

## What Editing means to me

Nancy Lutton

This is the second time I have put pen to paper to record the experiences of an editor. In 1982, the tenth anniversary occurred of *Toktok bilong Haus Buk*, which began its career as the journal of the Papua New Guinea Library Association. I had been one of the first editors of that journal and was asked to contribute an article to celebrate.<sup>1</sup> Recalling the trials and tribulations of producing that journal in a country where nothing ever runs smoothly or on time, it is a wonder I did not change my mind and withdraw as editor of *Archives and Manuscripts*, a position to which I had just been elected. However, the greatest satisfactions in life, are those achieved over adversity, and at the time I was badly in need of a challenge.

Also, I had been very conscious of *Archives and Manuscripts* as a journal and the editing side of it since 1973. That year, Jim Gibbney visited the University of Papua New Guinea to report on the University's records and archives. This included a look at the New Guinea Collection, to which post as librarian I had recently been appointed. Although Jim was then working for the Australian Dictionary of Biography he was a former archivist and had done a survey of New Guinea records in 1955. We clicked immediately and I assigned to him a role as my mentor. The New Guinea Collection needed re-organisation along archival lines and since Kevin Green had just left his job as National Archivist, there was literally no one else with whom to discuss ideas. Jim sent me all sorts of lecture notes and cited reading matter, most of the latter from *Archives and Manuscripts*, so I soon became aware of that connection.

I was aware of *Archives and Manuscripts* earlier than that having been a member of the Library Association of Australia for many years. In particular, I knew the name of Robert Sharman and that he was editor of *Archives and Manuscripts*, though at that time I had never met him. In fact, no doubt my surprise at learning Jim had once been editor, was because Bob had always seemed to be, as indeed he had been since 1960. The year before, in 1972, had been the year of the 'sensitive files' affair in PNG. I was secretary of the PNG branch of the LAA that year and was much involved. Realising at last that independence for PNG was an imminent reality, the Australian Government sent several officers from the archives to go through the records of administration there, and, it was



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reported, to remove anything that might be embarrassing to Australia in the future. The PNG branch of the LAA decided on a publicity campaign, especially encouraging academics and other prominent expatriates, as well as PNG politicians, to write letters to the editor and ministers in order to stop any such removal. The campaign was successful and was helped along by the LAA President of that year, who happened to be Bob Sharman.

I warmed to Bob on this account, and later, having persuaded him to produce a special issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* on Papua New Guinea to co-incide with Independence,<sup>2</sup> I found I could not fault his editorial. The view from Australia is so often patronising, but this showed a rare understanding and sensibility from someone who had never been there.

I was at the ASA Conference in Sydney in 1979 when Baiba Berzins was elected as editor. There were two candidates and I so wished that I could have nominated as well, but I still lived in Port Moresby then. In 1981 I was still getting settled in Perth and did not think to nominate, but in any case, distance still seemed to be a disallowing factor. When, in 1982, John Thompson resigned mid-term and nominations were called for a new editor, I thought long and hard about it, longing to nominate, but quite persuaded I would be unacceptable to the eastern states dominated ASA. I did not think to discuss it with anyone else. Indeed the Perth Branch was not established till a little time after my arrival in June 1980, although Margaret Medcalf had acted as contact person since 1975, so I certainly thought it would be a cheek to nominate. So I put the thought away, but when, a week or so later, Margaret suggested I should nominate, I said yes and signed on the dotted line before anyone could change their minds!

Then there were the elections — horror — three nominees! I felt I had no chance, and the others looked so suitable and qualified. Delays occurred in the election process due to a strike at the Australian National University where the returning officer Pennie Pemberton worked, and adding to my certainty that there was no hope. Lindsay Cleland's phone call then came right out of the blue, and with it a whole new world of friends and colleagues.

That is what editing *Archives and Manuscripts* means to me.

