American Society of Indexers
(nos. 76, 77, 78)

The three issues overviewed here, published in March/April, May/June and September/October 1986 respectively, have fewer feature articles than usual; they are concerned largely with domestic matters. Perhaps it is true, as the new President, Ben-Ami Lipetz, writes in his stirring article in no. 78, on ASI’s new approaches to management and budgeting, that: ‘ASI is simply emerging from its adolescence, and dealing with the mundane and critical matters of planning and control. As members of ASI, we derive excellent value for the modest dues. The way things are moving at present, we can look forward to deriving not less but much more.’ Our societies ‘emerge from adolescence’ at different ages, it seems; but the experience of deepening financial gloom expressed in earlier Presidential reports in the ASI Newsletter, and its sequel of rolling-up of sleeves and freshening of ideas and image may well be common to all of us. One of the positive ideas put forward under the New Deal is to instigate a series of ‘travelling workshops’ on indexing topics, which would set up their caravans in towns and cities throughout the States as requested by local indexers; it is expected that these would both provide a stimulus and service to members and contribute to ASI funds. Two large meetings, in New York and Washington, had shown unusually substantial profits in the previous year; to strengthen local groupings a new sub-committee was being set up to aid not only the establishment of new Chapters but also their continuing health and welfare. This affirmative and outward-looking stance must be applauded by us all.

No. 76 has Lesson Three of Carolyn Bridgers’ excellent ‘Bookkeeping for Indexers’; a round-up by Hans Wellisch of the available manuals and primers on PRECIS (he feels there is still room for a more concise and elementary one to make PRECIS as widely accessible as it deserves to be); an ‘Electronic Shoebox’ on index-generating software—the sort where you flag the terms to be indexed in an online text and hope that StarIndex or whatever will do the rest (I cannot believe that Linda Fetters has yet found the best on offer); an interesting mention of an article in Harvard business review on one tele-commuting firm with 1,000 employees all working from home (Linda Cooper feels that indexers should be well-fitted by temperament and experience for playing their part in the estimated 20 million homebased businesses in the US forecast for 1990...); and notice of the welcome publication of A guide to indexing software, an updated compilation of the reviews of indexing programs which have appeared in the Newsletter ($7.50 to non-members). The Editor, enthused by the prospect of the Indexer article on the indexing of Welsh names, wonders whether anything similar has been or should be done for American Indian names.

No. 77 contains the 1985-6 Annual Report; it is interesting to note that a policy of ‘broad mailing’ for seminars, which included membership forms, had brought in 50-60 new members (the mailing-lists of related local organizations had been used). Books reviewed include Herbert Hoffman’s Recorded plays: indexes to dramatists, plays and actors; both sound and vision recordings are included, in fifteen languages among which are Uzbek and Latin. Also reviewed is Bella Weinberg’s Education and training in indexing and abstracting; the reviewer is struck by the lack of consistency among the textbooks used by various courses, and deduces that there is still room for a definitive primer. Linda Fetters notes some new and updated programs; most are to be more fully reviewed at a later date, but much space is given to the ‘amazing control over formatting’ of the latest version of MACREN. Linda Cooper notes the importance of freelancing as a business, and the enhanced role of the freelance as a sought-after professional; an annotated bibliography is promised for a future issue. A new Editor is sought for ASI’s Register of indexers; ‘ASI is also interested in proposals for printing and publishing the Register as a viable commercial product’. The Wilson Award has been won by Marjorie Hyslop for the index to Metals handbook, Desk edition (see ‘Awards for Indexers’ in this issue). In addition to Linda Fetters’ regular feature on software, the firm of ‘Answers Unlimited’ contributes a detailed comparison of six programs, ranging in price from nil to $600. They conclude that you get what you pay for, giving their highest praise to the most expensive program, MIS (Compugramma), which they describe as the ‘Mercedes of the available indexing programs’.

No. 78 begins, delightfully enough, with two little poems: fit heralds of the New Deal already mentioned earlier in this article. As well as detailed analyses of a financial situation which suddenly looks much more cheerful (‘the reports of my death are greatly exaggerated...’).
and heartening details of plans for the future, there is a suggestion by Doug Thompson that ASI might set up an electronic bulletin board system. Inserted is the latest 'Organization Profile' of the Society, which summarizes its history, aims and activities, and lists its officers and sub-committees: as always, I found it very impressive. This issue had been produced early to give members speedy information on new plans; the return of regular features was promised for future Newsletters.

**Australian Society of Indexers**

(Vol. 10, nos. 3, 4)

No. 3 (August 1986) begins with an interesting account by Jean Hagger of a system for indexing local history collections designed by Australian Information Retrieval Services; there is a kit of documents, an option of computer software and various supplementary services, all intended for use by beginners and professionals alike. Ms Hagger hopes that the project, being of such great potential importance, will be thoroughly investigated, and that those who could use it will 'pursue with vigour efforts to get the necessary funding'.

There follows a survey (reprinted from State Library of NSW - PLD Newsletter) by Sue Scott of indexes to Australian newspapers. A project for establishing a national newspaper index had apparently been indefinitely postponed, and existing indexes remain partial, inconsistent and idiosyncratic. However, as Ms Scott indicates, unconventional handmade indexes may yield a heading so human and immediately helpful as 'thirst, died of' whereas the electronic bounty of the modern free-search databases may land you with 176 references to be searched at $90 per hour. Meetings, seminars and liaison with other organizations continue, and AusSI's recommended minimum rate moves in line with price index rises (but of course) to stand at $18.50 plus CPI rises for 1987.

