

Festival success for NBC

's probably just as well there was a train strike in Sydney when the National Book Council held their first function of the year on January 18 and 19 because if any *more* people had turned up, the vestibule in the Town Hall could not possibly have accommodated them . . .

The event was 'Writers at the Sydney Festival' — and it was a runaway success. From the time people began to see it listed in the festival events, the LAA's phone ran hot with inquiries. No wonder because Tom Thompson of the NBC (NSW committee) had organised such an impressive array of diversely talented Australian writers; everyone who showed up was so full of interest and enthusiasm that a large turn-up was inevitable.

And that's the way it turned out — as the first session got under way more seats were being carried in and for the final session it was standing room only.

In a session called Sydney — a School for Scandal, David Dale spoke of his experiences with defamation laws, with some fascinating insights into how much offence can be taken by some people, notably politicians, from a simple comment. And how sometimes a throw-away line just sounds right with apparently no special significance, yet can be construed as vicious criticism.

Speakers at each session varied in the



A pensive Peter Cook alongside an apparently puzzled Peter Corris at the Writers' Festival.

Patrick

Photograph by courtesy of the National Times

amount of relevance what they said actually had to the topic — but that didn't matter because the audience thoroughly enjoyed it all anyway.

Saturday afternoon's session looked at fiction in the making. Olga Masters and Tom Keneally spoke about their work in progress and how they approached it. Jean Bedford chose to read from the book she's working on, and I for one can't wait to buy a copy. As well as intriguing the audience by telling us of his research for the book he's writing on one of

the most bizarre cases to appear in Australia's newspapers for some time, Thomas Keneally was enthusiastic in his praise of the word processor on which he now writes novels.

Resisting the temptation either to sleep on Sunday morning or to enjoy the sun, a substantial number of Sydney's aspirin addicts turned up for the first session. And were well rewarded indeed with a highly entertaining discourse from Bob Hudson, who has achieved the distinction of being Sydney's most successful unsuccessful screenplay writer. Bob Ellis's wit and skill with words were much in evidence, his masterfully laconic style of delivery enhancing his work. For this observer, Sunday morning session stood out in two days of exceptionally rewarding and entertaining wordspinning.

For the final segment, the walls of the Town Hall had to expand. Every seat was taken and so was all the standing space. The atmosphere became hot and muggy, but no one cared. Who would, with Patrick Cook, Frank Moorhouse, Barry Oakley and Peter Corris as speakers on the topic Great Rivalries and Conflicts, made even more enjoyable by the effective chairing of Bob Hudson. Questions at this session lingered on, perhaps because no one wanted it to end.

Altogether two highly enjoyable days demonstrated most successfully the National Book Council's role in promoting Australian books and writing. Tom Thompson promises similar delights for next year's Festival. Mark your diaries now!

And of course the NBC in New South Wales will be involved in other meet-the-writer functions during 1985. Keep watching Incite.

Brenda Paterson

National Book Council (NSW)
Publications Officer (NSW)



Thomas Keneally (left), who is the new NBC President, talking to Bob Hudson at a reception given to those involved with the Writers' Festival by the Deputy Lord Mayor.

Photograph by courtesy of the National Times