

covered, and the number and nature of pieces. Where necessary further information is given.

At the next stage of a search reference is made to the class list giving details of the contents of each class, supplied by the department from which the records originate and made when the documents are boxed and labelled for deposit in the PRO. In some cases further reference is necessary to finding aids produced contemporaneously with the records. Registers of correspondence, for example, all entered in longhand, go back to the nineteenth century. Admiralty Digests, going back to 1793, were begun in 1812. They index subjects using a decimal notation. A system of calendaring and indexing Foreign Office papers was devised by the Foreign Office Librarian Lewis Hertslet. Indexes to F.O. correspondence were prepared under this system covering the years 1810 to 1906; then a card index, still heavily used, was kept up until 1920, after which the index was printed annually in four volumes.

Discussion

Discussion after the talk revealed a lively interest in the subject. The main question concerned the selection of records for permanent keeping. About five years after a file had been closed it was reviewed to see whether it still had administrative use. Before deposit in the PRO it was reviewed again. The final selection was made by a Departmental Record Officer and his staff in consultation with an Inspecting Officer from the PRO. The review procedure grouped material into three lots: the first for disposal as being of no historical value, as, for example, vehicle-licensing applications; the second, material of obvious historical value, such as *all* cabinet minutes and memoranda; the third, material which needed to be individually considered, such as case files which had become policy files and therefore needed to be preserved. Possibly up to 5% of records were finally kept.

News from China

'As your magazine is a world leading magazine, we cannot delay in furnishing you with this important information.' Addressed thus, how can we refrain from passing on the information?

China official annual report 1980, edited by the Beijing Xin Hua News Agency, is due to be published and distributed by Kingsway International Publications Ltd (Hong Kong) by mid-1981. Six hundred-odd pages will report in English and Chinese, with illustrations and statistics, on events in politics, law, economics, and in military, social and artistic fields. A biographical section and an index are to be included. The cost, before publication US\$30.40, after publication US\$38.

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What authors think of indexes *

The *New Statesman* of 13 June 1980 included an eight-page 'comparative survey of book contracts issued by 60 British publishers' by David Caute, chairman of the Books Committee of the Writers' Guild and literary editor of the *New Statesman*. Investigating—or exposing variations in—the 'standard' contracts, it covered delivery of manuscript, payment for proof corrections, changes to text, jacket design, blurb, royalties, rights (paperback, film, dramatic, American), free copies, frequency of payment . . . nary a word about indexes—who should compile or pay for them, who edit or approve.

The Author, 91 (3) Autumn 1980 includes a six-page survey, 'British publishers: what authors say', based on a questionnaire sent by the Society of Authors, in collaboration with the Writers' Guild, to all its members. 1,760 returned entries covered 253 publishers, leading to a three-page 'Survey chart' and a 'League table' of publishers according to the opinions of their authors. Topics covered in this one were—adherence to contracts, editorial departments and design, foreign and subsidiary rights, promptness, promotion, remaindering. On indexes—nothing.

How sad to think that authors appear to care about indexes no more than do booksellers. Has there been no improvement in attitude since it was written in 1729 of Archdeacon Laurence Echard's *History of England*, 'The drudgery of compiling an Index, was left to one who was thought not unfit for so low an Employment as giving an Alphabetical Epitome of that Volume'?

One and a quarter centuries have passed since it was urged that the publication of any book without an index should be made a statutory offence, with severe penalties for offending *authors* (not publishers!). It was no less a personage than a former Lord Chief Justice and Lord Chancellor who thundered this advice.

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A survey conducted in New York by Ronald Mansbridge of what authors feel about American publishers *did* include a reference to an index; the sad tale of an author whose publisher pressed him to let them compile the index in-house, then charged \$430 for this; and showed it in the account as an advance payment to the author—which would be subject to income tax—instead of as an expense. Authors in New York overall appeared most dissatisfied with their publishers, complaining of crass copy-editing, poor communication, retraction of promises, general inefficiency, and even dishonesty. (Report in *The Times*, 6 March 1980.)

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*Apparently they don't.