Symposium:

Indexers at work

Is there a stereotyped image of indexers setting about their trade? Or is variety the chief characteristic of the profession? Indexers of different types here describe for us their working circumstances.

The price of freelancing is eternal vigilance

F. T. Dunn

However much one may like to think of publishing as it used to be—a profession for gentlemen—as a full-time freelance indexer one has to adopt a strictly businesslike attitude.

This means, above all, though working at home, keeping as far as possible to ordinary office hours—and sometimes more than ordinary, with evenings, weekends and even holidays sacrificed when the pressure is on. In my own case it also means keeping one room of my home exclusively as an office, with at least a desk, a filing system and a reference library; I cannot imagine how some indexers apparently can work on the end of the kitchen table or on long train journeys. This matter of reference books can be a serious one for the freelance who has to provide his own. Apart from the obvious encyclopaedias and dictionaries, there are the yearbooks and other guides which must be renewed regularly. The more expensive ones like Who's Who can, of course, be consulted in public libraries, but as my nearest is 15 miles away this can, for me, be inconvenient and time-wasting. The freelance indexer must, in fact, have an extensive reference library of his own, to which he must constantly add all sorts of miscellaneous up-to-date information. For instance, I find it useful to cut out the lengthier obituaries from The Times and keep them in a looseleaf file as a supplement to the DNB (and how I hope that too many important people do not die while The Times is dormant).

Having equipped oneself for work, the vital thing is to obtain commissions, and to maintain as easy a flow as possible. Naturally one tries to programme the work so that two or three indexes are not all jostling for completion at the same time; on the other hand, one is reluctant to turn any work away if there is the slightest chance of doing it comfortably (and any publisher who finds an indexer refusing one commission after another may well feel the time has come to look elsewhere). However carefully one plans, things can go awry. The most common complication arises from a printer delaying the proofs so that their arrival eventually clashes with other proofs and the tightest of schedules falls apart. It is then that the midnight oil is burnt. And there is always the publisher who finds at the last minute that he has not arranged for an index, or that his regular indexer is ill, on holiday or dead, and then frantically rings a freelance (perhaps recommended by Mrs Wallis) to perform the almost impossible.

There is, of course, the more serious problem of too little work. With takeovers and mergers, and changes in organization, policy and editorial staff, commissions from long-established, friendly contacts can dwindle, and one must be on the constant lookout for new markets. This involves studying, for instance, The Bookseller for details of new firms and appointments, and notices of forthcoming books; capitalizing on reviews which mention unsatisfactory indexes; and occasionally reminding publishers of one's existence (taking care not to pester). The price of freelancing is eternal vigilance.

My actual working methods are presumably much the same as any other professional indexer's. If time allows, I read through the text in order to get some idea of the style and depth of indexing required and the subjects most frequently occurring. I then divide it into
categories such as people, places, organizations and finally concepts and ideas, and index each category separately. This does involve going over the same ground several times, but I find this easier than having to switch constantly from one train of thought (and one type of reference book) to another; it also increases the chance of picking up errors and inconsistencies. I work always on cards, and group them into alphabetical order at regular intervals.

Typing the finished index myself enables me to sub-edit, fill out abbreviations and revise if necessary. I send the top copy and one carbon, enclose my account and hope for prompt payment and the occasional word of appreciation.

Continuous indexing: a weekly periodical

M. Raymer

I work in a broom cupboard—at least that is what it was used for until, tired of always having the typewriter on the dining-room table, I fitted up a typing bench and turned the cupboard into a mini study.

The Veterinary Record arrives on Saturdays; at least that is the theory—it can be anything up to a week late. When it comes on time I usually deal with it on Saturday evening (not being musical enough to appreciate ‘These you have loved’). I dread a printers’ or postal strike. A holiday or a succession of visitors causes a backlog which I find troublesome, and I make every effort to keep up to date.

