

## Gilfred Norman Knight

12th September 1891—17th August 1978



Soldier, lawyer, civil servant, indexer, author and founder of the Society of Indexers, Gilfred Norman Knight (or 'GNK' as he was familiarly known to readers of *The Indexer* and to members of the Society) died in London, England, on Thursday, 17th August 1978.

GNK was educated at Bradfield College and graduated from the Honours School of Jurisprudence, Balliol College, Oxford, in 1913 (MA, 1920). In 1914 he entered Lincoln's Inn as Tancred Scholar, and was called to the Bar in 1918. World War I interrupted his education. GNK held a command in the East Surrey Regiment and was severely wounded at the Battle of Loos (1915). In 1917 he became Captain and Adjutant of the No. 16 Officer Cadet Battalion.

GNK enjoyed a varied career before entering the Civil Service in 1940. From 1918 to 1919 he was on the staff of the Judge Advocate-General, and from 1919 to 1926 (and again from 1938 to 1939) he was Assistant Secretary to the West India Committee. In 1923 and 1924 GNK was also Secretary to the West Indian and Atlantic Group of the British Empire Exhibition. In 1927 he served as Secretary of the County of London TA & AFA. From 1931 to 1932 GNK was Guardian to the Heir Apparent of Rampur State, India. In 1940 he joined the Civil Service, first as

a censor, transferring to the War Office in 1942, where he remained until his retirement in 1956.

GNK began freelance indexing in 1925 and since that date has indexed more than 100 books and periodicals. His long career as an indexer was crowned by the receipt of the 1967 Wheatley Award (instituted by the Library Association in 1961) for his index to Randolph S. Churchill's *Winston S. Churchill, Volume 2: Young Statesman, 1901-1919* (London: Heinemann, 1967), and by the Society of Indexers' Carey Award in 1977.

On his retirement in 1956 it occurred to GNK that an association of indexers was needed. There was an initial difficulty in that, although he had been indexing by then for over 30 years, he 'did not know the name of a single other person who worked in this field'. Through notices in the London newspapers, and 'several discreet luncheons' at his club, it proved possible to hold an inaugural meeting of some 60 interested persons at the National Book League offices in March 1957. Since that date the Society has gone on from strength to strength, and no small part of its present success is due to GNK's tireless efforts. Apart from his many contributions to the newspaper and periodical press on the subject of indexers, indexing and the Society, he has served prominently in the Society's executive: Secretary (1957/58, 1960/61-1961/62), Council Member (1958/59), Vice-Chairman (1959/60), Chairman (1962/63-1966/67), Vice-President (1967/68-1969/70), and President (1970/71 to his death). From the Society's beginning GNK has been an active member of the Editorial Board and he was also instrumental in the Society's efforts to provide training courses in indexing.

In addition, GNK was a freemason (LGR) and a chess enthusiast, becoming Honorary Life President of the Barnet Chess Club in 1972. His publications are a reflection of all his interests. Apart from numerous contributions to the *West Indies Chronicle*, the *Masonic Record* and *The Indexer*, GNK was the author of *Chess Pieces: An Anthology in Prose and Verse* (1949; 2d ed., 1968), *The Pocket History of Freemasonry* (with Fred Lomax Pick, 1953; 5th ed., 1976, with Frederick Smyth), *The Freemason's Pocket Reference Book* (with Fred Lomax Pick, 1955),

*Training in Indexing: A Course of the Society of Indexers* (ed., 1969), *King, Queen and Knight: A Chess Anthology* (with W. F. Guy, 1975) and *Indexing, The Art of* (in press).

*Obituary prepared by Peter E. Greig.*

Many tributes to GNK have been received by The Society of Indexers. We print below a selection of these.

My personal acquaintance with Norman can be divided into three periods. I joined the Society in the 1960s on the suggestion of Robert Collison and, as a new member, I was one of the many recipients of the kindly welcome he always gave to members attending Society meetings—what a wonderful example he set for the way senior members and officers of a professional body should behave towards their juniors. When I became Library Association representative on Council he welcomed me warmly to Council meetings and showed, both in those meetings and in the less formal atmosphere of the University Tavern afterwards, how keen he was on developing relationships between the Library Association and the Society of Indexers.

