WHY I AM AN INDEXER

Members of the Society of Indexers were invited to contribute.

RICHARD BANCROFT

About 13 years ago I discovered that I was spending more money than I was earning. I decided to try and make more money but I did not know how. I asked many of my colleagues for suggestions and also wrote to friends, particularly ones who appeared to have solved this problem successfully. Although people were sympathetic no one gave me an idea that would bear fruit. It was no exception to this that a colleague asked me to do an index for a burial register which he was editing for a local historical society, because this long-drawn out—it did not appear till 1962—and tiring work led to nothing else.

However, one day coming up in the lift at Covent Garden tube station I saw by chance an old acquaintance. In swapping news about what had happened since we had last met I told him I was looking for sparetime work. He replied that he was at that moment wondering who would do an index for a book his firm was publishing in a few weeks' time: would the job interest me?

I did this first index satisfactorily and over the next 6 years I did 10 more indexes for that publisher.

In the meantime I had seen a notice in the personal column of The Times calling a meeting of all interested in indexing—this was in fact Norman Knight's historic notice and the meeting was the founding meeting of the Society of Indexers. Through the Society I increased the number of publishers for whom I did indexes (and other jobs—semi-editorial, semi-research). I stuck to the humanities, but provided I could keep to that side of the river, I was always interested to extend my knowledge into welcoming though hitherto untrodden fields—for instance the antiquities of Jordan, or a life of Mme. de Genlis, or Egyptian gnostic books.

About three years ago I found my daily work had become so demanding in time and nervous energy that I could no longer undertake indexing in my dwindling spare time, although I still keep closely in touch with indexing by my work in the Society.

At first sight it probably looks like chance that I started indexing instead of, say, following an infallible system for the pools. But looking back I see how even in early youth I liked to set and keep things in order (some things—my parents or my sergeants in the army would probably speak less favourably about my tidiness) and how naturally I started to work in a great library and how I enjoyed it. So although it was chance that it was specifically indexing with which I earned some extra money for some years, it was not chance that it was work that involved putting order into the contents of books. By the way, the answer to the question which perhaps many would like answered but are too well-bred to ask, is that indexing did not immediately solve my balance of payments problem!

Miss R. D. COOLE

I became an indexer because the publisher for whom I worked in the inter-war years required it of me. In 1940, the Ministry of Food commissioned a cookery book from a well-known lady novelist and commissioned my employer to edit and print the book. The author was supposed to do the index but the manuscript she produced—she called it an index—was beyond repair even by our most skilled cobblers. Meanwhile the book had been set—the metal was standing—the
machine was idle. In despair, the Managing Director asked me if I would index the book afresh. He wanted the job done in a weekend but at least he offered a fee for it (in addition to my salary). Having edited (revised) dozens of indexes for this firm, I thought I could manage to do one myself. And apparently I could; for I accepted the job, did it in the time required, and there were no complaints afterwards.

The following year—1941—my life was drastically changed by the war. I left publishing, went abroad in 1942 and did not return permanently to London till 1955. Then, owing to a cancelled posting overseas, I found myself short of money—obliged to live on basic salary for the first time in thirteen years. So, with permission from my new employers, I contacted my old firm and was given a book on gardening to index—a nice, easy job because only an alphabetical list of proper names was needed.

Between 1956 and 1965 I did a good many indexes for various publishers, some of them for quite complicated and difficult books. Nowadays work is easy to procure but I no longer have the time, nor the energy, for anything much outside my regular job. Later on, after retirement, no doubt I shall recover my zest in indexing, provided I can face the chore of writing the cards (I do not type).

Most of the technical problems I encountered in indexing have been discussed at length in the Society of Indexers and many have been written up in The Indexer. There is no need to recapitulate them here. The best guide for beginners is British Standard 3700: 1964.

Although, the Society of Indexers has done much to alleviate it, loneliness—a sense of isolation—is the worst part of indexing. In my experience, publishers don’t want to be bothered with the questions that arise and a good many authors seem to take the index for granted. They want the job done but at the minimum of expense and trouble to themselves. The indexer has constantly to take decisions rather beyond his terms of reference yet he is also constantly at risk of being thought officious or domineering; or just a plain nuisance.

Settling the fee also presents a dilemma. If I ask a reasonable sum (settled in the light of the Society’s recommendations), the client is apt to feel the price is too high and I feel uncomfortable. If I ask less, I naturally feel exploited. The client, of course, always forgets the tax one has to pay. But there is also the fact that not all indexers are liable for the standard rate of income tax. These indexers can, and do, charge less and thus set a misleading example to publishers and authors.

