

Publishers and indexers: a colloquy

For The Society's second discussion meeting, 6 November 1980, two publishers' editors braved our questions. These bold souls were Jenny Dereham of Michael Joseph, and Camilla Raab of Routledge and Kegan Paul, who let fall such memorable *bons mots* as, 'No-one on our staff would dream of compiling an index;' 'We use only Registered Indexers;' 'A good indexer is a pearl beyond price;'—it was a good evening.

Those perpetual topics near to indexers' hearts were aired again—should an author index his own book? (the contract makes it financially advantageous to him to do so); do indexes sell books? (who can tell, and how?); how do indexers get work? (being available in July is a golden advantage); should indexers' work be acknowledged? (no—it is a service, comparable to proof-reading, avowed our publishers, and the name would 'clutter up the title page'. Elizabeth Wallis called this an anachronistic attitude, compared to the lengthy lists of credits following films); what is a good index? . . .

Camilla Raab brought a slightly heretical atmosphere in telling us of the points about indexes which 'drive her up the wall'. She disagreed with many points in the British Standard; thought the style of index should always follow the style of the text, saw no necessity for a headnote ('making a meal of it'), wanted full stops after all abbreviations ('as in Hart's Rules'), and deplored the use of different type to distinguish contents of tables from text in the index. She wanted all *see* and *see also* references at the end of entries, not in the middle, and page numbers that were included in main entry, not repeated as sub-entries. There were protests at some of these stipulations, and recommendations to obtain publishers' house-style leaflets.

The allotted length for the index and possible tailoring to size was discussed. Elizabeth Wallis protested that the allotment of space for the index was related not to the requirements of the book but to leftover production space. Jenny Dereham denied this, saying that at production stage a minimum number of pages—say five or six—for the index would be requested; this would *not* be merely the remnant of the last signature, which could prove to be three pages only. But if the space available for the index were five pages, and the index proved to need six, there was no appeal; another eight pages could not be added to the book because the index was one page too long. A. Sandison suggested that two pages might be better deducted from the text than from the index; but by indexing stage it is too late for that. Adjustment of index length at Routledge and Kegan Paul is totally in-house, with no

reference to indexer or author. Duncan McAra claimed that the best person to amend the index is the author, and told us that at John Murray the author must approve the index.

Peter Broxis pointed out that index length may be reduced by purely physical methods; taking the type size down a point, or with the new technology, reducing the whole by photographic methods.

Did we enlighten the publishers? They enlightened us.

H.K.B.

Sexism in indexing?

In 1957-8 I worked on the indexing, in two enormous, Dickensian ledgers, of the *Financial Times*. Like myself, the two chief indexers were male and fairly hefty—perhaps to *man*-handle the weighty ledgers; one was a German Jew who combined Teutonic efficiency with Semitic perspicacity.

But nowadays I suppose most book indexing is done by women, because the index is an after-thought, a chore, a useful but tedious necessity—the sort of thing traditionally associated with women, in a nominally-benevolent, actually-calculating country. Politics shadows even indexing.

Allan Bula

Where is the Post Office Tower?

A Post Office leaflet giving 'Latest recommended posting times for first class mail' (from St Albans) lists destinations alphabetically in seven sections. Wanting the deadline for sending to London, I looked in section 2, 'Major towns and cities'. After Leeds came Leicester/Liverpool—then Manchester/Newcastle. I tried section 3, 'English Counties', to find Leicestershire/Lincolnshire succeeded by Merseyside/Middlesex. Section 1 was 'Places with St Albans in the address'; 4-7 were 'Northern Ireland', 'South Scotland', 'North Scotland', 'Welsh Counties'. There was no special mention of London in any of the general notes. So where would London lie?

Answer—London preceded Aberdeen/Belfast, in section 2. Listing it first must be intended to lend it prominence or importance. But without special distinguishing type or symbol, or cross-reference, it is merely lost in the listing. The exception renders the rule useless.