this style, even though now theoretically capable of varying it. Others may think differently, however. But it does mean that the title abbreviations, assuming that the stylistic features remain as they are at present, can be printed with the entry where required. On the other hand, it may be that they are preferred as a separate section. But a point I should like to stress is that the system is fairly flexible, and can possibly be adjusted to demands that may exist for various treatments of the collected card file. The demand, of course, has to be expressed to be considered.

The Society of Indexers as a Servant of the World of Letters*

G. V. Carey

At the close of a business meeting on a Saturday morning what most of you want, I'm quite sure, must be to get away as soon as possible, and not to be talked to by anybody—least of all by a last-minute substitute for someone really worth while. So I promise to be brief.

Since you did me the great honour of election to the presidency I've seldom attended Council meetings, in the belief that society presidents are expected to emerge only rarely from their proper place: which is the Shelf. But it happens that I did attend the last Council meeting, and I'm very glad I did; for the Council had decided that this, the seventh year of our Society's existence, was the right time for a reappraisal (though not an agonising one, it's to be hoped) of our progress and of our policy in general. I was thus able to be present at their first deliberation on this subject. Our talk, based on a thoughtful paper submitted by a wise and experienced member of our staff,** was purely exploratory; no decisions were taken; any conclusions reached hereafter will naturally be laid before you in due course. Meanwhile it would be premature and quite out of place for me now to attempt any detailed report of our discussion, but I think that I may be permitted just one, very general, reflection prompted by it.

The occurrence in the aforesaid paper of a warning against 'grandiose' notions was criticised by another wise and experienced member of the Council; and in so far as it was liable to misinterpretation in the particular context in which it appeared, it was perhaps open to criticism. Nevertheless 'grandiose' struck me at once as a very apt cautionary word that we, as a Society, should do well to keep at least at the back of our minds; for aren't we perhaps just occasionally tempted to forget that our part on the literary stage, essential though it be, is not and never can be a star part? (I'm referring of course to literary indexing only. The various forms of scientific indexing remain, I'm ashamed to say, in spite of the admirable expositions that we're privileged to hear or read from time to time, a profound mystery to me, and I'm inclined to regard all concerned with them as stars of the first order.)

Believe me, I'm not myself immune from this temptation—to think of our calling just a little more highly that we ought to think. The longing to create is common to nearly all of us, and some of you, I dare say, may have experienced something of the feeling that often comes to me on the completion of an index—the flush of pride, soon tempered by the thought: 'IF ONLY I could write a book, paint a picture, compose a song, de-

* Written by the then President from notes of his address given at the A.G.M., 1964.
** The then Secretary, E. Alan Baker.
sign a building, that will live after me. But no: my Creator has seen fit to let me create nothing better than an index. And, even so, nobody will ever know that it was I who created it—will never even have heard of me. Oh well, perhaps in the course of time quite a lot of people may use the thing; it's even just possible that one or two may be moved to say: 'Funny—this index seems to get me quite quickly on to exactly what I want'.

Isn't that verdict, even though it may never actually reach our ears, in itself the one thing that really matters? So then, if in the theatre of literature we can be thoroughly efficient and helpful door-keepers, dressers, property-men, backstage hands, let's not be too concerned about our names not appearing in lights.

The aims of our Society, as set out in our Constitution, are five in number. The first is: 'To improve the standard of indexing'; and—rightly, in my opinion—fifth and last comes: 'To raise the status of indexers'. Let us firmly resolve to keep first things first. We are already doing much to improve the standard of indexing; the Society is already more than justifying the faith and foresight of its founder, Norman Knight. Of that I'm certain. We can be equally certain that, in so far as we succeed in attaining Aim No. 1, assuredly Aim No. 5 will be added unto us.

On a lighter note I start the last lap. If you can bear with me a few minutes longer, I'd like to mention a couple of items of 'indexers' shop'.

The first arises out of a bloomer announced, and duly denounced, just as the Council meeting I've referred to was breaking up: in a recently published book there was reported to be an entry 'Morrison, W.S.' that referred in fact to Herbert (later Lord) Morrison. Though I didn't say so at the time, as we were all in a hurry to be off, I know a better—or, rather, a worse—instance of that kind; for, after all, the two Morrisons were contemporaries and in the same line of business, but my example hasn't even that excuse.

