

History of Indexing Societies: Part III

Society of Indexers 1968-1977

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This part of the History returns to the Society of Indexers in the UK and traces a further ten years of development.

We left the Society of Indexers (SI), at the end of Part I of this history (in *The Indexer* 20 (3)), at its AGM in 1967, celebrating its first ten years' development. Progress continued through the following decade.

SI was proved well recognized when an under-stamped letter from Northern Ireland, addressed only: CONFIDENTIAL/TO SIR OR MADAM / SOCIETY OF INDEXERS, was properly delivered by the Post Office.

The category of Life Member was introduced, and urged upon members: 'We recommend this form of membership; ten times the annual subscription could — especially in days of inflation — prove an economy in the long run'. Indeed it did, to members who opted for the payment of ten times the annual subscription in a single payment — and caused a considerable financial loss to SI through the succeeding years, as subscription rates rose.

James C. Thornton, the first Vice-Chairman of SI, then its Chairman, who succeeded Gordon Carey as SI President, died in 1969. Carey and Norman Knight attended his Memorial Service at All Souls', Langham Place. The end of the same year saw the death of Carey, SI's first President. His Memorial Service at Eastbourne College was attended by Knight.

At the following AGM, in 1970, Knight was elected SI President. 'He said that the Society had awarded to him the greatest honour it was in their power to bestow; it gave him intense pleasure and he was deeply grateful'.

Technology

The inexorable coming of the computer continued. The index to volume 6 of *The Indexer*, 1968-9, shows articles titled: Computers and indexes; Computer indexing of archives; Computerized data processing for *British Technology Index*; Computerized data banks in science and technology. The first was 'a most erudite talk [by Helen Townley] on the impact of computers in the next decade', which 'expressed the belief that "human" indexing would continue at least for ten years — or more — in the non-technical fields'. There was also an entry, 'Computers, errors by': a gleeful listing by Knight of three 'ludicrous blunders' by computers (one a sustained typo), on which he commented, 'It may be asked if an instrument that is capable of such egregious errors can be trusted to compile an index'.

Internationalism

The society continued to spread through the world. The affiliation of the American Society of Indexers was welcomed in the Editorial of the autumn 1969 *Indexer*, and its constitution and rules printed in full in the spring 1970 issue. The April 1972 issue, 8 (1), had articles titled, 'Indexing in Israel', 'Indexing in Southern Africa', 'Current American Trends in Indexing', and (my favourite) 'Room for improvement in Australia'; the next, 8 (2), included 'Indexing in Canada' and 'Book indexing in the USSR'. 1977 saw the affiliation of the Australian Society (as recorded in part II of this history, *The Indexer* 20 (4)).

The Wheatley Medal

1968 brought glad tidings, with the award of the Wheatley Medal for Indexing (for 1967) for the first time to a member of the Society of Indexers — and none other than its own founder and Vice-President, G. Norman Knight. The award was for his compilation of the index to *Winston S. Churchill ... volume 2, Young statesman, 1901-1919* (Bancroft 1967). Knight professed himself delighted — 'I reckon this conferment as about the happiest happening of my life ... For the rest of my life it will remain a source of the utmost pride' — as well as relieved, recalling the failure to find a worthy winner of the award for its first two years, followed by three years of 'author-indexers as the winners — a triumph of the amateur over the professional'. Knight had spoken to SI of his work compiling this index, in a paper reproduced in *The Indexer* of Autumn 1966 (Knight, 1966). The runner-up, highly commended, was A.R. Hewitt, also an SI Vice-President, for his index to *Grand Lodge, 1717-1967*.

The following year again saw an SI founder-member-winner: Doreen Blake, together with Professor Ruth Bowden, for their cumulative 100-year index to the *Journal of Anatomy* (Blake 1968). For 1969 the Medal was awarded posthumously to James Thornton, for the indexes to Volume 2 of *The letters of Charles Dickens* (Clarendon Press).