The major article in no. 4 (November 1986) describes a different form of indexing: the arrangement of supermarket shelves (the text of a talk given to an AusSI Workshop of November 1986). Here the thesaurus is Direct Product Profitability, where a packet of cornflakes is unprofitable to sell (its large size means high storage, handling and display costs; the large numbers in which it is sold themselves add to sale-processing costs) so it is placed in a sort of sub-subheading on a lower shelf; whereas half the number of coffee-jars is profitable and therefore 'set in bold type' on the eye-level shelf. The 'size of entry' moves also with demand, so that within the overall uniform layout observed in all stores of the chain, spaghetti or gourmet food may stretch to 120 feet or shrink to 20 feet. The Apollo computerized system for shelf management is to be introduced into Woolworths Safeway in Australia shortly so you can be sure that if it takes you ten minutes to locate the pickled onions they are in exactly the right place from someone's point of view. (These 'alternative indexes' must be a fruitful source of inspiration—if the Editor of this journal should ever be short of material I will with pleasure offer brief theses on the kitchen cupboard or the landing bookshelf.)

The issue also carries a report on the successful November Workshop and notes of a meeting at which a police officer described the classification and identification of fingerprints.

**Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada**

(Vol. 8, no. 4)

The main article in this issue (Summer 1986) is Timothy Craven's 'String Indexing: a 1986 Overview'; this is the text of a talk he gave to IASC/SCAD's Annual Meeting, of which the theme was string indexing, and is itself a 'very selective sampling' of his recently published book on the subject (String indexing; Academic Press Canada). Mr Craven gives the criteria by which he selected or rejected various systems as examples of string indexing, analyses some typical formats, and lists five characteristics which he feels to be desirable from the searcher's point of view: clarity; eliminability (ease of discovering that an entry is irrelevant to your needs); collocation; predictability; succinctness. He also describes the conclusions of the EPSILON project to evaluate printed subject indexes.

The May Annual Meeting is well reported, and it is hoped that the texts of further talks may be published in future Newsletters. The new President, Susan Klement, opens the issue with a strong statement of intent on behalf of the new administration, which may perhaps lean towards the practical rather than the theoretical aspects of indexing. In particular, the Register of indexers is now in active preparation, and the Society hopes to achieve increased exposure to the media and within allied organizations, to the benefit both of better indexing standards and of increased membership. Peter Greig had produced a reading-list on string indexing which is now available. Canadian abstractors are asked to participate in 'John Kettle's Futureletter', which aims to collate abstracts of magazine articles on futures-oriented subjects.
Society of Indexers
(nos. 3/86, 4/86; MicroIndexer 6)

Both issues (of July and October 1986 respectively) are primarily concerned as is usual for this Newsletter with domestic issues. Like ASI, SI has a financial adolescence to emerge from: there is much of retrenchment, raising of revenue and budgeting plans. The motion to raise the subscription does contain a clause to arrange lower subscriptions for certain retired members and for founder members, a welcome initiative. A Scottish Group of SI had held its inaugural meeting, and resolved to hold meetings, arrange promotions and issue a specialized supplement to Indexers Available covering Scottish indexers in detail. (Now then, the rest of the Celtic Fringe!) A newspaper article is noted in which indexers had been described as working in 'seedy sweatshops' —a new vision of a cottage industry, no doubt. The AGM was to be combined with the Wheatley Medal presentation; the lack of topographical indexes to major reference works such as the Dictionary of national biography is bemoaned; one member has produced a new edition of her book on research resources, and another has co-authored A Reference companion to the history of abnormal psychology.

MicroIndexer 6 has twelve closely-written pages with as ever a great deal of information and interest. It is clearly an advantage to be able to touch-type if you use a micro: Richard Raper provides an informative article on the software available which allows your micro to teach you itself how to use it better (or at least faster). The computerization of the Oxford English dictionary is described, together with other forays by Oxford University Press into electronic publishing (I liked the sound of an interactive videodisc on volcanoes). There is an account of the latest Micro-indexing Workshop at Liverpool, together with a selection of available indexing programs, some of which had been demonstrated at the Workshop. Correspondents ask where to put the proofs while you are using a micro to index them, and assert that Microsoft Word is so flexible a tool that specialized indexing programs may not be necessary. Richard Wright tells you how to program your programmer if you feel impelled to get someone to design you an indexing program, dividing his list of desirable options into 'Necessary' and 'Nice'. Gerald Fowler, yet more ambitious, aims at helping you to write your own indexing program; he provides a 'catalogue' of sample entries such as '11 is eleven' (with a page-reference) by which the program can test its own expertise. Obviously the 'catalogue' is useful for testing a ready-made program if you are in a position to make changes to it. The Editor provides some advice on computer maintenance agreements, news of the new Acorn and of the latest version of the Amstrad word-processor, generally agreed to be a bobby-dazzler at the price—and a quotation from an advertisement: 'ASCII and you shall receive'.

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.

Initiation of an indexer

'During my first week in Malaya I was set to compile an index for the Perak Government Gazette. I had studied the orations of Demosthenes and the politics of Plato and Aristotle to fit myself for the burdens of empire and my first job was to unravel the abracadabra of D.P.W., S.R., I. of S. and the other mystic initials symbolic of British colonial administration. . . . Certainly there was neither romance nor glory in my first imperial task, and before I was to meet the Minangkabau saying "Start from alif; count from one" ten years had passed and then I had already waded through the alif, the ba and perhaps the ta [Malay equivalent of ABC] of administration.'


Indexing is . . .

'Indexing is the often unrecognized handmaiden of scholarship and librarianship. Few are aware of the special skills of the fine indexer, fewer still possess them. The indexer at once needs breadth of knowledge, familiarity with a wide variety of terms in all of their nuances, an ability to classify concepts and to establish relationships between them, and an enormous capacity for consistency, self-discipline, and hard work. The talents required are those of the cataloguer, the subject analyst, and the classifier combined.'