On indexing John Wesley*

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One of my reasons for accepting the invitation to speak to you today was that it gives me an opportunity to say certain things more adequately than I could on the occasion of the presentation of the Wheatley Medal. I propose to spend very little time on the detailed technicalities of the task I have undertaken for the new edition of Wesley’s Works. For one thing, I have already said something of that in The Indexer (10 (4) Oct. 1977, 176-7). Most of you, I imagine, are both more experienced and more skilled in indexing techniques than I am, and there isn’t all that much I could say which would not be either presumptuous or boring—or both. Winning the Wheatley Medal does not, I hope, give anyone the right to pontificate. I would like, in fact, to say something about two matters in particular: about Wesley himself as a person and an author and also as an indexer; and about the indexing of the earlier editions of his Works. And only then, as a comparatively brief peroration, something about my own task for the Oxford Edition.

If I may be allowed, then, to begin on a quite personal note, it is only right to stress how much of a co-operative effort the Wesley indexing is. It is a simple matter of fact that the winning index owed a very great deal to Frank Baker, the General Editor of the new edition. How much will become clear in what I have to say later on. Again, it is my privilege and good fortune to be working for a learned press whose high standards and meticulous attention to accuracy are second to none. None of you, as professional indexers, will need to be convinced of the importance of that. G. M. Young has put the point perfectly for me: ‘Being published by the Oxford University Press,’ he said, ‘is rather like being married to a duchess: the honour is almost greater than the pleasure.’ Well, being an Oxford Indexer is second only to the dizzy heights of being an Oxford Author. In my case, the association has already proved not only honourable and pleasurable, but immensely helpful also. Partly because it was to be the first of many, my index had a long period of gestation. There were many queries to resolve and decisions to be made, despite a great deal of preparatory work. All this took months rather than weeks and involved lengthy transatlantic correspondence. It was all in the interests of getting it right the first time and establishing helpful precedents for future volumes. But it must have seemed an interminable delay to those ‘clever men at Oxford’ who ‘know all there is to be knowed’. The publishers waited with commendable patience for something tangible to emerge; and without their patience and understanding the index as it exists would certainly not have been possible. I do not want to stir up envy in any of your breasts, but that is the simple fact and it is only fair to state it simply. If we are to have medals to raise the standards of indexing, I wonder whether an award for good conduct on the part of publishers might not be particularly effective.

To turn now to John Wesley, the man and the author. After all, besides the General Editor and the publishers, some of the credit for whatever virtues my index has must also go to Wesley himself as provider of the text. At this point, I am compelled, however diffidently, to take issue with the Selection Panel. They described Wesley’s text as ‘extremely difficult to index . . . discursive rather than pithy . . . hardly concrete enough for an indexer to be able to grasp and express his meaning concisely!’ Now insofar as this is saying that Wesley is concerned with ideas and arguments rather than with factual description or narrative, they are, of course, right. And therefore the indexer’s task is to look beyond the words and

*Text of the address given to the Society of Indexers on March 22nd.
phrases used to the ideas they are expressing. But that is no more than the age-old problem of identifying the key-concepts in the text. And that, as you will readily agree, is essential to any competent indexing that goes beyond the routine process of picking out persons, places and events.

What makes Wesley such a joy to index is that, being an educated man of the 18th century, rather than of our own, he had been trained to think clearly and therefore to express himself logically and coherently—as indeed befitted an author who appealed to 'men of reason and religion'. In an age of education for all, we on the other hand have long since abandoned any attempt to teach the art of thinking: we seem to believe that it requires no training, but only the application of our mother-wit. Five minutes attention to any TV discussion should disabuse us of that notion, yet it remains one of the great heresies of our age, part of the naiveté of the 20th century which future generations will find as quaint as Victorian morality seems to us. The fact is that, faced with a choice between indexing Wesley or the work of the average educationalist or sociologist of our own day, I know which I would choose. In George Lawton's words, 'Accuracy was almost a constitutional endowment in Wesley's make-up. He was celebrated as a logician at Oxford; he prided himself upon his accuracy even towards the end of his long life.' This is reflected not only in his lucidity of thought and an artless simplicity of style, but in his practice of numbering and sub-dividing his paragraphs. In short, no indexer could ask for a more co-operative author.

