BOOK REVIEWS

The language of British industry, by Peter Wright.
With map and two illustrations. 1974. MacMillan, 10 x, 206pp., £4.95.

"I am not so lost in lexicography," wrote Dr. Johnson in the Preface to his English dictionary (1755), "as to forget that words are the daughters of earth and that things are the sons of heaven".

The words that are dealt with in Peter Wright's handbook, scarcely one of which could have found its way into Samuel's pioneering effort, are very much the daughters of earth, since they form the jargon and slang, the local dialects, the vulgar language, abbreviations, as well as the technical terms employed by the actual craftsmen in industry—a relatively untapped area of language study.

The book's sections comprise: Origins and Developments; Characteristics; Social Context; Can it be Understood?; Selected Industries. Of what use, it may be asked, is all this to the indexer? Well, an indexer engaged upon a work on, say, electronics may light upon the term 'fritch', which he does not understand, but on turning to The language of British industry he or she will find it explained as a simplification of a frequency responsive switch. Similarly, in other branches of industry, what is the indexer to understand by such terms in the text as: cuddly-wifted, pow-fagged, clemmed, possing? What does a bonksman do? All those matters are explained in the pages of this book.

The book contains an ordinary general index, which is adequate enough. But there are no entries for the very many delightful expressions sampled above, and I should have preferred to see it supplemented by a glossarial index for them, containing in addition to the term itself, its meaning and derivation, the industry involved and, of course, the page reference. But then a reviewer's task is to concentrate on the material before him rather than to speculate upon how it might have been better written.

I read with dismay the frightening prophecy (quoted on page 153) of a Canadian Professor, Marshall McLuhan, who foresees a future of a languageless, completely computerized existence.

The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be... to by-pass languages in favour of a general cosmic consciousness... paralleled by the condition of speechlessness that could confer a perpetuity of collective harmony and peace.

What! a wordless world? Thank heavens, I shall not be in existence when those "Pentecostal" days arrive.

If indexes continue to exist then, presumably their entries will consist of a series of symbols, somewhat in the manner of this one:

\[ \frac{\sqrt[3]{z^2 + z}}{\frac{2(z - 1)}{419}} \]

Goodness knows how, in the absence of words, their order will be arranged. Possibly "cosmic consciousness" will look after that.

Meanwhile, Professor McLuhan is still forced to propagate his nonsense through the use of words.

G.N.K.


This particular volume is a fifth larger than the third edition. Particulars are presented concerning associations of every kind, and the information is given very succinctly by means of using abbreviations against symbols representing address, type of organization and sphere of interest, membership data, activities and publications. An introduction setting out the scope of the publication, its basis of compilation, arrangement and alphabetisation, and form of entry, as well as the list of abbreviations used, all enable one to obtain the specific information needed very rapidly and easily. Moreover it enables far more entries to be presented in a given space than would be possible by traditional methods.

More information is given about Irish associations than in previous editions, due to collaboration with the Institute of Public Administration in Dublin.

The main sequence of entries is followed by an Abbreviations Index and an extensive Subject Index.

This is one of a number of directories published by this firm relating to administrative, cultural and business organizations in Europe and overseas as well as in Britain.

L.M.H.


This is an essential reference book for every librarian and indexer. It includes, as one would expect nowadays, acronyms (also in European languages with English translations) and degrees; abbreviations for common words; for phrases (e.g. f.a.c. fast as can; b.s.d. for barrels per steam day (U.S.A.)); but there are also abbreviations for words in foreign languages, with translations; for scientific terms (e.g. im. hr. lumen hour (phys.)); for signs and symbols; for motor vehicle and boat registration areas, etc.

This is a really comprehensive collection of 45,000 entries assembled over three years. There are a few inconsistencies, e.g. whereas W.V.S. and R.W.V.S. each has an entry, although the note 'now R.B.L.' is given at B.L., there is no entry at R.B.L.; L. for Latin as is usual before a latin word or phrase does not precede deleatur against the delete sign.

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I noticed one omission: F.I.Inf.Sc.

The writing of the entries, their filing arrangement and the proof reading needed extraordinary care, patience and accuracy; to take one example, chosen at random, there are eight different entries (covering twenty-three meanings) for abbreviations consisting of the two letters fl, as follows: fl; Fl; fl.; fl.; F.l.; fl.; F.; F.L.;

L.M.H.