'Criteria for awarding the Wheatley Medal' was the subject of a joint meeting of SI and the Cataloguing and Indexing Group (CIG) of the Library Association (LA) in March 1968. The subject was 'warmly and lengthily aired, summing up present dissatisfactions with what many members consider the restrictive terms of the award', according to the Report of Council. The discussion was reported over three pages in *The Indexer* of Autumn 1968 (63-6). Richard Bancroft, in the Chair, read out with comments the ten criteria used by the panel. Peter

Lewis of the CIG suggested that the award held little interest for librarians, whose indexes 'were different from book indexes, and were concerned with information from whatever source, relating them to the context from which they came, a larger context of the world and knowledge generally. The book index tended to be related to the author's intentions, whereas the librarian's tended to relate back to information generally. Librarians were not compilers primarily, but extractors of information.' Their indexes tended to be ineligible for the Wheatley Medal, as were indexes made as part of a corporate effort, and scientific and highly technical works. Knight commented that he thought it admirable that collaborators in an index should receive an award, but that seemed a separate matter from an index, and should receive a second, separate award from the LA. Ken Bakewell finally proposed 'That every index published in Britain should be eligible for the Wheatley Medal', which was carried.

Debate about the criteria continued, including the possibility of presentation of a Bronze Award for a second work of outstanding merit. Revised conditions and new arrangements for inviting recommendations were established for 1970 (printed in *The Indexer* 7 (2), 58-9). Further revisions appeared in 8 (2), 112.

The first Medal to be awarded under the new conditions, for 1970, went to a separately-published index, E.L.C. Mullins's *Guide to the historical and archaeological publications of societies in England and Wales 1901-1933* (Mullins 1972). For 1971 there were only two high commendations; no medal awarded. No award again the following year (and only nine nominations). Mullins, the winner for 1970, reviewed the eight award-winning indexes to date at SI's AGM of 1972 (disingenuously opening, 'No member of the Society of Indexers, looking at my index and marvelling at the mysterious ways of the committee who awarded it the Wheatley Medal, could fail to recognize it as the work of an amateur'; Mullins, 1972). For 1973, for the first time, there were two winners, both chartered librarians: K. Boodson for the index to *Non-ferrous metals: a bibliographical guide* (of which he was the author) (Boodson 1975); and L.M. Harrod for the index to *History of the King's Works, volume 6, 1782-1851*. Further controversy followed. J.F.W. Bryon wrote 'An open letter to the Wheatley Medal Committee', claiming that he had initiated the concept of making an annual award to encourage better indexing of books, but had intended the medal to go to publishers, not indexers, and never for separately published indexes. A meeting was held to discuss the question, in 1975, with four speakers, whose papers appear in *The Indexer* 9 (3) April 1975, 101-7.

For 1974 the highest number to date of nominations for the medal was received — 39. It went to C. C. Banwell for the index to a legal work, *Encyclopedia of forms and precedents*. For 1975 the medal was won by SI Vice-President Margaret Anderson for her index to Judith Butcher's *Copy-editing: the Cambridge handbook*. For 1976 it went to John A. Vickers for the index to volume 11 of *The works of John Wesley: the appeals to men of reason and religion and certain related open letters*.

In 1971 Council began considering the institution of an Award in memory of G.V. Carey, but was anxious to avoid its competing with the Wheatley Medal. The three possibilities were an award for services to indexing, for an outstanding body of work, or for indexing in the scientific field (*The Indexer* 7 (4), 183-4).

The Register

SI's Register was first established in 1968. It necessitated an amendment to SI's Constitution, which had provided instead for the appointment of Fellows; a Special General Meeting was called to approve this. All members (over a hundred) of SI's existing Panel of Indexers became entitled to call themselves 'Registered Indexer of the Society of Indexers'. A Board of Assessors (seven) was appointed to 'consider applications and recommendations for inclusion in a Register of Indexers'. The ten 'Rules for the maintenance and administration of the Register of Indexers' are printed in *The Indexer* Spring 1969 6 (3), 127-8. They include specification of what the Board must take into account in considering applications: 'the competence of the candidate as an indexer, his or her past work, academic or professional qualifications and status, and other relevant matter'. The Board may 'include in the Register the names of persons distinguished in the field of indexing without calling for' such proof or evidence: honorary RI status is conferrable.

