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-compatible 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; summarizing 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!

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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 typo-graphical errors and hosts of other failings that we cease to mention them.’

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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 (1) 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.