American Society of Indexers

(No. 99, 100, 101)

ASI's AGM

We must all be delighted to learn from No. 99 (July/August 1990) that ASI's 25th Annual Meeting is already planned: Washington, 1993. Meanwhile there is plenty to report from the 1990 AGM, held in a hotel overlooking Lake Michigan ('a wonderful setting for an exciting program') and entitled 'Indexing Tradition and Innovation'. Nancy Mulvany's Outgoing President's Report is full of achievements, both traditional and innovatory, many of which have been noticed in these columns. Some administrative changes have taken place: finances are now formally budgeted; a mail-handling service handles incoming mail, and outgoing mail to members is processed through a bulk mail permit. ASI has established codes of practice to cover reprint rights on its published material (free for non-profit organizations); and for the sale or exchange of its mailing list (members may exclude their names from release by applying to the Membership Chair). A Connecticut Chapter has joined the ASI family. The incoming President, David Billick, presents his own Report with the help of an extended baseball metaphor; his particular intention is to involve as many members as possible in the work of the Society: 'It may be only one hour of your time in the course of an entire year but the collective hours will be invaluable to all ASI members. Let's work together to clear the bases in 1990-91 and leave them loaded again for next year's President.'

Much of the sinew of this issue is provided by summaries of papers given at the AGM. Jessica Milstead had explained and commented on the Standards structure in the US and internationally: Standards 'make things fit together'; most Standards were qualitative, while 'quantitative Standards are a long way off'; the current US Standard 'meets neither the needs of the electronic indexing field nor the back of the book indexers'. Ann Bishop and Elizabeth Liddy had reported on an Index Quality Study. First, an analysis using the same features as a study published in The Indexer in 1978 had found a sizeable increase in the number of books provided with indexes but little change in the quality of the indexes, apart from an increase in the use of cross-references; in addition thirty-six students had commented on the indexes to thirty-six books: 'there was a general feeling that the indexer missed major themes and treated each chapter as a separate entity... the page ranges were too large... the arrangement of subheadings and sub-subheadings [was] confusing'; finally a questionnaire to publishers had established that over half the indexes of 225 surveyed books had had indexes compiled by the author or another non-professional (and that over half the publishers set no size limit to their indexes and used the Chicago manual of style as a guide).

In the afternoon Diane Ullius had answered the question, 'What Does the Editor Want?', defining categories of editor as the Fearful, the Deluded, the Irresponsible, the Monstrous and the Good, and providing a thoughtful analysis of the ideal relationship between two professionals who have much in common; good indexers 'exude confidence'. Afterwards Phyllis Dickstein had described the special demands of indexing United Nations documents: political sensitivity was naturally a paramount requirement, and compatibility must embrace multilingual approaches; the time would come when indexes would be generated in any language automatically. The last speaker, Amy Warner, had reported the preliminary results of a linguistics-based study on automatic thesaurus construction using natural language processing. First results of attempts to create such a thesaurus with the minimum of human intervention had shown that searching by natural language (a concept selected from a document title) produced different results from searching through controlled vocabulary (index terms or keyword phrases), and that searching by keyword terms only produced retrieval of irrelevant items; ways of inserting semantic information to reduce the number of leftovers were being explored; present work on noun phrases was to be supplemented by work on verb phrases.

The correspondence columns demonstrate much interest and hard thought on the format and content of Register entries; there was some feeling that 'generalist' should not necessarily be a disparaging term, since it may well be a non-specialist who can best show a non-specialist reader 'that there are several paths into the wood', and one writer demanded to know what degree would have been applicable to her recent task of indexing the History of underground comics. (Worth a whole correspondence page in itself, perhaps?) 'Electronic Shoebox' reviews NLCINDEX, which describes itself as 'a
scholarly indexing program. I’m not clear why it is more scholarly than other programs; in any case it seems to do in a cumbersome way what is done more easily and often better by MACREX and CINDEX, though Linda Fetters does comment: ‘If you are a traditional indexer, that is, you mark your text and know what you want to enter before you ever touch the keyboard, this program can work for you’; but concludes that most of us should ‘get another program’. ASI’s archives are to be established in most distinguished company at the University of Michigan’s Graduate Library’s Department of Rare Books and Special Collections; and the winning of the Wilson award for 1990 by Marcia Carlson is noted.

