

Notebooks and Note-takers: da Vinci to Darwin
Symposium, 17-19 July, 2008
The State Library of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

Sponsored by the ARC Network for Early European Research (NEER)
with generous support from the State Library of Queensland
and hosted by the Centre for Public Culture and Ideas, Griffith University.

Conveners

Michael Bennett (University of Tasmania) & Richard Yeo (Griffith University)

“It is a strange thing that in sea voyages, where there is nothing to be seen but sky and sea, men should make diaries; but in land-travel, wherein so much is to be observed, for the most part they omit it; as if chance were fitter to be registered than observation. Let diaries therefore be brought in use.”

‘Of Travel’, Francis Bacon, *Essays* (new edition, 1625)

Programme, Thursday, 17 July

Registration 4.30pm - 6pm, Auditorium 2, SLQ

Opening Public Lecture 6pm

Professor Ann Blair (Harvard University)
‘The new status of note-taking in early-modern Europe’

Chair – Richard Yeo

Symposium Reception Queensland Terrace, until 8.15pm

Friday 18 July – Auditorium 2, SLQ

8.45 **Registration**

9.00 **Michael Bennett – Welcome**

Richard Yeo (Griffith University, Brisbane)
‘Remembering and thinking with notes in early-modern England’

Chair – Michael Bennett

10.15 **Morning Tea-Queensland Terrace**

10.45 **Paul Nelles (Carleton University, Ottawa)**
‘Information and anthropology: observation and notation in the early Jesuit missions’

Chair – Ann Blair

11.45 **Margaret Sankey (University of Sydney)**
‘Writing the voyage of scientific exploration: the notes and journals of the Baudin expedition (1800–1804)’

Chair – Yasmin Haskell

12.45 **Lunch-Queensland Terrace & White-glove event-4th floor, SLQ**

The White Glove event is hosted by the State Library – a display of books and manuscripts for you to handle while wearing white gloves. Staff will be available to speak about the items on display. It will be open from 1-2; allow up to 30 minutes.

2.15 **The social history of archives**

Introduced by Ann Blair, with contributions from Peter Anstey & Paul Nelles, and all participants.

3.15 **Afternoon Tea-Queensland Terrace**

3.45 **Close**

Symposium dinner at River Canteen, South Bank at 7pm for 7.30pm

Saturday 19 July – Auditorium 2, SLQ

9.15 ***Yasmin Haskell (University of Western Australia)***
‘Notes in prose versus notes in verse: a Dutch doctor’s
observations of 18th-century Italy’

Chair – Paul Nelles

10.30 *Morning Tea-Queensland Terrace*

11.00 ***Marie-Noëlle Bourguet (Université Paris 7 – Denis Diderot)***
‘Une mémoire de papier: travel diaries and scientific notebooks
in the 18th & 19th centuries.’

Chair– Lyn Tribble

12.00 ***Peter Anstey (University of Otago)***
‘Remembering and dismembering: John Locke as note-taker’

Chair – Richard Yeo

1.00 *Lunch-Queensland Terrace*

2.00 ***Michael Bennett (University of Tasmania)***
‘Case-notes and data-sharing: Edward Jenner and vaccination
networks in the early 19th century’

Chair – Peter Anstey

3.00 *Afternoon Tea*

3.20 ***FORUM introduced with a commentary from Lyn Tribble***
(University of Otago)

4.30 *Close*

ABSTRACTS

Peter Anstey (University of Otago)

‘Remembering and dismembering: John Locke as note-taker’

The philosopher-physician John Locke was a serious note-taker. Amongst the thousands of medical entries in his hand in his notebooks are four copies of an essay by Thomas Sydenham on apoplexy, each one different in important and interesting ways. This paper uses Locke’s copies of Sydenham’s essay to illustrate the manner in which note-taking for Locke is a form of remembering and dismembering the thoughts of others. It is a form of remembering and dismembering with a view to practical, therapeutic and even theoretical outcomes in medicine and natural philosophy.