In spite of these recurrent difficulties, in spite, also, of the sheer hard labour involved and of the discomfort of working under pressure, I do enjoy indexing. I enjoy it very much. But only once have I completed an index without wishing I could start all over again from the beginning. There is pleasure in the actual making of an index but not much satisfaction, as a rule, in the outcome.

BEDFORDIAN

After graduating from London University I decided to begin a career in librarianship. As I planned to marry soon after beginning work, I decided not to enter a library school, but to study for library qualifications in my spare time. After a short period working in the north of England, I was offered a post in the Archives and Local History Department of a London public library. This was a new field, as I did not have a history degree; but I had always been interested in the past, and found plenty of scope in the unexpected job. As well as answering enquiries and doing research for authors, much of the work involved the indexing of 18th century parochial committee minutes, prints and legal documents. I received much help from senior staff, and soon appreciated some of the problems of compiling an index. At the same time I was able to compare the merits of indexes to various books on the history of London. The indexes which I made were not printed, but produced on cards for the use of the department.
Bearing in mind that I should in due course give up full-time work in favour of domestic pre-occupations, I wrote to a number of London publishers, enquiring about the possibility of indexing on a free-lance basis. All these firms replied, saying that they would add my name to their list of indexers. With one exception I have heard no more from any of them. Some months later I received, from one of the publishers to whom I had written, a set of page proofs. The pagination of the American edition of this book, with its index, differed from that of the English edition, and I was asked to make the necessary alterations. When the book arrived I was away for a few days, and could not deal with it until I returned. Meanwhile I received a frantic letter from the publisher, asking when I could complete the work. Subsequent experience leads me to wonder why publishers do not forewarn that urgent work is about to come up; one could then make arrangements to fit in with their needs.

For the next ten years I thought very little about indexing, until I saw Mr. Knight's letter in the Library Association Record; I believe this was in June 1957. I felt at once that his idea of forming a Society of Indexers was an excellent one. The nature of this work is such that many of us would never meet each other or be able to discuss our interests and problems without the facilities which membership of the Society makes available to us. I became a founder member of the Society, and am very glad that I did so. Although I cannot attend many meetings, I read The Indexer with great interest and profit.

A little later, as a result of my membership of the Society, I received a request to tender for the compilation of a cumulative index to 40 volumes of the annual publication of a local history society. My tender was accepted, and after discussions with the Editor I began this task, which occupied four years. By contrast with my first publisher, I was not pressed unduly, and had time to consider the problems involved, and to make amendments in the light of experience as the index progressed. When preparing the volume for the press, I attended Mr. Knight's lecture on proof-reading, which was part of a course held at the North-Western Polytechnic, and found it very useful. Since completing the large index, I have continued to index the annual volume of the same society, and have made several indexes to handlists published by the local Record Office. Thus I was able to get back into action gradually, and had a substantial piece of work to quote when seeking further commissions.

When I had almost completed the cumulative index, I was invited to tender for a long-term government contract. It was very difficult to arrive at a figure for this work, and I have found, since undertaking the regular production of a large index, that there is a rather small profit margin for the amount of time, trouble and responsibility involved. However, this work does provide regular employment and income, and I am also able to estimate my commitments in advance. The great advantage to me, as a working mother, is that I am available in family crises, since the work can, if necessary, be done at night or at week-ends. There is not the artistic satisfaction of producing a carefully constructed index, since most headings and cross-references are already established. On the other hand, there is a challenge to complete the assignment within a fairly tight time schedule, and to keep the various parts (typing, checking, proof-reading, etc.) moving smoothly.

Recently I have had the opportunity to undertake, as a part-time venture, some work at the University in my local town. This is the English section of a repertory being compiled in Turin, containing details of all MSS relating to Italy, whether in Italian or not, which are to be found in a number of major countries. This has called for visits to museums, such as the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, etc., and also much correspondence with County Record Offices and other Repositories.

After the somewhat mechanical nature of my government contract, this is a stimulat-
ing experience. I was appointed on the strength of my experience in librarianship and indexing, together with a knowledge of Italian which I had acquired because the country and its language interest me. I suppose that all indexers who operate in the field of arts subjects would agree with me that wide interests are a great help in our work, while conversely one is continually learning from the books on which one is engaged.

I cannot expect to earn princely sums from working as an indexer. However, the possibility of arranging one's work to suit home circumstances is a great advantage.

