



January 2017

Origins

Neil Wilson

Who'd be a lexicographer? Easy enough to compose definitions for those words that have an inherently fixed meaning ("hydrogen" for example) but consider the many words that have changed meaning over time, such as "presently". In Shakespeare's time this meant "immediately". Such a change of meaning would not have happened instantly, so at what point in its transition of definition would earnest lexicographers have altered their dictionaries' entries for this word?

Consider too how they might now tackle "chronic", given its increasing use as a synonym for "severe" or "bad", with no reference to any time scale. That most famous of lexicographers, Samuel Johnson, acknowledged that even he could not enchain a language, declaring "you might as well lash the wind."

These problems notwithstanding, this issue fearlessly launches a new section entitled *Origins and Derivations*, for those who share our love of discovering the sources of our wonderfully rich English language. I hope you find it "wicked" – that is, in the sense now used by the young to convey "great"!

Why Write?

Rita Barsby

1. What inspires me
2. When I started
3. What I've written in the past
4. My successes

5. What I'm proud of
6. What next?
7. My dream as a writer

Answering this is rather like trying to resolve that old chicken/egg conundrum. My initial inspiration was having a letter to a magazine printed and winning the star prize. That letter was inspired by the deep emotions stirred up when the installation of a telephone cable across the Pacific Ocean in the early 1960s enabled me to speak to my father in New Zealand for the first time in over 10 years.

So I began writing other things - to stop feeling bored and useless as a young mum when I stopped working, as we did in those days. I wrote parenting articles and actually got paid for an account of a journey in our first car but then my children got the better of me and I stopped writing as I had no spare time.

As retirement approached I began again. I came to an AWC workshop and subsequently dabbled in letters and articles but mainly poetry that was inspired by experiences, things in creation that I saw, sometimes a phrase that popped into my head, or the theme for a competition. I have read and enjoyed *Writing Magazine* for many years and particularly enjoyed experimenting with the different forms of poetry that magazine introduced me to.

Fiction has eluded me as I am always stuck for endings in short stories, although I keep trying. My life doesn't allow me to enjoy longer spells of writing so that's why I tend to like poetry and articles.

I have enjoyed producing picture book scripts and stories for younger children but had no joy with publication, in what is a very competitive market. My dream is to see at least one of my stories in a book with lovely illustrations. (Alas, another downfall is my not being an artist.). Any ideas, anyone, about that?

Ode to Resolutions

Lisa Firth

January, time to start anew
Bin the fry-ups, caffeine too
Lose the booze and chuck the chocs –
Go on then, I'll just finish this box
Must be healthy, must be toned
Oh yes, and must lose half a stone.
Take up jogging, learn to Zumba
Bokwa, salsa and the Rhumba
Learn to play the clarinet
Speak a language, pay off debt
Take up woodwork, learn to knit
Ditch trashy telly and get fit
And if I make it past July
You just might see a piggy fly!

A Thought or Two for the Start of a Decade

Joan Nicholson

With this new year I'm seeing in the next decade of my life, which I suppose I have slightly less chance of seeing out than earlier ones. Like TS Eliot in the Four Quartets, this accumulation of years leaves me doubtful about the probity and relevance of all that has gone before. But this is not a depressing sensation at all. Rather than dwell on the what-might-have-beens, I must embrace new ideas and activities with a greater carefreeness than ever before, to make the most of the shorter time I have left. I take comfort from seeing Nature and life as an ever enduring cycle; everything comes and goes - even rock is ground down and then spewed up eventually in some geological upheaval of the future.

With this thought, I've put rock at the centre of my efforts. Rock guitar, that is. This is not a quiet occupation. No contemplation involved. Just a mad jabbing at the strings with a rebellious plectrum which never seems to know which string it's playing, trying to keep up with a rock band obligingly pumping its way through the music on the cd player. This is noise I would never opt to listen to for any length of time, but playing it is energising, mind bending and, unfortunately for husband John and possibly the neighbours, addictive.

So I turned the tables on him at Christmas. With a series of cardiac issues behind him, all serious, he maintains a hearty disdain for any precautions against further trouble, particularly when it comes to exercise. John has always been one who prefers either vertical or motorised progress. A keen rock climber in his youth, the walk to the bottom of the rock face (one not actually resounding with deep bass notes) was always tedious. A tour of sites in the car is his default position. Walking for its own sake has never seemed to John remotely preferable to sitting in a chair reading, or watching a round or oval object being hit, thrown or kicked up and down various green or brown surfaces by anything from one to fifteen players on a screen.

So I bought him a Fitbit. I hoped that the technical novelty would outweigh the remote possibility that it would morbidise John's attitude towards his symptoms. Checking one's pulse every 5 minutes is not good. Checking the number of paces one has taken is. Fortunately the gamble has paid off, at least for a few weeks. John has been volunteering himself for walks with slightly renewed enthusiasm. Cold weather and hills are not medically advised for someone with his history so we have to be careful. We've found a reservoir on top of the moors encircled by a completely flat, tarmac path totalling nearly 1000 steps, repeated circumnavigation of which provides the equivalent of pumping up and down on a machine in the gym but with fresh air, glorious views and no lycra.

The downside of the device has been the discovery that John actually sleeps very badly. He has a goal of 7 hours sleep a night; apart from trips to the loo and the occasional night when he simply can't get Donald, Boris or Vladimir out of his head, he thought he was doing fine. Yet Fitbit tells him he only achieves proper deep sleep

for two to three hours max. This awareness has led to both of us feeling so tired during the day that we nod off very frequently, usually when watching programmes that are utterly fascinating (like we have no idea if the tv crew made it from Orkney to the mainland in a skin and bone boat imitating those they think were used 9000 years ago - we assume they did.) Clearly we need more gentle rocking to sleep

It is unlikely that John and I will become super athletes or rock guitarists during 2017, but our minds and bodies will be stretched beyond contemplation of impending doom and gloom. Rock on, 2017!

