

A novel index format

Penelope Leach, the author of *Baby and child: from birth to age five* (Penguin Handbook, 1977, £4.95) introduces its 49-page index as follows:

In the main text I hope that you will find your child and yourself in every usual circumstance. Less usual circumstances or ones that need extra or technical information are in the A-Z Encyclopaedia at the back. Here you will find things that you will not need often, like illnesses and first aid; things I hope you will read before you need them, like safety precautions; things where extra information can save worry, like diet, and some things I hope you will find time for, like presents to make and games to play in the car.

The A-Z is also the index, so whenever you want information on a particular topic, look it up by name and hope that the name you think of is one of the names for that topic that occurred to me too!

Two experienced members of The Society of Indexers who are also mothers of young children give their opposing views of this novel format—perhaps more of a supplement than an index.

I have had this book beside me for the past few months to test out its novel format on my children's current problems. As an indexer I found it at first disconcerting to have some topics explained then and there, some with references to the main text and some with both. As a mother I did find answers to my queries fairly easily; with plenty of *see* references from synonyms, I hasten to add! A minor complaint, related to this particular encyclopaedia/index, rather than the format itself—some of the time saved by the reduction in page-turning was often offset by the excessive strings of page numbers in other instances.

To sum up—an attractive format, worth considering for books of a similar nature, and, perhaps, good publicity for indexes—the reader being encouraged to refer to the Encyclopaedia was continually reminded of the existence and usefulness of the index.

Elizabeth Cook,
Chester-le-Street.

Elizabeth Cook found the index to this book satisfactory. I have used it constantly over the last two and a half years and have found it consistently infuriating. Penelope Leach has tried to combine two things which in my view are incompatible, synthesis

(encyclopaedia) and analysis (index), and the index loses out all the way. Time and again I have found myself referred from specific to general (although I have learnt my lesson now and choose my terms accordingly). There may only be a slight delay in finding the right place (e.g. 'dummies, *see* comfort habits': there is a sub-heading 'dummies' under the heading 'comfort habits'). Sometimes the word or phrase from which you are referred does not actually occur in the entry to which you are referred (e.g. 'teats, *see* bottle-feeding'). Sometimes specific subjects are not given an entry at all: there is plenty of information about vitamins under the heading 'diet', but no entry under 'vitamins'. Sometimes the cross-reference seems to lead nowhere but to frustration: 'temperature/taking, *see* convulsions, fever', but under neither of these headings are you told how to take a baby's temperature.

It seems a great pity that so excellent a text should be served by so much less good an index.

Lucy Pollard,
London.

New building for the British Library

The British Library has long suffered from inadequate accommodation and this is rapidly becoming worse. It now occupies 16 different buildings in Greater London. Its stock increases at the rate of just under two miles of shelf space a year. The pressure in fact is so grave that some new building can no longer be delayed.

The need for new building was recognized by the County of London Plan in 1951. During the 1960s plans were made for developing a site in Bloomsbury to house what is now the Science Reference Library and to provide greater facilities for general reference and bibliographic services. Objections to the plans, however, resulted in their being dropped in favour of developing a site no longer required by British Rail a mile away in Euston Road.

The former Minister for the Arts, the Rt Hon. Norman St John-Stevas, announced that building is to start there as soon as possible, to provide certain essential accommodation for book storage and reference services, including those of the Science Reference Library. He added that the cost of the work now to be started will be £72 million at 1979 prices. The greater part of this expenditure, which will be spread over 12 years, will fall in the later years of the project, towards the end of the decade. No decisions on subsequent stages of the project have yet been taken. The work to be started will not directly affect the use of the Reading Room in the British Museum building.

M. P.

The Indexer Vol. 12 No. 3 April 1981