REVIEWS

Edited by Philip Bradley

Indexing and indexes

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This is the first issue of a continuing newsletter for all law indexers and other people interested in good law publishing, wherever they may be. The editorial team consists of indexers from four countries (Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and the United States) and the contents reflect the usual format for specialised newsletters — articles, news items and letters to the editor. Two of the articles are concerned with beginners in indexing — in the first, novice indexer Margaret Atkinson tells of her first introduction to indexing and her experience with the Society of Indexers' training course; in the second article, experienced law indexer and Wheatley Medal winner Betty Moys gives some very practical advice on how to become a good law indexer. This article is to be continued in later issues of Brief Entry.

Two further articles give insights into the experiences and methods of working of established law indexers. Robert Spicer tells of an unfortunate experience with an eccentric professor/author (exaggerated, 'for the sake of entertainment', but only too real as most of us can testify). In Passing the Burden, Moira Greenhalgh describes her method of sub-contracting/apprenticeship which has enabled novice indexers to gain experience in law indexing, while also relieving the over-worked law indexer of the more routine and straightforward tasks (proofreading of index galleys and the preparation of tables of cases and statutes) which require 'basic intelligence, ... incredibly accurate typing and a high boredom threshold'.

A newsletter for law indexers is very much needed — law indexing is a very specialised and often very difficult field, but it can be very lonely and it is often clouded in needless mystique. Hopefully, this newsletter will provide a much needed opportunity and space for debate, argument and exchange of useful information, and the experiences, problems and insights of law indexers in various jurisdictions will be reflected in its pages. It will depend on support and contributions from its readership for it to develop into a useful forum for law indexers, but if it does so, it will be well worth the £10 subscription.

Julitta Clancy, freelance indexer


The entire book was put through a word-extraction program similar to that explained in the text, stripping stop-list words, yet leaving a couple of pages to itself. Other technical services surveyed include acquisitions and preservation, together with a chapter on technical services in school libraries. Unfortunately, perhaps, all the material in the volume pre-dates 1993 — due to circumstances for which the editors take all the blame. The subtitle indicates the historical nature of the treatment and an interesting chapter on indexing in Theory and Practice gives us 15 pages of useful background, together with 58 bibliographical references.

Immediate reaction to the index to the volume centres on its strings of undifferentiated page numbers (the old, old tale), the unthinking see references where double entries would have been preferable and the occasional use of adjectives as main headings. It gives the impression of having been passed through a computer program rather than a human mind. The heading Indexing has 22 page references, followed by a further 21 attached to 18 subheadings (although this second group of 21 does not repeat any of the first group at the main heading — brownie points for that perhaps!). The heading Holy Grail refers to the following sentence on p. 175: '... in 1970 it (a journal article) was called, the latest vision of the Holy Grail'. However, perhaps one should not draw attention to these things. Perhaps we should accept the trade-off of less relevance for more recall. Quantity not quality.

Explorations in Indexing and Abstracting is written by an Assistant Professor in the School of Library and Information management at Emporia State University, Kansas. Focusing on the ways people seek information, the book examines the basic question of how to design indexes and abstracts so that they turn out to be as user-friendly as possible. 'Grappling with the question, "What is it about?" ... is at the heart of this book. Its stimulus is the thesis that no matter how facile the retrieval system, substantial failures result because of fundamental differences between the manner in which documents have been represented and the manner in which searchers represent their questions' (Preface). The work is not intended to be a manual of good practice in indexing and abstracting but an attempt to put the user in the driving seat. Whether this is entirely possible is a matter for discussion and argument and much effort in the past has gone into presenting recondite theories which run the risk of being so abstract as to be almost incomprehensible. The author of the present work cannot entirely escape the charge of breaking a butterfly on the wheel and some passages in the book exhibit that prolix periphrasis which often seems to characterise the present work.

The index to the book has a narrative introduction running to over half a page. The following is an extract offered without comment:

"The entire book was put through a word-extraction program similar to that explained in the text, stripping stop-list words, yet leaving a list of many thousands in place. These remaining words were alphabetized and their addresses within the book sorted. Each and every word was examined with an eye to its likely utility in the index. Some words, such as book, document, collection, patrons, research, system and word appear with such frequency that they are of little value in guidance. Some index entries do not list every instance of the listed word. Some significant words are also used in examples or in less-than-significant ways in some parts of the text."

