might be a printing error for *insulin* instead of a different substance. Cynthia Kolnick gave some practical advice on writing a contract, pointing out that a contract is concerned with *what* an indexer does rather than *how* s/he does it—rather like delegation in management. There were two very interesting panel sessions, one on indexing software (which included Hilary Calvert of *MCREX* as well as Peter Lennie of *CINDEX*, Hugh C. Maddocks of *Foxon-Maddocks Associates* and Doug Williams of *IN>SORT*) and one on freelancing consisting of Barbara Klein (a fascinating non-computer indexer), Elinor Lindheimer and Jane Maddocks. Topics discussed included availability of software for the Apple Macintosh, desk-top publishing, the impact of software design on how an indexer works, why and how one becomes a freelance indexer, charging methods, the impact of the computer on charging, pressures by publishers to computerize, what happens if page proofs are delivered two weeks late, how to obtain work and how to advertise oneself, whether indexers should proofread, working with authors, what if clients don’t pay on time? and the future of indexing.

Our American colleagues were friendly, hospitable, and thoroughly professional, and it was a joy to spend two days with them. My only complaint was that the one free day I allowed myself was not nearly long enough to see San Francisco properly, though I did manage to cram quite a lot into Sunday, 21 May, including tours of the bay and the city and a trip on a cable car. I can’t wait to go again!

Ken Bakewell
President, Society of Indexers

Indexing for children

The National Curriculum Council has proposed an English curriculum for UK school pupils, with recommended levels of grading for various attainment targets. Level four, to be reached by the average eleven-year-old, includes 'the ability to make effective use of information and reference books, and be familiar with the functions of contents pages and indexes and the classification system of the school library'.

A worthy aim, and may it be achieved! There are particular difficulties, though, in matching indexes to the child mind, outlined by Eleanor von Schweinitz:

The index, together with the contents page, is the main retrieval device of the information book. Educationalists now put considerable emphasis on the need for children to acquire the skills of information retrieval, whether it be to trace information through an automated electronic system or a printed book. Most information books for junior and secondary-age groups have an index, but many of them are woefully inadequate. How can we expect our children to become independent learners if we give them useless tools?

There are real difficulties for the indexer of many junior information books. The wide range of subjects touched upon in the text without substantial development poses a problem. Too often an index is little more than an arbitrary selection of terms with no apparent reason for their inclusion or omission. The reader is often directed to a word in the text but finds no real 'information' there or, alternatively, he looks for an expected term in vain. A recent book on the secret service which fails to index the word 'spy' is hardly likely to inspire confidence in the reader.

She also deplores the omission of references to key concepts, such as 'bias' and 'censorship' in a current book on the media, and she castigates perverse indexes that include important terms but conceal them—such as a book on the environment in which 'the reader will look in vain at G for greenhouse effect or W for whale. With perseverance the whale may be discovered at H (under hunting) and the greenhouse effect at W (under weather)'. Her final criticism is of a common error:

Yet another fault in many indexes is to list up to 20 or more undifferentiated page references following an entry term. A supreme example of this is in a 48-page book called *Lifeboat*—in which the index has the term 'lifeboat' followed by a string of 48 separate page references. To add insult to injury a further 9 entry terms are subordinated to lifeboat (including the term 'crew').


The indexer did it . . .

*The Independent* for 24 May 1989 reports a most unusual case of legal troubles resulting from indexing. *Chronicle of the 20th century* (Longmans, 1988) lists in its index four undifferentiated references to Maxwell, Robert. Four was too long a string not to be broken down, in this case—three of the text references are in fact to the noted publisher of that name; the remaining one refers to an alleged spy freed from Libya in 1987. Maxwell the publisher, never accused of spying, has issued a writ for damages.

Surely this must be a case where libel arises entirely from the index of a book, rather than the text itself?