In the first year of the Register, nine applicants were assessed, of whom four were accepted, making a total of 117 RIs. Sixty-three requests were received from publishers, chiefly in the field of science. In 1970 a note appeared in *The Indexer*, 'For the time being, Mrs Elizabeth Wallis is maintaining the Register of Indexers and dealing with enquiries from publishers'. (At the time of writing, 1998, this Registrar is still in post.) By 1972 there were over 100 Registered Indexers, and nearly 300 requests had been received from publishers. Elizabeth Wallis wrote about the Register and its administration in *The Indexer* (Wallis 1972).

Training

L. M. Harrod continued to run short annual courses in indexing, in London. The course was published in 1968 by M.I.T. Press: *Training in indexing*, edited by G. Norman Knight. Richard Bancroft, SI Chairman, reviewed it in *The Indexer* of spring 1969: 'the almost complete text of a recent course, the first publication in book form entirely on indexing by members of the society'.

The eighth course, held in 1970 at the North-Western Polytechnic, London, was featured in detail over three pages in *The Indexer* 7 (2), 60-2. Two courses were held in 1971 — introductory and advanced; they were the last of the series. Harrod wrote an account of the Society's training activities in the April 1972 *Indexer* (Harrod 1972), and explained that the short, London-based courses were to be discontinued, replaced by a correspondence course in indexing. He looked forward to the establishment of examinations in book indexing, with SI as the examining body, aiming at 'the highest possible standard of qualification', with degrees of Register membership — 'associate for those qualified by examination, fellowship for those with outstanding contributions to indexing in addition'. He concluded, 'With an examination system, the Society could be considered a professional body and could then proceed to formulate and if necessary enforce a code of conduct to be expected of its members'.

The correspondence course in indexing, as an introduction to the basic principles and techniques of indexing, was written by Margaret Anderson and administered by the Rapid Results College from 1973. Enrolment figures for the years 1973-6 were 78, 42, 61.

Copyright

Knight took up the cause of copyright for indexers in 1970, beginning with two pages in *The Indexer* 7 (1), 'The problem of copyright — an indexer's triumph', citing the Copyright Acts of 1911 and 1956, and recounting his own obtaining of £10 from a publisher in return for assigning his copyright to a biography that was to be reprinted in New York. The question of indexers' copyright was discussed by Council, and Knight wrote to *The Times* on the subject, his letter appearing on 27 January 1972. A legally worded Agreement was proposed 'as a model for those members of the Society who are disposed to sell the copyright in their indexes'. In *The Indexer* of October 1972 the topic was argued over seven pages by eight correspondents, with detailed 'Counsel's opinion' on existence, ownership, and assignment of copyright, and existing and future contracts, finally asserting, 'I therefore conclude that an index is the subject of copyright, independent from that in the appurtenant text. Where the indexer is a freelance contractor, and not an employee of the publisher, then the copyright vests in the indexer, whether or not he was commissioned to do the work, and remains his until he disposes of it'.

In 1971 for the first time SI interceded officially in a dispute between indexer and publisher, over difficulty in obtaining payment. In 1973 SI first appointed an Honorary Solicitor to advise members.

SI celebrated Knight's 80th birthday in 1972 with a luncheon at Schmidt's Restaurant attended by some forty members. In his acknowledgement to the toast, he observed that he had attended almost all the 74 meetings of Council in the 14 years since its founding, and all SI's other meetings except two (when he had been in hospital).

The Indexer

The society's journal continued to appear twice yearly, edited throughout the period by L.M. Harrod. It expanded from 40 pages in spring 1968 to 56 in October 1977. For the autumn 1968 issue 320 copies went each to UK addresses and overseas. More than 1200 copies of the spring 1971 issue were distributed, 700 abroad (Harrod 1971).

