

man in the armchair': the general reader of non-fiction on whose behalf so many of us work.<sup>11</sup>

Is standardization of indexing practice truly helpful to the user, or are both texts and users too unlike, idiosyncratic, all to conform?

Occasions have been recorded when following the rules has indeed misled the user. I described indexing a simple parents' guide to primary schooling, where those parents' likely knowledge of educational terminology did not coincide with that required by educational bodies compiling their databases, and choices had to be made between them.<sup>11</sup> Geraldine Beare wrote of a discrepancy between abiding by rules or helping readers that she encountered in compiling an index to the *Strand* magazine. She visualized the chase to and fro through the alphabet in an 800-page index, from pseudonym to real writer's name to collaborator and collaborator's pseudonym, with women from their original to married and subsequent names, that would have resulted from following strict precepts of consistency: 'Well, the mind boggles! It might be correct to do all this, but it does take up precious space and could cause annoyance to the user'.<sup>12</sup> Let us not displease our users in the attempt to please our regulators. Surely we must adapt the rules for the convenience of the user? Is best practice uniform practice?

Frances Lennie, mistress of CINDEX, put it: 'We're not building an index to abide by the rules of the index. We are building an index to serve the reader'.<sup>13</sup>

Jean Stirk observes, 'There are rules for strict alphabetical order, but this is not a panacea answer to users' problems . . . what laymen would know these rules?'.<sup>1</sup> Teaching the rules, to laymen and all, is no help, it appears. A survey of the use of indexes by students in the School of Information Studies of Syracuse University, New York, found the common assumption that 'the user of a back-of-the-book index thinks about accessing information in similar ways as a professional indexer organizes that information for access' to be incorrect.<sup>14</sup>

Manuals and standards for indexing ordain properly detailed analysis of the text in hand; provision of introductory notes; discrete page references where appropriate, as: 5, 6, 7, 8-9, 11, 12-13. Contrast this with the precepts of Edinburgh University Press given to the 1988 SI conference: 'one to two percent of the volume is allotted for the index; preliminary notes are not

approved; consecutive page references will always be run together'.<sup>15</sup> Whose behest would we wage-slaves follow?

So, beset by such conflicting claims regarding the structure and contents of our indexes, from users, subjects, authors, piper-payers, and regulators — whom should we seek to please? Make the index full for the publicity-seeker, or cheap for the publisher? Consistent for the regulators, or convenient for the unsophisticated? Cram in the most *recherché* detail for the researcher, or keep it concise for quick consultation? It is tempting to resort to the precept — just please yourself.

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## THE INDEXER Thirty years ago

The spring 1966 issue of *The Indexer*, Volume 5, No. 1, extended to 56 pages of text—the longest until then. L. M. Harrod's editorial leads off with, 'The science of indexing has numerous applications for it provides an essential appendix to every book of information, a key to numerous kinds of record, and an essential art of the different forms of information retrieval . . . So vast is the field that, together, these articles offer merely a peep into the complexity of activities which occupy those who call themselves indexers'. This, already, so long before the proliferation of online searching, databanks and CD-ROMs.

The Society of Indexers had held its fifth training course (over four days, with 35 students), and *The Indexer* had become 'a well established and unique journal', with copies despatched to 32 countries.

Margaret Anderson contributed a report of her survey into the length of book indexes, finding that indexes to history books generally fell into the range of 5% to 8% of the text; biographies were more lightly indexed than history, if at all, in the range 1% to 4% of the text; indexes in books

on science were 'more clearly related to the standard of difficulty of the text', with annual reviews of the sciences extending to 15%.

John Martyn of Aslib supplied ten pages on 'Citation indexing', with particular reference to the *Science Citation Index*. He considered, 'scientists are on the whole rather in favour of them, while librarians are much more cautious', quoting from a review of the index to the *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, 'Librarianship in the future will become a task less for the bibliophile and more for the electronic engineer'—a prognostication now apparently becoming well validated. Delight Ansley wrote of indexing encyclopaedias, considering the *Encyclopedia of science and technology*, *Encyclopedia of world art*, and the *New Catholic encyclopaedia*. Theodore Hines advances further towards the future with 'A computer code for alphabetizing', pleading for 'a general machine-compatible alphabetizing code . . . for indexes, library catalogues, and bibliographies . . . a new, logical, Anglo-American, computer-compatible standard for all our work'.

Norman Knight's comments are prolific throughout: he declares 'an encyclopaedia index can never be considered superfluous'; laments the lack of bold face type in encyclopaedia indexes; challenges the use of italics for titles of works of art; pleas for indication of which column

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# Index makers of today

## Ann Hall



Ann Hall's career in our world has followed a logical progression, as she became successively teacher; mother; home-based indexer; index assessor and supervisor; teacher of indexing. Each stage has been circumstantially caused, but has led to work that she thoroughly enjoys—so that she 'gets up each day eager to get on with the work'.