Wesley was a most prolific writer. Among the many and varied works he threw off as by-products of his busy life, there is one which will serve as a link between Wesley the author and Wesley the indexer. This is his Complete English Dictionary, published in 1753, two years before Samuel Johnson's great work. A dictionary is, after all, not so very far removed from an index. In Wesley's case, the title page makes no bones about claiming that, in the author's view, it is 'the best English Dictionary in the World'. And his 'Address to the Reader' elaborates this claim by the application of a little simple, but not too solemn, logic. This, he says, is not only the shortest and cheapest, but also by far the most correct dictionary available. All other dictionaries contain errors, 'whereas,' he says, 'I can truly say I know of none in this; and I conceive the reader will believe me; for if I had, I should not have left it there.' I like that immensely. It shows us Wesley in light-hearted mood and brings us as near as anything he wrote to John Wesley the man. His standards in this, as in other things, were high, but his words are infused with a dry sense of humour. I like to use the words as a touchstone: those who find them offensively immodest I suspect of that mediocrity which finds it easier to condemn than to emulate. And I find it congenial to echo Wesley's words, I hope in the same spirit. I will not attempt any mock-modesty by pretending that I don't think my Wesley index a very good one. (No one in his right mind talks about 'perfection' in this respect.) I let my index go to the publishers only when I was confident that I could not improve it any further. (Happy the indexer who is given such an opportunity!) I was confident that I had eliminated all errors and omissions, and could therefore say, 'I know of no blemishes in it—otherwise I would have removed them.' That may be the height of vanity; yet, given near-perfect working conditions, what indexer could logically and conscientiously say otherwise?

So we turn to Wesley himself as indexer. Robert Collison describes the 18th century as 'the first great age of the index'; and he instances Cruden's monumental Concordance as a major stimulus to the improvement of standards. He admits, on the other hand, that many books still went unindexed (as indeed some still do today) and that the standard of clarity and consistency still left much to be desired.1 I know nothing of the history of indexing beyond what Collison's chapter tells us, so I can only set Wesley's practice against that very general background. Many of the titles he published were short pamphlets—sermons, tracts, and so on—which scarcely called for an index. But there were more substantial works where the provision of an index was at least a possibility. The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion included in the volume already published in the new edition, are one example. Another is his Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation or a Compendium of Natural Philosophy. This eventually ran into five volumes, but in this case his readers had to be content with a detailed contents list at the end of each volume. Again, The Doctrine of Original Sin according to Scripture, Reason and Experience runs to 522 pages: a substantial volume of close argument, but with no index of any sort. It is not difficult to see why—at a time when subject indexing was still in its infancy.

On the other hand, the collections of hymns

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which Wesley published at various times often did have an index of first lines. For instance, the volume of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* which first came out in 1739 had no index, but one was added to the fourth edition of 1743. Many years later, the *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, first published in 1780 and for many years the standard hymn-book of Wesleyanism, had an index of first lines from the outset; but an index to the verses was not added until 1817.

Similarly two substantial historical works cried out for—and got—detailed indexing. These were his *Concise History of England* in four volumes (1776) and his *Concise Ecclesiastical History* in five volumes (1781). In the former, the index occupies 42 unnumbered pages at the end of volume 4. Most of the entries are sub-divided in quite a detailed way. The alphabetical arrangement is substantially sound, though with a number of oddities—especially, it would seem, at the beginning of a letter. For instance, 'Darnley' has got in before 'Danby' and 'Danes'; 'Hardicanute' and 'Harold' precede 'Habeas Corpus', though Harold reappears later in almost his correct position; 'Laud' gets in before 'Latimer' and others, and 'Lovat' follows 'Lundy'; 'Mary, Queen' comes before 'Magna Charta', though 'Mary, Queen of Scots' is in her rightful place. Sometimes we can detect a chronological influence at work, as when Thomas Cromwell takes precedence over both Oliver and Richard. 'St Albans' is placed among the As, not among the Ss, though the name is not inverted. The I and J entries are conflated, but not U and V. (On the other hand, when we turn to the *Ecclesiastical History* we find the U and V entries are conflated.)