The index is typed straight from the journal on to five-by-three-inch slips in strips of five. After checking, they are divided and filed. Often an article will provoke correspondence in following issues, and instead of making a subject entry for the letters I add the page number to the original subject entry. There are two volumes a year, so at the end of June and December the file is tidied up, the slips numbered (in case the printer drops them!) and posted off. Some weeks later they arrive back with the proofs.

Starting this year, the slips will be kept and interfiled until a five-year cumulative index can be produced. I anticipate that the problems will be mainly those of storage, though the final numbering of the slips promises to be quite a lengthy operation. Each half-yearly index contains an average of 1,500 slips.

As insurance against a postal disaster, I take a carbon, but this remains in strips and would serve as a basis to reconstitute the copy.

A possibly unique operation concerns the second carbon, taken on coloured paper. These slips are put into order and posted each week to the Library at the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, so that an up-to-date index is always available there. When I was librarian there I found it so useful not having to plough through all the copies that I have sent the weekly batch ever since—19 years! Stamped envelopes are provided by the library.

At home with the children—Invisible indexing

Liz Cook

When I was a librarian, classification and indexing were always my special interests. When I married, and continued for some time as a librarian, the idea developed that, if I had a young family, indexing at home might provide stimulating and convenient work.

My first two indexes, for books of which a friend was co-author, were completed just before the birth of my first son. Working on these I had few distractions from my home-office routine. With a small baby who slept a lot, this routine could be maintained; but when Daniel grew into a mobile toddler, quickly followed by his brother, problems arose. Boxes of cards and rustling page proofs have a fatal fascination, and the typewriter is much more exciting than a stack of beakers or truck of bricks. I can be ironing, gardening or even sit idle while the boys play happily on their own; but if I produce ‘Mummy’s work’, they invariably stop whatever they are doing and clamour to help.

For the present I have settled for a combination of what I call ‘visible and invisible indexing’. Visible indexing, with proofs and tools set out on the table, is relegated to evenings, when I try to switch over from a bedtime story-reading mum at six, to a professional indexer from seven to 11. This amount of time, together with week-end mornings, when dad takes the boys off to the park or the beach, is enough to finish most jobs.

Invisible indexing—which is not included in my calculation of hours worked—consists of mulling over choice of sub-headings, cross-references, or any other thorny problems while sitting on a park
bench or supervising the paddling pool. Preliminary reading and secretarial tasks such as parcelling up proofs and writing short letters, can sometimes be surreptitiously included in this category.

Working at home in the evenings and looking after a family, means that I am susceptible to family crises. For instance, I would not wish upon myself again the situation during Jubilee week, when I was rushing to meet a deadline and both boys had chicken pox. Dad gets roped in to help with domestic chores, and does more than his fair share of putting the children to bed when an index is in progress. ‘Why can’t men do indexing, then Mum could put me to bed?’ he was asked the other day. Another inconvenience is that I find I have to do during the day the things I would normally do in the evenings, such as hobbies, visits to the library, and the secretarial work I do for charity.

The nature of freelance indexing seems to suit me. I like working in short bursts, and look forward to receiving an index to do. While doing it I look forward to completing it, when I’ll have some time to call my own again. One month on, one month off would suit me best, although it never works like this in practice. ‘Why can’t men do indexing, then Mum could put me to bed?’ he was asked the other day. Another inconvenience is that I find I have to do during the day the things I would normally do in the evenings, such as hobbies, visits to the library, and the secretarial work I do for charity.

The Indexer Vol. 11 No. 4 October 1979 215

The art of indexing is only a half of it

Richard Haig-Brown

 Plenty is written about the art of indexing—little or nothing about the business of indexing. My wife and I work full-time though we are not always actually indexing; the erratic flow in demand creates periods of intense indexing activity, and others when there is none; then in a matter of days, if not hours, we can find ourselves faced with scheduling several calls, each of which must satisfy different needs without promising the impossible. We therefore have to have some secondary occupation which can immediately be dropped and left on one side. I study the investment market and take correspondence courses which do not have a set time-table; my wife is apt to spend hours tearing up pieces of cloth which someone else has spent hours weaving into one piece, so that she can sew them together again—something she calls patchwork quilting.

