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; Indexes censured; Indexes omitted; Obiter dicta.

Indexes praised

'The index is adequate and permits rapid reference.'

'... contains snippets joyfully culled from The Times between 1918 and 1983 by one with a flair for mixing the extraordinary, the fascinating and the odd into a basically hilarious whole—misprints, like the learned piece quoting Dead Sea Squirrels throughout, are indelible. This will prove the happiest of browses for all who know the lure of old newspapers—and an index of headlines and topics will be invaluable for speakers stuck for a bit of light relief.'

'Author, subject and numerical by paper indexes provide access to the information contained in this volume.'

'Indexes to subject content of courses, institutions and training centres, and research projects, allow access to the information from several different angles. The courses are cross-referenced, and the directory is well laid out and convenient to use.'

'The book is not easy reading, the translation sometimes seems ponderous, but it has excellent indices [sic] and a very broad bibliography ...'

'There is also a list of useful addresses and the book has a clear and thorough index.'

'But for those who find it [the 11-volume Pepys, 1983] a little daunting, on grounds of bulk or expense, Mr Latham has now prepared this one-volume popular edition, containing roughly a third of the words at an eighth of the price, together with various aids such as maps, a glossary and a detailed index. It is an exemplary piece of work which admirably maintains the high standards of the parent volumes; and ... is probably the best publishing bargain of the year.'

'It includes graphic descriptions, good illustrations and relevant indexes that point the way to total patient care.'

'There is also a valuable chronological table together with a good name index and subject index.' [bad names are omitted]

'An index enhances the value of the book as a source of information.'

'The book is handsomely produced and, as is so necessary in such a wide-ranging collection, well indexed.' [index by Angela Coss]


...contains notes (pp. 545-653), a comprehensive and systematically ordered index of all literary sources (pp. 655-691), a list of unpublished sources (pp. 691-693), an index of persons (pp. 695-701) and places (pp. 701-708), as well as illustration list and picture credits.


...its comprehensive index makes it a good reference book as well.


'The index withstands critical sampling.'


'This book captures the spirit of the specialty without seeking to define it comprehensively. It is instructive and hopeful, and the pleasure of reading it is greatly enhanced by its index and by the excellent up-to-date references.'


'Useful graphs and tables are included, the references are excellent and the index is comprehensive.'


'A splendid forty-four page index guides the reader through Professor Wernham's dense and detailed narrative.' [Index by the author]


'In style and presentation the book might have been more concise, and there is some repetition from one chapter to another. But indexing and cross-referencing are very thorough, and facilitate the use of the book as a work of reference.' (Index by the author)


'It is well indexed.'


'It makes no reference to other publications but has a good index.'


'Une bibliographie thématique de 476 entrées (p. 425-449) et un remarquable index (p. 450-473) font de ce livre un instrument de travail clair, maniable et passionnant.'


'One of the useful features of the book is a detailed annotated bibliography covering the period 1928-81. Over 400 references are listed in this section. In addition, each chapter has extensive references attached to it. There is a name index and a subject index, all of which makes this publication a truly up-to-date state-of-the-art report.'


'The book finishes with an excellent if brief index.' [Paul Nash, an SI member, did the index; 'financial constraints from the publisher led to the brevity of the index.]


'There is a detailed index. This is a most useful reference guide for all levels from student to senior engineer.'


'The indexing of author and subject matter is very well done, and prevents the material presented from simply overwhelming the reader.'


'The book is adequately referenced chapter by chapter and has a useful index.'


'This is a useful and practical handbook, not least because of its extensive glossary and index.'


'The books differ widely in approach. Patterson focuses upon a single issue: the dangers of plutonium. Spector's horizon spans much of the world. Sweet examines the three
facets of nuclear energy. Patterson is chronological; Spector's is encyclopedic and geographical; while Sweet's is more of an essay. Each book includes useful appendices. Mercifully, each is well indexed.'


'There is a detailed index that should help make this study accessible to those who do not necessarily want to read all the way through.'


'There is a full index and references are clearly noted; also each page contains a margin side-note indicating the contents thereon, a feature which I found most useful.'


'Excellent notes and index complement this study of extraordinary quality.'


'. . . a well detailed index completes the book.'


