Well, I’m just back from a wonderful cruise. It’s the longest holiday I’ve had since I bought that one-way ticket to England when I was 22.

Now I have to hit the deck running. Four days to get over jetlag and the ‘cold’ I brought back from Hawaii (wish I could have brought the ‘warm’ back from Hawaii as the autumn chill hit Sydney just as we returned – ugh!) then I fly to Adelaide for the Unlock the Past two-day researching and writing seminars. Afterwards I have two days for my voice to recover again, then I have some radio interviews to tie in with the release of the mass paperback version of *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable*. For those who are interested in catching interviews, talks or podcasts, here are some details.

**Radio:**

Thursday 8 May 4pm: Radio Adelaide studio interview (google to get URL)

Friday/Saturday 9/10 May 9.00-5.00pm: Unlock the Past researching and writing seminars, North Adelaide Football Club, Prospect SA.

Tuesday 13 May 10am: Radio 2CH, Sydney NSW.

Wednesday 14 May 7.25pm: ABC Hobart Statewide (936), Tasmania.

Plus various community radio stations (will add these to website this weekend).

**Author talks:**

Tuesday 3 June 6pm: Hornsby Library, Sydney.

Thursday 5 June 1pm: Campsie Library, Sydney.

Thursday 12 June (time to be confirmed): Stanton Library, North Sydney.

Thursday 26 June 7pm: Hurstville Library, Sydney.
History Hints: Muster Rolls and Pay Lists 3

Overview

This article continues the past months’ articles on British regimental muster rolls and pay lists for the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Wages

Britain’s military was a huge bureaucratic machine. It probably comprised the government’s largest workforce in the early 1800s. That being the case, it was essential that every penny being spent on that workforce was closely monitored. It explains why the record series under discussion is called the ‘Muster Rolls and Pay Lists’ rather than just the ‘Muster Rolls’. So let’s discuss the huge expenditure on wages.

The columns after the soldiers’ names relate to days mustered and pay received. The pay periods followed the Lady Day calendar (see newsletter 2013/2), with quarterly muster periods dating from 25 March to 24 June, 25 June to 24 September, 25 September to 24 December, and 25 December to 24 March. That being the case, it is easy to see if your soldier served for the full muster period or for only a partial period.

If your soldier served for a partial period but the date of commencement or cessation is difficult to read, use the ‘No. of days’ column to help you work out the problematic date. This column immediately follows the muster dates. For example, there were 90 days in the period from 25 December 1808 to 24 March 1809 (the time-period covered in the above image), which is the number listed in that column for most of the soldiers. If your soldier’s pay period commenced on 25 December but finished early, and if the cessation date is unreadable, you can use the number of days – say 62 – to work out that the cessation date was probably 24 February. With that projected date in mind, you can re-examine the cessation date in the pay list and see if it conforms to expectations.

The next column is titled ‘Rate per diem’ – that is, rate per day. Most of these privates had ‘1’ listed in the column because they were paid ‘a shilling a day’. In the same column, you will notice that some of the soldiers have a pay rate of 1.2 shillings per day (that is, one shilling and two pence per day). It is not obvious in the above cut-down image, but these were the soldiers with a number listed in the ‘Service - 14 years’ column (see last month’s newsletter). That is, after serving fourteen years, they were paid two pence per day more than recently-recruited privates.

Although the above image doesn’t include a ‘Service - 7 years’ example, once a soldier had served in the military for seven years, his pay increased to one shilling and one pence a day. That extra one or two pence a day seems a tiny amount to us, but the difference can be seen in their quarterly pay. While the total – shown in the next three columns – was either £3 11s 6d or just £3 11s for the one-shilling-a-day privates, the fourteen-year men received £4 6s or £4 6s 6d.

Question: if the men served for 90 days at one shilling per day, why wasn’t their pay £4 10s (remember, there were twenty shillings in a pound and twelve pence in a shilling)? The answer is that a certain amount was extracted from each day’s pay for food, uniform costs and so on. It is curious, though, that there was a 6d variance for many of the men. The men who received 6d less were probably being charged an additional fee of some sort. A reader may be able to explain the difference.
Words to the Wise: Read

To those of you who are attending the Unlock the Past two-day seminar series in Adelaide on 9/10 May (and to anyone else interested in writing family histories), I strongly recommend that you read one of my popular histories, as mentioned in the previous newsletter.

Why?

