

24th Annual Congress of the Society for Editors and Proofreaders

Exeter, UK, 31 August – 1 September, 2013

The University of Exeter's sprawling Streatham campus (UK) was host to the 24th Annual Congress of the Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP) from 31 August to 1 September 2013. In keeping with its theme "Editing at the Crossroads", the conference addressed the evolving nature of the publishing landscape and how copyeditors can stay up to date.

Saturday saw a number of events planned for those who arrived early, including a pre-conference course ("Efficient Copy-Editing" by Rosemary Roberts), a visit to Exeter Cathedral Library and Archives, a guided tour of the Cathedral, and finally the Exhibitors/Marketplace slot. The conference officially kicked off on Sunday with SfEP Honorary Vice-President David Crystal, OBE, returning for the keynote speech, "The English Language Copy-Editor's Guide to Britain." Dipping into his latest book, *Wordsmiths and Warriors: The English-Language Tourist's Guide to Britain*, Mr. Crystal shared fascinating insights into the chronology of the English language, by taking participants through places associated with invasions, writers, reformers and poets and the influences that shaped the language as we know it today.

Participants then launched straight into one of the 24 workshops and seminars that were to be held in parallel sessions across the next two days. The first session I attended was on rewriting and substantive editing, led by writing and editorial consultant Andrew Steeds. Mr. Steeds advocated the three Cs (clarity, coherence, consistency) but suggested that an optimal approach to substantive editing would help editors remain efficient while enabling them to edit in a manner that does not obscure the author's voice. The next session I attended was Nancy Duin and Anna Sharman's workshop titled "From Doing to Advising: Moving into Editorial Consultancy." Both industry veterans, the co-presenters distinguished between the freelancing professional and the consultant ("a freelancer measures his or her worth in terms of price per page, whereas time is the currency of a consultant"). In the end, they shared valuable tips for jumping on the roadmap to consultancy by peppering the discussion with personal anecdotes. Running concurrently was Julia Sandford-Cooke's session, "Social Media for Editors," providing a basic orientation on how to use the Internet as a marketing tool and to optimize business.

My final seminar for the day was with Martin Delahunty from the Nature Publishing Group, titled "Open Science and Future Trends in Digital Journals," which was by far the most relevant to professionals in STM publishing. Mr. Delahunty took us, almost without stopping for breath, through brain-tingling statistics on the research output and trending topics in digital publishing – the scientific paper trial, ORCID, under-reporting of negative findings, making clinical trial data available, open access, extended journal reach, post-publication peer review, Altmetrics – phew! His concluding remarks on how these developments will impact scientific publishing and copyeditors ("published research articles will become organic and evolve relative to user interaction and open peer review") left the audience

with plenty of food for thought.

Once the day's sessions were done, all the delegates reconvened in the evening for the annual gala dinner and dance, which featured an exclusive once-a-year performance by the SfEP choir, the Linnets, and a witty after-dinner talk by Michael Jecks, British author of historical mystery novels. On day 2, I waited eagerly in the front row of a packed auditorium for this year's Whitcombe Lecture to be delivered by Carol Fisher Saller, famed author of *The Subversive Copyeditor* and editor of the *Chicago Manual of Style Online's* Q&A. Ms. Saller's key message to copyeditors was an encouraging, bolstering one: in the context of changing publishing technologies, copyeditors should take these changes in their stride and adapt themselves, by partnering with other authors, societies, and publishing professionals; developing end-to-end services for authors; and educating themselves about using social media effectively.

Among the final day's sessions, I attended Dr. Joy Burrough-Boenisch's workshop on "Editing Non-native English"; she taught simple techniques to identify and address characteristics of non-native writing. Having a great deal of experience with editing scientific manuscripts by authors of Asian origin, I was curious to see how one would teach this subject, but I wasn't really expecting to learn anything new. Yet, I was impressed by the breadth and quality of Dr. Burrough-Boenisch's recommendations. One tip I cannot wait to use was to "back-translate" (on dictionary.reverso.net) an unclear expression to check alternative usage and vocabulary in the original language before translating it back into English. Finally, from a host of the "Something for Everyone" workshops, I attended the Editing PDFs using PDF stamps, which I thought was an interesting take on annotation. From the sessions I didn't have the opportunity to attend, there were several targeted at early career editors and writers as well as those which aimed to teach new skills: "How to succeed as a freelancer," "Finance for freelancers," "Medical writing: A practical introduction," and "InDesign essentials," to name a few.

For many, the SfEP conference is an annual outing – an opportunity to take a welcome break from deadlines and the rigors of editing projects, to meet old colleagues and make new ones, to learn new skills and get in touch with developments, and fit in a little time for socializing. As an academic editor and trainer, I felt that the meeting certainly lived up to its promise of providing participants with opportunities for developing new skills, networking and widening horizons. The informative sessions and enthusiastic discussions, not to mention the magnificent views of Exeter's hills, made for a memorable weekend, and I look forward to next year's meeting at the Royal Holloway, University of London.

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