A glossy index

The index to Lady Cynthia Asquith's *Diaries 1915-18*, recommended by a correspondent (page 50), is indeed most unusual. The text runs to 481 pages, the index to 47. It is much-heralded: at the foot of the first page of text we find a note:

Biographical information, with cross-references under Christian and nicknames, and also vocabulary definitions and identifications of places, is included in the annotated index. Later first references, when the index entry may be of interest, are marked by an asterisk.

The next four pages all have footnotes referring the reader to the index for guidance on names, and others occur through the book.

The index itself gives long biographical notes on major characters, followed by all the page references strung together with no subheadings at all. We give below some sample entries.

**Benson, Constance** (d. 1946: wife of Frank Benson, the actor-manager who was knighted in 1916, but herself a somewhat indifferent performer). 259

**Blow, Detmar** (1867-1939: architect, whose designs included the chapel at Avon Tyrell, the east end of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, and the Lord Kitchener Memorial Chapel, and who was also employed by the Duke of Westminster), 136-7

**Broughton, Rhoda** (1840-1920: novelist, author of *Not wisely but too well* pub. 1867, and others. Originally considered 'advanced' and shocking, she had been overtaken by time and respectability). 324

**Cliffe, Polly** (maid to Lady Cynthia who had always, according to the social rulings of the day, to accompany her mistress when she went out before her marriage. Lady Cynthia referred to her as 'a lugubrious body-guard with an unrivalled capacity for falling on the thorns of life', but her role had its problems, since her charge had 'often slipped her collar and chain' by hailing a hansom to make her escape in. She afterwards remained with her mistress for many years, as Lady Cynthia's servants tended to do). [4 full lines of page numbers]

**Mclnnes, (Mrs) Angela** (1890-1961: daughter of J. W. Mackail, q.v., she married at twenty-one James Campbell Mclnnes, a fine baritone and Bach singer almost twenty years her senior and a strongly contrasting character. They were divorced in 1917 and by a second marriage she acquired the name under which she became known as a novelist. Angela Thirkell. Her books brought Barset up to date in a refined gentility of manner which would have appalling the sturdy-minded Trollope, and a great deal of charged emotion underlay her account of her matrimonial affairs to Lady Wemyss. The more balanced view is given in *The Road to Gundagai* by Graham Mclnnes (Hamish Hamilton, 1965): Mclnnes went on to serve in the Royal Flying Corps and made a good career for himself afterwards in Canada). 306, 313

There seems to be no principle guiding the proportion of note to page references. Forbes, Lady Angela has *two full columns of gloss* followed by five lines of page numbers; Herbert, Mary has 12 lines gloss, 14 lines page numbers; Moore, George Gordon has three quarters of a column of gloss followed by only 3 page numbers. Wemyss and March, (Francis) David Charteris, 12th Earl of, has 14 lines gloss, 12 page numbers; Wemyss and March, Hugo Charteris, 11th Earl of, has 6 lines gloss, 16 lines of page numbers; Wemyss, Mary Countess of, has 14 lines gloss, 20 lines page numbers—quite undifferentiated. And the index includes a typographic novelty in such a place:

Douglas, Lord Alfred (1870-1945: son of the 8th Marquess of Queensbury. His relationship with Lady Cynthia was as follows:

[and indeed a small family tree is reproduced in the index at this point]

She herself never quite sorted this out and seems to have laboured under the delusion that she was a *blood* relation of the marquess), 445, 446

According to *The Indexer* 6 (2), Autumn 1968, page 62, this volume was reviewed by Randolph Churchill in *The Spectator* of 3 May 1968, where he 'made some astringent comments on the index'.

Our thanks to Random Century Group for permission to reproduce the above extracts from the volume published by Hutchinson, 1968.

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As for the author's own pleasures, there are few keener than seeing the index to his book. The feeling is akin to the kind of popularity one feels when flipping through one's address book, where every name, even those of the merest acquaintances, has, for a moment, an equal voice and presence. How learned the author feels just seeing those hundreds of alphabetized subjects and names, and how organized, as if someone had finally gone into his brain and—all for the gentle reader's sake—put those heaps of clutter into a gleaming row of file cabinets.


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