I came to writing ‘popular history’ from a background in writing family histories. In fact, I discovered the story of my first popular history, *An Irresistible Temptation*, while writing a family history. The story was so delicious – a political sex scandal – that I thought I would try my hand at writing ‘popular history’. The rest, as they say, is history.

Why is this important in terms of your own writing development?

At the time *Temptation* was picked up by a mainstream publisher, my only previous writing experience comprised university essays, the introductory pages for the colonial sources I had edited, some genealogical articles, and the thesis/essay for the Society of Australian Genealogists’ Diploma in Family Historical Studies – probably not dissimilar to many of you. I had not taken any writing courses and I had not read any books on writing. Worse, unlike most of you, it hadn’t even occurred to me to do so.

Why is this relevant? It means that I have walked in your shoes and I know exactly what you are trying to achieve. Most importantly, I have worked out how to write history in a way that is interesting, which is, of course, why you are coming to hear me.

Marian Pierre-Louis in her Genealogy Professional podcast (see March 2014 newsletter) asked me if I knew of anyone else in the genealogy world who is doing what I’m doing – that is, writing mainstream historical non-fiction thrillers. I said that I didn’t. While there are others writing in my genre (not many internationally, though, let alone in Australia), most are journalists or academic/professional historians. Their pathway is not the same as yours or mine.

As we all know, getting information about some of our ancestors is like getting blood from a stone. In my talks I will teach you how to make the most of these little bits of blood and I will provide an example in each instance to clarify my point. If you haven’t read any of my popular histories, though, you won’t have seen for yourself what I achieve with my writing so what I am saying will only resonate with you on a shallow level.

However, if you have read one of my books, when I say ‘This is how I achieve that particular result’, you will think ‘Ahhhhh! I understand what you are talking about. So that’s how you did that!’ You cannot help but get more out of my seminars. As I say to my students, my book *Writing Interesting Family Histories* is 25,000 words of ‘how to’, while my ‘popular histories’ are 400,000 words of real-life examples.

My books are possibly quite different to what you imagine them to be. In fact, Shauna Hicks, a highly skilled genealogist and popular speaker who is also on the Adelaide programme, made an interesting comment about *Captain Thunderbolt and his Lady*. Shauna had read *Writing Interesting Family Histories* and had attended my writing seminars. Even so, when she read *Thunderbolt*, she said, ‘It’s not what I was expecting ... [it’s] easy to read and even a bit hard to put down.’

Which of my books should you read? Writers improve with each book they write – or they should! – so my first recommendation is *The Peculiar Case of the Electric Constable* (my most recent book) and my second recommendation is *Captain Thunderbolt and his Lady* (my second-last book). You don’t have to buy a copy; you can borrow one from your library. If your library doesn’t have a copy, ask them to purchase one. If you want to buy one, you can ask at any good bookshop (if they don’t have a copy, they can order one; the older ones are print-on-demand, though, so they will take a bit longer to arrive). Alternatively, you can purchase books via my website: www.carolbaxter.com. A hyperlink to the order page is on the covering email.

Of course, I know from experience that most attendees will not heed this advice. So let me tell you a ‘secret’. Do you know the difference between success and mediocrity/failure? The answer: time and effort. All you have to do to succeed is to put in more time and effort than everyone else (which often isn’t hard because everyone else is trying to do as little as possible!). That’s all it is – as proven by the Rule of 10,000 (see The Secrets of Success on the next page). If you do a bit more than everyone else, and keep doing a bit more, you will succeed. How do I know? Because that’s what I did. And now I’m the teacher ...
### Inspirational Insights: The Secret of Success

When my offspring were young, I heard a statistic I’ve never forgotten, one that I repeated to them until they would say ‘Yes, Mum, we know; the difference between …’ (with the rolling eyes and patronising tone that the little darlings love to use!). The quoted statistics claimed that the difference between a *prima ballerina* and a member of the *corps de ballet* was 10,000 hours versus 7000 hours. I knew what those terms meant because I had dreamt of being a prima ballerina as a child; but, to the uninitiated, it means that the difference between the soloist and the backing dancers in a ballet production is 10,000 versus 7000 hours.

I don’t know about you but I had always thought that the soloist was up there because of some unique X-factor. Instead, the study had shown that ballet dancers who had enough of the essential qualities – physique, training, aptitude, etc. – to be offered places in ballet companies in the first place succeeded in gaining the top positions if they devoted more time and effort to their craft than their cohorts. Statistically, the dancer had to put in half-an-hour a day extra for six days a week for ten years, or one hour a day extra for six days a week for five years.