The index to the *Ecclesiastical History* is even more substantial, occupying 76 pages. There is detailed coverage of movements, doctrinal issues and so forth, as well as of persons and places, and the entries are helpfully sub-divided. The two St Augustines are carefully distinguished and the alphabetical arrangement seems, on a fairly rapid scanning, to be much more accurate. In fact, I suspect that in the five years between the two Histories either Wesley had substantially improved his indexing skills or he had learned the wisdom of not leaving it to someone else. I wonder whether I may not have discovered a new facet of his many-sided talents—Wesley the Indexer. Certainly, with his meticulous and logical mind, he had the essential attributes of the good indexer and the examples I have referred to ought to ensure him a niche in any history of indexing. Whether we have any provision for posthumous appointments to the Register I haven't checked.

So we come to the indexing of earlier 'collected editions' of Wesley's Works. There have been three of these before the present one. The first came out in Wesley's own lifetime, in the years 1771-1774, and to some extent under his supervision. 'To some extent' is an important qualification, since the work was far from perfect and Wesley himself often ignored it and went back to some earlier edition when he republished individual items during the last few years of his life. To enlist your sympathy for Wesley at this point, I need only quote Thomas Jackson's account of how the imperfections arose:

'The printer whom he employed on this occasion,' Jackson wrote, 'was William Pine, of Bristol, a member of his own Society, but one of the most careless owners of a printing press that ever tried the temper of an author. It was well for him that he had to deal with so meek a man as John Wesley, rather than with Dr Samuel Johnson, who would certainly have felled him to the ground, when the extent of the mischief he had done was ascertained. He not only defeated Mr Wesley's design to send out his Works in a correct and amended form, but sent them forth in a far worse condition than they had ever been in before.... On reading the volumes after they had been issued, he found not only important words and clauses, but whole paragraphs left out, and more than 100 pages of his Journal omitted! In many places the sense was seriously marred, and in others entirely perverted. Having found out the extent of the evil, the author affixed to each volume a frightful list of errata; and in the copy which he retained in his own library he corrected every volume with his own pen.'

This edition ran to 32 volumes and the last volume contained what purported to be an index to the whole. In fact, it is nothing of the kind, but rather a list of the contents of each volume. These are arranged in page order, not alphabetically, and the whole runs to a mere 22 pages. So, in effect, the edition is unindexed.

A second collected edition in 17 volumes was edited by the Rev Joseph Benson, one of Wesley's senior preachers, and published between 1809 and 1813. The final volume consisted of the index. It ran to 107 pages, and was often bound in with Volume 16; but it had its own title page.
and was separately paginated. It contained not one but four indexes:

A General Index
A Table of the Texts from which Mr Wesley preached the Sermons
A Table of Texts Illustrated in Mr Wesley's Works
An Alphabetical List of the Names of Persons to whom the Letters in the Sixteenth Volume were written.

Here we have genuine indexing, with the entries alphabetically arranged, though some of the refinements we now take for granted are lacking. Instead of bold type or roman numerals to indicate the volume numbers, there are separate columns for volume and page numbers, a method we would now dismiss as impossibly space-consuming. There is also the kind of prolixity common in early indexing. For example, the entry under 'Baxter, Mr Richard' runs like this:

his history of his own life and times commended his history of the councils mentioned his life referred to a quotation from, on visiting a quotation from, on reproving sin his book on apparitions mentioned what he thought a sufficient quantity of sleep and the entry under 'Methodism':

what? the origin of a short history of the rise of peculiar character and spread of the change which, as an instrument, it effects in men's hearts and lives the purity of the religion it recommends its freedom from enthusiasm and bigotry not mixed with vice or ungodliness its freedom from the spirit of persecution why the doctrines of, are objected to not justly chargeable with jealousies and divisions does not undermine morality has no tendency to popery Thoughts upon only scriptural Christianity the good effects of

It is followed by entries under 'Methodist' and 'Methodists', and this raises the question as to how far it is either possible or necessary to make such distinctions. Certainly, in the new index we have found it makes sense to herd all Methodists, singular or plural, into a single entry. (On the other hand, we have included an entry for 'Roman Catholicism', but none for 'Roman Catholic(s)’—only a cross-reference to 'Papists'; but before you accuse us of bigotry, please note that if you turn to the latter you will find only: 'Papists, Methodists accused of being'.)

