Indexing *The Times*
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The increasing importance of newspapers as a record of events in the 19th century was matched by an increasing need for a rapid and accurate method of locating that information both for reference and research purposes. *The Times* had quickly established itself as a major informer—"a journal of record"—and the development of an index to it was a natural progression. Over the years the Index has taken its place as an invaluable guide to current events as observed by *The Times* and, indeed, it is frequently used as a source in its own right or to trace items in other national or regional publications. The Index, like *The Times*, has had a long and chequered history and it has been subject to many variations in format and style. Today's Index is, we hope, the most up-to-date and comprehensive that has been produced—a complement to the world's most prestigious and revered newspaper.

In 1868 the pioneer of the Index, Samuel Palmer, first published Palmer's Index to *The Times*. Attempts had been made before to index the newspaper but none had managed to establish a regular publication. Palmer continued publishing his index until his death in 1899 by which time he had also begun the task of back-indexing to 1785 when the paper was first published. It was to his credit that he made a commercial success of the venture despite receiving little encouragement, spiritually or financially, from *The Times*. After Palmer's death his family continued publication until 1941. Palmer's highly individual style of indexing dominated the Index and, although he had his faults, the importance of his efforts in producing a guide to the early years of one of the world's greatest newspapers is undeniable.

In 1899, Miss Bailey began compiling a rival index which was published by Eyre and Spotiswoode, but her project was short-lived and, in 1902, it ceased publication. *The Times* came round to Palmer's way of thinking in 1905 when they decided to produce their own index although it was perhaps rather a snub to Palmer that they decided to call it *The Official Index to The Times*. The first monthly volume was published in 1906 and the Index continued to appear every month with an annual cumulative until publication reverted to quarterly volumes in 1914.

Newspaper Archive Developments Limited (NADL), a division of Times Newspapers Limited, took over the Index in 1972 when it was retitled *The Times Index*. The development of sophisticated microfilm techniques meant that vast backfiles of newspapers no longer presented a storage problem. *The Times*, with almost 200 years of publication behind it, was already an invaluable research aid and it now became even more accessible. NADL was able to add, not only to its microfilm range but also to *The Times Index* such publications as *The Sunday Times*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Times Educational Supplement*, and *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*. A more significant change in 1973 was the decision to computerize the sorting, editing and setting of the Index.

Producing a comprehensive index to a newspaper of *The Times* calibre is a skilled, detailed and painstaking process. NADL employ a team of 12 indexers and four typists to produce *The Times Index* alone. None of the present team had any previous experience of indexing before joining the company; but throughout an indexer's first six months of employment he or she is closely supervised by one of the existing team of highly-skilled indexers. The qualities we look for in a prospective employee are a good knowledge of current affairs and an ability to work quickly and conscientiously, eventually without supervision. Virtually the whole of the newspaper is indexed including all personal, company, and society names, news items, the court page, business news, and so on, although advertisements, sports fixtures and daily financial listings are not entered. To ensure consistency throughout the Index in long term, the papers are divided up into such sections as domestic news, foreign news, arts, business news, and so on, and every indexer is responsible for his or her own part. Problems do arise, however, when an item involves the subjects of more than one indexer and, as indexers seem to be instinctively territorial, delicate consultations are often needed to ensure that the same article is not indexed in conflicting ways.

The indexers scan the newspapers for news, features, or correspondence on their particular subject and they then select relevant headings...
under which to index the item. Many of the headings used in The Times Index are now well established because the same subjects tend to crop up year after year, but should a completely new topic arise, the indexer will have to initiate a heading. The increase in political terrorism in recent years is a typical example of how the Index has had to cope with a new trend. Conversely, other headings become obsolete over the years or the wording becomes dated. The old heading 'Turf' has now been replaced with 'Horse racing'. The Index must be on the move to keep pace with developments in the language and in the news.

The Times is a British paper, so the Index assumes a similar UK slant. Headings refer to home and general topics whereas foreign countries are prime headings in their own right. Thus, the heading, 'Fires' would refer to fires in Britain and general articles on fires. There would also be a subheading under, say, 'France' dealing with fires in that country. There are notable exceptions to this rule when international headings are used. These are necessary when a subject cannot be confined within national boundaries—a good example might be 'Shipping accidents'.

To reduce the total number of entries in the Index, cross-references are used extensively and, because many of these are standard, we are able to have them inserted automatically by the computer. Most entries in the Index are accompanied by a short abstract which provides the reader with a further guide to the content of the item. At the end of a year, the number of entries under a subject is often so immense that further qualification is essential. We hope that our abstracts are concise and unambiguous, but the occasional gremlin does slip through. For example, 'Electricity: Accidents—three youths found dead by guitars' and 'Refugees—man shot across Austrian border'. Every entry is, of course, accompanied by the date, page and column references, as well as a code denoting the publication.

Before 1973 each entry was written on a slip of paper and filed manually into alphabetical order before being edited and set. Computerization has eliminated the tedious process of manual sorting which, with an average monthly total of 25,000 entries, was a considerable task. Today, to prepare the information for data processing, each entry is written on to a preprinted indexing slip which allocates fields for each level of heading and for date, page, and so on. Until 1977 the slips were typed, using a special fount, on to pages that would be accepted by an Optical Character Recognition Scanner and, when the pages for each quarter were completed, they were processed by the Scanner. The information was sorted alphabetically, recorded on magnetic tape, and a printout was produced for the editing stage.

