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History Detective

THUNDERBOLT IS NOT QUITE DEAD

Lovely news. My third 'popular history', *Captain Thunderbolt and his Lady*, has just received equal first prize in the Society of Women Writers Biennial Awards 2013 in the Nonfiction category. Congratulations to all the other winners!

For those of you who haven't read the book, it tells the story of Frederick Wordsworth Ward (1835-1870), aka Captain Thunderbolt, the 'most successful' bushranger in Australian history. His extraordinary six years and eight months in the Australian bush remained the record until last year when Australian murderer Malcolm Naden was captured after six years and nine months living in the bush. Thunderbolt's lady was Mary Ann Bugg, the most notorious part-Aboriginal woman in nineteenth-century Australia. To me, Mary Ann was the most fascinating character in the book, as you can see from the way I crafted the story. As the judge, Emeritus Professor Elizabeth Webby, said: 'Mary Ann Bugg truly was one of a kind.'

MORE REVIEWS

More great reviews for *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable* from North America. *Maclean's Magazine* (Canada's equivalent of *Time* magazine) wrote that I 'successfully argue' that the Information Age dawned on New Year's Day 1845, and that the book is 'a deftly woven tale of crime, religion and science'. The U.S. *Shelf Awareness* newsletter—for libraries, booksellers and readers—wrote that it is an 'exhilarating real life thriller ... Baxter's accounts of the telegraph's technology, the prevailing cultural climate regarding murder and poisonings, contemporary forensic methods and Tawell's personal history are all worthy of an engrossing thriller ... Expertly told, *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable* is a captivating accomplishment in nonfiction.'

From Australia? Zippo, zilch, zero, diddly-squat, naught, nothing—even though one-quarter of the book is set in Australia. Cultural cringe? Inadequate publicity/marketing efforts? Bloomsbury suspect the latter. They are taking over distribution and will 'relaunch' the book when the mass paperback version is published next year.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Monthly Musings.....	2
Publishing Pointers	2
History Hints	3
Rave Reviews	4
Words to the Wise	5
Wentworth Talks	6



BLOGS

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

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MONTHLY MUSINGS

Seasons greetings to everyone. I hope you have an enjoyable break and begin the new year afresh.

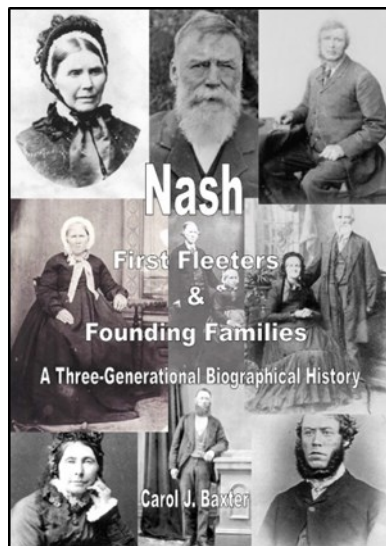
I too am giving myself a holiday break so I won't be sending out a newsletter on 1 January. The next newsletter, Volume 2 Issue 1, will come out on 1 February 2014.

What will I be doing during my break? I'm thinking of giving myself a treat—if I can get the first draft of *The Lucretia Borgia of Botany Bay* finished by Christmas. My idea of a treat? Working on one of my 'how to' books. (Yes, I know what you're thinking: 'Seriously? She needs to get a life!') But I have a dozen 'how to' books crowding my brain, fighting each other for my attention, demanding to be the first to get themselves onto the written page. I feel like a kid being asked to choose one chocolate only from a box of the yummiest variety. Should it be the companion volume to *Writing Interesting Family Histories* that I will call *Publishing Interesting Family Histories*, or my research skills book, or the book on surnames, or the one on given names, or on convicts, or criminals or ... The choices—oh, the choices! But I have to finish the first draft of *Lucretia Borgia* first so I'd better get back to it!

