



ROMANCE WRITERS *of Australia*

Romance Writers of Australia (Inc) Annual Report 2016/17

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Our vision is a world where Australian romance writers are well supported, highly respected and professionally successful.

Our mission is to support, promote and educate Australian romance writers.

Romance Writers of Australia: the heart of Australian romance

Romance Writers of Australia (Inc.) supports and develops writers of the world's most popular genre. RWA provides programs that target all stages of a writer's career – before, during and after publication – and promotes excellence in romantic fiction. RWA's strong community of members ensures writers can grow their careers in a nurturing and professional environment. So come join a professional, supportive writers' organisation where everyone loves romance as much as you do.

Objectives

- Promoting excellence in romantic fiction
- Helping writers become published and maintain strong careers
- Providing continuing support and development

Values

- Excellent Service: providing the best experience for members and associates
- Respect and Community: valuing and supporting each other and the genres we write
- Innovation and Creativity: fostering and implementing ideas to improve our services, programs and experiences for members
- Learning and Knowledge: building knowledge of writing craft, business practices and industry to better serve members
- Integrity and Ethical Practice: strong corporate governance, transparency, effective communication and honesty

Strategies

- Provide dynamic and responsive services that benefit romance writers in all stages of their careers.
- Ensure the highest standard of customer service while balancing the workloads of our volunteer workforce.
- Deliver valuable knowledge and networking through events, services and products.
- Promote the romance genre to media and the public.
- Develop a financially sustainable business model for ensuring the organisation's long term viability and growth.

Measures

- Our membership grows (3% annually with a 70% retention rate).
- Our organisation is financially stable and profitable.
- Our members consider their membership good value for money and integral to their career success.

Romance Writers of Australia (Inc.)
PO Box H120
Hurlstone Park NSW 2193

Phone: 0477 661 549
Website: www.romanceaustralia.com
Email: admin@romanceaustralia.com

2016/17 Committee

Executive

President – Claire Boston (June 2017), Leisl Leighton (July 2016 to June 2017)

Vice-presidents – Lana Pecherczyk and Victoria Purman

Treasurer – Shelley Findlater

Secretary – Penelope Janu (June 2017), Claire Boston (July 2016 to June 2017)

Ordinary Members

Events – Bronwyn Stuart

Professional Development – Elise K Ackers

Social Media – Imelda Evans

Public Relations/Media – Laura Greaves

Website – Lana Pecherczyk

Sponsorship – Victoria Purman

Volunteers – Michelle Diener (June 2017), Deb Tait (July 2016 to April 2017)

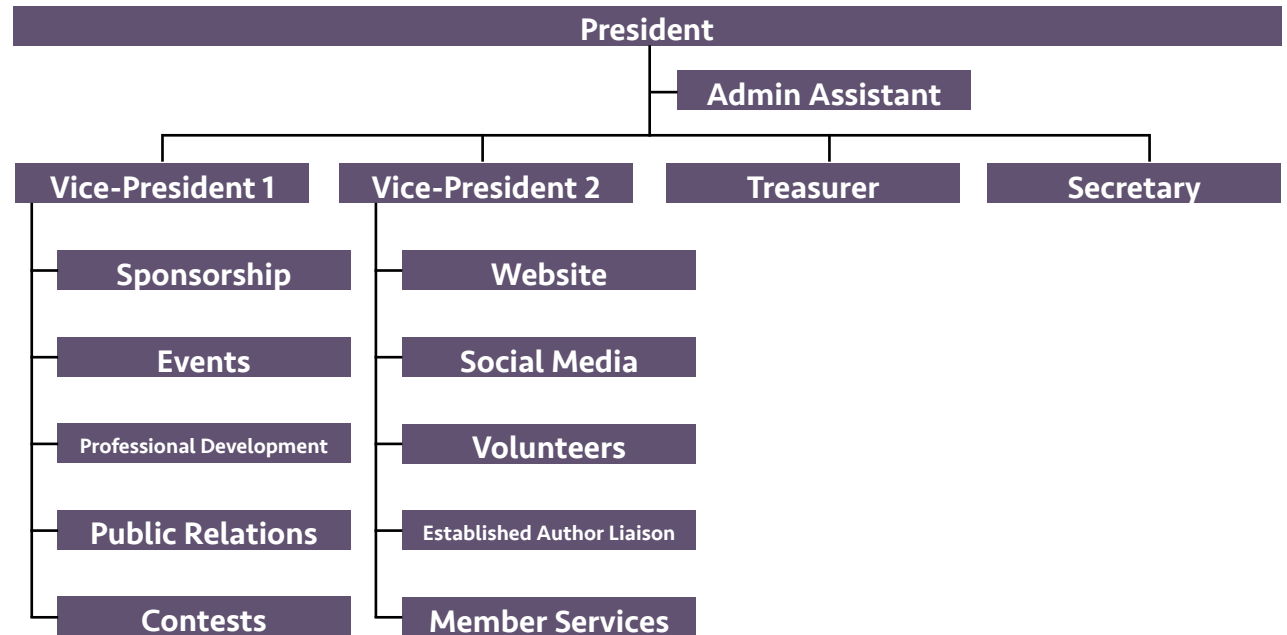
Established Author Liaison – Michelle Diener (June 2017), Deb Tait (July 2016 to April 2017)

Member Services – Shelagh Merlin

Contests – Claire Boston

Organisational Structure

This is the make-up of the committee for 2016/17.





Executive Summary – President's Report

Romance Writers of Australia continues to provide its members with support, and professional development, with more opportunities being rolled out in the coming months. Our membership continues to hover between 900-1000 people and we are looking into ways to improve our retention of members.

