PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE SOCIETY OF INDEXERS

LONDON, SATURDAY, 20TH MARCH, 1976

CONTENTS

1. Indexing in the mid-seventies. Robert L. Collison
2. Indexing and indexers from a publisher's angle. Bruce Wilcock
4. Looking ahead. J. Ainsworth Gordon

Only Mr. Collison prepared a paper (which is here printed in full), the other speakers preferring to speak from notes; the reports that follow are summaries of what was said. The conference was reported by Mr. B. T. J. Goudie, Mrs. B. M. Hall, Miss A. Hodgson, Mrs. H. M. Pearson, Miss M. Piggott, and Mrs. B. J. Simpkins, and the report was edited by Mr. A. A. Raven.

The opinions expressed are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the policy of the Society.

Mr. L. M. Harrod opened the conference by welcoming members and visitors. He apologised for his occupancy of the chair, which was due to the indisposition of the Society's Chairman, Mr. John M. Shaftesley. The Secretary read a telegram from the President, Mr. G. Norman Knight, conveying his best wishes to the conference and his regret that his state of health precluded his attendance.

Mr. Harrod then introduced the first speaker, Mr. Robert L. Collison.

INDEXING IN THE MID-SEVENTIES

Robert L. Collison,
Head of the School of Librarianship, Ealing Technical College, and a Vice-President of the Society.

The position of indexing and indexers at the present time is enhanced in interest through its having reached a stage where decisions must soon be taken concerning its future. Judging from the state of publishing today, there appears to be no way of postponing these decisions, and it is important that indexers should guide their own destiny and the future shape of indexing, rather than allow other interested parties—publishers, authors, and readers—to make them by default. The inclusion of readers—a community notoriously indifferent to the quality of indexes—is deliberate for, even if they do not consciously decide on their choice of reading by the presence or absence of an index—whoever heard of a reader refusing to buy a book because it had no index?—publishers appear to be convinced that sales of a book are likely to be less if it is sold at more than some magic conventional figure and this of course is influenced to some minor extent by the cost of the index. That this should be so is tragic, for a £300 index will not add much more than 10p to the price of a book that sells 3,000 copies, but the truth is that publishers—beset on all sides by rapidly rising costs—are casting about somewhat wildly, if not desperately, for items on which a saving may be made, and there are few people in a...
position to put a word for the index and, thus, for the maintenance of the publisher's reputation. Few authors appear to have any strong opinion about indexes, though when they are new to authorship they often resent what the small print usually tells them, that they are responsible for the provision of an index. The discovery of this fact, so often at the time they are coping with their page proofs, is an unhappy snaf since it puts a hurdle between them and the publication of their book. Moreover, if they are not inclined to make their own index, it will cost them a sum nowadays large enough to make a sizeable dent in their royalties.

This position, however, may not continue for very long. One publisher told me that in republishing American books, he made no move to add an index if one was lacking in the original issue. A more insidious development could stem from the fact that some publishers are agreed that an index should be part of any worthwhile book they publish, but that it need be only a name index, since subject entries are rarely satisfactory and are seldom needed. If notice is also taken of the many reviews that mention the presence of bad or almost useless indexes, it can be seen that the state of indexing at the present time is in what might topically be called a recession.

Nor should criticism be confined to the attitudes of publishers, authors and readers. Indexers themselves must be blamed, too, for some of the current attitudes in the book trade. A good indexer's work is worth a great amount of money, but there is a limit to what the market can bear, and it appears that some indexers are in danger of pricing themselves right out of the market. This is admittedly an illogical state of affairs, but its origins are not far to seek. For so many years the cost of compiling an index was arrived at almost in the form of an honorarium. The publisher would offer a few guineas which were gratefully received by a pensioner, a protégé or a postal clerk—the whole transaction was a social one rather than one of business, and both sides were satisfied—the publisher with his near charity, the indexer with his opportunity to earn congenially more at his fireside than he would gain by marking School Certificate examination papers. To take an example: about twenty years ago a publisher needed an index compiled urgently over a Bank Holiday period. He therefore appealed to one of his favourite indexers who had compiled many indexes for him in the past. The indexer completed the index (to a book of some 300 pages) to time, and sent an invoice for £25. The fee was paid promptly but the indexer was never commissioned to compile another index by that firm. The truth is that he had charged a realistic figure for those days to a publisher who had become used to commissioning indexes with no preliminary fixing of charges, and to sending a cheque for ten or fifteen guineas, that the commercial approach of this indexer was naturally resented, since a business-like attitude had so clearly superseded the friendly but undefined relationship between publisher and indexer.