PUBLISHING POINTERS: COVER DESIGN

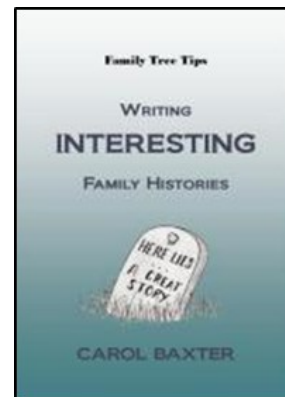
We've all probably said at one time or another 'Don't judge a book by its cover'. It's a silly saying in many ways because a simple fact of evolutionary life is that our ancestors' survival depended upon their ability to instantly decide whether the person/animal heading towards them was a friend or foe, or if the situation they were facing was safe or dangerous. So we are all programmed, for survival reasons, to judge a book by its cover. This means that, before a person has read a word of your book, they will have received a visual impression, and that impression can dictate whether or not they will read your book. But not always.

If you're writing a family history aimed at descendants of a particular family, the impact of your cover will be limited. An enticing cover may sell a few more books than a dry one, but most people will be buying the book because of its contents. Hopefully most will have pre-ordered the book before they have even seen the cover.



The cover of my Nash family history included pictures of family members and was actually sepia in tone. It lacked sophistication—to say the least—but it didn't cost a fortune.

A lot of 'how to' books are the same. So long as the general cover impression is good, the sales will be based on the title and blurb.



The problem arises when a single copy of your book is sitting on a bookshop shelf and is competing for attention with all the other books in the same section. That is when a good cover really matters. (Whenever members of my family go into bookshops, they make sure my books are facing out, even if it means 'rearranging' the shelves slightly! That also helps.)

Mainstream publishers invest a significant sum in cover design for that reason. In fact, the authors themselves have almost no input. Reportedly, some of the fiction authors making a bonza on ebook sites like Smashwords also devote a hefty proportion of their incomes to future covers. For fiction in particular, the cover is critical.

So cover design matters—up to a point.

HISTORY HINTS: MILITARY RECORDS

Whatever our views about war and its horrors, when we discover ancestors who served in the British Army we are pleased for the simple reason that we have a better chance of finding detailed information about their persons and their lives. I have three soldier ancestors and their stories are all fascinating.

My earliest, John Watson, fought with the Twenty-First Regiment of Foot during the 'American Revolution' (as it was called by the British) or 'American War of Independence' (by those who supported the 'rebels'). My ancestor was with the British at the Surrender at Saratoga in 1777—a turning point in the war. He was taken prisoner under a negotiated agreement that the prisoners would be returned to England. Few were. Ultimately most were struck off the British pay-lists and probably remained in America, but my man was exchanged with the Brigadier-General of his regiment (probably as his batman) and later went to work on the man's Scottish estate.

My next military ancestor, William Nash, was a marine who came to Australia with the First Fleet in 1788. He brought his common-law wife with him and they were officially married in Sydney and had six children. She ran off with another man in the early 1800s and, soon afterwards, Nash left the country. He apparently took passage on a ship that attempted to follow the route taken by explorer Matthew Flinders through the Torres Strait to India. The ship foundered with the loss of most lives. Details of the survivors are not known.

My third military ancestor came to Australia as part of the New South Wales Corps in 1796—the Rum Corps—and became addicted to rum. After suffering an almighty bout of delirium tremens, he experienced an almighty religious conversion and built the first Wesleyan church in the southern hemisphere (and the second and the third), while suffering some alcoholic relapses in the interim.

What do I know about my non-military, non-criminal male ancestors who were living in the same time period in England? Very little!

One reason we can find more information about soldiers is because we know where they were and, oftentimes, what they were doing as a result of the information included in the monthly or quarterly 'Musters and Pay-lists'. For the regiment itself, other sources paint a vivid picture, among them the regimental *Historical Records*.

