

# Naming the indexer: where credit is due

Elizabeth Wallis and Cherry Lavell

Traces attitudes over the years to naming the author of an index, and identifies the arguments for and against placing the name with the printed index.

## Introduction

This article originated as a response to a member of the (British) Society of Indexers resident in Australia who had asked what precedents there were for 'naming the indexer'. The point is believed to be important and worth every indexer's attention, so the reply to that enquiry is further developed here.

The first authority sought was the British Standard on preparing indexes<sup>1</sup> which, in the section 'Naming of indexers', says 'Publishers should offer indexers the opportunity to be named in the work'—cautious non-prescriptive advice, especially compared with the previous (1964) edition of the Standard<sup>2</sup> which was far more definite: 'for any substantial index, the qualified indexer, no less than the illustrator or any other collaborator, should be given proper credit by name in the publication indexed'. The 'substantial index' was assumed to imply one of not less than sixteen columns. The International Standard ISO 999 now follows the current British Standard.<sup>3</sup>

## The views of authorities on indexing

### 1. Hans Wellisch

Wellisch, who believes strongly that the indexer should be named, is the most recent authority to treat the subject, and his book<sup>4</sup> makes six pertinent references. The first (p. 17) rather cynically suggests that 'Indexes compiled by members of the author's immediate or extended family are easily spotted because the author's acknowledgement or dedication makes this fact publicly known' (shades of Barbara Pym). The second reference (p. 21) says: 'publishers ought to agree easily, though surprisingly few of them do' to name the indexer on the first page of the index, or at least in the acknowledgements. Other references in Wellisch's book relate to the indexing contract (p. 54), to the indexer's right under the UK Copyright Act 1976<sup>5</sup> to be identified (in certain circumstances) as the author of the index (Wellisch pp. 59–60), and to the fact that 'fame eludes the indexer' (p. 313). Wellisch's final point relates to the naming of the indexer in connection with typographic features of the index (p. 399).

In the matter of indexers' copyright, Wellisch notes (p.60) that the Canadian Copyright Act 1988<sup>6</sup> is essentially in agreement with the UK Act; however, the US law is quite different,<sup>7</sup> specifically stating that indexes are 'supplementary works' for which no separate copyright can be claimed. In principle, the US law grants the copyright in an index to the copyright owner of the indexed work. This means that an indexer in the USA must include an explicit statement in his or her contract, stipulating that the author or publisher waives copyright in the index.

### 2. G Norman Knight

Knight's fine work *Indexing, the art of*<sup>8</sup> deals on a single page with the (usually) 'enforced anonymity' of the indexer. Referring to the British Standard then current<sup>2</sup> Knight, with characteristic humour, says, 'no longer need indexers be, like alcoholics, anonymous'. However, the privilege of being named can be two-edged; Knight quotes from his own experience to illustrate that, occasionally, 'publicity can recoil in the hands of a captious critic' (p. 26). There is more to say later about the two-edged nature of being named.

### 3. Correspondence in The Indexer

Search of writings by Wheatley,<sup>9</sup> Collison,<sup>10</sup> and Mulvany<sup>11</sup> revealed no references to naming the indexer. However, over the years several letters in *The Indexer* have dealt with the point. Frank Dunn, in *The Indexer* in 1972<sup>12</sup> (reprint of a letter to *The Bookseller*) warned against spoiling a good case by exaggeration; he said the conscientious indexer's justifiable pride in producing a substantial and detailed index should not blind us to the fact that the index exists only as part of a book. Even so, he saw no reason why indexers should not be named, and he welcomed the publisher Harrap's initiation of a regular policy to include the indexer's name (subject to consent) at the head of any substantial index.

Sir Robert Lusty, Managing Director of the Hutchinson Publishing Group, reported in 1972<sup>13</sup> that he had given an instruction that in future all the Group's books with indexes should credit the indexer.

In the following year an article by Frank Dunn<sup>14</sup> noted (somewhat prematurely, as it now seems) that indexers' anonymity showed signs of disappearing; but his own preference was for acknowledgement by the author rather than a credit at the head of an index. In the same issue<sup>15</sup> James Thornton, distinguished indexer and one-time editor of *The Indexer*, noted an increasing trend towards acknowledgement, but pointed out that most indexers 'must confess to having compiled indexes to specifications with which we disagreed, resulting in products with which we were dissatisfied'. In such cases indexers would prefer to remain anonymous; another example of the two-edged weapon. Similarly, the provision of too few pages for an index which cries out for more space raises the question whether an indexer should undertake the work, when both the book and the indexer's professional pride deserve better.

