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## League of correctors toil to fix history

By Sally Pryor

Some might call them pedantic, eccentric or pernickety but the National Library of Australia sees them as tireless workers dedicated to bringing accurate information to the rest of the world. They are the correctors, the thousands of volunteers who for the past two years have been correcting digitised online newspapers for the library's collection. The newspaper program, which runs in conjunction with state and territory libraries, digitises historic Australian newspapers from 1803 to 1954, when copyright began. The idea is to make all the text and images available to everyone via the web, using software that converts old newspaper images into digital text. But even with up-to-the-minute technology, the small fonts and uneven printing in old newspapers means the conversions are not always accurate.

Enter the correctors, of whom there are now more than 7300 registered around Australia. As part of its Australia Day Honours, the library this week recognised the six most prolific correctors in the country, who between them have corrected more than 1.4 million lines of text. From across the nation, this motley crew of information enthusiasts travelled to Canberra to accept their place in the program's hall of fame. And all were in awe of this year's reigning queen of correctors, Julie Hempenstall, who has a whopping 352,002 lines to her name. A stay-at-home mother from Sutton Grange near Bendigo, Ms Hempenstall has a longstanding interest in genealogy. "I'm into murders and executions, and family notices," she said. "Anything that interests me really." She corrects full time, every day except Christmas. John Hall of Melbourne, who worked in the telecommunications industry for 40 years before retiring in 2008, came a relatively close second in the collectors' stakes, with 327,452 lines. He said he wanted all Australians to be able to access old newspapers online so that they might one day be able to have a similar eureka moment like he had when he stumbled across his grandfather's 1929 death notice online. He decided from that moment that he would search for anything relating to his name, Hall, and has been doing it for eight to 10 hours a day ever since. He only recently moved from third to second place, overtaking Fay Walker, of Brisbane. Also retired, Ms Walker has been correcting for the past 18 months and was stunned to be recognised in Canberra for her work - 290,389 lines. She's into war crimes and Japanese war trials, although at the moment she's focusing on plane crashes. "I get absorbed in one thing, and then I come across something and think 'oh, I wonder what's happened there', and then I'm off on a totally different tangent," she said. Recent entrant Ann Manley, of NSW, hasn't decided whether to actually retire yet, although she hasn't worked for the past two years, having been housebound with a back injury. What with her corrections - 240,951 lines to date - and other volunteer work as a swimming official and referee, she's pretty well occupied. "Who has the time for paid work?" she said. Retired Brisbane couple Lyn and Maurie Mulcahy together took fifth place this year with 222,790 lines between them. With an interest mainly in family history and shipping, they never go on holidays until they have completed their minimum 5000 lines a month to keep them in the top five.

SPOT ON: Anti-clockwise from left: Lyn and Maurie Mulcahy, of Queensland, Ann Manley, of NSW, John Hall and Julie Hempenstall, of Victoria, and Fay Walker, of Queensland

