The Indexer thirty-odd years ago

The spring and autumn issues (still so denominated) of *The Indexer* for 1967, Volume 5, Nos. 3 and 4, were edited by L.M. Harrod, with 48 and 56 pages respectively.

The first, like the previous issue, opened with a long (seven pages) article by the latest winner of the Wheatley Medal. Alison Quinn described her work on 'The Modern Index to Richard Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations*'(of 1589, with both Latin and English text; the volume edited by her husband). Some 10,000 (5" x 3") cards were used, in two filing drawers supplemented by shoeboxes. A typist was employed to help with the final transmission to page papers for the printer, who typed the persons and places, while the indexer herself typed the subjects and the entries for persons 'long and complicated enough to rank as subjects'. Even so, 'It took the typist from A to C to become accustomed to my writing and the shape of the entries'.

The indexing entailed much research: 'I had to remind myself that what I was supposed to be doing was indexing and not literary appreciation or even making a glossary'. Some expert information was incorporated into the index. 'However,' Quinn observed, 'an index is not the most satisfactory medium through which to present the fruits of investigation. It is much too arbitrary, while footnotes to an index does not commend itself as an innovation'. As a spinoff from the work of the indexing, a series of studies of Hakluyt was published.

Robert Collison wrote of 'Indexing deeds and documents', urging the desirability of this (with six historical documents reproduced) and the need for national coordination. He suggested 'a pilot project conducted on standard principles', with the Society of Indexers to draft the code and seek a grant to launch the project. 'The Society might then feel sufficiently encouraged to establish further individual projects, or more intensive efforts over a larger area. What better way could there be to demonstrate that indexing has far wider horizons than books and periodicals, and that its potentialities as a powerful aid to research have yet to be realised or even tapped?'

C.H.J. Kyte wrote of 'The Times index', observing that the title should have been in the plural: 'Since the paper was first published in 1785 there have been a number of attempts to compile an index to the contents of its columns'. He spoke first of Samuel Palmer's series of indexes from 1868 on. Some of his entries have become much quoted classics, such as 'Disgraceful act' as the subject heading for the loosing from its moorings of a floating chapel, or 'Rather uncommon for females' for two women's crimes. The current indexing procedure for the newspaper was then described: bi-monthly, by a team of seven, on 7" x 5" slips. A volume contained around 30,000 entries; printing and binding took 6-7 weeks. Kyte observed, 'Life would be much easier were all newspaper indexers gifted with foresight! Unlike indexing a book, where you know that the contents are not going to change, the newspaper indexer never knows where a news story is going to lead.'

A new series, 'Indexing masterpieces', featured 'Dr Powell's index to Boswell's *Life of Johnson*'. The article was the work of Esmond de Beer, indexer of the diary of John Evelyn in 1955, and was devoted to L.F. Powell's index to his own six-volume revision of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. De Beer declared,

> The index reflects the conversable character of the book to which it is attached: one dips into it, dallies, falls a willing victim, looks up reference after reference ... The more carefully one examines it the greater one's conviction that the index is a most efficient and most appropriate complement to the text. ... Dr Powell excels in the typography of the longer complex entries ... To facilitate consultation of the very long articles on the major characters, letters, corresponding to the initials of the keywords of the entries, are inserted in their appropriate places; these, and the important keywords themselves, are printed in heavy type.

Two full pages of the index are reproduced.

In an article reprinted from *Punch*, Alan Brien complained bitterly of the lack of indexes in scholarly books. He quoted some appealing or provocative index headings that might lure the casual book-shop browser to pay his money:

> Adam, his eldest daughter's hat exhibited Creation, what was God doing before the?

There were shorter articles on Spanish surnames, indexes to children's books ('However simple the book, however inexpensive the production, please, *it must have an index*'), time-saving hints for beginners, and the administration of 'The Society's Panel of Indexers' (the precursor of the Register). G. Norman Knight quoted varying reviews of his index to a history of opera (from 'the finest index I have come across in any book of this type' to 'we wonder whether the compiler has ever been inside an opera house'). There were reports of bodies working on standards: BSI was revising BS 1749, and both the Library Association and the American Standards Association were studying filing rules for manual and computer-sorted systems. News of the Society included its 10th AGM and sixth training course.

The second issue of the year completed the volume (of 208 pages), and included the volume index (three pages), compiled by F.H.C. Tatham.

The opening article was the second (and, as it proved, final) instalment of the intended series, 'Indexing Masterpieces'. James Thornton examined the index prepared by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn to their own 38-volume Library Edition of the Works of Ruskin (the 689-page index, published in 1912, constituted the final, 39th volume). Thornton himself had indexed the centenary edition of *The complete works of William Hazlitt*. He made cogent comments on the art of indexing in general, particularly of huge bodies of work. He urged the necessity for close co-operation, if not unity of being, of editor and indexer:

> The aim was 'an index explanatory of the principal purposes and contents of the various parts of the text'. It is possible that such an aim can only be achieved if the editor and annotator of the work is also his own index-maker. If the editor and indexer are not combined in the same person, there must be implicit trust, mutual confidence and constant communication between them.

and observed:

> A great expenditure of time and thought was spent 'in analysing, classifying and weighing references'. There in three words is described the work of an indexer!