In 1976 an author, James Reeves, wrote to the *Times Literary Supplement*<sup>16</sup> saying that when he asked his indexer if he might include her name in the list of acknowledgements, 'she gratefully said yes, adding that members of her society were not often acknowledged'. Reeves expressed surprise that such a 'matter of common courtesy' should be omitted: 'Why should a very hard-working, scholarly and skilled profession not be given its due?'

### *The views of publishers*

In 1979 Ann Edwards, an indexer and authority on marketing, sent a questionnaire to 17 publishers, 12 of whom replied. This piece of research<sup>17</sup> is now 15 years old and some circumstances have changed markedly since then. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the enquiry elicited some illuminating responses from publishers: for instance, that there was no need for acknowledgement because indexers, like editors, proofreaders and compositors, were only doing their job, and to name one would invite claims from the others. However, one publisher said they would permit an author to include an indexer in the acknowledgements, and another actually asked the author to mention an outside indexer in the acknowledgements. A third said that a good indexer was a vital part of any reference book, requiring skill and other qualities which ought to be acknowledged. For many publishers the question of attribution did not arise as they expected the author to prepare his or her own index. Ann Edwards' conclusion was that naming the indexer could only improve the standard of published indexes.

### *The views of indexers*

During that same piece of research<sup>17</sup> a highly professional indexer, Brenda Hall, had written to say that she had never been refused an acknowledgement when she asked for it. Some years earlier, Dee Atkinson writing in *The Indexer*<sup>18</sup> listed, among seven specifics

that indexers should expect from publishers, 'Recognition' which indexers, being human beings, needed to receive in return for hours of tedious work under pressure. She felt that the indexer allowed a byline would gain extra incentive to do a good job. Reporting the 1994 Australian indexing awards, Ross Harvey<sup>19</sup> noted that all the submitted works named the indexer—except for the medal winner!

### *Dissentient voices*

While this article was being planned a letter appeared in the Australian Society of Indexers newsletter<sup>20</sup> from Janet Hine, responding to an article by Kingsley Siebel published earlier.<sup>21</sup> Many indexers may find surprising her view that we are a subordinate and subservient profession (or sub-profession) and would typically prefer to concentrate on producing unobtrusive indexes, as near perfect as possible, than on getting credit. She claims that 'not all indexers want "recognition" or to be fussed with qualifications or medals.' She finds such things pretentious, and furthermore thinks 'it is enough to be able to make indexes that accord with the wishes of publishers, editors and authors, and be cunning enough to smuggle in the features we know (from our own experiences) will help users.' Clearly any indexer who took that view would not want to be named. For partly similar reasons M. D. Anderson<sup>22</sup> thought that indexers 'should rightly prefer to be inconspicuous', though one of the present writers<sup>23</sup> rejected that view as out of date.

### *Types of credit*

In pursuit of an answer to the original enquiry from Australia, an appeal inserted in the Society of Indexers newsletter<sup>24</sup> produced a gratifying response from members, with some 50 photocopies arriving to illustrate the variety of ways in which the work of indexers is recognized. In one or two cases the indexer's name appeared on the title page. Other examples showed names at the head or tail of the index; acknowledgements from authors; and (the authors' personal favourite) a list of credits at the front of the book acknowledging the many skills used in the creation of the book (or other work).

Even an index that fills a whole volume of an encyclopaedia is not always credited to its creator. However, it is accepted that magazines should list the names of all those who create them, from editor down to lowly assistant; and film credits too show everyone from producer and director through a long list of technical workers right down to caterers. Should not a book also list all those who contributed to the final product? If this means adding the copy-editor and proofreader as well as the indexer, so be it: production standards might rise all round, and they certainly need to.