Today indexers are not so unbusinesslike as their predecessors and, with reason, they seek to secure the rate for the job. Unfortunately the rate they seek is real money and publishers can rightly assume the attitude of protecting their authors since, as they can cogently argue, £250 or £300 will make a considerable charge in any author's royalties. The present position has been reached quite rapidly; for example, a publisher who, three years ago, regularly paid £80 for the revision of the index to a yearbook, now pays £140—a 75% advance! If a survey could be made of what indexers are now charging and what they charged five years ago, the increase in the cost of living would certainly be partially reflected in the increased figures—and rightly so, even though the cost of an index is now so significant a figure that it can no longer be safely included (unitemised) in the section labelled "Miscellaneous" on the debit side of an author's account.

Aid for new authors

What then should be done to remedy the situation? The Society of Indexers is an established professional body and its responsibilities are not restricted to trying to arrive at acceptable levels of remuneration for its members. The Society was founded to improve the state of indexing, and since the achievement of this object will inevitably improve the lot of indexers, its pursuit is made all the more palatable. The ways in which indexing may be improved are not, however, always easy to keep in view. One thing is certain: indexing is not improved overnight, and improvement can only be made by a long-term and carefully planned campaign. In all this effort, the key position that the author—not the publisher—is in 90% of the cases, responsible for the prompt provision of an index must be kept in mind. If the publisher reminds the author that he is due to submit an index, what is the attitude of the author? If he appeals to the publisher to find him an indexer, he may quite naturally be taken aback when he learns how much the index is going to cost him. At this point he may decide that, however unskilled he is, he will tackle the making of an index himself. Is this the point at which the Society sympathises with his predicament but gracefully withdraws? Were the Society to do so, its attitude would be disgraceful, for the Society is a professional body whose chief aim, I repeat, is to improve the quality of indexes.

There is an example, ready to hand, which may cast light on the way in which the Society can act both to help the author and to improve the quality of indexing. Some years ago British publishers began to get very worried about the rapidly rising costs of proof correction. Indeed, some publishers began to incline to the opinion that a manuscript should be text-perfect so that, in theory, the only corrections necessary would occur where the printer himself had made a mistake. More realistically, the publishers commissioned a handsomely printed folder (about the size of a bookmarker) which they distributed to all
their authors, explaining the position concerning proof-correction and its costs, and including some well written advice (and admonition) as to how authors could avoid unnecessary charges for proof-correction. It was a wise move and had some effect, since the costs it quoted for its examples of quite minor corrections were salutary.

This idea provides a useful indication of what the Society of Indexers might achieve. It is suggested that the Society should produce a similar folder which could be distributed freely through co-operating publishers and literary agents to all new authors. This pamphlet could comprise a brief do-it-yourself guide to the author so that he could tackle the indexing himself, embracing as it would a summary of the main rules of indexing, and including references to easily accessible books and periodical articles. It is suggested that much useful information could be conveyed in 800-1,000 words, and that authors should be encouraged to approach the Society for further aid and advice if they needed it. Would this be taking the bread out of the mouths of the members of the Society? On a long-term basis far from it, for anyone who has tackled an index for himself quickly learns what a demanding task making an index can be. The new author may well compile his own indexes to his first few books; as he becomes more successful, he has less time to devote to compiling indexes and will—through his own experience—be more inclined to commission later indexes from a professional indexer at a realistic figure. The main point here is that until authors have themselves learnt that indexes are the product of skill and learning, indexes will continue to be bad or even non-existent. Authors need to be won over to appreciate what makes a good index; they are the real public for the propaganda the Society should put out if it is to justify its position as the professional body in this area. The author is potentially the Society’s best advocate.

