



1 July 2013  
Volume 1, Issue 3

# History Detective

## CAPTAIN THUNDERBOLT IS DEAD!

After four years, my Thunderbolt journey is over. It began in May 2009 when I rang my publisher at Allen & Unwin to say that there was Hollywood film interest in *Breaking the Bank* (who knows if anything will ever come of that!). During the conversation, she suggested that I find a strong female character to write about. I mentioned having heard about a female bushranger and ... to cut a long story short, two months later I had a contract for *Captain Thunderbolt and his Lady*. The book came out in September 2011 and received great reviews. For example, Alan Gold in *Good Reading Magazine* wrote: 'Carol Baxter is doing for Australian history what our athletes are doing for sport: making it exciting, interesting, and world class.' (Yes, shameless self-promotion!)

But, in Thunderbolt country, I was being mercilessly attacked by a few individuals on the grounds that, if you can't destroy the message (that is, my evidence-based research), then try to destroy the messenger. These people had taken Thunderbolt's reins and steered his story in their own direction. 'Thunderbolt is not dead!' they proclaimed. 'The police killed the wrong man! They covered it up and conspired to keep on covering it up—and this conspiracy of silence continues even today and reaches as high as the office of the NSW Governor' (or words to that effect). Their claims caught the attention of some parliamentarians, who made a demand in the Legislative Council in March 2010 for the release of documents relating to Thunderbolt's death. Then ... But there's no room to tell the full story here. All is revealed on my Thunderbolt website: [www.thunderboltbushranger.com.au](http://www.thunderboltbushranger.com.au).

Countering these absurd claims via my website wasn't enough though, so I joined forces with Dr David Andrews Roberts, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of New England, to write two articles. The first, *Exposing an Exposé: fact versus fiction in the resurrection of Captain Thunderbolt*, was published in the international *Journal of Australian Studies* in March 2012. David and I spoke at the Sydney Institute on the topic that same month. The second article, 'Mrs Thunderbolt': *Setting the record straight on the life and times of Mary Ann Bugg*, has just been published in the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* (Volume 99, Part 1). This article debunks the myths and corrects the errors in the claims made about Thunderbolt's lover. Now, with a book, two articles in peer-reviewed journals, and a website full of timelines, analytical pieces, blog posts and so on, my job is done. Thunderbolt and Mary Ann, two fascinating Australian characters, can rest in peace.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

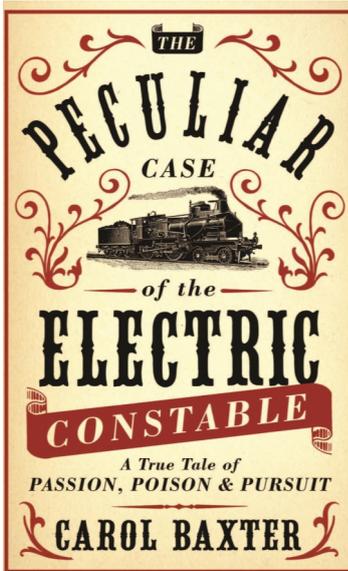
What's Inside.....	2
Tawell Tidbits.....	2
Monthly Musings.....	2
Rave Reviews.....	2
Words to the Wise.....	3
Publishing Pointers.....	3
Aussie Advice.....	4
History Hints.....	3
Sailaway Studies.....	6



### BLOGS

- Carol's Chronicles
- History Hints
- Words to the Wise
- Rave Reviews
- Publishing Pointers

[www.carolbaxter.com](http://www.carolbaxter.com)



### MONTHLY MUSINGS

As winter wraps its icy tendrils around us, I am hanging out for my next holiday—a cruise to the South Pacific late in July. As the boat doesn't get back to Sydney until 2 August, the newsletter will be dispatched a day later than scheduled. For that reason, I won't send the advance email alert advising everyone to make sure there is enough room in their inboxes. It was an effective strategy last time as there were few bounce-backs. Thank you! It may turn out that I don't need to do so in future, if everyone remember that it will be coming on the first of each month.

Enjoy.