Our contests continue to be well utilised and we received some great feedback from members when we ran a survey about contests during the year. The committee will be working through the suggestions to see what else we can offer our members.

There has been an increase in media relating to romance and Laura Greaves, our Media Portfolio Manager brokered a deal to have Booktopia exclusively announce the finalists of the Romantic Book of the Year award. This, along with the subsequent blog interviews with the Ruby finalists, has given the Ruby and romance in general, a much higher profile in Australia.

The move to a new website and new membership system had a few hiccups, but generally saw a large decrease in the amount of work for our volunteers with much of the sign-up and renewal process now automated. In addition, the change to Wordpress has enabled RWA to set up an online store to sell our short story anthologies and other merchandise, as well as easily advertise any volunteer vacancies.

RWA is proud to provide a number of professional development opportunities for its members aside from the conference. Our online workshop labs (OWLs) continue to be popular and we are looking forward to expanding the retreats on offer during the next year.

The Administrative Assistant role has continued to be key in our ability to keep on top of our governmental and procedural requirements and has worked with key volunteers to smooth out procedures and automate tasks.

This year, like the last few years, has continued to be a challenging time of balancing the needs of so many

members against increasing costs and communication difficulties. We continue to be aware of the need to keep our membership and events affordable, but at the same time are at the mercy of increasing expenses that are driving up the costs of running an organisation of our size. We have continued to put into place upgrades that while costly now, will hopefully result in lowering overall costs in the long run.

At the same time, we are struggling to reach our members through all available channels (HT, Facebook pages, loops and direct emails). We want to reduce the possibility of members missing important information about ongoing changes, events, professional development and promotional opportunities that are available and will look into a better communication strategy in the next year.

One of our biggest volunteer workloads continues to be the annual conference. As such we have changed the role of the Events Portfolio Manager to give it greater oversight and management and because of the time and stress burdens of this, have instituted a small honorarium that we look to increase if possible over the years to build into a part time position. The proper processes in regards to hiring someone for this position will be followed when our ability to pay for this position comes to pass.

In addition, conference is our biggest expenditure and it is getting to the stage where many of our members can not afford to attend. We will be looking in detail as to how we can provide a cost-effective and productive conference going forward and we will discuss this further with the membership. We are also exploring grant opportunities in order to be able to reduce the cost of conference for our members.

We have continued to build on our relationships with our major sponsors with Victoria Purman, the current Sponsorship Portfolio Manager and Leisl Leighton, as then President, once again held face-to-face meetings with representatives of the major sponsors.

The strategic partnerships with ACCOR hotel and Flight Centre have proved to be beneficial in the last year and has helped to decrease volunteer stress and fatigue. We have used the rewards points accrued by Flight Centre to pay for some conference flights, and we will see the benefit of the ACCOR points next year at the Sydney conference where they will be used to help keep the prices as low as possible in one of the most expensive places to hold a conference now in Australia.

In June this year Leisl Leighton stepped down as President due to health and family commitments and to concentrate on her writing. Claire Boston stood up to take her place as president and has been working on implementing an online content management system for all RWA volunteers. This will enable volunteers to access information from their predecessor and to ensure records are not lost in the transition between volunteers.

It has been a busy year, once again, and RWA would like to thank all the volunteers and RWA committee members who have helped throughout the year.

Treasurer

RWA's operational costs during the 2016/17 financial year resulted in a net loss of \$4558.29. Contributing to this loss is a decrease in membership income and higher conference expenses due to when we need to pay deposits for the hotels. We are looking at ways of further streamlining our processes to reduce costs.

Our net assets currently sit at \$145,955.85.

Income and Expenses:

As always, our main sources of revenue continue to be membership subscriptions, contests, OWLS and interest earned on term deposits. Our main expenses are wages and superannuation, and honorariums.

Claire Boston
RWA President 2016/17

Highlights 2016/17

- Agreement with Booktopia to announce the Romantic Book of the Year and promote it to the wider community.
- Implementation of new Wordpress website with online shop.
- The new membership database has automated much of the signup process and reduced the workload on volunteers.
- Creation of new milestone pins so members can celebrate the number of books they've written.
- Digitising some of our previously laborious tasks has resulted in a significant reduction in work for our volunteers. Examples of this include trialling a new online scoresheet for the Ruby and creating a new volunteer signup form.
- Creation of a new Instagram account for RWA.
- Roll out of a new retreats program for RWA with more retreats to come.

Memberships

Membership as at 30 June 2017: 904

Membership has slightly dropped since last year, but is a constantly fluctuating number month-to-month. There are currently 61 members who have expired in the last two months and may just be late in renewing.

Total Membership: 904 (as at 30 June 2017)

Ordinary Members: 892

Honorary Members: 12

Historical Membership

2017	904
2016	947
2015	992
2014	970
2013	897
2012	838
2011	732
2010	718
2009	723

Portfolio Reports

Contests

Coordinator: Erica Hayes & Claire Boston

The contest season saw a few changes this year with the introduction of the **Spicy Bites** anthology and changes to the **Ruby** including the introduction of writer judges and a final round of judging. The other item of note was a change of website which meant our previous contest entry system could no longer be used. We have trialled using both TryBooking and Jotform, and will continue to look into the best solution going forward. In addition we introduced online scoresheets for the **Ruby** this year which was a great success, with fewer judges needing to be chased up after the deadline.

The **Ripping Start** once again proved popular with 79 entries, but the Valerie Parv was our most popular aspiring and emerging contest with 84 entries.

The **Selling Synopsis** received 28 entries and is our least popular contest. We may review whether it is better to change the contest to something more members want. We will be running a contests survey prior to the contest season beginning again to find out what members want.

