INDEXES REVIEWED
edited by Norman Hillyer

This selection of extracts from reviews does not pretend to represent a complete survey of all reviews in all journals and newspapers. We offer only those quotations which members have sent in.

Our reproduction of comments is not a stamp of approval from the Society of Indexers upon either the reviewer’s assessment of an index, or his competence to give an opinion.

Extracts are arranged alphabetically under the names of publishers, within the sections: Indexes praised; Two cheers! Indexes censured; Indexes omitted; Obiter dicta.

Indexes praised


'Some indication of the wealth of his interests is to be found in the exemplary index where his career is reviewed under his various capacities, i.e. "as carriage designer . . . as drawing master . . . as philanthropist . . . as printer . . . as publisher".'

Allen & Unwin: The GDR: Moscow's German ally, by David Childs (346 pp., £18, pbk £7.95). Rev. by Timothy Garton Ash, Times literary supp., 8 June 84.

'Two indexes, a short section of biographical information, many tables and helpful footnotes to each chapter, increase its usefulness.'


'It is easy to read with plenty of subtitles, masses of very helpful figures and a good index.'


'And what a mountain of miscellaneous information superbly indexed is to be found here . . . Some elementary lapses in the footnotes, usually corrected in the index, suggest that the editorial team know their way about the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library better than they do about the history and geography of England and of Europe. One hundred pages of index to 1000 pages of text is a measure both of the aim and of the usefulness of the two volumes.' (index by Professor Hemlow)


'The index is comprehensive and clearly delineates between references to text, a figure or table and a research sample.'


'This directory, which is an invaluable source in a booming area of the United Kingdom economy, was seen as easy to use with both subject and alphabetical indexes.'


'Finally, there is an exceedingly complete and useful directory of sources, followed by one of the most comprehensive indices (sic) ever seen.' (index, needless to say, by the author)


'There are three indexes for easy access to the directory information, including a classified index grouping institutions by category of service.'


'There are book reviews and illustrations, with a Who's Who of Office Bearers and a progressive index which is most useful for those who have looked after their early copies.'


'. . . highly recommended for younger pupils with its expert indexing and brilliant illustrations.'

Heinemann: James Boswell: the later years, 1769–1795, by Frank Brady (609 pp., £20). Rev. in Economist, 24 Nov 84.

'His life of Boswell is superbly annotated and indexed, widely and thoroughly researched, and written with an easy fluency and wit that make it a compulsive read.' (index by Rachel McClellan)


'The comprehensiveness of this book, together with its good reference list and unusually detailed index, make it a timely and important reference book, at a price that all medical libraries and many individuals will feel is very reasonable.'
'The presentation is excellent, the listed of quoted references is unusually complete, and the index is very good.'

'Incidentally, the unusually meticulous index has assisted me several times already.' (index by the authors)

'Those who have the first two volumes will, of course, buy the third, if only for the lengthy index (the work of nine people).'
(index by Peter J. Carlton, Patricia A. Welsch, Gwyneth Hatton, under the supervision of the author; with the help of Barbara B. Smith, W. Jones De Ritter, Luis R. Ganez, Pamela L. Lein and Shannon S. Echols, all of whom, it is a pleasure to note, are given the credit in the book itself)

'There is also a good index.'

'. . . and a usefully detailed index.'

Murray: Queen Victoria in her letters and journals, selected by Christopher Hibbert (1984, 374 pp., £15.95). Rev. by Kenneth Rose, Sunday telegraph, 2 Dec 84.
'It is largely from these published collections that Christopher Hibbert has drawn Queen Victoria in Her Letters and Journals, adding a helpful introduction, linking passages, footnotes and an admirable index.' (index by Susan Hibbert, the author's wife; one of our members)

'Standard subject headings and layout are used for each section and there is a detailed subject index for easy access.'

'The book's four appendices include examples of formats used for patients, staff and general information, and there is a clear index and useful bibliography.'

Scolar Press: Medieval theory of authorship: scholastic literary attitudes to the later Middle Ages (323 pp., £35). Rev. by Helen Cooper, Times literary supp., 6 July 84.
'There are also two samples of that invaluable scholastic invention, the alphabetical index, one doubling as a dictionary of terms.'

'There is a clear indexing system and a very satisfactory bibliography at the conclusion of each chapter.'

Wiley, John: Nursing in the community, ed. by Victoria Schoolcraft (572 pp., £22.75). Rev. by Linda Louise Husband, Nursing times, 31 Oct 84.
'The references at the end of each chapter are useful and up-to-date and the index is particularly comprehensive.' (index by Maro Riofrancos)

Two cheers!