After graduating in English and geography, Ann obtained Diplomas in Education both in Keele and Québec, then taught in schools (Leeds, Lincoln, London, and Montréal) for some seven years. Like so many of us, she stopped teaching to bring up her own children (two), and sought congenial work to do at home. Two years' writing novels and plays brought only 'an interesting collection of rejection slips'. Then, after hearing a 'Fresh start' radio programme about proofreading and indexing, she obtained books on indexing from her local library, contacted the Society of Indexers, and attended a one-day training course (in 1970). Having indexed a local museum's newsletters and thus obtained a letter of recommendation, she wrote round to publishers, finally gaining an indexing commission at the fortieth letter. She indexed part-time for nine years (averaging a dozen books a year), then, not finding enough part-time teaching, became an SI Registered Indexer in 1979 and began indexing full-time—that is, around sixty indexes per year.

A keen SI member, Ann became involved with SI's Supervision Scheme, assessing indexes created by beginners who need the help and advice of experienced indexers—a 'buddy system'. Then, in 1984, Michael Gordon, the original author of the Book Indexing Postal Tutorials course, wanted someone to take it over. Ann, so experienced both in teaching and indexing, was the obvious successor, welcoming the element of teaching it restored to her. A year later the Halls changed their whole lifestyle; Ann's husband, Gary, also retired from

teaching, and they bought a large house in Moffat, a small Scottish tourist town. While Ann indexed and marked tutorials, Gary turned handyman and looked after bed-and-breakfast guests, later also taking up indexing and computer program demonstration (he works using CINDEX; Ann, MACREX).

'The Lodge' now offers a unique combination of Scottish sightseeing and indexing tuition, with 'residential mini-courses' with the two former-teacher, now-indexer, hosts.

BIPT is a practical course, based on the creation of five indexes. So far it has had about 600 enrolments. The teaching is largely based on individual comments in the marking. Ann's time now spans marking two to four tutorials a week; running the SI supervision scheme, with a team of 40 assessors; occasionally assessing indexes for SI Registration ('because I am grateful for all that the Society has done for me over the years'); and indexing five or six books a month. Oh, yes, and hobbies—amateur dramatics, singing, recorder-playing, film-making, gardening, weaving, sewing, long-distance travelling. In 1995 she became a member of SI Council.

Ann still loves her indexing—'It's fun! Intellectually stimulating and creative! Always a challenge!'—particularly the final editing stage. She considers that, by teaching people, she is still learning about indexing, and 'can now assess indexes at a glance'. She calls herself a generalist, who could tackle the indexing of any subject, and has indeed dealt with a wide variety; she does not hold with subject-specialism restriction—'an intelligent reader can pick out the bits that other readers will look for'; only an understanding of English is an academic essential. Ann hopes to produce indexes well provided with cross-references 'so that the thickest reader can use it'. She has compiled over a thousand indexes to date. In 1993 she was invited to attend the Women of the Year Luncheon at the Savoy Hotel in London, held annually 'to bring together women from all walks who have achieved outstanding success in their chosen field'. Ann was selected as a representative of indexers, after her work in indexing the *Oxford illustrated encyclopaedia* and the *Guinness encyclopaedia*, and teaching others to index.

Ann shows the same relish for her teaching as for indexing: 'When I occasionally find myself teaching a "born indexer" I'm excited and enthusiastic'—and even sees some of her students as 'giving the impression of jumping up and down with excitement and the sheer joy of indexing'.

To modify a line of Wordsworth's: 'Who is the happy indexer? This is she.'

H.K.B.

## The Indexer thirty years ago — continued

on the page indexes refer to, and the capitalization of the initial letter of every main heading.

E. J. Coates, editor of the *British Technology Index*, in 'Scientific and technical indexing', compares scientific literature which 'contains a greater number of concepts *in toto* and a far higher proportion of precisely defined concepts than does the literature of the humanities . . . from the point of view of the battle between words and meanings, the scientific indexer gets off relatively lightly' (soft texts paid due regard again!).

The bibliography of the works of Henry Benjamin Wheatley, begun in the previous issue, is continued in small print, running to almost another three pages. There is guidance on Islamic names, and an account of the indexing of the *New York Times*. John Bryon's critical article goes by the title, 'Let's have an improvement in British book indexes'. He suggested, 'Comparing an American with a British book on the same subject . . . the American work will usually be more fully indexed'.

H.K.B.