It is not only in times of high indexing activity that the qualities of self-discipline and sense of purpose are needed. We are always in the (home) office before nine and not at five past; for the self-employed time has an even greater value than it has in a factory. At least 15% of the year (say 300 hours out of 2,000) has to be spent in administration and maintenance. Accounts, filing, payment of bills, tax returns, cash flow problems, stationery requirements, keeping the Registrar informed of work done, bank statements, letters, progress statistics, bundling up used record cards for re-use, chasing bad payers, conferring within the society, forward planning of customer needs; are all an essential part of generally keeping the system in a tip-top state in readiness for periods lasting many weeks when none of these routines can be looked at at all. My desk needs to be arranged so as to be able to reach almost anything without getting out of a swivel chair; market research has to be undertaken; equipment has to be serviceable.

I reckon to devote nothing less than an average of two hours a day, seven days a week (700 hours a year), much of it after a normal day’s work, to developing a strong sense of recall, reading the newspaper and listening to the radio, so as to spot quickly the vital indexing clue or know where to go at once to verify a point; be it that Len Murray’s name is Lionel, what the social effects of the Bail Act are, who Maria Colwell was, what Kampuchea used to be called, why there is a poverty trap or whether Libya is a member of OPEC; any one of which, among thousands of such details, may be connected with the next indexing assignment.

Fifty per cent of what must be done attracts no fee at all, and the true hourly rate we get is but half the charged hourly rate; as that in itself takes no account of a pension, we do not expect ever to be able to afford to retire.

Those who claim that indexers need only concern themselves with the art must have been wedded to St. Matthew, chapter 6, vv. 31 and 34. Their insistence that business acumen plays no part in indexing disregards the need to eat, drink and be clothed, and denies the absolutely essential requirement to take thought for the morrow.
As I see it, the law holds that a man is responsible for his own actions, a dictum quite recently reaffirmed by the withdrawal of the right to shelter behind a disclaimer; it has not yet been fully appreciated by anyone just how much this change affects those who provide a service; which includes the indexer. On this one score alone it is of paramount importance to act circumspectly; and this includes the keeping of reliable records and accounts capable of standing up to close examination. Accounts and man-hours are also necessary to back up the case that indexers are underselling and undervaluing themselves in a highly specialized field, through not paying sufficient heed to economic realities.

The indexing part of working life
Richard Raper

Scratch an indexer and words leak out; true or not, for about 70% of my time I index books and journals for publishers and several other organizations. Of the remaining time some 20% is allocated to private tutoring in mathematics and science and the rest to consultancy work. In these few notes, I shall describe how I go about an indexing commission.

The reasons why not all my time is spent on indexing stem partly from circumstances and partly from the time involved in the process of indexing. This varies from a few days to three months and then payment is not always immediate. By varying my activities a reasonably steady cash flow is ensured, which is essential for a family man like myself.

The indexing process follows a fairly standard pattern, although each index is different. I emphasize the latter point, because the style of the author, subject, type of book, publishing house style and length of index are just some of the factors which make each index unique.

The search for better methods is also constant. Often a particular index will demand some innovation or other. Indeed I am looking seriously at computer or microprocessor systems for their feasibility with indexing.

After gaining a commission, I ascertain by means of a questionnaire sundry details on layout and presentation. To save space, subsequent steps while doing the index are here summarized in a table.

### Steps in preparing an index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read the text and design the index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write or type index entries on paper slips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check entries for accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort slips into order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type the manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check MS for accuracy and final editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despatch (including Admin.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking proofs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I would be lost without my wife's friendly criticism and assistance with sorting. Checking proofs is frequently done by the publisher. Paper slips are used in preference to cards. The latter I find rather cumbersome (although many of my colleagues find the opposite). Cheap newspaper blanks are cut into 10×4½ cm. slips in lots of 50,000 or so by a local jobbing printer. I constantly look for improved materials and have tried all sorts from perforated strip to punched cards. But this simple method works quite well.

