It's more than reasonable to want to monitor a title, but not at the expense of logic, and the proud editors, who until taking the job have very likely never been so

closely managed, are going to point this out quickly.

Fighting styles

House style is the other casualty of rigid thinking. Occasionally, an article appears with photography so unusually stunning that maybe we can break from house style just this once, cut out that picture and have it gloriously dead centre, ginormous on the page. The readers will notice, it'll catch their attention like a hammer blow, and, very likely, prompt a good response. It will wake up the long-term subscribers who have started to go through the motions. It will sit as a beacon of potential and daring to come, amidst the friendly, familiar style we feel comfortable working within.

It will almost definitely be rejected.

There's not a cramp on stylistic flair *per se*, it's more that, with the recession biting down on consumer sales and middle management fretting over where the blame will be placed, the idea of taking any sort of risk suddenly becomes that much more, well, risky. No one wants to be a victim to hindsight, to hold their hand up to signing off the article that didn't go down as well as expected. This isn't something that's hard to understand, but while some editors know better than to push things that little bit further than they should, some of us can't help but try our luck.

I have had huge arguments over the look of an article, and I'll admit that sometimes these have been unfounded and more a case of digging my heels in. But while no one would argue with the importance of following house style, editors who are aficionados first, editors second will be thinking just as much from the perspective of a reader as from anywhere else. It's insulting to think we'd risk our customers' reading experience

with a poorly conceived idea, and if we have something to say, it's with good reason.

Sadly, it's like screaming at the ocean, and the tide of sensible 'ain't broke' thinking predictably sweeps over the most heartfelt pleas. The article will be redesigned in rigid house style, upsetting the editor and designer, and at times depriving the reader.

Playing it safe

There are those who would say that the forms and checklists littering the desks of editors are there to do little more than justify the payroll of administrators, and that an unwillingness to push the boundaries of style is nothing more than running scared from the unknown. But it might also be argued that the worst thing about 'indie' editors is that

we're almost always sure that we know best, and will sulk if we're told otherwise. Quality control, it goes without saying, is going to need several levels of review to keep output at a high standard, and dealing with each editor's individual quirks only adds work to that process.

But we are employed as the characters we are, and while training young subeditors under tight paradigms works a treat, the older editors will find less worth in changing their preferred methods for the benefit of someone else. I'd go as far as saying that some employees will never be 'broken in', and will forever fall under the evil eye of an unimpressed publisher. But, I suppose, at least the choice is there. I, for one, will try to strike a balance between individuality and checklists, but I fear for my

sanity – I'm working these articles into my own checklisted schedules now, and soon, I fear, eating my cereal and nodding to passers-by will appear on the list too.

But lest we forget, it's often a particularly free-spirited editor's notion that they can do the job better that leads to new publishing companies popping up quite regularly, keeping all the more of us in employment. One can only hope they'll remember their own fiery arguments when they're staring down their nose at the next revolutionary hopeful brandishing a flowchart.

About the author ...

Rob Sandall is a penniless freelance writer trapped in the body of a national magazine editor. The former is to provide job satisfaction, the latter is to subsidize the continued existence of the former.

How do clients use the *Directory*?

There were over 5700 searches of the *SfEP Directory of Editorial Services* in the first two months of 2009. Rod Cuff looks at how clients use it, and what lessons there might be for us.

Searches, through the FreeFind commercial service, are free. Most users of the *SfEP* online *Directory* specify one or two words at a time, although they can also look for exact phrases, exclude words and use boolean connectives (see later). The box shows terms used more than 30 times in February (omitting words such as *the* and variants on *copy-editor*, *proofreader*, etc.). Others worth noting included *psychology*, *websites*, *physics*, *GCSE*, *business*, *anglicizer*, *accountancy*, *mathematics*, *biology*, *health*, *arts*, *EU* and *economics*.

January's list was very similar, the only notable additions being *theology*, *computer*, *chemistry*, *project*

[*management*], *travel*, *anthropology* and *thesis*.

It's not easy to derive useful hints from these, but here are a few ideas.

- 'Advanced' is never far from the top: it's worth becoming an advanced member!
- 'Screen' is probably from *on screen*: if you work on screen, say so explicitly.
- Think around your specialisms: if you include *European Union*, add (perhaps in hidden text – see below) *EU*, *EEC* and *European Community* as well.

The Results page includes three special links that users can explore.

Firstly, FreeFind automatically produces an index of all words found in at least one entry. This can have the occasional undesirable consequence: for example, searching on *computer* retrieves over 400 entries, since nearly everyone has *computer(s)* in their section on equipment and software.

Secondly, FreeFind offers search tips to help users improve results

Popular *Directory* search results: February 2009

fiction	advanced
science	screen
medical	development
history	travel
London	biography
education	law
music	

when the first attempt returns too many or too few entries. For instance, entries with specific words can be rejected. Users can use wild cards, but almost no one does. It's not unusual, though, to search using boolean logic, such as (*cats* AND *dogs*) OR *pets*. If there's more than one search word but no boolean connection, FreeFind's algorithm serves the user sensibly:

By default the search engine tries to locate pages that have exact matches for all of the words entered in your search query. If that fails, it then tries to locate pages which contain any words in your search query.

Thirdly, a boolean search can also be formulated by filling in advanced search fields, on a page that has its own set of search tips. It reveals that automatic word-stemming is employed by default:

Word stemming is used to match multiple forms of a word to a single query term. For example, when stemming is on, the word 'use' would also match 'used' and 'using', and the word 'run' would match 'runs' and 'running'.

The user can turn this off, but almost certainly doesn't. This is helpful to us. It means, for example, that if one of your specialities is a particular *technology*, you needn't clutter your entry with *technologies* and *technological* on the off-chance that the searcher uses one of those terms instead. Note, though, that *mathematics* and *maths* get different results: word-stemming is not as intelligent as one might wish.