Indexer aid for AIDS resources

Regular readers may remember the swift and full response of ASI members to the call for volunteer help with an AIDS resources index (see The Indexer 17 (2) Oct. 1990, 129–30); and the cover story of no. 100 (September/October 1990) gives a review by Nancy Mulvany of some of the background to this, in particular of her construction of a thesaurus for the project, which naturally enough was not without problems (‘I was indexing. I was creating subentries, not narrower terms under broad terms; ‘I had no idea where to place terms like dental dams, guerrilla clinics, bath houses, PWAs ...’). There are also insights into the considerable scope of the subject-matter: ‘... articles running the gamut from straight news stories to editorials to “Dear Abby” columns to obituaries ...’ Merging was about to be undertaken, but since the piles of newspaper clippings continued to grow, many individual indexers would have to work on the project. Mulvany thanks with grace both the specialist colleagues who helped with getting the project under way and the volunteer indexers ‘from across the US and Canada’; their names are listed in bold at the end of the article. It seems fitting that this very nice achievement should be noted in the 100th edition of the Newsletter, which had been in print since April 1970. Congratulations from us all to a publication which, throughout the years I have read it, has always spoken with a refreshing and individual voice, more an aspiring journal than just the largest and most ambitious of our newsletters. After modestly congratulating itself on achieving its century (and asking for a new Editor: ‘... our membership is the largest it has ever been. I should think that there is someone out there who can take over ...’), the Newsletter prints two parallel quotations acknowledging some superiorities of livewire over software. One is from a computer user-group’s bulletin, which praises an online indexing program but adds: ‘... none of these indexing programs will ever do as good a job as a qualified indexer whose extrapolations greatly ease the burden of a reader looking for specific information under a phrase or word not used in the text’. The other, from the information accompanying a hyper-text program, reminds us: ‘... while humans are weak in active memory ... they are spectacular in pattern recognition. In contrast, computers are brilliant in consistent recall of stored information, but disasters in pattern recognition ...’.

An entry form for the new Register is printed as part of the Newsletter, with revised subject classification (up to fifteen subjects may be indicated) and separate listings for Related Services, Type of Material Indexed and Language Specialities. ‘Electronic Shoebox’ reviews INDEX! (for use with VENTURA PUBLISHER). Linda Fetters is ‘very disappointed’ that this very sophisticated DTP program includes an unsophisticated index generation program, and in particular that its documentation shows a ‘casual approach to indexing’ and to indexers; though she concedes that with improvements it could become a ‘useful addition to the VENTURA user’s toolbox’. There is a summary of the operation and contents of ASI’s Software Library, which now contains thirteen disks, and a request for a new Software Librarian to replace Hugh Maddocks, its founding Librarian. The last item in the issue is Jessica Milstead’s report on NISO; revision of the US indexing Standard was to be undertaken.

