The Society of Indexers' fifth weekend conference was held at Chester College, 10-12 July 1987, with the title 'Indexing for the future'. It was attended by 71 members, including Christopher Blackburn from Canada representing IASC. The sun warmly blessed our gathering in now established fashion.

The Inaugural GNK Lecture

The first evening of this conference was a very special occasion. Thirty years from Norman Knight's founding of the Society of Indexers—the Inaugural Norman Knight Memorial Lecture was given, by the Earl of Stockton. SI Vice-President Ken Bakewell, as Chairman for the evening, introduced the lecture: his remarks are reproduced in full below.

Lord Stockton described what were to prove the main themes of the weekend's talks: electronic publishing, CD-ROMs, online databases, the future of publishing and its effects upon indexing. Macmillans' forthcoming 28-volume Dictionary of art, intended as a companion to The new Grove dictionary of music, to be published over 9 years at a cost of nearly £9 million, will be available in both electronic and textual form, including the illustrations.

We hope to print the full text of his address in our next issue.

STAIRS in Cheshire

Saturday focused on libraries' use of online databases. Alan Peacock of Cheshire County Library described their use of the IBM STAIRS (Storage and Information Retrieval System), which provides a rapid freetext retrieval system for documents and reports, and contains over 114,000 documents/screens of information which can be searched using any combination of words, phrases, numbers or codes no matter where the selection appears in the text. Originally introduced by Cheshire County Council for use by the Police Force in the 1980s, it was offered to the Libraries department for use by the research library, centre of a network of local government information service points. Input rapidly grew to cover all the contents of the library and that of the network libraries, access to the system spreading to the Archi-
Central Information Unit was set up to service the whole of Cheshire libraries, in particular to provide a business information service. By the mid-80s the public element on the database was beginning to swamp the original local government purpose; also, the public libraries were asking for a truly 'public' information system. Other factors behind the decision to look at restructuring the database included the inability of the early system to perform certain new tasks such as the automatic updating of addresses. In February 1987 a specification for a new 'public' database was completed, and work began on the new system, which will go live to the existing network of 5 local government and public library terminals. It will provide the same facilities of speed, free text searching, boolean operators, etc, as the original, but with substantial amendments and improved capabilities. There will be eight databases which can be searched either as a whole or individually, including bookstock records, local history, audio-visual collections, industrial data (including complete Dun and Bradstreet record of 17,000 Cheshire Firms), organizations and societies lists, Cheshire events diary, local events diary, and free format 'notes' database. Each of these databases has a shadow 'collection' database which will intercept all input to the system for inspection and approval by the central editing team to ensure compatibility and accuracy. This provision will become increasingly important over the years as the network of terminals and potential input spreads across the whole county to form the planned link-up of all 50 libraries, District Councils and other interested users. The system is intended to develop into a full 'public' information database covering all aspects of Cheshire life, providing a County-wide network of public access points using libraries, information centres, online remote access, and possibly public access terminals in shopping centres, bus stations etc. It will have a major impact on the way in which the public reference service is managed and may eventually include other information projects such as Adult education, Training Access Points, local schools, and direct publishing.

Lawrence Rawsthorne, Chief Cataloguer of the Clwyd Library and Museum Service, then spoke on 'Provision of community information via the new technology in Clwyd Library Service', which uses ASSASSIN, an online, free-text database system, and the WRAP package on Torch Micro and IBM PC, for calculating welfare benefits. He described the TAP (Training Access Points) project, which involves the creation of local and national databases listing training opportunities. The text of his address will appear in our next issue.

Following this talk, Elizabeth Wallis, in the Chair, commented that this indicated a complete transition period; Norman Knight himself would not have followed the Inaugural Knight Lecture given the previous night—not even have known its vocabulary; but it generated a sense of optimism and excitement.

Registration assessed

After lunch, two parallel practical sessions focused on indexing itself. Seven indexing software systems for microcomputers were demonstrated in the computer workshop, reported in MicroIndexer 8. Meanwhile, at an 'RI Open afternoon', the procedure for SI Registration was examined. Three assessors spoke on their own methods of examining an index submitted for registration: in an interesting contrast of approaches, Dr John Gibson checks back from the book to the index, doing mini-indexes himself of an early and a late chapter of each book he examines, and comparing these with the book's index, as well as watching for particularly difficult technical points such as table contents, and checking the indexing of these; while Paul Nash checks from the index back to the book, using the index as a reader would do, and checking the speed with which it leads him to the information he seeks. Anne Coles stressed the importance of the guidance that is sent to the assessors, and that for all of them, the criteria of good indexes, and the faults, were the same. The anonymity, impartiality, and high motivation of the assessment procedure were emphasized, and a desire for more practical workshops was made apparent.