The **First Kiss** and **Emerald** continue to have solid entry numbers with 43 and 54 entries respectively and the **Emerald Pro** had 19 entries which is three times last year's number. The addition of the final judge, and money prizes may have led to this increase.

The **Little Gems** anthology continues to be popular with 71 entries this year. This year we didn't run a cover contest, choosing instead to create a RWA brand for both anthologies going forward. In addition this year we had time to send the manuscript back to the finalists so that they could proof their stories.

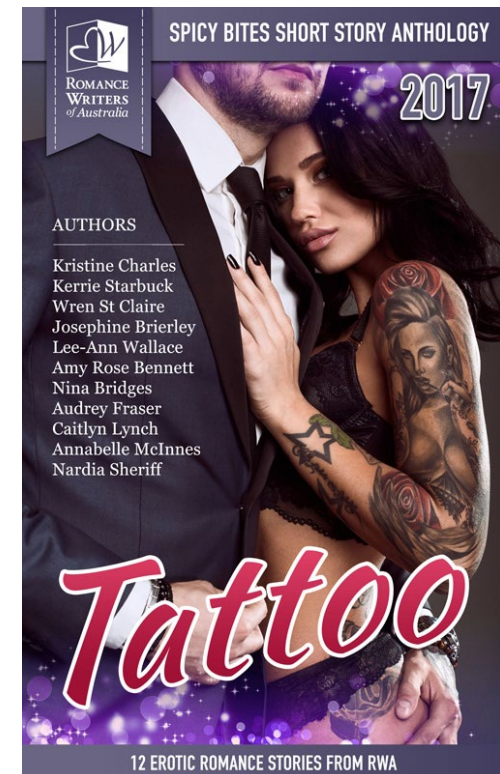
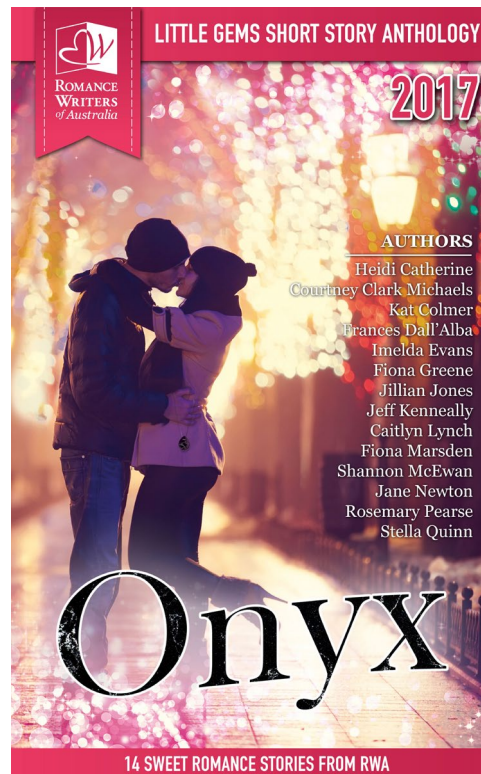
The **Romantic Book of the Year** saw the most changes this year. We introduced writer judges for the first

time which meant there was far less chasing up of late scoresheets. The finalists were announced much earlier than normal. To do this we locked in support from Booktopia to do the official announcement and to promote the **Ruby**. We also added a final round of judging to choose the overall Romantic Book of the Year from the category finalists. Using Jotform as an electronic scoresheet meant less work for the contest coordinators.

After calls for more opportunities for our members who write erotica, the **Spicy Bites** anthology was introduced this year. We received 24 entries which is a good starting point.

Most contests required an extended opening period beyond the usual three weeks in order to get entry numbers up. It might be better going forward to better publicise the entry periods and to give more warning on closing dates so that members can plan their entries.

Many of our contest managers are stepping down this year and we are on the lookout for new volunteers. A big thank you must go out to Erica Hayes who has coordinated the contests over the past few years and been a contest manager herself. She is also stepping down this year and her contribution will be missed.



Sponsorship

Coordinator: Victoria Purman

RWA's Sponsorship Coordinator and one of RWA's Vice Presidents, Victoria Purman, has continued her work throughout the year with a particular focus on organising sponsorships for the Brisbane conference.

RWA has re-invigorated our relationships with our sponsors and we are pleased to have long-term and continuing support with some of Australia's biggest publishers.

We are delighted to once again welcome Harlequin Australia as our Major Partner for Conference in 2017 and we thank them for their long-term and ongoing support of romance writing and writers in Australia.

Similarly, we welcome back Penguin Random House and Hachette as Partners.

Our other Partners for the Brisbane conference include Brother Australia and The Cartridge Family.

We also thank Pullman King George Square and Queensland Writers Centre for their support.

Major Partner



Partners



Media

Coordinator: Laura Greaves

Media Coverage

In 2016-17, RWA has had some very positive, wide-reaching media coverage. This coverage has both highlighted our work as an organisation and raised the profile of individual members' work.

There was an excellent feature about the 2016 Adelaide conference in *SA Weekend* magazine and a highlight of some of our published members advice in a dating column in the *Manly Daily* newspaper.

ROMA Award

Laura promoted our ROMA Award for media via the popular journalists' mailing list Rachel's List; the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA — the journalists' union) and also in the Facebook groups Freelance Jungle and Binder Full of Australian Women Writers, whose combined membership is in the thousands.

This year, there were twelve entries in the ROMA sent in throughout the year by RWA members. This is 20% up on last year and represents a more diverse range of pieces (and topics) than in previous years. Author/book profile pieces contributed the bulk of romance reportage in Australia this year, however ROMA-nominated pieces focussed more generally on broader genre reportage. This is in line with the intent and guidelines of the award.

