History of societies of indexers, Part II: three affiliations

Hazel K Bell

In its second decade, the Society of Indexers welcomed and assisted the formation of three affiliated societies: the American Society of Indexers (ASI), The Australian Society of Indexers (AusSI) and the Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada (IASC/SCAD).

ASI: The first ten years — 1968-77

From the initial founding of the Society of Indexers (SI), there was close liaison with fellow practitioners across the Atlantic. Two Americans attended the inaugural meeting in 1957, and were designated SI’s official Corresponding Members for the United States: John Askling of Washington DC, and John Cook Wylie of the University of Virginia. The second issue of The Indexer, September 1958, reproduced the six-page first draft produced by the American Standards Association’s Z39 Subcommittee on Indexing. The third issue reprinted an article by Lorena A. Garloch, Librarian of the University of Pittsburgh, from the (American) Library Journal (Garloch 1959).


Meanwhile, in the US… Alan Greengrass of The New York Times, himself an early SI member, details ‘The founding of the American Society of Indexers’ in The Indexer 11 (1) April 1978. He records that in 1968 he was finishing a library school degree at Columbia University, New York, when fellow student Mary Flad suggested the need for a professional organization of indexers. A press release convened a meeting at the University, chaired by Theodore Hines, Assistant Professor at Columbia’s School of Library Service, on 24 April, 1968. The American Society of Indexers (ASI) was founded six months later at a meeting in New York on 18 November 1968. Alan Greengrass was its first President, and Jessica Harris, a doctoral student at Columbia, its Secretary. Robert Palmer became chairman of the committee that drew up the ASI constitution and ASI’s liaison with SI.

SI was delighted. Norman Knight opened a guest editorial of The Indexer for Spring 1969:

What has often been predicted has now come to pass. An American Society of Indexers has been set up. This is clearly the most important and vital event in the indexing world since the formation of the original society twelve years ago. The Society of Indexers can but feel sincerely flattered by this form of imitation. We welcome the initiative shown by the American indexers and applaud their enterprise.

This was followed by a report by Palmer of the November 1968 meeting, and of his own ‘working luncheon’ in London with officers of SI on his visit to the UK in September 1968 (Palmer 1969). The ASI’s newly adopted Constitution (five pages), and a report of its first Annual General Meeting, held in New York on 16 June 1969, appeared in The Indexer in Autumn 1969. The membership stood at 146.

ASI began publication of a Newsletter in 1970, edited by Greengrass, with five issues a year. In 1971 it produced a Guideline on employment terms for freelance indexers and Guideline for publishers and editors on index evaluation. Through volume 7 of The Indexer, 1970-71, ASI is well featured. Reports of its AGMs for these years, and of a Special General Meeting held to authorise dues, appear. There are frequent references to the possibility of ASI’s affiliation with SI, with eventually a full page Message from the Chairman (of SI) concerning the ‘Proposed Affiliation’ (Bancroft 1971). Discussions between officers of the two Societies had been continuing ‘for some time, mainly because of the difficulty of coordinating the activities of two bodies not in continuous session and separated by the width of the Atlantic’. A draft agreement was circulated, to be discussed at an extraordinary meeting of SI held in October 1971. Bancroft urged:

The first two societies in the world for the advancement of indexing now have an opportunity to develop a joint policy and to strengthen their influence in combination. As these societies are situated in two countries which are the largest publishers in the English language and which together publish more books than any comparable group, the potential effect of the proposed affiliation is obviously immense.

Finally Knight was able to open the April 1972 issue of The Indexer with ‘A message from the President’:

Mark well the number of this issue of The Indexer. It is No. 1 of Volume 8 of the Journal of the Society of
Indexers. But it is also the first number to be published as the official organ of both the Society of Indexers and the American Society of Indexers.

This felicitous development follows the affiliation of the American Society, which was founded in 1968, with its British predecessor.

The 12 terms of affiliation were printed in full in this issue. Territories were clearly delineated:

8. The American Society shall refrain from soliciting new membership in the United Kingdom and countries of the Commonwealth, except Canada.

The Society shall refrain from soliciting new membership in the United States of America and its dependencies and Canada.