'The references are extremely comprehensive and follow each chapter: the index is comprehensive. On checking the index for two particular diseases, systematic sclerosis was well covered; but for mixed connective tissue disease I was referred to connective tissue disease—mixed, which was not indexed.'

'This book is nearly perfect: all it needs is a second index, ordered by tune, book and luxury chosen, so that we could then cross-refer among the castaways and work out which and how many of them were taking "Eleanor Rigby", the Litolff Scherzo, a beer kit or a rubber woman.'
Rev. by Russell Twisk, Listener, 1 Nov 84.
'A more imaginative index to the book would have been helpful: it would have been fun to know the Island's top ten, and see at a glance how often the apparent favourites Beethoven, Bach and Mozart crop up. Perhaps the next edition will oblige.'

'Besides breaking ground in treating books as concrete entities as well as sources of information, Bird's catalogue contains other innovative features. Chief among them is the great attention he pays to the provenance of books, that is, information about the ownership of the books catalogued, which appears in notes and then is organized in an Index of Provenance. Bird has prepared also a subject index which may turn out to be helpful, although I hesitate to say so until after further use . . . There are two features that we have come to expect in sixteenth-century catalogues, but which are missing here: an index of vernacular imprints as well as a concordance of Edinburgh numbers and those in the Short-title Catalogue, 1475-1640.'


'The triple index, persons, places, subjects, has been compiled by Miss Geraldine Tallon who is to be congratulated on exacting work well accomplished. Still, there is one desideratum: the index carries no direct reference to Trinity College, Dublin. Yet the College was patron of the three very substantial livings, Ardstraw, Cappagh and Drumragh for its clerical fellows to retire to in otium cum dignitate. T. C. D. was patron also of other wealthy livings, seven of them, in the neighbouring diocese of Raphoe.'


'I was interested to find, in Chris Argyris's contribution, a different use of the term "gatekeeper" from the one which is familiar to special librarians and information officers. The gatekeeper concept described by K. Lewin et al. (1939) refers to the inability of subordinates to achieve their goals without going through the gate controlled by their superiors. Strangely the subject index (yes, this book has one—however inadequate—


'What Sir Graham and his fifty authors do not apologise for is the disappearance of one invaluable feature of earlier editions—the extensive and wisely regimented index. The two new volumes each carry infuriatingly weak indexes, which we are invited to consult in conjunction with tables of contents appended to individual chapters. But this does not work anything like so well, and somehow detracts from the coherence of the opus.'

Collins: Another heart and other pulses: the alternative to the Thatcher society, by Michael Foot (220 pp., £8.95). Rev. by Hugo Young, Times literary supp., 22 June 84.

'Militant does make a brief appearance in Michael Foot's book. But not in the index. Between the more quintessentially Footian reference-points, Prince Metternich and John Milton, no Militant appears.'


'His publishers must take the blame for fashionably feckless editing and for farmong out the index to someone clearly not up to this taxonomic task, the result resembling both in by its inclusions and exclusions the absurdities of the present Court Page cast list in The Times and Telegraph. The author's ageing Regency Buck chum, the chatelain of Longleat, may be amused to find himself promoted to match his son-in-law of Beaufort; but a whole group of home and foreign intellectuals mentioned in the text are wiped out from the surviving sottisier of incorrect academic and social styles and titles.'


'The index is inadequate for the size of the book, because it repeatedly gives a string of undifferentiated page numbers after an entry—94 after "shearing", 54 under "cheese", 51 under "weaving", where half a dozen should be the maximum under one heading.'


'In his review of Dr W. R. Aitkin's Scottish Literature in English and Scots, Dr Gifford says that "the index leaves a little to be desired". Dr Aitkin knows this well, but the indexes were done by the Publishers who would not listen to his arguments against the way they were doing them.'


'In their explanation of merit being used as the basis of reward, the authors refer to the Nobel Prize as an example of rewarding merit for outstanding contributions to science, medicine and peace; the Pulitzer Prize for outstanding contributions to literature; and the Oscars for contributions to the cinema. There is also an H. W. Wilson Award for outstanding American indexes, but I fear that the compiler of the index to this book will not win it for example, the excellent chapter on management by objectives (pp. 90-105) is not mentioned in the index under "Management-by-objectives", though four other pages are.'

Methuen: A census user's handbook, ed. by David Rhind (£14.95, pbk £7.50). Rev. by Peter Thrice, Town & country planning 53.2, Feb 84.

'And the subject index was too short for what is intended to be a reference book.'


'Since the book will be used for reference purposes as well as out of interest in the conclusions drawn by Professor Milward, it is a pity his publishers did not see that it was provided with a better, more professional index.'


