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History Detective

The History Detective strikes again

Sex scandal ... bank robbery ... bushranger's exploits ... now a murder-mystery. And this time the History Detective is going international!

Welcome

Greetings to everyone from the quill of the History Detective, Carol Baxter.

Who am I?

Pursuing thieves and murderers, adulterers and philanderers through the ages is just an ordinary day in my world. Like Dr Who, I hunt ordinary individuals who unwittingly had such an extraordinary impact on their world that the consequences changed the course of history. After tracking them down – through historical research, of course – I write their true stories. But I don't just write, I also teach. In fact, I have a dream ...

Vision

My dream is to **entertain** and to **educate** in the areas of history, family history and writing. But there isn't much point in offering books and talks that entertain and educate if no one knows about them.

The *History Detective* newsletter

So I decided to start a newsletter to keep people like yourself informed about my plans and endeavours. It will include information about the books I am writing and the talks I am giving. It will also include guides to other books that you may enjoy or find useful, "hints" that may help you if you are a writer or a historical or genealogical researcher, and so on. For information about my own background and experience in these areas, see:

www.carolbaxter.com

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BLOGS

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- History Hints
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go to: www.carolbaxter.com

Helping YOU

There are many different educational tools that can be used to help others: "how to" books, seminars, webinars, videos, podcasts. I plan to use most of them in the educational side of my endeavours. In 2013 I have to focus on finishing my fifth book, *The Lucretia Borgia of Botany Bay* (to be published by Allen & Unwin in 2014), then I will pursue the educational side of things. Again I will keep you informed via future editions of this newsletter. But I have already begun with *Writing INTERESTING Family Histories ...*



WHAT'S INSIDE

Planning a formal newsletter is an interesting exercise. I have decided that each newsletter will include some regular features:

- **Carol's Chronicles:** What's happening in my world
- **History Hints:** Tips for genealogists and historians
- **Words to the Wise:** Tips for writers
- **Rave Reviews:** Reviews of non-fiction books that would appeal to historians, genealogists and writers

Suggestions for additional topics welcome.

WRITING INTERESTING FAMILY HISTORIES

Ask yourself this.

While many "writing your family history" books are available, how many of the authors began their career by researching and writing family histories then morphed into writing critically-acclaimed and now internationally-published biographical "thrillers"?

And how many of those authors then came back to the genealogical world to help family historians with their own writing?

That's what I have done with *Writing INTERESTING Family Histories*.

"Who would have thought a 'how to' book could be a page-turner," wrote one reviewer.

For more information and details of availability see: www.carolbaxter.com/writing-family-histories.html.

CAROL'S CHRONICLES

September/October 2013 marks the publication of my fourth "non-fiction thriller", as people often call them. I don't write fiction based on a true story, as some people think. I write fact in such a way that it reads almost like fiction. My books bring history to life – even to those who previously thought history boring or pointless and wouldn't normally read anything historical, as they have told me themselves! To write history in this way requires a certain type of story, though, one with lots of detail and dialogue in the original historical records. I choose historical crime stories for this reason, particularly ones that most people don't know about and that haven't previously been researched in depth, so I can add to the body of knowledge. Pursuing crooks is so much fun, and my fourth book is a particularly juicy story. In future newsletters I will keep you informed about its publication and availability, and also author talks and interviews I am giving in case you wish to attend or listen in. The book comes out in USA/Canada on 8 October 2013 and in Britain and ROW (it was a while before I discovered that ROW is an acronym standing for "Rest of World"!) on 5 September. When the book is published, I will give away a free copy to someone on my mailing list.

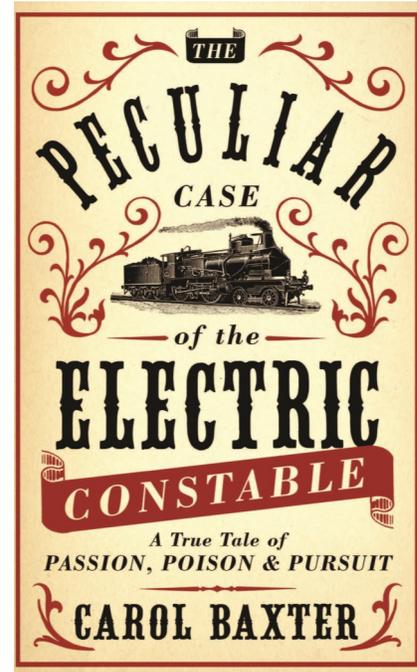
THE PECULIAR CASE OF THE ELECTRIC CONSTABLE

It was the year 1845, the dawn of the information age. At Slough, eighteen miles west of London, an agitated Quaker was spotted fleeing from a cottage. Inside, a woman was dying. What had happened? Before the unknown man could be stopped, he entered the carriage of a train bound for London's Paddington station. The train chugged off, seemingly taking him into oblivion. Then someone noticed the electric telegraph wires running beside the railway tracks, part of a new-fangled technology that was still in its infancy. Could a message be sent down the wires to catch him?