Software assessments

Software takes pride of place in no. 101 (November/December 1990) as Linda Fetters looks forward to possible refinements in indexing software (‘... only two programs] continue to develop, leaving the others further and further behind. The publishers of both CINDEX and MACREX are currently updating their programs’). Both these are improving their online help for users; both may be expected to offer display and editing facilities ‘more like a word-processor than a database management program’; one program at least may later incorporate a built-in spell checker [please, how does it know I didn’t mean to write ‘chequer’ or Cheka?]; Fetters would like to see really exotic format capabilities incorporated (‘No one has promised such a feature, but it never hurts to ask!’), and meanwhile welcomes a forthcoming MACREX innovation: a collection of style sheets developed by users to be associated with a specific index, thus eliminating the trek through the options menus for sort and format details. Both programs are likely to offer a ‘grouping’ facility, which would allow work on a section (e.g. entries from one chapter only) as if it were a whole index; CINDEX is to offer a Boolean search facility for really pinpoint searching. Graphical User Interfaces will allow switching between programs without exiting, or, if you have the right computer, running more than one program at the same time. MACREX is just into this, CINDEX is on the way. As a postscript, Fetters looks further ahead to a ‘text indexing program’, which would allow ‘proper’ indexing of a book which was itself online. [Such facilities have certainly been contemplated in the past; in the near future they will have to be realized. If
there were no other advantages, how glorious to know that your entry would carry about with it a corrected page-number throughout innumerable repaginations and revisions... Fettes does not 'expect this sort of program to be common for another five or more years'.

The President (and Anne Leach, the incoming Editor) had been considering new features for the Newsletter. ASI was also investigating electronic mail options both for the widely scattered Board members and for the membership as a whole; it was proposing a Member Survey, preparing to release its mailing list selectively to outlets which might benefit members, and exploring sources of administrative support. The Seventh Golden Gate Chapter Midwinter Conference was to be held on the business of indexing—'Indexing: Ergonomics and Economics'. Nancy Mulvany's last editorial announces to the world that she has been asked to write a book called Indexing books: an introduction; she asks members to suggest topics, problems and solutions. She was 'happy to report that my publisher has agreed to share the cost of the index equally with me, and that the indexer shall be chosen with the agreement of both of us. This should be standard in book contracts'.

Barbara Cohen had addressed an annual Midwestern University Presses meeting; some editors seemed to assume that a professional indexer would be second-best to an author-indexer, while others told horror-stories of author-indexers; both authors and editors seemed to have difficulty finding good freelances. Both presses and authors who valued good indexes were willing to pay for author-indexers; both authors and editors seemed to freelances easier but to advertise the importance of good them; there was a need not only to make access to membership as whole; it was proposing a Member ASI was also investigating electronic mail options both for the widely scattered Board members and for the newsletter. The Seventh Golden Gate Chapter Midwinter Conference was to be held on the business of indexing—'Indexing: Ergonomics and Economics'. Nancy Mulvany's last editorial announces to the world that she has been asked to write a book called Indexing books: an introduction; she asks members to suggest topics, problems and solutions. She was 'happy to report that my publisher has agreed to share the cost of the index equally with me, and that the indexer shall be chosen with the agreement of both of us. This should be standard in book contracts'.

Barbara Cohen had addressed an annual Midwestern University Presses meeting; some editors seemed to assume that a professional indexer would be second-best to an author-indexer, while others told horror-stories of author-indexers; both authors and editors seemed to have difficulty finding good freelances. Both presses and authors who valued good indexes were willing to pay for them; there was a need not only to make access to freelances easier but to advertise the importance of good indexes. Interestingly, Cohen wondered whether authors with clout found it easier to get their indexes paid for by their institution or press; were many censured indexes poor because a younger, less-published author could not afford anything but self-indexing? Cohen went on to emphasize the importance of liaising with professional publishing bodies not only for consciousness-raising but to share in the initiation and improvement of contracts and similar formal arrangements. The Washington Chapter had given its first Award for Distinguished Service, to Jane Maddocks for her 'dedication, leadership and vision' in re-establishing the previously moribund Chapter. Conversely, the Editor murmurs that certain Chapters, including the one in whose area she lives, are rumoured to be doing all sorts of interesting things but not telling the Newsletter about them... Jessica Milstead had attended the Annual Meeting of NISO (National Information Standards Organization). One speaker had described the Internet, to link networks with different protocols; the meeting had heard some views from publishers, who had tended to perceive in Standards little relevance to their needs—it might be advisable for librarians and publishers to work together in this field; committee chairs had spoken of their own fields of work and raised many general points relating to the stresses and challenges of the current Standards expansion; and there had been spirited discussion as to whether Standards should precede practice, or be set up in response to established working methods.

