know how widespread in the English-speaking world is the convention that a word-processor operates a word-processor.

MicroIndexer 4, under its new editor, Connie Tyler, has twelve A4 sides, sparsely laid out, with a detailed report on the computing workshop at the Durham Conference and on the software demonstrated, and some analysis of the SI questionnaire-responses as they dealt with computer-use: 44 (out of 236) admitted using a computer—some for word-processing only, some making use of a developed program, some working on their own software. There is a review of INDEX-AID, felt to be inexpensive but probably inadequate for serious indexing (it certainly has its own unusual approach to alphabetization). Ann Hall contributes some original ideas for using up your old computer-components; as she points out, ‘in these swiftly moving times a computer can be considered senile at the age of four’. Some examples: cut the top off your VDU (which is Very Definitely Useful, of course) remove the innards, and you have a novel aquarium or terrarium; an old disk-drive, also with its innards removed, makes a fine hamster-cage (‘No hamster has ever been known to gnaw its way out of one of these’). There is a good review of the WORDWISE package for the BBC-Acorn micro (known to its many friends as the Beeb) and of its more sophisticated version, WORDWISE PLUS; followed by a review of a book, Using Wordwise Plus, which is felt to be of value mainly to enthusiasts. There is a short, but very bitter, cod glossary (‘Simple to instal—the installation procedures are likely to invalidate the warranty’) and a round-up of micro news and forthcoming meetings and exhibitions. We shall look forward to hearing more of the new inexpensive Amstrad word-processor.

J.L.B.

Copies of newsletters or single items mentioned in this feature may be available on application to the secretary of the society concerned; see addresses given at the end of this journal.

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Info '85—Using knowledge to shape the future

Info '85 was a combined conference and exhibition organized jointly by Aslib, the Institute of Information Scientists, The Library Association, the Society of Archivists, and Sconul (Standing Conference of National and University Libraries), held at Bournemouth International Conference Centre, 16-19 September 1985. Although the majority of delegates were librarians, there was a substantial minority quite unconnected with the library services—a point that seemed to be overlooked by a number of speakers and, incidentally, by some of the press.

The conference consisted of some 18 papers presented over two and a half days—a very intensive programme which posed problems for those who, like me, were sole exhibitors. In fact the Society of Indexers was lucky enough to be given, at the last moment, a table next to the tea and coffee stand on the balcony overlooking the main exhibition. Although we could not compete with the major exhibitors with their full-sized, well-manned stands, delegates could not pass by our table on their way to refreshments without noticing us!

Exhibitors covered the whole range of books and services from bookbinding through publishing, packaging, marketing and the inevitable computers. The delegates too, numbering around 1,000, were diverse in their professions. Universities and colleges, county councils and numerous computer companies were there in force, but so too were organizations as different as Age Concern, ICI, General Foods, the Ministry of Defence, National Girobank, the BBC and NALGO. There were also many representatives from other countries including Iran, Holland, West Germany and the United States.

As for the conference sessions themselves, these can only be described as bland—interesting, but non-controversial. The only one that brought forth any kind of dissent was the debate on the motion 'This house believes that information technology signals the end of libraries'.

Two speeches were widely reported in the press, and rightly so: that by Viscount Macmillan of Ovenden, and that by Richard Luce, the new Minister for the Arts. Lord Macmillan's first main point was the need for a single comprehensive British bibliography covering all past and present books and periodicals, giving full titles, exact prices, and at least a cross-reference to a current catalogue—not to mention the need also for software indexes. No small undertaking! Secondly, he discussed the problems of copyright. Flexibility was obviously important, and licences might be a possibility. As an example of copyright theft, he quoted a loss figure for his own company of £3m a year, of which 90% was due to overseas pirating.

Richard Luce, in his first major engagement since taking over from Lord Gowrie, reaffirmed the present government's commitment to the arts, but pointed out that although he was committed in principle to a free
library service, there was nevertheless no bottomless pit of public funds. He also hinted that alternative sources of funding might be inevitable, which did not please many librarians in the audience.

On the whole, the conference and exhibition were a great success and extremely well organized: a credit to the five organizations involved.

Geraldine Beare

9th International Online Information Meeting

CD ROM was the buzz-phrase at this year's meeting, held at Novotel, London, 3-5 December 1985, where the rising importance of optical storage in the field of publishing via electronic media was given full recognition. Most major exhibitors and many of the papers delivered at the meeting concentrated on this subject.

CD ROM (Compact Disk Read Only Memory) is a development based on the compact audio-disk and could lead to a major change in the way information is distributed over the next few years. The main applications proposed to date include:

(a) software distribution
(b) optical publishing of reference material, technical manuals and a range of large, relatively static databases which tend to grow in size rather than change radically
(c) bibliographic database distribution as an alternative to online call-up systems.

There are savings in distribution and other costs for computer manufacturers using CD ROMs to issue new software packages or upgrade an old one (a above) instead of issuing 20 or more floppy disks to each customer of each version of his computer. The users have only to load one disk and, in addition to the basic software, the CD ROM will have an online, interactive version of the latest operation manual.

An example of optical publishing (b above) is the Academic American encyclopedia.

The third major application (c above) offers database producers a new means of distribution and, ultimately, of selling their information; it also provides users with a cost-effective way of accessing a range of different databases. Producers now experimenting with databases on CD ROM include the British Library with 600,000 records, including British books in print on one disk, and the Library Association with LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts).

The user will have to buy hardware in the shape of a 16-bit microcomputer with at least 256 k of RAM, a CD ROM drive and the cost of the subscriptions. To justify this, the user would have to make very heavy usage of a database and pay out considerable sums each year in call charges. Medical and legal databases would seem to be attractive for the CD ROM treatment.

The meeting was claimed to be the largest yet, with over 100 major companies with 140 stands, and more than 4,000 visitors expected. The present venue continues to be unsuitable for a meeting and exhibition of such size; a more suitable home is needed.

Tom Norton

Sententious indexing

The Indexer 9 (1) April 1974, 21-2 quoted from the index of the 78th, revised edition of Enquire within upon everything (Houlston and Sons, 1888)—27-page, triple-column, full of such useful entries as

Beds for the Poor, How to Make
Dirty People to be Avoided
Falling into Water, How to Act

A feature not there recorded, however, was the use of this index to promote moral precepts. Each of the book's 388 text pages has one, in small capitals, as its headline, and the index is no exception to this stern rule. So one is admonished as one searches; usually in rather glum fashion. The precept above the page of As is most appropriate to its place: AN INDEX IS A KEY TO A TREASURY. Splendid! (But any index . . .?) Then, above B, we move to HONESTY IS A STRONG STAFF TO LEAN UPON. Good thought, if not particularly apposite to information retrieval. And so through such good advice as study not TO BEAUTIFY THY FACE, BUT THY MIND; BUSYBODIES NEVER HAVE ANYTHING TO DO; THE LANE OF BY-AND-BY LEADS TO THE HOUSE OF NEVER. Some use is made of facing pages; D-E casts double gloom with FOR AGE AND WANT SAVE WHILE YOU MAY OPPOSITE THERE ARE NONE POOR BUT SUCH AS GOD DISOWNS. A comma at the end of the headline above F, KEEP ON GOOD TERMS WITH YOUR WIFE, is the only indication that this thought is continued above Q-R, YOUR STOMACH, AND YOUR CONSCIENCE. Above Z, page 415, the editor sinks thankfully back with ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

What a temptation—to preach, or promote our own ideas, in the space above each page of our indexes! Would publishers' editors notice? What might we choose to say? And have readers found any other examples of this practice?