THE WHEATLEY MEDAL*

NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR INVITING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Library Association Wheatley Medal is awarded annually for an outstanding index published in the United Kingdom during the preceding year. At present recommendations are invited from members of the Library Association and from the Society of Indexers, but the number of recommendations made has been so small in comparison with the number of books which might justifiably have been recommended that it is felt that the medal might be losing its value. A methodical system must therefore be devised to replace the haphazard invitation of recommendations so that the public may know that the award has been given to the best, or at least to one of the best, indexes published in the period covered, and not merely to an outstanding index chosen from the few that chanced to have been submitted.

As a first step, it is proposed that, as from the 1970 award, a select group of the larger public libraries, university libraries and special libraries (35 in all) will be invited to submit two outstanding indexes each in their own specific subject fields. It is hoped that by the careful allocation of subject areas the whole field of knowledge will be covered.

As indexes are often difficult to judge accurately at first sight, the field to be judged in any one year will include publications of the three preceding years, e.g. 1970 award would cover publications of 1968, 1969 and 1970. Recommenders will be asked to give a concise account of their reasons for recommending the index and may include indexes already submitted, if within the three-year period. Where two indexes seem equally outstanding, the panel may exceptionally recommend a double award. Recommendations from other persons, including publishers, may also be submitted and will be considered.

All recommendations will be made on a form available from the Library Association. This will set out notes for guidance and a list of special criteria which should be satisfied.

Recommendations should be sent not later than 15th February, 1971, to the Editor of Publications of the Library Association. The list of recommendations will then be circulated to the members of a small panel nominated jointly by the Society of Indexers and the Cataloguing and Indexing Group of the Library Association who will be responsible for preliminary judging and recommendation. The final decision will be subject to confirmation by the Chairman of the Library Association Publications Committee, and no announcement will be made until this confirmation has been received.

REVISED CONDITIONS OF THE AWARD

(a) The award to be called the Wheatley Medal and to take the form of a gold-plated medal with suitable inscription.

(b) Indexes published in the United Kingdom during the preceding three years, i.e. 1968, 1969 and 1970, to be eligible; printed indexes of any type of publication may be submitted for consideration.

(c) The index must include all headings that common sense would expect, and scholarship need to find in an index.

(d) The index must be the best possible for the work of which it forms part, and attention will be paid to features novel to standard indexing which serve a useful purpose.

(e) Recommendations for indexes to be entered for the award are invited from members of the Library Association and of the Society of Indexers, publishers and others. A number of selected libraries will be invited to submit indexes in their special subject fields. All recommendations will be submitted on a form available from the Library Association. This will include notes for guidance and a list of criteria which should be satisfied.

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The recommendation on the award to be made by a panel consisting of three representatives of the Library Association Cataloguing and Indexing Group, and three representatives of the Society of Indexers, with power to co-opt. The final decision will be subject to confirmation by the Chairman of the Library Association Publications Committee.


SCOTLAND YARD’S ‘GIRL-FRIEND INDEX’ HELPS TO TRACK ‘GREAT TRAIN ROBBERS’

In 1964 The Indexer (Vol. 4, pp. 41-7) published an attractive, first-hand account of Scotland Yard’s Fingerprint Index by the officer in charge of it.

Other indexes as well, of course, are kept at ‘the Yard’, and there is a fascinating description in The People of 26 April of how two of them, the Nicknames Index and the Girl-Friend Index revealed the identities of some of the perpetrators of the ‘Great Train Robbery’ seven years ago. It is from the pen of Ernest Millen, ex-Deputy Assistant Commissioner of Police, who was in supreme charge of the hunt.

At a time when there was scarcely a clue, an informer who was already in prison on another charge, hoped to lighten his own term by ‘squealing’; his only stipulation was that his name must never be disclosed. Accordingly, heavily disguised, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Millen and Commander George Hatherill paid a nocturnal visit to the prison for an interview.

The following is an extract from The People* of 26 April, 1970:

‘Much of his information was sketchy and uncertain at first. To anyone but a detective it might have seemed useless.

‘He was terribly vague about names. In fact it was far more useful when he could reveal a nickname. Then we really had something.

‘A nickname is a far stronger lead to a villain than a real name, which villains change regularly.

‘But the nicknames they earn in the underworld stick with them.

‘And a nickname can take us to one of the most valuable sources of information at the Yard. There, in Criminal Records, is an index that has traced many a villain across the world—the Nickname Index.

‘Once we have been told a villain’s nickname we can find in the Index his Criminal Records Number, his real name, all his aliases and the kind of crimes in which he specialises.

‘We have another index just as valuable—the Girl-Friend Index.

‘Our informer at the prison found himself quite unable to tell us the name or the nickname of one of the suspected Train Robbers, nor could he even describe him.

‘But he could tell us the name of the girl the man went around with.

‘A check in the Girl-Friend Index quickly told us the names of the men that girl associated with. From that list we could extract the one most likely to have been at Sears Crossing in Buckinghamshire on the night of the Great Train Robbery.

‘So it went on. Bit by bit, name by name, we were getting what we had hoped.’

G.N.K.

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