Recent years have seen a confident 'coming of age' of the genre in the Australian media, but the challenge for the coming decade will be to move away from the (tired) 'defences' of romance and into reportage on the more nuanced strengths of the genre. This year's finalists may be the front edge of this shift.

Other Publicity Activities

Booktopia

RWA has been fortunate to establish an excellent working relationship with Booktopia. They exclusively revealed

our Ruby shortlist in May and followed up with in-depth interviews with each of the finalists.

Instagram

RWA is now on Instagram: @rwaustalia. We currently have 230+ followers and steadily growing. The platform has been particularly useful in promoting the Brisbane conference.

We have also started the hashtag #loveozromance and encourage all RWA members who use Instagram to follow our account and to use this hashtag when posting about their work.

Hearts Talk

Editors: Carla Caruso and Daniel De Lorne

Hearts Talk has undergone significant changes this year — not least shifting from print to digital format. According to Hearts Talk's joint editors, Carla Caruso and Daniel De Lorne, these have been well received by the membership.

Members also wanted more writing 'craft' articles. We've been lucky that a lot of members have been contributing articles of this kind of their own volition. Authors are realising the value of promoting their new releases in Hearts Talk through such articles — and are also, of course, providing valuable information to members reading.

Other new columns for the year include Penelope Janu's 'Legal Beagle' column, tackling legal issues in fiction; blogger-turned-newbie-author Renee Conoulty on books and blogging; and established internationally-published author Stefanie London on writing life.

Anne Gracie has also continued with her column — thankfully! — and always sources contributions from interesting established authors like Ally Blake and Jennie Jones.

It did take a little while for members to get to grips with uploading their new release books themselves, but that is

improving. And in response to a request from a member, we've recently extended the cut-off for submitting new releases to give people a little longer.

RWA Podcast

We have progressed with plans to launch a RWA podcast. Watch this space!

Hearts Talk

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Anything But Regular

Former Sydneysider Georgia Clark is behind the funny, sexy new novel *The Regulars* (Simon & Schuster), which has had praise from *Pretty Little Liars* creator Sara Shepard to Hollywood star Jessica Biel.

The novel's premise had us hooked: "*The Regulars* is about three young women, living in Brooklyn, who get their hands on *Pretty*, a mysterious purple potion that turns the user supermodel-gorgeous for one week at a time. But there's a dark side to *Pretty*, too, and as the gloss fades for these modern-day Cinderellas, there's only one question left: What would you sacrifice to be *Pretty*?" We were pretty lucky (bad pun) to chat to Georgia, now based in the Big Apple.

Hi, Georgia. What was your life like in Oz previously and how did you come to land in New York?

I was born in Manly, grew up in Hornsby Heights, then Crow's Nest, which was recently named the most livable suburb in Sydney. (I liked it because it was a stone's throw from the city.) I went to school at Gosford High School and uni at the University of Technology, Sydney.

After graduating in 2002, I spent seven years kicking around the inner-city before I moved to New York when I was 29. I moved because I'd fallen in love with Brooklyn in a wild whirlwind romance (10-day trip with friends), and I'd also won a national pitching competition that came with a return airfare anywhere in the world as part of the (very generous) prize package.

My life before moving was very good—I love Sydney, it's a beautiful, easy place to live—but it was my hometown, and I was beginning to feel the constraints of the familiar. I wanted more: more opportunity, more adventure, more grit. I certainly got it: I moved to New York without a visa, job, circle of friends, or place to live. In the middle of the recession. It was a wake-up call.

Continued on page 4...



Photo: Daniel N. Johnson

Events

Coordinator: Bronwyn Stuart

Bronwyn Stuart took over the Events portfolio fresh off the back of playing an integral part in the Adelaide conference. She has continually shown she is confident and qualified for the job and is looking to the future of Events as a whole, already working on 2018 and 2019 conference guests and programming.

Events Going Forward

In a bid to streamline processes, RWA's Administrative Assistant has compiled a conference manual and a

budget document. Decisions have been made like keeping the pin at 25mm, the printed program at A5 and the content program to involve 1.5 hour sessions with a program template to be added to the conference manual. This has all been done not to take artistic control from the coordinators but to try to limit the volunteer burn-out reported year after year after year.

Continuity going forward is one of our biggest changes and most demanding needs. With each year's conference

team reinventing the wheel and numbers steadily creeping up and over the 400 delegate mark, running the conferences off the backs of volunteers is becoming harder and harder. In the next few years, the committee will be looking at hiring a dedicated paid events staff member if funds permit. There will still be a need for volunteers.

Annual Conference

Adelaide Conference – *Ain't Love Grand* 2016

Adelaide was chosen to hold RWA's 25th Anniversary Conference at the stunning Stamford Grand. With nearly 80 workshop submissions it was difficult to narrow it down to the five streams but in the end Adelaide offered an enviable program. The Friday Workshop presenter was Michael Hague attracting 255 delegates and core conference had 398 delegates. In addition RWA partnered with Flinders University and the Flinders Institute for Research into the Humanities, the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance, and the Centre of Excellence for the History of the Emotions, to deliver an academic program.

RWA was proud to support the Indigenous Literacy Foundation (ILF) in our fundraising again and Harlequin Australia was our Major Partner for Conference. Other Partners for 2016 Conference included Penguin Random House, Hachette, Dymocks Adelaide, Flinders University, Jolley's Boathouse, Australian Romance Readers Association and Fuji Xerox Tasmania.