Reverting to Benson's index, we find subheadings arranged not alphabetically but (more or less) in volume and page order (I have found no explanation of the irregularities). There are examples of too mechanical a handling of the text, as when Wesley's references to 'St Augustine' and 'St Austin' are grouped in two separate entries, although the one is no more than an archaic variant of the other. These were, I suspect, shortcomings common enough at that time; and I think it is fair to conclude that on the whole Benson did a good job by the standards of his day. Nevertheless, his index is, by our standards, far too selective. This is especially noticeable in the case of place-names (particularly prolific, of course, in Wesley's Journal); his principle of selection seems to be to include only those passages where there is some element of description. For instance, Flamborough Head gets in because of Wesley's account of it as a haunt of sea-birds, whereas London does not appear at all—all we find is:

'London, the bishop of, a letter to . . .'

It is always tempting to linger over such curiosities as 'Balloons, remarks on . . .' or, for any of you who are beginning to work up a thirst, 'Bass, some account of . . .'. But such unintended oddities occur in any index from the past, and it is time we passed on to the third collected edition.

Thomas Jackson's edition was a much more competent piece of work. Jackson was a Wesleyan preacher who rose from humble beginnings in the East Riding to become Connexional Editor and twice President of the Conference. (I have already quoted his account of the first edition of the Works.) Jackson's edition, one of several major editorial undertakings, appeared in 14 volumes between 1829 and 1831. The last 170 pages of volume 14 contained an extensive Index of General Subjects, preceded by an index of scriptural references. Inevitably, it can be faulted: perhaps most obviously for the strings of undifferentiated references which are so daunting to any index-user. These occur especially in the case of places frequently visited by Wesley and
therefore mentioned many times in his *Journal*. London, for example, comes into its own at last, with no fewer than 170 general references, followed by a number of sub-headings. To be fair to Jackson, I should note that the 20th century ‘Standard Edition’ of the *Journal*, edited by Nehemiah Curnock, is not very much better in this respect; and it remains to be seen, of course, how far we shall succeed in solving the problem in the new edition. But I am afraid that on *that* score Thomas Jackson would hardly have got on the Register, much less won the Wheatley Medal.

All the same, in other respects his index does represent an enormous stride forward and would, I suspect, compare very favourably with other indexes of his day. This is especially true if we take into account the circumstances in which the edition was published. Jackson had no William Pine to contend with, but he did have his problems. From the outset, he had to face the hostile criticism of some members of the Wesleyan Book Committee, who refused to believe his claim that he had found at least 20 pamphlets overlooked by his predecessor, Joseph Benson. Despite this unpropitious beginning, the 14 volumes were issued at the almost incredible rate of one every two months and the edition, index and all, was completed in just over two years. Jackson himself wrote: ‘A copious index is appended to the 14th volume, drawn up with great care; so that Mr Wesley’s opinions on any given subject may be readily ascertained.’ Mr Wesley, of course, had opinions on most subjects, and had in most cases given expression to them; so Jackson’s 14 volumes served the needs of several generations of Methodists to whom Mr Wesley’s opinions were a touchstone. Nor, I think, were his words about the index an idle boast. Other aspects of his work may perhaps best be dealt with in considering the problems of indexing the new edition, to which we must now turn.

The ‘Wesley Works Editorial Project’ is just 20 years old. It was launched in 1959 by the deans of five Methodist theological seminaries in America. Seventeen years were to pass before the first of the 34 volumes actually appeared in 1976. But the interval was a busy one, filled with much unavoidable preliminary discussion, decisions on editorial policy, bibliographical work and the preparation of a definitive text. One early decision was to group the material into a series of ‘Units’, some made up of a single volume, others (like Wesley’s *Journal* or his letters) filling up to six volumes. One or more ‘Unit Editors’ were appointed for each of these, and in due course it was decided that there should be Unit rather than Volume indexes.

