

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF VERBATIM REPORTERS

PROCEEDINGS

at the

121st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

held at

CLIFFORDS INN

Fetter Lane

London

EC4A 1LD

on

Wednesday, 21st May, 2003

In the Chair: Lindsay Bickers (President)

Secretary/Treasurer: Mary Sorene

Council:

**L Bickers, E Cordaro, F Dobson, V Doyle, N Forrest, K Jobson,
A Lloyd, J Lukins, R Nott (President Elect),
V Wason (Immediate Past President) and E Willett**

Present:

**C Bedlow, R Bell, B Bennett, L Bickers, D Burden, C Booth, J Chandler,
D Cole, L Cordaro, F Dobson, V Doyle, N Forrest, P Frith, J Gough, A Lloyd,
J Lukins, A Mills, R Nott, M Roberts, J Roper, S Scott, M Sorene, A Tang,
V Wason, E Willett, J Whitaker**

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome everybody. The Secretary will read the notice convening the meeting.

(The Notice convening the Meeting was read)

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from: Lynn Gifford, Laura Harrison, Helen Tennyson-Spelman, Dawn Scott, Audrey Boyes, Franny Barrett, Rita Fox, Ann Hill, Margaret Beaumont, Chris Armstrong, Diana Tapper, Helen Edwards, Sue McIntyre, Miriam Weisinger, Ginny Holland Jones, Nicki Leahy, and Lynn Briault.

Minutes of the 2002 AGM

THE PRESIDENT: I am sure you have all received the minutes of the last AGM, most of you by e-mail. You have all had an opportunity to read those minutes. Spare copies are available.

Are there any corrections to or comments on those minutes ?

(The acceptance of the minutes was proposed by Roger Bell and seconded by Jackie Roper)

(The Minutes of the 2002 AGM were agreed and signed as a correct record of the meeting)

Treasurer's Report

THE SECRETARY: This report has also been circulated and, hopefully, read. There are some spare copies available. It is just a question of getting approval.

THE PRESIDENT: Do you want Mary to go into any detail about the money situation? If you have studied the accounts, you will have noticed that the Institute has quite a lot of money invested. Are there any questions? (You trust us with the money!)

(The acceptance of the Treasurer's Report was proposed by Julie Whitaker and seconded by Barbara Bennett)

(The Report and Accounts were received and adopted)

Presidential Address

THE PRESIDENT: Now you have to suffer me for a few minutes, I am afraid.

Dear Colleagues, the Council is pleased to see you this evening at this our 121st AGM of the Institute. We are still here earning our living taking notes because, as a profession, we have adapted to current needs and opportunities as they have presented themselves. Are we in the business of taking a shorthand note or of producing transcripts? The answer is "both" because what is read on the screen is transcription.

Let us go back a bit. Shorthand writing in some form has been known since the time of Julius Caesar or even earlier, crude though it must have been when written on tablets of wax. Pope Gregory the Great in about 600 AD mentions that he revised his "homilies" from stenographic reports and St Jerome had ten stenographers, four to take dictation and six transcribers. Emperor Severus in the third century decreed that a shorthand writer who made a mistake in reporting a case should be banished and have the nerves of his fingers cut so that he could never write again!

Samuel Pepys leaves us a vivid account of the Great Plague and the Fire of London, written in the Shelton system. In the 17th century, shorthand was frequently written as a form of correspondence and there is evidence of this from America, where one – and note the name - Sir Ralph Berney spoke of the "multitudes of women practising shorthand in churches". Were these the first women to do so?

You do not want a history lesson on stenography, do you? It is a fascinating subject and the developments over the years have brought us to where we are today. History makes us what we are. Would that time allowed to scrutinise the various systems of pen shorthand over the years and the famous men who wrote them, Isaac Pitman probably being the most famous, though Gregg and Gurney's shorthand play an important role. Here I go again, blethering on.

From quill pens in the late eighteenth century, through all the various writing implements for written shorthand, eventually to the first French machine, which arrived in 1827. It was unlike the present Grandjean machine. The first United States steno machine was developed in 1909. Camille Palanque designed and oversaw the manufacture of the first British shorthand machine in 1939, though it did not come into use until after the war.

The first typewriters for commercial use came into action in 1843. Shorthand writers soon embraced their use, though I believe even then there were the die-hards who could not see the benefits of typewriting and persevered with their written transcripts until forced to change.

