The first fees for indexing, and the second Wheatley Medal

The autumn, 1964 issue of The Indexer, Volume 4, No. 2, was the second edited by Leonard Montague Harrod. It had twenty-four pages of text, with a sixteen-page insert of illustrations.

It opened with a six-page article by Peter Ferriday, ‘Indexing of periodicals’, in which some current and earlier indexes were examined to determine ‘how effective they are and how they might be improved’. Judgement was forthrightly expressed: the form of index adopted by Public Administration ‘seems almost valueless’; ‘that to the Journal of the Royal Society of Arts has faults which render it all but valueless’; ‘The index to Nature is distressing... Idiocies abound. The system is... absurdly wasteful and can be quite ineffective’. The article concludes, ‘Indexes seem at present constructed for those who know what they are looking for, to the extent of the word order of titles, and therefore not likely to use the index at all. ... The required development would seem to be in the direction of subject indexing as used in the British Technology Index and the abandonment of the chance involved in such notions as “significant words” and “key words”.’

Detective Chief Superintendent J. W. Godsell, Officer-in-Charge, Fingerprint Branch, New Scotland Yard, provided the five-page text of a talk he had given to the Society of Indexers, ‘Fingerprint indexing’. He described the origin of fingerprint systems; fingerprint recording forms; classification of patterns; and ridge detail, counting and tracing. The sixteen pages of illustrations showed details of all these, with patterns, impressions, symbols, filing sequences and combinations, with photographs, charts, forms and a ‘burglar’s nightmare’ cartoon, falling through the ridge pattern. Altogether a fascinating work.

The British Standard on Indexes (so headlined) had been published, after three years’ sub-committee work, and cost 10/- (ten shillings) ‘obtainable through any bookseller’. The Committee on Remuneration for Indexing Work set up in June 1962 by SI’s Council produced a three-column report, covering and outlining indexing procedure; systems of payment; costing; and concluding with the recommendations of these ‘scales of remuneration for indexing work done at home’:

For straightforward books such as chatty reminiscences, the indexes of which consist mainly of names and places with few problems of alphabetical arrangement and with few concepts or ideas to be indexed, minimum payment should be 9/6 (nine shillings and sixpence) per hour;

For books and periodicals of moderate scholarship where good general, but little specialist, knowledge is required, minimum payment should be 12/6 per hour.

For scholarly and specialist works in the humanities or sciences requiring specialist knowledge and detailed indexing of concepts or ideas, minimum payment should be 15/- per hour.

For the second time since its establishment in 1960, an index was found worthy to receive the Wheatley Medal Award. Also for the second time, the Medal went to the author of the book concerned, who had compiled his own index: J. M. Dickie, for the index to How to catch trout (published by W. & R. Chambers).

Mr Dickie explained, ‘Having spent all my working life in publishing, I have had much to do with indexes. As it happens, this has been more in the using of indexes than in the making of them.... To tell the truth, there are so many things to forget in fishing and I have such a bad memory, that I was eager to produce a good index for my own use. It took me much longer than I expected, to my surprise not all the time being spent on the index as such, but quite a bit on amending the text of the book itself.’

Correspondence is about indexing the peerage, and, yet again, ‘One index or more than one?’. Reviews include one of the newly published British Standard 3700, praising it with the proviso, ‘We must beware lest we judge indexes by BS 3700 and not by satisfying ourselves that they are proper keys to the text’ (Alan Baker, then SI Secretary).

H.K.B.