Around the year 1850, an *Historical Record* was published for each of the British regiments of foot. These publications pre-date the conflicts that dominate most current regimental histories so, for those with military ancestors serving in the pre-1850 period, they are among the most useful sources for general regimental information. Some volumes provide little information about the regiment's activities—merely dates and places—while others attempt to tell a story.

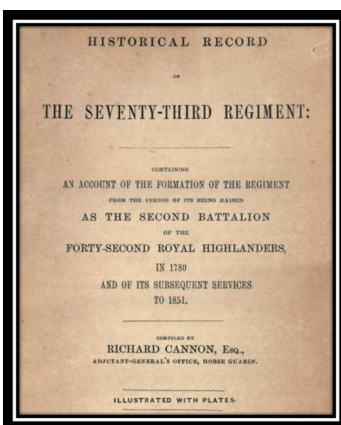
When your ancestor's regiment was in action with another regiment, make a point of examining the *Historical Record* for that other regiment as well as its description might be more detailed. John Watson's regiment was in company with the Twentieth Regiment during the engagement described in the *Historical Record of the Twentieth Regiment of Foot* (pp.23-4):

'In the spring of 1777, the regiment [then in Quebec] was selected to form part of an expedition, under Lieutenant General Burgoyne, designed to penetrate the revolted provinces, from Lake Champlain to Albany, and thus open a considerable extent of country to enable the Royalists to declare their principles. To engage in this service, the Twentieth Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Lind, embarked on board the flotilla and, after a pleasant journey along Lake Champlain, landed at Crown Point, from

whence it advanced to invest Ticonderago; but the Americans quitted the fort without attempting to stand a siege. Again embarking on board of the flotilla, the regiment moved along the lake and, about three o'clock on the afternoon on 6th of July, the Ninth, Twentieth and Twenty-first Regiments landed near Skenesborough, and ascended the mountains to get behind a fort occupied by the Americans at that place; but as the three regiments ascended the hills, the Americans set fire to their fort and fled with such precipitation that only thirty of their number were made prisoners ...'

The 'revolted provinces' – what a phrase! – are now part of the United States of America.

You can access most of these volumes via Google books but begin your search at <http://archive.org> as this website allows free access to out-of-copyright publications like the *Historical Records*. If the relevant publication is not available online, contact the regimental museum. The staff should be prepared, for a fee, to photocopy the pages covering your dates of interest.

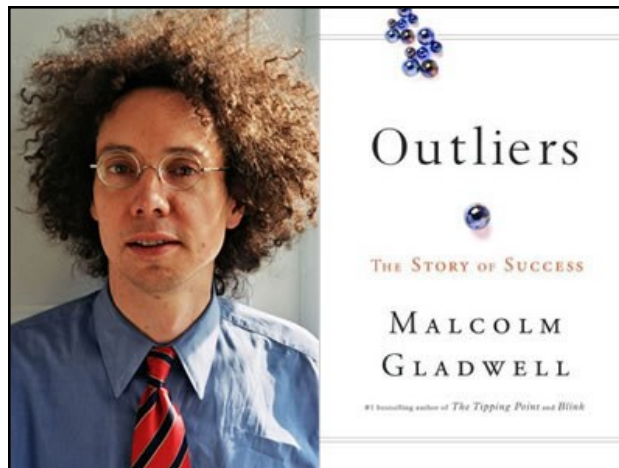


RAVE REVIEWS: MALCOLM GLADWELL'S BOOKS

'A mind stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimensions.'

This saying, to me, epitomises the effects of reading Malcolm Gladwell's books. In fact, his books don't just stretch my mind. Reading them leaves me feeling like I am on an extraordinary high (who needs drugs!), with my mind so stimulated by new ideas and by understanding things that I had never realised I didn't understand that I feel like it's about to explode. In 2005, *Time* magazine voted Gladwell one of the 100 most influential people—and I can fully appreciate why.

