standardized. Finally the 11 titles were merged into one index for full cumulation. The 23 individual indexes produced 20,219 entries. After the final cumulation I had 20,720 entries. Almost all of the additional 500 entries were see also references.

Hardware and software support

The computer used was a Viglen 80286 with one megabyte of memory and a 40-Mb hard disk. This was adequate—just. Many tasks ran very slowly—a full re-sort of the final index took four hours, but could have been speeded up by using a smaller record size.

This work was done with the help of the CINDEX indexing software system, version 5.0. By the time I began the work I had become very familiar with the software, so no additional learning of its potential was needed. Complex editing of related chunks of the index was made easy by working in both sorted and un-sorted mode and by using the GROUP command. The ability to maintain abbreviation (key-word) files separate from the main index helped, as did printing portions of the index on the screen to check the appearance of the result. CINDEX’s SUBSTITUTE command proved most useful as it allowed me to insert the volume codes quickly, check on entries with improperly placed page references, and add a double hyphen to the page references for the benefit of the type-setter’s software. CINDEX provided every feature and technique I needed in this work.

Lessons learned

1. Don’t do it again—at least not in a hurry!
2. Take materials and printing time into account on your budget; a printout of this index took nearly eight hours, tying up my computer accordingly. I took to printing draft copies of the index overnight.
3. Payment frequency was wrong. I should have asked for payments every month or every two months. If you have to accept longer periods between payments, build overdraft interest charges into your costs.
4. Standardize the spelling early on. Not just the obvious American-British variants in things like labour, but the permutations on hyphenated or un-hyphenated terms.
5. Build a set of targets into your schedule. Offer to send parts (or books) in draft form at set periods if the publisher doesn’t suggest it first. This breaks down the task into more manageable segments.
6. Get approval to talk to the type-setter directly. This avoids a lot of problems, as well as the editor’s time and nervous energy. I found that I could work happily with a knowledgeable type-setter and solve most difficulties easily. Make arrangements to send a trial disk to the type-setter, with a few hundred entries, to let him try to match your system.
7. Ask to proofread the index, and budget for this. If an index of this size has your name on it—you’ll want it to be the best you can manage.

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Oh dear, what can the matter be this time?

John A. Vickers

And still they come . . . Just when you feel confident of having touched bottom, an even more horrendous example of botched indexing rears its ugly head, prompting a volley of mixed metaphors!

There is a case, in the name of kindly generosity, for quietly letting the weakest go to the wall and die an unnoticed death there. There is, on the other hand, a more Spartan case for deliberately exposing the weak and the deformed in the interests of the species. I would like to find some middle way between these extremes of sentimentality and ruthlessness. But, if pressed, then I have no doubt that the inadequate (and, even more, the downright atrocious) index has to be publicly exposed, though with sympathy where it is due and as much understanding as one can muster of what went wrong and why. Only so can the rot be stopped from spreading and reasonable standards maintained—if not advanced. ‘(S)he did her/his best’ is just not good enough to excuse the inexcusable.

After all, the wisdom of consumerism is more and more widely accepted in an age when quality all too often yields to shoddiness under the influence of market forces (our latest and, it seems, most potent idol). Who (except the perpetrators) would defend turning a blind eye to mechanical defects in an electrical appliance, or to shoddy design work or unskilled maintenance in the case of a car or plane? It is perhaps more than time that literate members of the public (which is more than just a circumlocution for ‘readers’) had some legal protection against incompetent or irresponsible authors, publishers and (of course) indexers.

But I am preaching . . . and to the converted; and on both counts must waste no more of the editor’s space, but come to the real subject—or object—of my righteous indignation!

Amos: Victorian Methodist traveller by John Matthews
has many virtues (as well as some historical defects); among them, an attractive format at a price which in these days is remarkably low for a case-bound volume. It is also interesting (to a bibliophile) as being produced by an organization called the Self Publishing Association, which sounds a commendable enterprise despite a whiff of the world of the 'vanity press'.

