

Georgette Heyer is remembered chiefly as a writer of detective stories and popular historical novels, notably for her Regency romances. These, with titles such as *The convenient marriage*, *Regency buck*, and *The Spanish bride*, pretty, pouting heroines and dashing rakes of heroes, are perhaps not regarded very seriously as examples of their genre, so it may come as a surprise to learn from Jane Aiken Hodge's biography, *The private world of Georgette Heyer* (Bodley Head, 1984), that Heyer's historical research and recording were scrupulous.

'She was beginning to collect her reference library and to accumulate research material ... Illustrations from magazine articles were lovingly clipped and filed ... Useful material from books was carefully traced or copied ... meticulous files of notes ... growing fast. She could turn to her indexed vocabulary books and find *rumbo* for Newgate when she wanted to introduce thieves' cant ... notes meticulously cross-referred.' When Heyer planned a historical biography of John, Duke of Bedford, 'She began to collect information ... for the years of John's life, 1389 to 1435. Three card indexes cover this period, itemized by year, month and day', as well as 'a card index of biographies, running from the dukes of Alençon to Richard, Duke of York', and files 'thick with information of every kind'.

Clearly, the instincts of an indexer lay within the writer of romances. We may recognize too her glee in discovering errors when proof-reading: 'I had given the same name to Mrs Underhill's housekeeper and Sir Waldo's valet ... I went through the proofs of Carola Oman's new book and don't seem to have missed a thing'.

Indeed, for her friend Carola Oman, a more serious historical writer, Georgette Heyer compiled a back-of-the-book index: to Oman's *Britain against Napoleon*, published in 1942 by Faber & Faber. It appears a fine, full, proper piece of work.

The index takes 16 pages, for 353 pages of text. It is informative—all names and titles are given in full, with supplementary facts, even when the resultant length may seem disproportionate to the page references:

Bentinck, William Henry Cavendish, 3rd Duke of Portland, First Lord of the Treasury, 1807–1809, 280

Muffling, General Baron von, Prussian Military Commissioner to British Army in 1815, confers with Wellington, 332.

Major topics are broken up by subheadings. The entry for 'Napoleon I, Emperor of the French', takes two columns of subheadings, mostly with only one page

reference, arranged strictly by order of occurrence in the text. Subheadings generally are carefully selected, requiring full consideration of the text; for example:

Navy, British, Mutiny at the Nore, 64; conditions in, 64, 65; condition of ships, 176; strength of at Trafalgar, 238; Napoleon's praise of, 347.

There are helpful cross-references from titles and pseudonyms to names, and from alternative spellings. People with the same name are properly differentiated and identified. There are classified entries, listing Battles (in chronological order, with dates); Battleships, British; Battleships, French; Caricatures, of ...; Foreign Affairs, Secretary of State for, *see* (names and dates given); and others.

The changes in indexing practice of forty years show particularly in terminology and punctuation. No colons mark off main headings from subheadings, as shown above after 'Navy, British'. An unusual convention is the distinctive use of commas between consecutive page references and semi-colons for breaks in page sequence (as in the example below). *Et seq.* is used. Perhaps there is a touch of verbosity in:

Austen, Jane, allusions to the works of, 176; 298
Black Hole of Calcutta, *mention of*, 157.

Really, though, this proves to be a competent and helpful index, whose quality was recognized by the book's author in the following proper acknowledgement, printed unusually and conspicuously at the end of the index, set out thus:

The author desires to record her most grateful thanks to the maker of the Index—Georgette Heyer.

Our thanks to Messrs Faber & Faber and the Bodley Head for permission to quote passages above.

How indexers operate?

'... as in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern amid general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is quite accurately, a going to nature, yet the result is no mere photograph, but purely the product of the writer's own mind.'

Thomas Hardy's diary, 3 June 1882.