I discovered Malcolm Gladwell's books earlier this year when I was editing *The Peculiar Case*. In the epilogue, I argue that John Tawell's story had a profound influence on the success of the electric telegraph, that it in fact launched the Communication Revolution. At the time, I was in touch with the curator of the Science Museum in London, the museum that holds the electric telegraph used to send the historically important message that pursued John Tawell on New Year's Day 1845; the curator said that he didn't think the events of that day launched the Communication Revolution, that the electric telegraph was on the verge of success anyway. Yet my own research had shown few references to the electric telegraph in the British press prior to 1845 and considerably more in that year than the previous years combined, and I also knew that the first British electric telegraph company was formed in August 1845, etc., etc. I knew that the events of that day had indeed been pivotal but I didn't know how to justify my reasoning. Then I remembered that someone, for a different reason, had mentioned a book called 'tipping point', or something like that, and that I had written down the title and author. I found the reference, looked up the title in my local library catalogue, found that the book was available, raced to the library to get it before anyone else could borrow it, read it, and was blown away. He explained exactly what I needed to know. Moreover, his book was an international bestseller (he was paid an advance of \$1 million dollars to write it!) so I wouldn't need pages and pages to explain my reasoning; I could just mention Malcolm Gladwell and *The Tipping Point* (published in 2000).



Since then, I have bought that book and all of his others and have read most of them. Gladwell looks for stories and academic research that overlap and provide insight and inspiration. His motivation for writing *The Tipping Point* was the drop in crime in New York, the spread of epidemic diseases like AIDS, and the success of certain businesses: what did they all have in common?

Blink, published in 2005, talks about the difference between good decision-making and bad, about how we can make a brilliant decision in the blink of an eye or an appalling one.

In *Outliers* (2008), he talks about individuals who succeed and why they succeed. The answer is amazing and gives hope to us all. It also talks about families and how something that happened a long time ago can profoundly influence our lives today (something worth thinking about as genealogists write their family histories). In fact, when he explores his own family history, he identifies the fact that one of his female ancestors—an African slave—was beautiful and was sent to Jamaica instead of America as being pivotal in his own life story.

What the Dog Saw and other Adventures (2009) includes articles he's written for *The New Yorker* (he's a staff writer there).

In *David and Goliath* (2013—which I am currently reading) he shows how strengths can also be weaknesses, which is why Davids can beat Goliaths.

It's extraordinary stuff.

WORDS TO THE WISE: THE UNIVERSE OF WORDS

Is 'universe' a common noun or a proper noun? I had this bizarre thought late at night (if I mentioned that I have sleeping issues, would anyone be surprised?). But think about it: science has long determined that the universe began with a Big Bang—a term coined by Fred Hoyle in 1949. Scientists have tracked the moment in time ... oops, I can't say 'the moment in time' as there was no 'time' before the Big Bang for the simple reason that time and space both began with the Big Bang (my despairing science teachers would be astonished to find that scientific discoveries actually interest me now). So let's put it this way: scientists have tracked the moment of the universe's eruption into existence back to 10^{-43} seconds; that is, 0.0001 seconds with dozens of zeroes between the '.' and the '1'.

'Yes, yes, we all know that,' you say. 'Get to the point.'

Well, I recently read Stephen Hawking's book *The Grand Design* (I won't include it in my Rave Review section because it is not for the faint-hearted!). Despite my determination to read the whole thing, I ended up skimming the second half until I reached the last couple of chapters. These chapters were fascinating. The gist is that he and other scientists theorise that our universe may not be a 'universe' after all—that is, a single entity—but rather that, in its originating moment, the Big Bang created a multitude of universes and that some 'took' (like ours) while others didn't. To provide a picturesque analogy: imagine bubbles bursting from a pool of hot mud. Some grow into big bubbles and fly off (universes); some become little bubbles that soon pop; while others fizzle before they even become fully-formed bubbles. This raises the possibility that our universe may not be the only universe in the universe—that is, it may be one of a series of universes that form a multiverse.