Membership of the Society of Indexers gives one a sense of corporate existence which would otherwise be entirely lacking, together with a chance to meet other solitary workers from time to time. When one has to consult a book with no index, one's appreciation of the great usefulness of our work is increased, and one returns with greater enthusiasm to the task in hand.

H.R.

My career as an indexer began quite suddenly, almost arbitrarily, one summer early in our married life, when we were encumbered with financial problems and I was desperately trying to find a way of earning money at home, since I had a young child to care for and could not go out to work. A sympathetic friend, hearing of my troubles, at once said that the publishers with whom she worked were looking for someone to index a history of the Indian Army in wartime which was to appear the following year: why shouldn't I take on the job? Horrified, I declared that I couldn't possibly do any such thing, I knew nothing about indexing! 'Nonsense!' my friend replied, 'of course you could—it's only a matter of ordinary intelligence . . .'.

Of intelligence, yes, but also of concentration, application, dedication, and in my case of earnest supplication to the patron saint of indexers, whoever he may be, since after a brisk interview with the publishers concerned I found myself landed with the commission in spite of my inexperience—they must have been desperate too! Somehow the index got finished, my second child was born (a girl, but full of fighting spirit, as befitting one exposed to such heroic prenatal influences), I received my welcome fee and also, in due course, a copy of the book with a handsome dedication from the famous author.

Thereafter I didn't look back; I received further commissions from the same publishers, then from others. Eventually I found myself working principally for Catholic firms who publish not only religious works but books of general literary interest; biographies of saints and of historical figures were my favourites and by far the easiest, though, with brash temerity, I also indexed various theological writings, praying to be preserved from heresy as I did so—perhaps it is a good thing that indexers remain anonymous!*

Regarding fees, I usually found it best to assess the book as a whole and then to reach a friendly and fair agreement with the publishers, who have been almost invariably pleasant and agreeable to deal with. When necessary I have invoked the support of the Society of Indexers, of whom I am a Founder Member, and this has been a great help.

I have always tried to resist being rushed, because of domestic commitments; nevertheless many an index was finished late at night, with my husband's kind help in checking the entries and assembling the pages.

The Society has also been of valuable assistance in introducing me to publishers and recommending me; I have greatly appreciated this and have also enjoyed the Annual Meeting and social gathering, though I am not able to attend many of the other meetings.

My active indexing career lasted for about twelve years or so, after which I became involved in translating, which took up all available time, so that I had to refuse commissions for indexes, and by degrees these

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* Not necessarily, see The wonderful Orwell Index. Editor.
have naturally fallen off. However, I look back on my indexing years with gratitude and satisfaction; they were full of varied interest and fascination, for by great good luck not a single dull book has come my way. The patron saint of indexers has done me proud—may he continue to watch over us all!

HAZEL BELL

Devious are the paths by which one comes to indexing. I first heard of it as a profession when working for the printers who produced stationery and notices for the Society of Indexers—perhaps not a very fruitful field of recruitment. It was many months later, having given up outside work to produce two sons, that I began to feel that some form of skilled, commissioned work to be done at home, in those hours when son (a) was at nursery school and son (b) asleep, was necessary, both financially and to preserve my tenuous grip on sanity and the world outside. At the same time I saw reports in the papers of the new agencies which were being set up to provide part-time work at home for women in my position, anxious to continue exercising their professional skills at home while bringing up families. One of the types of work mentioned was indexing. To a compulsive list-maker, cross-word puzzle addict, and tracer of single themes through literary works, this seemed mentally tailor-made. I remembered those Society of Indexers’ invitations I had chased through the printing works, and to find out more, wrote to the Society.

I received a most helpful letter from the late Alan Baker. Following his advice, I read my way through the four prescribed books, completing the exercises, then prepared my own index to a book without looking at the published version, and compared the two. Greatly emboldened by finding that the few discrepancies were all in my favour, I decided to prepare another index, this time to a book which lacked one; this would be both for further practice, and to be a work sample to submit to publishers. For the purpose I selected John Livingstone Lowes’ Geoffrey Chaucer, as being (a) my own copy—I could mark it freely; (b) fairly short; (c) very familiar to me, both itself and its subject matter, from University Eng. Lit. days; (d) interesting and entertaining enough to stand repeated close study; (e) frankly in need of an index—the publishers might even make me an offer for it for a possible reprint!