I bought each volume of Churchill's *The Second World War* as issued, and as soon as Vol. I was in my hands I turned at once to the index. Incidentally, the fact that this was immediately preceded by no less than two and a half pages of Errata seemed to prejudice that some of the backstage hands on that great work hadn't been up to their job. In the index itself almost the first entry that happened to catch my eye was:

**Boothby, Guy, 93n., 242**

My first reaction was: 'Now, what on earth can Churchill possibly have had to say, in relation to the Second World War, about Guy Boothby, an ephemeral writer of thrillers popular in the 1890s?' Then almost simultaneously came the deduction: 'Elementary, my dear Watson; obviously the references must be to Robert Boothby.' After which I looked up both contexts, and found that that of course was the answer. I further deduced, incidentally, that the compiler of that index must have been nearly as ancient as myself—again, 'Elementary, my dear Watson'; Guy Boothby died in 1905 and within a year or two was almost forgotten; at any rate nobody born later than about 1895 would instinctively associate with the surname Boothby the Christian name Guy.

The elderly indexer anyway earns no marks on that question.

My second and last point relates to a subject often discussed or written about; indeed we had an entertaining paper on it after a General Meeting only a year or two ago: 'Humour in indexing' (*The Indexer*, Vol. 3, pages 60-63). But whereas this is normally dealt with from two angles only—index entries that are themselves humorous (a) unintentionally, (b) intentionally—I'd like you to consider another facet of the subject that I've never yet seen or heard referred to: How far can or should a humorous context be indexed simply on the ground of its humour?* I apologise for an overdose, from now on, of the first person singular, but it's only from personal experience that I can illustrate exactly what I mean.

---

* This subject was dealt with by Mrs. E. M. Hatt in her talk on 'Humour in Indexing' on May 19, 1962 (*The Indexer*, Vol. 3, pages 60-63).—Editor.
More than ten years ago (1953, to be precise) I was indexing Noël Coward’s *Future Indefinite*, one of those light autobiographical works that are easiest of all to deal with, needing few entries other than names of persons and places. But in a description of the author’s stay in a Moscow hotel occurred the following passage:

I turned on the bath tap marked ‘Hot’ and was astonished to see a tadpole come out of it and vanish down the plughole. Later on... I spoke to the manager about it. I explained, as politely as I could, that although he might consider what I was saying to be alien propaganda, in England when we turned on a hot tap, as a general rule, hot water came out of it, whereas if on the other hand we wished for a hot tadpole, we turned on a tap marked ‘Hot Tadpole’ and, owing to the efficiency of our Capitalist State, a hot tadpole usually appeared. The manager received this gentle reprimand with the utmost courtesy.

Now, that made me laugh aloud (whereas, to tell the truth, I’d found some of the book rather tedious), and I said to myself, ‘I’m sure there must be lots of other people whose sense of humour isn’t very different from mine; and, what’s more, that some of them at some time or other might want—as I certainly should—to remind themselves of, or point out to others, that passage. Very well, then: into the index must go that tadpole’.

But that’s not quite the end of the story. Years later, in fact not much more than a year ago, at some party or other a lady, launching out spontaneously on the subject of books, asked me whether I’d ever happened to read a book of Noël Coward’s called *Future Indefinite*, and—believe it or not—almost before I had time to reply went on: ‘If so, I wonder whether you remember his absurd description of a tadpole incident—I particularly enjoyed it’. I could have embraced her there and then (she was in fact more than ordinarily attractive). Instead I exclaimed, ‘I’m eternally grateful to you for that bit of evidence that my life has not been wholly wasted. If ever you should pick up the book again and want to find that tadpole, you’ll be able to, in the index, under “Tadpole, encounter with a”. I know, because I put him there myself’.

Which brings me to my final point: namely the conviction that there are occasions when humour, as such, should be indexed. I hope you’ll agree with me.

Reviewing *Churchill and Beaverbrook* by Kenneth Young (Eyre & Spottiswoode) in *The Sunday Telegraph* on September 18, Kenneth Rose (‘Albany’) writes: ‘He [the author] also failed to persuade his publishers to provide an index worthy of the research and narrative skill that have gone into the volume. They should have looked at the long and excellent index provided by a rival firm for Lord Beaverbrook’s own *Men and power*.’ The latter book was published by Hutchinson in 1956.

‘The index of Allen Churchill’s story of *The Roosevelts* lists 106 different members of this famous clan, sprung from a 17th-century Dutch immigrant who hacked a farm out of the New Amsterdam wilderness.’

Kenneth Allsop evidently believes in taking an early look at the indexes of books he is reviewing. In his notice in *The Daily Telegraph* of April 14, 1966, of a new book published by Frederick Muller, the above forms the opening sentence.

‘The absence of an index in a book so full of references is lamentable.’—Kellow Chesney reviewing *Rogue’s progress* edited by John L. Bradley (Longmans, 30s.) in *The Observer* on August 28, 1966.

**CATALOGUE OF THE SOCIETY’S LIBRARY**

The Council at its last meeting decided to make a copy of the Catalogue of the Society’s Library available to all members who wish to borrow one. Based on the number of requests received, the Council will decide in what form to reproduce copies.