

DIARY OF PRESS WEEKS

Christian J. Kay

Pre-launch

Glasgow: Sunday, July 5, 2009.

12 noon. Give interview to Nicola Woolcock, *Times* reporter.

3.00 p.m. Fend off attempts of *Times* to send round a photographer during Wimbledon Men's Singles Final. OUP offers picture of box of slips as alternative. *Times* settles for Rodin's 'The Kiss'. Article, plus third leader, appears on July 6.

Glasgow: Monday, July 6.

3.00 p.m. Give interview to Torin Douglas for 6 o'clock news on Radio 4. Bad line, so only fragment is used. However, quite a long piece on their website.

4.50 p.m. Give live interview to Radio 5 Live.

Agree to interview for Today programme at 8.15 a.m. on Wednesday if they send car to London hotel.

Have intermittent conversations with reporter from BBC website, who develops an obsessive interest in the history of trousers. Wonder why I chose to offer him this section. Reminds me of one of our early forays into publicity, when we were struck dumb when invited to choose a word to search for until someone was inspired to suggest 'pus'. So we looked for synonyms for that. However, his article memorably says, "...a new beast is emerging from Britain's vast ocean of words, a colossus to rival Roget".

Glasgow: Tuesday, July 7. Pre-launch day.

7.15. a.m. Give (fairly) live interview to Radio Oxford.

8.00 a.m. Collect Jean and John in taxi and go to airport.

9.20 a.m. Rest of entourage arrives. Fly to Heathrow. On landing, Marc answers call from an Australian radio station. Interview arranged.

London, 11.00 a.m. In taxi to hotel; answer first of sequence of calls from Andy French of *Oxford Mail*.

12.30 p.m. Meet Jane Roberts for lunch in SOAS. Joined by Irené Wotherspoon, Julie Coleman and Louise Sylvester.

3.00 p.m. Pre-launch at Institute for English Studies, Senate House. Attendees include journalists, local academics and some familiar faces: Deborah Chirrey, Sue Cooper, Freda Hughes (Thornton), Julia Marshall. You and Yours (Radio 4) calls during the launch.

4.30 p.m. Today programme cancels; scuppered by being on 6 o'clock news.

Interview arranged with Nathan of South West News Service.

6.00 p.m. Talk to Nathan. Grab pizza with Jane and Irené.

9.15 p.m. Return to hotel to chat to Steve Kineen on Australian breakfast show.

London: Wednesday, July 8.

8.30 a.m. Meet Harry Mount of *Daily Mail* in hotel foyer. Photographer arrives shortly thereafter and takes numerous shots in lounge and garden. Enjoyed the chat BUT that was before I saw the article.

9.30 a.m. Have further conversation with Andy French in noisy taxi en route to Paddington. Arrange to meet his photographer at Brown's restaurant in Oxford at 12.

10.20 a.m. Narrowly catch train to Oxford, put off by the fact that all carriages are labelled 'First'. Have to cope with buying ticket, finding train, etc. as entourage has preceded me to Oxford.

11.45 a.m. Meet Freda Hughes at Brown's. Photographer decides to return at 1. Answer a few more questions from Andy French. Others arrive following a meeting at Oxford University Computing Services.

1.00 p.m. Photographer has chosen the Oxfam bookshop as a suitable venue. Accompany him there in a thunderstorm. His girlfriend studied linguistics and he thinks he might buy her an HTOED for Christmas. Encourage this.

2.00 p.m. Meeting with James McCracken at OUP. Greet some old friends: Anthony Esposito, Jane McCauley, Fiona Macpherson, Catherine Soanes, John Simpson, Ed Weiner.

5.00 p.m. Bus back to Heathrow. Flash winning smile at security guard who takes photograph. Realise that this may not have been necessary.

Glasgow: Thursday, July 9.

10.00 a.m. Get to department in time to receive call from Radio Ireland; agree to be interviewed by someone described as the Irish equivalent of Chris Evans. They would like to discuss three words: *trousers, loo*, and, as a last minute inspiration, *kettle*.

Email from Stuart Macdonald of *Sunday Times* asking for interview.

Do some research on loos and kettles; feel adequately informed about trousers.

Email from Jonathan Gifford of ABC Perth (Australia) requesting interview for Breakfast Show.

Suggest Friday or Saturday.

12.45 p.m. Duly interviewed by Radio Ireland. Kettles not mentioned. Singularly uninteresting concept anyway.

