INDEXING THE LIFE OF SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL*

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At our Annual General Meeting this time last year we were privileged to listen to an exceedingly interesting talk on 'How I Indexed Dickens's Letters' by Mr. James Thornton (The Indexer, Vol. IV, pages 119-122). But our new newly elected President was careful to state in his first sentence: 'Or at least the first volume.'

Exactly the same modification applies to this talk. It is only the first volume, dealing with Winston Churchill's earliest 25 years until the turn of the century that I have so far indexed. This volume is due to be published by Messrs. Heinemann in October and will be previously serialized in The Sunday Telegraph in September.

A Cumulative Index?

It will be followed by at least nine other volumes, four more of straight biography, with at least five companion volumes of documents and records. It is planned to publish them at the rate of one main volume together with its companion or companions each year. As regards the companion volumes, I have inspected the proofs of the first and can only say that, so far from being dry (as might be expected from a volume of archives), from the fact that it deals more fully with certain incidents and aspects and even scandals related in the biography, it is to anyone interested in those incidents and aspects even more exciting than its parallel volume. Each volume will carry its own index of course, but I rather gather that it has not yet been decided whether there shall be a final volume containing a cumulative index for the whole series. My view (for what it is worth) is that in the case of a valuable work of this nature, which is bound to be used as a work of reference for many, many years to come, such a cumulative index is indispensable.

The author has lavished and is lavishing such immense pains on his presentation of his father's Life that I feel certain that, when publication is complete in five years' time, the whole work will take its permanent place in literature as the standard and definitive biography of Sir Winston Churchill. This could be so, indeed, if only by reason of the vast amount of material to which the author has exclusive access.

Author's Co-operation

Before I come to describe the index itself I ought perhaps to mention that never can there have been an instance of more complete co-operation between the indexer and the author or his representatives, of whom I hope to say a word or two a little later. Mr. Randolph Churchill indeed took the greatest interest in the index and on three occasions invited me to stay at his home in East Bergholt, Suffolk, in order to discuss my methods and progress. These visits were most enjoyable. The house, in its beautifully kept grounds of 23 acres, is mainly eighteenth century but its fine central staircase dates from the reign of Charles II. Now East Bergholt was the birthplace of John Constable and where he did much of his painting—some even from the very house which is now Randolph Churchill's home, so that from almost any window one is confronted

* The substance of a talk given after the A.G.M. on May 19, 1966.
with an authentic Constable landscape. In this connection I would especially mention the famous 'Haywain at Flatford Mill'.

Here, amid an assemblage of stirring Churchilliana, the author has a regular team of research workers and secretaries helping to produce the biography, with the result that William Hardcastle, the B.B.C. announcer, speaking rather out of turn, referred to the place somewhat unkindly in a radio talk as 'the Churchill factory'.

The Galley Proofs

I found that compiling the index was on the whole fairly straightforward. None the less, certain problems presented themselves. In the first place, because of the time factor it was necessary to start my work from the galley proofs of the text. I must say a word about these particular galleys. All my hearers will be familiar with the drab, elongated, straggling strips of paper, tiresome to handle and temper-fraying to use, that normally pass for galley pulls. Imagine my delighted surprise at the actual form that the Churchill galleys took. The proofs consist of cunningly fastened loose-leaf pages, each only slightly longer than a page in the book, the pages are printed on good paper and have wide side, top and bottom margins and are bound together to give the impression of a paper-back, complete with the title inscribed in gilt lettering on the cover. All that was needed to complete the illusion would have been a tastefully decorated jacket!

They certainly proved a joy to read through and work from. When I tackled the author about the unusual elaborateness of the galley proofs, he explained that his father had always insisted on his proofs being submitted to him in just that form. It may sound as somewhat of an anticlimax if I add that when the galley proofs of my index arrived they consisted of the ordinary elongated straggling strips! Possibly, to round off my description of those wonderful text galley-proofs, I ought to mention that at the head of each page is the following formidable caution:

SECRET
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I have previously indexed books completely from their galley proofs and there is an account of two of my experiences in this connexion in The Indexer (Vol. III, pp. 90-2). As my hearers will appreciate, the process is rarely wholly satisfactory, while the whole job inevitably takes much longer when even merely started in this way.

In the present instance, after my typed headings and subheadings on the 5 x 3 cards I inserted the galley page numbers in pencil, and when the paged proofs eventually reached me, the actual page numbers were substituted in ink by a young lady assistant from a local public library, Miss Linda Warden, whose services had become necessary, again because of the time factor. This lady was later to prove extremely useful also in checking the accuracy of the page reference numbers in the index galley proofs.

