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# History Detective

## TAWELL TIDBITS

It is now only a month until *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable* is to be published in Australia and Britain. It comes out in USA and Canada in October. Two British authors have been kind enough to offer endorsements, for which I am most grateful. Fiona Rule, author of *The Worst Street in London*, *London's Docklands* and *London's Labyrinth*, has written:

*Long before Dr Crippen was apprehended using wireless communication, new technology led to the arrest of another lesser known but no less intriguing character. Carol Baxter's vivid account of a Victorian murder and its aftermath is meticulously researched and thoroughly engrossing. I would recommend it to anyone interested in the murkier side of life in the 19th century.*

When I give writing seminars, I talk about the importance of reading 'history books' with a view to capturing not just the facts about a place and its society but the essence—as Fiona does in her books about London. I will include a review of *The Worst Street in London* in a future newsletter. In this street, three of Jack the Ripper's victims were killed, a subject of particular interest to me as the timeframe of my fifth book, *The Lucretia Borgia of Botany Bay*, straddles the Ripper murders. In fact, some parliamentarians and members of the press said that my protagonist, Louisa Collins, was worse than Jack the Ripper!

Siân Rees, the author of the bestselling *The Floating Brothel*, has written that *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable* is a 'masterful reconstruction of a forgotten story'. I will discuss Siân's books in the Rave Reviews section of this newsletter.

## VALE GARRY WILSON

I first met Garry in the 1980s (we both had *Kinross* ancestors residing in Dunblane, Scotland) and we had intermittent contact thereafter. In the last dozen years, he had been building up biographies of all early Tasmanian residents by linking together the entries for each individual from convict records, musters, church records, and so on. Passionate about his hobby, he was also pedantically thorough and loved to talk about his breakthroughs. A few months ago he joined the Biographical Database of Australia, but he died on 3 July 2013. Hopefully his Tasmanian work can be recovered and added to that project. A life cut short with so much still to offer: Garry you will be missed.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Monthly Musings .....	2
Rave Reviews .....	2
Words to the Wise .....	3
History Hints .....	4
Publishing Pointers .....	5
Fun and Games .....	5



### BLOGS

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

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## MONTHLY MUSINGS

For anyone interested in more intensive writing courses, I have been invited to Wentworth (near Mildura) to give a two-day session of writing workshops and seminars. This will comprise nine sessions, beginning on the evening of Monday 25 November 2013 with an introductory session, then four seminars/workshops on each of the following two days. If you would like further information, contact Leanne Watmuff at Wentworth Library on (03) 5027 5062, or email me and I will forward her email address.

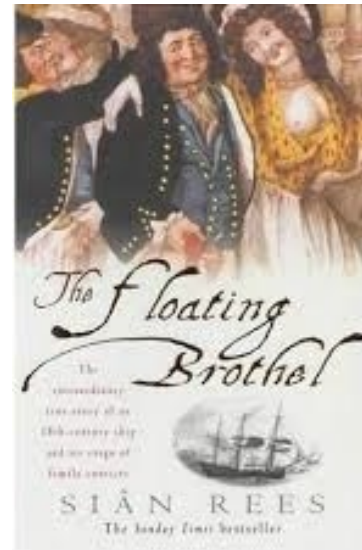
Next year, I will conduct a similar series of writing seminars and workshops in Sydney. I will also cover similar topics in a series of webinars for those living elsewhere.

Stay tuned.



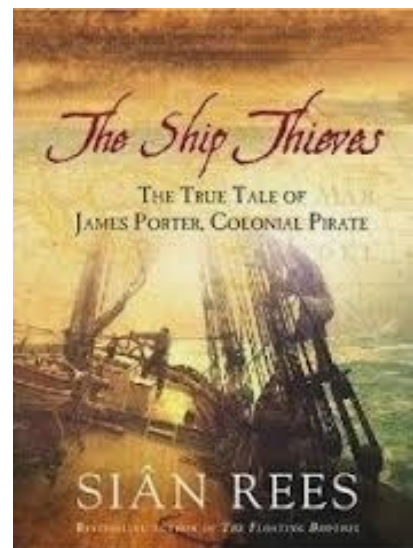
## RAVE REVIEWS: SIÂN REES' BOOKS

Many of you will recall hearing about or reading Siân Rees' *The Floating Brothel*, which came out in 2001 and was a bestseller in Australia. It spawned a docu-drama of the same name. Both tell the story of the female convict transport, *Lady Juliana*, which left England in 1789 and took nearly a year to reach Sydney, arriving around the same time as the Second Fleet proper. *The Sydney Morning Herald* said the book was 'exceptional'. It's a particularly worthwhile read for those with convict ancestors, especially female convict ancestors, as it communicates the atmosphere on board a convict ship as well as the practicalities involved in transporting a shipload of humans half-way around the world.