Jean Simpkins had prepared a demonstration shocking index to a 50-page handbook of educational advice, which was displayed, with fourteen separate faults listed—horrible indeed to behold!

In the evening Alexander Wilson spoke of 'The librarian in the information world' of new electronic publishing products; the text of his address will be reproduced in this journal. To the first speaker from the floor, the information future sounded 'terrifying—galactic!'. Discussion suggested that new information technology seems designed according to technical possibility rather than for the needs of the user, and often is not available for their direct consultation. Financial restrictions, particularly in the third world, impede public benefit from the huge assembled information banks.

Databases—inputting and searching

On the Sunday morning, our last speaker, Norman Nunn-Price, Managing Director of CONTEXT Legal Systems Ltd, spoke of 'The value of the computer as an indexing tool', describing the principal techniques available, the generation of concordances from full text, frequency counts, the use of compression techniques, searching by means of boolean operators, the importance of the man-machine interface, and likely future developments. The computing systems available for indexing documents were described both from the point of view of the end user seeking a reference and of the indexer producing an index printed or stored for use in the machine.

Reassuringly, he spoke indulgently of computers as
capable only of dull, repetitive tasks, merely able to add or compare two numbers—but coping with this boring work without boredom. We should not be afraid of them but simply tell them what to do—the end-product depends on the accuracy of the data stored.

He described the organization of the JUSTIS database. One library of particular interest was CELEX, the European Commission's database of its own legal materials. The entries in this are translations from the original French, so the difficulty of the legal language used is further complicated by the translation process, which tends to leave the words in the order used in the French language.

The exact location of information achieved by use of a database actually increases paper reading, as the information seeker goes to the actual original text to find the reference once the computer has pinpointed it for him, and as it has been found that sales of printed publications, including back numbers, increase when the text has been entered into such databases.

The full text of this talk will appear in *MicroIndexer* 9.

In the discussion following this talk, members commented on release from the drudgery-aspects of indexing, by leaving them to the computer, enabling human indexers to concentrate on the more interesting work of indexing concepts; and on the artificial changes of language the computer is causing.

Open discussion session

The final session was introspective, with questions to a panel. Ken Bakewell described the changes in the forthcoming revised British Standard on indexing, and the registration procedure was further considered. There were happy reports on the foundation and development of the Scottish group of indexers, and a desire for more local groups. We considered with what professional group we are, or should be, most closely allied; the conference had been greatly concerned with librarianship, and a proportion of SI members are librarians (by training and/or practice), but it was suggested that indexers' more natural colleagues are authors and publishers, and we should concentrate on promoting links with these, as well as with other information organizations such as Aslib and the Institute of Information Scientists.

As for future conferences—annual—practical—overseas—extended—different scenarios were enthusiastically proposed, but the high eagerness for them was constant and clear.

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**The Norman Knight Memorial Lectures**

*The following is the introduction by Ken Bakewell to the Inaugural Norman Knight Memorial Lecture, delivered on Friday 10 July 1987.*

There are now many members of the Society of Indexers who never had the privilege of meeting Norman Knight. There may even be some who are not quite sure who he was or what his connection with the Society was. It is, therefore, appropriate to make a few introductory remarks about the founder of our Society before introducing our distinguished guest speaker.

When Gilfred Norman Knight retired from the Civil Service in 1956, having been a freelance indexer since 1925, he felt a sense of loneliness and wanted to meet some fellow indexers. Letters to the press and 'discreet lunches at his club' culminated in a meeting at the National Book League at the end of March 1957, which was attended by some sixty indexers from all parts of the country, and one, Professor William Heckscher, who had flown from Utrecht specifically to attend the meeting. Thus was the Society of Indexers born.¹

All those who knew Norman Knight will testify to his charm, kindness and courtesy. When I joined the Society in the 1960s, on the suggestion of our current President, Robert Collison, I became one of the recipients of the

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**Gilfred Norman Knight 1891-1978**

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