At the centre of all this activity has been Dr Frank Baker, a British Methodist scholar whose appointment to a post at Duke University, North Carolina, enabled him to concentrate his attention on the editorial work. Dr Baker has long been recognized as a leading authority on 18th century Methodism. In addition to his role as General Editor, he is responsible for the bibliographical unit and also for the volumes of Wesley’s letters.

The last of the 34 volumes was allocated to a ‘General Index’, but for many years there was no question of appointing an indexer, if only because there was no immediate prospect of anything to be indexed. However, it is an indication of the careful editorial planning and foresight that as early as April 1970 a meeting of the Editorial Board at Duke University decided to appoint an indexer forthwith. You will, I hope, forgive a short personal reminiscence at this point. I happened to be in America at that time and had been at Duke a couple of weeks earlier. By a quite unexpected change of plans, I had completed some work at the New York Public Library earlier than anticipated and had decided to return to North Carolina rather than endure several days of sight-seeing in New York. So it happened that Frank Baker and I met in the senior common room at Duke immediately after the Editorial Board had ended its meeting and I learned that I was being asked to undertake the task. Thirty-four sizable volumes spread over 20 years or so amount to a substantial undertaking, not to say a life sentence. My decision to accept the challenge was nevertheless an instantaneous one and the events of that day are naturally indelible in my memory.

During the next six years Frank Baker and I were engaged in discussing general guidelines for the indexing and then in applying them to the indexing of Volume 11, the first to appear. I do not propose to weary you with a step-by-step account of the long road that led to the appearance of the first unit index, but will confine myself to a few landmarks. In indexing, as in most worthwhile activities, doing is much more interesting than talking about it.

My first step, soon after returning to England, was to examine a selection of Oxford
publications in order to discover the principles on which the indexing had been done. I assumed, however naively, that there would be a discernible policy, though Hart's Rules for Compositors, the Oxford house-rules, gave no guidance on this matter. I expected to discover at least which of the two basic methods of alphabetization was favoured, if not invariably used. But here I met with an immediate set-back. My publishing demigod turned out to have, if not feet of clay, then at least an Achilles' heel. I discovered, firstly, that some indexes used the one method, some the other; secondly, and much more perplexing, that some appeared to be using both or even a confusion of the two, as in the following examples:

Alphabetization:

(1) Oxford Dictionary of Quotations:
(b) 'Word-by-word' method: West / West Port / Westen / Western . . .
(c) Neither: Dead / Dead-born / Deadlock / Dead men's fingers / Dead Sea / Dead-struck / Deadly . . .
(In this last example, neither method seems to apply. A 'word-by-word' arrangement would give: . . . Dead-struck / Deadlock / Deadly . . . Alternatively, an 'all-through' arrangement would give: . . . Dead-born / Deadlock / Deadly / Dead men's fingers . . .)

(2) Iremonger, William Temple: The following sequence seems to conform to neither of the two standard methods:

New Romney / New Sees / Newcastle / Newman / Newsom / New York
(The 'all-through' method would give: Newcastle / Newman / New Romney / New Sees / Newsom / New York
Alternatively, the 'word-by-word' method would give:
New Romney / New Sees / New York / Newcastle / Newman / Newsom.)

(3) Persons and Places:
The normal rule that persons precede places is ignored in the following:
(a) C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the 16th Century:
Oxford / Oxford, Earl of
(b) D. Bush, English Literature in the Early 17th Century:
London / London, William
(c) M. R. Watts, The Dissenters, Vol. 1:

I submit that the only satisfactory explanation of the facts is that whoever compiled those indexes was hardly aware that there is a choice of two methods. The obvious next step was to raise these points with the Oxford University Press. Their reply included several statements which you will recognize immediately as arch-heresies. For a start: 'We ourselves have traditionally taken the view that an index is normally the author's own responsibility and that as the man who produces the book he is in principle the man best qualified to produce the index.' Then follows an elaboration of this that begins promisingly with what looks like a recantation, only to lurch back into an even more specific confession of error. (It is rather as though the spirit of the martyred Cranmer still haunted the Oxford quadrangles.) 'Our traditional view has become less easy to maintain of recent years, with the accumulation of a body of writing about the theory of indexing, the growth of a group of professional indexers, a more exacting standard of expectation on the part of librarians and readers, etc.' Splendid—especially as, a few lines later, there comes a reference to this Society. But wait for it: 'Nevertheless it remains true that if an intelligent and competent author is prepared to do his own index he is the person most likely to produce a sensible one.' A palpable fallacy, if ever there was one!