My favourite of Siân's first three books is *The Ship Thieves*, which tells the story of Tasmanian convict, James Porter. A persistent but unsuccessful bolter, he eventually managed to steal a boat and sail 6000 miles across the open ocean to Chile. This book is a great read. It vividly communicates the convict's world, particularly the horrors of living in a place like Macquarie Harbour—and, of course, the nightmare of an ocean journey in a small boat. As well, it is beautifully written; for example: 'The little society that Captain Briggs controlled at Macquarie Harbour was a microcosm of Governor Arthur's island-wide vision of perfectly oiled penal cogs and godly screws: a snakes-and-ladders board of punishment and reward.' Evocative!

Siân's fourth and fifth books (which I've not yet read) are: *Sweet Water and Bitter: the Ships that Stopped the Slave Trade*, and *Moll: The Life and Times of Moll Flanders*, both published in 2011.



## WORDS TO THE WISE: EPIGRAPHS

I discovered 'books' when I was in primary school. In fact, I have Enid Blyton to thank for my reading passion although, funnily enough, I bought one of her books when my kids were young thinking that it might help get them reading but it was so stilted I couldn't get past the first few pages! In my younger days there wasn't much of a 'young adult' genre, so by the age of 12/13 I was reading Alistair Maclean and Mary Stewart, and I still love crime/thriller/mystery/adventure stories. Mary Stewart's books also intrigued me because of the little quotes she had under the chapter headings. For some reason, I rarely read chapter headings, but I always read those quotes: the tantalising clues to the delights in store in the following pages. Not surprisingly, when I started writing myself, I took pleasure in finding appropriate quotes for each chapter. Some were insightful, some tongue-in-cheek. Part of the pleasure was in imagining the reader's awakening realisation as to why I had chosen that particular quote.

Be careful what you wish for.

ANONYMOUS

When *An Irresistible Temptation* was picked up, I found myself in the world of mainstream publishing. Having never attended any writing courses, or even read any books on writing, I was a complete ignoramus, so I endeavoured to listen hard and say little (OK, OK, *my* version of 'saying little' rather than that of a stoic purse-lipped gentleman) as I didn't want to risk saying something that made me look like a complete idiot. A couple of times in my initial meetings with my publisher (I soon learnt that the commissioning agent in a publishing house is called a 'publisher'), I heard her mention the word *epigraph*. 'Was that "epitagh"?' wondered this genealogist, but then I asked myself why she would be calling my chapter quotes 'epitaphs'. When I got home, I looked it up in a dictionary. 'Epigraph' was the official word for my start-of-the-chapter quotes. I could now use it without feeling like I was standing on the idiot-abys.

By this time I was voraciously reading books on writing so I could fast-track my knowledge. I soon discovered something interesting. In

the writing industry, epigraphs are generally considered to be an elegant and sophisticated writing tool. Thank goodness for that because it can take half a day to find a really good epigraph for a single chapter and when you have 40 chapters divided into five sections each also requiring an epigraph ...! At those times I would start thinking 'I'm mad!'

If the idea of using epigraphs appeals to you, open an 'epigraphs' file on your computer and note anything you come across that might make a good epigraph. You may never use it, but you never know. Reading a novel at one time, I came across a quote from Leonardo Da Vinci and noted it down:

*The bee may be likened to deceit for it has honey in its mouth and poison behind.*

It ultimately proved a perfect epigraph for John Stephen Jnr, the lying, cheating, embezzling, adulterer protagonist of *An Irresistible Temptation*. Imagine reading that epigraph then wondering what was coming next. One quote I memorised when I was 22 was: 'Everyone has a reason to exist if only to serve as a horrible example'. I've not used it in a book but I've muttered it under my breath many a time when dealing with difficult people!!!