In 1977 it was decided to produce the Index on a monthly and annual cumulative basis which meant that the OCR Scanning system was not fast enough to cope with the demand for an Index produced on tighter schedules. A system using punched paper tape was introduced and is still in operation today. The entries are typed using a Flexowriter machine which produces hard copy for the indexers to check for accuracy and also translates the information into a binary code via a series of punched holes in the tape. When all the entries for one month have been typed, the paper tapes are sent for processing and the sorted file is again placed on magnetic tape. To provide our customers with an Index which is as current as possible it is edited once at this stage, but a second edit, or update, is done at the end of the year on the annual cumulative volume. The corrections to the monthly Index are also typed on to paper tape and are entered on to the existing computer file to amend the entries. The information is then subject to another computer programme which filmsets the Index to our format. Page headings and numbers are added to each page automatically, and publication codes for The Times are suppressed leaving only codes for the Sunday Times etc. The Index is then printed and bound in a volume of about 140 pages of 297 × 212 millimetres.

Producing an index by computer does provide the researcher with a more up-to-date source and, although it certainly assists the indexer, there are some new problems which are only dealt with by careful programming. When the computer receives two entries to the same subject it will amalgamate them giving, on the printout, one heading with two different date references. To do this successfully the computer is programmed to ignore punctuation and capitals, otherwise the very slight differences in the headings are interpreted as an indication that the headings are different. Similarly, the computer will amalgamate two personal names which appear identical although two different people may be involved. To combat this, control characters have to be introduced into the programme to separate
them and it is at the editing stage that special vigilance is needed to spot such names and add controls to them. Indexers have to be continually aware of the need for consistency and accuracy, and especially so when using such a system; but the facility of the computer to eliminate the more mundane tasks is only one of its advantages over the manual sorting and setting method. Another labour-saving aspect of the computer, that I mentioned earlier, is the automatic insertion of cross-references which are certain to be needed every month; for example, 'Broadcasting: Television SEE Television'. For all cross-references entered the word SEE is added in the correct place by the computer. The ease of correcting entries is another benefit of this system. Each entry is allocated a number and corrections are merely entered again on that number, and only the field which is incorrect needs to be changed rather than the whole entry. Correction listings can be received at any stage so that a permanent record can be kept of any alterations, and entries can still be added to the Index at the final correction stage.

Perhaps the major advantage of the system is the ability to store all records in a small area and, more importantly, in a very flexible form. Thus, it is quite a simple matter to accumulate 12 monthly indexes into one annual index—although editing the annual is a mammoth task. We can also ask the computer to retrieve all entries on any particular subject, date, or entries indexed by a particular person or for a specified publication. Using the latter technique we are able to produce annual indexes for The Times Literary Supplement and The Times Higher Educational Supplement. The possibilities are endless.

In recent years NADL has broadened its horizons and sought microfilm rights to many varied publications, and it has initiated indexing projects to supplement the backfiles it has available. The very first five years of The Times, or The Universal Daily Register as it was then known, are currently being indexed for the first time. Indexes for the years 1785 and 1786 have already been published and work is continuing on the three years to complete a microfilm and indexed record to The Times for 193 years. This project requires much detailed work and dedication because the newspapers of the day were not presented with the clarity that we see in The Times today.

Another project using The Times material is the Obituaries from The Times published in books covering the periods 1961-1970 and 1971-1975 (1951-1960 is in preparation). These books contain an index to every obituary printed in The Times during those years and selected obituaries are printed in full. Apart from making fascinating reading, the books provide for the researcher in-depth biographical detail for most of the great names of the century.

The Times Literary Supplement was first published in 1902 and was originally distributed free as part of The Times. As it grew in size and popularity it developed into a separate publication and has since gained a reputation as a record of the literary and artistic world. Yearly indexes have been compiled to the TLS, but over 76 years of publication the styles have obviously varied. NADL has undertaken a major project—to produce a new index to those years. The first volume of the TLS Cumulative Index, which covers the period 1902 to 1939, has been completed and a second volume is being prepared to cover the years from 1940. The 1902-39 Index contains more than 350,000 references to reviews, articles, letters and leading articles, and they are arranged in three categories within the alphabetical order to enable the user to find the items more easily. These categories are personal names, book title entries and subject entries. These volumes will obviously become a major reference work to the literary scene this century.

At the time of writing the suspension of publication by Times Newspapers Limited is still in force. In the absence of The Times and as a service to customers NADL has decided to index The Daily Telegraph and The Sunday Telegraph so that an unbroken record of events can be maintained. When one mentions the future in connexion with the newspaper industry, the words 'new technology' spring to mind. NADL has already made good use of available technology to produce its indexes and the future can only bring more sophisticated and speedier methods of using computers to aid the indexer. Already we are jointly involved with Research Publications Inc. in the United States in producing an Index to The Washington Post, using a system where indexers type information direct to the computer. But however advanced the technique is for publishing such indexes, there is still a need for consistent and intelligent indexing, without which the 193 years of indexes to The Times would not have achieved the unrivalled position they hold today.

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