Our Supporters for Conference 2016 include Haigh's Chocolates, the SA Writers' Centre, authors Tess LeSue, Susanne Hampton, Suzie Hindmarsh-Knights, Trish Morey, Bronwyn Stuart and Victoria Purman.

We thank all our sponsors for their support.

Brisbane Conference – *Love Gone Wild* 2017

The Brisbane conference is being held at the Pullman King George Square from 11-13th August 2017. Our guest speakers include Kate Forsyth and Anne Gracie who will be doing the Friday workshops, and our keynote speaker Marion Lennox. International agents and editors include Waxman Leavell Literary Agency, Harlequin, William Morrow/ Avon, Penguin, Hachette, Tule Publishing and Entangled Publishing.

Registrations opened a little later than in 2016 and currently stand at Core – 367, Gala Dinner – 267, PJ Breakfast (extra event) – 43, Extra Cocktail tickets – 35. The team decided to forgo Trybooking and use Jotform.

Part of this year's program is a PJ Breakfast with proceeds going to charity. Kate Forsyth will be the breakfast speaker and delegates are encouraged to attend in their PJs. Escape has once again sponsored the After Party and Harlequin have sponsored the themed Cocktail Party.

New items this year include a business hub with businesses like Google, Draft2Digital and Bolinda as well as paid manuscript assessments.

Sydney Conference 2018

Emily Madden is the conference coordinator for the Sydney conference which will be held at the Sofitel Wentworth. She is currently putting together a super-star team to assist. Now that the role of the Events Coordinator has been widened, it will be the job of Bronwyn Stuart to source speakers and international guests with the conference coordinator assisting where possible and providing a wish list of her own.





Member Services

Coordinator: Shelagh Merlin

The Member Services portfolio has had a good year overall though there was no activity in the Groups Liaison area. In Grants, two funding applications have been lodged this financial year, the first of which was unsuccessful.

New Member Liaison

Following the change to the new website, a decision was made to automate the welcome email that is sent to new members four weeks after they join RWA. This move meant that the New Member Liaison role was redundant and the incumbent stepped down from the position. New member inquiries are now handled directly by the Member Services Coordinator.

Groups

All three member loops have been active this year with loop participants becoming increasingly more involved as the year has progressed. Both the Emerging and Established Author loops reached the major milestone of more than 100 members earlier this year.

The Aspiring Author loop, which is coordinated by three volunteers, has been extremely active throughout the year, both in terms of organised activities and in terms of existing members warmly welcoming newcomers as they join. The monthly Author Q&A sessions have continued this year, with an excellent line-up of top flight authors giving up their time to answer questions. The bi-monthly BIAW (Book In A Week) challenges have been well attended with most participants reaching their targets.

The Emerging Author loop successfully moved to Facebook at the end of the last financial year and this has proven successful with members interacting regularly. The new moderator has settled in well and is posting discussion topics from time to time. Group members are also posting links to articles they consider of interest and group activity has been steady.

The Established Author loop is generally quiet although the introduction of discussion topics at the beginning of 2017 has seen a significant increase in group activity. From time to time group members post questions or comments to the group and these generally result in a flurry of helpful responses.

Critique Partner Scheme

The two volunteers managing the Critique Partner Scheme are doing an excellent job and have indicated their intention to continue in their roles in the 2017-18 financial year. As at 31 March 2017 the Beginners/Intermediate database had 172 members Beg/Int while the Advanced database had 46 members.

Independent Writer Scheme

The volunteer managing the Independent Writer Scheme is doing a good job and has indicated that she is willing to continue in the role. She has made several attempts to broaden knowledge about the scheme through guest appearances in the Emerging Authors loop and via a post on the RWA Facebook page. This has resulted in one new mentee being added to the scheme and a number of inquiries from overseas writers who have been advised to join RWA in order to take advantage of the service.

Group Liaison

There was no activity in the Group Liaison portfolio in 2016-17 and the volunteer managing this area resigned early in 2017. There is a good position description in place and we hope a new volunteer will step into the role.

Grants

The Grants portfolio was added to Member Services in 2016-17 with the intention of sourcing and securing co-funding from all three levels of government to assist with the day to day running costs of the organisation and enable RWA to employ a full-time events coordinator for the annual conference.

A grant application was lodged with the Australia Council in February 2017 to fund the events coordinator role, however was unsuccessful. A second grant application was lodged under the City of Sydney Cultural and Creative Grants program. The outcome of this application is yet to be advised.

Volunteers

Coordinators: Deb Tait and Michelle Diener

We are continuing to investigate ways we can automate processes in order to ensure volunteers have less work to do.

A new addition is a volunteers section on the website which advertises new volunteer positions to members.

We also created an electronic form to capture new volunteer information which has made management of volunteers so much easier.

Web Services

Coordinator: Lana Pecherczyk

New Website

Due to changing technologies and the expiration of our current hosting contract, we moved to a completely new system on a new hosting company which gave us more freedom and opportunities.

We kicked off the year with the new website going live. It was a huge job and all the volunteers involved worked overtime to do the job as quickly as possible. This process took about one month with a temporary splash page up, and then about two months to smooth out most kinks. We're constantly updating and tweaking the website at a weekly rate as best we can.