Some reviews of indexes complete this issue. In the third edition of The Federal data base finder (570 pages of lists), access to information is provided by fifty-five pages of Contents, of which the first page is a 'Quick View', plus highly-organized (alphabetical) textual matter; plus a forty-eight page Subject Index. This index, however, separates such topics as aviation, flight, seaplanes, and pilots and provides no cross-references; there may be up to fifty undifferentiated main page-references, of which only some will re-appear in sub-entries; and it is reasonable for Nancy Mulvany to conclude: 'It is easy to see why the [ALA] has granted it two Reference Book of the Year Awards. Under the direction of an experienced index editor, it may someday become a contender for the American Society of Indexers’ Wilson Award'. In contrast, she is in scarifying form for the index of The Society of text, a collection of papers on hypertext and multimedia: 'The index is close to useless. There is nothing worth salvaging... I give more thought to walking my dog than the editor obviously gave to the format of this index... That the editor and publisher of this book exhibit so little regard for the authors and readers is appalling'. Right!

__Australian Society of Indexers__
(Vol. 14, nos. 1–2, 3)

_Varying editors and rules_

No. 1–2 (March–June 1990) is an issue of achievements. It begins with the Annual Report: membership, now 205, had shown a nett increase of nearly 10%, and it was particularly pleasing that numbers in New South Wales had grown—the establishment of branches was to be facilitated. A full list of current members is included, subdivided by state.

Alan Walker, who had received the AusSI Medal for his index to The Penguin new literary history of Australia, contributes a major article (expanded from his acceptance speech) subtitled pleasantly: 'The View from...
the Back of the Book’. Commenting on the lack of recognition and feedback commonly experienced in what tends to be a single-handed and solitary occupation, he reminds us of the headline supplied for a newspaper article by the first AusSI Medal winner: ‘Surprise an Indexer—Notice Him’, before acknowledging the support he had received from colleagues and his editor in this project, which he describes as a ‘vicious book’ on the grounds that the corner of a ‘heavy and aggressive’ page-proof had ‘jumped up and hit me in the eye’; the cornea had been injured and lost him two days’ work. [Are we insured against this revolt of our subjects; indeed, are not such revolts the natural reaction to being pinned and written on and rifled through with no regard for the sensitivities of paper and print? ‘Books are not absolutely dead things . . . ’]

Walker devotes the bulk of his article to some thoughtful ‘Observations’ on publishing: his first is: ‘A system in which over 90% of all books are behind schedule by the time they reach the indexer [must have] something wrong with its scheduling’. He has perhaps been particularly unlucky in his publishers, but the basis of truth in what he says may well find general agreement; he does concede that this ‘is something which indexers just have to live with’. Secondly, he expounds with wit the formula:

\[ i = 16n - (t + p + a) \]

expressed for non-mathematicians as: ‘The number of pages available for an index is always between 1 and 16, and is the number of pages left in the last gathering after everything else has been accommodated’; to this he adds that indexers themselves have been slow to formulate guidelines for index-length based on such factors as the incidence of proper names, the format of the book (textbook, directory), and so on. Thirdly, it is his experience that ‘while an indexer may deal with the same author [many times], it is extremely rare to deal with the same editor twice’; he feels that this mobility of editors ‘does not help in maintaining and developing relationships between indexers and publishers, a proper and natural function of the editor’. Walker’s fourth Observation is succinct: ‘Publishers’ faith in automation is greater than the urge for quality control’; he is wholeheartedly in favour of automation as such, but deprecates a tendency to omit altogether monitoring processes which are not easily handled by machines, and to allow such devices as spell-checkers(chequers/Chekas . . .) to replace rather than aid skilled human quality control. In his concluding paragraphs Walker returns to the question of feedback, asking in particular that readers should be enabled to make their needs clear (for instance, in an index consisting largely of proper names, the occasional lower-case main-heading may be read inadvertently as a subheading to the last proper name; in such an index one might ‘break one’s rule’ and give all headings upper-case initials); and urging that ‘a closer integration of the indexer’s work in the editing and production process would be beneficial to all parties’.

