

Thirty-nine to one: indexing the novels of Angela Thirkell

Hazel K Bell

Describes the compilation of a cumulative index to 37 books and two batches of letters by Angela Thirkell, and considers what such an index may show about an author.

Angela Thirkell (AT) was born in 1890, granddaughter of the pre-Raphaelite painter, Sir Edward Burne-Jones. She embarked upon a career as an author at the age of 43, with two broken marriages behind her, to support herself and her sons financially. In the remaining 28 years of her life she wrote a total of 35 books, including a sequence of 29 novels set in 'Barssetshire', in succession to Anthony Trollope's, and one set in 1838. I have — voluntarily, uncommissioned — compiled a cumulative index to all her novels, two collections of her short stories, her biography of Harriette Wilson, her autobiographical account of her childhood, a satirical account of her emigration to Australia, and two batches of her letters. It runs to 34 x A4 pages in 4 columns, with a word count of over 35,000. Readers may well wonder, why do it?

In the first place, I maintain that fiction to which one frequently returns needs indexing as much as any form of non-fiction, to enable one to find passages one may recall and want to trace.

There is much in Thirkell that is worth the finding, and among 37 volumes that is no light task. Thirkell devotees would find it difficult, without benefit of my index, to know where AT writes of: Brahms, bridesmaids' dresses, the *British Medical Journal*, a Christening cake, couvade, Noël Coward, perpetual curates, the *Daily Express*, Sir Isaac Newton's dog, Easter Island, fathers of new babies, a foot-muff, the Frog prince, a gargoyle, grape scissors, a hat for a horse, jazz, Pepso bread, or the book a mother proposes to write, 'Why I hate my children'. I could look in my index and state just where they all are. I even indexed some lines that I thought too good to lose in the mass, such as the descriptions of Christmas as an 'odious and disrupting season'; London as 'land of lost delights' and 'transpontine Squattlesea'; the exact sciences as 'a subject that even Cambridge must be slightly ashamed of encouraging'; teaching as a profession in which 'you cannot like your colleagues or your pupils'; one girl as 'entirely uneducated — never any good at anything but

Lifelong indexing — continued

For Knight (Ch.2) 'the mechanics' consisted of printed page proofs, cards or slips (or gummed labels, or thumb-indexed notebooks, or shingled sheets), a wooden tray or a shoe-box, A-Z guide-cards, and a pen or typewriter. For Mulvany (Ch.10) the 'tools' can still include cards, but have extended into the use of computers for a variety of tasks. Many indexers currently work from printed page proofs, but supply their indexes on disk; increasingly — with more electronic documents being produced — texts are coming to indexers in electronic, rather than printed, form. In the lives of many current practitioners, there will undoubtedly be several further changes in document production and work organization to be absorbed. We shall have either to join in, to work with a gradually decreasing circle of clients, or to get out.

The important things remain the same: traditional values

The need to develop is not something which should cause us anxiety or promote insecurity. Far from it. Acquiring new knowledge is always interesting and can be fun — in this case it is financially rewarding, too. No matter how much our specialist subject fields advance, or how indexing practice changes, or what additional equipment we have to buy, the fundamental nature of indexing — the thing that makes it a very special activity for us — stays the same. We will always want to produce indexes which are accurate, comprehensively informative, user-friendly, good-looking, and worthy of the texts to which

they refer. That aim does not change, but we — the indexers, analysing the textual information, representing and mobilizing it, helping to take the message from writer to reader — must continue to develop throughout our working lives. New indexing? We'll be there!

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* No disrespect to the original dinosaurs, but they are extinct.

** 'Tending to take the initiative in making things happen, rather than waiting until they happen and then reacting' (John Ayto (1989). *The Longman register of new words*. Harlow: Longman.)

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mathematics'; and another kindly complimented, 'It is a certain air of arrested education about you that delights me'. (She marries someone else — why should that be?)