New Membership System

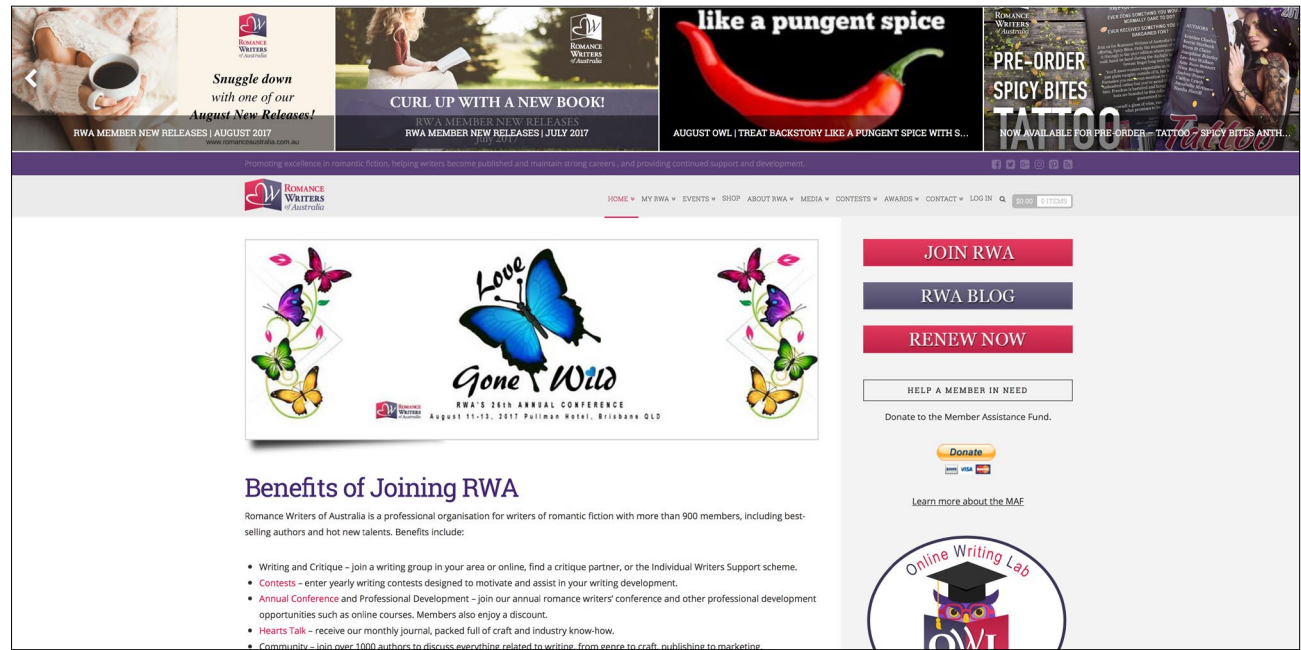
We invested in a new membership system, which allows for instant membership and easy data analysis.

The new membership system now allows for instant new membership and has many features straight from Wordpress. We have multiple features such as a subscription based membership level if the demand is there. We also swapped host companies. The new hosting company came with unlimited email for our staff and volunteers which has lifted some constraints with the way we operate.

New Email System with Automated Emails

We changed from Mad Mimi to Mailchimp which has saved some money and allows for greater flexibility with integrated automation with our membership system. We now send an automatic email seven days after a member joins, and can do more. We also send an email shortly after membership expiration to remind members to renew.

Email communication is a growing portfolio currently run by the webmistress (not including Hearts Talk communications). We are also inviting members to sign up to an e-newsletter list separate to our membership only list that sends an update once a week of all our blog posts. Additionally to *Hearts Talk*, we send communications to



our members regarding important organisation updates such as conference and contest news.

New Form System

Jotform is now the program used to help with conference, new release uploads, contests and more when Trybooking is unsuitable.

New E-commerce

There is an integrated e-commerce system in the website now that is used to sell Little Gems and other merchandise. This system came with the website upgrade at no additional cost to RWA.

New Website Features

- The Speaker Bureau is being trialled. It's free for any member to add their profile. We would like to expand this initiative and will investigate appropriate avenues with the help of a volunteer.
- A new volunteer job posting section has been created on which RWA will advertise opportunities.

- PDF search function is currently being workshopped with the developers of the plug in to work with our *Hearts Talk* indexing.

New Moodle system platform for our OWLS

The old forum hosting has expired and with it the old Moodle platform. The new site has had a new version of Moodle installed and now we are successfully running OWLS through it. This software is free.

Contest Management System

We looked at many options for contest management systems and the general consensus at the end of it was that for the available budget we have, it was better to stick with Jotform which can be used for many other means.

Coming up next year...

RWA Podcast: A team is being gathered to run a monthly podcast that will educate the world on romance writing and provide an extra avenue to our members for which to promote their new books and to learn about the craft.



Social Media

Coordinator: Imelda Evans

In the last year, our social media presence has continued to evolve, to keep pace with the changing needs of our members and to increase our visibility to the general public.

RWA Blog

Our blog has continued to be a vital communication tool in the online space.

For our members our official communication tool has always been, and continues to be, our monthly newsletter, Hearts Talk. But we recognise that people's lives move fast these days and since many of our members are routinely online, receiving news on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter is also useful.

The problem with those platforms though, is that posts are ephemeral and very hard if not impossible to search. Our strategy, therefore, is to post all the important communications on our blog, from which they feed out to Facebook, Twitter and Google+. This allows us to get news out to as many members as possible wherever they are and whenever they are online, but at the same time, keep an easily searched archive of articles available on our own platform.

Facebook, Twitter and Google+

Our public Facebook page has continued to gather new followers. The growth rate has slowed a little compared to last year, but it has been steady throughout the year, and currently stands at 2771.

Our members-only community group on Facebook is also flourishing, and has even spun off some member-run, special-interest groups, such as our group for RWA members who are studying for, or have completed, PhDs, and our word-count encouragement group that started as a '50k in thirty days' event in June this year.

Twitter and Google+ continue to be mainly news outlets for us, but they serve a useful communication purpose

for those members whose social media activity is mainly on those platforms.

