LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Alphabetization methods

John Vickers and Nancy Mulvany engage in an interesting little set-to in the letters column of the April issue of *The Indexer*. I agree with John Vickers that it would be dangerous for indexing beginners to put too much confidence in Nancy Mulvany's arguments. The point at issue here is surely not the sorting order assigned to commas by computer programs (merely a means to an end) but the final order of a range of entries which include certain types of heading. It seems to me that John Vickers is absolutely right to condemn the treatment of proper names in the Mulvany example. Any sequence which allows intruders into a list of surname/forename entries is neither common sense nor what users expect. Nancy Mulvany talks (with a slight sneer?) of 'those who wish to canonize arrangement orders based upon usage...'. I would have thought that that is exactly what all framers of cataloguing and indexing rules try to a large extent to do. We are all computer users now but I would still wish to reaffirm my oft-stated belief that the computer should be servant and not master. As Nancy Mulvany herself points out, MACREX allows the sort to be decided by the indexer. The default order does not have to be accepted, and an inspection of the index to Vol. 17 of *The Indexer* will reveal that I myself have manipulated the sort for my own ends so that the inverted heading 'Index, The' files before other compound headings beginning with the world 'index'.

The problem boils down to what to do about the arrangement of inverted headings, and the following (possibly rather hackneyed) example surely demonstrates that there is a problem and that the answer supports John Vickers. Firstly, five headings arranged on what I at least would argue are the most helpful principles:

- London, Jack
- London, William
- London Airport
- London, Midland and Scottish Railway
- London University

Secondly, the same headings arranged in the order that Nancy Mulvany would advocate:

- London Airport
- London, Jack
- London, Midland and Scottish Railway
- London University
- London, William

It is worth noting here that if further inverted headings which are not proper names are introduced then the well-established principle of person, place subject, title will have to be invoked to produce the best order:

- London, Jack
- London, William
- London, Central
- London, Diocese of
- London Airport
- London, Midland and Scottish Railway
- London University

Note too that the comma in the penultimate heading does not make the heading inverted.

Incidentally, I also agree with John Vickers about the treatment of continuous and non-continuous page references.

GEORGE DIXON
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Street-by-street arrangement

The letter from John Vickers (*Indexer* 19 (3) April 1995, 213–14), with which I entirely agree, prompts me to draw attention to a different kind of word-by-word arrangement. It seems to have gone out of use now, but was at one time common in street directories and may cause confusion for the unwary.

Wheatley, though without using the terms 'word-by-word' or 'letter-by-letter', favours word-by-word, where he says 'Headings consisting of two or more distinct words are not to be treated as integral portions of one word.' On pp. 139–40 he refers to the *Post Office directory*, saying that names of streets 'are now arranged in a strict alphabetical order on the lines laid down in this rule' and then gives examples. The examples, however, are certainly not what we should expect nowadays. The first sequence is

- White Street
- White's Row
- White Heart
- Whitechapel

Another is:

- King Square
- King Street
- King and Queen Street
- King David Street
- King Edward Road
- King William Street
- King's Arms Court

etc. Although he draws attention to a minor error (which he does not include in his list) Wheatley makes no comment on a feature that we would now regard as unacceptable, namely that King Street comes before King and Queen Street.

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Using the word-by-word system we should now expect:

- King and Queen Street
- King David Street
- King Edward Road
- King Square
- King Street
- King William Street
- King's Arms Court

I looked at the Street Directory section of the Post Office London directory to find out when it changed from this system to the 'normal' word-by-word system. It was in 1960, but there was no explanation, although some other minor changes in the order of sections took place at the same time. Some examples follow:

1959:
- Nevis Road
- New Broadway
- New Court
- New End
- New Place
- New Road [9 of these]
- New Row
- New Square
- New Street
- New Street Hill
- New Street Square
- New Barn Street
- New Basinghall Street

1960:
- Nevis Road
- New Barn Street
- New Basinghall Street
- New Bond Street
- New Brent Street

etc., with the rest following in what we would now call strict word-by-word order.

Exactly what name we should give to this system I do not know: perhaps something like 'concept-by-concept'. The basic rule seems to be that the whole of the part of the name preceding the word 'Road', 'Street', etc., is taken as a unit for filing purposes before considering the final word. This does not however apply with New Street Hill and New Street Square, which are presumably there by 'attraction' to New Street.