The indexing program \textsc{index4} was to be placed on public domain (copies obtainable through AusSI); the Sydney group had held a panel discussion on the use of computers in book-indexing (I liked particularly the comment of Jill Matthews—who designed her own system based on \textsc{filemaker}—that her ‘clients range from a publisher who takes her database on 3.5-inch disk to one who sets from her printout in hot metal’); AusSI members were invited to attend the next Conference at Hvar, and to buy various indexing books and Standards at a discount. The Newsletter also reprints, with responses and comments, a questionnaire sent by the enterprising NSW group to its members to elicit their views on meetings: ‘Costing and charging’ was the most favoured topic; talks, panel discussions and workshops were equally popular; half the respondents would be willing to talk, at least as part of a group; and Thursdays at 6pm would suit most people best . . .

\textbf{Lats and Longs}

\textbf{No. 3 (September 1990)} graciously gives pride of place to an interestingly detailed summary of the British Society’s Edinburgh Conference. The other major article gives some ‘notes’ from a talk called ‘Lats and Longs’, given in Melbourne by Dorothy Prescott. (Despite the growth and initiative in NSW noted above, Victoria still has more members than the rest of the Antipodes put together—‘Antipodes’ because there are two from New Zealand.) Prescott had treated exhaustively many aspects of map indexing, supplying also the titles of many useful books of authority and reference. ‘In reproductions of old maps the authors/cartographers are critical, and could warrant a separate name index’; ‘Latitude is always quoted first’; for a geographical atlas index, the basic grid reference must be supplemented by the actual point co-ordinates, obtainable from a gazetteer; boundaries, place-names and spelling change in time and space; ‘geographical names are a minefield’—but this talk seems to have been a mine of information.

New South Wales indexers had formally constituted themselves a Branch; and had gone on to hold a fruitful panel discussion on ‘Dealing with Publishers and Editors’. The next AusSI Medal Dinner was on its way; and Australian indexers might then close the year by attending a seminar of the Australian Database Development Association with the theme ‘Will Online Go Offline?’ I do hope the next AusSI Newsletter will give us the answer to that one.
Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada

(Vol. 12, nos. 4, 5)

5 x 3"s as billets-doux

Michèle Hudon, IASC/SCAD's new President, concludes her column of aspirations and pleas in no. 4 (September 1990) with a paragraph in French for francophone members. The SCAD of the Society's title is for 'Société canadienne pour l'analyse de documents'—an aspect less frequently emphasized in recent years, it seems to me. (Vivent les indexeurs(? quebecois libres! Le monde francophone vous attend...). The main article, reporting on IASC/SCAD's AGM, which had been held in Halifax, Nova Scotia as part of a joint meeting with the Dalhousie University School of Library and Information Studies, illuminates aspects of thesaurus design. Michèle Hudon had introduced the principles and practice of thesaurus construction, while Toni Petersen had followed with a long and absorbing account of the development of the Getty Foundation Art and architecture thesaurus, the first edition of which had recently been published in three volumes and in electronic format (‘but not yet complete... since only twenty-three of the projected forty hierarchies appear in this set’). The unique project, developed in consultation with 200-odd test sites, divided descriptors into facets (styles, agents, materials etc.), facets into hierarchies, and finally hierarchies into alphabetically ordered descriptors; the AAT vocabulary had come to include well over 50,000 terms.