But it was during the third period, after I had become Chairman of the Society in 1976, that I really came to know Norman. He had now become too frail to attend Council meetings and in fact we only met twice during this period—when I presented the Carey Award to him in 1977 and at our 21st Anniversary Conference in July 1978. The kind letters he wrote to me, however, were full of friendly advice and showed his continued interest in the Society and its members. I also remember with pleasure the telephone call he made to congratulate me on my election as Chairman; his deafness and the fact that I was recovering from hospital treatment to my throat did not make conversation easy, but how typical it was of him that he should take the trouble to make the call.

I count it a privilege to have known Norman. Without him the Society would not exist, of course, and our magnificent conference in 1978 could never have taken place. We have photographic records of him greeting his guests at that wonderful reception which those of us who were lucky enough to be there will never forget.

—Ken Bakewell,  
Chairman of The Society of Indexers.

Our greatest tribute to him can be an on-going effort to further the goals and objectives he sought for so long. Indexers are now recognized, because of his foresight.

—BevAnne Ross, Past President,  
American Society of Indexers.

All connected with the field of indexing know of the major contribution that G. Norman Knight made in scholarly work and in the development of professional standards. The Society of Indexers, of which he was the mainspring in its formation, will remain a memorial to the zeal and untiring efforts of a man who realized so clearly the importance of the discipline of indexing in the transfer of information of every kind—in the sciences, in technology and in the humanities.

We would like to acknowledge the keen and kindly interest he took in the formation of the Australian Society of Indexers and in the development of the profession in Australia.

—Clyde Garrow, President,  
Australian Society of Indexers.

It is pleasant to know that he lived long enough to see the definite success of the Society through its 21st anniversary. I can also, now, understand why the Society held a 21st anniversary rather than waiting to the end of the first quarter-century. On a more personal note I am particularly happy that I did have an opportunity at the conference to meet GNK and to speak, if only briefly, with him. No person, not even Wheatley, did so much for indexing and indexers.

—Peter E. Greig,  
Past President, IASC/SCAD.

I first met Norman Knight in 1957 as a result of his letter to the *T.L.S.* inviting indexers to get in touch with him. He called to see me at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in Russell Square and, after outlining his ideas for the formation of a Society of Indexers, he paid me the compliment of inviting me to accept nomination as the Society's first Chairman. This was the first of a number of meetings at some of which we discussed a Constitution for the Society and the setting up of 'panels' of indexers in

various specialist fields (for which the Register was later substituted) whereby publishers and authors might be put in touch with experienced indexers. I think he regarded this facility as one of the most important functions of the Society; he was untiring in his efforts to ensure recognition of the fact that an index is an essential part of any scholarly (and sometimes not so scholarly) work.

Writing in 1958 he said: 'When, about five years ago, the need for such a Society as ours first occurred to me I was not acquainted with a single other person who worked in the same field'. As the result of his initiative hundreds of such persons have been brought together, not only to their mutual advantage, but for the benefit of the world in general. Two of the Society's objects are 'to improve the standard of indexing . . .' and 'to raise the status of indexers and to safeguard their interests', objectives which were very close to his heart and which he saw realized in his lifetime.

His enthusiasm was infectious but he remained the driving force behind the Society in its early days. His wise counsels and experience were invaluable. He cultivated numerous international connections and was generous in his hospitality to visitors from overseas.

To him must go the credit of having encouraged the formation of a Society in America which ultimately became affiliated to our Society.

His reluctance to accept the Presidency of the Society was indicative of his retiring nature and desire to avoid the limelight but, happily, the Council was able to persuade him to take the office, thereby honouring the Society as well as himself.

He was a man of outstanding ability and of wide and varied interests. A distinguished indexer, he was probably unequalled in the literary field.

A kindly man, he will be sadly missed by all those who enjoyed the privilege of his friendship.

—A. R. Hewitt.

When I became editor of *The Indexer* he sent notes, letters and made frequent telephone calls with suggestions and queries regarding its contents. When an issue was already pasted up for the printer, or even in the press, there was often the urgent call from Norman with something which *must* go in that issue. He was not always successful!