The journal regularly included reports of SI Council and AGMs, news of the American Society of Indexers, letters, book reviews, and extracts from press reviews commenting on indexes. There were many articles on indexing practice and principles: these included papers read at SI's discussion meetings and those by speakers at two all-day conferences; lectures from the training courses; Wheatley medallists' accounts of their winning work (Blake, 1968; Boodson, 1975). Bernard Levin cited Peter Broxiss's 'Syntactic and semantic relationships' as an example of 'articles so learned they make my ears sing' (Levin 1977). The longest was J. Edwin Holmstrom's 'The indexing of multi-author, multi-volume and periodical publications' in the April 1972 issue: 13 pages of text with 20 pages of illustrations inserted. Extracts from the memoirs of Knight and Carey appeared; the theme of authors as indexers constantly recurred.

Harrod spoke about the editing of *The Indexer* to the SI AGM in 1971. He recounted his 'most troublesome problem' as having been when 'type was being set from copy made by an electrostatic process. The typesetter had to wipe the page with

his handkerchief for some reason, and as the handkerchief moved quickly across the page, so the image disappeared. All that was left was my ink corrections to what was not there!' Another copy could not be obtained until the deputy editor returned from a three-week holiday (Harrod 1971).

Several symposia were organized, each stemming from a theme sent by a member. In spring 1968 Oliver Stallybrass proposed 'An unusual method of making a book index': the use of a thumb-indexed notebook (*Indexer* 1968). His two pages describing the advantages of this system were followed by comments of 15 contributors, including, from Neil Fisk, the acerbic: 'I agree with Mr Stallybrass that "Nobody who is incapable of copying a three-figure number correctly should be making an index at all", but I would add that nobody who leaves in the British Museum "a wodge of cards" containing the results of his professional work is fit to be out by himself'. In autumn 1969 eight members explained 'Why I am an indexer' (three mothers at home with young children; one 'desire for hidden influence' (*Indexer* 1969); one seeker for spare-time work; two given indexing as part of their employment by publishers, one as a librarian; *The Indexer* 1969). In April 1974 K.G.B. Bakewell started the ball rolling on 'The inadequacies of book indexes', on which seven others sent their views (*Indexer* 1974a). In the next issue five others commented on Alison Quinn's proposed topic, 'Selective indexing' (*Indexer* 1974b), with another four in the following issue (April 1975).

Publications

Some classic textbooks on indexing appeared during these years — in addition to *Training in indexing*, referred to above.

The twelfth edition of *A manual of style* from The University of Chicago Press was published in 1969, including a new 32-page section, 'Indexes' ('also being published separately'). It was reviewed over two pages in *The Indexer* 7 (1) by Knight, who thought 'it contains a great number of useful hints and pertinent observations', but cited ten instances where American practice as there prescribed differed from the UK's, concluding, 'it should suffice to warn the aspiring indexer that he must not in every case be beguiled by the seductive wording and authoritative manner in which the *Manual's* recommendations are couched'. In a letter in the following *Indexer*, J. Arthur Greenwood suggested, 'You let Chicago off rather lightly in your review. Herewith my caveats', with two pages of further criticism.

Margaret D. Anderson's *Book indexing* was published by Cambridge University Press, in succession to Carey's earlier pamphlet in their Guides Series, *Making an index*, in 1971. Harrod reviewed it: 'It covers the whole field of book indexing, stating theories and describing practices in a most workmanlike way. ... the distillation of the experience of one of our most industrious indexers'.

Indexing for editors by R.F. Hunnisett came from the British Records Association in 1972. John Shaftlesey gave it a three-page review, calling it 'extremely useful ... highly instructive ... scholarly'.

Michael Wace greeted Judith Butcher's *Copy-editing: the Cambridge handbook* in 1975 as 'a comprehensive guide to all aspects of the editorial process ... an excellent book', stating, 'The section on indexes is a useful digest of the generally accepted arrangement and style which are to be found in

contemporary books on indexing'. For the index to this volume, Margaret Anderson won the Wheatley Medal.

