

Index makers of today

This journal has featured many distinguished indexers of the past in its series, 'Index makers'. In a new section, 'Index makers of today', we intend to spotlight contemporary members of the profession. To begin with, three members of the Society of Indexers.

Elizabeth Wallis



Photograph by Jeff Jackson

Elizabeth Wallis began her career in the Surrey County Library, gaining a diploma in librarianship. She happened upon indexing when working in the *Daily Mail* and *Sunday Despatch* Reference Library, where she indexed all editions of the latter paper for staff reference, in elaborate detail. Only two copies were made of the indexes, typed and bound; but to produce them she was given in-house a strictly formal training in indexing, emphasizing the necessity to observe conventions. She found the task fascinating, oddly relaxing, a way of creating order and satisfying her own creative potential, and has stayed ever since with indexing as a career—both practising and promoting it with vigour.

Elizabeth became a founder-member of the Society of Indexers, attending that first London meeting in 1957. She was elected onto SI's Council in 1969, undertaking 'for the time being' (*The Indexer* 7 (2), Autumn 1970, p. 66) the maintenance of the newly-established SI Register and dealing with enquiries from publishers; and has remained on Council and as Registrar ever since. Each *Indexer* index since volume 6 (1968-9) has included a substantial entry under Wallis, Elizabeth (the first subheading being, 'appointed Acting Editor of *The Indexer*'). Currently she is SI Chair, Registrar, and Chair of the Training and Accreditation Committee, and has taken particular satisfaction in overseeing the production of SI's distance-learning indexing course modules.

Her busy life has many other facets. She married a journalist and raised two sons, in Kew, south-west London. She spent much of her career as a librarian in

specialist libraries concerned with the media—news-papers, periodicals, films, and finally as Assistant Film Librarian to BBC Television. She has worked part time as an Advice Worker for the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) for many years, and compiles for them a bi-monthly digest of education publications. She has produced several editions of ACE's *Education A-Z*. She has also worked as Information Officer for the Centre for Studies on Integration in Education at the Spastics Society. Currently she is editing a database on sources of information for school governor trainers, and a Governors' Current-awareness service.

Among it all, she has continued to work as a freelance indexer, specializing in education, politics, and periodicals (an interesting reflection of her SI offices!). Her indexing credits include *Whitaker's Almanac* from 1972 to 1987; *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1968-74; and *Childright* since 1983. Indeed, she wonders whether she holds a record for one of the longest-standing indexing commissions, having indexed a journal on the politics of Africa now for 30 years (Oh shade of Barbara Pym . . .).

Our Registrar considers that an index can really be judged only after reading the whole book, to which it must offer completion, reflecting the text—a counsel of perfection, she acknowledges. Indexing is subjective, and the qualities chiefly required are endurance and energy—a lazy indexer is the worst offender, in her eyes.

Wholly forthright and honest, with a fervent overall concern for the profession of indexing, its conduct, rewards and status, Elizabeth has devoted the same energy and commitment to her work for the Society of Indexers in many aspects as she has to her indexes.

Mary Piggott

After graduating in French and qualifying in librarianship at University College London, Mary Piggott worked for ten years in Lancashire County Library. Then, for nearly 30 years, she taught cataloguing, classification and bibliography where she had started, at UCL; several SI members have learned from her. She made those subjects her own, writing and editing classic texts on them, published by the Library Association: notably, her *A topography of cataloguing: showing the most important landmarks, communications and perilous places* (1988), and *The cataloguer's way through AACR2: from document receipt to document retrieval* (1990). She also served as a committee mem-

ber preparing the 1967 revision of the *Anglo-American cataloguing rules*, and on British Standards committees.

Mary gave a memorable talk to SI members in 1990, much-cited since, on 'Authors as their own indexers'. She declared herself confronted by the problem, 'was I an author who had indexed her own book, or an indexer who had written a book?'. Her indexing has been restricted to her own publications and those of her department at University College London. However, they have received acclaim, such as Ronald Sturt's observation in the fourth volume of *The Indexer*, 'The index by Miss Mary Piggott [to *The heritage of the English library* by Professor R. Irwin] . . . is compiled in a thoroughly workmanlike and helpful fashion. More important, it invites scrutiny.'

Indexing attracts her because of her interest in the exact and economical use of words, besides the 'human interest' of imagining different approaches by readers, allied to what she calls 'the pedagogic desire to set the readers off on their own voyage of discovery'. She sees indexing as important as well as fascinating because, 'Books without indexes waste the reader's time and often leave him frustrated and unable to get as much from a work as he might if he were able to remind himself of previous events or explanations in a narrative, or to connect two passages which he wants to read in juxtaposition.' For access to the information on a database it is even more important to have a key to enter and a guide to follow a route with properly preferred and related terms taken from a thesaurus, and careful directions to use them: only books and periodicals 'can be flicked through' when indexing fails.

Mary joined the Society of Indexers at its inaugural meeting, and spoke at its first training course, in 1958, on 'Form and style of name entries'. She represented SI on British Standards documentation committees, and still reports regularly on Standards to the Society. By 1977 she was SI's Librarian, Assistant Editor of *The Indexer*, a member of SI's Council and of the Wheatley Medal Panel, retaining most of these positions for several years; indeed, she has only recently handed over the care of the SI library, and is still SI's representative to the BS committee concerned with indexing and alphabetization. Unit 2 of the current SI training course in indexing, 'Choice and form of entries', is co-authored by Mary. She has made many contributions to this journal, witty, perceptive and scholarly, and figures large in our volume indexes.