An offer to publishers

Nor should the Society’s efforts end here. The plight of the publisher who is trying to keep down his book prices to a reasonable figure must be recognised in an age when it has already been found that it is now cheaper to have a book printed in the U.S.A. than in this country. Publishers, by and large, have never shown much interest in indexing, and it is easy to sympathise with their attitude when any idle reviewer who cannot be bothered to read a book two or three times finds he can write a so-called review by concentrating on the publisher’s blurb and completing his “review” by tearing the index to pieces. It is suggested that the Society might select a few standard works, frequently republished, whose indexes are at best indifferent. Let the Society approach the publishers and propose that, as a team effort, they supply new and adequate indexes at cost. Here again is a professional approach in which the inadequacies of the existing indexes could be indicated. The Society need fear no criticism for its action, since it can be assumed that if the existing indexes are inadequate they are not the work of professional indexers.

If the Society stresses that this offer is merely an experiment in the effort to improve the quality of indexing, some at least of the publishers will be sufficiently public-spirited to accept the challenge and to take part in what should prove a most interesting venture. The effort, in the case of each book, could be tackled and shared by a very small working party under the leadership of a member with some considerable experience in indexing books in the appropriate subject-field. The results of each indexing experiment could be written up in detail in The Indexer—thus forming a most practical guide to the art of indexing from which every professional indexer could benefit. The results would certainly reach the notice of many publishers and would help to build the image of the professional approach which the Society is anxious to foster.

All of which could involve the Society in expenditure with no quick return. But such moves could be spread over a period sufficient to allow the Society to carry the costs without beggaring itself. What is the alternative? Is it to badger publishers into accepting schedules of rates of pay for indexing with which they do not truly agree? Indexing is worth every penny that a reasonably-minded indexer wants to charge, but to achieve such reward it is necessary first of all to convince both publishers and authors that when they spend money on indexing they may as well buy quality. It is a long-term task, but it is well worth the effort, for a good book without an index is as maddening to have as a handsome clock without a key.

Indexers and the computer

A few years ago quite a number of people with much experience in indexing believed that the automation of indexes was just round the corner. The possibilities were exciting and several articles appeared whose authors are now grateful that their ideas have passed into oblivion. As most experienced indexers have learnt, no amount of skilful programming of computers can produce the finished index. Computers are dumb, as recent notes in The Times on the laughable mangling of mailing lists have shown. Indexing will always need the skill of the indexer. Nevertheless, it is clear that the computer can be of considerable help, and perhaps the Society could instigate a careful study of the areas in which the computer has been most successful. Chief of these is the field of concordances where computers have already done a superb job. Users of concordances need complete indexing under every word, with no possibility of error. In the old days all this was done by handwritten slips, and a glance—for instance—at the Tennyson concordance reveals what a daunting job that must have been. The prefaches and acknowledgments to many of the old concordances show that they were the product of the effort of entire families—conjuring up in one’s mind fathers and mothers, aunts and children, all

90 The Indexer Vol. 10 No. 2 October 1976
been published so far, though it is fairly certain that techniques that have evolved do not appear to have inconceivable. Details of the methods used and the advances which a few years ago would have been rigid timetable shows that indexing is achieving numbers of indexers to work consistently to a fairly careful planning, and the editorial task in organising periodicals. These are very costly ventures carried out problems involved can only be overcome by very sets of individual cumulative indexes to groups of periodicals dealing dexing on a giant scale. Recently a number of com
way as a pocket-calculator will aid him on other occasions. Consulting the specialist Beyond all this lies the rapidly growing field of indexing on a giant scale. Recently a number of commercial projects have started to provide libraries with cumulative indexes to groups of periodicals dealing with the same subject area, and to sets of individual periodicals. These are very costly ventures carried out with remarkable speed by teams of indexers. The problems involved can only be overcome by very careful planning, and the editorial task in organising numbers of indexers to work consistently to a fairly rigid timetable shows that indexing is achieving advances which a few years ago would have been inconceivable. Details of the methods used and the techniques that have evolved do not appear to have been published so far, though it is fairly certain that the aid of the computer has been sought wherever
practice. Though the individual indexer will naturally admire what is being done, not every indexer would feel attracted sufficiently to want to participate in such work—the pleasure of constructing personally an index to a single volume has more appeal to the average indexer. Thus two very different types of indexer are working side by side, each largely ignorant of the other's experience. Yet it is clear that the sharing of experiences could benefit both. Another area which is largely a closed book to most indexers is the well-used, long-established field of law indexing. Practically all law manuals have a common distinctive feature in that they have lengthy and elaborate indexes usually printed in large type. Those who use them are invariably impressed by their high standard of subject indexing. And yet a comparable field—that of medical works—seems to make do with conventional indexes in small type. There must be quite a number of law indexers of whom at least some might be persuaded to share their knowledge with indexers in other areas through the pages of *The Indexer*.