Another helpful default is that case and accents are ignored: for instance, a user specifying *Baillière* and *bailliere* retrieves identical results. However, it's as well to cater for users who turn off the default but later forget to change it back. So if your entry has an accented word, I can fix things 'under the covers', if you wish, so that accented and unaccented versions will be found but only the accented one displayed on screen. In fact, I can extend that offer

The screenshot shows the SFEP (Society for Editors and Proofreaders) website. The header includes the SFEP logo and the text 'Society for Editors and Proofreaders'. Below the header, there is a navigation menu on the left with items like Home, About SFEP, News, Membership, Training, Qualifications, Directory, Conferences, Magazine, FAQs, Links, Members' area, and Code of practice. The main content area is titled 'SFEP: Directory Search Results' and features a search bar with the word 'italy' entered. Below the search bar, there are three search results listed, each with a brief description of the member's services and expertise. The first result is for Pamela E. Ward, the second for Judith Wardman, and the third for Daphne Trotter. Each result includes a 'Search' button and a 'Refine' button.

Directory search results for italy.

to *any* word that you don't want to have visible on screen but that you'd like to serve as a hidden searchable term. For example, if your free text says 'expert in the history of the Potteries', your hidden terms could include *Arnold Bennett* and the names of the Five Towns.

FreeFind emails a weekly list of the 50 most recent queries (usually on a Monday). They can be wildly eclectic: those for 16 March included *promotion* AND *tenure*, *Christian children* and *commercial women's fiction*. These snapshots illustrate the problems of relying on frequency figures to give a true picture: variants on *fluent German proofreader London* occurred seven times in an hour, and clearly came from just one potential client. A week earlier, the 50 queries included 12 consecutive instances of *proofreader* and 19 variants on *typesetting quark keyboarding keyword*: that's

62 per cent of the sample taken up with efforts by just two searchers.

You're welcome to change your directory entry as often as you like, by sending an email to online-directory@sfep.org.uk (I batch routine updates, but will email you when the change is made). Restrictions from the days of the printed directory – limited lengths of free text, client list and subject list – no longer exist. If you want your free text to stand out more with paragraphs, bullet lists, web links ... just ask. Feel free to re-order specialisms or clients as you wish. Be creative! Be bold! Be better off!

About the author ...

Rod Cuff has been running the online *Directory* since 2002. He still enjoys the interaction with so many members, even more so since it became a paid job.

SALES ASSISTANT ANGELA		
FUN VEG PEELER	VEG HANDLED	2.49
GOODS TOTAL		2.49
CASH		2.50
CHANGE		0.01
THANK YOU FOR SHOPPING LOCALLY		
T1	2 Apr 2009	8 15:20 RECEIPT 2887

Thanks to Peter Nicol, who submitted this gem of consumer encouragement.

Continued from page 1 ...

open. Yet getting a foot in the door and making connections was tough, and I relied on (and, thankfully, gained confidence through) working collaboratively and hunting in packs.

Down South, my experiences of small-business support were disappointing. Fast-forward to a rural setting, and Business Link has come up trumps, providing a professional services 'broker' who is well informed and fully fired up. I certainly underestimated the tenacity of the rural economy. Here is one example. Battle-scarred by the foot-and-mouth epidemic, farms here in Cumbria have been energetically reorganizing and, in many cases, diversifying. Many are ditching the middleman, instead dealing directly with up-market restaurants that are looking for, among other high-quality ingredients, flavoursome mutton. There are consequent opportunities for wordsmiths to provide support such as web content writing and editing and the production of marketing materials. This also goes for a whole host of leisure and tourism operators, small-scale manufacturers and service providers and web-based businesses.

Making connections

You arrive in a new place knowing no one. The neighbours are welcoming, but, as far as your business is concerned, it's a standing start. Ploughing up and down the nearest public swimming pool one morning, feeling distinctly glum, I fell into

conversation with another (expatriate) 'early bird'. She told me about a local networking group. In these parts, they're refreshingly different – a world away from the high-pressure 'You must turn up every Wednesday, at 6.45 am sharp!' urban variety. I've picked up a bit of business from clients within striking distance (which pleases the accountant) via these groups, but just as important is their value as a source of local nous and answers to daft questions such as 'Where do I find a large-format laminator in a hurry?'. A rural women's network group recommendation put me in touch with the most responsive IT support business I've ever come across, anywhere – and the group has shown, over and over again, how much small rural enterprises (especially those run by women) can help each other out. And last, but not least, three cheers for the SfEP local group!

Despite (or because of) the challenging economic climate, there is a surprising number of business start-ups in the pipeline (encouraged perhaps by grant funding for rural micro-businesses from the Rural Development Programme for England), again offering potential for providing wordsmithing backup. I'm also, slowly, establishing connections with the big names in the energy sector that have local representation (some of which I've worked with before in other parts of the country), via a business cluster group.

Practical considerations

The practical details of running a small business in a rural location have become a bit of a preoccupation. All-day power cuts didn't cross my mind when I lived in Home Counties South, or North London or Chester. Now, I'm poring over diesel generator catalogues. In October, a spectacular *son et lumière*, courtesy of a sudden massive bolt of lightning, caused a day-long outage and blew the wireless router into oblivion. Where are the nearest short-let serviced offices? Three-quarters of an hour away!

What about 'client churn'? Have the technology, distance no object?

Most of my regular, long-standing clients have moved with me. But time will tell, and I suspect that some feel more comfortable when they know you're just round the corner and can drop in to bale them out. For others, location is completely irrelevant.

The most obvious downside for me is longer journey times, which, during the dark Cumbrian winters, are tedious. A recent bid for an editing job on site at the Midlands HQ of a civil-engineering client involved a 5.00 am start one morning, which turned into a 19-hour day. I got back home late in the evening (after another early start) of the following day – completely whacked! But come the beginning of March, the rural idyll reawakens, and it's perfectly possible to put in a respectable number of hours at your desk on a home-office-based day *and* manage a decent fell walk for some creative inspiration. And just in case you *really* need to stay in touch, have dongle, will google – the ultimate in flexible working!

Working in 21st Century Rural England, published by the Institute for Employment Studies, is a worthwhile read.

About the author ...

Penny Poole writes and edits for businesses throughout the UK and also delivers the SfEP's one-day course 'Getting work with non-publishers', running in London on 1 October.

The SfEP review of books

This month we are adding the following review to the website. It first appeared in *Editing Matters*, Mar/Apr 2009:

- *New Oxford Companion to Law*, reviewed by Julian Bates.

Conference call: SfEP 20th annual conference, Vanbrugh College, University of York, 14–15 September 2009

'Editing in the 21st century': a sneak preview

The conference committee has put together a stimulating programme for the SfEP's 20th annual conference. Here, we take a peek at some of the exciting new workshops and seminars.