'. . . it would be churlish not to praise the excellence of the bibliography and index . . .' (index by Mrs. P. A. Knightly)


'The book is precise and well presented with a good index.'


'The index includes national grid references to practically every place mentioned in the text, ensuring that this work has consummate qualities as a tourist guide besides its scholarly qualities as a work of county historical geography.'


'There is a good cross-referencing index and a list of further resources.'


'The book is patently a labour of love, and its publishers have done it proud. What with maps, notes, indexes to maps (Irish and English) and a full general index, as many bookmarks are required as for an old-fashioned missal . . .' 


'A good index guides the reader through a wide range of psychotherapeutic techniques. This enables the book to be used for reference, but it also provides fascinating continuous reading for the involved professional.'


'Attention to detail is good: the biblical index includes the two main text types under separate heads.'


'Indexes of people and places round off the book, which will be an essential source for anyone writing about any castle in England or Wales from now on. Any work as extensive as this lays itself open to criticism on points of detail, but Castellarium Anglicanum triumphantly achieves the objectives of its subtitle. My own card index is now in the wastepaper basket.'


' . . . it also contains an extensive bibliography, and appendix containing Attridge's rules for scansion, a list of the sources of examples, and an excellent index.'


'The final volume contains an eighty-two page comprehensive index to persons, titles and subjects.'


'No typographical errors are seen and the index has proven infallible . . . The Guide is well indexed, with over 10,000 names and other entries, and this review closes with the advice that no major research library can be without this tool.' (index by the author's wife, Hilda Pearson, SI Information Officer)


' . . . and a very valuable index. This enables one to check up quickly on what Mamaine thought of Albert Camus, whom she describes after showing him round London in May 1948 as "really the nicest man on earth".' (index by Douglas Matthews)
Organisations have suffered similarly. Provided that you are systems centres, but these are not indexed. Presumably other subject headings for three of them, two do not appear in the seven principal activities listed. In the index, there are no thirty-nine entries hardly amount to a guide to the contents. It is rather confusing to find that the bold Cambridge Antiquarian Records Society: A Cambridgeshire source. It is to be earnestly hoped that in the promised expanded index if you ever want to use the book as a reference, you will be willing to read all the entries in full (not an onerous task), then the contents will be useful. But you will have to generate your own expanded index if you ever want to use the book as a reference source. It is to be earnestly hoped that in the promised future editions, the index will be addressed properly . . .


'The index of persons and places is apparently full and accurate, although it is rather confusing to find that the bold type used for entry numbers in the text denotes page numbers in the index. The subject index is more patchy. Little attempt has been made to index the text itself, and all but a handful of the entries refer to the introduction.'


'Nor are matters much helped by the fact that the first of the two enormous indexes is largely useless, the second entirely so."


'Although the book is attractively produced, the index is not comprehensive and in several chapters the reader has to suffer some teeth-grinding misuse of English, which even extends to chapter headings: "The Generally (Inadvertently) Swallowed Liquids."'


'Another irritation is that the index is faulty. For most but not all of the listings the wrong page numbers are given (for practical purposes subtract 2)."


'Microbiologists might benefit from having a copy but for most physicians a reference copy in the hospital library would suffice. With this in mind the authors could improve its suitability for occasional reference. The index is poor—a clinician's guide to fungal disease should index endocarditis, meningitis, and pneumonia, for example, rather than only cardiovascular, respiratory, and central nervous system infections. Farmer's lung is not indexed. A cross reference from the section on "systematic mycoses caused by opportunists" to the chapter that lists fungal infections of different organ systems would be useful.'


'It is pity it is far too long, abominably written, atrociously indexed, ignorant, full of error and quite incredibly boring, but otherwise I can whole-heartedly recommend it.'


'Also, the inadequacy of the subject index may be assessed from the absence of references to epoxies and toughened acrylics.'


'The index too is unreliable, which makes one question the value of an index to such a collection: it's either there for scholars, I fear, or not at all. Those scholars interested in Burra's brushes with Judy Garland, for instance, can look up the index and find some, but not all, of the painter's references to her. However, scholars interested in finding quick references to silent movie stars (Naldi, Negri, Swanson et al.) will find the index as silent as those dear ones themselves.'