Norman had already retired when he launched the Society, and he put his whole heart into the project. Willing helpers were encouraged to devote all their spare time to the welfare of the slowly developing infant, and his enthusiasm was infectious. Emphasis was on the improvement of indexing in general, with no thought of personal gain except possibly that which might come with the recognition of indexing as a specialist subject. Norman left no stone unturned in seeking increased membership, in promoting the sales of the journal, and in furthering the interests of the Society.

Those who were acquainted with Norman Knight will remember him as a kindly man with a keen sense of humour, who at early meetings generally smoked a very long-stemmed pipe. His paternal aspect was accompanied by a friendly manner to all his colleagues, and he particularly welcomed newcomers to the Society. Until recently, he seldom missed a meeting, and his views always commanded respect, even if one did not agree with them. He defended his ideas with vigour, but bore no grudge against his temporary opponents.

—John L. Thornton.

The art (or is it the science?) of indexing books and other publications has made immeasurable progress during the past century. Of all who have contributed to this progress, three personalities stand out as its principal architects. The first of them was Henry B. Wheatley (1838-1917), who founded almost exactly a century ago the short-lived but highly influential Index Society, and whose status as the father of modern indexing is commemorated by the annual award of the Library Association's Wheatley Medal for an index of outstanding quality. The torch he lit was kept burning brightly by Gordon V. Carey (1886-1969), rightly dubbed (by a reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement*) 'The Prince of Indexers', whose memory is honoured by the Carey Award, presented by the Society of Indexers—on most rare occasions, and most aptly—for outstanding services to indexing.

Last, and many would say greatest, of these three was G. Norman Knight, first recipient of the Carey Award in his 87th year. Having created a world-wide organization, with thriving affiliated national societies in the United States and Australia (and now another in Canada), he lived to see his Society celebrate its 21st anniversary and, as its President, to welcome in person 150

representatives from all five continents at this year's first international conference of indexers.

The matron of the officers' home where he lived told me: 'He kept himself alive for his big party, you know; that was the one thing that really mattered to him. He got to it, all dressed up so smart and proud, and that was the important thing. After that, he was ready for the end, and he died a happy man.' What she calls his 'big party' was, of course, the Presidential reception at the beginning of the conference. Though he was so frail, he was dignified and charming and very much the father-figure surrounded by 150 representatives of his growing world-wide family.

—J. Ainsworth Gordon,  
Secretary of The Society of Indexers.

I have been through the letters he sent me, which still smell strongly of tobacco! He was furious with publishers who sent him unstitched page proofs from which to work. He rightly claimed that an indexer should receive not only a fee for preparing an index for the British edition of a book, but also a fee or royalty when that index was printed in an American edition of the same book. Shortly after moving to Scio House in 1970, he wrote:

'I like this place very much indeed, although my first impression was of a cross between a first-rate officers' club and hospitalization for life. They have given me a fine ground-floor room from which I can survey the six acres of well-kept grounds. But it is all vastly expensive and, when the time comes, I expect to find myself "dying beyond my means".'

I asked him to index *Superior person: a portrait of Curzon and his circle in late Victorian England* (1969) after admiring the index which he had produced for Lord Birkenhead's life of Walter Monckton.

We did not meet more than half a dozen times at most, but transacted our business by letter or telephone. He produced a magnificent index. It gave him particular pleasure to live again in spirit among so many men who had been at his beloved Balliol. I printed these words in the book:

'I should like to acknowledge the special skill of Mr Norman Knight, whose lively eye has saved me from several blunders and whose index is as much a work of art as of reference.'

—Kenneth Rose.

I knew him for 10 years but I was chiefly his chess friend. Therefore less conversation passed between us in that time than would be uttered in 10 days by companions meeting for purely social reasons.

Originally he wrote to me because he had read a book by me in which I mentioned that I liked to play chess. In those days he could travel with more ease than latterly so he took to calling on me on his way to see his sister in Fulham. Only once or twice did I visit him at an address which may have been in Barnet. There I received the impression that, like me, he lived entirely in one room; the place was dim and infested with books.