But an index, of course, does much more than locate specific items in a text. Another effect is to bring together all references to the same topic, thus showing, from the length of the collated entries, which themes and topics the author has the most to say about. The largest topic entries in my Thirkell index are those for: babies, baths, books, church, clothes, dogs, Latin, names, railways, schools, servants, weddings and women. Lists are built up of subjects classified together or as cross-references: for instance, my entry 'shops' has '*see also* butchers; chain stores; fish shops; Post Offices', and 'chain stores' has '*see also* Bostock & Plummer; Empire & Fireside Stores; Gaiters; Luke & Huxley's; Sheepshanks; Woolworths'. English shoppers will gleefully recognize the transmutation of names of genuine chains: Empire & Fireside must be Home and Colonial; Gaiters is surely Boots; Luke and Huxley's is Marks and Spencers (delightful — another gospel writer and 19th-century philosopher!); Sheepshanks is Woolworths.

The characters in the sequence of 29 novels set in 'Bassetshire' recur throughout (a period of 27 years is covered), and are already listed in *A guide to Bassetshire People* (Moreton and Draper 1993). I have included only particularly significant references to characters in my index; but have assembled lists of types as cross-references to that guide, such as:

butlers SEE Gudgeon; Horton; Peters; Simnett; Sparrow

doctors SEE James Ford; Morgan; Perry

Literary quotations

Then there is the sheer number of AT's references to writers and artists, and quotations from works of literature. Her prose is dense with quotation; I know of no author who quotes more profusely. These all show what were AT's favourite authors or quotations. A pamphlet, *Angela Thirkell and Charles Dickens* (Jeude 1992), tells us that AT uses 252 or more quotations from Dickens in her Bassetshire novels and makes 73 or more references to him; the greatest number of Dickens quotes are from *David Copperfield* (43); Mrs Gamp from *Martin Chuzzlewit* is referred to 24 times. Dickens is the champion in the Thirkell references lists, but I can name the runners-up.

Shakespeare is the first of them, with at least 89 references — 29 general, and another 60 dispersed among 21 of the plays. Chiefly featured are *As you like it* and *King Lear*; references to *Hamlet* are separated into: general/ film/ in Mixo-Lydia/ Ophelia.

AT well knows her Bible, and quotes it freely and deftly. I found some fifty references — with five to the Book of Proverbs — but there may well be more; many are esoteric and take research to recognize! A vicar's wife at a meeting 'said, Ha-ha! inside herself'. This comes from the Book of Job, where a horse 'saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha, and he smelleth the battle afar off'. Perhaps not many people know that. Dominance is often described like that of the WVS (Women's Voluntary Service) leader 'to whom the buying and checking of goods to be sold from the hospital trolleys were her washpot and over the pricing and selling of them did she cast out her shoe': the surely obscure reference is to Psalm number 60.

Anthony Trollope, the *fons et origo* of the Bassetshire novels, gets at least thirty references — they are difficult to differentiate,

with so many place and personal names duplicated! Alfred Lord Tennyson comes in 42 times: eleven of the references are to his long poem, 'Maud'. The match-making lines from 'Maud':

'Well, if it prove a girl, the boy
Will have plenty: so let it be'

are applied five times to three prospective couples. Robert Browning's works make 38 appearances (that I have noticed — maybe more). Of these, 'Soliloquy in a Spanish cloister' accounts for five; 'The lost mistress' for nine. 'Friends the merest / keep much that I resign' is said pathetically by three rejected lovers to their lost ladies; 'The silence grows to that degree ... its bosom does so heave' is applied to four couples.

AT's uncle Rudyard Kipling's works have 23 references in the novels, as well as several to him personally in *Three houses*, her account of her childhood. Lord Byron's relationship with Harriette Wilson is much traced in *The fortunes of Harriette*; his death is noted in *Coronation summer*; his poems are mentioned seven times in the Bassetshire novels. Macaulay's 'Horatius at the bridge' comes in twelve times. Sir Walter Scott has 20 references; Jane Austen, 15. Edward Gibbon (of *Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*) is mentioned nine times; Stella Gibbon (*Cold Comfort Farm*), five. W S Gilbert's *Bab Ballads* receive four mentions; the Gilbert & Sullivan operas, twenty.