The Register was to be produced this year on a word-processor, since database-manager production, as originally intended, had proved too complex for immediate use; many books and meetings are noted, with special billing for this season’s ‘must’: a forthcoming talk by Gerard Salton (see below). A membership profile had produced some interesting findings: ‘Over the 13-year period, 1977–1990, a total of 384 different persons joined IASC. In its first year... IASC gained 30% of this total for a count of 115 members... Today, 21% of our membership is drawn from those 115... In recent years, membership has hovered round the 100 mark’. It would be interesting to know whether other Societies would produce comparable profiles. The novelist John Updike had noted that the Italians had ‘already issued a dictionary of uncommon words and odd quotations found in Umberto Eco’s Foucault’s pendulum but... [it] is a dense and inventory novel that lacks, and needs, an index’; the Editor suggests that such the same applies to other labyrinthine novels, perhaps ‘Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Nabokov’. The last item in this issue may give hope to old-fashioned acquisition librarians: the poet, Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt, had met her future husband while working at the Library of Congress, and her son, where he might have expected a pink-ribboned bundle of love-letters, had found ‘a cache of old index cards apparently used as surreptitious notes under the eye of a super-intendent who supposed perhaps that mother was typing Dewey decimals’. No guidance is given for those wishing to prosecute similar intrigues online.

‘Artificial intelligence is a dead end’

As was to be expected, the talk given to the Toronto meeting by Professor Gerard Salton, who ‘is considered the world’s pre-eminent expert in computerized text processing’, is given pride of place in no. 5 (November 1990). Much experimentation in text-processing had produced variously successful results: ‘a syntax analyser correctly parses only about 60% of a document’s sentences’; ‘automated dictionaries are also not of much help: using the Longman’s dictionary of contemporary English, he found that only some 77% of nouns could be parsed correctly’; ‘Artificial Intelligence... is essentially a dead end’; he also ‘had little faith in Expert Systems’. Salton’s methods had under certain conditions ‘achieved an accuracy better than 90% in matching queries with text’. Applications of this process might be to sift ‘junk’ from ‘real’ electronic mail(!) or to ‘help users navigate their way through an electronic encyclopedia by quickly identifying... closely related articles, somewhat in hypertext fashion’. Allan Veaner goes on disarmingly: ‘An active period of questioning followed, most of it too technical for your editor to follow’; clearly many members had felt that Salton’s system might work only with text that was already highly controlled (e.g. factual information) and that the ‘very broad and very deep’ world of human information would require, perhaps for ever, ‘a great many tools and a wide variety of methods’. The glimpses of one particular tape-measure for this ocean had however clearly provided much stimulation and interest for a large audience.

A joint meeting of ASIS, ASI and IASC/SCAD on ‘Indexing Software: The Theoretical and the Possible’ had ‘enraptured’ its audience. Cecelia Wittman had illustrated the relative inflexibility of wp and dtp software compared with stand-alone indexing software: Linda Fetters had outlined the present and potential capabilities of such software (see version under ASI above); and Susan Klement had discussed the difficulties of international Standards, particularly ‘the general failure of the information processing community to distinguish “open system” indexing (descriptive periodical indexing) from “closed system” (analytical back-of-the-book indexing); a tape of the proceedings is avail-
able at US$11.50. It was time for membership renewal; IASC/SCAD was to join five related societies for a Christmas social; an index (compiled with AUTHEX PLUS) to the Financial Post, 1907–1948, would bring the journal up to the time of its inclusion in Canadian periodicals index; indexing workshops on print and non-print documents respectively were to be held, and also a full course on indexing and abstracting; a Canadian feminist thesaurus was available; there was to be a computer-based Dance Archive, expected to fill fifteen CD-ROM disks with both text and images; the CONSER project would help you to find which A&I service abstracted any serial in which you were interested; and a Canadian needlecraft magazine provided a subject index to its advertisements—what an excellent idea for all concerned.