There was already in existence, a vigorous editorial committee, two of whose members, Colleen Pritchard and Peter Moore, had already taken over production of the *Bulletin*. As they thought it was essential for the *Bulletin*, at any rate, to be produced in the same city as the Council Executive (and truth to say, I did too) and they were willing to do so till the end of the biennium, I thankfully left that to them. In fact, I'd almost forgotten the *Bulletin* and was not all that keen. Council had sensibly realised that it would take time for a new editor to get into stride, so Don Brech had undertaken to produce one issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*. It was he, therefore who sent me what files he had and to whom I looked for advice in the early days. Colleen Pritchard also wrote most helpfully,

saying John Thompson had asked her to be Book Reviews editor, but naturally I might like to make other arrangements. I couldn't believe my good luck and immediately confirmed her as Book Reviews editor. With her collaboration, I immediately changed the style of presentation of book reviews so that they would be more recognisable as such, rather than independent articles. *Archives and Manuscripts* is apparently particularly noted for 'trenchant<sup>3</sup> book reviews, so it was important to highlight this section. When I got to my first Council meeting a few months later, this warm, helpful attitude was evident in every one of the Council as well as Colleen and Peter and their employing institution, ANU Archives of Business and Labour with Mike Saclier and company.

Another section editor whom I inherited was Ann Pederson in Publication Notes. Of all the people mentioned so far, she was the only one I knew. During my study leave from UPNG in 1976, I had attended the Georgia Archives Institute in Atlanta, USA, and Ann had been the organiser. I had been delighted when she had been appointed to lecture in archives at the University of NSW, and even more delighted to retain her in the editorial team.

I deliberately choose to live in a city the size of Perth (or Brisbane, or Adelaide, or Port Moresby) rather than Sydney (or Melbourne) because such cities still provide everything that is needed for comfortable city living, without the hassles of a larger metropolis. I had already produced a printed work for the Library Board of Western Australia, so felt confident that I could find a printer to my satisfaction for *Archives and Manuscripts*. So I shopped around, and eventually decided on the printer for the Anglican Church, Design-Display and Print. Apart from giving me the lowest quote, the clinch was that their representative, Jenny Hill, was so helpful and informative. That company has had its ups and downs and early this year, went out of business. Jenny joined another company, Confidential Copy Centre, and I have followed her there.

For my first issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* I needed to match the cover colour that Don Brech had chosen, a turquoise blue. Unfortunately it was not available in Perth, a disadvantage of small city isolation which I felt keenly. So I chose the closest to it and simply copied the design from an old white issue of my own. I quite like the old design, it was beautifully understated yet meaningful, but still felt it was time to be more expressive. I asked the Library Board's graphic designer Sheryl Stephens whether she would be willing to do one, and she was. The first one she produced was turned down unanimously by Council when I showed it to them. In doing so, they made very constructive comments which I took back to Sheryl. After many hours of hard work, the result was produced in time for the next volume in 1983, and as far as I can tell, it pleases most people. Unlike Baiba, I have not looked for meaning in colour, but I do believe that variation in colour is stimulating.

I seem to be quite fortunate with the flow of unsolicited articles. My own first priority, is to produce the finished product on time. I believe that once that aim is achieved the confidence thus generated will encourage others to spend effort in producing the finished version of their article. Articles start with an idea, then researched, then written, then polished. At any of these stages, the author may contact the editor. Most, that I have received, are already in their final form before I am ever aware of them. This, I believe, shows confidence in the journal.

Some soliciting is certainly necessary, and essential if one wants to weave an issue around a theme. A theme is very difficult to develop, and in my opinion, a great luxury. The only 'theme' I have attempted, is the present issue, and that is causing a lot of worry. Because there is a theme, other contributors are holding off and it looks like being a light issue in bulk. Most of my solicitations have been of the various Perth contributions (except for Kandy Jane Henderson and Bob Sharman in an earlier issue) which have arisen out of Perth Branch programs. I felt I needed agents to solicit articles in other states, so when later, I appointed *Bulletin* branch sub-editors, I hoped they would do that for me too.

News Notes has been a feature of *Archives and Manuscripts* for very many years, and indeed it has grown and expanded as archive institutions have developed. It was early suggested that it was a section that could be felt that as it was hard facts about permanent institutions, its proper place was in *Archives and Manuscripts* so long as personal notes were excluded and transferred to the *Bulletin*. I did accept that it could be edited by someone else, so for the first year I handed it all to two of the Perth editorial committee Ann Archer and Stephen Howell. However, at the Adelaide Conference, it became obvious that the new Council felt that the *Bulletin* could and should be produced in Perth if the editor lived in Perth. At the same time, Colleen Pritchard decided to give up Book Reviews and in the search for a replacement I found two eager beavers. Paul Brunton thereafter has edited Book Reviews, while Maggie Shapley agreed to do News Notes. The former editors of News Notes now assist me with the proof-reading of the *Bulletin*.