Regarding The Indexer:

9. The appointment of the Editor and Editorial Board of The Indexer shall remain the prerogative of the Society. The American Society shall appoint one corresponding member of the Editorial Board who shall be responsible for submitting the American Society's contributions to the Editor. (The first was Jessica Harris.)

Through volumes 8, 9 and 10 of The Indexer, 1972-7, ASI published several reports of its activities. Three pages of 'Biographical profiles' of ASI officers featured: Dee Atkinson, Charles Bernier, Betty Byrne, Philip Deemer, John Fall, Nathalie Frank, Alan Greengrass, Jessica Harris, Theodore Hines, Margaret Hunton, Marlene Hurst, Barbara Marks, Robert Palmer, Barbara Preschel, Anne Richter, Peter Rooney, Harold Roth, John Rothman, Elizabeth Stalcup, Eleanor Steiner-Prag, Jane Stevens (Richter 1973). The ASI Register of members was distributed to members and to publishers from 1974.

ASI's first all-day meeting was held in New York in 1972, with its papers, on training and on indexer/publisher expectations, summarised in The Indexer (Preschel 1973). Their constitution was revised, and the amended version printed in the October 1974 Indexer. Their Committee on Ethics, Standards and Specifications produced its Statement on ethical responsibility of indexers and index publishers to index users, and Specifications for corporate-author indexes, ... for computer-based indexes, and ... for published card indexes, which all appeared in the October 1975 issue. The Committee on Indexer Education compiled a directory and conducted a survey of courses of indexing in Canada and the US; James D. Anderson presented the results in a six page article in The Indexer, 1975 (Anderson 1977).

Frederick Blum of the Eastern Michigan University Library described the work of the American National Standards Institute and its Z39 Subcommittee (Blum 1975). The annual meeting for 1976 was held in Chicago, the first meeting of ASI to be held outside New York; the Chicago Chapter was the first regional ASI Chapter established.

The 1977 AGM represented the tenth anniversary of ASI. Mary Lee Tsuffis handed over the Presidency to Bev Anne Ross. Membership was 327. Six talks included one on 'Microform indexing and techniques'. ASI's first decade had seen it well set to encounter the coming years.

 Australasian societies

The first published membership list of the Society of Indexers, for 31 January 1958, shows the National Library Service of Wellington, New Zealand, as an overseas institutional member. James E. Traue, who worked there, served as New Zealand’s Corresponding Member to SI. In 1960 the SI Membership Secretary, Alfred Talbot, who worked in the London office of the Bank of Adelaide, asked the daughter of a former bank colleague, Brenda Miller, a schoolteacher and librarian in Canberra, to become SI’s Corresponding Member in Australia. The Indexer for Autumn 1963 records her being entertained by SI Officers on her visit to the UK.

AUSI

In 1972 H. Godfrey Green, a freelance indexer in Glen Iris, Victoria, became SI’s Australian Correspondent, actively promoting the formation of a Society of Indexers there. He enrolled more than forty personal and institutional members, and a meeting held at his home resulted in the formal adoption of a constitution for The Society of Indexers in Australia (The Indexer 8 (3) April 1973, 180). He provided for the April 1972 Indexer a four-page article with the splendid title, 'Room for improvement in Australia', justifying this judgement in context with:

The index seems to be the first thing that publishers here try to reduce or dispense with when the cost of publishing a work becomes too high.

For this reason perhaps, most indexes in Australian publications are of poor quality, often containing inaccuracies and for the most part handling the subject concept approach badly ...

Much could be done to improve the quality of indexing in Australia. Many appear to be a bad selection of topics, not sufficiently comprehensive, and assist the reader very little.

Brenda Miller wrote in the April 1973 Indexer of 'Indexing children's books', particularly in Australia.

In the words of Clyde Gorrow and Jean Hagger (Garrow and Hagger 1979), as The Society of Indexers in Australia progressed, 'Membership grew to approximately 100; meetings were held; newsletters were published; Australian members not only read The Indexer but wrote articles for it.' Josephine McGovern reported on 'Indexing in a State Parliamentary Library' (the Library of the Parliament of Victoria) in a talk given to the Society and reprinted in The Indexer in October 1976.

