Repagination seems to be regarded as the Cinderella of our profession. It is something we do unwillingly and we rarely admit to doing on a regular basis. The general image of repagination is that it demands little or no skill, so if a book is worth repaginating—why not take the opportunity of reindexing it instead?

There are of course a number of reasons why repagination is both necessary and useful: a book may be reissued in paperback; a new edition may be printed enlarging or reducing the page size; one volume may be extended to two, or three volumes decreased to two, with no increase or decrease in text. So far as the editor is concerned, repagination should take less time and therefore cost less than a brand new index. It makes sense in economic terms to do this; but life is not always so simple!

Suppose an author decides to index his own work and completes his index before the editor has had a look and decided—in his/her wisdom—that passages should be deleted, chapters should be enlarged. The author acquiesces, but forgets about his original index. When you, the indexer, are asked to repagate this index, you find yourself with a number of problems. I should make it clear that I believe repagination demands patience, skill, a methodical approach and creativity. Back to the problems!

First: there are no page numbers to work from because, obviously, the author was referring to his final ‘draft’ and the editor has thoughtfully removed these page numbers from the proofs to avoid confusion. (This is assuming the index has already been typeset, which it often is not.) What you have is a photocopy of the author's handwritten index, possibly typed if you are lucky.

Second: you must come to grips with the fact that the author does not view his magnum opus in the same way you do. He is rarely so objective, and often his terminology leaves much to be desired. He repeats himself; he uses subheadings with gay abandon; he ‘forgets’ vital pieces of information, or places them obscurely as a subheading; and overall, you wonder whether his index actually refers to the proofs in hand.

Third: the text has been subtly altered. Additions/deletions are not reflected in the author’s index, and at the end of the day, you are left with references which do not have any page numbers. Good indexer though you may be, you still have the niggling doubt that perhaps you have missed the references in the text; so, for the tenth time, you reread the book, lest you prove both blind and stupid. On the other hand, whole passages appear to have no index reference at all—people, places, subjects have been left out! Have they? Once again, you are assailed with doubts as to your own ability as an indexer.

All this, though, is but a preliminary to an index I recently agreed to repagine. By all accounts, it should have been straightforward enough. Admittedly, the author was long dead, so there was no way either I or the editor could check elusive entries, but the book had been in print in one form or another for over 150 years, so what was there to worry about?

For a start, the new edition was to be a three-volume set expanded from a two-volume set. Again, no problem! Surely one of the excellent computer indexing programs could help? Put in all the old page references, put in all the new, shake it all up, and everything would just fall into place.

On receiving the proofs, however, I realized that it was not going to be that simple. The original index was quite full and appeared to have been compiled by the author himself; not a problem in itself, but additional information—not readily appreciated in the text—was there in the index. The language of the text and that used in the index were not always in agreement. Prior knowledge was expected of the reader (and therefore of the indexer) and classical allusion and oblique references were frequent. Again, this should not have mattered, for surely, all one was doing was shifting pages at regular intervals. Anybody could cope with that, with or without an indexing program. No skill or creativity involved, just patience and a methodical approach.

How wrong! Anyone who has tackled an index such as this will appreciate that skill and a certain amount of creativity are indeed needed. It is not good enough just to move page numbers and hope that the references move with them. In this instance, the two volumes, each containing approximately 450 pages, had one index to cover both. The new three-volume set, each volume containing between 275 and 310 pages, also had to have
one index to cover them all. All the volumes were separately numbered.

For convenience, the old two-volume set will be referred to as O1 and O2, and the new three-volume set as N1, N2 and N3.

I assumed that at least N1 would equate fairly closely with O1 and that problems, if any, would occur when matching N2 and N3, for obviously the page numbers would be vastly different: e.g., N2 page 48 equalled O1 page 324; N3 page 157-8 equalled O2 page 305.

I also assumed that relating the headings and subheadings to the text would be relatively easy. What I failed to take into account initially was that indexes of the mid-nineteenth century were quite different from modern indexes. Terminology in the text rarely appeared as such in the index, and consistency in terminology in the index was entirely lacking. A man might be executed, massacred, beheaded, guillotined, death of announced; he might leave, quit, flee, emigrate, escape, retire or be dismissed. Although these words have different meanings to us, in this text/index they were often used synonymously.

Knowledge is either assumed or added to. For instance, a number of processions take place and are described quite fully. Generally, the names of all people in the processions are mentioned in both the text and index. But, exceptionally, names appear in the index only—the author has added to our knowledge, perhaps on the assumption that because the man was there in fact (but not mentioned in the text) he should nevertheless be put in the index.

Similarly, in the text, a person (or place or event), could appear under a nickname; referred to by description only; by reference to a person known to him; or by classical allusion. In the index he would appear under his own, rightful name. Napoleon on one occasion is referred to as ‘that little bronze-complexioned Artillery Officer of Toulon’. Robespierre is known as ‘Sea-green’; Philippe Orleans as ‘Young General Egalite’; and the Jacobin Society as the ‘Mother Society’. These are just a few examples to show that, faced with an unfamiliar characteristic or vague terminology in the text, to locate it in the index proved on occasion difficult.