As I research my books, I note down anything potentially useful found in original records as well as my background reading. When I have exhausted my list and still have more to find, I start searching for quotes on the internet. Thank goodness for the internet! With *The Peculiar Case*, though, I had to change quite a few of them. My British publisher wanted epigraphs that pre-dated the events (I had some great Arthur Conan Doyle quotes I had to dump) and only those from the classics that were not particularly well known (I lost a couple of doozies on those grounds as well).

If the quote is really long, try to cut out any unnecessary bits and replace them with ellipses (...). Readers will skip it if it's too long.

I do not recommend using multiple epigraphs to start a chapter. Some authors do so to reinforce a point or to present a contrasting position. In my opinion, the epigraph's impact is instantly lost. Epigraphs are a powerful writing tool. Use them judiciously.

## HISTORY HINTS: NAMES, NAMES, NAMES

No doubt most of you have a 'hobby' of some sort, perhaps common or esoteric or simply odd. I've had a few hobbies in my time, including one that most people thought bizarre. When I was ten or eleven, I began collecting girls' names.

'How does one "collect" girls' names?' you perhaps ask politely, while thinking, 'Hmmm! It's not like collecting stamps or coins!' Well, initially I would borrow or buy 'given name' books, and also extract names from birth, marriage and death notices. By the age of 13, I was going into the State Library by myself and looking up name books from all over the world. I was only interested in girls' names because surnames could be used as boys' names. Ultimately I had a list of 22,000 girls' names. In those pre-computer days, it became unmanageable and I was forced to give up. Yet I always retained a fascination for names, indeed for words and sounds generally, which probably explains why I majored in linguistics at university.

Names are intriguing. You have almost certainly looked in a 'names' book to see what your name means. 'Carol', for example, is pretty obvious. It means 'song of joy'. Whenever people ask me how to spell it, I say 'as in Christmas'! (Just as an aside, following the last few months' History Hints, Christmas carolling also had its origins in pagan rituals: during the winter solstice celebrations, the Roman Mummers would dress up in costume and travel from house to house, singing and dancing to entertain their neighbours.) The name *Carol* itself first became popular in America in the twentieth century, probably from the influence of cinema, and was a shorter form of the older *Caroline*.

Names, names, names. Imagine how I felt when I acquired a job in my 'new' hobby, family history research, and had access to lists and lists of genuine names. I temporarily sated my passion when I edited the *General Musters of NSW, Norfolk Island and Van Diemen's Land 1811* (Australian Biographical and Genealogical Record, Sydney, 1987—sample below) by including lists of all the male and female given names noted in the musters, sorted both alphabetically and

by frequency. As a family historian, I have since found these lists useful in indicating commonness or rarity.

The muster listed all the adults resident in the colony except Aboriginals, government officials, and soldiers and their wives. Most residents were serving or emancipated convicts who came primarily from England and Ireland, but also from other parts of the world. The lists provided some fascinating statistics. The four most common male names were: *John* (19%), *William* (14%), *Thomas* (11%) and *James* (9%). This means that one in every two adult males living at that time in New South Wales—and, by extension, England in the late 1700s and early 1800s—carried one of these four names (imagine being a schoolteacher!). While these names were also used in Ireland, the Irish influence was particularly seen in the eighth name: *Patrick* (3%). The top 15 names were carried by 83% of males. Clearly 'common names' in those days were truly common, which means that an 'uncommon' given name might actually have been rare.

Only 0.7% of the male population and 0.7% of the female population had a 'middle' name (fascinating that the percentages were the same). Multiple given names didn't become

TABLE 13: FEMALE GIVEN NAMES (Numerical Order)

			%
1	Mary	530	23.8
2	Elizabeth (316) / Elisabeth (1)	317	14.2
3	Ann (227) / Anne (89)	316	14.2
4	Sarah	179	8.0
5	Jane	112	5.0
6	Catherine	104	4.7
7	Margaret	104	4.7
8	Hannah	57	2.6
9	Eleanor (50) / Elinor (1)	51	2.3
10	Martha	42	1.9
11	Susanna (3) / Susannah (29)	32	1.4
12	Maria	26	1.2
13	Mary Ann (25) / Mary Anne (1)	26	1.2
14	Charlotte	24	1.1
15	Bridget	22	1.0
16	Frances	20	0.9
17	Isabella	20	0.9
18	Ester (2) / Esther (12) / Hester (1)	15	0.7

common for the working classes until after 1850. Later in the century, families went overboard and began giving their offspring two, three and four middle names. Today, it has settled down to a customary single middle name.