Rising from the shadows are three well-known SfEP members who have kindly offered to share their expert knowledge (and frustrations) on how not to panic when faced with tables on your computer screen, how to make the best use of the SfEP's newest, growing, invaluable resource – SfEPWiki – and how to get to grips with Microsoft Word 2007. In addition, there is a new seminar on the role of virtual teams in publishing.

Editing tables on screen

Penny Howes has worked as a freelance copy-editor for 10 years, mainly for STM publishers, with some additional research and writing work.

Penny's workshop will outline the basic features of tables in Word and look at typesetters' requirements for dealing with them – either as tabbed text or as Word tables. It will then move on to look at the numerous ways in which authors can present tables in a Word document and how the copy-editor should deal with them. Many of them 'look right' but are quite a challenge to edit and present in a way that is usable for typesetting; some don't even look right in the first place, and are more of a challenge; and then there are those that can only be described as 'tables from Hell'! We will use a hands-on interactive approach, with delegates using a file supplied beforehand to work through the various problems that may be encountered. Participants need their own laptop

and a basic working knowledge of Word, but little experience with tables will be assumed.

Using and contributing to SfEPWiki

Louise Bolotin has been a journalist and editor for 30 years, specializing in finance, technology, consumer and societal issues.

The workshop will start with a live tour of SfEPWiki, explaining how a wiki works and covering basic questions such as why a wiki is unlike traditional websites, how to search it, and the concepts of sub-pages and categories. Participants will then learn how to contribute to SfEPWiki using the most common and basic coding commands in the MediaWiki software that powers most wikis. They will discover how to edit live wiki pages, create and link pages to each other, and make levels of headings and tables. The concept of the 'wiki sandbox' will be explained, and there will be practical exercises so that everyone can try making their own pages.

Moving to Word 2007

Anne Waddingham is one of our most prolific workshop leaders who never fails to inspire.

Looking at its many versions, Word can sometimes seem like a maddening friend whose eccentric habits include a makeover obsession. The latest incarnation, Word 2007, comes bedecked in 'ribbons', like Scarlett O'Hara played by Dame Edna – fancy new duds but the same raddled harridan underneath. If you are contemplating upgrading to the new interface, or have taken the plunge and are wondering what

happened to the File or Tools menu or to AutoCorrect, or are puzzling over where your templates have ended up, then this workshop will reassure you that much is the same underneath the ribbons, and that there are even some new features that make Word 2007 an attractive option.

Effectiveness of virtual teams

One of the two new seminars will be delivered by Nora Naughton, the managing director of Naughton Project Management, a company providing editorial and production solutions to publishers, as well as training and consultancy.

Nora's seminar will start with an overview of how the structure of publishing has changed over the last 15 years. The industry faces a huge global challenge: accelerated advances in technology and the global reach of the internet influence the way information is disseminated, and traditional publishing markets are becoming marginalized.

In publishing, the speed at which information reaches readers is often critical, and the availability of 'free' content is changing the way that publishers must do business. Readers no longer want to wait months for content.

Whether publishing is traditional through books and journals or online, effective virtual teams are critical. They allow reduced overheads, enable input from global expertise, ensure and monitor quality with fast turnaround, and can provide a better work/life balance for team members.

The seminar will examine the creation, management and effectiveness of virtual teams in publishing – a topic that is particularly relevant in the 'information age'. It will cover issues such as trust, leadership, communication and knowledge management. ■

Volunteering: then and now

Gillian Clarke, veteran of the Society and the committee, and now a council member, looks at the changing role of the volunteer from the early days of hands-on admin and involvement to the current more hands-off delegation that is becoming a reality for most directors.

One of the thoughts that have occurred to me since the 2008 conference – ‘20/20 vision: looking forward, looking back’ – has been about how we all are involved in running the Society. I’ve outlined the background below, much of which is based on my having been on the original committee and, now, being on the current council.

How did things work at first?

At the beginning, everyone was a volunteer. The meeting in November 1988, at which the Society was proposed, ended with Norma Whitcombe, with her stalwart colleague Michèle Clarke, concluding that there was enough interest to turn the idea into a fact. She asked for volunteers to form the first committee. At that point, the only roles specified were the chair (which Norma took by unanimous vote), the membership secretary (which Michèle had agreed to take) and the treasurer (for which Lesley Ward volunteered – after a long pause when the rest of us kept very quiet!); the remainder would be members of the committee.

At our first committee meeting, held in December in one of the quieter areas of the Royal Festival Hall, London, we shared out roles according to what each of us felt we could contribute. Because I’d been teaching copy-editing for the Publishing Training Centre (then the Book House Training Centre) and thus had some understanding of the administration of training courses, I spoke up for training, and gave myself the title of training liaison, a job I eventually did for eight years (or nine, if you count my first, voluntary, year).

Early on, we established that ‘secretarial’ parts of our work could be reimbursed. This was based on the fact that Norma had a part-time

secretary, who would type letters and so on to do with the Society of Freelance Editors and Proofreaders (as it was then called). Apart from that, we developed ways of offloading some of our work to other volunteers, some of whom were paid a small fee, others not.

For example, the administration involved in dealing with applications to attend our training courses could take up quite a lot of time, especially as the number and range of courses we offered increased. This was outsourced, and a small fee paid per hour involved. Booking venues and tutors remained part of the core job, as did determining how often to run a particular course and commissioning new courses and tutors.

The newsletter began as two sides of an A4 sheet, but quickly grew and was produced more formally. Initially Michèle distributed this herself, but soon found that this work with a growing membership needed to be outsourced – to a neighbour, this time. Even then, however, the job grew and needed to be put out to a distribution company. In the meantime, the editorship of the newsletter continued as a voluntary job until 2004, although the typesetting, proofreading and management had been paid jobs for some years beforehand.

As the membership continued to grow, the job of registering new members became a task for which the then membership secretary was paid a small fee per person enrolled.

Changes in the wind

As the years have passed, and the Society’s role has grown, other jobs have been born. For example, the restructuring of the Society – a huge task, in response to the membership’s request – was developed by a volun-

teer group, the membership restructuring committee. One of the results of the restructuring was the formation of the admissions panel, which is responsible for examining applications for upgrading membership. Panel members are paid an hourly rate for this task. The principle of the applicants being anonymous (to prevent bias – one way or another!) was carried over from the days when the Society had a system of ‘Registration by test exemption’. By this method, members with long experience could become registered by obtaining references from three clients, who were promised confidentiality regarding their responses. Another voluntary group is the remuneration committee, which looks at, and makes recommendations about, the fees paid for SfEP work.