Michael Bennett (University of Tasmania)

‘Case-notes and data-sharing: Edward Jenner and vaccination networks in the early 19th century’

By the beginning of the eighteenth century many physicians were keeping case notes on their more important patients and most interesting cases. Primarily records of treatment and aides-memoire for the physician himself, the notes on special cases could be shared with their colleagues, whether through private communication or through publication in lectures, journals or books. Debate over the care of smallpox patients, and the risks associated with smallpox inoculation (variolation) encouraged medical practitioners to collate case notes and compile data on recovery and mortality rates. The Royal Society played a key role in this enterprise, and its secretary, James Jurin, pioneered the use of medical statistics. From 1798 Edward Jenner’s cowpox inoculation (vaccination) prompted debate, discussion and data-sharing on an hitherto unprecedented scale. This paper examines the networks of correspondence and the institutional structures that proved so effective in soliciting, ordering and disseminating observations of cowpox, and in using them to modify and refine the theory and practice of vaccination. Especially striking is the sharpness of focus of this activity as, within a decade, the practice spread round the globe, and legions of medical practitioners, lay enthusiasts and anxious parents pooled their experience. Notable too, are the rapid development of new forms of record-keeping, arguably a foundation for family medicine; the establishment of specialist institutions to serve as clearing-houses for information and suppliers of vaccine; and Jenner’s own role ‘as vaccine clerk to the world’.

Ann Blair (Harvard University)

'The new status of note-taking in early modern Europe'

Note-taking plays an important role in the management of information and the creation of knowledge. For example, the notes we take in reading books, conducting surveys or observing nature often serve as sources for the works we write and the conclusions we draw, in the humanities, the social sciences and the sciences. Unfortunately when notes are valued only temporarily they are often not saved beyond their immediate use and are lost to historical inquiry. Historians have recently begun to study note-taking as an historical phenomenon and to assess what sources are available. Almost no notes survive from periods before the Renaissance, although we have indirect evidence about the kinds of notes taken in some contexts in antiquity and the Middle Ages. Starting with the Renaissance, however, there are a number of large collections of notes which survive—reading notes, for the most part, taken by famous scholars, for example, but also by some little-known gentlemen. I will examine why, starting in the Renaissance, collections of notes were sometimes preserved long after their initial use. Drawing on different kinds of sources (advice books about note-taking as well as surviving notes), I will present an illustrated survey of methods of note-taking in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, including notes in the margins of books, in notebooks and on loose slips of paper, and of the uses to which they were put.

Marie-Noëlle Bourguet (Université Paris 7 – Denis Diderot ; Centre A. Koyré)

'Une mémoire de papier: travel diaries and scientific notebooks in the 18th & 19th centuries.'

The journal, diary or notebook belongs to the imagery of the scientific traveller's persona and posture. Through the analysis of theoretical and prescriptive manuals and a close scrutiny of the notebooks of a few naturalists and scientific travellers, such as André Michaux, Horace-Benedict de Saussure and Alexander von Humboldt, I will explore the gestures and cognitive practices at work in the routine writing of a travel journal. Three themes, or moments, will be investigated: the notebook as an auxiliary tool to memory and a disciplined technique of attention and observation in the field; the entangled play between the traveller's sensory experience and note-keeping practice; finally, the uses of travellers' notebooks and journals in the production and construction of knowledge. As a frontier object that belongs both to the field and to the cabinet, both to the time of the experience and to the time of the return, the notebook lies at the core of the traveller's endeavour, as a crucial epistemological object.

Yasmin Haskell (University of Western Australia)

‘Notes in prose versus notes in verse: a Dutch doctor’s observations of 18th-century Italy’

Almost every aspect of the literary activity of Gerard Nicolaas Heerkens, a cosmopolitan Dutch physician and poet of the Enlightenment, is characterised by ‘note-taking’ of one form or another, from memoir to medical mnemonic. The focus of this paper is a Latin prose work, *Notabilia*, in which Heerkens describes his Grand Tour of Italy in the middle of the eighteenth century. It is characterised by detailed observation of places — but also of people. What is the genre of this work? Is it a late flowering of the ‘humanist educational journey’? Does it have pretensions to elegance and exemplarity (it is, after all, written in Latin) or are we dealing with something more humble? I shall compare Heerkens’ prose with his verse account of the same journey, *Italica*, to see whether it is any more or less anecdotal. I shall also consider the significance of Heerkens writing travelogue/autobiography in Latin in this period.