This book is based on the translation of the original German text, which was reviewed in The Indexer 5 (4), p.205; this edition follows the same pattern as the earlier one but it has been considerably revised and updated; in fact chapters 10 and 12 have been almost entirely rewritten. Several chapters deal with the documentation aspects of information retrieval systems.

Incidentally, the publisher has given cataloguers a little problem by referring to this edition on the jacket but not on the title-page, as the second.

L.M.H.


In a paper on David Ricardo, the famous English economist (1772-1823), delivered to the Jewish Historical Society of England in April, 1972 (and to be published in that Society's Transactions), Professor A. Heertje, of the University of Amsterdam, comments: "Ricardo was a far better thinker than writer on economics", and adds a note on James Mill's letter to Ricardo of 22 December 1815 in which Mill says: "For as you are already the best thinker on political economy, I am resolved you shall also be the best writer". This letter is quoted in Vol. VI of The works and correspondence, of which this Index volume is the last.

To an indexer, the word "thinker" applied with such emphasis to the subject of a book is a warning signal—and when the book extends to over ten volumes (Vol. XI, the Index, also contains additional material and notes to the extent of 24 pages out of a total of 138 pages), the warning becomes almost volcanic. For it means that one is bound to be faced, among other things, with a mass of theory to reduce to potential main concepts for the index.

That the editor and sponsors of this formidably intellectual and important set of volumes were anxiously aware of the difficulties is explicit in the Prefatory Note by Mr. Sraffa to this index, which I quote in full:

"This much delayed Index completes the edition of Ricardo's Works. Of the previous attempts at making an index only one, sketched out with the help of Professor A. Heertje, proved useful for the final version. For the rest I am indebted to Mrs. Barbara Lowe, who returned to Cambridge to help complete the work begun many years ago".

"Much delayed" and "many years ago" will, I think, be better understood when it is explained that Volumes I-X were published in 1951-1955.

In the light of these circumstances, it would seem almost churlish to voice any criticisms. The system adopted for sections of the index, from a technical point of view, is not too apparent. The economic concepts into which David Ricardo and other famous founding economists, from Adam Smith onwards, delved are adequately deployed, as one would expect. But one cannot move easily among them, as one must hope for in an index. This, it must in fairness be admitted, is not peculiar to this index. It is perhaps appropriate to quote a comment in an article by Israel Shenker in The Times in January this year on the publication of the new form of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The chairman of the board of editors of the new version, Mr. Robert Hutchins, says Mr. Shenker, remarked of the previous Britannica, "...The index enables you to hunt but often not to find." So it seems to me here, and I speak from both sides of the fence, as indexer and researcher.

I admit I am now riding a hobby-horse. A good index is a beautiful, even exciting thing for an indexer to see, just as an accountant must be presumed to take joy from a column of figures in good order—unaccountably to me! Everyone to his trade. Plentiful sub-entries in an index are a boon, but the problem is, how are such sub-entries compiled? In alphabetical sequence? On a chronological plan? Based serially on volume and/or page number? Or are they apparently at random? My hobby-horse is my preference for them, time-wasting that surely could be avoided by alphabetisation on a reasoned basis?

But let us take two or three common examples of economic compartment: "Gold", "Price", "Rent". To each of these, naturally, there is a longish section, with subsections aplenty, but if you wish to pinpoint an item you have to read first through nearly all of them, time-wasting that surely could be avoided by alphabetisation on a reasoned basis?

The naturally long portion devoted to David Ricardo himself contains a plethora of material; the themes are roughly separated by division into paragraphs, each containing what are not exactly subheadings but variations on the theme, and the headings are in no sense in alphabetical order. For example, the first few paragraphs begin: "birth and childhood ..."; "Jewish background ..."; "marries at twenty-one ..."; "homes in London ..."; "Clubs ..."; "early visits to Holland ..."; and so on, nor is there in each paragraph a discernible pattern of
volume and page number. Suppose one wishes to trace opinions, say, on Ricardo "as theorist", which I think is a reasonable assumption for a researcher, one will find no subheading of that nature, but after some pursuit through a couple of columns will come on a paragraph opening with "abundantly theoretical . . .", and going on "too theoretical, Malthus too practical . . .", "a visionary . . .", "imagines strong cases . . .", "dropped from another planet . . .", "the Oracle . . .".