But all these quotations had to be identified before they could be collated. I had decided to list all titles of works and quotations under their authors' names. This was making a rod for my own back!

Who said that?

AT assumes her readers' knowledge of all her favourite works; does not condescend to explain or expatiate. The poems, novels and pictures are not attributed to authors/ artists — if her readers fail to realize of whom she writes, AT merely despises them. Typical is:

"When James was quite little," said Lady Graham, "Mamma found a dead thrush on the window-sill and James was eating some chocolate pudding and mamma let him bury it in a boot-box."

Such educated members of the party as heard this remark felt that there were still milestones on the Dover Road and rejoiced accordingly, though to an ignorant generation this will mean nothing.'

'Educated' here implies, 'familiar with the works of Charles Dickens'.

Often references are merely hinted at, as, 'When we lived at Hendon Barnes's gander was stolen by tinkers' (quoting Mr F's Aunt in *Little Dorrit*); 'If there were a garden path I would sit down on it' (like Betsy Trotwood in *David Copperfield*, as we are not told). Laura Morland, in *Never too late*, experiences 'The *Schadenfreude* of the Dickens addict when other and less favoured human beings do not recognize his immortal work'.

It may be by no means apparent that a quotation is lurking in AT's prose; borrowed passages are woven gracefully into her narrative. 'Never had Miss Bunting in her long career had a pupil who had tasted honeydew with such vehemence, or drunk the milk of Paradise with such deep breaths and loud gulps' (from *Kubla Khan*, basically). Lady Emily's mother 'had not feared the furious winter's rages for nearly fifty years' (the phrase comes from a song in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*).

David Leslie, meeting Anne Fielding, 'had an impression that she had lived beside the springs of Dove' (like Wordsworth's Lucy Gray). "'Feeder has the rows, not me," said Mr Traill, as heedless of grammar as the Monks and Friars of Rheims' — of whom the uncredited poet Richard Barham told us that, on seeing the wasted form of the Jackdaw of Rheims, 'Heedless of grammar, they all cried, "THAT'S HIM!"'. Clarissa speaks of her ageing, confused grandmother as 'too too Mary Rose' (from AT's godfather, J M Barrie). 'It was the azalea's breath and she was dead,' murmurs the widowed Lord Crosse, 'looking out of the window onto the garden that he and his wife had planned and made and loved', as did Coventry Patmore in his poem, 'The Azalea'. 'To Susan at the moment there was nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon' (*Anthony & Cleopatra*).

Angela Thirkell's quotations may be not only unattributed but also deftly adapted for her purposes. 'Dawdle, the very word was like a knell,' to a schoolgirl, rather than 'Forlorn!', a very word said to be like a bell in Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'. 'The gods are just and of our pleasant vices do occasionally make something quite amusing' — in *King Lear* those gods instead 'make instruments to plague us'. Charles Belton is told, 'Your brother was full of ancestral voices prophesying woe' rather than war, like those in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*.

Quotations may even be mixed: 'The long winter of everyone's discontent like a very unpleasant snake dragged its slow length along' (Richard III meets Alexander Pope).

Many authors are denied their due credit. George Eliot is referred to only as Miss Mary Anne Evans in an eight-line passage, and her novel *Amos Barton* invoked three times, but not as such. There are several references to works by Charlotte Yonge and Richard Barham; but these are unattributed, may well not be realised. References are only to (Yonge's) *The Heir of Redclyffe* (five times); then we have, 'makes them both feel heroic and Daisy-Chain-ish' (another novel by Yonge) — no more. *The Ingoldsby Legends* are referred to five times in the Barchester novels, but their author, Barham, never named. John Buchan's hero, Richard Hannay has many references, but no details of titles or author given.