So if our universe is actually part of a multiverse, surely we will need to give our universe a special name so as to distinguish it from the other (theorised) universes. Do we just promote it from common name to proper noun; that is, 'universe' becomes 'Universe'. Perhaps that already happened when the earth (dirt covering surface of known existence area) became Earth (planet of existence). Yet calling our magnificent universe 'Universe' seems rather pedestrian, doesn't it.

What else could we name it? Hmmm, that becomes problematic. We would need a panel of experts from all over the world to choose a name. Meanwhile, how would we define 'experts' and what might they choose? Statesmen/women (Mandela?), scientists (Newton/Einstein?), scholars (Socrates), sportspeople ... Perhaps we'd better forget naming it after a person (particularly a middle-class, white, male type of person). Something universal perhaps, like 'R2D2'?

Can you imagine how long it would take to reach a consensus?

Imagine having to create an entire vocabulary. 'Burrp,' burps a caveman as he and his companions look at something previously unnamed. 'Birrip?' query his companions, looking at him as if he must be the font of all wisdom. 'Is it called 'birrip?' The burper nods sheepishly, appreciating the admiration and unwilling to admit to merely an unintended belch (OK, OK, it is nearing the witching hour as my fingers flash across the keyboard indulging in this absurd flight of fancy!).

So what is the point of this piece?

Words are fascinating entities. At some point every word we use had an origin, whether deliberately chosen or adopted or evolved. As writers we need to think about the

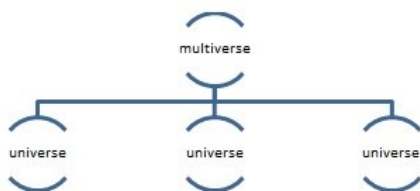
words we use rather than just dumping them into our prose. Of course, thinking about words means having crazy ideas about nouns late at night when we should be sleeping!

Good writers have a broader mental lexicon than most other people which allows them to be choosy about the words they use. In fact, good writers absorb words into their lexicon because words themselves intrigue them.

So how can you increase your own vocabulary if you think its too limited? One suggestion is to learn five new words a week then use each of them five times that same week. By the end of the week, the words will be glued into your brain. And you will be sure to get opportunities to use them, even if only to tell five people about the strange words you have learnt!

Or you can just find a good online thesaurus.

Back to the word 'universe'. It comes from the Latin 'universum' which is formed from *unus* (one) and *vertere* (to turn); literally, it means 'turned into one'. Perhaps it is appropriate as a proper noun after all.





About the author

Carol Baxter is the author of three works of narrative non-fiction published by Allen & Unwin (*An Irresistible Temptation*, *Breaking the Bank*, and *Captain Thunderbolt and his Lady*), and these, along with her just released international book, *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable* (Britain's Oneworld), have all been published to critical acclaim. In 2015, Allen & Unwin will publish her fifth book, *The Lucretia Borgia of Botany Bay*. Carol 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.



WENTWORTH TALKS 25-27 NOVEMBER

What a lovely few days I've just had at Wentworth, a pretty town on the junction of the Darling and Murray Rivers, 35kms from Mildura on the NSW/Victorian border. After a two-hour plane flight to Mildura, I was picked up by Leanne Watmuff, the Local Studies librarian at Wentworth Library. Leanne was responsible for organising my visit to the district. That night I gave an introductory talk at the Friends of the Library Annual Meeting and, on Tuesday and Wednesday, I gave eight seminars on researching principles/practices and on structuring, polishing and publishing a family history. We had 35 attendees at the researching seminars and 32 at the writing seminars and, from the feedback, a great time was had by all (including me!).

My very great thanks to Leanne for organising the event, to Jenny McLeod, President of the Wentworth Historical Society, and to the other members of the Historical Society's council, who decided that they wanted to charge attendees a low fee and would themselves make up any shortfall, and to the Library Manager Peggy McKenzie who organised for the library to finance the food provided to the attendees. It was a wonderful example of the library and historical society joining together to benefit the community. Most of the council members are in the photo below.



FAREWELL

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

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