As mentioned earlier, I had not been particularly eager to do the *Bulletin*, but once I got into the swing of it, I began to enjoy it very much. It is certainly the best way of knowing what is happening in the archival world. The fact that I am so far away, has probably encouraged the Council to remember to communicate.

I had long thought that the *Bulletin* would look more attractive if reduced in size, and besides it would save on postage. So that was the first thing to do, without any change of style in typing. Wrappers, instead of envelopes were also ordered to save costs, as postage from Perth would obviously be quite a lot more. However, I wanted more. I suggested a logo competition and this was launched. Disappointingly, there were only three

entries, but each presented a number to choose from. Val Casey's designs were outstandingly good, and accordingly she won the prize. Meanwhile, Jenny Hill and I discussed the possibility of coloured paper and I accepted that having a new colour for each calendar year was both attractive and a memory guide.

I regard the *Bulletin* as essentially Council's means of communication with the membership, and the membership with each other. The conveners are encouraged to send regular reports. It was Baiba's idea to start a letter from the President. It has always been hard to get Branch Secretaries to do more than simply send in a copy of their minutes. I had noticed that Colleen and Peter seemed to write much of the *Bulletin* and I did not wish to do that. I do not consider that the editor should also be journalist. When Perth Branch had been formed late in 1980, we decided one position on the executive would be 'contributor to publications'. When Colleen Pritchard and Peter Moore handed over the *Bulletin*, they particularly mentioned the help this afforded them as editors. I therefore decided to ask every Branch to appoint a branch sub-editor who would be responsible for writing Branch news for each *Bulletin*.

The editorial committee members in Perth, are all but one, colleagues working in the Battye Library. We have a fairly informal procedure whereby articles received are circulated, commented upon and edited in pencil. If in doubt about the subject matter I try to find someone else knowledgeable in that topic to read it and advise. Those accepted go through final editing by me before handing to the printer. The proofs are shared out between us all and at least two people, generally three go through each one. Address labels for both *Archives and Manuscripts* and the *Bulletin* are stuck on by the security clerk in the Battye Library, and after enveloping, *Archives and Manuscripts* then only needs to be counted and taken to the post office. The *Bulletin* is more difficult due to the need to comply with registration procedures. The sorting order is unbelievably complicated, but we learn more each time and now have it down to a fine art.

I like editing because it is one way to practise creative management. Creative management is my practical application of the historiographical 'idea of progress'. Everything can be improved. The status quo is anathema. One must first imagine what can be achieved, in practical terms, in the given situation and then work towards it even if it means going around or stepping back from an obstruction. More than this, the leader must also ensure that everyone involved is improved by the exercise, either by gaining experience, learning something or simply enjoying themselves. As willing horses are much easier to lead, it also means selling enthusiasm and you can't sell what you have not got.

Reading through these accounts by former editors, it is clear to me that each, whether they know it or not, has practised creative management. Jim Gibbney and Allan Horton literally created it. Bob Sharman turned it from

a duplicated typescript to a respectable and internationally recognised journal. Andrew Lemon carried the flag for the new Australian Society of Archivists. Baiba Berzins organised the first graphic cover. Don Brech saw the need for team work and I have expanded on that.

I do not consider myself a specialist in the English language, or that I should impose my style on authors. I do strive for good grammar and spelling. Some guidelines are necessary for consistency and layout and design are my prerogative. Producing *Archives and Manuscripts* and the *Bulletin* is essentially a managerial job of co-ordinating all the parts, soliciting, corresponding with authors, exhorting, advising, rejecting in a constructive way if necessary; creating from the raw material of the typescript a thing of beauty that looks well and reads well; trying to ensure that each of the many helpers, the section editors, the book reviewers, the correspondents, the contributors, the editorial team, receive the pleasure that I do.

It also means many friends.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Lutton, N. 'The beginnings of "Toktok bilong haus buk"' *Toktok bilong haus buk*, No 32, October 1982.
2. *Archives and Manuscripts* Vol 6 No 4, April 1975.
3. *Historical Studies* Vol 21, No 83, October 1984, p 310.