Geoffrey Dixon, formerly Craigie College of Education


The author of Indexes: writing, editing, production, has presumably wished to pass on to others her lifetime’s experience as editor, indexer and publisher. Her book, she says, ‘proposes a methodology and technique for preparing a quality back-of-book index suited to the subject of the book within the limits imposed by costs and the publishing schedule’.

Her approach throughout is practical. It is that of the publisher’s editor, based entirely on American practice and limited generally to her own experience. ‘Other than academic courses in indexing in library science, organised training (in indexing) is remarkable for its absence’, she says (p.v). The United States Department of Agriculture’s course is the only one of which she has knowledge!

The ten chapters, which aim to be self-contained and which each ends with a summary, cover (1) Methodology — preliminary decisions on organizing the indexer’s work according to how and when the proofs are received, the time-schedules, the nature of the text, and the number of index entries per page; (2) Technique — based on the use of cards or slips; (3) Format; (4) Alphabetization and order; (5) Style; (6) Production; (7) Revisions — indexes for works reissued with amended text; (8) Specialties — essential features and choice of format for indexing books in Science and Technology, Humanities, Social Sciences and Textbooks and Reference Works; (9) Freelance indexing; (10) Computer-assisted indexing. An appendix shows extracts from seven published indexes illustrating solutions to particular problems.

While helpfully giving a more detailed description of the stages in a book’s publication and the nature of the book itself, and the consequent choices of format and type-size for the index than is generally found in guides to indexing, Virginia Thatcher is more apt to say ‘Do this’ (because that is the way it is done) than to discuss some of the points that may give rise to queries in the reader’s mind. She says, for example, ‘A reference (citation) with more than two authors should carry only the name of the principal (first) author in the names index’ (p. 28) and ‘Neither the author nor the indexer sees the proof’ (p. 104). (To judge by the number of misprints, that fate befall the text of the book under review).

The Bibliography is perfunctory. There is no mention of The Indexer and the words in the title of Norman Knight’s Indexing, the art of are transposed.

The demand for a second edition of Wellisch’s Indexing from A to Z has given the author the opportunity to update his references to standards and the changes they call for in practice, to add a few new sections, including those on Legal texts, Medical texts and Technical manuals and reports and to expand or improve others. He has also introduced a Classified list of sections. Under rubrics such as Indexing technique and Terminology, he brings under a single heading related topics dispersed Classified list of sections. Under rubrics such as Indexing technique and wellisch’s book was reviewed in The Indexer 18 (1) April 1992, 59). practice and enhancing the value of the book. (The first edition of thus facilitating the study of any of the larger problems of indexing under their specific names in the main alphabetical section of the book, and reports and to expand or improve others. He has also introduced a list of recent indexers and indexes awarded the Wheatear Medal or highly commended is another useful guide to good practice for the aspiring indexer. The critical analysis of published indexes is an essential part of learning how to index (and sometimes how not to index), a point emphasized throughout this unit.

A particularly interesting addition to this section is ‘How I index’, in which six experienced indexers describe their working methods (reviewed in The Indexer, Oct. 1996). This is an excellent illustration of the fact that there is no one ‘correct’ method of indexing. Nevertheless, the importance of consistency, accuracy and the needs of the user are emphasized throughout. Subsequent sections consider the form and structure of entries and the intricacies of proper names, and the unit concludes with a list of recommended reading and a self-administered test (with answers). Trainees are advised to work through this to assess their readiness to sit the society’s assessment test for this unit.

The self-administered test has also been revised to reflect the changes to the text and now includes sample indexes, enabling trainees to compare their efforts at indexing a section of the text with the work of three experienced indexers. This again emphasizes that indexing is not an exact science and that different indexes to the same document may be equally valid. In learning the skills of indexing, there is no substitute for hands-on experience, and one might have wished for more exercises of this kind. Given that this publication is part of a training course aimed primarily at new indexers, perhaps more space could have been devoted to the self-administered test. However, this is a minor quibble; thorough study of this unit should give would-be indexers a good grounding in the actual process of indexing. Alternatively, some may realize that there’s a lot more to indexing than they anticipated and that they do not have an aptitude for it after all.