Thornton also emphasized the necessity for a single, careful analytical index to the whole body of the work of 'any great
discursive writer', endorsing the words of Edward Cook about Ruskin's: 'A series of indexes to the several books would not, in themselves, suffice to illustrate his teaching'. Cook and Wedderburn stated, 'The voluminousness of the references to be arranged has necessitated many long, and some very long, articles in the Index [by articles they presumably mean what would now be called entries or entry arrays]. In these cases a system of subdivision was essential, more or less elaborate. In the case of the longer articles in the Index, the reader is requested to read first the synopsis at the beginning of each'. Thornton explains, 'The article on Ruskin himself has 2 main sections and 39 subdivisions. The article on Art has 20 subdivisions. The subdivisions are numbered and given headings, and are listed at the beginning of each article', and comments, 'By this device of a synopsis, an index to the index, Cook and Wedderburn have added notably to the armoury of the indexer ... The synopsis may state what the article does not attempt to do as well as what it does. It may give cross-references, it may itself include references'.

Two very long articles follow. Richard A. Storey provided ten pages on 'Indexing archives', distinguishing archives and their indexing needs from collections, and describing in detail the work and indexes of the National Register of Archives. Jean M. Perrault, Lecturer in the School of Library and Information Services, University of Maryland, wrote of 'Approaches to library filing by computer' with nearly 12 pages of text, more than two of references, and five of appendices.

James Negus, a publisher's editor, gave an example of the index specification that he offered when commissioning indexes. H. V. Molesworth Roberts considered the complexities of 'Subheadings and their arrangement'. Margaret D. Anderson, a frequent contributor to early Indexers, sent her comments on three issues that had been aired there. She had studied the length of book indexes, examining French, German, Italian and Russian technological and scientific books, and concluded, 'We are fortunate in that publishers of books in the English language are more generous about indexes than those of some other countries'. She analysed the contributions to the symposium on page numbers in the autumn 1965 Indexer.

A letter sent to the New York Tribune in 1860 was reprinted. Signed 'Bibliophile', it was in fact written by Samuel Austin Allibone, who later became head of the Lénox Library in New York, and compiled a 3-volume Dictionary of English literature. We reproduce this splendid fulmination below.

The Report of SI Council for 1966-7 gave a membership of 261, over 100 members on the Panel (precursor of the Register, from which names were supplied to publishers requiring indexers), and details of the sixth training course. The Indexer had a circulation of 610, and was normally of 48 pages. The Society had a permanent address: c/o Barclay's Bank Ltd, 1 Pall Mall East, Loncon SW1.

Hazel K Bell

BOOKS WITHOUT INDEXES

Correspondence of the N.Y. Tribune, October 27 1860

Sir:— I beg you to call the attention of the most learned of the medical profession to an indication of mental obliquity upon the part of authors and publishers (especially those of the United States), which has already worked incalculable evil in the Republic of Letters, and threatens to work more. Within the last few years, as is well known to literary men, many authors who have devoted anxious days and nights of careful research to various departments of learning, have published bulky volumes professing to contain the results of such investigations, but presenting to the eye of the reader nothing save a confused mass of matter, almost totally useless for want of an alphabetical index. So much for authors: and if they be partially excused on the plea of that want of practical common sense to which mental abstraction is supposed to be unfavourable, what shall be said for publishers, men of business, who are sometimes found willing to risk their capital by printing — perhaps even stereotyping — such confused masses of matter, without insisting upon the addition of a copious alphabetical index.

Is it a fear of trouble upon the part of the author, a dread of expense upon the part of the publisher, that disgraces literature by Indexless books?

But will the author let the toil of years be lost to a large part of the world — for lost it surely is — rather than add a few days or weeks of labour to make the whole available? Will the publisher risk thousands of dollars on the plates of what should be a valuable work, and yet grudge the outlay of a few more dollars for the paper and print of an index? A man unaccustomed to books, after reading this article would be apt to say — "Such stupidity is incredible; surely this writer cannot be in earnest." Alas, it is too true! I have known of instances where indexes were objected to by publishers, because they were too minute [i.e. too detailed] — took up too much room! A carefully prepared index to a set of one of the most important of late American publications was reduced perhaps to one half, to diminish the expense of paper and print! An American editor of an English work boasts, in the extreme of his stupidity, that he has saved the American publisher of the book he edits the expense of an index!

Let the remedy be applied forthwith. Let Lord CAMPBELL's proposition be carried out at once. "So essential," remarks his Lordship, "did I consider an index to be to every book, that I proposed to bring a bill into Parliament to deprive an author who publishes a book without an index, of the privilege of copyright: and, moreover, to submit him for his offence to a pecuniary penalty." (Preface to Chief Justices, Vol. III.)

After "author" above, add "or publisher," and let such a bill be passed at its next Legislature by every State which boasts an author, publisher, and printing press. What would be thought of an architect who built a large house and left it without staircases for exploration? What, then, shall be said of an author or publisher who sends a book into the world without an Index?