Indexing Problems

But now a complication arose. A number of text additions and deletions having become necessary, fresh sets of galleys were issued with the resulting changes in galley page numbers. Similarly the paged proofs were not the final versions, since the foundry plate pulls contained several alterations, owing to important matter having been received at the last moment—one lady who had been indexed under her married name actually reverted to her maiden name between one page proof stage and the foundry pulls, I am bound to confess that ensuring that all these changes were duly reflected in the index became somewhat of a headache; some indeed were too late to be inserted on the cards and could only be made on the index proofs.

One problem that presented itself concerned the alphabetical arrangement of the Churchill family. It may not be universally
known that Sir Winston himself had a hyphenated surname and the ever rightfully punctilious Court Circular right up to the end of 1951 invariably referred to him as Winston Spencer-Churchill. But it is related how much he resented coming at the end of the school roll-call (or 'Bill', as it was named at Harrow) and in a letter he wrote to his father as early as 1888 he explained: 'I never write myself Spencer Churchill but always Winston S. Churchill'. In any case, since scarcely anyone would dream of looking for his name or those of his parents, Lord and Lady Randolph, under 'S', they were indexed under 'C'. For the meticulous-minded, however, cross referencing is provided in the entry under 'Spencer-Churchill'.

Another problem I had to face was how to treat the entry for the central character of the book, the subject of the biography. The other two chief characters, Winston's parents, Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill, I dealt with at some length and normally, except that I devoted a separate section (under the same main heading) to Lord Randolph's political career. But with Winston himself I was mindful of the words of wisdom and warning uttered by our President emeritus, Mr. G. V. Carey, when he addressed our Society in 1961 (The Indexer, Vol. II, pages 120-3). Taking an imaginary example of a Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Tarquinius Proudman, he showed how utterly unnecessary were most of the subheadings which would normally clutter up the several pages of index devoted to a synopsis of his entire career; the vast majority could be far more conveniently placed, and were more likely to be looked for, under appropriate separate entries.

Perhaps the outstanding example of the lengths to which an indexer can go in overloading the entry for the subject of his book is furnished by the American indexes to the well-known Boswell series. Under Boswell, James, we are treated in Boswell on the Grand Tour to 3½ pages of index; in Boswell's London Journal, to 4½ pages; and in Boswell in Holland to no fewer than 5½ pages (or eleven columns)!

In the carefully compiled index to Boswell in search of a wife it is not pretty to find as many as 38 references to Boswell's catching, escaping from, or being treated for, the pox. I suggest that these had better been relegated to an entry under the letter 'V'. With all this haystack piled up around the index-user's needles, he almost needs (as Mr. Carey pointed out in connexion with his 'Tarquiniius Proudman') an auxiliary index to find the object of his search.

In the case of Churchill, Winston Leonard Spencer, I felt that it would be wrong to omit the heading altogether. What I have done, therefore, is to limit the full-blown subheadings to Characteristics, Finances, Health, Hobbies and Political Interests. Under Education I simply cross-referenced to his schools and the various subjects he was taught, while under Military Career similarly to the regiments, places and campaigns in which he served. Or so I had planned. But my galley-proofs were edited by other hands and when the page-proofs arrived I found that the subjects, such as English, French, Latin, Mathematics, etc., had been deleted as separate entries and transferred to the Education subheading of Churchill, Winston Leonard Spencer.

For those of his works that are quoted or referred to in the text the reader is cross-referenced to the entries under their titles. Even with this limitation the complete entry for Winston Churchill occupies over two pages.

Fullness of Entries

As regards my entries generally, these will be found to be somewhat fuller than is common in today's practice. That is to say, I was not content with providing a mere list of proper names and subjects, but in nearly every case supplied either a brief description of the item forming the heading or else briefly what happened to him, her, or it, in the text. I will give a sample entry a little later, to show my meaning. In making these fuller entries I have reverted to some extent to the custom of former days. In Alexander Pope's
time, to study the index was regarded as a short cut to knowledge of a book's contents, as he shows and derides in his Dunciad:

How index-learning turns no student pale
Yet holds the eel of science by the tail

Not that I would claim that anyone could pass an examination on the early life of Sir Winston Churchill after reading my index. Nor would I approve the florid style of indexing adopted by William Prynne in his Histriomastix: the players scourge (1632). Let me quote one entry, yes one single heading (which I have actually abbreviated):

Women-Actors notorious whores . . . and dare then any Christian women be so more whorishly impudent as to act, to speake publiquely on a stage perchance in man's apparell and cut haire here proved sinful and abominable in the presence of sundry men and women? . . . O let such presidents of imprudence, of impiety be never heard of or suffered among Christians, 385.