The exception to the 'mainly news' function for Twitter is during our annual conference, when many of the attendees live-tweet from the conference to share insights from workshops, pictures from social events and awards results with the members and friends who couldn't make it. We create an official hashtag each year and on some occasions we have even trended on Twitter Australia!

Goodreads, Pinterest and Instagram

Our Goodreads account was established to promote our members' new releases. However, in recent years, we have realised that it was neither necessary, nor particularly effective at doing that job, so we have stopped updating it with new releases. We are considering whether an account that lists Ruby winners and nominees might be of use.

Pinterest

Erica Hayes, one of our most tireless volunteers, has continued to post our members' new releases each month on boards divided by romantic sub-genre.

au.pinterest.com/rwaus

Instagram

We are now also on Instagram! Our presence there is still in its infancy, but followers have been kept up to date with our OWL promos and assorted writing-related pictures. We look forward to finding new ways to use this platform to benefit our members.

www.instagram.com/rwaustralia

YouTube and Yahoo

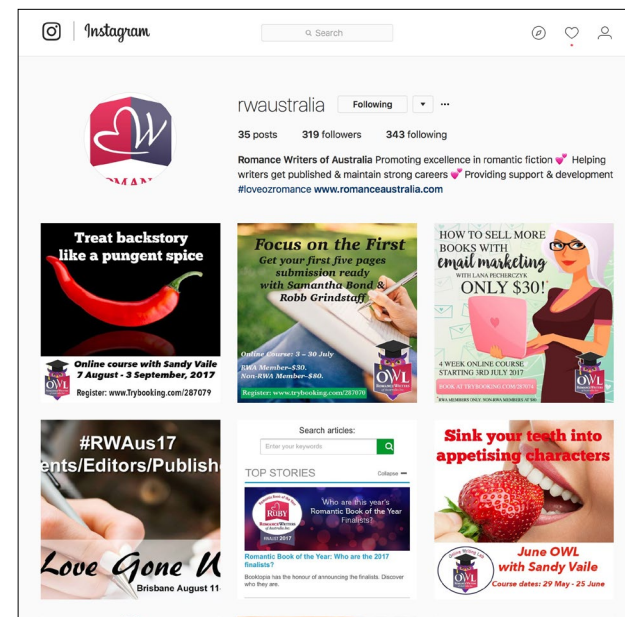
Our YouTube channel is still mainly serving to provide instruction in our OWL delivery program, Moodle. But we are maintaining it in the expectation that we will find future uses for a video platform.

Yahoo Loops

Although other social media outlets have taken much of the traffic away from our e-loops, they still exist as a news and conversation venue for those who don't like to use Facebook or other social media platforms. Our most active e-loop is still Romaus, although it must be said that it gets quieter and quieter as the other platforms get busier. I expect that eventually, the Yahoo loops will be closed down, but only if their functionality is replicated elsewhere.

Moving On

The biggest change to the Social Media Portfolio is that, after five years in the portfolio, Imelda Evans is stepping down from committee and therefore from the job. The last five years have been ones of massive change in social media generally and in RWA's social media activity in particular. She has done well to keep up with the constant changes and is handing the role over to Louisa West.





Professional Development

Coordinator: Elise K Ackers

OWLS Report

The OWLS portfolio comprises of three volunteers, Jillian Jones Coordinator, Pauline Johnston Registrar, and Linda Apps Moderator.

The 2017 OWLS calendar was finalised in time for early promotion. This calendar year we offered two OWLS per month instead of one.

A post-OWL survey process was reinvigorated to capture attendee and presenter feedback on everything from content to delivery platform. Costs of OWLS increased in 2016 and payment processing moved to Trybooking in November 2016. This has reduced the need to chase participants for payment, as it doesn't allow for registration without payment.

OWLS were trialled on the new version of Moodle in May 2017; it worked well and all future Moodle-based OWLS will be held on the new version.

Retreats

The Retreats Portfolio was commenced shortly after Elise Ackers began as Professional Development Portfolio Manager in August 2016, with the intent of bringing writers together throughout the year to write, socialise and escape from daily distractions. Members were surveyed across various platforms, including online loops and social media, to determine the nature, frequency, cost and size of a desirable retreat. Although survey participation was low, the expressed support in the concept was high across the membership.

This new portfolio comprises of three volunteers. Kim Lambert is the Venue Coordinator, responsible for sourcing retreat venues and drafting Retreat programs. Host & Attendee Liaison Jay Hicks is the single point of contact for retreat attendees and hosts, and Coleen Kwan has taken on a dual role as Finance Coordinator and Marketing & Communications Coordinator.

The team is aspiring to develop a yearly schedule which aligns with major events, i.e. 50k in May and NaNoWriMo in November. Retreats will be both big and small, regional and close to major cities, programmed and free-flowing – all preferences are being catered for, where possible.

The Retreat Program was created in response to an identified member need. Rural writers stated that they felt isolated from their writing peers, and some members were seeking more opportunities for greater connections. This program is in its early days, and its continuation is completely dependent on members' participation and support. The Retreat Team welcomes feedback, ideas, and other volunteers to join the portfolio, and has been a dynamic team to date, as it has put this exciting new feather in RWA's cap.

Focus for 2017/18

In addition to our ongoing responsibilities for the portfolio we will be investigating and developing the following areas for the next 12 months:

- We will look into new revenue streams in order to provide our members with more opportunities.
- We aim to roll out the RWA writers' retreats with events tailored to different locations around Australia and with varied outcomes.
- More resources and benefits for Established Authors.
- More fundraising for RWA to assist with funding an events manager and further investment in the organisation's infrastructure.
- Continue to raise the public and media's awareness of romance and promote not only RWA but our members as well.
- We are rolling out an RWA Podcast.
- Continue to develop RWA's content management system and automate processes where possible to reduce the workload of volunteers.