Even some of the novels' titles are borrowed, or twisted, from others. *Love among the ruins* was first the title of a picture by Thirkell's grandfather, Edward Burne-Jones. *Cheerfulness breaks in* is duly attributed on the copyright page as 'Mr Edwards to Dr Johnson': 'I have tried too in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in'. *O, these men, these men!* (not similarly attributed) is sighed by Shakespeare's Desdemona in her last scene before Othello comes to kill her. *The demon in the house* is a parody of Coventry Patmore's poem *Killing the angel in the house*.

Quotations from the literature of other languages are thrown in with equal negligence. Walking in the 'white unfamiliar' winter landscape with Noel, Lydia murmurs, 'It is all very solitaire et glacé'. Noel responds, 'If we are spectres évoquer-ing le passé, it is a very nice past'. They are quoting Paul Verlaine's poem, 'Colloque sentimental' — but not giving him the credit. For Latin: when a Canon hears Rose Fairweather prattle and laugh, 'an old tag from his schooldays came back to his mind', and he says, 'Lalage' — no more. The line invoked comes from Horace: 'Dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo, dulce loquentem'. To translate (taken from the *Oxford dictionary of quotations*): 'Still shall I love Lalage and her sweet laughter, Lalage and her sweet prattle'.

This was an index that required much research. The characters in the novels themselves indulge in conscious quoting and seeking of quotations, and many are keen crossword puzzle solvers!

AT also makes knowledgeable references to pictures and the world of art. A Rectory is described as 'not unlike "Bolton Abbey in the Olden Time"'. And if there are readers who do not know this picture ... we can, like Miss Fanny Squeers (of *Nicholas Nickleby*), only pity their ignorance and despise them.' A Nannie with her charges appears as 'a kind of Laocoon group'. The narrator of *Trooper to the Southern Cross* describes the picture 'with the medieval name of "Melencolia" by some Boche artist' that his wife brings with her to Australia: 'a sketch of a woman in an old-time kind of gown ... sitting all hunched up with a lot of things strewn about her and a kind of little flying fox up in the air holding a label to tell you the name of the picture.' (Sydney Customs officers query the importing of this picture, but she tells them, 'It's a family portrait, and that's my auntie and her flying fox that she makes a pet of', and is allowed through.)* The name Albrecht Dürer is not to be found in the book.

'Horrible modern English usage'

AT was intensely concerned over the abuse and deterioration of language, grammatical correctness and horrible 'Modern English usage'. This concern shows in the index. The entry for **language** has the subheadings:

agricultural; archaic; bad (*see also* swearing); Biblical; church; common idiom; mispronunciation; numbers, expressing; rhyme (Cockney / usage); *see also* English; French; German; grammar; Greek; Latin; pronunciation

There are also entries for Fowler, H.W., French, German, Greats, Greek, and an extensive one for **latin**, covering grammar, jokes, parody, learning/ teaching, pronunciation, reading, reciting, rhymes, and women (with cross-references to Greats, Horace and Virgil).

Some particular bogies of vocabulary are included in the index, because I feel AT's comments on looking up those terms are well worth the finding. There are 'actually'; fiancée, which leads to, 'the dreadful word fiancée (and what we can do about it we really do not know)'; 'fridge' ('that horrible word'); furniture names ('Mrs Belton wished that she could stop Mr Adams calling a sofa a couch ... wondering why such very small things as the name of a piece of furniture should matter. For the fact remains that they do matter.');

genteelisms; lounge (in direct narrative, 'still we cannot say lounge'); marge ('an underbred word, but it has come to stay'); 'sort of' ('Young people appear incapable of speech without that meaningless qualifying phrase').

The entry for **pronunciation** has many caustic entries under the subheadings BBC and controversy, with a cross-reference to latin.