Some changes have come about as team roles have altered, and others have developed from ideas suggested or requested by the membership. The Society’s structure is an example of responding to the membership’s desires.

Easing the volunteer’s role

Although outsourcing some of the then committee work (such as



Bridget and Helen hard at work on renewals

By Christina Thomas

training admin) began fairly early on in the Society's life, the pace at which centralization has developed has speeded up more recently.

For several years now, the Society's management team – the council – has been reducing the amount of hands-on input that directors have in running the Society. The 'secretarial' and admin work for which committee members could be reimbursed is now done in our office: Helen Martin looks after the day-to-day matters, and the bookkeeping/accounts work is done by Bridget Buckle. We also have an executive secretary, Justina Amenu, who does much of the work that once fell to the committee members and then (since we became a limited company) the directors. The directors make the strategic decisions (after discussion by email and at council meetings),

and the office executes them. Examples of tasks handed over include dealing with applications for membership, membership renewal, paying invoices, seeking conference sponsorship, administration of our training courses and adding to the benefits of membership.

The Society is very fortunate to have members who volunteer to do 'occasional' jobs, such as proof-reading information that is to be sent out, collating the papers for conference, helping with the marketing and public relations aspects of the Society, and so on. The job of director is still regarded as voluntary, but is paid if it is necessary to put in more than 15 hours in any one month. (This excludes the time spent attending the six council meetings, as we all regard this as an obvious part of our role.)

It has been a rewarding experience to make a comeback (in 2007) to the management team. I am revising the skills I learned all those years ago – speaking in public, arguing my case to fellow committee/council members, and generally keeping up with what is going on. As well as having SfEP headed paper, we directors also have business cards for our roles – they make a great impression. And, of course, when putting together or revising your CV, directorship of the SfEP is an impressive addition!

About the author ...

As Gillian says, she is a founder member of the SfEP. She has seen the Society develop from a 'baby' in which the membership was grateful for anything that was on offer, through the recalcitrant teenage years and now into young adulthood. Happy birthday, SfEP!

Finer points 'Pointing' clauses

Sylvia Sullivan

The poet John Clare was famously idiosyncratic if not downright cavalier about punctuation:

I do not use that awkward [sic] squad of pointings called commas colons semicolons &c... for they even set gramarians [sic] at loggerheads & no one can assign them their proper places for give each a sentence to point & both shall differ – point it differently.

(Storey M (ed) (1988) John Clare: *Selected Letters*, OUP, Oxford, p153)

Well, poetic licence may allow Clare and others to ignore it, but for humble wordsmiths, especially those concerned with non-fiction texts, punctuation is an important element of our work.

Of all the punctuation marks, the comma vexes writers, editors and proofreaders the most, because all

are prone to, in Clare's words, 'point differently'. Although many publishers, particularly science publishers, instruct their authors and contributors to use as few commas as possible, there are occasions when their inclusion or omission can have a subtle but significant influence on meaning.

One case is in defining and non-defining adjectival clauses (also known as restrictive and non-restrictive clauses). Consider the difference between:

The teacher who is waiting in the staff room is the art master.

The teacher, who is waiting in the staff room, is the art master.

In the first example the reader can infer that there is only one teacher currently in the staff room and he happens to be the art master. The adjectival clause 'who is waiting in the staff room' is defining.

In the second example the reader can infer that there is only one teacher involved, and the information that he is in the staff room is extra – the clause is 'non-defining'.

In each case the sentence can be shortened, but the presence or absence of commas around the subordinate clause gives a different meaning to it.

The teacher waiting in the staff room is becoming impatient.

The teacher, waiting in the staff room, is becoming impatient.

Consider, too:

Kauto Star won the Cheltenham Gold Cup for the second time in March. His stable mates Denman and Neptune Collonges finished second and fourth.

Here, the reader might infer that three horses from the same stable contested the race. ▶



Kauto Star won the Cheltenham Gold Cup for the second time in March. His stable mates, Denman and Neptune Collonges, finished second and fourth.

Here, the reader might infer that Kauto Star has only two stable mates and their names are extra information.

Now, I know that Kauto Star has more than two stable companions, and I can conclude that the first sentence is the more accurate. But what happens when you do not know the subject? Take the following example. The Gospel according to John (19:25) in the *New International Version Bible*, has:

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

In the *King James Bible*, the same verse is rendered:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

Was John referring to three or four women? From the *NIV*, I would have said that there were four women: from the *King James* version, probably three. In all these versions 'the wife

of Cleophas' is a defining clause, necessary because there are several women with the same name – my dilemma as an editor or proofreader here lies in 'Was the Madonna's sister also named Mary?'. In similar circumstances, I would have been unlikely to query the *NIV* – in the absence of further information, it clearly reads that there are four women, except I had a lingering subconscious niggle that there should have been but three. However, faced with the *King James* version, I might have queried this and suggested: 'his mother, his mother's sister (Mary the wife of Cleophas) and Mary Magdalene'.

This illustrates that the sense, and therefore the need or otherwise for enclosing commas, can often be deduced from supporting material, but on occasion only the author may know what is meant.

Another common misapprehension concerning such clauses is that 'which' should be preceded by a comma. However, this also depends on whether the clause is defining or non-defining. Consider the following:

The cat which is sitting on the mat is a Persian blue.

This implies that there is at least one other cat.

The cat, which is sitting on the mat, is a Persian blue.

Here, there is no other cat.

This seems to me to be a good reason to encourage authors to use 'that' for defining clauses.

The cat that is sitting on the mat is a Persian blue; the cat on the rug is a Siamese.

Although it is largely a matter of style, many people today prefer to use 'which', whereas to me 'that' has a sharper, more precise sound, which is surely what is intended in a defining clause. It may not be practical or desirable at proof stage to change 'which' to 'that' at every available opportunity, but when editing, particularly short documents such as reports or brochures, it is something I always bear in mind.

About the author ...

