Review article

Indexing Walford

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In the 24 years since John Walford's guide to reference material made its first appearance his name has become a familiar shorthand way of referring to a work which, through its successive revisions and the recently published concise edition, has earned the respect and admiration of successive generations of users. Faced with an enquirer whose needs cannot be met from reference works immediately to hand or already well known to the librarian, one's reflex action is to reach for Walford, in the confident expectation that within the pages of the appropriate volume there will be discovered details of at least one publication worth consulting.

The basic organization of the 'full Walford' is by now thoroughly familiar. Each of the 3 volumes making up the 4th edition comprises descriptive annotated entries arranged by the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC). Apart from the present volume, Vol. 1 covers science and technology, and Vol. 3, when published, will deal with generalia, language and literature, and the arts. The bibliographic descriptions are entered under personal or corporate authors, or editors, or under title. The annotations are indicative of the scope, arrangement and character of the work described, and often include quotations taken from the work. Other features of Walford's approach to his task are the frequent use of quotations from reviews, and the inclusion of 'subsumed entries' for works which, presumably, are regarded as insufficiently important to warrant full description. The compiler claims some 5,000 main entries are here, additional to the 2,000 or so subsumed entries, which is overall an increase of 10% on the total for the previous edition of this volume, published 1975.

For such a work a good index is clearly essential, and the announcement in the introduction to this volume that L. J. Taylor, Wheatley Medallist in 1980, has furnished the index raises expectations that this requirement will be well met. Certainly a generous proportion of space has been afforded the index, which takes up 110 pages (13½ per cent of the total pagination). With 71 lines per column, and three columns per page, a total of some 23,400 lines is available. Clearly this is no puny index. In an introduction, Mr Taylor explains the scope of the index (authors, titles and subjects in one sequence); principles for entering works listed or mentioned in the text (under the headings there given, with added entries for most compilers and editors of works entered under title, for most titles of works entered under compilers or editors and for a few other distinctive titles); the treatment of subjects (principally entered from section headings in the text, though other subjects have also been entered); exclusions (form headings and certain geographical areas); abbreviations; principle of arrangement (word-by-word); the organization of voluminous entries. The only omission of any consequence is an explanation of the use of bold type for subject entries, though this is self-evident upon the most cursory examination.

How well does this index serve its users? If the requirement is to trace the description of a work of which the author, title, or compiler is known, bearing in mind the stated limitation of title entries, a very high success rate should be achieved. It is possible to quibble over particular decisions involving the provision or absence of added title entries (Mason's Who's Who in World War II, and the Welsh Office's Digest of Welsh statistics qualify, but the British Tourist Authority's Digest of tourist statistics and Sadhu's Who was who in India 1901-1970 have no title entries), but otherwise this part of the index appears to be comprehensive and almost completely accurate. Searchers for references to the three works emanating from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development will observe that two of them are entered subordinately under the United Nations heading (p. 803, column 1) while the third appears under the full name of the organization (p. 803, column 3).

It is when the treatment accorded to subjects is examined that concern over the adequacy of the index arises. A rough estimate puts the number of subject headings within the lower part of the range 1,000-2,000. In fact, this proves upon scrutiny to be adequate to represent the subjects encountered within the volume, but the thoroughness of the subject indexing is not, at this stage, all that it needs to be if the user is to be able to trace all the works on a subject via the index. It would be unfair to pass too harsh a judgment on this aspect at present, since the plan for the 4th edition of Walford includes, as part of the third and final volume, a cumulated subject index. It is perhaps not a forlorn hope that there the present limitations of the subject element within
this volume's index will be made good. The following examples will demonstrate the importance of not assuming on the evidence of the index alone that all works dealing with a sought subject have been traced.

Suppose one has an enquiry relating to the genealogy of American families. There is an index entry 'Genealogy: United States, 693'. However, other relevant material will be found within the section indexed under 'Genealogy and heraldry, 520–42', including Waters' Genealogical gleanings in England: abstracts of wills relating to early American families, the entry for which quotes a review describing the work as almost unequalled in extent and importance for American genealogical research. It may be argued that to look under a general heading as well as under a specific one is not an uncommon or an unreasonable search strategy, but this could have been covered in the introduction to the index.

Less easy to account for is the varying treatment of some guides to archives. There is a general entry 'Archives, 551–3' followed by 38 entries for archives of particular places or subjects. However, a work on the archives of the University of Cambridge (page 313) cannot be traced this way, presumably because of an unstated policy not to index under this heading archives of institutions. The solution here would be a blanket 'see also' statement. Staying with the heading 'Archives', more discrepancies appear. There is a sub-heading for 'Bedfordshire, 634', generated for a guide to the Bedfordshire Record Office, but also on page 634 a guide to the Huntingdonshire Record Office has no entry under the 'Archives' heading, an omission which applies also to Emmison's Guide to the Essex Record Office (page 638). The danger is of course that a user who chooses the search term 'Archives' will assume that the counties listed there are the only ones for which guides to archives occur in the volume.

A final example concerns two works on awards for gallantry. Abbott and Tamplin's British gallantry awards is described on page 271, and is indexed under 'Awards—armed forces, 271–2'. On page 541 the entry for Wilson and McEwen's Gallantry: its public recognition and record appears, but this is indexed under 'Gallantry, Orders of'. The only potential link between the two in the index is really a near miss, because an entry under the general heading 'Awards' refers to page 540 only.

Indexers deservedly have their award; reviewers have a thankless task. It is expected of reviewers that they will find faults, and when the object under review is an index there are always some faults to find. What finally matters is whether an index will help rather than hinder the effective use of the text indexed. Without question Taylor's index to Walford 4/2 does help, and with some fine tuning of the subject indexing when the cumulative index is prepared we should be able to extract full value from this outstandingly useful work of reference.

Reference


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Review article

Indexing LISA

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The cumulative index¹ to the leading English language abstracting journal on librarianship and information science is a vital reference tool for those who do not have access to an online search service. Those who do have access to such a service will, of course, answer their enquiries for specific items of information far more quickly by using it.

The index is in two sequences—a name index (pages i–xcvii) and a subject index (pages xcix–ccclxxi). There is a brief introduction to explain that in both indexes entries refer to issue year and abstract number, with the year shown in bold type. The introduction could be much longer, as much more explanation is needed, particularly in relation to the name index. For example:

1. Scope: what is a name? Titles are clearly included, but I would have expected to find 'AACR' in the subject index rather than in the name index. 'PRECIS' appears to be a subject from 1976–78 but a name from 1979–80. I would have regarded 'Benefit Assessment and (surely for?) System Change' as a subject. MARC is a name and a subject from 1979–80 but a subject only before then.