So much for indexing. My tutoring work is not relevant, but consultancy is worth a mention as it involves indexing skills and information expertise as well as other disciplines. Thus among my mixed occupations, of which indexing plays a major role, there is a rich variety of interest.

### Division of labour in rapid indexing of technical periodicals

J. Edwin Holmstrom

During the past 12 years, providing annual volume indexes to the three regular periodicals of the Institution of Civil Engineers, as well as five-year indexes in which the references to all three journals are merged with references to reports on conferences and symposia held during the same period, I have developed a working procedure to ensure that each successive stage in the compilation of an index is performed by one person and checked by another before the next stage is undertaken, in the interests of accuracy.

The principle adopted in this system is separation of what might be called the specialist's component of the work, which needs to be performed by an indexer professionally well
Application of geotechnics to the solution of engineering problems—essential preliminary steps to relate the structure to the soil which provides its support

J. E. JENNINGS, PrEng, BSc(Eng), SM, DSc(Eng), DSc(Eng)(Hons), NonFASACE, FICE
A. B. A. BRINK, DSc(Eng)(Duel), MAfIoT

The approach to designs involving the application of soil mechanics involves a good understanding of the problems of both structure and soil. Geology, geomorphology, and landforming processes are important facets to such understanding but the ultimate design decisions rest on a sound application of good engineering judgement. This Paper presents a simple and pragmatic view of soil mechanics design. Considerable call is made on the principles employed by Terzaghi and Hvorslev in their approaches to such engineering problems of structure and soil. These serve to remind engineers that they should strive to maintain a balanced view at all times.

Figure 1. A facsimile reproduction of the first page of a paper in the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Part I—Design and construction, marked by the indexer.

versed in the subject matter and thus capable of value judgements, from the 'clerical' component which can be entrusted to an assistant needing only common sense and the appropriate typing and sorting skills. Successive batches of the text to be indexed pass to and fro between them as each of the following phases is accomplished. Time is saved as both can work simultaneously; and indeed money, since the indexer's time is worth more per hour than the assistant's.

1. The indexer scans rapidly through the whole of the text to gain a general impression of its contents and the relative importance of the topics discussed, not at this stage pondering detail but bearing in mind the sound military precept that time spent on reconnaissance is seldom wasted. (If, however, completion of the index is particularly urgent he may mark the names that are to be indexed in the first instalment and pass this to his assistant before he scans the rest.)

2. The assistant receiving part of a text marked with authors' names typewrites these names followed by the title and pagination of their work onto address labels. (Packets containing sheets of 20 suitable labels can be bought from stationers under the trade name of Ivy Series TWL 31 size, gummed on the back and having lines of perforations for tearing them apart. Alternatively, 'self-stickers' temporarily attached to backing sheets which contain 24 labels each can be used. Either kind is much quicker to type upon than separate cards or slips, but rolls of address labels are slightly less convenient.)

3. When the indexer has scanned through a whole instalment of the journal he reads it through again more carefully, deciding what should be indexed and marking the pages accordingly as exemplified in Fig. 1, then completing a 'drafting slip' for each section of the text as shown in Fig. 2. Most of the needed words can simply be underlined wherever they happen to occur, in text, title or summary, and are made readily findable by marking with ringed numbers, only a few connecting words having to be written in longhand. Subject index entries are preceded by code abbreviations of main subject heads (beginning with small letters so as to avoid confusion with names) such as,

- damBR Dams, barrages and reservoirs
- testE Testing and experiment
- soilM Soil mechanics

These devices save the indexer much time and, what is important for accuracy, they ensure that the typing is copied from print instead of from handwriting.

4. The assistant receiving a section of text with the drafting slip attached to it then proceeds to type the subject references on labels as already described (Fig. 3). If the indexer has made a mistake, for instance by accidentally using the same ringed number twice over, this immediately becomes apparent from the fact that the words strung together make gibberish. (Two carbon
copies on ordinary paper are made, one for filing by the indexer and the other for sending to the client by way of insurance against some calamity occurring before the index is completed and printed.)