'Indexing is seldom complete in multi-author textbooks, and this one is no exception. A quick check under "A" failed to reveal acupuncture, aldolase, asparaginase, or Australia antigen, though all these words appear in the text. A cross-check with the index on another volume on the same subject is easy to carry out, and it is curious that publishers do not take the trouble to do this.'


'The worst feature of this translation of a standard Russian text of 400 pages is its useless index. I do not know who is responsible for this serious defect, nor whether the culprit is Russian or American. But, had this book appeared 60 years ago, I know that Lenin would have utterly condemned its "truly Soviet slovenliness." [so, whose face is red?]

Is there anything to criticise? The only fault I could find concerned the index. Consulting the index is the starting point for much of the use that is made of a volume like this, so it should be good. Unfortunately most large multiauthor textbooks are indexed (as in this case, I suspect) by the publishers, who do not have the authors' insight into which words should be included. To take one small example at random: in Mari Mannik's excellent chapter on rheumatoid factors, the author would have been in no doubt that the word 'antiglobulin' might provide a lead in to his subject for someone unfamiliar with the topic. Yet it does not appear in the index. I believe that good indexing is a neglected skill in medical publishing. In a multiauthored text there would appear to be excellent reasons for asking all authors to mark in their manuscripts each and every word that should appear in the index. The publisher can then do the rest."


'The editors' awesome industry and indiscriminate appetite have produced an omnium gatherum which, had the material been digested, compressed and shorn of information found in other directories, could have been reduced to more manageable and comprehensible proportions of half the length. The same criticism applies to the mammoth index of 150,000 machine-made entries, which lacks both coherence and cross-references. While, therefore, the Guide is an indispensable research tool with which academic libraries will need to equip themselves, the scholars for whom it is intended are left with labours of searching and sifting that they might reasonably have expected to be saved."


'This work will be of interest to the sociologist, economist, anthropologist, historian, and other social scientists, as well as to the general reader. It contains helpful maps, a glossary of fishing terms, and good pictures. Its two-page index, however, is inadequate for a book that is so full of information and provocative ideas."


'Some enhancement of the bibliography was attempted by producing three indexes to ameliorate the lack of a taxonomy in the bibliography itself. Subjects are limited to 42 classes, some of which are sub-classified by language and subject headings (disciplines and fields, for example). Some classes include only one citation, others as many as fifty, all indexed by last-name author entries rather than document numbers. The bibliography itself must serve as the author index. Consequently the reference system in the subject index seems to provide, but in fact does not, a list of all authors addressing the same subject, and this index violates some of the most basic rules in book indexing. The second index is to the literary corpus studied, arranged by language. These are entered without authority controls or any uniform citation; they vary from subject categories such as "German lyric" to more precise titles and authors; the latter appear as lifted uncritically from citations without standardization, so that a treatment of a German biblical text is buried not under Bible or even the German Bibel, but under G, as G"ottische Bibel. At least the article "Die" was inverted. For the same text, i.e., the Bible, one has to check each language class and second-guess the form of entry. The last "index" lists abbreviations and acronyms, which might have been more useful as part of the preface materials."


'The word personality. . . appears in the subtitle, but only rarely in the study: and I have yet to determine whether it is intended to be synonymous with "character" or to describe the particular "complex" and "rounded" characters that we allegedly meet in the poets Ginsberg discusses. The problem is exacerbated by the inadequacies of the book's index. Fearing that I had nodded through an important discussion of "personality", I wanted to review the passages where Ginsberg uses the term; unfortunately, it is not listed in the index. Other specialized words like ethnopoeia or ekphrasis and presumably important concepts like "audience" are also missing."


'A book of this importance deserves a better index. Although the index runs to 131 pages, 5 pages more than that in Donaldson's Scottish Reformation, it is no more than a simple list of names and place names . . . Even within its own narrow limits the index has defects . . . [numerous details given, says our contributor, but this seemed enough . . .]"