In the beginning of our friendship, he played better than I but, as the years passed, inevitably he lost command of the game. When he made a rash move and saw the consequences of it, he would fly into a rage, apologizing a moment later for what he termed his childishness. He was, of course, not angry with me but with old age. Although he seemed never to have been young, he nevertheless deeply resented the slightest hint of senility.

When we were together, I never felt that he was withholding from me any part of his life; I formed the opinion that his past really had been uneventful and that, when middle age set in, he had become, if not lonely, solitary. I was surprised that he had chosen to write the kind of books that few people would read and that could only be compiled after spending days in reference libraries.

When he became what he called 'tottery', I started to visit him in Scio House. Because, at the end of each of these occasions, he always made arrangements for another, we must conclude that he required—possibly, longed for—companionship. He was so courteous, always remembering to thank me for the pleasure that my presence gave him—indeed there seemed to be nothing about him that would alienate anyone. We must therefore recognize a mystery at the heart of Mr Knight's character. If I had even an inkling of what this was, I would try to analyse it. Alas, I have not. To me he always seemed simultaneously to be very hospitable but, in the last resort, withdrawn.

—Quentin Crisp.

To the Secretary of The Society of Indexers:

Though the most junior member of the immediate relatives of the late Gilfred Norman Knight, I have been asked to write all thank-you letters, and I make it my first concern to write to thank you and your Society for the beautiful flowers and for the so kindly and appreciatively worded message which accompanied them. You probably know that the book on indexing which he spent much time and research on over the last few years was, happily, completed before his last illness prevented him from working further. . . .

It will seem scarcely necessary to send the very best wishes to the Society, but you as well as I will know that that is what my uncle would have wanted expressed, since, as you also know, indexing was his great, absorbing interest and gave him the greatest satisfaction for many years.

—Hilary True (*née* Knight).

All who knew him as working colleague or as personal friend will doubtless share with his fellow indexers the desire that Norman Knight, like Wheatley and Carey before him, should be fittingly and lastingly remembered. To this end, the Society of Indexers has opened a 'Norman Knight Memorial Fund'; not for the creation of yet another award, but for the furtherance of some practical aspect of indexing to which our Founder attached special importance.

Mrs Sarah Barkay writes from Jerusalem: 'My husband, **M. Z. Barkay**, your Israeli representative, died on 13 December 1978. I know he was happy to be the Society's lone member in Israel.' Zvi Barkay, who was indeed our sole member in Israel during most of the 70s, joined the Society in June 1960, being then Senior Librarian of the Jewish National & University Library in Jerusalem. He was also Secretary of the Israel Library Association. His most formidable enterprise was the indexing of the 32-volume *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, which kept him fully occupied for almost a decade. Our sincere condolences to Mrs Barkay, whom the Officers had the pleasure of meeting personally as long ago as 1966, when she and her husband were entertained to dinner, on the occasion of their only recorded visit to this country.

The book world has also lost a notable figure in **Oliver Stallybrass** who died at the end of November. He had been a librarian, editor, translator and indexer. Particularly admirable are his edition of the works of E. M. Forster (The Abinger edition) and the indexes he compiled to the collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell. His early death deprives us of a valued and exemplary colleague. We offer our sympathy to his wife and children.

**H. V. Molesworth Roberts** joined the Society of Indexers in 1961, when he was Historical Research Officer at the Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and was for many years an active member of the Society.

In later years he became almost a permanent resident in the Sutton Reference Library, occasionally asking for something, but more often than not telling a young and inexperienced assistant just where to find the piece of information needed to answer someone else's difficult enquiry.

He was a charming man, and all the young female staff of the ramshackle old library were very fond of him. He used to tell us that he kept details of all of us (his 'girlfriends', he called us) in a card index which he intended would be published after his death—time will tell!

Susan King.

## THE INDEXER

The Autumn issue will henceforth appear at the end of *October* (not September as hitherto).

The change has been made to avoid editorial and production difficulties through the summer holiday period.

**S** *Indexing, the art of* by G. Norman Knight is to be published later this year by Messrs George Allen & Unwin, and will be available to readers of *The Indexer* at 20% discount. Details in our October issue.