Ann Barham, freelance indexer


When in the musical world it might be said that those who become interested in the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan are a special breed. They have certainly organized themselves into a number of societies for support and to further their mutual interests. The Gilbert and Sullivan Journal first appeared in February 1923 shortly after the Society itself was formed in 1924. The journal thereafter reported the doings of the Society and of the Savoy Opera ‘faithfully, expertly and in great detail’. The index has some useful Introductory Notes in which the conventions

The Indexer Vol. 20 No. 3 April 1997 175
REVIEWS

The journal was published three times a year. Each volume covers seven years and thus contains 21 parts. At the foot of each page of the index the dates covered by the journal volumes are shown. This is a convenient device, but since the page numbers run on throughout each volume it is no easy matter to find the appropriate issue. Headings give the volume number in roman numerals and the first page only (in arabic) for a location except on page 75 where for one heading arabic figures alone are used to denote the volume and a spread of pages. This spread occurs again on page 99 but here roman numerals are used correctly.

In the second index the same conventions and abbreviations are used as in the first except that for each location the volume number and the spread of pages is given, all in arabic numerals. A footnote on every page refers the reader back to the symbols used. It also indicates by means of asterisks where there are identical illustrations and for each performer an indication is given of the periods during which they were most active. This index has been produced on a superior quality paper where the print shows much more distinctly and so is easier to read. The 40 volumes were published over a period of some 20 years, presumably every six months or so. Both of these indexes give direct references to performances and recordings reported in the periodicals and must be a delight to devotees of the genre.

The third index is quite different from the others. Its aim was 'to provide access to illustrations (mainly photographs) which have appeared in published works' and is limited to work done by professionals. Newspaper illustrations are not used, being too ephemeral. The work gives reference to over 5,800 illustrations contained in over 130 sources resulting in more than 10,000 citations. These illustrations are indexed under names of performers, names of characters, names of operas, of people associated with the Savoy Opera and of some places associated with the productions. A two-page note details the various abbreviations and other devices employed to make searching easier and this is followed by cast lists of the Savoy Operas. Ten pages are then given over to lists of films and videotapes of the Operas, many having more than one entry. This list of sources takes up 11 more pages and for each one, a figure in parentheses tells how many illustrations are to be found within it. Most of the sources are, of course, books but the list includes two series of cigarette cards published by John Player.

These three indexes must be a unique trio and an undoubted labour of love. They provide a most useful reference tool for anyone interested in the Savoy Operas and all that is associated with them. The Photofinder will be of particular interest to producers of operas, both amateur and professional, because they will quickly be able to find out for themselves what the scenes and costumes of earlier productions looked like.

Frank Merrett, educationist and freelance indexer

OTHER SUBJECTS


There cannot be many people working in the world of books who have not been asked such a question as 'Who wrote Roger the Taurus'? or 'Have you got James Joyce is useless'? Many more important facts than these appear in Adrian Room’s introduction. He gives information about the different kinds of titles which books have in relation to their contents from the obvious such as Mark Twain’s The adventures of Huckleberry Finn to the obscure such as Anthony Burgess’s A clockwork orange. He mentions in fact seven kinds of title. One kind consists of a noun or noun phrase such as Forster’s A passage to India; another is where the title relates to a character in the book but does not give his or her name as in Henry James’s The ambassador; a third is the use of titles naming the setting or location of the book as in Grace Metalious’s Peyton Place.

There are also statistics of the number of titles beginning with a particular word. Such words, he suggests, say something about human apprehensions: in a representative group of books he found that, apart from In and My, the most commonly used words are Man, Last, Black and Death. As one frequently finds, the introduction to a book is sometimes as much a mine of information as the text.

The text here consists of the titles of 1300 important literary works arranged alphabetically with minor additions. In each entry there is an account of the story and usually a quotation from which the title is taken. The author has gone to considerable lengths to locate these sources. Although we may easily deduce why a book has a particular title (for example Pride and preudice) we can find out from Room that it is taken from a statement in Fanny Burney’s Cecilia. Another book, which many of us will remember from our schooldays, Kipling’s sea story Captains courageous, is named after the words in the line 'when captains courageous whom death could not daunt' which appears in the anonymous ballad Mary Ambree.

The index consists of authors of books listed, authors of books cited from which titles are derived, and a few subject entries. There is also a three-page bibliography. This is an interesting work for anyone involved with English Literature.

Philip Bradley, formerly Dundee College of Technology