## TAWELL TIDBITS

Behold, the subject of *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable*, the Quaker John Tawell, a true Jekyll-and-Hyde character. It's always great being able to put a picture to a name, isn't it. I didn't have the pleasure of doing so with the little minx, Jane New (*An Irresistible Temptation*) or William Blackstone and his bank robbery brethren (*Breaking the Bank*). Captain Thunderbolt (*Captain Thunderbolt and his Lady*) was survived only by his gruesome morgue photos and Mary Ann Bugg (Thunderbolt's lady) by a speckled shot. But herewith John Tawell. If only it showed his full face, rather than just the side view. The man who drew the picture was one of the journalists at Tawell's trial, so the side view was probably the only view he had.



## RAVE REVIEWS: LONGITUDE

For many of us who live in Australia or America or other English-speaking countries outside Britain, our ancestors journeyed from their home country to ours by ship. Yet most of us will be unaware of how deadly these journeys were prior to the 'discovery' of something that seems so ordinary to us today: longitude. Ship's masters could determine latitude using calculations based on the positions of the sun, moon and stars. To determine longitude, however, they needed a sea-going clock. It wasn't until the mid-1700s that an exact chronometer was crafted. Until then, ships travelling across the major oceans often just headed due east or west, trailing something behind them to provide a guide as to how fast they were going, then prayed that they didn't hit—literally—their destination in darkness, storms or fog. Incorrect calculations wrecked many a ship and even entire fleets.

For a simple explanation of the problem, google Ted Andros' article *Latitude and Longitude*. For a wonderful story about this discovery, read Dava Sobel's international best-selling book, *Longitude*. Initially, from what I have read, she wrote an article on the subject and received such a fabulous response that she enlarged it into a book. It is beautifully written and worth reading not just for the historical resonances, but as a story of human triumph and perseverance.

## WORDS TO THE WISE: EASY READING

In writing my works of narrative non-fiction, I have to read many academic-type books and articles to gather background information. For the book I am currently writing, *The Lucretia Borgia of Botany Bay*, I have been reading about female criminals, serial killers, poison, arsenic, capital punishment, colonial politics and so on. While some of the information contained in these books is fascinating, the writing can leave a lot to be desired. Some of the authors seem to have forgotten the fundamental reason for writing their books—to communicate their knowledge to readers—and instead seem more preoccupied with impressing readers with their intelligence. Here is an example from the book *From Noose to Needle* by Timothy Kaufman-Osborn. Note: I did not search for something particularly obscure, I merely plucked this example at random:

*Much the same end is achieved via the law's endorsement of a culturally specific construction of pain. That account, occluding its own historicity, renders pain radically solipsistic and so effectively unintelligible.*

Seriously? It took me two days to read a mere 200 pages. What he had to say—when I could understand it—was interesting, but the reading experience was exhausting and most unpleasurable.

By contrast, here is an example plucked at random from *The Strange Birth of a Colonial Democracy* by respected academic, John Hirst. It is about the establishment of responsible government in New South Wales in 1856:

*Squatters themselves had scant regard for the law. As pioneers, squatters and their overseers were pre-occupied with survival and not too scrupulous about means.*

The whole book is similarly easy, enjoyable reading. And how about this from Peter Cochrane's *Colonial Ambition*, on the same subject:

*He was a knobbly, gangling fellow, all joints and limbs in that thin tube of a frock coat and tall topper, a stick insect of a man with the face of a frog.*

Evocative and poetic. Not surprisingly, Cochrane won the Prime Minister's History Prize. Cochrane wooed his readers with beautiful prose. Hirst took them on an easy horse-ride. Kaufman-Osborn bludgeoned them with 'big' words.

We read many more books than we write, so think about what you enjoy reading before you start writing. Your readers will be grateful!



## PUBLISHING POINTERS: SIZE AND WEIGHT

It is important to think about the size and weight of your self-published book before you start writing. Many will be posted, so it is best to keep postage costs down. If you are writing a 'how to' book or memoir or small family history, aim for an A5 publication (148 x 210 mm) which is half an A4 size (297 x 210 mm). In Australia, A5 fits comfortably into an Australian Post Padded Bag 3 which costs \$1.30 (or you can buy these bags in bulk from online dealers for about half the price). If you can keep the weight under 250 grams, the postage currently costs \$1.80. If you charge \$3.50 or \$4.00 for postage/handling, this gives you room to move in case prices go up.