The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable: a True Tale of Passion, Poison and Pursuit is a delicious tale of "murder", mystery and scientific revolution. It involves a man who could, arguably, be called the most 'influential' convict ever transported to Australia.

For the publishers' catalogue announcement, see:

www.carolbaxter.com/electric-constable.html



HISTORY HINT: CALENDAR CONFUSION

In February 2013, I was one of the speakers on the Unlock the Past genealogy cruise and in one of my talks I happened to mention the changeover from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. I was surprised to find that a lot of the attendees didn't know about this important historical event so I thought I would discuss it here. It's an interesting bit of trivia for non-historians, but helpful for family historians.

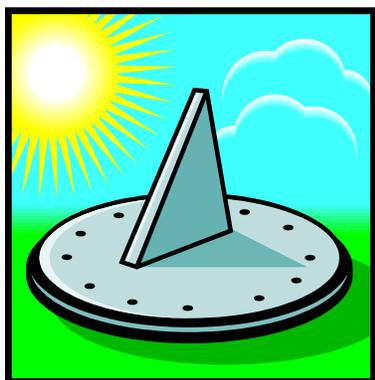
In 45 BCE, Julius Caesar implemented what became known as the Julian calendar, the system of date-keeping used thereafter in the "Judeo-Christian" countries (and others). Without our handy computers, his astronomers managed the extraordinary achievement of devising a civil calendar that diverged from the solar calendar by only eleven minutes per year.

Unfortunately, by 1582, the compounding effect of that divergence meant that the civil and solar calendars differed by eight days. In that year Pope Gregory XIII decreed that the Gregorian calendar should replace the Julian calendar, with "leap year" rules to help keep the calendars in alignment. Protestant England, however, refused to follow such a decree.

As a consequence, in 1752, when England at last took action, the civil and solar calendars deviated by eleven days. The authorities decided to delete eleven days from a single year to bring the two calendars into alignment. Accordingly, 2 September 1752 was followed by 14 September 1752. This meant that the year 1752 wasn't the normal 365 days, but only 354 days.

Imagine the community's reaction: the masses were outraged because they thought they were losing eleven days from their lives. Imagine trying to make such a change today – particularly in our current political climate where the two sides of politics refuse to agree on ... pretty much everything!

For family historians, think about the impact on your ancestors' lives. After I discussed this subject in a seminar, an attendee came up to me and mentioned that this change had impacted upon her mother's life. No, her mother was not born before 1752. She was born in the USSR prior to 1918, the year Russia changed to the Gregorian calendar. In old age, her mother ended up in a nursing home suffering from dementia. She told the staff that she had two birthdays – and they, naturally, thought this was the dementia speaking. But it wasn't. She truly did have two days on which she could celebrate her birth. If



she had been born on **11** February 1731 (like American President George Washington), under the legal provisions of the new calendar her new birth-date became **22** February 1731. Actually, it became 22 February **1732**, but I'll explain that additional change in my next newsletter.

So, if you had the "choice" of two birthdays, which would you choose? It's an interesting question, isn't it?

WORDS TO THE WISE: THE POWER OF A PRONOUN

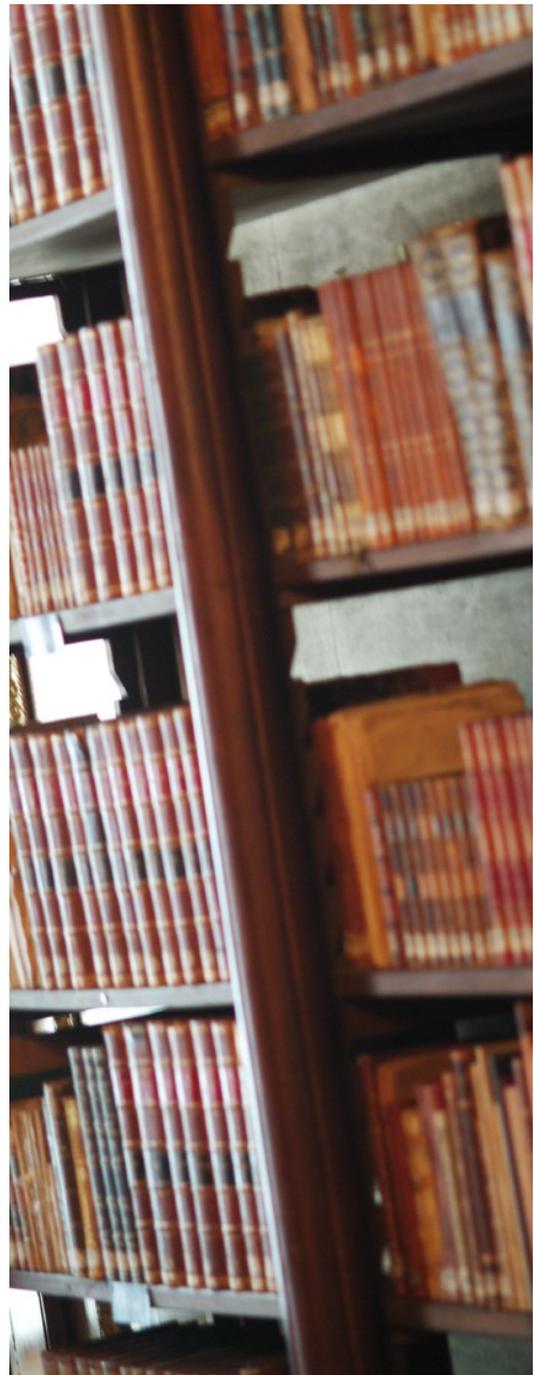
This hint is for writers of any genre, fiction or non-fiction, including family historians.