Problems such as this must have been one of the reasons for the change. Does anyone have any more details? Better still, was the original system ever codified? I imagine not, and that it was something that developed by custom and practice.

Although it is a minor matter, it shows that what we think of in terms of two main systems can be broken down into sub-systems. More importantly, anyone using these directories without understanding the system could easily be misled into believing that some streets did not exist!

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References

John Vickers offers another example of the effect of ignoring the comma before inversions, taken from the Bartholomew Gazetteer of Britain:

- Leigh Devon
- Leigh Dorset
- Leigh Glos
- Leigh Gtr Manchester
- Leigh H & W
- Leigh Kent
- Leigh Salop
- Leigh Surrey
- Leigh Wilts
- Leigham Devon
- Leigh Beck Essex
- Leigh Brook
- Leigh Common Som
- Leigh Delamere Wilts
- Leigh, East Devon [3 of these!]
- Leighland Chapel Som
- Leigh, Little Ches
- Leigh, Lower Staffs
- Leigh, North Oxon
- Leigh-on-Mendip Som
- Leigh-on-Sea Essex

This alphabetical (dis)order is probably the result of leaving it to an inadequately programmed computer and shows what may result if letter-by-letter alphabetization is allowed to ignore commas and spaces. The topographical device of printing each heading in bold (and thereby dispensing with either a comma or brackets to separate it from the county) does not compensate for the mishmash which scarcely justifies the description of 'alphabetical arrangement'.

J.A.V.

Poetry in indexes

I must apologize to Dr Vickers for giving the impression that indexers function in their profession on the same level of creativity as poets. Certainly, this was not my intention, as my title, 'Poetry in indexes', might otherwise have been 'Indexers as poets' (The Indexer Oct 1994, pp. 102–4).

Examples that I used for illustrating certain congruences between poems and indexes came from my own knowledge of poetry which is obviously more limited than that of Dr Vickers (The Indexer April 1995, 201–2).

DENA SHER
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Variegated indexers

I am grateful for the positive feedback regarding my paper, 'Why postcoordination fails the searcher', which appeared in the most recent issue. From the feedback, it has become clear to me,
however, that in writing the article I made two incorrect assumptions about the prior knowledge of readers of The Indexer.

First I assumed that all subscribers to this journal are familiar with the basic terminology of electronic indexes, and hence I did not define 'Boolean searching'. I had not assumed that readers knew the specific search commands of DIALOG, and hence explained its truncation symbol, for example, but since Boolean operators are common to all online vendors as well as CD-ROMs, I expected these concepts to be common knowledge for all types of indexers. One reader correctly made a 'hypertext link' between my article and the filler on Boolean searching which (serendipitously?) appeared in the same issue.2

The second incorrect assumption I made is that the majority of readers of The Indexer are book indexers, and that even those who are not, are familiar with the terminology of that profession. One database indexer wrote me directly that she agrees with postcoordination’s deficiencies, but that my promotion of ‘coined modifications’ required examples. Many examples of these were included in my prior article, ‘Why indexing fails the researcher’.3 but the lesson here is that the terminology of book indexing cannot be assumed to be familiar to all readers of this journal.

As Vice-President/President-Elect of the American Society of Indexers in 1988, I tried to attract database indexers to a society consisting mainly of freelance book indexers, by organizing a conference covering all facets of indexing.4 The membership of ASI has since more than doubled (owing to a variety of factors), and several new national indexing societies have been founded, as reported in this journal.

Indexers (and perhaps would-be indexers) are joining these societies without having read the retrospec-

tive literature and without familiarity with the jargon of the field. I expect (and hope) that not only book, periodical, database, and image indexers are among the new members, but also thesaurus and hypertext developers. While the officers of indexing societies welcome these new members, it is important for contributors to and editors of newsletters and journals in the field of indexing to recognize the diversity of backgrounds of our readers and not assume a common knowledge base, as I did. Mea culpa.

References
1. Weinberg, Bella Hass. Why postcoordination fails the researcher. The


Bella Hass Weinberg
Professor, Division of Library and Information Science
St John’s University, Jamaica, New York

I cannot believe any reader of Pickwick ever wanted an index to it.’
—Take a breath, and discuss

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