So I was fascinated when I read about such a study in Malcolm Gladwell’s *Outliers*, a book I reviewed in the December edition of the *History Detective* newsletter. The study Gladwell mentioned was conducted in a German music school in the 1990s. The psychologists leading the study asked the school to divide their students into three groups, comprising:

1. Those who would reach the top of their field – that is, the prima ballerinas of the music world;
2. Those who would succeed in finding a place in, say, an orchestra but would never be a soloist;
3. Those who would teach privately or in schools.

The psychologists then studied the students in depth, getting them to fill in questionnaires and talking further to their teachers. Ultimately, they found that group one had devoted at least 10,000 hours to their studies; group two, 7000 hours; and group three, 4000 hours.

But there’s more – and this is where it gets even more interesting. The psychologists then went out into the ‘real world’ and studied the music world’s version of the *prima ballerinas* and the *corps de ballet* and the ballet teachers who reign supreme in the local church or school hall. They found that the statistics held true, that the posited ‘Rule of 10,000’, as they called it, was real. They found that the grinders, those who did the critical 10,000 hours, always succeeded. And they found that the successes had ALL done the critical 10,000 hours.

Clearly, success isn’t some indefinable X-factor quality. Success is a product of putting in the hard yards. Practice really does make perfect – as the statistics now show.

Of course, most people hope to succeed by putting in as little time, effort and money as they can. So all we have to do – if we want to achieve success – is to do more than most people can be bothered doing.

As a genealogist, historian and writer, this is both comforting and inspiring. It means that if we learn enough about the principles and practices of research and/or writing, and if we put in enough practice, we can all succeed in our endeavours.

Looking back on my own genealogical journey, which I began when I was 17, I recollect that I spent most of my spare time doing genealogy. I can remember my mother calling me to dinner over and over again and that I would respond ‘Just a sec … just a sec’ as I kept typing on an old manual typewriter. I also bought every relevant genealogical ‘how to’ book I could find – not many in those days, admittedly. And instead of just filling in paper or, years later when they became available, computer-based genealogy forms, I typed all the results of my research into prose family histories. In so doing, I unwittingly did the critical 10,000 hours needed for success as a genealogist and the critical 10,000 hours needed for success as a writer.

If you ask most of the genealogists and writers conducting seminars to assess how many hours they have spent learning and doing, you will almost certainly find that they too have devoted at least 10,000 hours to their pursuits. This equates to twenty hours per week for ten years. Interestingly, the psychologists conducting the study, and also Malcolm Gladwell who explored the topic in greater depth in *Outliers*, found that it took most successful people around ten years to reach their own 10,000 hours.

So keep doing and, most importantly, keep learning how to be a better ‘doer’. For example, in my writing seminars and in *Writing Interesting Family Histories*, I recommend four books on writing. I discuss these books in the Rave Reviews section on the next page. Those who borrow or buy these books have a better chance of writing a good family history – or a good anything else – than those who don’t. Remember writing skills are learnable and these books will help you learn. The *craft* can be taught. The *art* comes only after the craft has become second nature.

But remember, while practice makes perfect, no one will become a bestselling author, for example, by spending 10,000 hours writing ‘I want to be a bestselling author!’
Rave Reviews: Writing Books

In the two-day Adelaide seminar on 9/10 May, I will display a PowerPoint slide listing the names of four books I recommend for writers. I’ve mentioned these books in all the writing talks I give—and even in the writing books I’ve written—yet I suspect that few if any of the attendees/readers have borrowed or purchased them (I would love to hear if anyone has). So I have decided to talk about them in more depth in this newsletter.

**Words Fail Me** by Patricia O’Conner (Harcourt, 1999) is light, humorous and fun to read. More to the point, it is jam-packed with writing hints, particularly on the foundational level, so it is ideal for beginner-writers. If you have only enough money to buy one book on writing, this is the book I recommend. I have read it many times and each time I get something new from it or remind myself of something I have forgotten. Some of the chapter titles or subtitles are shown below and reflect the liveliness of the author’s writing style:

- 7. Verbs that Zing
- 10. Pronoun Pileups
- 11. Misbehaving modifiers
- 18. Thou shalt not embarrass thyself

**Word Painting** by Rebecca McClanahan (Writer’s Digest, 1999) covers the sensory side of writing. I have to admit that I didn’t ‘get’ this book the first time I read it. I was still so immersed in the world of encyclopaedia-style dry writing—the type that most genealogists and historians produce—that the book barely resonated with me. For that reason I begin my two-hour *Writing Interesting Family Histories* book and seminars by explaining the problems inherent in this style of writing and by trying to demolish the mental barriers that have limited genealogists to writing in this way. Only then can I open everyone’s minds to writing styles that are more enjoyable for them to write and for their readers to read.

