SI conference 1987

Following the success of most enjoyable SI conferences in Edinburgh (1977), London (1978), Cambridge (1980), Bristol (1983), and Durham (1985), the Society of Indexers is planning another for 1987: 'Indexing for the future', Friday—Sunday, 10—12 July, at Chester College. The booking form enclosed within this journal gives details of the programme, including speakers, computer workshop, and society business. Further forms or details from the Conference Secretary, Mrs C. Tyler, Hillcroft, Kettle Lane, Kinsey Heath, Audlem CW3 0DR.

We urge readers to seize the opportunity to attend this conference, in the light of the words of David Lodge in Small world (Seeker and Warburg, 1984, quoted by permission of the author):

The modern conference resembles the pilgrimage of medieval Christendom in that it allows the participants to indulge themselves in all the pleasures and diversions of travel while appearing to be austerely bent on self-improvement... With this excuse you journey to new and interesting places, meet new and interesting people, and form new and interesting relationships with them; exchange gossip and confidences (for your well-worn stories are fresh to them, and vice versa); eat, drink and make merry in their company every evening; and yet, at the end of it all, return home with an enhanced reputation for seriousness of mind.

The 10th International Online Information Meeting, incorporating the Electronic and Optical Publishing Exhibition and other satellite events, will be held from 2-4 December 1986 at the Novotel, London. This 10th Anniversary Meeting will reflect on historical issues and address current developments such as optical disks. Further details from: Conference Organiser, Learned Information Ltd, Besselsleigh Road, Abingdon, Oxford OX13 6LG; tel. 0865 730275.

The 1987 annual conference of the Institute of Information Scientists, entitled 'Meeting the challenge of change: new horizons for the information profession', will be held 13—16 July at the University of Warwick. Details from: Sarah Carter, IIS, 44 Museum St, London WC1A 1LY; tel. 01-831 8003/8633.

A Pymian occasion

"It's an unusual idea having a conference of people like us," said Dulcie", the indexer in Barbara Pym's affectionately witty novel, No fond return of love. It seemed even stranger to have a conference on the life and work of Barbara Pym; but the first such was held in Oxford, 4-5 July 1986, giving its participants a sense not so much of déjà vu as of fulfilling a fantasy—a wryly self-deprecating one. The neologism 'Pymian' was much heard and applied.

The conference, sponsored by Barbara Pym's old College, St Hilda's, was attended by over 50 devotees, some having come especially for the occasion from Sweden and the US, and including several of Barbara Pym's Oxford contemporaries—some familiar from the published diaries and letters. Memorabilia were displayed, memories rehearsed, insight into the novels and their characters was given in two splendid literary addresses, and a former colleague from the International African Institute spoke of Pym's 28 years of editorial work there. Her responsibilities included indexing; and he estimated that she had proofread 1,000,000 words of anthropological publications.

It is given to few of our trade to have conferences held in their honour; but this one was as truly deserved as it was thoroughly enjoyed—despite the pervasive sense of being most drily observed from above.

Barbara Pym's ironic portrayals of librarians and indexers are continued in her latest posthumously published novel, An academic question (Macmillan, 1986), where we meet Heather Armitage, 'an anxious-looking woman... who seemed never to have recovered from the worries of card indexes and bibliographies in the days when she too had worked in a library...'. After Heather makes a rather catty remark, we are told, 'Evidently a life spent with card indexes did not make for generosity of spirit'.

Vintages for indexes?

From the author's reply to an anxious indexer requesting comment on a particularly complex and difficult specialist index:

I have not yet seen a copy of the index which you prepared. My own experience is that it is only after a period of time that one is able to judge the merits of an index. I have therefore made a diary note to write to you in the summer when I will pass on any comments about the index which I receive.