5. The indexer on receiving the typewritten labels is able to check them against the text very quickly as the references are still in page number order. He verifies that their total number agrees with what he had marked at the bottom right-hand corner of the drafting slip. If the typing is correct he signifies this by deleting in red the abbreviations of main subject head under which each label is to be inserted, but if he finds some typing error or has second thoughts about the wording of a reference he corrects or amends it and marks a large R over it, meaning 'Retype'.

6. The labels that have been checked go back to the assistant who does any necessary retyping (placing the retyped labels over the originals for easy checking), then separates and sorts them into approximate alphabetical order placing each batch in 'pay envelopes' marked with the letters AA-AD, AE-AH, AI-AN, AO-AU, BA-BD, etc.

Figure 2. Index references drafted on slip.

Application of geotechnics to the solution of engineering problems: essential preliminary steps to relate the structure to the soil which provides its support. P.64 (Nov.) 571-89 (G.20)

geot
See also Soil mechanics

Soil M
Profile inferences from surface observations and existing exposures followed by systematic recording and sample testing. In JENNINGS, &c (1978) P.64 (Nov.) 572-3, 576-86

Soil M
Profile inferences from surface observations and existing exposures followed by systematic investigation; recording and sample testing. In JENNINGS &c (1978) P.64 (Nov.) 575-6

Soil M
How to secure a three-dimensional picture of the subsoil; engineering problems to be anticipated in residual and transported soils. In JENNINGS, &c (1978) P.64 (Nov.) 575. 580-1

Sol M
Profile inferences from surface observations and existing exposures followed by systematic investigation; recording and sample testing. In JENNINGS &c (1978) P.64 (Nov.) 573-3, 576-86

Figure 3. Index references typed in page number order on gummed address labels.
7. On completion all envelopes are returned to the indexer who takes out the labels, lays them out and sorts them in exact alphabetical order under each name or subject head. He can now change his mind as to the most appropriate headings under which to place any particular index entry, make other adjustments, carry out further checking and introduce all needed cross references. When satisfied that all are in correct alphabetical order and have the main subject headings interpolated he replaces them in the envelopes.

8. Finally the indexer or his assistant sticks the labels onto backing sheets, constituting copy for the printer.

9. To make up the five-year Author Index, Subject Index, Place and Project Names Index covering all ICE publications combined, the backing sheets containing the entries in the separate annual-volume indexes are cut up, merged into one alphabetical order and attached to fresh backing sheets by using an adhesive. (Alternatively a carbon copy onto gummed labels might be made at the same time as the original typing, but in practice this proved more troublesome than it seems.) The appearance as printed is seen in Fig. 4.

As regards accuracy the advantage of this system is that the indexer and his assistant check one another's work automatically at each stage, and that names as well as most other words and page numbers are copied from print instead of from handwriting. The risk of printer's errors, however, is not eliminated. In principle this might be achieved by using a good electric typewriter to prepare the labels, suitable apparatus to align and space them, and photo-litho to reproduce them, but the appearance of the result on attempting this (for a different job) by cruder means was not satisfactory.

Dissemination of technical information

Proposed Federal policy on the dissemination of technical information which results from Federally-funded research and development forms the subject of two special issues of Information Hotline, Vol. 11, nos 3 & 4, March and April 1979. The policy is set out in the [US] Office of Management and Budget's Bulletin No. 78, which is reprinted in the March issue, where it is followed by copies of responses received by the OMB from Federal agencies, university libraries and public libraries. The April issue prints the responses from associations, the private sector, state agencies and individuals.

Big Brother is also an indexer

The United States Privacy Act of 1974 requires the disclosure of the existence of systems of records on individuals, and a Senate Bill proposes reorganization of national intelligence activities. A report in a special issue of Information Hotline on governmental intelligence agencies identifies 168 indexes of individuals maintained by the FBI for investigative purposes. Column heads are Title [of Index], Description and use, Status [active or inactive], and Number of field offices maintaining index.

*Information Hotline 10 (4) April 1978.