Chapter titles include:

- 4. The Nose and Mouth and Hand and Ear of the Beholder
- 7. The Eye of the Teller: How Point of View Affects Description

Ultimately, all good writing requires a good structure. Think about a book’s structure as if it were a dartboard. The circle on the outside is the structure of the book itself. The bull’s-eye on the inside is the structure of its smallest component, the phrase within a sentence. Each circle has to be well crafted. Critically, it also has to work within the larger circle so that together they produce a great whole. Which brings me to the next two books.

These are part of a series by Bruce Ross-Larson which was published by W.W. Norton and Company in 1999 (it must have been a good year for books on writing). They are titled **Powerful Paragraphs** and **Stunning Sentences**.

**Powerful Paragraphs** focuses on structuring good paragraphs and includes chapters with the following headings:

- 2. Unify your paragraphs around strong points
- 3. Link your paragraphs

The failure to appropriately link paragraphs, for example, is a common problem in amateur writing and creates a jerky effect.

**Stunning Sentences** includes chapters with the headings:

- 4. Elegant repetitions
- 5. Credible quotations
- 8. Deft connections

Sentences also need to flow smoothly. A great sentence, or perhaps even a great phrase within a sentence, is sublime.

Thousands of books have been written about writing, but, for non-fiction writers, these are the four I most strongly recommend. Each offers great writing examples. Don’t be reluctant to mark the ones that appeal to you. The preciousness of these books lies in the information they communicate rather than in their state of pristineness.

My copies are covered in highlighting and side-margin crosses so I can skip through the books and easily read those sections again. It’s one of the reasons why it’s worth buying rather than borrowing books on writing.

You can buy all of these books online. They are inexpensive on Amazon.com; however, for those of us in the Antipodes, the killer is the international postage. One trick to beat the postage bugbear is to send all the books to an American friend or relative (if you have one) and get them to pay one international postage charge to Australia rather than the separate fee each bookseller will charge. Another option is to purchase the books via the Fishpond link included in the covering email. The prices are reasonable and the books are sent postage free.
Beware

We are constantly told to keep backups of everything. What people don’t add – which they shouldn’t need to as it should be blindingly obvious – is to check that our backups have actually worked.

In March, my computer got hung while I was working. I’ve only had it for fifteen months and it’s a lemon so it wasn’t unusual for this type of thing to happen. While still under warranty, I hadn’t time to send it in to have all the problems fixed so I had just kept on going. Mistake number one.

When it got hung, I turned it off, as usual, and powered it up again. This time instead of starting in safety mode, it went into some sort of repair loop. My husband can normally fix these types of things but, hours later, no luck. Obviously it was a bigger problem than we had initially envisaged. However, I wasn’t overly worried as my important files were backing up to Cloud – or so I thought. My son, who had organised it, was out at the time; when he came back and told me how to access the Dropbox file, I discovered that there had been pilot error (on my behalf) and that nothing had backed up since my son organised the Cloud backups last May. I hadn’t checked to see that they were working. Mistake number two.

I had regularly emailed a copy of the Lucretia Borgia manuscript to myself to ensure that there was another copy out of the house, but my emails are only held on the internet for two weeks. A short time before the crash, I’d had a large file come in that had filled up my inbox so I’d blithely deleted all the large files. The copy of Lucretia Borgia that should have been on the web went with them. I haven’t checked to see that they were working. Mistake number two.

I had stopped backing-up to external drives as the three I had purchased over the years had all had power problems (apparently it’s quite common). So, while I had two drives still in the house, all the back-up files were old. Mistake number ... who cares. Stress can’t count!

I took my laptop to a computer shop thinking that the man there might be able to quickly solve the ‘boot’ problem. Not only could he not do so, he couldn’t access my hard drive with all my files. He wasn’t even sure they were still there. Imagine my stress level.

Fortunately, a data recovery place was able to get them off for a hefty fee. But let us all heed his words of advice: back-up your files to every medium possible! I now have a new external hard drive, a cloud back-up, a full backup on an old laptop, and an email of Lucretia Borgia going to either my husband’s email or my own every day.

Are you absolutely certain that all your files are exhaustively backed up?

FAREWELL

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

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