They didn’t do that, but I was extraordinarily lucky, as I know, having since tried the same procedure with other publishers, winning never more than a polite letter. In this case, however, the editor who replied to my letter offering my services for indexing had just been asked by a friend for the name of an indexer for one of her own books, and mentioned me to her. She gave me the book to index, and I was in; had broken the vicious circle of ‘no work without previous experience; experience to be gained only by work’. After this, I was able to write to the Women’s Home-work agencies, saying that I had had one index published, and from these sources I have received a great deal of work, compiling in all 50 indexes so far over the past four years. (Not one Job has come through the Panel of the Society of Indexers.)

Indexing at home with two (now three) small children does of course have its own problems. The worst moments are when publishers or authors telephone while the baby is actually crying on my lap, or visiting children are playing an uproarious game which I cannot inaudibly subdue—my own are well telephone-trained. Not fiddling with Mummy’s cards holds more weight for them than any of the ten commandments.

The chief problems, however, come from publishers. There are three precious hours every morning when the two boys are both at school, and it is during these that I mean to do all free-lance work, sternly leaving washing up, beds and dust till the nursery school child comes home; these can be done while answering childish prattle—indexing cannot. However, the schedules on which indexes are sent rarely allow only three hours a day, and evenings, being devoted to
them, and they overflow into the rest of the day. Here the stage of work being done affects amalgamation with general domestic pursuits. The actual writing of cards demands absolute concentration and quiet.

I do resent the time taken out of the first two days to read and re-read the book. I find familiarity with it, and its subject, the greatest asset there can be, and if galley proofs could be sent in advance, just for reading again and again (not preliminary card making, which people often assume you want advance copies for), the actual indexing could be begun far more quickly and efficiently when page proofs do arrive. Where time has seemed so short as to make pre-reading a luxury, I have occasionally started making out cards before reading right through the book, but it has always led to trouble and revision. Publishers do not appreciate the need for familiarity with the book you are working on. I was once asked to complete the index to a biography which the author had started himself, and abandoned at page 91. I was sent his cards, and the proofs—from page 91 on!

As a professional filler of three hours a day, indexing has not proved a good choice for me—but only because of the tightness of publishers’ schedules, and lack of forethought in not allowing advance reading of books to be indexed. As a provider of precise, academic, quiet and fascinating work, it makes a splendid antidote to the hectic and mostly mindless whirl of housework and child-rearing. It divides my life into spates of frantic, head-down-whenever-possible, totally committed time, usually of two weeks’ duration, when all invitations are refused, meetings not attended, dust collects and children play alone; and periods in between when it feels like a holiday to fall on neglected domestic duties. At least there is no monotony. The close, repeated and detailed study of the books I have worked on, especially when tracing important subject headings or major characters through, has led to my knowing each one more closely than those I studied for that Honours degree, giving me several tiny areas of intensive knowledge. The next question is—how to utilise these?

KATHLEEN BINNS

Many's the time I reverse the order of the words of the symposium's title to ask myself the question. And sometimes I can find no good reason and yet—never to index another book? As a comparative newcomer to the art I have not yet had the test of indexing a 'real' book in the sense of one having a fairly long index. Perhaps when I do I shall find the answer.

It was at the suggestion of a friend that I first became interested in indexing. She (who had never indexed a book anyway) made it all sound so simple, implying that it could so easily be done at home while one's children are dependent, as an alternative to part-time work. The suggestion coincided with the announcement of an impending Society of Indexers' course, so I decided to learn a bit more about it first. After many years' experience of cataloguing I felt I might just be able to cope with indexing—after five days' lectures I came away convinced that if there was one thing worse than being a cataloguer it was being an indexer!

For some months thereafter I did nothing more about indexing because I could see no way of overcoming the initial difficulties of getting started. And then a friend with publishing connections wrote to a few publishers on my behalf and two of them were kind enough to write to me, but, having no experience to offer, I was not surprised when no work was forthcoming.

Months later, right out of the blue, a third publisher telephoned and asked if I could do an index. Just like that! I stammered that I had never done one before and were they really prepared to take me on trust. Oh, yes, was the reply, this is quite simple, and a book on home economics was mentioned—something I felt I knew all too much about. The 'brief' was impossible, and I spent three miserable days until the publisher realised it too and revised the instructions. Nevertheless I agonised over that index, and twenty indexes later I still have
panic butterflies until I get the 'feel' of an index. Subsequently I have worked for the other two publishers, in each case on 'dirty' jobs, i.e. filling in the page numbers to an author's index which has been no index at all. One of the editors, realising that the job was not a fair one to ask anyone to do, later made handsome amends, but I am amazed that publishers will keep their authors 'happy' at such cost to their own, and the author's and the book's reputation.