Subheadings and what they show

Subheadings devised to differentiate references for long index entries covering copiously treated topics can of course prove most illuminating to read through, clearly showing the author's attitudes and interests. Here are some examples of subheadings from the Thirkell index.

clergy: Canons, celibacy; clothes (*see also* gaiters); country; curates, perpetual; induction; lower-class; names; padres; Rectors and Vicars; unsatisfactory; in war; wives (sub-sub clothes); women adoring; *see also* church/es

servants: address by; club; confronting; AT's daily help; dismissing; introducing; loyalty; managing; marrying/leaving; nostalgia for; obtaining; quarrelling; retired; rivalry; training; transgressions; unmarried mothers; in wartime. *see also* bells; butlers; chauffeurs; cooks; footmen; gardeners; maids; Nannies

women: adoring clergy; Australian view of; beauty; church-going; clever/knowledgeable; doctors; dons; dress; educated; efficiency; firm handling of (This one has several sub-subheadings: 'I needed beating'; 'a true woman who adored the hand that held her in check'; beating, desirability of; 'at once licking the hand that beat her'; 'like a true woman licking the hand that chastised her'; 'licking the hand that held the whip, like a true woman'; masochists; 'need beating'; 'if necessary beat her'; 'need riding to subdue'; self-abasement, 'peculiar passion for'; subjection [enlightening subheadings indeed!] 'in forces; friendship; in government; idealised by younger men; and Latin; middle-aged heroines; non-technical; organisers / village leaders; readers; rich; rivals; sharing home; unescorted; at university; after war; working/careers, ubiquitous; *see also* housewives; mothers; WI; widows; witches; wives; WVS

Autobiography in Bassetshire

I find my composite index particularly interesting as showing where topics that have been treated in AT's writing about her real life — *Three houses*, her account of her childhood (Thirkell 1931); *Baby, Mother and Grandmother* (Thirkell 1982), her letters to her mother detailing her third son's infant years; and her letters to her friend and typist written during the last ten years of her life, in her sixties — appear again in fiction. There is much autobiography, and nostalgia, to be found in the Thirkell fiction.

Childhood

First, AT's childhood memories, recounted in her earliest book, *Three houses* (Thirkell 1931). I put references to this in bold type in the index, so they can be easily detected and compared with fictional entries. For example, there AT writes of 'the silver eggspoon which my brother put down the hole of the rocking-horse's pommel, and nothing would get it out'. This is recalled in her early novel, *Wild Strawberries*, in the Graham children's nursery: 'A large dappled rocking-horse with fiery nostrils stood in one corner. The pommel had long since been lost, and down its socket a good deal of property had been lost ... Part of a doll's tea-set and two nursery teaspoons were known to be in Dobbin's stomach, and no power on earth had been able to get them out'. So in the index:

rocking-horse: **TH 19; WS 60-1**

Of her nursery wall-paper AT writes in *Three houses*, 'One occupation I can thoroughly recommend if your heartless parents send you to bed while it is still light. You lick your finger and rub it up and down on the Morris wallpaper. Presently the paper begins to come off in rolls and you can do this till you have removed so much of the pattern that your mother notices it.' In *Three score and ten*, AT's last novel, Lord Stoke reminisces, 'I can remember the pattern of my nursery wallpaper as if it was yesterday. If Nurse put me in the corner I used to lick my finger and rub it up and down the wallpaper. I got quite a lot off that way till Nurse told my mother' (Thirkell and Lejeune 1961).

In AT's nursery, she tells us, 'was a small recess into which I was put when I had offended ... fenced in with a chair and left to repentance' (Thirkell 1931) Grandfather Burne-Jones, filled

with pity, 'took his paint box into my corner and painted a cat, a kitten playing with its mother's tail, and a flight of birds, so that I might never be unhappy in my corner again'. In *The Old Bank House* Agnes Graham reminds the housekeeper how 'when darling Clarissa was a baby, Mama painted pictures in all the corners of the nursery so that if she was put in a corner for being naughty she would not feel dull'.