Or, to give perhaps an easier example, under the main heading of "Sinking fund". A subsidiary paragraph lists the Sinking Funds of a number of politicians, given in neither alphabetical nor volume order (although I am not advocating volume order in any case, but it may be thought to have some logicality): "Stanhope's . . . Pitt's . . . Addington's . . . Petty's . . . Perceval's . . . Vansittart's . . . Parnell's plan . . ." Would not such entries ease the path of research if they began with Addington and went on in order of initial until Vansittart?

Oddly—and laudably—both the run-on paragraph method and lack of regular alphabetisation are disregarded in one instance with the entry "Scotland". Here, single-line sub-entries follow each other in proper order from "banks" down to "Scotch linen laws petition." But why only here?

Names are well covered; subjects perhaps not so adequately; and some cross-references I might have expected I did not find. Yet, despite any shortcomings, it was abundantly necessary for reasons of scholarship to produce this index and one is glad that at last severance has had its reward. One feature is an additional great help: the alphabetical lists of works not only of Ricardo himself but also of some other great figures, such as Malthus, attached at the end of the personal sections, which form valuable bibliographies.

John M. Shaftesley.

PHYSICS ABSTRACTS

100, 1,000, 1,000,000

A milestone in the dissemination of information occurred on the 16th September 1974 when INSPEC, the Institution of Electrical Engineers' information service, published the 1,000th issue of Physics Abstracts. With its September issue, Computer & Control Abstracts will reach 100 issues.

The first issue of Science Abstracts, from which Physics Abstracts, Electrical & Electronics Abstracts and Computer & Control Abstracts grew, was published in January 1898 for members of the IEE and the Physical Society. The journal, published monthly, covered "principal papers published in Europe and America in the various departments of electrical engineering and physical science".

It was decided in 1903 that Science Abstracts should be published in two parts, "A" Physics and "B" Electrical Engineering, and in August 1903, the IEE took over full responsibility for the entire publishing process.

During the next sixty years, Science Abstracts A and B (Physics Abstracts and Electrical & Electronics Abstracts) proceeded steadily but not dramatically. The production was always in the hands of the IEE, and Physics Abstracts was published in conjunction with the Institute of Physics, IEE, and the American Physical Society (later with the American Institute of Physics), and Electrical & Electronics Abstracts in association with the IEEE. The number of abstracts published per year was usually between 2,000 and 3,000 in each journal. Subscription rates at this time were usually nominal and the publications were subsidised by the various bodies.

The most significant change did not take place until the early 1960's when it became obvious that with the information explosion, it would be impossible to cope with the increasing flow of information by the existing methods. It was therefore decided to look into the feasibility of computerization of the input to Physics Abstracts along with the other abstracts and current papers journals that had been developed. It was also, about the same time—1966, decided to form a new group within the IEE to control the publication of all the secondary journals, Physics Abstracts, Electrical & Electronics Abstracts and the new Computer & Control Abstracts which had been launched that year, together with the Current Papers journals covering the same subjects.

This new division was named INSPEC (Information Services in Physics, Electrotechnology, Computers & Control).

It is one of the world's leaders as suppliers of information to the physics, electrotechnology, computers, controls and engineering industries, with some 75% of sales being outside the U.K.

It is also one of the leaders in the development of new abstracting, indexing and computerization of information, having been the first service, in 1969, to computerize the input to its journals and to print by computer typesetting.

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January 1969 saw all the journals being produced by computer typesetting techniques from information stored on magnetic tape.

Apart from the production of the journals, the information on the tapes was then searchable against the specific information requirements of individuals (Selective Dissemination of Information). Topics—standard profiles covering set subject matters—were also produced. Sales of copies of the tapes to universities, research centres and industry for their own use, were commenced. At present, thirty-two tapes are taken in seventeen countries. The latest development is in the field of on-line retrieval of literature documentation.

It is interesting to note that it took from 1898 to early 1935 to produce the first 100,000 abstracts. The next 100,000 took until early 1954—19 years. Each subsequent 100,000 abstracts took seven years, four years and three years respectively.

The input rate to *Physics Abstracts* is at present about 84,000 abstracts a year, so what originally took thirty-seven years is now covered in about fourteen months.

It is perhaps coincidental that the one millionth abstract to appear in *Physics Abstracts* will be in the 10,002nd issue (abstract number 72,298) published in mid-October.

Up to September 1974 the number of abstracts published in all three journals totals 1,683,786, of which over 670,000 are in computer readable form.

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