Having quickly realised that one hardly indexes because the money is so good, it was difficult to see why the bug began to bite. Although I do not really like working under pressure, there now seems to be something lacking after a few weeks without an index in hand. The work is very satisfying—it is somehow 'yours'. You make your own rules for each book and the artificial restriction of space is the only really irritating thing. The feeling of involvement is pleasant too, particularly on those odd occasions when one finds a statement which one knows to be inaccurate, and by telling the editor one can make a real contribution. I have not yet specialised and I find that a book I am asked to index will often lead me to an interest in a subject which might not otherwise have attracted me, and one's range is continually being extended. Indexing apart, I find I am now reading more than I used to do.

A slightly irritating thing is being asked to do a book at some future date—publishers rarely get their proofs to one when they say they will, but are noticeably impatient for results. Recently this has worked out fairly well for me, as it happens—a book expected in December has arrived in October and one due in September has been put back to December; but advance bookings do put one in a quandary when faced with an urgent telephone request, and one can turn work down which could have been fitted in easily if one knew that publishers' schedules had been delayed.

The question of fees is particularly delicate for a beginner. I have found a predetermined fee both favourable and unfavourable, although in the former case I have worked just as hard at cutting as at compiling the index. When the question of fee is left to me I find it difficult to know what is a reasonable amount to charge, having regard to the work in question and to the prospect of getting further work from the same source. Rates when fixed by the publisher do vary considerably.

One thing worries me and that is the feeling I have when I have sent off my copy and have nothing else in view. What if I am never asked to do another index? Free-lance work of this type suits me very well, but building up satisfactory connections, so that an even flow of work is assured, is very difficult. How many publishers is it reasonable to approach? Every now and then I write to a few more offering my services. Some have replied that they have a large panel already, some will put my name on their files or circulate their editors, and some do not even bother to use my stamped addressed envelope.

On the whole I have been treated very kindly and though the books have been comparatively small, nearly all have interested me and each one teaches me a little more about indexing.

MICHAEL WACE

Although the editor has been good enough to offer some suggestions for ways in which one might approach this topic, I have found it difficult to keep to them when considering what to write. Why have I indexed books?

A desire for hidden influence, perhaps? The anonymous work of the indexer—whether through omissions or commissions—can suggest an inference that may not coincide with the author's intentions and yet not misreport the text. In this way, it is possible for him to be an effective influence on the reader without the reader being aware of it. Macaulay (himself an indexer at the early age of 15) understood the point when he wrote to his publisher, 'Let no Tory make the index to my History.'

The very anonymity of the index may tempt the compiler to use it as a vehicle for one or two ideas of his own. I can recall

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seeing the proof of an index to a book that contained numerous references to Sir Winston Churchill. Under the main entry for Churchill appeared the unlikely sub-entry 'a pacifist?'. The book dwelt at some length on the period of the first World War and the textual reference was to a reported remark of Churchill's, in connection with a parliamentary Bill on conscription, that he would not help to conscript men in order for them to be slaughtered in France. A permissible entry perhaps—but the author deleted it in the proof.

On occasion, it may be the author who wishes to use the index, to make the reader aware of a particular point, that for some reason he does not want to make explicit in the text. I once indexed a book that mentioned a fairly eminent politician (let us call him John Smith) who happened to be German by birth (he was christened, say, Johann Schmidt); a fact that he did not like to be known (the period was the earlier part of this century). He had made many enemies during his lifetime and the author of the book was one. Although the author made no reference in the text to the original nationality of Smith he used the index for a minor stab at his enemy by insisting that the entry read 'Smith, John b Schmidt, Johann' and with a cross-reference from 'Schmidt'.

But possibly one's reasons for becoming an indexer are rather more noble. Might it be in order to acquire knowledge? You may think that indexing is a rather laborious, and indirect, way of achieving this but I suppose that, through our work, many of us have read books that we would not otherwise have seen—indeed, we might have even doubted their existence. Who, for example, would have thought that a book exists on the sturgeon fish-hooks of the lower Danube or on the ethno-botany of pre-Colombian Peru? For my sins—or rather, my fee—I have had to read 1,500 pages of small and close-set type in order to compile the index for a yearbook that contains essential facts about every country in the world. For a time, I knew whether Ulan Bator or Ulan Ude was the capital of Mongolia or whether the Comoro Archipelago was an overseas department or an overseas territory of the French Community, but the knowledge is no longer with me. However, it is probably as well that most of us do not remember all that we have read in the course of duty. A person who is at once knowledgeable about training puppies, the Vorticist movement in modern art and the military campaigns of Charles XII of Sweden would be rather unbearable—like Themistocles who, it is said, could call by name each of the 20,000 citizens of Athens, or Dr. Sanderson, Bishop of Lincoln, who could recite all the odes of Horace, all Tully's Offices and much of Juvenal 'without book'.