In *Three houses*, AT tells us that as a child, 'I took a couple of ginger-nuts to bed to make them soft and malleable. In the morning it was my pleasure to roll them into sausages, or mould them into balls, or into the likeness of the human face'. In *What did it mean?* (1954) Lydia remembers doing the same: 'In the morning one could squish them up and make animals and faces with them, only nurse said not to'. Thus my index reads,

biscuits / ginger: **TH 119; WDM 13**

Baby care

There is much in the novels about courtship, marriage and the care of babies (or delegation of such care to nannies) in Bassetshire. As for AT's own care of her baby, in *Baby, Mother and Grandmother* we have the letters she wrote as a young mother from Australia, to her mother in London, during the years of Lance Thirkell's infancy — 1921-5. The letters are charming, and foreshadow the many delightful, tender descriptions of babies in AT's novels.

She writes in 1921 of her son Lance sleeping 'with both arms out, flung about anywhere with starfish hands', and 'flung up above his head or starfish on the eiderdown'. 'I see two feet waving over the edge of the cot, and then two hands waving about till they catch the feet', and, 'He has just found his feet and when sat up among cushions he bends cautiously over till he can see a woolly boot and then moves it very slowly and gingerly backwards and forwards with a stupified expression.' These descriptions seem to foretell many of the starfish-handed babies of Bassetshire, particularly small Harry Merton, who in *Private enterprise*, published in 1947, was 'lying on his back on a rug, waving his hands about with a general air of wondering where these starfish creatures had come from. ... he managed to catch one of his fat feet in his fat hands and was a good deal surprised by what he had done'; and little Philip Carter in *Growing up*, 'lying on his back holding his own toes and quite unable to account for their presence in his cot'.

AT tells her mother that her baby son 'talks most exquisitely in the loveliest voice I have ever heard. Fluting is a coarse expression for its sweetness.' Later, in *County Chronicle*, she tells her readers how the Dale twin babies, after their christening, 'began the one to talk melodious rubbish, the other to emit fluting squeaks of happiness'. The concern with Lance's vaccinations, and whether they will 'take', is reflected in anxieties about the vaccinating of Sybil Coates's baby in *Demon in the House*.

Professional representation

AT represents herself in the novels in the person of **Laura Morland**, a widowed novelist who like AT must write to pay for the education of her sons. So clearly is Laura Morland the professional novelist and alter ego as seen by Angela Thirkell that I made a long (though not full) entry for her alone among the characters of Bassetshire. Her subheadings in the index are:

Morland, Laura: articles; books (with sub-subheadings — 'all the same'; bad; earning power; 'extra', 'Molly Bangs';

'only pot-boilers'; own attitude to; 'rubbishy'; 2nd-rate; son's attitude to; 'under another name') career; clothes; fan mail; hair; handbag contents; 'other or writing self'; papers, sorting; personal life; publisher, relations with; refuses marriage proposals; as single mother; typewriter, difficulties with

Later life

When we come to AT's last work, the first five chapters of *Three score and ten* (Thirkell and Lejeune 1961), written at the age of 69, we find very sad reading. This novel was completed by C A Lejeune after AT's death in 1961 (Lejeune 1964) and published posthumously. I put any references to Lejeune's chapters in brackets in the index, and will refer here only to AT's own part.

Three score and ten frequently moves into the first person — almost late autobiography. AT, in the person of Laura, now in her seventieth year, remembers her childhood and schooldays, familiar to us from *Three houses* and earlier novels. I found that I made many references to the same subjects in AT's chapters of this book and the letters she wrote in her last years to Margaret Bird, her friend and typist: there is an astonishing amount of overlap, which made it worth including these letters in the index, for purposes of comparison. References in the index to these letters, (published in the *Journal of the Angela Thirkell Society*) are in brackets, located by date of month and year.

