Focus in a wide world

Indexes traditionally come at the back-of-the-book, indexing at the end of the production schedule. Do indexers bring up the rear in importance also, in the publishing world?

This journal is now completing its fourth year of publication of the regular continuation, as a current-awareness feature, of Hans Wellisch’s two highly acclaimed volumes, *Indexing and abstracting: an international bibliography* (ABC-Clio, 1980) and *Indexing and abstracting 1977–1981: an international bibliography* (ABC-Clio, 1984).

The contents of that feature show how profuse and disparate is published material about indexing, as to both topic and source: a dispersion emphasized in Ming-yueh Tsay’s bibliometric study in this issue. Our Wellisch bibliography is divided into twenty or so sections, including Indexing Languages and Systems, Subject, Serials and Newspaper Indexing, Name and Citation Indexes, Computer-assisted and Automatic Indexing, Databases and Thesauri, History, Law and Indexers. The items cited come from publications concerned with librarianship, information systems and processing, databases, serials, publishing, medicine, chemistry, archaeology, abstracting; from journals, newsletters, books, and conference proceedings in several languages. Indexing is pertinent to all disciplines of learned publishing.

Another regular feature, Norman Hillyer’s compilation of extracts from press reviews that comment upon the quality or lack of indexes, reveals how high and wide-spread is the degree of concern with indexes on the part of reviewers in every discipline. With an ever-increasing number of comments upon indexes being sent to us by helpful members, we are now in the happy position of being able to select the more instructive or entertaining items. Our book reviews show the number of volumes published that are concerned with indexes and indexing, its standards, training, and reference books of particular use to indexers.

As well as the appearance of so much diffused material on indexing, even within our member societies publishing is increasing, with the production of ever larger, glossier and more professional newsletters, supplemented by features on electronic indexing, as well as directories and training courses. Indexing crops up throughout the learned publishing world; and indexers’ Societies publish profusely.

Items from *The Indexer* often reappear outside its pages, as collections and individually. A 430-page selection from the first 21 years’ issues, *Indexers on indexing*, was published by Bowker in 1978. We were pleased recently by a request from the producers of *Library literature: the best of 1988* to reprint Bella Hass Weinberg’s leading article from our April 1988 issue, ‘Why indexing fails the researcher’. Previous selections of *Indexer* articles for inclusion in this annual series have been Laurence Urdang’s ‘The human use of human indexers’ from our April 1979 issue, and Paul Barnett’s ‘Beyond the Appendix with gun and camera’ (October 1983). Other reprises include William S. Heckscher’s ‘The unconventional index and its merits’ (April 1982), in *Art and literature: studies in relationship*, a collection of his writings published in 1985 by Duke University Press; Philip Bradley’s ‘A founding father: Frederick Ruffner and the Gale Research Co.’ (April 1988), to be reprinted in *Library Review*, and K. Boodson’s ‘Subject bibliographies in information work’ (April 1976) which is included in the Information Science teaching programme of the University of South Africa. The Japanese Association of Indexers has requested permission to translate into Japanese and reprint in their journal Elizabeth Wallis’s ‘The business side of indexing’ (October 1987), Hans Wellisch’s ‘“Index”: the word, its history, meanings and usages’ (April 1983), and Philip Bradley’s article mentioned above.

We look forward to permeating further the wider world of publishing, originating items that appear again in other formats and languages.

*The Indexer*, however, now completing its 32nd year and 16th volume, remains the one journal devoted solely to indexing: its practice, problems, function and quality, worldwide. Our trawling is extensive: articles come from many countries, with or without organized societies of indexers. This is the place, too, where news of all the national indexing societies is reported, in our regular ‘Shoebox, International’ résumé of each society’s newsletters. And our regular A&I bibliography, reviews and
compilation of press extracts indicate all that is published on the subject outside. Here is the hub, the nexus of indexing, in a world where publication on indexing constantly proliferates.

We endeavour still to maintain high standards, wide coverage, and a unique focus on indexing.

Indexing specialisms—league table

The eighth edition of the Society of Indexers’ annual publication, Indexers available, now out for 1989–90, gives an interesting indication of the varying numbers of specialist indexers in different subjects. The most popularly indexed subjects—where more than fifty indexers are offered—are biography, biology, countries/travel, and history. Only three or fewer offer atlases, electronics, fashion/clothes, local history, or newspapers. Computing has 18 indexers; directories/guides, 17; law, 16; librarianship/information science, 13; medical/paramedical sciences, 41; psychology, 17; reference works, 22; science (general), 38; social sciences, 42.

Under special skills are listed 8 abstractors, 12 bibliography compilers, 6 classifiers, 33 copy editors, 7 database indexers, 44 proofreaders (arts and humanities) and 20 proofreaders (sciences).

Does it all indicate the ease or difficulty of the various subjects; the degree of specialist knowledge required for them; their intrinsic appeal; or their share of the publishing world?

Sir, you go too far!

A correspondent to our last issue complained of unauthorized liberties taken with her index by an academic editor. We wonder how she would have reacted had she been the indexer of the first ten volumes of Transactions, the journal of the Association for Studies in the Conservation of Historic Buildings.

An Editorial Note prefacing number 12, 1987, of this journal, first pays tribute to the compilation of an index: ‘the mountainous labour that it requires. This noble work . . . ’ and credits the indexer who has spent the previous eighteen months working on the Transactions index. ‘We have had many discussions about it: it would surprise you how difficult it is to decide on a dozen apparently simple matters, especially on what to put in or to leave out. I hope that the result is consistent; if it is not, do not blame George.’

Do not indeed. With insouciance, the Editorial Note continues: ‘Having received his neat manuscript, I decided that the index should be in two parts, the first of persons, the second general. This involved rewriting it, but fortunately I had just been provided by my office with a word-processor, so I was able to incorporate amendments and additions, adjust or combine entries, and separate out the two indexes, at the same time as typing it on my new machine.’ The rest of the Note is devoted to praise of the new technology and the editorial benefits it brings, with final thanks to English Heritage ‘for a most generous and exceptional grant towards the cost’ of the production of the Changeling Index.

The published index appears to have emerged sensible and unexceptionable. But how would our members feel if they were George?

Building indexes

Perhaps the first press launch of an index was held at the Royal Institute of British Architects in London on 17 July 1989, for the cumulative index to the catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the RIBA: an occasion described by Max Hutchinson, President of RIBA, as designed ‘to celebrate this great contribution to architectural scholarship’. He spoke of the index as ‘an immense work of dedication, hard work and application’, describing the indexer as ‘bent over the index, barely coming up for air during the entire day’.

This index is an imposing work of 612 pages, edited by James Bettley and compiled by Richard Raper. It consists of a names index, with details of architects and their designs, from pages 3–343; an index of locations from 347–584; and on pages 585–602, a list of errata found in the original 19 volumes of the catalogue, which lists over 300,000 drawings. The index volume costs £225.

Richard Raper is Managing Editor of what may be the only group practice for commissioned indexes, ‘Indexing Specialists’, in Hove, East Sussex, where he employs 17 indexers, full or part-time. These he trains himself (none are members of the Society of Indexers; some are graduates, in a variety of specialisms). All work on computers, some at home. ‘We supply an excellent product . . . our firm has won awards and citations so you can be confident our work is good’, states their publicity. Last year they indexed more than a hundred books, with an increase of over a hundred per cent turnover: indexing as a business, indeed.

The team method has proved successful: this latest major index has been given its own press launch, and last year their index to The triumph of invention: a history of man’s technological genius was awarded a Highly Commended certificate by the Wheatley Medal Panel (see The Indexer 16 (3), 201–2).