The time has come to make a concerted effort to contact the indexers so far overlooked—chiefly because they are fully occupied with very difficult tasks—and to analyse and synthesize the collective wisdom of indexers today. In this way progress can be made to the mental and material profit of all.

**DISCUSSION**

*Mrs Kirchgasser* suggested that the Society should continue to concentrate on dealings with publishers, rather than approach authors direct. *Mr M. S. Gordon* suggested that literary agents might be employed to deal with indexing services, and that the Society of Authors might cooperate in this. *Mrs Findlay* commented that in some subject fields, notably medicine and law, publishers did in fact tend to take responsibility for the production of indexes. *Miss Hoffman* supported the idea of approaching authors, and *Dr Sykes* suggested that examples of both good and bad indexing might be included in the proposed leaflet. *Mr Raven* feared that such a leaflet might just encourage authors to be satisfied with their own efforts. He reminded the meeting that the publication of indexes for books that lacked them had been one of the objectives of the Index Society, founded in the 1870s.

*Mrs C. Gordon* described the use of a computer to index periodicals in school libraries in London. *Mr Harling* asked whether model concordances could be produced by computer on particular subjects, to be adapted for indexing use, saying that authors are inclined to use models in the compilation of indexes for their own books. *Miss Keenan*, *Mrs Hall* and *Mrs Kerényi* all spoke of the difficulties of standardising terms, even in a limited subject field, for application of the computer to indexing, but they agreed on the desirability of achieving standardisation internationally.
Mr Collison commented briefly on several points that had been raised. He thought that Miss Kirch-gasser's experience in dealing with publishers had greater relevance in the United States than in Britain, saying that he himself had experienced some difficulty when trying to persuade publishers to take responsibility for indexing.

INDEXING AND INDEXERS FROM A PUBLISHER'S ANGLE

Bruce Wilcock,
Science Editor, Oxford University Press

Mr Wilcock began by pointing out that, as science editor of a university press, he was probably not typical of publishers in general.

Publishers, he said, are now under great and increasing financial pressures, and are therefore more than ever concerned with cost and speed of production; capital is tied up while a book is being produced, and delay costs money. An index adds to the cost of producing a book, and to the time spent in producing it, but the value of a good index is out of all proportion to its cost. Recent changes in production methods are probably not a significant factor, since they do not greatly affect the cost of index production. Even when a book is reproduced direct from typescript, the index merely takes its share of the reduction in cost.

Reviewers often deplore the lack of an index, though it is uncertain whether reviews greatly affect sales, especially in the case of academic books which are often reviewed long after publication.

Regardless of the cost factor and of the possible effect of an index, or lack of it, on sales, the better publishers are concerned with index quality. But what exactly is quality? How can money be spent on indexing to best advantage?

Type of index

Whether a book should have an index, and what kind of index it should have, is usually decided by the publisher, in consultation with the author, who is usually required to pay for the index. An author often needs advice about the best way of indexing his book; the editor should be able to give this.

Most academic books require author and subject indexes, whether separate or combined. It is usually inadvisable to combine an author index with a bibliography, as the complexity of the setting may increase the cost of proof correction and may prove confusing for the user of the book.

The indexing of a multi-author book presents particular problems, since the volume editor must organise it, and his enthusiasm for the project may at that stage have been blunted.

Who should prepare the index?

The four possibilities are: (i) the author; (ii) a professional indexer; (iii) someone on the publisher's editorial staff; (iv) the author in collaboration with indexer or editor.

The author will know his book better than anyone else, but may underestimate the needs of his readers, tending to forget that they may lack his special knowledge of the subject. Authors may also lack indexing skill. A professional indexer, on the other hand, may find difficulty with specialised subjects, especially where the book is near the frontiers of research. The publisher's staff are usually too busy to undertake the work. The ideal solution is for the author and a professional indexer to work together, but difficulties and delays can result, especially if they live some distance apart and cannot meet.

Payment for the index

The publisher would like the best of both worlds—he decides whether an index is needed, but the author pays for it. Its cost may be made a charge against the author's royalties; but with academic books, where royalties are often very small, this may result in the publisher having to bear the cost for a year or two. Fixed payments are more common than royalties in the case of multi-author books.