In a letter dated 3 Jan 1957, AT writes, 'My Leg is playing up, just to show. But half the elderly women in Chelsea have a limp or a shuffle.' And on 17 Dec. 1958: 'I hobble — luckily I have my grandmother's umbrella with a long handle and a crook at the top which makes a nice crutch.'

In *Three score and ten* we find: 'Elderly women are much more apt than men to "Have a leg" ... to use a very old expression for limping — dot and carry one. Going as we do up and down the main shopping street of the pleasant suburb of Riverside where we live, most of us — that is the elderly — are furnished with a stout stick, or, as in our own case, the tall parasol of one's grandmother. It is a fine upstanding creature with a strong crook handle. The ex-parasol, re-covered with black, supports our rather rickety footsteps when we aren't using it to shelter us from unexpected rain.' So my index has,

parasols/umbrellas: (LMB) 12.58; TST 60

A letter of 8 January 1960: 'They are removing our pretty gas lamps and replacing them by those awful tall electric lamp posts that shine into all the bedroom windows.' In *Three score and ten*: 'Our local Council has caused the charming elegant Victorian gas lamps in our street to be dismantled and has put up in their place very powerful and hideous electric standards whose light shines ferociously into our front bedroom windows'. In my index:

street lamps: (LMB) 1.60; TST 139

Multiple references

Duplicated references coming together in the index show the amount of repetition AT fell back on as she aged and wearily continued to write. The falling back on repetition of well-told tales is matched by the increasing use of quotation in the later novels. Edith Jeude reports: 'Mrs Thirkell increased the number of Dickensisms as she continued to write. The first fifteen of her Bassetshire novels contain only 78 Dickens references: the last fourteen bulge with 246! *Love at all ages* (her last completed novel) has 48 (Jeude 1992).

Multiple references also show the close relations of certain novels — *Love at all ages* (1959), for instance, draws on and recalls *Pomfret Towers*, published in 1967. *Three score and ten*, AT's last novel, looks back to *Demon in the house*, her short stories published 24 years earlier in 1934. There are sequels within the Bassetshire sequence.

Social history

As well as showing so much of AT's personal life, her novels are illuminating about social history; the first was published in 1933, and each successive one is set in the year before its publication — prewar, wartime and postwar. In my index you can look up: air raid precautions, dummy books on book-case doors, button boots, cami-knickers, clothing coupons, dowagers, food rationing, ginger beer bottles, goat carts, an Ideal boiler, lorgnettes, parasol whip, smoking jackets, a speaking-trumpet, a stamp-wetter, stays, telephone party lines, a weighing-chair, and all those references to servants.

References in the index to *Coronation summer*, the novel set in 1838, and to *The fortunes of Harriette*, the biography of a Regency courtesan (both scrupulously researched by AT), lend a historical perspective. There are subheadings, '18th-century' or 'Victorian', for: art; Cambridge; clothes; daughters; dogs, care of; dressmakers; dustmen; fathers; governesses; London; novels; opera; police; racing; railways; rowing match; street lighting; tea-making. The total references for Byron, Canning, Dickens, Disraeli, Palmerston, Scott and Thackeray are increased. References to *Trooper to the Southern Cross*, AT's satirical account of her sea journey to Australia, broadens the geographical range, gives new subheadings, 'Australian' under etiquette, food, stained-glass windows, swearing, wives and women, and 'on shipboard' under baths, cats, children, dances, dentistry; lends a contrasting mood, with more sombre entries added to those for alcoholism, ambulances in wartime, Roman Catholic church; and throws new light on AT with unexpected new entries such as belts as weapons, bottles as weapons, female impersonation, street fighting.

I begin to wonder how anyone can attempt literary criticism *without* indexing the work in hand. First compile your index ...

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* A reproduction of Dürer's 'Melencolia', and an article on its contents, appear in *The Indexer* 13 (1) April 1982, 6-25.

Hazel Bell is a freelance indexer and former editor of The Indexer. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the eighth meeting of the Angela Thirkell Society North American Branch, Santa Monica, CA, 14 March 1998.