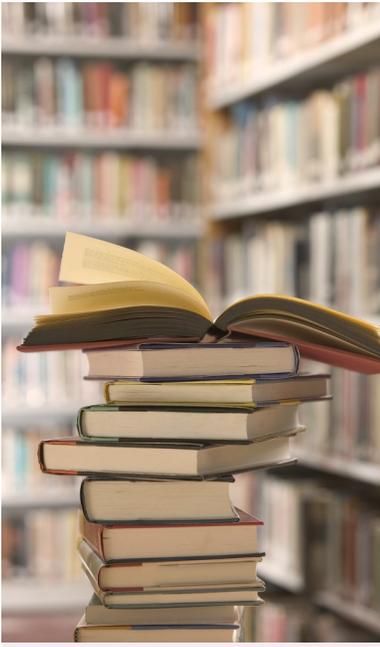
Pronouns – he, she, they – are a surprisingly powerful tool. *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable* has recently gone through the edit process and, in a few instances, the copy-editor suggested changing the pronoun “he” to the name of the protagonist, “John”. I resisted, explaining that I had worked out a strategy that allowed a greater sense of immediacy for the reader; it is particularly helpful in my style of writing as I try to make my stories read as if they have the immediacy of fiction without fictionalising the narrative.

If you have read any of my books, you will know that it often seems as if you are seeing the world through the character’s eyes, rather than through the lens of the normal historical narrator. One way I achieve this is by giving the character their full name at the start of the section, then saying “she ... she ... she” for as long as possible until I am forced to write their given name again. By writing “she ... she ... she”, the reader soon feels as if they are inside the character’s head. However, every time the reader reaches a point where the character’s given name is listed, it has the effect of sweeping the reader out of the character’s head and back to the 21st century, reminding the reader that they are not seeing the world through the character’s eyes but through the eyes of the real narrator, the author.

I recently read something in which the author listed the full name of the protagonist almost every time he mentioned the person. The person had multiple middle names so it soon became a laborious read.

Remember: the power of a pronoun!





About the author

Carol Baxter is the author of three critically-acclaimed works of narrative non-fiction published by Allen & Unwin (*An Irresistible Temptation*, *Breaking the Bank*, and *Captain Thunderbolt and his Lady*), with another title (*The Lucretia Borgia of Botany Bay*) coming out in 2014. Her fourth book, *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable*, is being published internationally by Britain's Oneworld in 2013. She is also the author of a genealogical 'how to' book, *Writing INTERESTING Family Histories*, and has more 'how to' books in the pipeline. She is a Fellow of the Society of Australian Genealogists and an adjunct lecturer at the University of New England (NSW), and has edited many sets of early Australian records.



RAVE REVIEWS

As anyone who knows me can attest, my favourite book is Simon Winchester's *The Surgeon of Crowthorne* – also called *The Professor and the Madman* in USA. It tells the true story of a madman and the making of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and is a beautiful story. "Beautiful" may seem like a strange word to use, but you will understand why I describe it that way when you read the book; it became an international best-seller for that very reason.

In the world of narrative non-fiction – my own genre – this book is a standout. The poetry of the writing, the sensitivity of the characterisation, the backdrop of the extraordinary dictionary-making endeavour: all come together to create a work that is truly sublime. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in history or in writing (family historians included), and for anyone who just wants a great read.

EMAIL MAILING LIST

Please forward this email newsletter to anyone you think might find it interesting or useful. They can then contact me if they wish to be added to the mailing list. Each time I publish a book (I have many in the pipeline), I will draw a name from the mailing list and that person will receive a free copy of my book. Your name is already on my mailing list because in the past few years you corresponded with me about genealogy, history, writing, speaking, or the subjects of my books, or provided me with your email details at a seminar. If you would prefer not to receive future issues, please let me know.

FAREWELL

So, until the next issue, the History Detective bids you good researching, writing, and reading.

Carol Baxter

www.carolbaxter.com