

'Indexes' and 'indexing' in encyclopedias

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A survey of the treatment of the subjects 'index' or 'indexing' was made in seven English-language and twenty foreign-language general encyclopedias, in five encyclopedias of librarianship, and in one specialized encyclopedia. The treatment of these topics is quite uneven and in most instances not up to date. The Societies of Indexers should make efforts to improve this situation.

Most people, when in need of quick information on a topic with which they are entirely or largely unfamiliar, turn to an encyclopedia in the expectation that it will contain a concise definition, an explanation of the topic's main features, and perhaps a bibliography with references that will contain more detailed information. Though these general expectations are not always fulfilled, by and large, encyclopedias must be effective for such purposes, or they would not be produced in great variety, nor would even the smallest libraries keep, as they do, at least one such reference work prominent upon their shelves. How well is an inquirer served by large general encyclopedias and by some more specialized ones when looking up the subjects of 'indexes' and 'indexing'?

The answer to this question may surprise professional indexers who might have thought that works of reference which rely so heavily on good indexing (whether in the form of cross references or in separate index volumes) would devote considerable space and detail to the subject. As the following survey shows, this seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

The encyclopedias which were examined for this rather informal, and certainly not exhaustive, survey were found in two large university libraries and in the reading room of the Library of Congress. The year of issue for each work is given in parentheses after its title.

English-language general encyclopedias

Since 1881, when H. B. Wheatley's article 'Index' first appeared in its 9th edition,* the *Encyclopaedia*

Britannica has provided the most extensive treatment of indexes and indexing. The article was carried through the 11th edition, in which latter it appeared unsigned and somewhat abridged, though with a bibliographical reference to H. B. Wheatley's book *How to make an index*. In the latest revisions of the 14th edition, a completely new article by Don R. Swanson appeared. It began with the history of indexes (largely based on Wheatley's work) and dealt with the problems of indexing, the processes involved in the compilation of an index, and index evaluation and performance. Ample space was devoted to citation indexes and to their prototype, *Shepard's citations*, and the way lawyers use this tool, and there was even a funny quotation from a science-fiction article on indexing, set apart in a box. In addition, there were reproductions of pages from the first index to the *EB*, the *Science Citation Index*, and from three concordances, two of which were compiled by computer. The article concluded with a discussion of automated indexes and had an extensive bibliography. In the present revamped 15th edition (1974), there is first a very brief definition of 'Indexing' in the *Micropaedia*, with references to 'Chess and automation' (which turns out to be almost entirely irrelevant); to 'Library computerized systems' which deals superficially with KWIC indexing; and to 'History, methods and problems' with a page reference to vol. 9, p. 569f of the *Macropaedia*, which is incorrect. At the indicated place, there is a discussion of abstracts, whereas Swanson's article on indexing (a subsection of 'Information processing') begins in fact on page 570e. It is unfortunate that just 'indexing' is wrongly indexed! And even more regrettable that the article has now been much abridged (less than three pages as against six and a half pages in the 14th edition). Gone are all the illustrations, the example of lawyers' use of *Shepard*, and the sci-fi piece on indexing. But the bibliography has been brought up to date, eliminating most of the older entries, and on the whole the reader can still get a fairly good idea of what indexes and indexing are all about—if he can find the article, that is. He would however be better advised to look up the subject in the latest revision of the 14th edition (1973); as many critics of the 'new' *EB* have pointed out, this is true also of many other topics.

*See 'Index, by H. B. W.', *Indexer* 7 (4) Autumn 1971, 176-177.

The *Encyclopedia Americana* (1979) devotes two pages to 'Index', written by Maurice F. Tauber. The article begins with an historical overview, mentioning the work of H. B. Wheatley, and leading up to modern developments, especially the standards on indexing published by BSI and ANSI. It then discusses the preparation of indexes, the two alphabetical filing systems, and technical details; mechanical production of indexes is also briefly explained, though this part of the article does not seem to have been updated for several years. Tauber then surveys the work of the professional societies in the UK and the US, and concludes with examples of special indexes, the H. W. Wilson indexes, and computerized A&I services such as MEDLARS. Within the limited space assigned, this is a rather well-balanced exposition of the topic, rounded out by a bibliography of six books, including those by Wheatley and Collison.

