BOOK REVIEW


The Society of Indexers was founded to improve the standard of indexing and in the pursuit of this aim has, among other things, sponsored several courses for beginners in indexing. The present volume is the almost complete text of a recent course, the first publication in book form entirely on indexing by members of the society, edited appropriately enough by the founder of the society, G. Norman Knight, and appearing over the distinguished imprint of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

It may be questioned whether the publication of a particular course is better than that of a more definite work with the imprimatur of the society but at least the course has the interest of the variety of styles in the different contributions—some were edited from tape-recordings made at the time of delivery of the lecture while others are more formal and considered—and the stimulation of a legitimate diversity of opinions expressed in them.

After a useful introduction and a glossary of indexing terms there are two papers on the elements of book indexing by Mr. Collison. The first gives a little of the history of indexing and deals with general points and the second discusses the practice of indexing—size of cards and types of stationery, sorting of entries and so on. Then there is a full but concentrated account by the editor on alphabetical arrangement, followed by one by Brigadier Searight on forms of personal and place names, which is distinguished by the amount of information it gives on oriental personal names—information that it is not easy to come by in a single place elsewhere. (He might, though, have been more generous with European names: for instance modern Greek or Bulgarian, or those of married Dutch women.)

Mr. Langridge on subject headings emphasizes the importance of classification and perhaps, with this, understates the importance of the author's or authors' own choice of words. Further he recommends a preliminary examination of the material in order to draw up a rough list of the main categories into which the subjects will fall, but he does not sufficiently underline the value of published classification schemes in which most of the indexer's work has been done for him and done in a generally acceptable way, nor does he mention any by name or refer to any list of subject headings.

Mr. James Thornton, as might be expected from an indexer of his particular experience, has produced a masterly paper with a considerable distinction of style on the long literary index.

Mr. Ferriday gives a useful account of periodical indexing, bringing out the main points and describing some gruesome examples of bad indexing.

Dr. Holmstrom's and Mr. E. J. Coates's two papers on scientific and technical indexing are well thought out. Mr. John Thornton gives a practical paper on medical indexing. Mr. Hewitt on legal indexing more than confirms our gloomiest fears that 'the indexing of practitioners' law books is a highly specialised task' but gives a very clear account of the lines on which the indexer with the proper specialist knowledge compiles such indexes.

The editor (himself a specialist too!) very properly concludes the book with two papers on the editing of indexes and their preparation for the press and on the correction of index proofs, and with an index which is a model of a good index.

The reviewer, though, must record that when he was trying to find quickly the various opinions of the contributors on whether a book or other material should be read completely before indexing, failed to find this in the index until he chanced on it as a sub-heading of Book Indexing. However he remembers that a contributor in this book had also written that no index can satisfy everyone on every point! In short an interesting and valuable book, but at 75s. is it likely to be read as much as it deserves?

RICHARD BANCROFT.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Inclusion in this list does not preclude subsequent review.

Commercial and Industrial Records Storage by Robert L. Collison. Ernest Benn Ltd. 1969. 50s.