It must be borne in mind that when repaginating an index, one reads the text, finds a person or subject likely to be indexed, then hunts through the index to see if that person or place or event has been indexed. This is where creativity comes in, because it is most unlikely that you will find it where you think it ought to be. Even if you have looked under every heading and subheading seeming at all possible, do not give up hope—it is sure to be there, somewhere!

But if a reference appeared on page 100 of N1, must it not be traceable to within a page or three in O1? Not so! The distinct impression I received from the index to O1 and O2 was that it had been moved verbatim from one edition to the next without due checking at any time. Normally one would indeed expect to find the pages moving ahead steadily as the text became more widely spread. Not so! Sometimes, the pages from N1 and O1 matched exactly; sometimes N1 was three pages ahead, sometimes three pages behind. Occasionally, a typographical error had crept in and been perpetuated; for example, a 1 for a 7. I would be looking for a reference on page 15 when it was to be found on page 75. On the whole, events covering several pages were treated correctly in the index to O1 and O2—but then again, sometimes not.

Certainly events and people, worthy of mention (I thought), appeared nowhere in the index. On the other hand, insignificant people and places did. Some events I thought important appeared as subheadings, deep within the index, extremely difficult to locate. Some main headings were impossibly split—the army, for instance, appearing under many guises—as army, as names of regiments, as events under other headings, and on occasion, not at all!

I was allowed some initiative in dealing with discrepancies, omissions and additions, and did tidy up a bit, rearranging some headings and adding and subtracting selectively. Not, I think, that you would notice unless you studied the old and new indexes very closely.

As an exercise in patience, skill, creativity and methodical approach, this work was certainly a challenge. The 16 pages of index to O1 and O2 each contained two columns, each column consisting of up to 70 lines, each line consisting of up to 45 characters. The number of headings plus subheadings in run-on sequence to be checked can only be guessed at. But I enjoyed it in

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the end; not at first, though, as I found the style at times perplexing and difficult to follow. And my family certainly did not appreciate the month it took me to do the work.

The index is as much an historical document as the text to which it refers. It contains many oddities, and, in common with many indexes, the indexer has included material not strictly necessary. Some of us include headings that are humorous or quirky—relevant, but not vital. It is our way of identifying the index as uniquely ours. I cannot say which, if any, of the headings in N1, N2 or N3 were or are irrelevant in this sense, but one does appeal: 'blood, baths of'. I would expect to find this type of heading, in view of the subject of the book. However, the heading refers not to the Revolution, but to the fact that Louis XV was ordered by his doctors to 'take baths of young human blood for the restoration of his own'. It occurs in N1 on page 14, and again, further on in the same volume, though only the first reference is recorded in the index to O1. (In passing, Louis XV is referred to as that 'Great Personage', not by name.)

No doubt you have guessed by now which great work I repaginated with such difficulty. It was of course Thomas Carlyle's French Revolution, first published in 1837.

The point of all this? Those who still regard repagination as an exercise fit only for indexers incapable of providing original indexes—please think again! It is not always so easy as you have been led to believe.

The analytical anti-index

Judy Batchelor wrote in our April 1989 issue of the anti-index, where 'the signifier refuses absolutely to relate to the signified'. Local History for March 1990 reprints an article from New York History by Carol Kammen which gives a different meaning to the term, using it for a perceptive analysis of changing attitudes to history with the passage of time.

'While the books in my personal library have either a Table of Contents, an Index, or nothing at all to help one locate information within, they also contain an Anti Index', Carol Kammen writes. She lists in the back covers of her history books all the topics she had sought in them and found not covered, as 'frequently the authors of the books in my library skipped altogether the subjects that interested me'. Analysis of the themes emerging from her lists of excluded topics led her to accept her history books as reflections 'of the authors' own historical interests and time', whereas 'My Anti Index works in a positive way to enhance my understanding of my own historical interests'. She examines in detail the contrasting—or complementary—actual index and contents list, and her own Anti Index of a history of Ithaca written by Henry Abt in 1926, and concludes, 'The past does not change, but our historical interests shift with the times and that accounts for the differences... My Anti Index reveals much about my own era and its interests; Abt's index and table of contents reveal a great deal about the interests and concerns of the early 1920s, and the themes of earlier historians tell us a great deal about their own time... an Anti Index is a good way to gauge one's concerns—and the concerns of one's own time'.

The 1988 revision of the British Standard on indexing defines 'the function of an index' most pragmatically as, 'to provide the user with an efficient means of tracing information'. The anti-index is invested with a function altogether more philosophical and of higher cultural significance, and we welcome it.

References


—P.S. In her article referred to above, Judy Batchelor posited the para-index, anti-index, non-index, sub-index, meta-index and sur-index, inviting examples of them. We do not know into which category should fall this volume described by Alice Thomas Ellis in her column in the Spectator, November 1988:

I have several nineteenth-century domestic encyclopaedias... [in one] when you get to Childbirth you are told to turn to Parturition and when you get to Parturition you are told to go back to Childbirth, but all generations are shy about something.

Prototype indexer?

'When Miss Theodora Bosanquet went that summer's day in 1907 to Miss Petherbridge's secretarial office, an employment agency... For some time she had been proofreading an index to the Report of the Royal Commission on Coast Erosion. She was wearing her usual office outfit, a white blouse and green skirt, a belt and a tie, a “business-like and, I hoped, becoming costume”.'