Sylvia Sullivan is an advanced member of the Society and a former newsletter editor and committee member. With a background in ornithology and conservation, she now specializes in project management.

Wiki watch

Louise Bolotin

The SfEP council decided in late March to grant corporate members access to SfEPWiki. Some joined almost immediately following the announcement, while the number of those joining from the general membership continues to rise. Volunteers are still busy mining the SfEPLine archives, which has greatly boosted the number of pages, currently close to 200. The new section on typography continues to grow, covering lots of thorny questions on fonts, character codes and unusual characters, among other things.

New pages:

- Zipping files
- Accountants
- Professional indemnity
- Quotations
- ISBNs

Updated articles:

- Pricing work
- Rates
- Finding work
- Working on PDFs
- Ergonomics
- Abbreviations

Wanted pages:

- Overseas clients
- Accounts
- Invoicing

- VoIP
- XML

The list of wanted pages is increasing as fast as new pages are being added – you can see a partial list of the wanted pages on the wiki's home page. If you have knowledge of any of the wanted topics, do please dive in and share your expertise. If you don't have the confidence to create new pages, many of the existing ones need organizing and editing, or expanding.

There will be a hands-on workshop on SfEPWiki at this year's conference in York, aimed at complete beginners.

To access SfEPWiki, go to www.sfepwiki.org.

LETTERS



Why I absolutely love my job

Paul Beverley

Probably the two things I most enjoy in life are learning and teaching, and I've spent a lifetime doing both, but the (almost) four years since I started as a freelance and joined the SfEP have been the most fulfilling. After well over 20 years of self-publishing (books and magazines), I thought I knew about editing and proofreading. Ha! Then I joined the SfEP and started to *really* learn.

When people ask me about my job, I say that I get to read lots of interesting things and get paid good money to do so. What could be better? But there are several different aspects to indulging my lifelong passion for learning.

The joy of learning English – the 'Brush up your grammar' course was an excellent start, but every day I learn more about English – and what a lot there is to learn!

The fun of 'playing with' words – I've always applied my (limited) knowledge of programming to manipulate words rather than numbers. As a teacher in the 1970s, it was to help me generate reports, and now it's to analyse the use of words in a book, to produce macros (most satisfyingly, PreEdit, which greatly improves my productivity) and to edit LaTeX scripts.

Continuous 'on the job' learning – the more I learn about editing and proofreading, the more there is to learn, and, once again, the SfEP has been crucial – both the courses and SfEPLine. Yes, I've bought books, but I learn best by interacting with others, which is why SfEP courses and being on SfEPLine have been so important to me.

(May I, dear editor, be permitted a heartfelt plea at this point? The absolute prerequisite for learning is the admission of ignorance. More than once on SfEPLine I've experienced the attitude, 'Well, if you don't know *that* you shouldn't be doing the job!' My skin is pachydermic, but are other potential learners inhibited by this attitude? If so, in my view, it's a real shame.)

'Well, I never knew that' – I thoroughly enjoy learning about such a wide range of subjects, from an Indian travelogue to a dictionary of plastering, from urgent daily press releases to a monthly magazine about European engineering, from workbooks for primary maths to postgrad textbooks about astrophysics – there's something new to learn every day.

The joy of sharing with others – I feel that my satisfaction has now come full circle. Last week, two friends who have just done the PTC proofreading course worked alongside me on my engineering magazine. It was just brilliant – such fun not working all on my own for once, but also the joy of sharing my enthusiasm for the job with others wanting to get started.

I'm a very happy (just got his bus-pass) man.

My views on my club

Muriel Nichols

I was saddened to hear Janet Reed's views on the SfEP in *Editing Matters*, Mar/Apr 2009, as they are so different from my own.

I picked up several points, the first being that Janet has possibly been 'pushed', against her will, into joining various organizations in the

past, and possibly joined ours with some inherent, natural, trepidation. I have felt the same way on many occasions, as I've walked through a door to a first meeting, or attended a gathering of people much more knowledgeable than I am.

Reading on, I was pleased to find the words 'share information', as, to me, sharing, especially with lots of people via the voluntary (third) sector, will, in these days of continually reduced educational facilities, apathy, greed and credit crunch, save the country. I recently wrote a letter to *Country Life* about the return to facilities provided by churches and theatres, to fill the gaps in education in history and geography. To me, this revolves around sharing and voluntary mentoring.

Now, the great divide: I am bottom of the lowest order in our profession: a 61-year-old woman with no specific qualifications, attempting to run a proofreading business. But I still felt happy and welcome and part of a sharing environment at our conference in Oxford last year. I took home tomes of useful information, as well as a sense of confidence in my work, and felt I'd made many friends. SfEP legal advice has already helped me enormously, saving me £200 and my good name. Central to the SfEP is, I believe, sharing. The people who befriended me are, I know, more knowledgeable than I am, but they shared what they knew, unconditionally – which is why the SfEP first started.

As a 'for instance' of the welcome I felt, I attended the indexing talk, as I'd left my booking too late to select areas relevant to me. When we had group discussions I expected to be left out – knowing absolutely nothing about the subject except that it's manned by people far more expert than me – but I wasn't ignored and really enjoyed myself.

If finance allows me to get to York (the kids are getting married!), I do hope we meet.

BOOK REVIEW



Microsoft Office Word 2007: Essential Reference for Power Users

By Matthew Strawbridge, Software Reference, Ely, 2007. 640pp, £39.95 (pbk). ISBN 978 0 955 46141 5

This sizeable work (think telephone directory) was self-published by our own Matthew Strawbridge, and is a labour of love – if that's the right term – if ever I saw one. Matthew has painstakingly gone down all the highways and byways, as well as the side roads and little lanes, to explore every menu, every option, every button that Word 2007 possesses, so that you don't have to.

Why would anyone do such a thing? The blurb explains that this is *not* a user manual but a 'serious reference for power users, for whom the online help is not detailed enough'. Power users are envisaged to be Word trainers, helpdesk support staff and Microsoft Office programmers – not your average SfEP member, then.

Having said that, there's much to be got out of this book, if you're a serious Word user, for editing, particularly if you're confident enough to wade into the swirling waters of

Visual Basic, the macro programming language. This is because the book is heavily cross-referenced to the relevant Word commands; indeed, Chapter 9 is a complete alphabetical list of built-in commands, and even includes old ones (in grey type) that should not be used in new macros.