'In a volume of such immense and scholarly detail, abounding with musical examples, it is a disaster that the publishers have skimmed on the index, whose lack of subheadings undermines the reference value of Moore's 20 years' hard labour.'


'On the other hand, Mr Rowley could have profitably paid more attention to the indexing of his book.'

'What lets the volume down, and lets it down badly, is the index. This is simply an index of places and of persons. For a work of this sort an index of professions or trades and of lords with their tenants or following was needed . . . Even without these, the index has serious shortcomings. Namesakes are not distinguished; styles of knights are omitted; and religious houses are incorrectly, or barely, identified. These deficiencies must reduce the value of the volume to all but (he most diligent reader. It is to be hoped that the executive committee will not allow poor indexing again to mar a series which Mr Cornwall's work otherwise so magnificently starts.'


'The index is poor and does not do justice to the contents.'

Indexes omitted


'It does not have an index.'


'There is much of interest here, but an index would have added to the book's usefulness.'


'The book is reasonably priced and has sufficient factual content to merit a simple index, which is lacking, but does contain an unacceptable number of printing errors for a book in which a wrong letter could mislead badly a junior student.'


'But the book itself would be more credible if the quotes were attributed to their publishers, which they are not. An index too would have helped. Still, a book of delightful disillusionment. Honest!'


'The present book is scrappy, repetitive, above all lacks an index. The last is a disaster, because the author's views on the people dealt with are by no means always consistent, and without an index it is almost impossible to collate what he really thinks about, say, T. S. Eliot, who crops up here quite often.'


'In summary a thorough, thought-provoking and timely volume, marred only by the lack of an index—a grave omission from a "handbook".'


'The book is occasionally marred by some irritating English, such as a reference to "the growthful effects of training"; and it is a very great pity that the publishers did not appreciate the value of an index.'


'I once heard Dr De Bono explain why he never provides an index to his books, and I was not convinced. Heirs and Pehrson unfortunately show his influence in this respect too.'


'My one big complaint is that there is no index. I can remember so many good things I cannot now find.'


'Valuable for non-bankers as well as those in the business, though the absence of an index is a handicap.'


'The book is without an index.'

Obiter dicta


'As biographies get longer and longer there is more detail than the story needs. One sees the name "Edith Sitwell" in the index. One turns to page 240, eager to see what the two Dames could have said to each other. But the reference is only to Edith Sitwell's book on Bath.'


'The very length of the index bears witness to the barefacedness of Adler's name-dropping—something like a thousand names included, from A. J. Ayer and Donald Bradman to Jack Yardley and General Zhukov. The connection with music as opposed to a star career is generally rather slim, but those who follow Larry Adler letters in *Private Eye*—a latter-day feud that has seriously got in the way of the writing of autobiography, so he claims—will need no telling about the way his words leap off the page. The tone is casual, but every sentence has been weighed with care. As a virtuoso writer he is a superlative mouth-organ player.'
information retrieval—
"Giving wisdom to the fool?"

The International herald tribune of 4 Dec. 1984 reports that the computer at Bar Ilan University is "challenging the traditional role of the rabbi as teacher and sage". The computer, an IBM 3081, has been programmed by the Responsa Project team at the Center for Computers and Jewish Heritage with input of the 36-volume Babylonian Talmud, the fifth-century compendium of Jewish religion, law, philosophy and ethics, as well as the Old Testament and the works of Israeli author S. Y. Agnon, a Hebrew dictionary and grammatical rules.

Hitherto Jews had to approach learned rabbis with questions on rulings of anciently established Jewish law, and these must consult about 3000 volumes of responsa—a body of rabbinical rulings recorded through the last ten centuries—which were unindexed. Now 248 major collections—47,000 of the 500,000 question-and-answer precedents—have been stored in the computer's data banks, and any researcher can retrieve the relevant responsa within minutes.

Much use has been made of this information retrieval in the Israeli courts. But qualms about too ready accessibility of hitherto privileged knowledge are soothed by the director of the Responsa project, Yaacov Choueka, who explains, 'The Book of Daniel says God gives wisdom to the wise . . . it would be a waste to give wisdom to the fool . . . You must be wise already to use the computer. It only gives wisdom to the wise'.

Let's have another one . . .

The Sussex Archaeological Society Newsletter No. 43, August 1984, reports the publication in the late summer of 1984 of 'the long-awaited Index volume to the six volumes of Victoria County History, Sussex, published without indexes between 1905 and 1953' (Vols. I–IV, VII, IX)—to be marked by a wine and cheese party. What we say is, the publication of every index should be duly celebrated with a party . . .