There is a review of the Index/abstract directory, a 'companion directory to the Serials directory'; Diane Henderson acknowledges its usefulness, but feels that too much of the material is already included in the parent publication and would like to see the rest added to that 'and save the trees'. The second edition of D. B. and A. D. Cleveland's Introduction to indexing and abstracting receives a long and detailed review from Susan Klement, who gives in her first paragraph her conclusion: 'There has long been a need for a good introductory text to indexing. There still is.' This issue's running footer is: 'Renew your IASC membership NOW! Thanks'; and the last page carries a solid and helpful summary of IASC/SCAD's nature and activities. Two thoroughly sensible ideas.

Society of Indexers
(Nos. 3/90, 4/90; MicroIndexer 13)

Subgroups and responses

The Editor, before producing no. 3/90 (Summer 1990), had spent some time manning ('womanning?' she wonders) an exhibition linked with the annual Antiquarian Book Fair: 'I was the one lurking behind the glass-fronted display cases working, naturally, on an index'. (If you have met Geraldine Beare, you may agree that anything so graceless as lurking hardly fits her persona; if there was lurking being committed, I think it was A. N. Other, disguised as GB.) The Treasurer thanks members for donations received as acknowledgements for commissions received directly through the Society: 'New [Registered Indexers] and new members may like to know that voluntary contributions are most acceptable, in the form of two and a half per cent of fees for indexing work commissioned through the Registrar or through Indexers available'; it seems that SI's Treasurer is also incapable of being graceless, even in a dunning letter.

SI's first Accredited Indexers had been approved (Accreditation is an acknowledgment of indexing competence validated by the passing of five 'core' tests linked to (though not inseparable from) SI's own recently established correspondence course). An Irish Group was being contemplated; and a Law Indexers' Special Interest Group had been formed. If this tendency to form both local and subject subgroups continues, one can foresee a multidimensional network which should greatly strengthen the Society, and indexing in general. Letters, though numerous, offered as many solutions as there are prepositions to an earlier query: 'Is it an index to, for, or of the book?'; and a separate correspondence may well be sparked off by the avowal from 'a very eminent member' that almost any book could be indexed [better] by its author.

Images and epitaphs

No. 5/90 (Autumn 1990) has the Editor seeking light relief from harrowing indexes on war and child neglect: 'I "read" via [BBC] Radio 4', whose serialized readings aloud of both new and well-loved books had afforded 'Such diversity! Such contrast!'. (Has she tried the BBC World Service, I wonder? If anything, an even better aural library...). More chances for indexers to gather: a South-Western Group was holding its inaugural meeting in Bristol; and enrolment forms were enclosed for the second Conference on the island of Hvar, Yugoslavia. Also enclosed was a draft 'Agreement to Prepare an Index', and a reminder of the existing questionnaire on indexing fees.

The Editor asks for enlightenment and clarification. What does her son’s video manual mean by: 'The index search system rapid access (forward or reverse) to the beginning of any programme having an index signal'? In which stories is Sherlock Holmes's card index system mentioned? [See The Indexer 7 (1) Spring 1970, 19–20. Ed.] And what about the author of a newspaper article, who aimed to 'attempt to revamp the image of the index, in the hope that publishers will begin to publish them separately, thus saving all index-lovers a great deal of money and shelf-space'? I’ll have to wait for the answer to that—and muse myself meanwhile on the deeply sympathetic chord struck by this introductory note to the index of A. E. Taylor's Plato (sent in by an SI member): 'This index makes no pretensions to be exhaustive, but it is trusted that it will be found sufficient.' Perhaps one might adapt that for one’s epitaph.
More indexing—less witchcraft