She has seen many changes—improvements—in indexing in the 35 years of SI's existence, attributable perhaps to that factor. Fewer book indexes are entrusted to inexperienced, untrained indexers now, as publishers appear to be realizing the additional value that a good index gives to a book. She deplores, though, 'a pathetic belief in some quarters that the machine can index all by itself'.

Her quiet, demure manner veils a shrewdness which



can on occasion release a devastating dry wit, as in these sample *bon mots* from her reviews. She concluded a joint review of volumes of ALA, BLAISE and Library of Congress filing rules, 'I must follow this account with a warning. Simultaneous consideration of three sets of rules for alphabetizing, together with residual memories of previously known rules, can be mind-boggling and my mind may well have boggled here.' And of J.M. Dickie's author-index to his *How to catch trout*, she wrote, 'Our fly-fisher's index reflects unhurried hours of quiet contemplation beside still waters, and so much enthusiasm for his hobby that he rewrites most of his book in the index, quite forgetting that brevity was one of his stated objects.'

SI members are still learning from Mary Piggott.

John Vickers

John Vickers graduated as a theologian and teacher, and came to head the Department of Religious and Social Studies at Bognor Regis College of Education, from which he has now retired. A PhD. for a thesis on Methodism and Society in Central Southern England followed several publications in the field of Methodism, including the writing of biographies, and editing two volumes of Religious Census of counties as well as the fourth volume of the *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*.

John joined SI in 1970 as a life member, and has made many witty and pungent contributions to *The Indexer*. Among his *aperçus*, in the report of SI's 1978 conference he was quoted as seeing no necessity for the teaching of indexing: 'Those who cannot teach themselves should take up something else—like knitting.' He became a member both of its Council and Editorial Board in 1991.

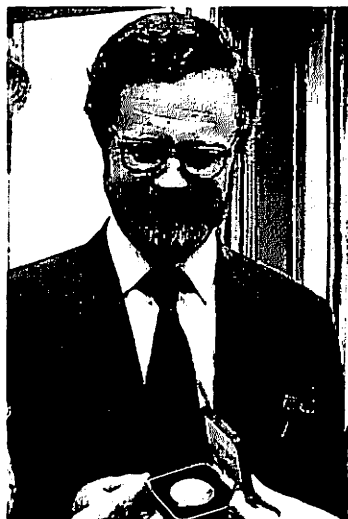
John's working methods for indexing are collaborative. He reads and assesses the text, marking it up to indicate the chosen headings and arrangement, writing page references and additional entries in the margins.

and passes it in batches to his colleague/wife who keys it into the computer, where CINDEK takes over (but not without human supervision).

He was awarded the Wheatley Medal in 1976 for his index to Volume 11 of the Bicentennial Edition of *The works of John Wesley* (OUP, 1975). He described the commission he had undertaken in being appointed official indexer to this project in *The Indexer* (10 (4) Oct. 1977, 176-7): 'The new edition . . . has been planned in 34 volumes, grouped in 15 "units" of related material, and publication will extend over about 20 years. The final volume will be a General Index to the edition'. In fact, the originally projected 20 years schedule has now been indefinitely extended, one volume being produced each year: a rate 'enough to stretch my resources of time and concentration', he observes.

After receiving the Wheatley Medal, John quoted Wesley, his great subject (*The Indexer* 11 (4), Oct. 1979, 189-97), as declaring on the title page of his *Complete English dictionary* of 1753, 'All other dictionaries contain errors, whereas I can truly say I know of none in this; and I conceive the reader will believe me, for if I had, I should not have left it there.' Our own John added, 'I find it congenial to echo Wesley's words . . . I let my index go to the publishers only when I was confident that I could not improve it any further. What indexer could logically and conscientiously say otherwise?'

Other indexes that John has brought to the point of self-confidence are to: *The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society Vols I-XXX*; *Oxford illustrated history of Britain*; *Oxford illustrated history of English literature*; *Oxford illustrated history of Medieval Europe*; *Oxford illustrated history of Ireland*; and *Oxford illustrated history of Christianity*. He maintains neverthe-



less, 'Indexing, though taking up all the time I can spare it, and ranking high in my list of favourite forms of relaxation, has to take second place to research, writing, editing and publishing.' He has held several professional positions in the historical field, and has helped to compile guidelines on indexing which are to be issued by Oxford University Press to all their indexers.

John lives in Bognor Regis on the south coast of England, travelling by rail up to London for SI meetings and work in libraries. Bognor is known as a resort for the retired, but John's is a most distinguished and productive retirement.

HAZEL K. BELL

Laborious humour

Williams obstetrics, 16th edition, by J. A. Pritchard and P. C. MacDonald, from Appleton-Century Crofts of New York, with more than a thousand pages, appears a sufficiently serious, weighty work. Unexpected, then, to find in its index, in the three-columns-long entry for LABOR, the following sequence:

normal, 395-432
 cervical dilation, rate of, 385
 occiput presentation, 395-403
 of love, hardly a, 1-1102
 pain
 causes, 376
 relief, 413

as well as the equally laboured entry:

☐ chauvinism, male, voluminous amounts, 1-1102

Oh, well said!

'Journals need good indexes just as much as books do but they have their own particular problems. In an ideal world each annual volume of a journal, whether published in a single part or several, would include an index, and there would also be a cumulative index to make life easier for those wishing to search long runs. In reality, however, the costs of such duplication are likely to be financially prohibitive, and a choice has to be made between indexing each volume separately and issuing a cumulative index. There is no clear solution, but many readers find a cumulative index a more efficient way of locating the information they need.'

—from T. C. Champion, 'The role of the journal editor' in *Signposts for archaeological publication* (3rd ed.), Council for British Archaeology, 1991.