

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.

Nancy Mulvany was born in Texas and grew up 'throughout the United States'. Settling in California, she attended the University of California (UC) at Berkeley, reading geography and philosophy. After a period of writing and editing she looked for something 'that went a little quicker', and turned to indexing. She enrolled in the UC indexing course taught by the late Dr BevAnne Ross (first winner of the ASI's Hines Award). BevAnne became her lifelong friend, and wrote of the academic ability of her student, 'she was one of only three who got As in three years of my teaching at UC! What a *protégée* she has been — it is always nice for a teacher to have a student achieve to a higher level than the teacher! Nancy is such a student.'

What Nancy finds most enjoyable about indexing is the thorough immersion and absorption of the process, its demand for total attention: 'Designing an information access structure that meets the needs of the text and the audience is a challenging task that I find engrossing. Indexing makes use of a diverse set of skills — reading and writing, comprehension and communication, induction and deduction, left-brain and right-brain functions. While indexing is methodical, it is also a creative and imaginative process; the individual interpretation adds distinction.'

Nancy has found an extraordinary variety of ways to utilize or apply her indexing skills.

She has compiled indexes, of course (or 'written' them, as she has it), including those for *Microprocessor-based design* and *Labor management laws in California agriculture*. She takes corporations as clients, such as Apple Computer, Hewlett-Packard, Tandem Computers, and VISA International, indexing operating manuals and providing consulting services. She takes great interest in the presentation of indexes in an online format, and has worked with a variety of hypertext authoring tools to produce these. Her first such was the *1988 PC world index, hypertext version for DOS*. Recently she has worked with HTML to produce a subject index for the Indexing Conference Web pages on the WeLL: (<http://www.well.com/user/nmulvany/idx.htm>).

She has written about indexing: articles in many journals (including this one), particularly on technology for indexing and electronics; and the well-received textbook, *Indexing books* (University of Chicago, 1994) — produced to meet a need of which she was well aware as a teacher of indexing herself.

Nancy teaches indexing in person at UC and on the correspondence course of the US Department of Agriculture.

She finds much in common between the teaching and the practice of indexing, which both involve the use of communicative skills. Her teaching has made her more aware of the indexing process, while her approach to teaching indexing has benefited from interaction with her students. Intriguingly, she finds a notable variation in students' performance according to their age. 'Without a doubt, those in their twenties tend to have a far more difficult time with the course than do older students. The younger students seem to



Nancy Mulvany

find it difficult to anticipate the needs of the audience. For example, they are far less likely to add cross-references for alternative vocabularies. It is as if the younger students do not yet have the experience and depth of worldview that older students have acquired. Clearly, experience in the world plays a role in successful indexing.'

Nancy's teaching method is to talk with her students about index audiences and the various ways to address their needs. After 12-15 hours of instruction regarding the basic rules, they are given their first index-writing assignment. Having 'seen hundreds and hundreds of indexes for the same material over the years', she believes 'Each index is unique and each student is an individual. The teaching of indexing, the evaluation of indexes, just like indexing itself, cannot be reduced solely to method and standardization.'

Having become a total devotee of the MACREX indexing program in her early indexing days — 'I never did an index using cards, except on BevAnne's course' — she contacted the Calverts, decided to bring the good program to the US, and published MACREX there.

She hosts the Indexing Conference on the WeLL, an online conference system based in Northern California, and co-hosts the conference of the Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility.

Nancy became the American Society of Indexers' President in 1989, and chaired its 25th anniversary conference 'with her own unique blend of iron rule and dry humour', as this journal's report of the occasion observed. She also served on the National Information Standards Organization committee to revise ANSI's *Basic criteria for indexers*, but resigned when the committee would not draw the fundamental distinction between authored indexes and computer-generated ones.

Who else would have seen so many directions in which indexing skills might be spread? In Nancy we have a highly expert, clear-eyed Jill of all aspects of indexing.

H.K.B.