This and similar breathless outbursts in the index were duly quoted by the Attorney General when Prynne was prosecuted in the Star Chamber and was sentenced to stand in the pillory and be deprived of both ears. Justly, some may think—not for the index's contents, but for its prolixity.

In the Preface to Winston S. Churchill, 1874-1965, it is stated that ‘the necessary details of rank and identification’ will be found ‘in the index’. Fulfilling this requirement necessitated supplying dates in most cases and other details not available in the text, and involved a good deal of research in encyclopedias and other works of reference and of telephoning public libraries, embassies, etc., etc. Let me give just one instance. When he was at his preparatory school, Winston twice wrote to his mother expressing a desire to see Buffalo Bill. I felt that the mere heading: ‘Buffalo Bill, 90 bis’ rather lacked point. Accordingly my entry runs:

Buffalo Bill (W. F. Cody, 1845-1917), WSC wants to see (1887), 90 bis

A somewhat unusual feature of this biography is that, at the author's suggestion, short biographies of the major characters who make their appearance are provided at the front of each volume. Their names in the index are printed in small capitals and the entries are correspondingly shortened, details being confined to those mentioned in the text proper. This is to be the standard practice throughout the five main volumes.

I am aware that it is unusual in an index to give a character's dates after his name, although it was successfully done in a previous work of Randolph Churchill’s, his Lord Derby, 'King of Lancashire' (1959), which was indexed by Mr. Michael Wace, a member of the Society's Council. I notice, moreover, that Mr. Michael Maclagan, whose own index to his Clemency Canning (1962) won the first award of the Wheatley Medal for an outstanding index, supplied the dates of death for most of his characters. I think that in historical works particularly, the practice is a useful one, although of course it involves more work for the indexer. In the present instance, however, I have most gratefully to acknowledge having received considerable help in obtaining these dates from two gentlemen who are acting as research advisers to the author and to whom I referred earlier as his representatives. These are Mr. Michael Wolff, the well-known editor of Crossbow, and Mr. Andrew Kerr, both of whom I am glad to welcome to this meeting.

Length of Index—Ratio to Text

But there was one rather unfortunate result of these fuller entries. They caused a serious miscalculation on my part as to the length of the index. My index cards (which, after being carefully edited, went to the printer in that form) totalled 1,656 and, judging from previous experiences, I estimated that these should produce about 40 pages, or at the most, 48 pages. Imagine my dismay when it was discovered that in fact they made 66 pages of index. What had happened was that in my previous indexes the majority of entries had consisted of single-line headings, whereas in the Churchill index
it is the exception to find an entry consisting of fewer than two lines. Now every indexer knows how disheartening it is to have to make substantial cuts in his or her index, and in this case it became necessary to cut four pages or eight whole columns. One of the first casualties had to be the very extensive list of acknowledgements. I am grateful for very substantial help in making these cuts from Mr. Wolff and Mr. Kerr, who also gave valuable assistance in correcting the proofs. It is my contention that proofs cannot be corrected too many times or by too many people, provided, of course, that the corrections are submitted to the original writer, who must remain the final authority. I am mindful of a late chief editor of Penguin Books, with whom I was acquainted. He was not only a fine indexer, but also had such a reputation as a proof-reader that it was said that scarcely a printed page (whether published or not) could be put in front of him in which he could not detect at least one error!

I must admit that in the matter of correcting my index galley proofs my mentors and I did not invariably see entirely eye to eye. I have already mentioned the instance of Winston’s education. There was also the controversy over the spelling of abbreviations. I always use a full stop after every abbreviation except where the last letter corresponds to that of the unabbreviated form, as in Dr, for instance. I did not mind so much seeing the stops disappear altogether in H.M.S., V.C., and A.D., and the letters being joined up into HMS, VC and AD, but did protest over the loss of the stop after ‘no.’ for number (as in No. 46, Grosvenor Square), because of the danger of its being mistaken in its naked form for the adjectival form of ‘no’. ‘House-rules (in this case, the East Bergholt house-rules) however, have to prevail and in this matter the indexer had to yield.