Families were even less original in naming their daughters. One in every two girls had the name *Mary* (24%), *Elizabeth* (14%) or *Ann(e)* (14%). The top fifteen girls' names were carried by 87% of the women.

Next year I will write a book about given names. It will discuss how certain names became popular and provide detailed statistics on frequency (both from the 1811 Muster and a broader cross-section of years), as well as other interesting and useful information for family historians. This should finally sate my passion for names!

## PUBLISHING POINTERS: AESTHETICS

When I was preparing *Writing Interesting Family Histories*, I borrowed books on self-publishing from local libraries so I could arm myself with knowledge. One book was extraordinary. The cover was a simple piece of white cardboard containing nothing but the title in small black Times New Roman font. 'OK,' I told myself, giving it the benefit of the doubt, 'it's simple and straight to the point.' Once I opened the book, I realised that my initial impression—cheap and nasty—was correct. The layout was dreadful. It was also badly written and full of spelling, grammar and punctuation errors. Ironically, it was a perfect example of what not to do when you self-publish a book. Hopefully the library hadn't paid for it.

Self-published books often give themselves away by their internal layout. In an attempt to reduce pages and therefore cost, authors can cramp everything together. For example, they might include the copyright details on the full title page (page one), then place the contents details on the back of the full title page (page two), and start the main text on page three. Even worse is when the main text begins on a left-hand page. These same authors also often try to increase the number of words printed on each page by reducing the size of the top and side margins. Sometimes the margins are so small and the page numbers so close to the bottom that they look like they are about to fall off. If the author has failed to use central gutters as well—that is, wider margins for the spine margins—that part of the page can be difficult to read.

The mainstream publishing industry needs to keep costs down so they wouldn't leave 'white space' without good reason. A book is not just an information source, it's an aesthetic experience. If readers immediately think 'cheap and nasty', they could chuck your book away. That's the last thing you want. Work out what you like in terms of a book's internal aesthetics, then do the same for your own books.



### Fun and Games: Naming Nemesis

'A name? If a party had a voice, what mortal would be a Bugg by choice?' teased British humourist, Thomas Hood in *Miss Kilmansegg*.

Some Buggs did indeed make such a choice, among them the father of Mary Ann Bugg, the female protagonist of *Captain Thunderbolt and His Lady*. Convict records listed her father as James *Brigg* (a transcription error that persisted), however he used *Bugg* when he had the chance, and descendants still carry the surname today. Its origin lies in the world of the fey folk: hobgoblins, bugbears, and bo-geys. But, today, it reminds us only of the creepy-crawlies of our physical world—hence Thomas Hood's wry comment.

If I had been Hood, I would have replaced *Bugg* with the surname of my ancestor's brother-in-law: *Hogsflesh*. What a truly horrible surname! Are we surprised that the mortals in that family changed it to *Hodges* in the late 1800s?

What is the worst or funniest or most bizarre ancestral surname or surname/given name combination you have come across? If you want to send me your classics, I'll publish some in the next newsletter. Nobody has yet managed to beat *Hogsflesh* for 'worst' in my opinion.



### 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.



## WOMEN WRITERS' WEEKEND

The Society of Women Writers has their biennial women writers' weekend on 18-20 October 2013 at the Brahma Kumaris Inner Space Centre at Wilton, NSW. I spoke at one of their earlier retreats and it's a lovely relaxing environment in which women can slough off the stresses and strains of daily life and immerse themselves in the writing experience. They have an exciting speaking panel including Cat Sparks, the fiction editor of *Cosmos* magazine; Wendy James, winner of the Ned Kelly prize for crime fiction; Sharon Evans of Big Sky Publishing, who will assist authors to prepare a publishing pitch; and many more. Here's a web link:

[www.womenwritersnsw.org/biennial-women-writers-weekend-retreat](http://www.womenwritersnsw.org/biennial-women-writers-weekend-retreat)



## FAREWELL

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

**Carol Baxter**

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