Just as an aside, there is a new book out about Oscar Wilde's trial. One reviewer wrote about the discovery of a transcript of the entire proceedings, written in long-hand, which is the basis of the book. I wrote to the editor of the paper stating that the transcript must

have been from shorthand notes taken at the time as no one in 1895 or now could write verbatim speeds in long-hand. My comments were merely noted!

Then we progressed to electric typewriters and word processors. Our transcripts now look clear and neat. Let us hope the content is as good. Many of our members are using computer-aided transcription masterfully but, once again, one can only hope that revisions and corrections are being made as required. Transcripts should not just regurgitate the spoken word but improve upon it. Sworn evidence must be verbatim, as we all know, but in the private field I do believe transcripts need tidying up. When read after the event, no-one wants garbled, unpunctuated nonsense.

Computer-aided transcription has developed into speech-to-text reporting. This is a growing and important area of work. Speech-to-text reporters working for the deaf require great accuracy. They are constantly updating their dictionaries to keep abreast of the subject matter at meetings. Their new code of conduct clearly states the requirements, including passing a course in deaf awareness and two practical sessions with a deaf reader. Perhaps some of you here are considering undertaking this work.

Where do we go now? Our greatest concern must be that so few people are entering our profession. Pitman's shorthand is no longer being taught in its pure form and the truncated versions are not suitable for high speeds. The nearest school of stenotyping is in Dublin, though one firm in London does teach its own reporters. There are a few long-distance learners of Stenograph and Palantype. I fear that inevitably tape recording will become even more widely used in future.

Not every machine writer has become a fully-fledged CAT reporter. Personally, I find that a great deal of my work requires heavy editing and my Possum software does not make transcription quicker for me, though I accept others probably achieve much better results.

The new American systems have very sophisticated software and, of course, Eclipse can now be used on the Possum machines, and that probably improves matters. Most of you will remember the good demonstration we had at last year's AGM on this subject. This year we have Jean Gough, who is, I am sure, making light of my every word. Jean subtitles for the BBC and knows her stuff. Thank you for that, Jean.

Very refined software indeed is needed to cope with the client who wants a transcript produced with embedded macros to go straight to the printer. Our job is to give the client what he requires. Deaf people need fast, accurate, verbatim transcription that can be read easily on a screen. Speech taken over headphones translated from another language into English and tidied into a house style requires a different approach.

Our experienced pen notetakers, who have over the years covered the full gamut of work, enjoy the challenge of rewriting badly spoken speech, and often paring down the waffle to the bare bones. A seamless transcript on a write-out is invaluable to the lawyers. One

colleague was recently accused by counsel of being a Rottweiler, so tenacious was she in checking the medical terms at the end of the day.

We all need to aim to keep up to date with current affairs and to read a decent newspaper every day. In the wide ambit of general reporting, who knows what will come up next? What a brilliant lot we are! We are always on a learning curve.

I could open a debate on the standards of transcripts, but perhaps now is not the time. Tape recording is improving with multi-track systems and digital sound but someone has to type the tapes, and there is no substitute for the experienced notetaker at the hearing. We can prove our worth by giving the client a high standard of work. It is no good producing "as is" work, just churned out. How often have we heard it said, "That`s what he said and that`s what he`s getting"?

I know one agency, when challenged about using raw CAT transcripts, replied that they edit all the work anyway! Perhaps this will be the next major change to the way we work – producing a CAT transcript straight on to a disk and handing it to the client or the agency where another person edits as necessary. It is all very well taking an almost perfect note, but the final product is what matters.

Another major step forward is e-mail. Communication has been greatly enhanced by e-mail. No longer do we have to phone colleagues asking for or receiving information at an inconvenient time. The Internet, too, is an invaluable aid in answering queries that arise when preparing a transcript.

Now you want to know about what BIVR has been doing for the last year. The Council is delighted with its website. We thank our Secretary, Mary, and, in particular, Carryl, her daughter who is at university, for the fact that the website exists at all, and also for the joy and interest it provides. I cannot help noticing that the younger ones take a different approach to it than we oldies. Once again, time marches on. If you have not yet logged on, why not make that the next thing you do when you sit at your computer?