The knowledge of others is the raw material of our work, and even if we do not wish to acquire it for ourselves, we do try to impose a pattern upon it. Perhaps this challenge to our ingenuity is the reason for becoming an indexer, although few of us would be as ambitious as a Mr. Ramsay who, it is stated, in the first annual report (1879) of the Index Society, had a plan 'to analyse and systematise the contents of all books on some general principles'. It is not reported whether he succeeded.

Although we may grumble at the parsimony of those who commission us I suspect that in the final, Marxian, analysis the reason for becoming an indexer is the obvious one: money.

F. T. DUNN

When I became a full-time free-lance proof reader and sub-editor after several years' experience in publishers' editorial departments, indexing did not occur to me as a possibility, although of course as an editorial assistant I was fully conversant with its problems and principles.

However, indexing jobs were offered me as a by-product of my normal free-lance work, and over the years this has snowballed until now I do probably more indexing than proof-reading. My publishing background has naturally given me the advantage of contacts which other indexers may have had
to build up laboriously, and personal recommendation plays a great part. (Not only from publishers. Authors too, impressed by an index to another author’s book, will take the trouble to find out the indexer and urge that their own index be entrusted to him. This has led to some very pleasant personal contacts—the most learned and scholarly authors proving always the most unassuming and grateful.) The Society of Indexers’ panel has led to some valuable introductions, and altogether—with half a dozen major firms employing me—I rarely have to seek work, though always ready to accept more.

It is of course the long, substantial index that provides challenge and—I think I can use the word—excitement, demanding considerable thought in deciding scale and depth, what categories to include, and how to organize the main entries, sub-sections and so forth; demanding also a wide general knowledge and an extensive personal reference library.

With long, closely packed books, especially biographies and historical and political works, my method is to divide the text into categories—personal names; places; publications; organizations and groups; abstract ideas and themes—and to index each category separately, with a final round-up to include miscellaneous items before co-ordinating the whole. This does mean going through the book several times in succession, but I find this much easier than trying to index everything straight through and having to adapt oneself to perhaps several types of entry on one page, especially when one reference may continue for several pages. I find it better, too, to concentrate on and ‘break down’ abstract subjects separately—if only because a different attitude of mind is called for. This method also means that one needs to have only one type of reference book out at a time; it all makes for a tidier desk.

Occasionally I have tried the possible short cut of merely listing page references to begin with, underlining those which are to be extended later; but this is really no time-saver, and it is easier and wiser to detail entries as one comes to them, with the context fresh in one’s mind.

Time is of course the great problem, since the index, being the last item, is usually wanted in a frantic hurry; and any time saved by doing preliminary work on galleys is nullified by the complication of later adapting galley numbers to page. Printers do not help with their growing reluctance to supply correctly imposed signatures from which to work; instead, one is expected to handle an unwieldy mass of page-on-galley proofs. For greater ease I cut these up into separate pages—and for a recent 700-page book this manual work alone took almost a day, still leaving me with a pile of loose pages easy to misplace.

To this unprofitable time at the beginning must be added similar time at the end in turning the cards into neatly typed copy. This can often take two or three days, and since I am not married I have no willing unpaid helper to whom this could be delegated. I always try to provide copy which will need little or no editorial attention from the publisher, and therefore I follow each house style as far as possible—giving page references, for instance, variously as 111-2, 111-12, or 111-112 (remembering too that even the use of that second comma in listing three items can vary).

To sum up, I continue indexing because it helps to earn me a living. Luckily, I also enjoy it. I enjoy indexing books on subjects of special interest to me, because then I find it much easier to judge the relative importance of each item and am more alert to discrepancies and errors in the text. I enjoy the detective work of tracking down people mentioned only by surname or nickname or who undergo changes of name or title in their climb up the ladder. I enjoy seeing a long index taking on a definite shape and even a character of its own.

And very occasionally I enjoy the leap from anonymity when a grateful author names me in his acknowledgments. But not nearly often enough.