Chapter 1, on basic concepts, is especially useful for filling in the gaps that we all have in our knowledge – I'd learnt half a dozen new things by the time I reached p5! Matthew's tips are particularly handy, and are often backed up with reference to Microsoft Knowledge Base articles. Two examples are instructions for turning off the Mini Toolbar, which appears like a ghost when your cursor hovers over selected text – irritatingly causing me to format text accidentally – and, more seriously, a warning of a bug in the Document Map feature when used in large documents.

Chapters 2–8 painstakingly list all the features and commands for the Office button, the ribbons, task panes and dialog boxes. Chapter 10 is a table of all the default keyboard

shortcuts and their commands, while Chapters 11 and 12 cover field codes and fonts, respectively, including a comprehensive list of symbols. There are seven appendixes, listing, for example, all the default words that are replaced by the AutoCorrect feature and an explanation of all the puzzling shapes that your cursor can turn into when handling, for example, graphics, as well as a chart of the 'invisible characters', such as the grey square brackets that indicate a bookmark has been inserted.

Don't buy this publication if you're getting frustrated because the Tools menu has disappeared in the new ribbon interface and you can't find AutoCorrect. I wouldn't recommend this book if you are just feeling your way with Word 2007 – use Microsoft's interactive tutorial or buy a good 'how to' guide such as *Word 2007: The Missing Manual* (Pogue Press, 2006) if you want to learn about using wildcards or extended text, for instance – and the blurb makes it clear that this book is for experts. But if you want to save yourself some time finding out what all those ribbon and dialog options mean, and maybe incorporate them into useful macros, then this book has no equal. ■

Anne Waddingham

TRAINING

SfEP courses May–Jul 2009

Editing medical texts

23 Jun

BA, London

Efficient copy-editing

28 May

BA, London

Going freelance and staying there

26 May

4 Jun

BA, London

SBC, Edinburgh

Introduction to proofreading

27 May, 24 Jun, 29 Jul

3 Jun

BA, London

SBC, Edinburgh

On-screen editing 1

9 Jun

HC, London

On-screen editing 2

13 May

HC, London

Proofreading for accreditation

1 Jul

BA, London

Proofreading problems

2 Jun

SBC, Edinburgh

BA: Booksellers Association, 272 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1BA.
HC: Happy Computers, Cityside House, 40 Alder Street, London E1 1EE.
SBC: Scottish Book Centre, 137 Dundee Street, Edinburgh EH11 1BG.

All courses are described on the Society's website (www.sfep.org.uk/pub/train/training.asp). Bookings should be sent to the SfEP general secretary (training), Erico House, 93–99 Upper Richmond Road, London SW15 2TG (admin@sfep.org.uk).

NEWS

What the council's been up to

Topics for discussion at the 11 March council meeting were as varied as ever, and included:

- Council vacancies: it looks as if two new members may be needed at the AGM.
- Office computers: two are near the end of their useful lives, and purchase of new ones was approved.
- Sponsorship for the conference: the current list was reviewed, and suggestions made as to who might be approached.
- Conference venues: the council is keen to establish three venues around which the conference can revolve – the advantage would be that this would free up much valuable time currently spent on looking for venues. Nottingham, Oxford and Edinburgh are the current contenders.
- Mentoring: induction and training plans for mentors were discussed.
- FAQs and membership information: revision and updating is progressing well.
- Internet and wiki: corporate associates will be given access to the wiki, but their access to SfEPLine will be reviewed later this year. Meanwhile, Nancy Duin continues to update pages, and a major overhaul of the members' area is nearing completion.
- Future plan: a template for this, including headings, was agreed, and the document should be completed by the end of June. This will help directors establish priorities for their areas of responsibility and, once complete, will ensure a smooth transition when directors' portfolios change hands.

And to round it off, Justina Amenu was congratulated on completion of the first of what it is hoped will be many years of ensuring that the Society runs with increasing efficiency.

Publicity pointers

Katharine Timberlake

'Should the SfEP seek a higher profile?' I was gladdened to read the positive responses to this question at the Oxford conference. Indeed, wanting to check out what the membership wants was what prompted me to suggest this question to council. Now, as marketing and PR director, I feel that I am doing something that is aligned with the aims of many of us.

The report in the last issue of *Editing Matters* broached the questions of expense and the setting of priorities. Delegation of jobs, large and small, is but one approach. Hence, the budget is small and the MPR (marketing and public relations) subcommittee is large (43 volunteers, thank you!). We do not have to rely on paid suppliers. Much more to the point, together we can take on a large number of the many tasks that have, to some extent or other, a degree of pressing priority. With this volunteer help, one of my goals is to achieve a higher level of activity and provide a means of sustenance for the future.

I am currently researching the SfEP's early days. What I am hearing again and again is that freelancers in 1988, when they heard about plans for a new society, were thinking, 'This is exactly what I need'. Thus was the first committee given the impetus to meet for a day every six weeks, to go away and get things done, and for individual members to set up the local groups.

This commitment is the Society's foundation, and it sits on it still nearly 21 years on. All-day council meetings every two months and 15 voluntary hours each a month are the norm, local groups are still organized by individuals and there are the supporting subcommittees as well. Contrary to the few (as far as I can tell) who said otherwise at the

conference, if we can consolidate SfEP even more to uphold editorial excellence even better, it is well worth the time and effort.

SfEP suggested minimum rates

In the light of the current economic climate, the council has decided not to revise the suggested rates for 2009, so the 2009 rates will be the same as those suggested for 2008.

Rates for the job

The time has come round again to canvass for more 'rates for the job' to add to our web page (www.sfep.org.uk/mem/jobrates.asp), which has now been updated to July 2008.

The 'rates for the job' survey helps freelancers to be aware of what their clients (or similar companies) are paying. That way, they will be able to quote *real* rates already being paid by their clients (or similar companies) to other freelancers and so – one hopes – raise their own rates and not be undercut by those commissioning them. All contributors remain anonymous; however, only rates attached to named clients will be included.

If you would like to contribute, please submit the following details ►

Get our name on your CV.