Collier's encyclopedia (1979) has about three-quarters of a column on 'Indexing', by Nathaniel Stewart. First, the term is defined, then the work of indexers is briefly explained, and the rest of the article deals with alphabetical arrangement, page proofs, and the H. W. Wilson indexes. Card and strip indexes, so the final sentence says, are used for business purposes (a statement which will puzzle librarians). The *Encyclopedia international* (1971) has less than a page on 'Indexes and indexing' by W. J. Kurmey, covering the history of indexes, a brief discussion of periodical indexes, a section on indexing procedure, and a paragraph on punched and edge-notched cards as mechanical aids. Neither of the last two has a bibliography.

The one-volume *New Columbia encyclopedia* (1975) devotes the relatively large space of half a column to 'index' (lower-cased, to distinguish it from the following capitalized item 'Index' of books prohibited by the Roman Catholic Church). The article covers book and periodical indexes and their history (listing among others *Poole's index* and the H. W. Wilson indexes) as well as indexes to 'illustrations, artifacts, formulas and collections of materials'—a feature not mentioned by other encyclopedias. It states candidly that 'Books written to give information are of little value unless properly indexed', and also that, 'Indexing requires experience and skill', while mentioning that indexes can now also be compiled by computers. The article concludes with a bibliography of two books on indexing by M. A. Anderson and R. Collison. Within its limited scope this is an excellent presentation of facts for the non-specialist.

It is perhaps not surprising that encyclopedias primarily intended for children and young adults do not include the subject of indexes, given the limitations of their scope, although it would seem that one cannot begin early enough to tell children what indexes are

and how to use them; the more so since at least some of the popular encyclopedias depend on separate indexes, generally located in the last volume of a multi-volume set. But it is a sad disappointment to see that the major British encyclopedia, *Chambers's encyclopedia* (1967) has absolutely nothing on indexes or indexing, nor are these terms listed in its subject index. How a work that in itself is vitally dependent on an index (and a fairly good one at that) can omit any reference to the topic is impossible to understand. Similarly, the popular American *Funk & Wagnall's new encyclopedia* (1971), distributed mainly through supermarkets and thus aimed at a wide audience, is also silent on indexes, although it has its own two-volume index, which shows that its editors are not unfamiliar with the subject.

Before turning to the encyclopedias of other countries, it is worth noting that one of the older American works, the *New international encyclopedia* (1930) had a rather good one-page article on 'Index' (unsigned). It began with a definition, explained the need for and value of indexes, dealt with methods of compilation, devoting some space to the problems of specific entry, and concluded with advice on the preparation of an index for the printer. The bibliography cited Wheatley and a few other books that appeared before the late 1920s.

Foreign-language encyclopedias

Only a few foreign encyclopedias devote whole articles (or at least some paragraphs) to the subject. In chronological order, these are the *Encyclopedia Italiana* (1933-39) which has about half a column on 'Indice', signed by Stefano La Colla; about half of the article is on the history of indexes and the earliest printed books in which indexes (or rather abstracts) appeared, namely Pliny the Elder's *Historia naturalis* and Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*, both of which were published in their editio princeps in 1469. On the whole, indexes are equated with tables of contents (a long-standing tradition both in Italy and in France), though regular book indexes are also mentioned, especially those to encyclopedias, with vol. 36 of the *EI* itself as an example. The founding of the Index Society in 1877 is mentioned. There is no bibliography.

The Greek *Neōteron Enkykliopaidikon Lexikon* (1957) devotes 18 lines to 'ΕΥΡΕΤΗΡΙΟΝ', giving a definition and mentioning some types and kinds of indexes, and the Portuguese *Gran enciclopédia del mundo* (1961) has half a column on 'Indice', mentioning the works of Wheatley and Poole as well as the *Reader's Guide*.

The recently completed French *Encyclopedia universalis* (1968-75), one of the few modern encyclopedias which is not arranged alphabetically but in classified order, devotes about three pages to various aspects of indexing in its section 'Documentation' (vol. 5). Under the heading 'Classification et indexation'

verbal indexing is treated as one of the forms of classification, and 'Les index' compares manual indexing to KWIC and other types of automatic indexing. The following paragraphs, all of which contain shorter or longer discussions of indexing, deal with thesauri, computerized information retrieval, optical coincidence cards, keywords and their frequency, and the special problems of indexing chemical literature. Altogether a quite extensive overview of indexing with emphasis on its automation, and the only one for Francophones.