If the author, or the publisher, arranges for an indexer to do the work, two ways of arriving at the fee are commonly employed: the negotiation of an hourly rate, or agreement in advance on a fixed fee. An hourly rate can be unduly favourable to a slow or inefficient indexer, while a fixed fee can result in the indexer having to choose between skimping the work and being underpaid if the task proves more complex than was expected. Mutual trust between indexer and editor is necessary, since it is usually the editor who recommends a suitable indexer to the author. The editor should know what the market rate is and be able to advise the author accordingly.

When should the index be prepared?

Some authors—and publishers—like to begin the index from the typescript, but Mr Wilcock said he discourages this and usually advises indexing at page proof stage, even though this may slightly delay production. If indexing is begun before page proofs are available, the page numbers have to be inserted later, and to take two bites at the cherry in this way can be both time-consuming and inefficient. The indexer often finds errors and inconsistencies in the text, so that production departments usually hold back page proofs anyway until the index copy is received. When a book is set from camera-ready copy, the index can of course be compiled before the book goes into production.

Typescript and proofs

Double-spaced typescript is the ideal, but indexes are sometimes submitted on slips or cards. A handwritten index is acceptable if the writing is legible.
The typographical style of the index will depend on the book. It is often more convenient, for example, to have each sub-heading on a new line, but the cost is greater and space may not be available.

Corrections in proof are now extremely expensive, as they are done by hand whereas the original setting is done on a machine. Everything in the index should therefore be absolutely right before it goes to the printer, and proof-correction should be confined to printers' errors.

**Summing-up**

There is a need for cost-consciousness all round—from publisher, author, and indexer—and this is good professional discipline. It need not detract from quality, but care and imagination are needed to produce first-class work without causing delay. Efficient procedures that avoid waste of time or money are essential.

**DISCUSSION**

*Mrs Wallis* asked what instruction publishers received in evaluating indexes. Mr Wilcock thought that editors are not as well informed about indexing as they should be. Indexing is not prominent in courses for editors, and the Publishers Association should be approached about this. *Mr Wace* agreed—he encourages editors to study indexing, and his firm (Macmillan) has an internal leaflet on the evaluation of indexes.

*Mrs Findlay* suggested that publishers should be sure to tell indexers what they want. She had known them to change their house style without telling the indexer. Mr Wilcock agreed.

*Mrs Hall* pointed out that the quality of an index may suffer when dates are not kept by the publisher and the time available for compilation of the index is cut. The indexer is often expected to make up for time lost earlier, but a reasonable amount of time is needed for indexing. She also asked how the space available for an index is decided upon, saying that publishers' estimates are often badly out in this respect, and she asked whether the indexer could be appointed at an earlier stage to give professional advice on the kind of index that would be appropriate.

*Mr Wilcock* replied that he sympathised about the time problem, but pointed out that unforeseeable delays do occur. MSS., for example, are often late in arriving, and further delay may be incurred in editing and setting. It is often important to get the book out by a particular date, such as the beginning of the academic year, and publication may have to be delayed for a year if the deadline is missed. As to length of index, the O.U.P. is not dogmatic where academic books are concerned, though superfluous entries are pruned. It is important to keep the book to an economic size. He agreed that the indexer should be brought in as soon as possible.

*Mr Duke*, of Longman, said that his firm gives the indexer a copy of the MS. and asks his advice about the index at that stage.

*Mrs Pollard* pointed out that if the indexer is appointed well before proofs are ready, and the book is subsequently delayed, he may have other commitments when the book eventually arrives. Mr Wilcock replied that the editor should keep in touch with his indexers about scheduling, and added that it is perfectly fair for an indexer to relinquish a job that fails to arrive on time.

*Mrs Raven* questioned whether it is right for the author to be asked to make, or to pay for, the index. He thought it was not. The author knows what should be indexed, but is usually bad at organising the index, e.g. arranging it on the same plan as the book. An author often skims the work, often providing few, if any, sub-entries. A shallow and trivial index is the result. The author is usually not an experienced indexer, and is also asked to undertake the work at a difficult time, when he has simultaneously to deal with the proofs—which can be a traumatic experience as well as time-consuming. As regards payment, the index is not a part of the author's text but a guide to the subject-matter of the book, and should be provided by the publisher much as he provides prelims and jacket copy. The index should be a cost of production, and if the author makes it he should be paid a proper fee for doing so.

