

Webb's Web

 Posted by Kerry Webb  25 comments

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Good reading on the web

One of my happier discoveries in recent time has been longform.org (longform.org – who would have guessed?), a site that posts links to new and classic non-fiction articles from around the Web. I came to it through Twitter, where I can see tweets that summarise the latest articles, and the one that's freshest in my memory is an interview with E B White, the author of *Charlotte's Web* and many other stylish works. His answers in that piece are so good, and anyone who recognises Jane Austen as a deeply humorous woman deserves our respect. See it at tinyurl.com/3zz9ssp.

The scanning continues

The British Library and Google have announced that they'll be digitising 250,000 books printed between 1700 and 1870 (tinyurl.com/3g4enqb). They'll be providing full text search, download and reading options available through Google Books and the Library's website. I'll watch with interest then how the various challenges to Google's grand plans will fare in the light of this, although the BL project clearly states that the books involved are out of copyright.

A read letter day

So, first I got to hear Geraldine Brooks speak at the National Library about her new book *Caleb's Crossing* and I decided (on the basis of her sparkling presentation) to buy it. The queue at the Library Bookshop was a bit too daunting, so I followed my usual practice and looked for it on Abebooks where I found the ever-reliable Book Depository had the hardback at a reasonable discount - but of course it would take a week or so to arrive. On a whim I tried our local bookshop (the only one in the shopping mall since

the debacle of the venture capitalists) and found that their price for a paperback edition was within a dollar of the UK hardback price. Now, it's only one example but it does show that the local people can be very competitive when they choose. As for Geraldine's conversation with her enthusiastic public, well, I'll admit that I'm eagerly waiting for this year's Boyer Lectures (www.abc.net.au/rn/boyerlectures/stories/2011/3229262.htm).

The social whirl

We don't get to the movies much these days, but it's hard not to notice what's coming out – so I knew that there's been a movie about Facebook that had been quite well reviewed, but wasn't in a hurry to check it out. I found the error of this judgment during a recent trip when our hosts suggested that we rent it through iTunes one night. It's a damn good picture and it had me thinking about the whole social media world for a few days afterwards. One thing I wondered about was at what stage did Zuckerberg and Co. realise that they were onto something really big. And of course the movie is only based on a series of factual events, so we shouldn't get too involved in it. All this was brought home to me when, at the end of June, the announcement came through that NewsCorp had sold MySpace for around \$500 million less than they had paid six years ago. Who would have thought? There are plenty of opinions about what went wrong, what they should have done differently and so on, but it just shows me that there's a lot of change going on, and you have to have a bit of luck to go with your genius if you want to succeed.

Unwanted visitors

On my ALIA Blog (www.alia.org.au/members-only/webbsblog/, in case you've forgotten) I get a fair bit

of spam, but it's usually so obvious that there's no real effort needed to get rid of it. Some posters are a bit smarter, praising the points I've made but offering to get me more readers; however they can be spotted quite easily too. So it's with some amusement that I see these usual suspects turn up in the comments sections on other blogs where they'll stay for a short time before being shown the door.

Different ways of looking at things

I use Twitter at work mostly to keep in touch with people of professional interest: social media experts, government ICT gurus and people talking about libraries – and for this the ordinary Twitter interface works well. And with a locked-down environment on the work computer it's very difficult indeed to load extra software. That's why it took me so long to get around to looking at Tweetdeck (www.tweetdeck.com). After having tried it for a couple of weeks at home, I'm not convinced that it's something that I need or want. The interface is crowded (although I suspect that I could tweak it a fair bit); so crowded in fact that I find it hard to concentrate on the tweets coming through. One thing I did appreciate though was the listing of direct messages – some of which I'd not noticed coming through vanilla Twitter.

And today I checked out another entrant in the field: Gist (gist.com). This service offers to collect all of your input streams in the one place, and asks for access to your Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts – and any others you might care to specify. I've tried it with Twitter, but as I have an aversion to exposing my friends to Facebook spam I don't think I'll trust Gist any further than that.

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