'In September 1975, the whole scene changed. Godfrey Green found that changes in domestic circumstances deprived him of the time and opportunity to continue in office' (Garrow and Hagger 1979). Jean Uhl volunteered to take his place, and at a meeting held in Melbourne on 4 December 1975, it was decided that an independent society should be inaugurated (Annual Report of the Council for the year 1975-76, The Indexer 10 (2) Oct. 1976, 83). 'On 27 April 1976, the last general meeting of the Society of Indexers in Australia, having approved the termination of that organization's existence, became the inaugural meeting of the Australian Society of Indexers' (Garrow and Hagger 1979). Negotiations began for the affiliation of the reconstituted Society with SI, and L. M. Harrod’s Editorial for the October 1977 issue of The Indexer reported:

The revived group of indexers in Australia have ... agreed to the suggestion that they should be
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affiliated to the Society of Indexers ...

We therefore give our Australian colleagues a very warm welcome into our family of indexers — as we did the members of the American Society of Indexers some years ago — and wish them every success in furthering their cause throughout the whole of their vast country.

The terms of affiliation appeared in that issue of The Indexer, followed by a report from their Secretary, Sylvia Ramsden, reading in part:

The Australian Society of Indexers ... has now been in existence for just over a year. We have a membership of 57 drawn mainly from Melbourne where we are based, but also have members in the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and Tasmania. The average attendance at general meetings is 17.

We have held four general meetings plus an Annual General Meeting and have had guest speakers on a variety of indexing topics. We have begun publication of a Newsletter ... We are in the process of setting up a panel of experienced indexers with a view to starting a Register of Indexers ...

Although small in numbers our members are very enthusiastic and ideas are beginning to flow. We hope that as these are put into practice our membership will increase (Ramsden 1977).

New Zealand

In New Zealand, meanwhile, Gerald Fowler, a microbiology technician from England, had moved to Wellington in 1967. When retirement loomed he sought a congenial second career, and became a freelance indexer, as SI's only member in New Zealand, corresponding frequently with SI members. He tried to found a New Zealand Indexing Group and newsletter, with the 'thirty or so indexers here', but this did not take off.

Canada

The SI Membership list of 31 January 1958, the earliest, includes only one Canadian, Janet McGinnis, who was also Corresponding Member for Canada. No more appears about that country in The Indexer until the terms of affiliation of ASI with SI, printed in the April 1972 issue, quoted above.

Then, from 1973-4, Peter Greig, Chairman of the Index Committee of the Bibliographical Society of Canada (established 1969) and indexer at the Library of Canada's Parliament, came to England for postgraduate studies at Leeds. He brought with him and lodged in SI's Library a set of newsletters of this Committee, reported in The Indexer as follows (Wallis 1973):

Newsletter no. 3 (April 1971) prints the report of the first Executive meeting of the Index Committee, held on 20 March 1971 in Toronto, where it was resolved that the Committee should concern itself primarily with the promotion of indexing and the training of indexers, rather than undertake major indexing projects itself. Guidelines for future activities were agreed upon, including the compilation of a Union List of Indexes and a Directory of Indexers. An Index training workshop pilot project is being set up in cooperation with the School of Library Science at the University of Toronto.

A questionnaire/survey on local indexing in Canada, reported in Newsletter no. 3, was sent out to over 350 libraries at the beginning of March 1971.

Having made contact with SI, Greig provided several substantial articles for The Indexer: on periodical indexing in Canada (Oct. 1972), book indexing in Canada (April 1973), the Canadian humorous writer Stephen Leacock (Oct. 1973), and Islamic filing (April 1974).

Greig himself — who fitter? — wrote for Knight's Indexing, the art of an account of the subsequent founding of IASC:

In March 1977 the Committee on Bibliographical Services for Canada (CBSC) convened the Canadian Abstracting and Indexing Services Workshop in the National Library of Canada. The participants noted the absence of a specific forum for abstractors and indexers in Canada, and recommended that such an association be formed.

The CBSC sponsored an Open Forum for Indexers and Abstractors on 12 June 1977 at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Library Association in Montreal. This meeting resulted in the establishment of the Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada/Société canadienne pour l’analyse de documents.

In 1978 Peter Greig and Mary Dykstra (Assistant Professor in the School of Library Service at Dalhousie University) attended SI's first International Conference, and discussed with SI officers the affiliation of IASC with SI. John Gordon, then SI Secretary, commented (Gordon 1978):

For all of us who were there, that was the weekend when the Canadian connection became a reality and the newest society truly became a member of the club.