*Mr Wilcock* agreed that authors have shortcomings as indexers, but said that he had often found them to be over-enthusiastic in providing excessively elaborate indexes. Some are idiosyncratic and forget the viewpoint of the reader. But can anyone else really understand the subject-matter? This applies particularly to the kind of book that he usually deals with. He agreed that the author may have an emotional crisis, but said that in his experience it tends to come later than page proof stage. Authors tend to be possessive about their work, unwilling to let anyone else deal with it. If an indexer does the indexing, Mr Wilcock thought, the author should certainly see the index before it is set. At the O.U.P. at least, he added, the author is expected to provide a table of contents and to draft the jacket blurb. As regards payment, it would in theory be feasible for the publisher to treat the index as a cost of production, but he saw no justification for such a course. With costs rising rapidly, such a change of policy would be difficult to implement at the present time.

*Mrs Blake* pointed out that, in the case of multi-author books, the publisher is rarely delayed by the time taken to make the index, as he has to spend more time getting proofs back from so many authors. She said that an indexer can often help by sending corrections in instalments, and Mr Wilcock agreed that this can be most valuable.

*Mrs Frame* raised the question of copyright in indexes and the possibility that the indexer might...
receive a royalty. Mr Wilcock replied that most publishers ask indexers at the outset to assign the copyright. He had not heard of publishers making further payments to indexers in the form of royalties, and said it would be up to the indexer to negotiate this with the publisher clearly in advance. If royalties were to be paid, the amount of paperwork might be prohibitive in relation to the small sums of money involved; if any additional payment were made for copyright, he thought a lump sum would be a better arrangement.

INDEXES IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Cecilia Gordon, I.L.E.A. School Libraries Organiser

Mrs Gordon declared that adequate indexing of children's books must be considered an essential educational adjunct from an early age. She emphasised the importance of familiarity with our alphabet, something which in her experience is often neglected by teachers and which needs especially to be taught to pupils who have English as a second language. In London infants' schools, children are early taught the basics of indexing, since books are broadly categorised by subject by means of colour-coding, the key to this being an alphabetical index on the classroom wall.

Mrs Gordon deplored the fact that some publishers do not seem to share her opinion of the importance of indexes in children's information books. In the Education Library at County Hall, the display collection of children's books has 1,223 titles in its Natural Science section; of these, only 723 have indexes of any description—and the politest description for many of them would be 'inadequate'. There still seems to be widespread confusion, she said, between the purposes of a contents list and those of an index, but even conventionally arranged indexes are not always helpful. In a Hamlyn book on giraffes, for example, the index contained a heading 'giraffes' followed by no fewer than sixty-two page references. She gave other examples to show that poor indexing is by no means confined to books on natural science, or to the output of only a few publishers.

One-volume encyclopedias are in particular need of good indexes, especially as so many of them are arranged thematically in a way that is confusing to a child. The need is even greater in the case of multivolume encyclopedias. Mrs Gordon criticised Macmillan's Our world encyclopedia for its use of roman numerals for volume numbers in the index while the spine of each volume is numbered in arabic.

DISCUSSION

Mr Wace briefly defended Our world, and Mrs Gordon invited members to examine it and judge for themselves.

From Mr Harling's question about the age at which children learn alphabetical order it emerged that there is as much individual variation as in the age at which they learn to read, if not more. Miss Keenan wondered whether children's awareness of the principles of indexing would be affected by different methods of teaching reading. Perhaps, but not decisively, thought Mrs Gordon: it would be more potently affected by the presence of numerous nationalities and native languages among the children in one class at school.

In response to Mrs Holmes's comments on the Oxford General Reference Library, Mrs Gordon praised the series highly but remarked on the O.U.P.'s apparent tendency to take it for granted that all children have a reading age of about fifteen and come from bookish homes.

LOOKING AHEAD

J. Ainsworth Gordon, Secretary of the Society

Mr Gordon began by inviting the Society to consider whether a national conference should be instituted as an annual event, or whether members would prefer to meet, perhaps, biennially. He suggested the possibility of a residential conference, perhaps for a weekend. Members should also review the possibilities of different venues, he suggested, because members were already well distributed nationally and meetings in the midlands or the north might appeal to many.