## Conclusion

Surely the indexer's labours should be acknowledged. Our view, shared by numerous others, is that indexes will never be good enough as long as they are deemed a subservient activity. It is one thing to have to take instructions from our clients which result in an inferior product. However, it must be part of an indexer's skill to earn respect and attention; how else can we take pride in our work, and strive towards even better indexes? The days of the gifted amateur have gone; we have to inhabit the world of training, accreditation, and even N/SVQs (National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications). Our work is hard, pressurized and little understood, but we must be prepared to accept responsibility for it; and the corollary is recognition for it. We must all work together to bring about a situation in which we are proud to have our names attached, in one way or another, to every index we produce. That will entail insisting on implementation of the clause in the Copyright Act that protects us from the ill-informed publishers' editors who mangle, truncate or 'tidy up' our work: alterations which in effect constitute derogatory treatment. To quote another remark from our distinguished Wheatley Medallist, Margaret Anderson:<sup>22</sup> 'before seeing his name over an index, the indexer would wish to secure that the index was printed as supplied to the publisher'. We must agree with that; but it may take a test case, in a UK or North American court of law, to be decisive one way or the other on the authorship and integrity of an index.

## References

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3. International Organization for Standardization. *Guidelines for preparing indexes to books, periodicals and other documents*. ISO 999 (approved for publication, probably during 1995).
4. Wellisch, Hans. *Indexing from A to Z*. New York: H. W. Wilson Co, 1991. 17, 21, 54, 60, 313, 399.
5. UK Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988.
6. Canadian Copyright Act 1988.
7. United States Copyright Law 1976, 1978.
8. Knight, G. Norman. *Indexing, the art of*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979, 25-6.
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13. Lusty, Sir Robert. *The Indexer* 8 (2) Oct 1972, 116.
14. Dunn, Frank. Indexing over twenty-five years. *The Indexer* 8 (4) Oct 1973, 199-200.
15. Thornton, John. *ibid*, 206-9.
16. Reeves, James. Letter. *Times Literary Supplement* 23 July 1976, reprinted in *The Indexer* 10 (2) Oct 1976, 85.
17. Edwards, Ann. Do you get the credit you deserve? *The Indexer* 11 (3) Apr 1979, 141-2.
18. Atkinson, Dee. Indexer-publisher relations: a two-way street. *The Indexer* 8 (3) Apr 1973, 172-4.
19. Harvey, Ross. *Newsletter*, Australian Society of Indexers, Aug 1994.
20. Hinc, Janet. *Newsletter*, Australian Society of Indexers, Aug 1994.
21. Siebel, Kingsley. *Newsletter*, Australian Society of Indexers, June 1994.
22. Anderson, M. Letter. *The Indexer* 18 (3) Apr 1993, 191.
23. Lavell, C. Letter. *The Indexer* 18 (4) Oct 1993, 263.
24. Society of Indexers. *Newsletter* 1994/2, May 1994, 13-14.

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*Elizabeth Wallis is Registrar of the Society of Indexers and chairs its Training, Accreditation and Research Board; Cherry Lavell is the Society's Registration Administrator.*

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## What can you tell?

In further championship of strings of undifferentiated references, we challenge the common assertion that these are useless, conveying no information to the reader. Contrariwise: sheer mass can be as informative as minute specificity. No shrewdness is required to deduce information from the following raw data in the index to *Elizabeth Taylor* by Donald Spoto (Little, Brown and Co., 1995).

Burton, Richard  
 drinking of, 90, 179, 190, 191, 192, 206-208, 211-213, 215, 226, 230, 231, 235, 240, 241, 245-246, 256, 261, 315  
 sober periods of, 241, 243, 245, 256

Taylor, Elizabeth  
 drinking of, 108, 118, 119, 145, 157, 169, 175, 177, 190, 208, 211, 217-218, 226, 231, 234, 235, 238-242, 245, 246, 253, 262, 263, 273, 281, 288-289, 293-296, 310  
 drug use of, 145, 169, 194-195, 238-240, 278, 279, 281, 288-289, 293-296, 310, 319  
 jewelry of, 12, 41, 54, 98, 122, 123, 127, 128, 131, 132-133, 196, 197, 224, 235-236, 241, 242, 245, 250, 256, 262, 263, 271, 279, 291, 301, 304  
 surrogate fathers of, 17, 19, 20, 40, 45, 63, 99-100, 108, 120, 129, 138, 152, 192, 223, 242