The British Standard on Indexing, *Recommendations for the preparation of indexes* of 1964 was revised (as BS 3700 : 1976), and Harrod and Mary Piggott, SI representatives on the BS Committee that drew up the Standard, spoke about it to a meeting in 1977 (*The Indexer* 10 (4), 186-91). Harrod and Piggott also represented SI on the BSI Documentation Standards Committee, and Peter Broxis represented SI on the BSI Panel on Thesauri and Indexing Principles.

SI's first publication (apart from *The Indexer* and earlier offprints) was a discussion paper, *Problems in determining fees for indexing*, by R.S. Haig-Brown, circulated to members in 1976.

In 1970 Harrod became SI's Librarian, authorised to spend £10 per year. He was succeeded in 1976 by Mary Piggott.

Growth

Local groups began in 1976, when the society's first was formed in Merseyside by Ken Bakewell, and Jean Simpkins started a local newsletter in Reading.

The Society began to achieve publicity in the national press and to acquire champions. *The Indexer* of April 1977 reprinted articles by Frank Kermode from the *Daily Telegraph* ('Getting in by the back door'; 20 Nov. 1976), and Bernard Levin from *The Times* ('A haunting, I promise, for those who refuse to tell who's who and what's what'; 17 Dec. 1976). Kermode calls good indexes 'brief abstracts of learning'. Levin, in an early example of what were to be many splendid declamations by this journalist on SI's behalf, led off with 'One of the things I am going to do before I die is to achieve the restoration of capital punishment for publishers and authors who put forth their works without an index'. Less welcome were 'an unsolicited reference to the Society' in *Woman's Own*, followed by a misleadingly produced feature on BBC 4's 'Woman's Hour' in January 1977, which led to 'a spate of 756 enquiries', deemed inappropriate. Elizabeth Wallis, complained to the BBC Programmes Complaints Commission that she and the Society had been unfairly treated. The report and adjudication issued by the Commission were reproduced in *The Indexer* (Wallis 1978). 11 (2) Oct. 1978, 110-12.

Carey award

By 1977 Council had decided the form that its Carey award should take, honouring the name of SI's first President, and being the first award SI offered (the Wheatley medal was awarded by the LA). It was to be 'made occasionally to recognize outstanding services to indexing'. The October 1977 *Indexer* announced its award — the first — to be made to G. Norman Knight. It consisted of 'a framed parchment, appropriately worded and beautifully illuminated', reproduced in the journal, presented by Ken Bakewell, then SI Chairman. Knight commented, 'It will go handsomely with my Wheatley Medal. Wild horses would not drag out of me which of the two I value more highly'.

Conferences

SI's first national conference was held in London, 20 March 1976, with four speakers (reported in *The Indexer* 10 (2) Oct. 1976, 88-95). The first regional conference followed in March 1977, in Edinburgh. Again, four speakers included John Ainsworth Gordon, SI's Secretary since 1975 (Gordon 1977). He observed that this conference was being held exactly 20 years after the inaugural meeting of SI in London, and reviewed those years of SI's development, claiming its achievements to be: that indexers need never again feel professionally isolated; *The Indexer*, 'a professional journal which builds up into an encyclopaedia of indexing and a treasure-store of information'; the publication and revision of BSI's authoritative recommendations on the technical standards required for the indexing of books and periodicals; the Register; the affiliation of ASI and AusSI, and, soon IASC; the training correspondence course administered by the Rapid Results College; and the awards of the Wheatley Medal (Gordon, 1977).

The AGM in 1977 saw SI with 400 members, 108 RIs, a growth of enquiries from Continental publishers, and its journal circulating to more than 50 countries. Its Chairman was Ken Bakewell, Secretary John Ainsworth Gordon. It awaited its 21st anniversary conference, to be its first international one, attended by representatives from ASI, AusSI, and the newly established Canadian IASC. To be continued ...

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