2.30 p.m. Telephone interview with *Sunday Times*.

Regretfully decline opportunities to appear on *You and Yours* and *Fred Macaulay Show* as will be away next week. They may come back.

Glasgow: Friday, July 10. No further word from ABC Perth. Is it all over?

In Transit: Monday, July 13.

No. Travel down to Slyne on alleged holiday. Chris Evans gets ever closer, but miss opportunity to appear on Radio 2 with Simon Mayo 'depping for Chris'. *You and Yours* still in pursuit, but decline to find a studio somewhere in the west country to chat to them.

Tuesday, July 14.

Two requests for interviews forwarded by Juliet Evans at OUP: Alan Brown of *Sunday Times* and Philippe Gohier of *Maclean's Magazine*, Canada. Further proposals from *You and Yours*.

Wednesday, July 15.

Chat to Philippe Gohier while sitting in garden of Somerset hotel. *Maclean's* article appears on 18/8/09. No further word from Alan Brown. Agree to report to BBC Scotland on Thurs. 23 July in order to do *You and Yours*.

Glasgow: Tuesday, July 21.

ABC Perth reappears; agree to chat to chat to Jonathan Gifford on breakfast show at 9.30 p.m. This duly takes place.

Glasgow: Wednesday, July 22.

You and Yours rescheduled for 12 noon, for transmission on Thurs 23 at noon. The driver of the car sent to collect me asks if I'm being interviewed about a book, and then "Is it a thesaurus?" and then "Are you that lady?" His daughter had caught one of the radio broadcasts ... I had that thesaurus lady in the back of the cab once ... Chat to Shari Vahl. Luckily, the bookseller who comes on after me thinks that we might sell some copies.

Think I may have sold about six copies.

Scottish Initiative

Glasgow: Tuesday, August 11

Story announcing publication and inviting former workers to get in touch appeared on the University Website. Picked up by *Metro*, *Daily Telegraph* (Stephen Adams, online and print), *Daily Record* (David Taylor), *Evening Standard* (13/8/09). A few responses.

Metro interview: 'And now you've finished, have you got something else you'd like to get back to, like your garden, or a big piece of knitting?'

Glasgow: Thursday, August 13

Enjoyable 25-minute interview with Maria Zijlstra, for Australian National Radio programme in Melbourne, 'Lingua Franca'.

Glasgow: Friday, August 14

Interview with Mark Smith of *Herald* newspaper, plus photographer. Article appeared on Mon 17th. OK except for strange claim that I sniffed and then called American English trivial.

Also in August

Phone call from Keren David of *Jewish Chronicle*. Michael Samuels talked to her. Good article appeared on 20/8/09.

Article on AHRC website as case study.

Article by Beachcomber in online *Gulf Daily News* (4/8/09).

September

A quiet month. 2/9/09. Request from Johannes Waechter, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*, Munich, for interview ahead of article. 40 minutes on phone, 7/9/09. Interview appeared 27/11/09. Much excitement among German friends.

Launch day in Glasgow

Thursday, October 22

OUP press release picked up by a variety of papers and websites: *Daily Sport*, *Sun* (21/10/09), *Glaswegian* (22/10/09), BBC website (22/10/09), and versions in Dutch, French, Spanish, Hungarian and Lithuanian. Review by Michael Quinion on World Wide Words (25/10/09).

My day begins with the arrival of the BBC car at 6.30 a.m. I chat brightly to Radio 5 Live at 6.55 followed by John Humphries on the Today programme at 7.20, Good Morning Scotland at 7.40, and Good Morning Wales at 7.45. In between times, Marc and I apply ourselves to 'translating' the following passage into its synonyms:

The world's longest course is like a golfing safari, with eighteen holes stretched over 840 miles in an outback landscape strewn with kangaroos, camels and dingos. The fourth hole claims to have the largest population of southern hairy-nosed wombats anywhere in Australia.

It stretches over the vast Nullabor Plain and can take as long as five days to play – the idea is drive between each hole, some of which are over 50 miles apart.

The Old Course at St Andrews this most definitely is not – hole five is the home to a mischievous crow infamous for stealing wayward balls.

We achieve the following in time to fill the final slot on the programme at 8.55:

The molde's longest course is like a golfing caravan, with eighteen pits stretched over 840 miles in a Red Centre choreography strewn with boomers, ships of the desert and warrigals. The fourth pit claims to have the largest population of southern hirsute-nebbed badgers anywhere in the wide brown land.