But to return to the length of the index. I do not consider that 62 pages of index—it is printed in 9 pt. type—to 550 pages of text is an excessive ratio. I am fortified by the fact that the modern tendency is towards long, comprehensive indexes to important works. For example, A. J. P. Taylor’s *English History, 1914-45*, published last year by the Oxford University Press, contains 78 pages of index to 601 pages of text, while Michael Maclagan’s biography that I mentioned just now has 35 to 370. The British Standard for the *Preparation of Indexes* (B.S. 3700: 1964) has an even greater ratio, $10^1$ to 21, but then that is only a pamphlet, and the index is printed in single column. Here are two other outstanding examples: John Askling’s index to *Statistics of deadly quarrels* by the late Dr. Lewis F. Richardson (Stevens & Sons, 1960) ran to 49 pages of index to 300 pages of text excluding bibliography, while Mrs. Alison Quinn’s index to the new C.U.P. edition of Hakluyt’s *Navigations*, which ran away with the recently awarded Wheatley Medal for last year, extends to 140 (three-columned) pages, making 420 columns, compared with 889 pages of text.

*Devices used*

It will be found, I think, that in the Churchill index, I have pulled out nearly every stop available to the indexer, including the open diapason of using bold type for page references for items to which more than a few lines are devoted in the text. Similarly I put page references in italics to denote illustrations or maps. I also use *bis* and (more occasionally) *ter* after a page reference to indicate that the subject is referred to quite separately twice or thrice respectively on the same page. I know that this practice is derided by some indexers as providing unnecessary spoon-feeding to the index user, who, it is contended, should always read through the whole of each page to which his attention is called in the index. But I do not agree. Having been caught myself, I know how easy it is, in the absence of a specific direction, to find one reference at the top (shall we say) of a given page and then, since this is not the object sought, hurry on to the next page indicated, finally giving up the quest in disgust, when all the time it was to be found lower down on the original page looked at.
All these devices are explained in preliminary notes at the top of the index, as recommended in the British Standard. But I have also made occasional use of another device which is somewhat frowned upon by the British Standard, chiefly because of its employment in the wrong sense. I allude to the word passim. '196-200 passim' should mean that the subject of the heading is referred to, not continuously (which would require plain '196-200'), but in scattered passages throughout those five pages. Used correctly in this way, the word can be responsible for a considerable saving in page reference numbers and is in this way useful.

My subheadings are run-on and are mainly in chronological order, even when this involves inverting the page number order. One innovation I did make. When there was a mass of subheadings, I divided them up into paragraphs. This gives them a more inviting appearance, for nothing (to my mind), is more distressingly tiresome in an index than unbroken blocks of subheadings, unless it be solid rows and rows of unbroken page reference numbers.

I have tried in this talk to give an idea of the methods I used in compiling this index, as also of some trials and tribulations while I was engaged in the exercise. I forgot to mention that at one period the indexer was carted off to hospital for an operation, so that for three weeks the 'Norman Knight factory' had to close down.

When I was asked to undertake the index to the Life of this great statesman, I considered it an exceptional honour and also somewhat of a challenge.

Whether I have been able to produce a really worthwhile index, useful to reader and reference hunter alike, and worthy of the book to which it is appended or whether it will prove merely an 'also-ran', time alone will show.

The lively discussion that developed after the talk mainly concerned the question of a cumulative index and whether this should include the companion volumes, or should these have a separate one.

**Who Pays for the Index?**

A triangular 'difference of opinion', which was recently brought to the notice of the Society of Indexers, should prove of interest to indexers, authors, publishers and literary agents.

A well-known London firm of literary agents, acting for an American publisher, arranged for the publication of one of the latter's titles in this country. The book contained no index, but the English publisher felt that it required one and wrote accordingly direct to the American author. The index was prepared and the book was published containing it.

When the first royalty statement was received from the English publisher it was found to contain a fairly considerable charge for the compilation of the index, offset against the money due to the author. On the author's demurring at the deduction, the English publisher stated that 'it is the invariable British practice for authors either to make the index themselves or to pay for it to be made'.* It should be mentioned that there was no reference to an index in either the English or the American contract.

The American author thereupon expressed his willingness to 'go along with British practice', but considered that 25 per cent. of the indexer's fee ought to be paid by the American publisher. The latter, however, at first denied liability, on the ground that no index had been authorized.

All the parties concerned continued completely friendly throughout the negotiations, which were ultimately settled with a compromise.

That seemingly innocent-looking little clause in the standard publishers' contract, under which the author agrees to supply an index if required by the publishers, is at present the subject of correspondence between the Society of Indexers and the Society of Authors.

G.N.K.

* We do not believe that this correctly represents British practice, holding that it only applies where there is a specific clause to that effect in the contract.