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Chandler, tallow, at Abbeville, 6, 16.
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Indexing appassionato

In the July 1983 issue of the Bulletin of the American Name Society, Keslie B. Harder, the society’s President, writes of his experience in compiling an index to volumes 16-30 of its journal, Names, covering 15 years. He refers to ‘the therapy of drudgery’, and claims, ‘Mood changes can play different tunes in indexing, causing a set of abstractions to appear that are quite different from the mental condition at another time. Mischievousness, fright, joy, lust, anger, all intrude and have to be somehow brought to a consistency, a straight line.’ Engagingly he concludes, ‘In evaluating the index that I completed typing into manuscript form nearly three months ago, I now give it a fuzzy passably fair. For this reason I called it ‘an index to the second 15 volumes of Names, not the index.’

A glossary for indexers II

Some additions to our suggestions for terms needed for the lighter aspects of indexing (The Indexer 14(1), 57)

Agoraphilia, or space-hunger: cabined, cribbed, confined by piles of proof sheets, cards, reference books, filing tray, the indexer finds there is not world enough for indexing any more than time. (And where should one put the typewriter if one wished to type one’s cards . . . ?)

Card, innumerable: during last-minute editing one card is found bearing a heading—let us suppose ‘Whistler, mother of’—and no page-number. You are certain the lady was very important to the text, and you have no idea whereabouts she appeared. You will in any case need to stay up all night to meet your deadline; the only recourse is to start typing and hope that the sight of some other entry (let us suppose ‘Father, my, known by Lloyd George’) may jog your memory in time.

Card, lost and found: ‘Whistler, mother of: 49, 63, 76–91; see also Lloyd George’ caught on a woolly sleeve, was carried unwittingly about the house, and is discovered under a chair the day after the index has been posted. Struggle with conscience and win: drop her in the dustbin.

Card, lost irretrievably: Whistler’s mother with all her references slips straight off the table into the waste-paper basket, which is tidily emptied shortly afterwards. No struggle with conscience is required: you’ve forgotten she ever existed and no one ever misses her.

Cries of an indexer, agonized: occur variously as ‘I’ve lost God’; ‘Has anyone seen my Ship/s?’; ‘My Libido’s gone’. No attention need be paid to these; the missing topics will re-appear behind ‘Gold Coast see Ghana’, ‘Sindbad the Sailor’, ‘Middle age, problems of’ or ‘Knee, diseases affecting’.

Off-guard confirmation: when one feels the momentary impulse to turn to the index of the book one is working on for information on a topic or character—then one knows indeed the reader would expect to find an entry under that heading . . .

Pernicious meddling: the tampering by author or publisher with a well-constructed index, to its detriment.

Phantom entries: those tempting might-have-beens we must restrain ourselves from including, such as, ‘Interest, totally lacking throughout’; ‘Fun, not a lot of here’; ‘Ignorance, paraded, 57–84’. It lies in our power to gratify friends’ wishes to receive recognition in print: ‘Higgins, Jane, opinions unaccountably omitted’; ‘Buggins, Ernest, splendid fellow, see elsewhere’. But, of course, we mustn’t.

Self-indexing: new buzz-term. We’d like to see it done.