Origins and Derivations

Neil Wilson

Letting the cat out of the bag: Dishonest market traders in Merrie Olde England (and no doubt further afield too) would substitute a near worthless cat for the more valuable piglet you had bid for, and hand it over in a bag. Opening this bag to check your purchase would allow the cat to escape and so expose the secret of the switch.

Goodbye: a shortening of the blessing “God be with you”.

Farewell: derives from a salutation wishing your companion good health.

Wotcha: corrupted from what was once a common greeting of “what cheer?” – a polite enquiry as to a person’s mood apparently.

Deadline: a line drawn around a military prison, beyond which you were liable to be shot.

Down to the wire: In the 1800s North American racetracks extended a thin wire across the finish line to help determine which horse had won, so a closely fought race was said to have gone down to the wire.

Cordon bleu: Back in the 16th century the French king Henry the third created the *l’Ordre des Chevaliers du Saint Esprit* (Order of the Knights of the Holy Spirit) as the highest order of chivalry and denoted by the Cross of the Holy Spirit which hung from a blue ribbon. The knights so awarded came to be called *Les Cordon Bleus* and by extension the food prepared for the sumptuous feasts held in their honour. Cordon Bleu cookery lessons began in 1896 at the Palais Royal in Paris.

Pound weight: the Latin word for a weight was *pondus* – hence to **ponder** (weigh something up) but the *lb* abbreviation for our pound weight derives from the verb *libero*, meaning to balance or weigh, from which we get **to deliberate** and the star sign **Libra**, represented by the symbol of a set of scales.

Eavesdropping: The “eavesdrop” or “eavesdrip” of a ninth century house was the area of ground hit by the rainwater coming off its eaves. An ancient law forbade a building to be less than two feet away from the boundary of its owner’s land, so that this “eavesdrop” would not descend on a neighbour’s land. Standing in the eavesdrop enabled you to listen in on conversations that drifted over your neighbour’s fence.

Have you come across any intriguing origins and derivations? Please share them with us by sending them to me – Neil.

For our **January** meeting we explored the frivolous but fun world of the **Clerihew**, which sounds like a quaint Dickens-era clergyman but is in reality a four line verse, invented in 1891 by a schoolboy – one Edmund Clerihew Bentley – in a boring science lesson....hence this:

*Sir Humphrey Davy
Abominated gravy
He lived in the odium
Of having discovered sodium*

Thus inspired those attending spent 20 minutes or so composing their own clerihews, a selection of which follows:

Pat Farley

Golfer Tiger Woods
Never failed to come up with the goods
until he cheated
Then game and fame depleted

Joan Nicholson

Vladimir Putin
puts his boot in
wherever he knows
it will rankle his foes

Lisa Firth

Charles the First
came off the worst
when Cromwell the crawler
made him eight inches smaller

Neil Wilson

Andy Murray
always in a hurray
clad in white
and now a knight

Neil Wilson *and* Chris Manners

Meryl Streep
Said “You’re a creep”
Trump retaliated
“You’re overrated”.

Chris Manners

Jeremy Corbyn
is used to absorb
the scorn and unease
of Labour MPs.

Theresa May
will acknowledge one day:
Brexit
Wrecks it.

Groan Corner

Neil Wilson

“Chopsticks are one of the reasons the Chinese never invented custard” - Spike Milligan

“A bar on the Moon? – trouble is it would have no atmosphere” – Anon.

“Deep sea divers with chickenpox – do they come up to scratch?” – Ronnie Corbett

“...and we’ll speak to an out-of-work contortionist who says he can no longer make ends meet” – Ronnie Barker

An Irish carpenter applies for a job and is asked by the patronising English foreman to prove that he is clever enough. “What’s the difference between a girder and a joist?” the foreman says. “Well now” the carpenter replies, “the former wrote *Faust* and the latter *Ulysses*.”

Future Meetings:

February 14th: Lisa Firth will tell us how she has already succeeded in becoming a published novelist with Harper Collins.

March 14th: Members’ evening: primed with a supplied (enigmatic!) first sentence you’ll have a quarter of an hour or so to let your creative forces rip and write on....

April 11th: Probably a members' manuscripts evening

May 9th: Graham Mitchell will give us the inside story of "Why Stanbury never got a railway station, and other local politics".

Contributions to AWC newsletters: Thanks to the three members who had sent me copy, compiling this newsletter went ahead. Prose and poetry on any topic and in any genre are eagerly sought for future issues. What inspires you to write? Tell us about your experiences of when it's gone well – or badly! What has helped – or hindered – you in writing? Please also consider contributing even just a few lines of critique on books you have recently read, that you want to recommend (or even warn us about!). Here's my example:

Jeeves and the Wedding Bells (2013) by Sebastian Faulks:

Hilariously written, the text is all by that master story-teller Sebastian Faulks but written very much as a homage to P.G.Wodehouse, using the same pre-war language (by Jove!) and the same cast of beastly or spiffing characters, don't you know.

And...finally:

To be knowledgeable does not mean you are therefore wise, and conversely of course you can be wise without knowing lots. Philosophers have debated at length about this crucial difference but surely Miles Kington (1941 – 2008, inventor of *Français* – a comic mix of English and French) succinctly summed it up thus: *Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is not putting it into a fruit salad*