To keep the book under 250 grams, you need to calculate the weight of your paper and cover. For example, normal printer paper is '80 gsm', which means 80 grams per square metre. There are 32 sheets of A5 paper in a square metre (16 sheets of A4), so each A5 sheet weighs 2.5 grams (that is,  $80 \div 32 = 2.5$ ). As such, 80 sheets of 80 gsm A5 paper weighs 200 grams. Each A5 sheet comprises two pages of writing (front and back), which means that 160 pages of text on A5 80 gsm paper will weigh 200 grams. However, 80 gsm paper is thin and shows the writing on the reverse side so consider using 90 or even 100 gsm paper— which means fewer pages in your book. For the cover, it is best to use 300gsm paper as it is sturdy (don't go under 200 gsm unless your priority is a cheap publication—in price and looks). The cover is, effectively, A4 in size so it will weigh about 20 grams. Paper, cover, padded bag and a sheet of A4 paper (for an invoice, receipt, covering letter, etc) should weigh just under 250 grams. Perfect!

## AUSSIE ADVICE: STATE ELECTORAL ROLLS

Have you ever requested a specific record series and been directed to something else? Communication errors easily occur during historical detective hunts, mainly because researchers don't really know what they are looking for. In my case, I knew exactly what I was seeking: the State Electoral Rolls which survive in book form. I also knew that the staff would direct me to the wrong source—the Commonwealth Electoral Rolls (now on microfiche)—because it had happened so many times previously that I had been forced to remember the first two characters of the call number in an attempt to circumvent the misdirection. So I specifically told the staff what I wanted and what I didn't want. Guess what?! But note: I am not telling you this so I can have a whinge (well, not totally!), just to make clear that you will encounter the same problem if you go to the NSW State Library desk and ask for these volumes.

Why? In Australia, we are required by law to vote in three elections: Federal, State, and Local, so our names are on three voting lists—or more likely two, as the local and state lists are probably the same. As these two lists are updated at different times, the information in each can vary, which can be helpful for family historians.

Most of us know that the Commonwealth (aka Federal) Electoral Rolls have been available on microfiche for two or three decades. To make life easier for us, Ancestry.com has now digitised and indexed all of these lists for the years 1903-1980.

Most researchers, however, don't know about the State Electoral Rolls. There is no scope here to talk about the political situation here in the mid-1800s. Suffice it to say that in New South Wales, for example, around the time that Britain handed over the reigns of government to elected representa-

tives of the people (1856), other laws came into effect that broadened the voting franchise. Some voting lists have survived for the 1840s, 1850s and early 1860s—usually intermittent and incomplete. By 1869, however, when this main record series begins, most men were eligible to vote. Accordingly, these returns serve as a pseudo census of adult males in a district. Even better, the lists were made every two or three years, and sometimes more frequently.

The lists for 1869-1900 are available on microfilm in the NSW State Library's Family History Centre. The early years list name, residence and voting qualification (eg. residence, freehold). From 1894, occupation was added. When I examined them for the family of bushranger Captain Thunderbolt (a celebrated horseman as well as a thief), I was fascinated to find that his son Frederick Wordsworth Ward jnr was listed as a 'groom' in an area where most men, including his half-siblings, were miners, farmers and tradesmen. Genes!

The NSW State Electoral Rolls for the post-Federation years have not been microfilmed, but are available in book form at the NSW State Library. From 1903 to 1917, they are located at call number DQ324.242/1; and from 1919 to 1929 (incomplete) at DS324.242/3.

To determine the relevant electorate, go to the book stack above the 1869-1900 microfilm drawer, look for the volume titled *NSW Electoral Rolls Divisions Index Pre-1930* (NQ324.944/1), and find the relevant town. For example, Mudgee, where Thunderbolt's son lived, was in the 'Mudgee' state electorate (federally, 'Robertson'). Then fill out an order slip, noting, in the appropriate boxes, the series name—NSW State Electoral Rolls—the electorate, the time-frame and the call number, and hand it in at the main ordering desk. If the staff tell you that the post-1900 electoral rolls are on microfiche in



## AUSSIE ADVICE: STATE ELECTORAL ROLLS (CONTINUED)

the Family History Centre, you will know what to answer.