Last but not least among those that treat indexing at some length is the *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* (1977) which devotes about one page to 'Ukazatel' [Index], written by two eminent Soviet authors of several books on librarianship, R. S. Gilyarevskii and E. L. Prizment. They define and explain various kinds and types of conventional bibliographic indexes, and then discuss citation indexes, and permuted and co-ordinated indexing. There are two small illustrations, showing the title pages and specimen pages from the index volume to the *Malaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopedia* (the abridged edition of the *BSE*) and from the *Citation Index*. The bibliography cites three works by the authors, all published between 1970 and 1975, and Collison's *Indexes and indexing*.

All other European encyclopedias follow the pattern of brief, concise entries established by *Brockhaus* (of which the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in its 11th edition said 'no work of reference has been more useful and successful or more frequently copied, imitated and translated'). Indeed, it seems as if a large number of them actually copied and translated their entries from either *Brockhaus* or *Meyer*, the other large German encyclopaedia. The present edition of *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie* (1970) has four lines of definition under 'Index': 'Alphabetisches Namen-, Titel- oder Schlagwortverzeichnis am Schluss eines Buches oder als eigener Band . . .', and *Meyers Konversations-Lexikon* (1977) has also four lines, but under the more traditional German term 'Register'. Other German multi-volume encyclopedias, e.g. *Der neue Herder* (1970) and *Bertelsmanns Lexikon-Lexikothek* (1973) also have only brief entries under 'Register'.

The French still consider an index to be at least partially the equivalent of a table of contents. The *Grand Larousse* (1962) says: 'Table alphabétique abrégée, placée à la fin d'un ouvrage, et comprenant les mots principaux employés par l'auteur, avec l'indication des passages où ils se trouvent'. †One wonders

why 'abridged' but most modern French books have indeed only very skimpy indexes, if any at all. *La Grande Encyclopédie* (1886-1902), once Larousse's great competitor, had about half a page on 'Table des matières' (subordinated to the entry 'Table. VI. Bibliographie') by E. D. Grand, where a subject index is expressly likened to the German 'Inhaltsverzeichnis', but in the second part of the article some large alphabetical indexes of French books from the 18th and early 19th century are cited.

The Spanish *Diccionario Enciclopédico Espasa* (1978) and *Salvat Universal* (1969), the *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana* (1926), and the Mexican *Diccionario Enciclopédico UTEHA* (1953), the *Grande enciclopédia portuguesa e brasileira* (1937), the Dutch *Grote Winkler-Prins* (1969), the Swedish *Focus uppslagsbok* (1960) and *Svensk uppslagsbok* (1963), the Danish *Nordisk konversationsleksikon* (1963), the Polish *Wielka encyklopedia powszechna PWN* (1962) and the Hungarian *Révai nagy lexikona* (1911-35)—all have brief entries, ranging from two to six lines, and give only very terse definitions such as 'alphabetical list of names and subjects in books and periodicals' or similar phrases. None of these encyclopedias says anything about the process of indexing, whereas almost all deal with the *Index librorum prohibitorum* right after the entry on 'index' (or at least close to it, depending on the spelling of the word in various languages); encyclopedias from predominantly Catholic countries devote inevitably much more space to that infamous index than those from Protestant countries.

Encyclopedias of librarianship

The most extensive treatment of the subject is found in the multi-volume *Encyclopedia of library and information science* (1968-). In volume 1, C. L. Bernier devotes more than 30 pages to 'Alphabetic indexes', discussing the qualifications and training of indexers, the rules of indexing, filing problems, the editing of an index, and the quality and evaluation of indexes. All this is treated strictly from the point of view of scientific and technical indexing, whereas other types of indexing (e.g. legal, biographical works, historical literature) are not even mentioned. The article concludes with a glimpse of the future possibilities of automation—which is of course now entirely out of date (as are indeed most of the earlier volumes of this haphazardly planned and very badly edited encyclopedia, not one of the ornaments of the library profession). In later volumes, there are contributions by David C. Batty on 'Chain indexing' (vol. 4, 1970), treating the subject in 11 pages; Susan Artandi on 'Co-ordinate indexing' (vol. 5, 1971) which is disappointingly brief; and J. Rothman on 'Index, indexer, indexing' (vol. 11, 1974), surveying in 14 pages the function of indexes, their history, the different types of indexes (conventional, co-ordinate,

* 'Alphabetical list of names, titles or keywords at the end of a book or as a separate volume.'