He invited those present to express their views during the discussion, and added that members who were not present might be invited to send their views later.

Membership

Mr Gordon reported that the United Kingdom membership stood now at about 350, with 250 in the American Society and another fifty in the now-independent Australian association. If the Society was to speak with an authoritative voice, however, membership might need to be greatly strengthened: it was worth considering how many practising indexers were at work in Britain without being members of the Society. He suggested an objective for 1977: that every member should try to recruit at least one new member.
Publishers

It was important to recognise that, in pursuit of the Society's aims, publishers should be recognised as allies. But there were over 3,000 publishing houses in Britain, of whom only 700 were members of the Publishers Association. How could the Society build constructive lines of communication with so many? There was not even a coherent body of facts on which to begin. What did the Society know about publishers' relations with indexers: whether publishers were knowledgeable about indexing, or cared about it; whether they had house rules on style or typography; whether they offered regular contracts, and, if so, on what terms; how they negotiated fees for indexing; whether they paid well or badly, promptly or tardily; whether they had a regular panel of indexers, or used agencies, or applied to the Society's Register; whether they were willing to give beginners a chance or employed only on previous recommendation? Individual indexers must have wide experience of the answers to such questions, but the Society had found no way of tapping that experience systematically. Some way of pooling such information would be very valuable.

Service to members

Mr Gordon reminded the conference that the Society is its members and the members the Society: it exists to do what the members want, but there is no one to do the work but the members themselves. The present annual subscription of £5 must give value for money, but he would like to hear from members as to what they want in the way of a service from the Society.

Local groups

Concern for the many indexers working in isolation was expressed by Mr Gordon—many indexers were London-based but many in the provinces must feel somewhat cut off from a publishing scene that is still very much centred on the capital. Local initiative was the answer; already in Merseyside and Reading local activities were afoot, and more could be done by members in their own localities.

Beginners

From his ever-growing mail the Secretary was aware that beginners look to the Society for help, particularly in obtaining indexing work. This was another field in which a store of information about publishers would be useful, as would the activity of local groups.

Administration

Mr Gordon concluded by describing the growing volume of administrative work undertaken by officers of the Society. He suggested that, as the Society grew in strength and in activity, it should look forward to the time when it might be necessary to employ a full-time Secretary, however impracticable that might seem at present.

DISCUSSION

Mrs Findlay proposed that a questionnaire should be sent to all members about their experience with publishers, to provide a pool of information such as the Secretary had suggested. Mrs Quinn, agreeing, thought that it would be useful to ask whether indexers had refused work because of poor pay or other conditions. Mr Fisk supported the suggestion of a questionnaire but urged that the draft should receive very careful consideration.

Mr Harling urged that all members should be asked for their views on the question of another conference, as those present must be representative only of those who were able to attend in London on a Saturday. Mrs Quinn thought that group discussion techniques might usefully be adopted on another occasion, especially if it were spread over a weekend, but Mrs Suggett thought that family commitments would make a weekend difficult for many.

Mrs Hall suggested that members interested in local contacts might find a distribution map in The Indexer a help.

Mr Fisk expressed concern about the problems faced by beginners, and suggested that a probationary category in the Register might be considered, especially for those who had completed the correspondence course successfully.

Mrs Kerényi regretted that few people seemed to know about the Society, or even of the existence of indexing as a profession. Mrs Hall suggested that more thought should be given to publicising the Society. She also reminded members that some years ago it had been agreed that members who provided indexes for substantial works should ask to be acknowledged. She said that she had several times requested this since becoming a Registered Indexer, and had never been refused such acknowledgement.

Mr Harling asked for a detailed report, at some convenient time, on the activity of the Register. Mrs Wallis commented that she depended on members to send her information about work obtained through the Register, and regretted that many did not keep her informed. Mrs Blake suggested that members who obtained work through the Register should be liable for a small fee, if this were practicable, or might instead offer a part of their fees as a gift to the Society.

Mr Harrod, in his closing remarks, thanked the four speakers again, on behalf of the Society, for their contributions, and also thanked members for their attendance and for their part in providing a series of enjoyable and thought-provoking discussions.

An exhibition of books about indexing was mounted in a show-case outside the conference room, and a handlist of the exhibits was distributed to all who attended the conference.