'... but a strong complaint must be made about the index. The German edition was poor in this respect; the English one is even worse. Major works of reference demand a good index, and publishers who fail to observe this rule are neglecting their duty and insulting their public. A few illustrations of the defects will suffice. Comparing the two indices [sic] one observes that the English one is apparently reluctant to mention unscholarly foreigners, so ex, e.g. Goethe, Grillparzer, Hegel, Holderlin, Perikles, Schiller, Seneca, Stesichoros, Voltaire, Zeus: enter Campbell, Jebb (complete with knighthood), Murray, Pearson. The omission of many important names and topics is hardly compensated by the insertion of recherche items of minimal significance—e.g. the Athenian Feast of the Chytroi, "Ergiffenheit" [sic], "Wald- fänke". Under the authors' names their plays are listed, not in alphabetical order, which would be helpful, but in order of first mention, which is irrelevant. The compiler is either ignorant or careless who can include the Kyklops, the Troades, and the Choephoroi (!) among the "fragments and lost plays" of Euripides. In short the index is a disgrace which diminishes the value of a precious volume. When another edition is called for, as it probably will be, we must hope that something better is provided."
ABC-Clio: Administration, personnel, buildings and equipment: a handbook for library management, by David Kohl. James Thompson's review in American Libraries 16(4), April 1985, pained the publisher:

'...one of Thompson's key points is a lack of a subject index. Although a subject index may have enhanced use of the book, both the author and the publisher thought that it would more likely encumber it, since it would be largely redundant with the table of contents. The table of contents was designed to serve a dual purpose: to outline the organizational structure of the book, and to provide the user with direct subject access to the material. Fortunately, we have received overwhelmingly positive responses to Kohl's handbook from managers and administrators in all types of libraries, many of whom eagerly await the next five volumes . . .'

James Thompson replied in American Libraries 16(6), June 1985:

'I did indeed read the introductory sections, every word of them, in a vain attempt to find a sensible explanation for the book's structure and scope. I noted the "principles of selectivity"; I submit that they are the wrong principles, and that they contradict the foreword's claim, which I quoted in the review. An index, far from encumbering the book, would render it usable. I recommend one for the second edition which, if the series sells as well as [the publisher] expects, is inevitable.'


'In several other respects it is an infuriating book, for it represents a golden opportunity fudged; the spoiling of a splendid ship for a ha'p'orth of tar. I can't tell how many authors are represented. I can't tell how many—or what—subjects are dealt with, or at what respective lengths. I can't effectively use this book at all—and neither can any other Animal Rights campaigner—as a brimming arsenal, which it could and should have been. Why not? Because, believe it or not, there is no index!'


'While the annotated chapter list gives a good description of the book's content, the lack of an index may be judged by a few professionals to be unfortunate. [that's putting it too gently]'


'In such a book absence of an index can be counted almost a crime; the lack seriously reduces the value as a reference source of a well-written book.'


'Unfortunately this volume suffers from the usual editorial annoyances that I have to expect from the reprint volumes of this publisher, namely, the absence of running heads, unnecessarily heavy and glary paper, and the lack of either an author or subject index.'


'There is a consolidated reference list, but no index.'


'Unfortunately, there is no index or bibliography, a recurrent omission by Ignatius Press.'


'One serious shortcoming is the lack of an index, even of geographical names; this must be put right in the new edition which will certainly be called for in due course.'


'But there is no index to the book itself, and no emphasis on the absolute necessity of having one in any serious work.'


'There is a great deal of otherwise hard-to-find information packed into this volume, which suffers only from the lack of an index.'


'In a work of this complexity, a subject index, as well as one of persons and places, is surely a necessity.'


'There is a bibliography of 100 pages, though unfortunately no index.'


'The annual also needs either an index or a more comprehensive table of contents.'

Physico-chemical Biology, Amsterdam: The bacterial photosynthetic apparatus as a photoelectric transducer, by V. D.

"The English writer Malcolm Muggeridge once described a book written without an index as "like a railway timetable not giving the name of the stations". The lack of an index is the biggest deficiency of the book. It makes it impossible for the casual reader to scan through for comments on a particular species, or any other general issue. If space was at a premium, the titles of the articles cited could have been dispensed with, but an index is a necessity."


"The absence of a bibliography is perhaps in keeping with the author's approach. The omission of an index (an infuriating feature of the book) is less excusable."