† Abridged alphabetical table, placed at the end of a work, and containing the principal words employed by the author, with an indication of the passages in which they occur.

concordances), and various technical and economic problems, as well as the evaluation of indexes. To some extent, this article fills the lacunae in Bernier's earlier one, but much is repetitive and redundant. All articles in this encyclopedia have more or less extensive bibliographies.

The older one-volume *Encyclopedia of librarianship* (1967) has a two-page article by R. L. Collison on 'Indexing of books and periodicals', covering the history of indexes, modern methods of indexing (with two examples), the two methods of alphabetizing, technical matters and references to the earliest automatic methods which are now of historical value only. The bibliography lists seven books. Another article in this work, by the same author, is on 'Coordinate indexing' and explains on one page Taube's Uniterm system, its advantages and disadvantages, with three references.

German librarians on each side of their dividing border produced the *Lexikon des Buchwesens* (1953) in the Federal Republic, and the *Lexikon des Bibliothekswesens* (1969) in the Democratic Republic. In the former, which has brief Brockhaus-type entries, there are two somewhat similar ones for 'Index' (which contains the etymology of the term and a brief listing of types of printed indexes), and for 'Register' (also a typology of book and periodical indexes). The latter work, which has somewhat longer and more detailed entries as well as translations of each entry term into English, French and Russian, deals first with 'Index', where the history of subject indexes and several examples of such published reference tools are treated and four references are given; this is followed by 'Indexieren' where mainly co-ordinate indexing methods are discussed on a whole page, including a comprehensive bibliography citing American, British, Russian and German references in books and articles; finally, there is 'Register', where the kinds and types of indexes are explained, and half a column is devoted to references; in this case only German ones.

The massive *Handbuch der Bibliothekswissenschaft* (2. Aufl., 1952-61), which has long, scholarly articles dealing with a great variety of topics under broad headings, offers almost nothing on indexes. Its own very detailed index refers to a passing remark on ancient indexes in Roman libraries, and to a section in a comprehensive article on cataloging by Heinrich Roloff, where 'Die Register' takes up about one page in the chapter on 'Realkatalog' [subject catalog]. The question of broad versus narrow subject headings is briefly discussed, but no aspects other than those pertaining to indexes of classified subject catalogs of books are treated.

In *The Librarians' glossary* (3rd ed., 1977) (not an encyclopedia, but much more than a mere dictionary)

'Index' has about one page with seven different definitions, including those of the ANSI and BSI standards; some of these seem to be redundant. Other relevant entries with shorter definitions are 'KWIC index', 'Permutation indexing', 'Uniterm concept co-ordination indexing', 'Index language' and 'Indexing language' (with different definitions), 'Indexing service', 'Indexing at source' and 'Indexing by exclusion'. This seems almost to be too much of a muchness, and it might perhaps have been better to include some of these terms under 'Indexing' (where not all cross-references are given).

Other specialized encyclopedias

One of the few specialized encyclopedias outside the field of librarianship is the *Encyclopedia of education* (1971) which devotes seven large pages to 'Indexes'. The article is written by Norma O. Ireland, a professional indexer, and covers the history of indexes, the various types of indexes (with several examples from the field of education), the indexing process, filing problems, and finally professional matters, including the work of The Society of Indexers and the American Society of Indexers. The bibliography is the most extensive found in any encyclopedia, containing 39 items ranging from Wheatley's book of 1879 to a research report issued in 1966.

There may be other encyclopedias on specific subjects containing entries on indexes and indexing, but a search among likely candidates did not turn up a single mention.

Conclusion

It would seem that an inquirer who wishes to know something about indexes and indexing is by and large not very well served by the general English language encyclopedias (with the possible exception of the *EB* and even in that case not by the latest edition), and even less so by most of the foreign ones. Perhaps the professional societies on both sides of the Atlantic should make concerted efforts to persuade editors of general encyclopedias either to include the subject of indexes and indexing where it is now totally neglected, or to revise and update their somewhat skimpy and often out-of-date articles which no longer reflect the state of the art; revision is particularly needed for the bibliographies, where such exist at all. With all due respect to Wheatley, his book can no longer be considered to be of value to an indexer, more than a hundred years after its first appearance; quite apart from the fact that a copy is now difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Other works written before 1960 should now also be removed from recommended reading lists for would-be indexers, and be replaced by several excellent textbooks and anthologies that have appeared during the past few years.