

**Book Review** - *Writing a Non Boring Family History*, revised edition, by Hazel Edwards, Hale & Ironmonger, McMahon's Point, NSW, 2011 ISBN 978 086 806 7162 paperback, 129pp, E-book option see [www.hazeledwards.com](http://www.hazeledwards.com) for details

I originally purchased the first edition of this book when it originally published in 1997 and have found it very useful in writing up my own family histories. I have drafts but have not yet taken the final step of publishing. At the State Library of Victoria's Family History Feast day this year, Hazel was one of the speakers and as usual I found her talk inspirational. During the lunch break I purchased a copy of the second edition as it is still my intention to publish my draft family histories, as soon as I make them 'non boring'.

Hazel also sent me an E-book copy so that I could compare between the two formats. I will confess up front that I still prefer reading a paper based book or magazine although e-books are much cheaper and you don't need to keep buying more bookcases!

This new edition still has all the original basics and the book is divided into five sections. Section 1 is Pre-history and looks at all the things you need to do to get started. Chapter 1 examines why you are writing a family history and what some of the excuses are for not completing the writing and how to deal with procrastination. It's almost as if this chapter was written for me!!

The next chapter is really important and is simply titled Who Are Your Readers? You really do need to determine who you are writing for as this then guides how you will write the history.

Increasing the Potential Readership is the next chapter and this is about broadening the scope of the family history so that it might be of interest to those outside the family. Perhaps it could be of interest to the local community in which your ancestors lived.

Chapter 4 is all about 'Is this going to be 'fun' or a 'drain'?' and you have to expect that writing is not all easy and straight forward and this also ties in with Chapter 5 'What is your deadline'. Obviously you need a deadline or you will be like me and never finish those draft family histories. However, if you put too close or too tight a deadline, you can put yourself under unnecessary stress.

Chapter 6 is interesting in that it looks at whether you should have co-writers or collaborators and what some of the benefits and hazards might be. My personal preference is to work alone but that is not everyone's style.

The all important questions of cost and who will pay are addressed in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 looks at the question 'is a brief needed'. The latter can help you detail exactly what you want which then assists with working out the costs of the various components of a publication.

Chapter 9's title says it all – 'any controversial bits?'. Nearly everyone who has undertaken family history research has come across family secrets and skeletons. How to deal with them is always something that needs to be considered carefully depending on the particular circumstances.

The various styles of Facts, Faction and Fiction are looked at in Chapter 10 and Chapter 11 looks at the various methods of publishing including commercial and self publishing. Chapter 12 addresses what format the history will take and the final chapter in Section 1 is Researchitis – how much is enough?

Section 2 is Making It Non-Boring and there are 14 chapters in this section. I should say some of the chapters are quite small but Hazel asks lots of questions throughout which make you think of lots of things. This section also gives examples to highlight what she is saying. Chapters include how to shape the story, how to write so that readers don't skip over bits, how to make characters 'real', verification, choosing titles and subtitles, working with themes, checking, controversial bits (again), and time management and some hints for interviewing relatives.

Section 3 is Finalising and this is more about the publishing process. There are five chapters including Length and how much is enough and the various extras you need including indexing. The question of self publishing is looked at in more detail as well as editing and proofreading. The final chapter looks at the final product and the launch and marketing the family history.

Section 4 is titled Imaginative Approaches with six chapters targeting difficult areas of a family history. These include how to make the story more engaging, how to do openings, including family letters or diaries, writing eulogies, onsite historic tourism and even writing history for kids in non boring ways.

The final Section is Useful Contacts including addresses and online resources.

Overall the book is an easy read and if you stop and answer all the various questions as you go along, by the end of the book you have a good idea of what you are doing and why. If you are like me, and already have some drafts done, you can go back and see how you can make them more interesting or engaging to a reader.

The one area that I felt was not covered is the increasing trend of family historians and genealogists to blog their family stories on the internet rather than write an overall family history. I have also been doing this and it is one way of publishing your research although I think in the longer term, you still need to do some overall history to bring the stories back into a family context.

Hazel's book is still relevant to the family history blogger and can assist in making those shorter stories more interesting and how to develop an outline of an ancestor when all you perhaps have is a name on a passenger list.

I'm going to leave the book out on my study desk along with one of my draft family histories and I will try (operative word is try) to find time to work on it in a systematic and consistent manner until I have a draft that I am happy with. I will probably go down the e-book path as I don't have too many relatives that would buy copies although I will print out a few copies for libraries, mustn't forget legal deposit. Wish me luck!

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