In all fairness and to end on a more eirenical note, I should add that the letter does go on to state a principle with which I wholeheartedly concur, and one which indexers themselves perhaps tend to overlook at times: 'Users' convenience, within reason, should be the overriding criterion.' Amen to that, say I!

So we continued to work on our own indexing principles. There were some decisions that were quite quick and easy to make. Additional material in the footnotes is to be indexed, in-
cluding references to primary sources but not to secondary ones. (There is a slightly grey area here, but so far I have had no difficulty in resolving the issue.) In most, if not all, units there will be a separate index of scriptural quotations; these, not surprisingly, are very common in Wesley's writings. We decided to attempt to identify the more substantial exposition or discussion of a text by using bold type. However, in volume 11 this did not prove either necessary or feasible. Meanwhile, the decision to use bold type in the General Index to denote volume numbers means that some other method—perhaps the use of an asterisk—will be necessary for marking the major scriptural references.

Certain units are likely to call for other special indexes. For example, the Minutes of Conference may need an index of preachers' names; and, of course, the Hymn-book will contain an index of first lines.

Quite early on we settled for the 'word-by-word' method of alphabetization, which I myself always find most natural and most satisfactory. (It isn't really much more than a matter of taste, is it?) One feature of Wesley's writings which posed a slight problem here was his quotations from not only Latin and several modern European languages, but also Greek and Hebrew. The Greek and Hebrew alphabets differ from our own, of course, and there are no exact equivalents for some of the sounds represented in them. Thomas Jackson did his best to incorporate these words in their original form at the correct point in the English alphabetical sequence, but with only partial success. Our solution has been to dodge the problem by transliterating the words and indexing them accordingly, followed by their original form in brackets. Two examples from Jackson's index may illustrate the advantage of this—quite apart from the fact that fewer and fewer people in the 20th century can cope with the Greek or Hebrew alphabets. Among the As Jackson included the Hebrew word for God: 'דָּם - which begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Aleph. But Aleph is not the equivalent of our 'A'; in fact, it is not a vowel, but a silent consonant. The normal transliteration of the Hebrew word is 'Elohim' and its natural place is therefore among the Es. Similarly, any Greek word beginning with a vowel has a 'rough' or 'smooth' breathing to indicate whether the initial vowel is or is not aspirated. Jackson indexes the Greek word δόλωκληρος among the Os because of its initial Omicron, and he ignores the aspirate. But as soon as we transliterate it as holokleroi it takes its place quite naturally among the Hs. In the new edition we have, in fact, gone a stage further by grouping all foreign words and phrases together under such headings as 'Greek language . . . words and phrases quoted'.

I must here indulge in a modest boast—so modest that it is really a disclaimer. I would hate you to get the impression that I make any pretensions to linguistic ability. Such grasp of foreign languages as I have ever achieved has been by dint of hard effort and never very secure or lasting. My Hebrew tutor, George Anderson, would be the first to agree that I was one of his failures—but it was certainly my failure, not his. (What he did teach me, of far greater value than any command of Hebrew, was a respect for high standards in matters of scholarship, and a reluctance to accept anything second-rate.) After 25 years or so of neglect, such Hebrew as I did acquire has been reduced to a mere handful of words. These include, by a happy coincidence, the only two Hebrew phrases that occur in the 'Appeals' volume of the new edition. You will immediately recognize the sense of triumph which I felt on discovering that one of these two had been wrongly printed by the compositors. Two almost identical Hebrew letters, He (ה) and Heth (ו) had been confused. Neither the Oxford proof-readers nor the General Editor had spotted this, so my moment of triumph was unsullied. Of such trivialities is the indexer's heaven composed!