Sad to say, in present company, by far the most blatant weakness in the book is its index. The evidence that it was produced on a computer (probably without an actual indexing program) is paraded at the very beginning, where the As are preceded by a group of misplaced entries in quotation marks (not 'quotes', please: I was a pre-war baby, brought up on inverted commas!). If this were all, we might settle for sympathy, directed wherever it was most deserved. But it is only the beginning. Correcting it would have left much more fundamental weaknesses in the main body of the index.

Not to be tediously detailed, let me do little more than catalogue those weaknesses which may at least identify the main pitfalls of 'self-indexing' for the unwary author who is persuaded that no particular skills or techniques are involved. If this helps to avert the threat of further indexes of similar deplorability, it will have served its purpose and intention.

1. Inappropriate (because uninformative and therefore unhelpful) headings abound (e.g. Middle Street; Primrose Street; Thornham Street). Obviously, these should have been treated as sub-headings of the places in which they are located. Middle Street turns out to be in Lancaster. This blemish is compounded by the fact that the first of the two page-references is to an Independent Methodist church and the second to an out-house in the same street (and probably not worthy of an entry).

A rather different example of how failure to be specific can be unhelpful is the heading 'Bentham'. Even without initials or first name, this raises false expectations, and then turns out to be a Lancashire place name. (Ironic that so useless an entry should lead us to expect to find the arch-Utilitarian!)

2. The places in which Amos Matthews exercised his ministry are used as the main chapter headings and—presumably for that reason—do not feature in the index. This is an error of judgement, since the same place-names do occasionally turn up in other chapters. There is one exception, Lancaster. For no obvious reason, this is singled out for inclusion, only to be followed by a string of 49 page references, most of which are consecutive and could have been reduced to '161-200'.

3. Conflation of different items whose only link is that they share a common label: The entry 'Bethel. 123,126' conceals the fact that the first reference is to a 'Bethel Evangelistic movement' in Liverpool, while the second is to Bethel Chapel in Wakefield. Here is our old enemy 'verbal indexing' once again.

4. Lack of discrimination in deciding what to index. The statement that a local Liberal M.P. was eventually elevated to the Peerage as Lord Burton gives rise to the entry 'Peerage, 60'. The comment that Amos 'had already slipped into his role as the Nonconformist Bishop' is solemnly indexed under that last phrase. On the other hand, many significant details do not get a look-in, so that the index fails lamentably as an aide-memoire.

Since my concern is with underlying principles, I pass over technical faults (such as the failure to invert the phrase 'Churchwarden Longman'). My point is that competent indexing calls for more than an application of basic skills.

Correspondence with both publisher and author has established that the index was prepared by the latter, but that blame has to be apportioned between them. The index as printed was a first draft, 'to be drastically edited and improved', but overtaken by the production schedule, so that it was treated as camera-ready copy without, apparently, the knowledge of either the author or the copy-editor. Clearly, the publishers have much still to learn about monitoring their production schedules, and the author deserves sympathy—but not unreservedly. It is another case of 'All have lost, and none shall have prizes.' For the remaining faults in the index are pretty fundamental, and it is hard to believe that, having got there in the first place, they would have been eradicated by anything short of competent re-indexing. As a much higher Authority than I would tell you, creation involves more than tinkering with chaos.

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**It's child's information retrieval**

Hodder & Stoughton's *Finding out about finding out* by Bobbie Neate, published in 1992, has pertinent words in a page on indexes in the section, 'Structure and organization of children's information books'. Neate acknowledges the importance of indexes as tools, but reports finding them in only 58% of informative texts for children that she surveyed. Moreover, many of those indexes were 'not a good guide to the usefulness of the book', often lacking helpful detail and arrangement, and advice to users (e.g. as to the significance of bold type in the index). She suggests that children need both guidance in use of indexes, and to be taught indexing skills and conventions—as well as better indexes provided for them.

'**YIPPEE!' or, Please may we be introduced?**

'In spite of the fact that the list is short enough to scan by anyone interested in catalogues or lists of books I have provided an index of subjects, collections and compilers.'