The Veteran Course at St Andrews this ratifiedly is not – pit five is the home to a mischievous cow-bird remauldit for snitching thwarted balls.

This seems to be acceptable. Most people who heard it react with incredulity.

The next stop is the department for a break and a bacon roll (thanks, Marc!) before meeting Alex Watt of Sky News at 10.30 and spending some teeth-chattering moments doing an outside interview. Unfortunately, this is the day that Nick Griffin is on Question Time, which rather swamps my efforts. However, the transcript produces an immortal moment:

Sky: "So it's not just a dictionary then, it's a thesaurus almost as well?"
CJK "Yes, entirely as well."

Classic stuff – did nobody tell them the clue is in the title?

All this takes longer than expected, and they still want to come back and film in the department, where BBC Scotland TV is expected at 11. Luckily, colleagues have arrived by this time, so Flora, Irené, Marc and others do things like 'here is a drawer of slips', while I do 'here am I looking at a НТOЕD'. We repeat the performance for STV News in the afternoon. Judging by comments from people encountered subsequently, a lot of people saw these programmes.

Get over to WILT to set things up at 4. Party commences at 5.

Articles and reviews begin to appear:

21/10/09: *Daily Express*

23/10/09: *Daily Mail*; *Times*, *Telegraph* (both also online 21/10/09)

1/11/09: *Sunday Times*

Mosaic (OUP house magazine; October); Glasgow University newsletter and student *Guardian* newspaper.

Oxford Today.

Literary Review (November; Elspeth Barker talks of "the two volumes stoutly flanking Shakespeare and the Bible on that shimmering desert island".)

GOOD online magazine 7/11/09 (a magazine for 'people who want to do good'; coincidentally, I am spared an interview with an American online magazine called *Vice*, which seems to be for the other kind of people).

23/11/09: *Herald* review (Alan Taylor).

27/11/09: Chosen as one of his books of the Year by David Wootten (history prof.), TLS

28/11/09: *Times Magazine*; desired gift of Brian Donnelly, former diplomat.

28/11/09: *Guardian* review, chosen as one of his books of the Year by Philip Pullman; featured in spread of 'gifts for intellectuals'.

1/12/09: General reports of Saltire awards in *Scotsman*, BBC News, *Bookseller*.

There are also some memorable radio moments in October.

On Monday 19th, two writers, Tibor Fisher and Lawrence Norfolk, had an enthusiastic discussion on Radio 4's Front Row. Memorable quotes included describing HTOED as "a peace treaty between the needle and the haystack" and commenting "I've already built a shrine to it in my front room". My own moment of glory came on Friday 16th, when I delivered a Free Thought about categorisation on Radio 3's The Verb, and its breakfast programme. And on Radio 4's The Unbelievable Truth on Monday 25th, Arthur Smith used some of 'our' euphemistic synonyms for trousers in his lecture on the subject. Possibly a coincidence...

A new departure, starting on October 29, was a series of five weekly 'blogs' for OUP's North American website: (1) History of the project, 27/10/09, (2) Kinship, 5/11/09, (3) Categories, 12/11/09, (4) Encounters with the Press, 19/11/09, (5) Sounds and sense, 26/11/09.

A major honour was the Saltire Research Book of the Year Award to HTOED 30/11/09.

Time zones took their toll. While Australian breakfast programmes are great because one records them in the British evening (I am not a morning person), a recording with Bernadette Young of ABC Perth for an afternoon show led to an unexpected phone call at 9 a.m. Equally unexpected was a 9 a.m. call from the Forces Breakfast Show in Cyprus on Sunday 25th. We had agreed 11 a.m. UK time, but the difficulty of working this out was exacerbated by British clocks going back that weekend. I hope our boys weren't feeling too bright either.

Last to wake up, on 12th November, came BBC Radio Good Morning Kent, inspired by the juicier bits of the *Sunday Times* review.

And one parting shot from Johannes Waechter of *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*:

Dear Christian,

I'm happy to inform you that the interview will finally be published next week, on Friday Nov 27. There's only one last detail that's missing from the layout, and that's your age. It would be very kind if you could supply me with this last missing piece of information. Thank you very much, best regards, Johannes

Heaven forfend that my age should be missing!

(Un-)Favourite questions:

What is the oldest word in the English Language?

What is your favourite word?

Why did the project take so long?

How old are you?

What are you going to do now?

Favourite topic areas:

The Great Fire of 1978.

Trousers.