LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Book prices

I am very grateful for the favourable review of my book *The Conversion of Scripts* (*The Indexer* April 1979, p. 178-179), especially since the reviewer was kind enough to extol its virtues but not to mention some of its faults and shortcomings of which I am painfully aware, e.g. several misprints in Russian. However, I must disagree with her terse statement 'The book is expensive'. In fact, among the books reviewed by Miss Piggott, it is the best bargain in terms of price per page. One page of *Conversion* costs 5.88 cents (although admittedly in the UK it is priced at 4.13p per page, or about 8.25 cents). The *PRECIS* book comes to 5.92 cents, the two small books from India (printed on rather inferior paper and poorly bound) come to 8.33 cents for Cameron's lecture and 10.90 cents for Perreault's, while the British Standard is a truly staggering 35p or 70.00 cents per page! And now hear this: a recent American book entitled *The Future of the Catalog: the Library's Choices*, containing 110 pages and bound in soft covers, sells for $24.50 which amounts to almost a quarter dollar per page. Talk about expensive books! In view of these facts, I believe that my publisher, John Wiley & Sons, should rather be congratulated for publishing a scholarly work with complex typography and footnotes at the bottom of each page at such a reasonable price.

Yours sincerely,

HANS H. WELLISCH.

Our reviewer writes: It may have been a short sentence but it was followed by a dozen lines of what was intended to be a justification of the price of the book reviewed. The 'statement' was the whole, not merely the introductory sentence. If only one had time to check one's references!

A captious review

Please allow me to comment on Mr Haig-Brown's captious review (*The Indexer* 11 (3), 186) of *Wills proved at Chester 1831-1833*, edited by Dr and Mrs Dickinson.

Dealing first with the criticisms of the introductory section, it should be noted that this was not prepared by the Dicksonsons, but by Brian E. Harris. 'The List of Volumes (hardly explicit) . . .'. This is the centenary volume of the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, and the title 'List of Volumes' is perfectly explicit in its context.

'Neither index nor the Analytical Index draws attention to the references being to volume number instead of pages.' It is not clear what 'index' means here, but as the Indexes of Subjects, Editors and Printers all refer to the List of Volumes, why should anyone expect the references to be to page numbers?

As for the numbers of entries given for these indexes, Mr Haig-Brown is so anxious to demonstrate that indexers make mistakes that he makes some himself: two out of his four enumerations appear to be inaccurate.

Turning now to the main part of the book: 'The index content shows it was mechanically copied from the text, devoid of thought or system.' The list of wills was assembled from sources no doubt confused and obscure, and put into alphabetical order of testators, with accompanying indexes of places and occupations: does this not involve thought and system? The last sentence of the review is unjustifiable: much skilled intelligence has been employed throughout.

The index of occupations is full of interest. Cordwainer, sawyer, tide-waiter—do these occupations still exist? Pauper, prisoner for debt—what had these to bequeath? Second Lieutenant, Brazilian navy—a junior colleague of Admiral Cochrane?

Dr and Mrs Dickinson's labours will be appreciated by students of genealogy and local
history for a long future. Older members of the Society of Indexers appreciate also Dr Dickinson's past services as one of our auditors.

Your faithfully,
M. D. ANDERSON.

Our reviewer writes: The Index of Occupations contains such monstrosities as 'Spinsters 5-141 passim', separate entries for dyers, fancy dyer and woollen dyer (but not fried fishmonger), while customs refers to two, some 15 others occurring elsewhere.

[It appears that our reviewer concentrated on the technical points of compiling the index rather than the work of assembling and ordering the material.—Ed.]

Chemical Abstracts indexes

Your pseudonymous contributor, Monocle (The Indexer, 11 (3) April 1979, p. 143), is to be commended for his grasp of the economics of Chemical Abstracts production and the possible impact of on-line thereon. However in arguing for reducing the price of the major secondary services by reducing the quality he has, perhaps not surprisingly for one with monocular vision, seen only half the picture.

The number of papers published in chemistry, and the depth and scatter of the subject, continues to increase. This makes it ever harder for individual scientists to find what they are looking for. Our retrieval capabilities must surely be maintained and improved to keep pace, rather than degraded. For example, recent legislation is leading to increased use of the CA indexes for specific compound searches. This is only possible because of the intellectual investment made over the years in comprehensive substance indexing. The maintenance of quality has always been a firm element of CAS policy. They already use author abstracts to the maximum extent consistent with this and with production of an English-language data base. (Would Monocle be happy with author abstracts and index terms in Japanese?)

There are other ways of reducing prices—improving operational efficiency, increasing usage, co-operation among secondary services, for example. CAS are actively pursuing all of these and their unit costs have in fact consistently fallen over the last several years.

Of course not all the scientific community needs the total CA. Nor do they have to have it. More and more smaller packages are being made available, for example the CA Selects series, of which there are now 77 varieties. Monocle argues that the scientific community has not consciously decided it wants the large secondary services. Enough people want CAS services to keep us viable. Most of our customers spend 4- or 5-figure sums. I cannot believe such expenditure is incurred in the absence of conscious decisions!

Yours faithfully,
DOUGLAS C. VEAL,
Chemical Society Information Services,
Nottingham.

Back-of-the-book indexing

Anthony Raven had some fun with 'back' (The Indexer 11 (2) Oct. 1978) and I should appreciate the opportunity of bringing him back to reality.

The phrase at the head of this letter became established several years ago in the ever-widening field of indexing to identify and distinguish the special form of indexing which he, and probably most of the practising members of the Society of Indexers, use.

There are other forms of indexing with which I think he is familiar, but if he is not, the library staff of his alma mater or of the Library Association will be pleased to show him examples. Or if he would like to see reproductions of several of them on one page, he may see this in a copy of On the performance of nine printed subject index entry types which is reviewed in this issue of The Indexer (page 247).

Yours faithfully,
L. M. HARROD.

Copyright protection for computer software

The case for copyright protection of computer programs and data bases as compared with other materials already protected by US legislation is examined in a special feature by Shirley Radack in Information Hotline 11 (1) Jan. 1979, 15-17, in the light of a report from the [US] National Bureau of Standards entitled Copyright in computer-readable works: policy impacts of technological change, by Roy G. Saltman.