I have already spoken of Wesley as a lucid thinker. He was also a master of the English language. Throughout his long evangelical ministry, he never ceased to be the Oxford don, even though he had resigned his Lincoln fellowship in 1751. His thorough grounding in the classics put at his command a wealth of resonant latinisms (the kind that roll off the orator's tongue and that we associate especially with Johnsonian English). Yet, in fact, the most striking feature of Wesley's style is its simplicity and directness. He is, above all, a master of the forthright, the colloquial, even the earthy—in fact, of the 'vulgar' in the proper sense of the language of the common people. George Lawton has shown with a wealth of examples how full his writing is of idiomatic and proverbial phrases more reminiscent of the market place than of the academic cloister. It is possible that the final volume of the Oxford edition will include a concordance of such phrases. Meanwhile we are
including in the unit indexes at least the more striking of them and those which seem to have been special favourites. Not that it is always easy to determine what is or is not proverbial. One minor exchange between Frank Baker and myself concerned the phrase ‘leave the ship’, which Wesley uses several times. The image of the Church as a ship goes back to Apostolic times and it is this which is clearly in Wesley’s mind. But a recognized metaphor does not of itself constitute a proverb and the nearest the Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs comes to Wesley’s phrase is in the proverb about ‘rats deserting a sinking ship’. I argued that this was certainly not Wesley’s meaning. His meaning is much more a biblical than a proverbial one: a combination perhaps of allusions to Peter leaving the boat to go to Jesus (in the ‘walking on the water’ incident) and Jonah being cast out of the ship as a means of stilling the storm. However, in this instance I was over-ruled by the General Editor and ‘leave the ship’ appears among the proverbial expressions in the index. I am probably wrong, but I remain unconvinced!

By far the most important issue that had to be dealt with from the outset was the handling of abstract terms, especially doctrinal ones. This, of course, is always more difficult than the indexing of persons, places and so on. In writings that are both theological and controversial, it inevitably looms large. For this reason, we spent some time and effort on identifying as many of Wesley’s key concepts as possible, largely on the basis of an examination of his standard sermons. (There are also, of course, several recent studies of Wesley’s ‘theology’, for instance those by Colin Williams and Albert Outler, to serve as guides.3) Two or three successive subject lists were compiled before any actual indexing began. (You will appreciate how impossible this would have been had we been operating on a commercial basis, instead of doing it for the sheer—well, let us say ‘fun’—of it!) One interesting feature of these lists was the absence of any references to certain key Christian doctrines; for example, the Trinity. Similarly, when I came later on to examine Benson’s and Jackson’s editions, it was interesting to find that neither could muster more than five references to God in the whole of Wesley’s Works. Again, Benson’s index has only seven references to Christ; Jackson has nine, while my own index to the Appeals manages to find seven. These figures point up the fact that Wesley was not concerned to produce a systematic theology, covering all aspects of Christian doctrine. Rather, as Rupert Davies pointed out in his essay on the Methodist doctrines, Wesley selected ‘the way to Heaven’ as the one vital (and comparatively neglected) area of Christian theology for sustained attention and exposition. Wesley’s teaching, in other words, turns out to be not strictly a theology at all, nor even a Christology, but rather a Soteriology. Practically, if not logically, the being and nature of God is subservient to the way of salvation. This was what Wesley meant by a ‘body of experimental and practical divinity’.4 Speculative metaphysics for its own sake was of no interest to him.

I have already said something about the obvious need to get behind the actual words used to the concepts expressed by them. But of course an author’s choice of words is itself significant and any preference for one word or phrase rather than another should be reflected in the index, if the needs of scholarship are to be adequately served. So the question of synonyms and near-synonyms arises. Synonyms themselves present little difficulty. If Wesley used two words more or less inter-changeably (for example ‘quietism’ and ‘stillness’), all that is needed is to decide which occurs more frequently and is therefore the more characteristic. On this basis, references to the Sacrament of Holy Communion are grouped under the phrase ‘Lord’s Supper’, with cross-references as required, though in this case the phrase ‘means of grace’ also appears as a sub-heading under ‘grace’. Similarly, ‘Bible’ (and also ‘Word of God’ treated as a sub-heading of ‘God’) is cross-referenced to ‘Scripture(s)’.