"Information workers and researchers would expect to find subject and author indexes and ideas about where to look for more comprehensive coverage of particular topics but sadly none of this valuable information appears in this bibliography, which greatly reduces its usefulness . . . The best feature is that each entry is given a short succinct and accurate abstract, a useful guide to its scope. Given the amount of effort this must have required we are left with uncertainty about why this bibliography was published in a form which conflicts so powerfully with practical usefulness. If the compiler wished to avoid indexing it would have been better to provide a series of bibliographies on specific issues which could then be regularly updated."


"In style this book, an unrevised dissertation, is ponderous, verbose, and jargonistic, and has no index."


"Is this book what it purports to be, or an epistolary novel written in an immensely plausible pastiche of Zola? . . . Perhaps the original French edition (it is praised on the jacket by Le Monde, but Lady Bracknell would certainly have said that nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability) explained everything, and the fault lies with Viking for not providing the book with a provenance; after all, they have not provided it with an index, they have set it in ugly Souvenir, and they have had it bound so badly that when I opened it flat the pages began to fall out."


"This is best seen as a work of reference that will prove valuable to a wide range of students of the period, from toilers at the "causes of the first world war" coalface to Schumpeter economists. One cheer only, then, to Weidenfeld & Nicolson for making it available in English without an index."

Obiter dicta

"This book has no formal index. Readers and reviewers are not, however, invited to take this as a sign of idleness or lack of scholarly attention on the part of myself or my editors: it has been a deliberate decision. The number of books published by Rosamond Lehmann is quite small, each is mentioned over and over again in my text and to most of them whole chapters are effectively devoted. This is not a biography; my text is not concerned with places, people or events so much as with themes. Any index which confines itself, in the traditional way, to concrete items, proper names, etc, would be too short and uninformative to be of much use; conversely one which attempted, by some means, to recapitulate the true nature of the book's contents would not make much sense except to someone who had already read the book. I have therefore preferred to set out the contents to each chapter rather more fully than is customary in the Contents, in the hope that this will be of sufficient assistance to any reader wishing to look up a specific book or phase of the author's life."

—Gillian Tindall's introductory note to her book Rosamond Lehmann: An Appreciation (Chatto & Windus, 1985)


"As far as the articles go, they vary enormously; and some very odd decisions about format seem to have been imposed. For example, the only way in which an author can be located is by the romanized alphabetical order of the pronunciation of the Chinese characters by which his or her name is represented. There is no index in any script but Chinese. So the Chinese user who wants to find out about Mario Vargas Llosa has to know the name to look up is Ba'crijasi Luesa; Wordsworth frère lurks under the disguise of Huazhuihsu (and Dorothy is only mentioned in passing). It may be amusing to find entries on John Updike, Anders Osterling, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Max and Pedro Henrique Urena and Quintus Ennius in alphabetical sequence in their standard sinified forms; but imagine trying to look up any of these authors up."


". . . ironically the index is an afterthought, printed separately and tucked into a pocket."

'This reviewer must tread warily; Rowse has a reference to "the third-rate reviewers of the TLS", and warns that he is willing to "tell the inferior their rating" . . . [so 'this reviewer' gets his oar in first].

Readers will not be surprised to learn that, in addition to highly personal glimpses of public figures such as Bevin and Attlee, H. G. Wells and Rebecca West, Cyril Connolly and Evelyn Waugh, we are also treated to a fair amount of autobiographical detail. The book lacks an index; but let us see what the entries under the author's name might have looked like for just one twenty-page chapter, that on J. M. Keynes: Rowse, A. L.: a lifelong Oxonian, 15; ravaged by scepticism about general truth of political theories, 16; openly challenges Regius Professor of History at a lecture, 16; rare recruit at Oxford from working class, 16; had read much Carlyle and Ruskin as a schoolboy, 16; does not subscribe to Marxian dogmatism, 17; but obsessed by Marxism, 18; subject of minor altercation between Keynes and Nicholas Davenport, 18; duodenal ulcer adversely affected by youthful sexual repression, 18; constantly concerned for Keynes's intellectual well-being, 18; writes articles urging Keynes to come to terms with Labour Movement, 19; in favour of temporary tariff on imports in 1931, 19; wants to bring together all elements opposed to the National Government, 21; unsuccessfully urges this course on H. Dalton, 21; has little respect for academic economists, 22; irritated by some supposedly intelligent persons, 22; work on Shakespeare met by blinkered incomprehension, 23, 24; complains of low intellectual grade of today's egalitarian society, 23; does not claim to be an economist, 23; urges Popular Front against the Old Men, 24; raises Parliamentary candidate for Cambridge University, 25; arduous uphill political work for a decade wins Penryn and Falmouth for Labour in 1945, 26; finds Victor Gollancz unappealing, 27; travels second-class from USA, 27; no longer cares about people bent on remaining fools, 28; finds G. E. Moore faintly ridiculous, 29; frequently remembers war dead, 31.