The PUBLISHING TRAINING CENTRE
AT BOOK HOUSE

As the training provider for your industry, we offer:

- five distance learning courses:

<i>Copy-Editing</i>	£495
<i>Effective Copywriting</i>	£385
<i>Picture Research</i>	£385
<i>Editorial Project Management</i>	£485
<i>Basic Proofreading</i>	£385
- more than 60 short courses
- online grammar training (£45 for 1 year)

020 8874 2718 www.train4publishing.co.uk
www.grammaratwork.co.uk

on present clients or ones for whom you've recently worked:

- the name of the company
- the rate of pay
- details of the work
- the approximate date when you last received this rate.

If the work is for a non-publishing company, it would be helpful if you could give some indication of what the firm does. I'd prefer hourly rates, or an approximate hourly rate if you're working on a fixed fee, per page or per word basis, as this makes it easier for people to compare rates.

The data should be sent to Jean Rollison at sfep-rates@sfep.org.uk.

Opportunity for a book trade child

Do you have a child who was born between 1 September 1998 and 31 August 1999 and will complete primary school Year 6 in summer 2010? Are you in need of assistance? The Sue Thomson Foundation is offering a place at Christ's Hospital School, Horsham, for September 2010 for a boy or girl whose parent(s) work in the book trade as employees or as freelancers.

The Foundation, a charity that helps children in need and which has strong links to the book trade, offers one place annually at Christ's Hospital, an independent secondary boarding school of considerable repute. More details are available from Jane Akers (The Sue Thomson Foundation, Furners Keep, Furners Lane, Henfield BN5 9HS; 01273 493461; thesuethomsonfoundation@macdream.net).

SI conference

In a break with tradition, the Society of Indexers is holding its conference in York, back to back with the SfEP conference (ie Friday 11 September to

Sunday 13 September 2009). When this was first announced, there were concerns that for delegates attending both conferences this might prove to be too much of a good thing. However, the savings in terms of travel costs and time should prove attractive to many. In addition, there is a special price reduction for SfEP members attending both conferences but not arriving until the Saturday. For details, see the SI website (www.indexers.org.uk).

Editors and proofreaders who are considering adding indexing to their portfolio of skills may also be interested in the 'Introduction to indexing' workshop to be held on the Sunday afternoon (13 September), immediately prior to the SfEP AGM. Again, full details are on the SI website.

Canadian conference

The Editors' Association of Canada – Association canadienne des réviseurs is holding its 30th Anniversary Conference from 5 to 7 June in Toronto. Further details can be found at www.editors.ca/conference/conference2009.

Renewals

All membership renewals should now have been processed. If you have not renewed, please contact the office (administrator@sfep.org.uk) urgently to avoid letting your membership lapse.

Amanda Harper

We were sorry to receive notification of the death of Amanda Harper. She was involved in setting up the computer systems for the office when it was established in Mermaid Court in the early 1990s. She helped to write

the original membership database system and, later on, the *Directory* database. She was always very helpful and knowledgeable, as can be seen from her contributions to SfEPLine.

Company moves and developments

Compiled by Imogen Olsen

We gratefully acknowledge *The Bookseller* as the main source of these news items, reported between January and March 2009.

- **Atlantic Books** is to set up a new genre fiction imprint, Corvus, under Nic Cheetham.
- **Beautiful Books** is planning to expand and to recruit new staff.
- **Cambridge University Press** announced in January that it is planning to make around 133 jobs redundant, mostly in the printing arm but with around 20 in the UK education publishing business. Talks are still in progress.
- **CCV at Random House** (Cape, Chatto, Harvill Secker, Bodley Head, Yellow Jersey, Square Peg, Pimlico and Vintage) is trimming its lists by 15 per cent for 2010 and by half that for 2009.
- **Cromwell Press** has been bought from administration by John Boden of the new print company Baldwin, and will continue to trade as Cromwell Press.
- **Frances Lincoln** is to develop a children's list under Janetta Otter-Barry, publishing 20–25 titles a year.
- **Games Workshop** is to sell its Solaris Books fiction publishing imprint, and concentrate on Black Library.
- **HarperCollins** is planning to streamline its structure. Consultation is in progress, which may result in 5 per cent of the workforce being made redundant. Pay increases and expenses have been cut back.
- **The History Press** has now paid all royalties outstanding from its days as NPI, and is planning to

expand. Four new commissioning editors are being recruited, and it is hoped to publish 675 titles in 2009.

- **Mainstream** has cut its list by 12–14 per cent.
- **Octopus** has been restructured, resulting in seven redundancies, and ‘the balance shifting a bit more towards out-of-house’.
- **Pearson** has reported strong results, and is to review the company-wide pay freeze on salaries over £30,000.
- **Penguin Group** has unveiled record profits for 2008.
- **Penguin Press** is to launch a ‘playful’ new imprint in July, aimed at the gift market. Particular Books will publish seven titles this year.
- **Quarto** is reported to be looking out for acquisitions after enjoying increased sales in 2008.
- **Quercus** has cut back its plans to expand, and Anthony Cheetham has resigned as chairman and publisher.
- **Random House** is to cut 5 per cent of its UK workforce, amounting to 30 jobs.
- **Simon & Schuster** is moving its bespoke publishing house Martin Books from Cambridge to London, making four staff redundant.
- **Taylor & Francis** has recorded its ‘best ever’ financial results, having published 24 per cent more journals than in the previous year.
- **Vision Sports Publishing** has moved to 3rd Floor, 19–23 High Street, Kingston KT1 1LL.

Local groups

Edinburgh Group

Stephanie Pickering

Congratulations to the few who made it through the blizzards and jams to our February meeting, namely Jane Ward, Margaret Christie and Lucinda Byatt. I was there too, and so was our intrepid guest speaker, Bert Barrott, who came in from the upper slopes of Midlothian.

Bert talked about his 30-year career as a small publisher, starting

with a litho press he accidentally bought at auction and taught himself to use. His publications have largely been reprints of hard-to-find antiquarian Scottish and Edinburgh books, such as Hugo Arnot’s *History of Edinburgh* of 1816 and Edward Topham’s *Letters from Edinburgh* of 1776. He told us of some of the ups and downs of small publishing, why resetting the text, although time-consuming, is more useful than producing a facsimile reprint, and we discussed the advantages and disadvantages of print on demand. One of the conclusions Bert came to was that publishing is rewarding and satisfying in itself, but that if you actually want to make more than just a little money from it, you need to have an interest not only in printing and publishing but also in marketing, as this is where the small publisher is at a considerable disadvantage. He also showed us a sample copy of his latest publication, a second edition of his *Atlas of Edinburgh*, a folio volume of reproductions of old Edinburgh maps, which will be available in a few weeks’ time from West Port Books, West Port, Edinburgh, or from the Textualities website (<http://dev.textualities.net>). We did not want to linger too long, so after thanking our speaker, and braced by small amounts of wine and Pentland Ale, we made our way back into the slush and icy blasts.