It was Canada's bilingualism, reinforced by the influence of a strong contingent of delegates from France, that stimulated consideration — for the first time — of the possibility of moving out of the English-speaking limitations within which we have hitherto operated. Even before the formalities of affiliation are completed, the youngest member of the family is already making its influence felt.

Terms of affiliation were indeed agreed, and printed in The Indexer in April 1979. IASC then had 115 individual and institutional members.

Mary Dykstra recounted the story of the coming into being of IASC to SI in May 1979 ("Word from Canada", The Indexer 11 (4) Oct. 1979, 202-4). She observed, 'From its beginning, the (Canadian) Society has been national in its outlook. ... A rather large group within the Society are concerned with the teaching of indexing and abstracting. It is significant that the Society's annual meeting is held in conjunction with the annual conference of the Canadian Library Association, since so many of the members belong to both of these organizations ... It is my feeling that the most dominant group within the Society is the large national indexing and abstracting services, mostly of periodical or report literature, ... While some IASC members are professional indexers, working on a permanent contract or as freelancers, the majority of members are librarians. Other librarians within the society are cataloguers and indexers of general or special library collections. The genuine freelance nonlibrarian book indexers seem to be a relatively
small group within the Canadian Society’. PRECIS was used as the indexing system in more individual projects in Canada than in any other country in the world outside Britain.

References

Dorking — a retrospective and an update

Forty years ago an International Study Conference on Classification for Information Retrieval was held at Dorking [England], under the aegis of FID, which had recently set up a committee on the general theory of classification. It was organized by Aslib with the cooperation of the Classification Research Group (CRG) and the University of London School of Librarianship and Archives. Representatives came from France, Germany, India, Italy, Netherlands, UNESCO, United Kingdom and United States.

The conference proceedings record the delegates’ belief in the necessity of a faceted classification for systematising analysed subject matter and for the identification of more specific relationships that could be applied generally. Delegates also agreed that there was a demand for a new general classification, for a reconsideration of the problems of notation, and for more rigorous control of terminology, both that of special subjects and that of classification itself. (The conference had initially had its own problems with terminology.) In his masterly 'concluding survey', Eric de Grolier notes how classification depends on language, and adds, "I should say that language depends on classification also" (International ... 1957).

Ideas discussed at the conference had implications not only for the construction of general and special classifications, but also for the construction of theses and index entries. Notable examples of subsequent developments are the revised edition of the Bliss classification (Mills & Broughton 1977-), Thesaurofacet (Aitchison et al 1969) and PRECIS (Austin 1974), as well as the series of international conferences held in Elsinore (1964), Bombay (1975), Augsburg (1982) and Toronto (1991).

In June 1997 the 6th International Study Conference on Classification Research was held in London, organized by FID/CR and University College London, in association with Aslib, Classification Research Group and International Society of Knowledge Organization. Some of the delegates to the first conference were invited to the conference dinner to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Dorking.

The sixth conference had the broader title ‘Knowledge organization for information retrieval’. Papers ranged in scope from classification as an aid to automatic indexing and in retrieving information from the internet, thesaurus construction, what constitutes ‘an event’ or ‘a subject’ and problems of ambiguity, to consideration of individual classification schemes — including specific subject areas. Publication of the conference proceedings is due in the near future.

Some of the seminal papers published in the intervening forty years have been collected by Alan Gilchrist and published by FID (Gilchrist 1997). Gilchrist describes his compilation as being "not a comprehensive survey of the intervening years between the Dorking ‘Classification for Information Retrieval’ and the London ‘Knowledge organization for information retrieval’, rather it is a snapshot tribute to the Dorking pioneers, which recognizes the links between Dorking and London and that information retrieval is still a topic worthy of attention”.

Despite the disclaimer, the papers cover a wide range of subjects, showing how the focus of interest has shifted, and leading to the problems that exercise us currently. The first paper is a memorandum from the CRG, first published in 1957 as an appendix to the Dorking proceedings. The last three, published between 1995 and 1996, cover intelligent text processing, advanced searching, tricks of the trade, and users’ needs.

Mary Piggott

References