Partial synonyms present a rather more complex problem and usually call for the use of ‘See also...’ The chief risk here lies in a waste of the user’s time through the unnecessary duplication of references under two (or more) headings. Ideally, perhaps, if there is a cross-reference, no passage should be indexed under both headings; at any rate, such double-indexing should be rigorously kept to a minimum. An example of such partial synonyms in the case of Wesley is ‘New birth’ and ‘Regeneration’. Again, ‘the Fall’ and ‘Original sin’, if not actually synonymous, are clearly a closely-related pair. To take another important example, ‘Forgiveness’ and ‘Justification’ may be treated as synonymous and indexed under the latter; but what about ‘Sanctification’ and ‘Holiness’, together with a cluster of phrases that orbit around one of Wesley’s favourite doctrines, that of ‘Christian perfection’?

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This is the kind of issue that has to be resolved by an evaluation of Wesley’s thought and language, rather than by any doctrinaire principles. Rightly or wrongly, I find in myself a certain reluctance to apply any rules at all rigidly here. I feel the need to be governed to some extent by the material and the interests of the user. Nevertheless, a high degree of consistency is clearly demanded, both between different units and also between the unit indexes and the General Index.

This need to establish early on guidelines that would ensure consistency throughout the indexing has been in the forefront of our minds from the outset. On the whole, I am satisfied that we have got the guidelines right and applied them, so far, with reasonable success. But their application must remain flexible for two reasons at least. Firstly, there is the wide variety of Wesley’s writings included in this collected edition. They range from theological debate to narrative (in his Journals), from biblical exposition to the intimacy of his personal letters. And this variety of subject matter necessarily calls for some variety in the way it is handled in the index.

Secondly, there are certain concepts and key terms which occur particularly often in Wesley’s writings—words like ‘justification’ and ‘faith’ and ‘love’ are obvious examples. From the outset we have tried to break down these major entries in ways that will become increasingly helpful as we approach the General Index. By the time we reach Volume 34, a formidable number of references will have accumulated under such headings as these, and almost certainly a process of further breaking down will be needed. For this reason alone, it will not be sufficient to compile the General Index merely by conflating the 15 Unit Indexes that lie strewn along the path we have trodden. Much of the material accumulated will need to be worked over again and a limited amount of rearrangement will almost certainly be necessary. All the same, if we have been working on the right basic lines, the task of compiling the General Index should be made very much easier. And the General Index itself should be much more serviceable to the reader, which is what it is really all about. Perhaps in the end the most searching test of my success will be the ease with which someone else is able to take up and complete the task I have so cavalierly undertaken. Though I am considerably younger than most of the Unit Editors and may live to see the completion of the series, it would be folly to take this for granted. Failing that, I shall be satisfied if someone else finds that I have managed to make it easy for him to take over what I have begun. Indexing is a pastime that encourages even the meekest of us to enjoy playing the tyrant in our own little kingdoms. The hardest, but perhaps the most important, of all lessons is that none of us is indispensable.

Notes
7. In the Preface to *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists*, 1780. A similar phrase occurs in the introduction to the first volume of his *Christian Library*.

Trop de zèle

According to the *Evening Standard* (19th June 1979) an index has perhaps made publishing history by causing the temporary withdrawal of a book already published. A biography of Brendan Bracken by Charles Lysaght contained an aspersion on a prudently unnamed duchess. The indexer—zealous, conscientious, well-informed—cited the supposed lady by name in the index—thus identifying her and laying the publishers, Allen Lane, open to action for libel. The book, immaculate index and all, was withdrawn from sale for tactful emendation of the index.

Indexing tunes

‘Breaking the sound barrier with a hummingbird’s index to musical themes’ is the title of an article by Harry C. Bauer in *RQ* 18 (2) 1978, 156-159, which draws attention to ingenious methods of indexing tunes, particularly that invented by Denys Parsons and used in his *Directory of tunes and musical themes*, 1975.