The second great event of the year has been the introduction of a new section to the Council for speech-to-text reporters. During the year, Lisa Cordaro was co-opted on to the Council and has been very enthusiastic in keeping us informed about the work of STTRs. We hope more reporters will convert to this rewarding form of work. We will soon have two new members on the Council, Julie Whitaker and Caroline Booth. We welcome them.

We do not know what will happen at the next round of tenders for the Crown Courts or with the Tape Transcription Panel. I am sure the new President, Robyn Nott, and the Council will give the news at the appropriate time.

Since the amalgamation of the National Society of Stenotypists (the NSS) and the old Institute, there has been a fund of money to spend on training. A great deal of work goes

into planning a seminar or weekend workshop but we hope to have more of them in the future. Indeed, at our last Council meeting, we were discussing this very point.

The Council has dealt, I hope efficiently, with most matters that have arisen. The experience of people like Betty Willett has been invaluable. Now that she has retired, though she tells me she is busier than ever, we are able to lean on her even more heavily to ferret out information and write reports. She is definitely the "mother of the Council". We greatly miss Jenny Chandler's input but realise the weight she carries in her professional life. Fortunately, she has now recovered from her recent ill-health.

Sadly, Bob Freeman died last year. He is missed and fondly remembered for his cheerfulness and wit. Over the year, we have lost other reporting colleagues whom we will remember in our own particular way.

I thank my colleagues on the Council for their support. I also thank Ivan Trussler of Harry Counsell for allowing us to hold our Council meetings in their offices. We are paying for the hire of this room for the AGM, but BIVR has had no other accommodation expenses for Council meetings during the year.

Mary has kept me straight in her capacity as Secretary. She delves about the websites and comes up with very interesting snippets. She has worked very hard for us all in her capacity as Secretary and Treasurer. She is a gem and we thank her. (**Applause**)

We welcome your questions and comments - but not too difficult, please!

ROGER BELL: I just wanted to say that what we have seen on the screen has been sheer magic for me. Well done, Jean.

THE PRESIDENT: There are no questions. Are there any comments?

JACKIE ROPER: I would like to thank you, Lindsay, for the history you gave us of our profession. I wonder if you used the Internet or is it an example of your vast array of knowledge?

THE PRESIDENT: These are just bits and pieces I have been keeping a note of through the year. I am very glad it is over. I shall never do it again!

Council Election

THE PRESIDENT: Some members retire from the Council by rotation and, as there are more vacancies than candidates, we do not need an election.

We welcome Lisa Cordaro, who was co-opted on to the Council during the year, and nominated and seconded this year. We also welcome Julie Whitaker and Caroline Booth,

as I mentioned in my speech. They are both here and we welcome them to the Council. They will be working with Lisa, mainly on STTR work.

Election for President Elect

THE PRESIDENT: There are five nominations for President Elect: Frances Dobson, Naomi Forrest, who has been President once before, Jean Lukins, who unfortunately could not come today because of work commitments, Valerie Doyle, who has also previously been President, and Ann Lloyd.

The voting slips will be passed out. Only full Members and Fellows are eligible to vote.

(Anne Mills and Roger Bell were appointed as tellers)

THE PRESIDENT: I have the results of the election for President for the year after this one. It was very close and there had to be a recount. (It sounds a bit like the Presidential elections in the US, doesn't it?) Valerie Doyle received 12 votes and Ann Lloyd 11, so it was very close. Welcome, Valerie. Robyn is President for the coming year and Valerie will be President the year after.

Appointment of the Accountant

THE PRESIDENT: Mr Kypri, now trading as Alliance Accountancy, is willing to continue. He is a Certified Accountant. The Council have studied the figures and everything seems to be in order.

(The appointment of Mr Kypri was proposed by Jackie Roper and seconded by Barbara Bennett)

Date of Next Meeting

THE PRESIDENT: The AGM is usually held in the third week after the Easter sitting, making the date 5 May, 2004. The Council has authority to alter that if necessary, as it was this year, and for very good reasons. We expect the next AGM will be held on 5 May, 2004.

If there is no other business, that concludes the AGM, and we will release Jean from taking notes. Jean has very kindly agreed to answer some questions on her system and her work, but let us do it in a civilised way!

(Jackie Roper thanked the Council for their work during the year)

(A short question and answer session took place, with numerous questions from the floor, followed by refreshments)