Paul Nelles (Carleton University, Ottawa)

‘Information and anthropology: observation and notation in the early Jesuit missions’

When the second generation of Jesuits hit the overseas missions in the 1560s and 1570s, many had received extensive instruction in how to take notes and maintain notebooks in Jesuit colleges. Jesuit note-taking followed a recognizably scholastic pattern of reducing textual and oral information to a manageable summary for purposes of study and memorization. In the missions Jesuits drew upon supplementary models of recording and describing material and mental experience. Note-taking in the missions was rooted in the spiritual journal, a daily record of spiritual experience. Jesuits were first introduced to this form of spiritual record-keeping when performing the *Spiritual Exercises*. The exercises demanded close observation of both mental processes and physical behaviour and the creation of a non-textual chart of spiritual progress. This was supplemented with the appropriation of visual techniques for representing perceptible reality. Jesuits were asked to construct a mental image of the mission, as though viewing a devotional image. Objects were introduced until the constructed tableau resembled a suitable representation of the reality of the mission. It was this tableau which would then be described in textual form. Such a method might seem at odds with the scholastic techniques of note-taking employed in the colleges which aimed at rapid mastery of a subject. Yet the modes of observation, description and note-taking used in the missions in fact had a similar purpose: to record and re-create experience. This illuminates the flux of mental, visual and textual modes of representation at play in the note-taking process.

Margaret Sankey (University of Sydney)

‘Writing the voyage of scientific exploration: the notes and journals of the Baudin expedition (1800–1804)’

From the fifteenth century to the nineteenth, the recording of European sea voyages of exploration in search of unknown lands became increasingly codified. The accounts of voyages of discovery in early modern, prescientific times — such as those of Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, De Quiros, Vaz de Caminha — were narratives, often fragments and assemblages of notes, written to present unknown parts of the world to a European audience for the first time, thus proving their existence. With the dawning of the scientific era, the distinction between fact and fable became more important, and the need for the provision of proof became enshrined in the process of note-taking, with rules being set out in various documents and manuals, giving rise to the different varieties of sea log.

During the European Enlightenment, with the shift in the paradigm of knowledge towards an experimental, rationally-based understanding of nature, the voyage of discovery underwent a dramatic transformation and so did the modes of note-taking during voyages. An examination of the journals and logbooks of the Baudin expedition, a French scientific expedition to the Southern Hemisphere (1801-4), will demonstrate how the varieties of note-taking, both fragmentary and chronological and with their many redundancies, form networks encapsulating the modernist project.

Richard Yeo (Griffith University, Brisbane)

‘Remembering and thinking with notes in early-modern England’

In their advice on note-taking, leading Renaissance humanists stressed the allocation of material to an appropriate Head (category or theme) in a notebook. The notion of transfer from, say, pocketbook to folio commonplace book was allowed, but usually with the aim of consolidating material in a personal archive that reinforced memory. During the 17th century, there were developments in note-taking that permitted (or even encouraged) more scope for the use of loose notes rather than entries in bound notebooks. This trend was sometimes favoured by those confronting a vast accumulation of empirical information, such as members of the early Royal Society of London. Robert Boyle, John Locke and Robert Hooke were aware of traditional note-taking methods but challenged some of the underlying assumptions — for example, by stressing that the collective gathering of empirical data (as advocated by Francis Bacon) outstripped individual memory capacity; and that tentative and temporary allocation of material to categories was justified. From this perspective, scientific thinking depended not on recall from memory (crucial for rhetorical performance) but on the retrieval and reshuffling of moveable notes.

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