Helpfully, the Family History Centre also holds microfiche for electoral rolls for some of the other pre-Federation states: Victoria (1851, 1856, 1899), Queensland (1860-1900) and South Australia (1884-1900). For these and the other Australian states, the post-1901 state electoral rolls might survive in their own state libraries. For anyone researching families from across the water, the Family History

Centre also holds New Zealand rolls for 1853-1981.

If you are undertaking historical research in a country other than Australia, it might be wise to try to determine what electoral lists have survived for your area of interest. You may discover that, similarly to New South Wales, more lists are available than most people know about—including staff at the relevant record repositories or libraries!

## HISTORY HINTS: CALENDAR CONFUSION 3

An email from a reader reminded me that I hadn't mentioned the names of our calendar months: January through to December. As mentioned last month, pagan beliefs and celebrations have had a powerful influence on western history and religion. In terms of the months of the year:

January celebrated Janus, the Roman god of fences and doorways, who is depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions, hence *Janus*, a 'two-faced person'.

February: day of purification, a Roman celebration in that month.

March: from Mars, the Roman god of war.

April: from Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty. My birthday month. Rather lovely.

May: from the Greek goddess Maia associated with spring and fertility.

June: from Juno, the Roman goddess of marriage and the well-being of women.

July: From Julius Caesar, who named this month after himself. Such arrogance!

August: From Augustus Caesar, who tweaked the Julian calendar, and had to stick his nose in it as well. Seriously?!

September, October, November and December: obviously by this time they were having troubling thinking up a name (or were bored) as these stand for the seventh, eighth, ninth and

tenth months of the March-beginning calendar year.

Some British people were unhappy about the continuing influence of the pagan gods. The Quakers (John Tawell, the subject of *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable*, was a Quaker) were so affronted by the link between the month names and the pagan gods that they refused to use the names, instead saying 'first month, second month ...'. They also refused to use the days of the week for the same reason (Thursday, for example, celebrates the Norse god of thunder, Thor, and Sunday the mighty Sun God—which is why Sunday came to be treated as a special day). Accordingly, the Quakers called the days of the week 'first day, second day'.

When I was researching Tawell through the Quaker records, I had to mentally 'translate' these dates. Very confusing. No wonder the custom did not spread more broadly. Yet, in some ways it has: we often write dates in the form 2/1/2013. It's still confusing though. To some this represents 2 January and to others 1 February. I made the most of this 'loophole' when holidaying in America when aged 20. A bar served me a drink and congratulated me on turning 21—a month before my actual birthday. In fact, I think they gave me a free drink. I didn't correct them. Calendar confusion—sometimes very handy!





#### **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.



## **SILAWAY STUDIES**

I love cruising. Car trips—beam me up, please! ... planes—even *I* find the seats cramped and I'm the size of a 12-year-old ... trains—well, at least we can read on them ... but, aaahhh, a boat, where the journey is as much fun, if not more, than the destination. I've had a great time on the two Unlock the Past cruises I've been a speaker on (March 2011 and February 2013), and I know the attendees have as well. Which brings me to Unlock the Past's plans for future cruises. Lots more!

Perhaps you've thought that you might like to go on a cruise one day. According to my daughter, who is a travel agent, cruises are now the most popular type of overseas holiday because of their affordability. Perhaps you've also thought you might like to improve your skills as a researcher or writer, or would just like to build friendships with other like-minded individuals. If so, or just out of sheer curiosity, check out their new website:

[www.unlockthepastcruises.com](http://www.unlockthepastcruises.com)

## **FAREWELL**

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

**Carol Baxter**

[www.carolbaxter.com](http://www.carolbaxter.com)

[c\\_baxter@optusnet.com.au](mailto:c_baxter@optusnet.com.au)

**Copyright Carol Baxter 2013**