_MicroIndexer 13 (September 1990)_ comes with a brace of new editors: Isobel and Peter McLean; and a format which looks slim and spacious but holds quite a lot of good things. The first article reprints Linda Fetter’s review of CINDEX, Version 4 from ASI Newsletter, no. 92. IBM-compatibles only; index-length up to 65,534 records; screen resembles a 3” x 5” card for current entry; up to four indexes may be open at a time; up to 600 abbreviations are saved automatically; very precise searching; sophisticated repagination facilities; thesaurus format available (summary of main headings and cross-references for keeping track of large or multi-compiler (indexers); command- rather than menu-driven (‘online help would be a welcome addition’). The detailed review comments on all these and many more features, (most with equivalents in MACREX), and concludes that CINDEX is ‘an excellent choice for creating any kind of index’. There is a brief comment on CINDEX by an experienced MACREX-user, who notes that each program can read the other’s files, is ‘surprised it omits menus for its operation’ and feels it may be a little less flexible in its operation than MACREX. You pays your money (not much for a demo disk) and you takes your choice.

The second article is also borrowed from elsewhere, and takes a wittily irascible look—or perhaps swipe—at w-p manuals: The “indispensable” DESQ key is actually the ALT key’. The indexes in these things are nearly non-existent, though you could not tell this by looking at them. They are vast...’ (but they contain little you are looking for though they may use terms of their own answering to nothing in the text); ‘The writers of these tomes seem intent on showing you just how versatile their word-processors are: ‘Please, to save me undue distress and excess baggage... can we have books that are clear and concise, with proper indexes and a minimum of witchcraft’. The writer is Gareth Husk.

Richard Raper contributes a practical and helpful article on choosing a printer (hardware). There is clear explanation of the different types (daisy-wheel, micro-dot etc.), a reminder that you can link an electronic typewriter to your PC, explanation of different paper-sizes and types, and a few guidelines on the specific requirements for indexing.

Micro-indexers will be glad to know that it is hoped to produce _MicroIndexer_ quarterly in future. _A la prochaine!_

**Judy Batchelor**

Judy Batchelor is a former Vice-Chairman of the Society of Indexers, now its Membership Secretary, and a freelance indexer.

The Indexer thirty years ago

In its 42 pages Volume 2, No. 3 of _The Indexer_, published in Spring 1961, boasts five meaty articles on topics all still current today—so the last word was not then said, but neither did the journal deal with mere ephemera. The matters considered were: cumulative indexing of _Keesing’s contemporary archives_; indexing gramophone records; the use of classification in book indexing; the indexing of Chinese names; and the typography of indexes (concluding that there is great need for ‘a common-sense approach in co-operation between author, indexer, publisher and printer....The essence of typography is a together-ness in more senses than one, and it must never be forgotten that for it to intrude itself upon the notice of the reader merely shows it has failed in its purpose’).

There is controversy in correspondence: ‘In the documentation profession... there are fashions. One of the present fashions is chain indexing... I can go on like this for a long while’... vs. ‘The alphabetical index cannot be considered apart from the classified sequence to which it is a complement’. As well as obituaries, there are announcements of marriages and engagements of members, and list of new members (welcome to Thomas Rowland Powel, who was to win the Wheatley in 1977, and to British Nylon Spinners); these were pre-Newsletter days. Eight countries have ‘Corresponding members’. There are book reviews, and quotations from press reviews lamenting the absences of indexes. Clearly, all that time ago, the Society of Indexers was already on to a good thing.

**Reviewer’s despair**

In a despondent and disillusioned account of publishing in Britain in the 1990s (*Daily Telegraph*, 9 Jan. 1991), Humphrey Carpenter, a biographer, includes the wail: ‘Regular book-reviewers like myself get so used to inadequate indexes, wrong dates, festoons of typographical errors and hosts of other failings that we cease to mention them.’

How sad that this despairing acceptance of the apparently inevitable should prove to be the reason for the paucity of reviewers’ notice of indexes, documented by Cherry Lavell in a letter to this journal (17 (I) April 1990, 60). It must be the barbarian non-professional hordes out there who are responsible for the deplorable inadequacy complained of. Indexers’ Society members can only sigh, gird their loins, and strive to raise the standards of indexing wherever it occurs.