Since I started in public libraries in 1951, most of my working life has been concerned with branch libraries, first by working in them, then by supervising an area, and now merely by looking after them from a safe distance and occasionally visiting them on sunny days. It follows that I have been involved for many years in the field of direct assistance to readers in their search for the right book.

The Association of Assistant Librarians (AAL) has led the field in publishing aids for branch and other librarians, and I have always found Sequels and Fiction index of great help. Both started as single-volume publications, but AAL have since published separate volumes for children, Junior sequels and Junior fiction index, recognizing the importance of work with children.

Everyman's dictionary of fictional characters has also proved useful, but mainly in helping adults because references to children's books are confined mainly to the characters familiar to everyone, such as Bunter, William George (I prefer Billy Bunter). In 1976 the well-known children's reviewer, Margery Fisher, brought out her impressive Who's who in children's books, which answers many questions asked by children; the short articles describing the personalities and the authors' styles are literature in their own right.

It seemed to me, however, that there was still a need for an aid for librarians, teachers and even parents trying to identify 'the book about The Ugli-Wuglies'. Children often remember a character in a book, not its author or title, and librarians cannot remember every character in every book. Television serials for children make a bad situation worse, by giving the serial a new title based on the main character, and seldom mentioning such mundane information as author and title. When the serial 'Kizzy' was first televised, for instance, every branch librarian in the country must have been asked for the book, and most failed to identify The Diddakoi, by Rumer Godden. Similarly, Sylvia Sherry's book A Pair of Jesus-boots was televised as Rocky O'Rourke, a new title perpetuated in a subsequent paperback edition.

Most enquiries, however, are by individual children or adults pursuing their own particular interests or memories, and they often want, not just the same book again, but more books about the same character.

So I decided to compile an unpretentious list of characters, mostly with one-line entries, giving merely the character's name, a brief description, author and title. Descriptions were to be main character, historical character, mythological character, magic creature, space creature, doll, dog, school, cat, and so on. I decided to include as characters anything with a memorable name, such as Greyfriars School, Grubstreet the toy wooden bear, and the ship Alabama.

Characters chosen for entry had to be restricted, for obvious reasons; and the list of books to be indexed had also to be selective. I decided to limit books to those available today in public libraries, firstly because it is not very helpful to tell a child that the book he wants has been out of print for 50 years, and secondly because these were the only books to which I had access, anyway; one must be realistic.

The form of entry, too, had to be subjective. I decided each case on its merits, but generally chose to enter under Christian name or nickname rather than surname, eg Wendy Darling, with occasional surname entries, eg Darling family, to hedge my bets. I hope that I am right in thinking that children remember first names best.

In children's books even more than in adult, authors seem to use a set of characters in a series of books rather than just once, and children do often ask for more books about the same gang, family, or other characters. If I had listed every book of a series in every entry, the result would have been a massive book, I decided, therefore, to locate characters only to series, eg William books or Swallows and Amazons books; this meant adding a small section on Books in Series, to give the full list of books in cases where the titles do not indicate the name of the series.

To keep a check on which books I had done, and which remained to be done, I used catalogues of children's fiction, published by the main library suppliers (Woolston and Blunt, Askew
A simple tick in a catalogue showed that I had 'done' that book.

As for the actual compilation of a list of characters, to be put eventually into alphabetical order, the obvious method was to use 5 x 3 cards. After all the planning and preparation, I started work. I took home over 4,000 books (not all in one load) and started on the first one. I very soon discovered that blurbs are surprisingly unreliable. Many of them spelled a character's name differently from the name in the text, and many blur-writers didn't seem to have read the book with much attention. So I had to skim through every book and decide which characters might possibly prove memorable to a child, or might suggest a serial title to TV producers. Some books produced no entry at all, some a score of oddly-named minor characters which are often more important than the main characters; for instance, one actual enquiry referred to Napoleon, a cat, a rather minor character in the Bill Badger books by B.B., and another to the Ugli-Wuglies, who proved memorable to one child in spite of playing a minor role in The Enchanted castle, by E. Nesbit. Clearly odd names are likely to be remembered.

The grind proved enjoyable. I have never specialized in children's work (in fact my book has surprised and amused some of my colleagues), but I found the books interesting. Finally, I tipped about 7,500 cards out on to a table and sorted them into order. I found that The Pitman Press were willing to take these handwritten cards as a satisfactory manuscript, and after discussing the publication with their production expert, I settled on 10 on 12pt IBM Press Roman with entry names in upper case. Pitman's prepared the master copy, and printed and bound the book. In November 1977, after two winters of enjoyable work, I started selling copies to libraries and schools, mainly through the library suppliers. I was interested to find that several Central Reference Libraries and some Universities bought copies, not merely branch libraries. One reported use is by people answering quizzes or entering competitions. Overseas sales were slow to start, but came along in time. Children's books, of course, are pretty international and books on the shelves of British libraries are written by authors from all over the English-speaking world, as well as a few Europeans in translation. Similarly, most of the books indexed are in stock in libraries overseas.

But, in the end, what is it? Like all reference books, it offers answers to hundreds of questions that will never be asked, and fails to answer hundreds, perhaps thousands, of questions that will in fact be asked. Is it an index? I could have followed Dent and called it a 'Dictionary of —', but perversely I chose to call it an index, which led to the invitation to write this account of its making.

Index to characters in children's literature is reviewed on page 184.

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Indexing laboratory notebooks in a chemical R & D environment is the subject of an article which describes how the Wiswesser Line Notation is used to indicate functional groups and lengths of alkyl chains and the sizes of rings in coding chemical compounds. Besides the chemical itself, the name of the chemist, the date of first synthesis, and the relevant finding codes are transcribed for optical scanning by computer and subsequent printout in a variety of indexes, which, being always at hand and continuing the history of any given compound, can save duplication of laboratory work. (Donna M. Mendenhall. Indexing laboratory notebooks in a chemical R & D environment, Special libraries, 69 (7), 1978, 261-266, 5 ill. 9 refs.) M.P.

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The American National Standards Committee Z 39, which recommends documentation standards for use in the United States and participates in the preparation of international standards in the same subject area, has established a new headquarters office at the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Bureau of Standards, Washington, D.C., 20234. After reorganization it will tackle a heavy programme of standardization, based on some 60 requests received from library, information and publishing services. Brief reports of its work during the year 1977-78 appear in Special libraries, 69 (9), September 1978, 396-401. M. P.