North West Group

The North West Group is currently out of operation. If anyone is interested in re-establishing the group, please contact Ann Ridgway (ann.ridgway@virgin.net). The suggested area coverage is south Cheshire and surrounding areas. If there is enough interest, a first meeting will be arranged.

West/North Yorkshire Group

Helen Stevens would like to invite members in West and North Yorkshire to meet up for an informal get-together, with a view to starting up a local group if there is enough

interest. The suggested venue is Salts Mill in Saltaire, near Bradford, which is right next to Saltaire railway station (Leeds–Skipton and Bradford–Skipton trains). She doesn’t have a date in mind at the moment (May or June?). Please contact Helen (helen@saltedit.co.uk) if you are interested in coming along. It would also be helpful if you could indicate what days, or times of day, would be most convenient for you. ■

DIARY

Thu 7 May Edinburgh Group meeting

6.30 p.m. at The Film House. Contact Stephanie Pickering for details (stephaniepickering@blueyonder.co.uk, 0131 4479690).

Wed 13 May Glasgow Group meeting

2.00 pm at Susan Milligan’s: Flat 3/1, 39 Cecil Street, Glasgow G12 8RN (0141 334 2807).

Wed 13 May Southampton Group meeting

12.30 p.m. at the Cricketers’ Arms, 232 Chestnut Avenue, Chandler’s Ford, Eastleigh SO53 3HN. All welcome. For further details, contact Penny Sucharov (023 8029 2266, psucharov@sfeep.net).

Thu 21 May London Group meeting

6.30 pm in the room above Trattoria Mondello, 36 Goodge Street, London W1. For further details, contact Eric Smith (smith.eric@btinternet.com).

Thu 28 May Edinburgh Group meeting

6.30 p.m. at The Film House. SfeepWiki demonstration. Contact Stephanie Pickering for details (see Thu 7 May).

Tue 9 Jun Glasgow Group meeting

2.00 pm at Susan Milligan’s: Flat 3/1, 39 Cecil Street, Glasgow G12 8RN (0141 334 2807). ■

Spotted in the press

The Bookseller of 13 March ran a feature on outsourcing, asking if, since companies continue to cut staff, publishing freelancers and agencies might be among the few winners of the recession. The short answer, it seems, is probably 'yes'.

A straw poll amongst SfEP members found a majority noticing no effect on work levels so far. Dottie Irving, a well-established PR consultant, 'thinks the recession might prompt clients to focus their publicity outsourcing on a tighter range of books and seek full value for their spend', but sees no slacking in demand for her agency's services. The message is much the same from specialists in production.

Of course, the recession means that publishers make staff redundant, which in turn leads to an increase in the number of freelancers chasing the available work.

And what of the work that goes abroad? It would seem that since UK freelancers are not on the whole increasing their fees and the pound has weakened substantially, we no longer seem as expensive as we once did.

In the article, our chair, Sarah Price, is quoted copiously, and there are frequent references to the Society. It is accompanied by a panel of 'Ten steps to successful outsourcing' that contains sensible suggestions such as to seek recommendations and to keep a tight brief. Particularly pleasing is 'Teamwork, treat everyone as a part of your team'. Most pleasing of all is tip 2: 'Look for accreditation. The Society for Editors and Proofreaders is among trade groups providing structured training, and keeps a searchable database of qualified members.'

Christina Thomas

Biased, dogmatic and right Facebook works for me

Facebook and other social networking websites have suddenly burst onto the business scene in recent years, and have sparked quite a fierce debate about the advantages or otherwise of joining these sites.

While there is nothing new about networking face to face, the introduction of networking online has created an entirely new dimension. Perhaps this is why it unsettles so many business people and why there is such uncertainty about its value.

I admit that I'm biased! I like Facebook: I subscribe to it and to several other social networking sites. But why? I've always been a fan of networking with other people, so Facebook and its ilk are natural extensions of what I would do anyway.

I've been a member of several business networking clubs, but I much prefer to network online – mainly because most of it is free and because I can do it at times that suit me. I'm not required constantly to find visitors and sign them up as members nor do I have to provide a constant supply of referrals for other members of my local group. I don't want to 'twitter' on about this, but instead of sitting around a breakfast table for a year fruitlessly waiting for a small and ever-changing group of associates to make good an expensive investment, by joining a particular online networking website (Ecademy) I've started building up a network of hundreds of business contacts from across the world for a fraction of the cost of joining a business breakfast club. And, yes, it has led to promises of editing or proofreading work in the future.

There is certainly a potential for time-wasting on such sites as Facebook, but in any business we need to manage our time effectively, and this applies whether we are talking to people on the phone or interacting with others on social networking websites. In order to build an effective business relationship with anybody, both sides need to make an effort to get to know each other well and to listen to each other's requirements and objectives. This needs a certain investment of time on our part to make our membership of a social networking site worthwhile – but at least we can choose when to spend time online: we are not required to turn up at a specific time and place each week and pay for a breakfast/lunch we don't want, just to network with a relatively small number of business people for an inconvenient period of time.

Another concern is privacy. Whether you are using social networking websites to promote your business or just for a bit of fun, you do need to tell others a little bit about yourself or your business and how you can be contacted – that is, assuming you want to be contacted by others! On every social networking website you can control who sees your personal details, what notifications you want to receive and what applications you want to download. It's entirely in your hands.

Social networking online is here to stay, but it's a bit like Marmite: you either love it or hate it! It reminds me of the reluctance of some SfEP members in the past to embrace email and on-screen editing, but look how indispensable these have become. Try Facebook, Ecademy or LinkedIn for yourself and see if they work for you. Eventually, you could move on to blogging or instant messaging. Or would that be a step too far!?

About the author ...

Jeremy Lockyer is a freelance copy-editor and proofreader who loves meeting other people. He spends most of his working day copy-editing film journals for a publisher based in Bristol.