Volunteers

Thank you to all volunteers, contest managers, judges and more who helped RWA so much in 2016/17.

Contest Team Members

Erica Hayes, Cat Whelan, Pauline Johnson, Marnie St Clair, Jo McAlister, Lis Hoorweg, Tricia Sargant, Margaret Midwood, Claire Boston, Beverley Eikli.

Contest Judges

Ainslie Paton, Aislinn Kearns, Alison Rixon, Allen Brown, Ally Blake, Amy Andrews, Andrea McNally, Anita Joy, Anna True, Annabelle Rose, Anne Oliver, Babette Furstner, Beverley Eikli, Bree Vreedenburgh, Caroline Savage, Cassandra Dean, Catherine Evans, Cherelle Murphy, Cherie Skinner, Cherrie Forrest, Chris Weston, Christine Wells, Claire Boston, Claire Nice, Coleen Yan, Cris Hickey, Deanna Lang, Debbie Cox, Deborah Allen, Denise Rosetti, Dianne Osborne, Ebony McKenna, Elizabeth Squire, Enisa Hasic, Erica Hayes, Erin Kuhne, Erin Moira O'Hara, Euphrasia Holmes, Fiona Georgiou, Fiona Greene, Frana Graco, Frances Maslen, Gemma McBride, Gina Hollands, Heather Garside, Heidi Catherine Michailidis, Helen Lacey, Helen West, Helene Young, Holly Scribe, Jack Bridges, Jan Almond, Jan Bridges, Jane Ainslie, Janette Whitehead, Janice Bridges, Janis Linford, Jenn St George, Jennifer Brassel, Jennifer Hoff, Jennifer Kloester, Jennifer St George, Jenny Addicoat, Jess Anastasi, Jess Langhorne, Jo Harris, Jo Jackson King, Jo McAlister, Joan Gilham, Joan Wright, Joanne Dannon, Juanita Kees, Julie-Anne Carter, Juliet Madison, Justine Woulfe, Karen Turner, Karina Coldrick, Karlene Blakemore-Mowle, Karyn Brinkley, Kathleen Curtis, Kerrie Ptolemy, Kerrie Starbuck, Kerry Stapleton, Kristine Thomas, Kylie Short, Lauren James, Lia Kamp, Linda Hills, Lis Hoorweg, Lisa Chaplin, Loretta Kelly, Louise Reynolds, Madeline Williams, Madeline McCreanor, Malvina Yock, Margaret Midwood, Margaret Penhall-Jones, Marian Chivers, Marie Miller, Marilyn Forsyth, Mary De Haas, MC Dalton, Mel Tesco, Michelle Diener, Michelle Conder, Michelle Wood, Mim Andriano, Monique McDonnell,

Morgan Watts, Neely Lyon, Nicole Murphy, Nicole Pfeiffer, Nikki Logan, Paola Matthews, Pat Haggerty, Pauline Fluerty, Pauline Johnston, Rachael Johns, Rachel Bailey, Raewyn McGill, Rita Azar, Rob Hap, Rosemary Foy-Brown, Rowena Candish, Rowena Candlish, Sandra Linklater, Sandy Curtis, Sara Hood, Sarma Burdeu, Sasha Cottman, Shannon McCarthy, Sharon Sherry, Shelley Findlater, Sheryl McKnight, Shona Husk, Stella Frances, Sue Webb, Susannah Sabine, Susanne Bellamy, Suzanne Cass, Suzanne Hamilton, Tamara Martin, Teresa King, Terry Keeling, Tina Marie Clark, Tory Crabtree, Tracey O'Hara, Victoria Black, Virginia Suckling, Virginia Taylor, Wendy Leslie, Zoe Younger.

Events Team Members

Adelaide Conference

Linda Brown, Amy T Matthews, Bronwyn Stuart, Victoria Purman, Carla Caruso, Dianne Osborne, Trish Morey, Maggie Mundy, Suzie Hindmarsh-Knight, Bec Sampson, Susan Panageris, Charmaine Osborne, Helen Katsinis.

Brisbane Conference

Kendall Talbot, Tina Marie Clark, Tania Joyce, Bronwyn Stuart, Sylvia Marson, Sue Ellen Pashley.

Sydney Conference

Emily Madden, Bronwyn Stuart, Shannon Curtis.

Media Team Members

Laura Greaves, Carla Caruso, Daniel de Lorne.

Member Services Team Members

Shelagh Merlin, Nas Dean, Joanne Dannon, Bec Sampson, Dannielle Line, Julie-Anne Carter, Emily Barlow, Karina Coldrick, Rachael Johns, Janice Bridges, Cat Whelan, Rowena Candlish.

Professional Development Team Members

Elise K Ackers, Jillian Jones, Pauline Johnston, Linda Apps, Kim Lambert, Jay Hicks, Coleen Kwan.

Social Media Volunteers

Louisa West, Laura Boon.

Web Team Volunteers

Bree Verity, Vicki Taylor.

Hearts Talk Volunteers

Rachel Bailey, Rhyll Biest, Frances Burke, Pam Collings, Renee Conoulty, Anne Gracie, Laura Greaves, Erica Hayes, Sara Hood, Vonnie Hughes, Penelope Janu, Clare Karacsonyi, Moraig Kisler, Stefanie London, Jodie Morphet, KE Osborn, Nicole Pfeiffer, Patsy Poppenbeek, Serena Sandrin, Janette Whitehead, Malvina Yock.