And so on. Rowse of course knows this perfectly well, and tells us that a "writer's ego is where he gets his inspiration from. The little strokes [of egotism] are there to keep the reader on his toes—irritation, better than sending him to sleep".


'The editing and presentation of the letters are impeccable (well, virtually impeccable—the French writer Pierre Louys tells us that a "writer's ego is where he gets his inspiration from. The little strokes [of egotism] are there to keep the reader on his toes—irritation, better than sending him to sleep").'


'Her book . . . questions how such idealized images of femaleness have affected the way women have behaved in real life. How have they, for example, affected our Prime Minister, some of whose stances so definitely stem from the mythical Britannia, who was herself related, such are the ironies of selective myth-making, to the all too real and rather less than admirable Boadicea, Queen of the Iceni? Here is how Mrs T appears in this book's index:

Thatcher, Margaret: representations of; and Falklands War; verbal imagery; status and charisma; character and feminity; and nuclear protestors.

Marina Warner's range of reference is enormous. Mrs Thatcher in the Index has, above her, St Teresa of Avila and Tertullian; beneath her, the goddess Themis and the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius I.'


'The funny thing that happened to Norman St John-Stevas, should you be curious, was his asking reception at the Cadogan Hotel whether Oscar Wilde had been arrested there. "Yes, sir, but it's under entirely new management now." Another funny thing, it is perhaps not fair to add, is that St John-Stevas is here indexed as "Norma". But that could happen to anyone.'


'Unfortunately the precision in the use of language is not matched in the transcription of proper names; misread initial letters undermine the index and less disruptive mistakes nevertheless deprive us of some interesting surnames. Many mis-readings and the rendering in square brackets of words legible in the document suggest that the edition was prepared from a photocopy. More inexplicable, however, is Professor Pugh's method of calendaring and his treatment of proper names; he fails to come to terms with the freedom offered by the former and his approach to the latter often defies analysis. The text is swollen by up to five place-name variants from different documents and by both original and modernised forms of dates, which produces entries such as: Ambresbyr (Ambreshir', Ambrisbur', Aumbresbyr'). John Sleg of Doneheved (Donehevede, Donhevede, Dunhevede, Dunhevede) taken for stealing sheep (bidenlibus) . . . on Friday before St Luke 16 Edw. I (15 Oct 1228). The consequently overloaded index has also to perform the function of footnotes (for the identification of office-holders) and cross-references, both virtually absent from the text; the latter would have been particularly useful among the fascinating indictments and plaints of the trial-baston sessions.'

Our warm thanks to those who contributed to this section:

Jane Angus (Crathie), Ken Bakewell (Liverpool), Hazel Bell (Hatfield), Philip Bradley (Dundee), Virginia Catmurn (Hinchley Wood), Margaret Cooter (London), Tony Evans (London), John Gibson (Wichenford), Irene Greatorex (Staines), Peter Greig (Ottawa), Brian Hunter (London), Cherry Lavel (London), Jackson Lethbridge (State College, Penn.), Paul Nash (Abernyte), Tom Norton (Farnborough), Hilda Pearson (Cambridge), Helga Perry (Canterbury), David Pygott (Ashstead), Roger Smithies (Toronto), Madeleine Swann (Twickenham), Elizabeth Wiggans (Blackheath).

Contributions of review extracts welcomed by Norman Hildebrand (Hatherleigh Vicarage, Okehampton, Devon EX20 3JY). Closing dates 30 June and 30 November for the subsequent issue—the earlier, the kindlier.