History of indexing societies part IV: 1978-82

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Coming of age

1978 was SI’s 21st anniversary year, greatly celebrated. The April issue of The Indexer that year, volume 11 no. 1, had a special anniversary logo on its cover, and opened with ‘Society of Indexers’ Coming-of-Age: 21st Anniversary Congratulatory messages’, from (in alphabetical order, of course): the American Library Association, the American Society of Indexers, Aslib, the Australian Book Publishers Association, the Australian Society of Indexers, The British Library Bibliographic Services Division, the Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada, the Institute of Information Scientists, the Library Association, the National Book League, the Publishers Association, and the Society of Authors. There was a three-page survey of SI’s development to date, considering how far each of its five declared objects had been achieved, with lists of all those who had held office in the Society (Gordon 1978 a). Membership was then 522, a fifth being overseas, and a sixth institutional. The survey concluded, ‘Looking back over the twenty-one years of the Society’s existence, we may well feel that Norman Knight’s brain-child, sturdy from the beginning, has developed as usefully and happily as could have been hoped’.

John Thornton, then an SI Vice-President, considered, ‘Progress in indexing: fact or fiction?’, his own conclusion being, ‘The Society must redouble its efforts to ensure that good indexes are provided, possibly by invoking the aid of all users, making the reader more index conscious, but not forgetting the fact that the demand for more and better indexes can only be met by more — and better — indexers’ (Thornton 1978). John Ainsworth Gordon, SI’s Secretary, hailed the anniversary conference: ‘The central event of the Society’s 21st Anniversary Year will be a unique occasion: the very first international gathering since the inaugural meeting on 30th March 1957’. He wrote of ‘what a profound influence the Conference has already had, even before it has taken place ... our ties with our related Societies in Australia, Canada and the USA have been greatly intensified’ (Gordon 1978 b).

The Conference took place in July 1978, at Digby Stuart College, Roehampton, South London. It was attended by representatives from twelve countries, including officers of the American, Australian and Canadian Societies of Indexers (ASI, AusSI and IASC); and Norman Knight, SI’s Founder, who gave a Presidential reception to inaugurate the conference. Dorothy Thomas from ASI, Jean Hagger from AusSI, and Peter Greig from IASC, all read congratulatory messages from their societies. The Wheatley Medal for 1977 was presented, and the sequence of books that had won the Medal since its inception in 1962 was displayed (Bell and Piggott 1978).

The first of the conference speakers, William Heckscher from Princeton, New Jersey, was the only Founder-Member who had attended the inaugural 1957 meeting from outside the UK.

Another speaker was Hans Wellisch, making his first appearance at an SI meeting, and delivering a paper — ‘Early multilingual and multiscrypt indexes in herbals’ — that ran to 22 pages in The Indexer, and proved but the first of a series of outstanding, substantial contributions this author was to make to the journal (Wellisch 1978).

Publications

There were special publications to mark the occasion. A select reading list on indexing was published by SI ‘as a birthday present to itself’, as Mary Piggott commented in her review. Leonard M. Harrod (editor of The Indexer for the previous fourteen years) had edited Indexers on indexing: a selection of articles published in the Indexer (published by Bowker). In this volume articles from the 21 years’ issues of the journal were reprinted, grouped under six headings, ‘photographically reproduced from the original text, but with new and elegant captions, and handsomely and solidly bound in blue with white lettering’ (Piggott 1978).

The April 1978 Indexer announced Harrod’s resignation as editor, after 14 years (Harrod 1978). He reported that the print order for the journal had doubled since 1964; it was circulated to 53 countries and ‘used in most schools of librarianship and information science’. Ken Bakewell, then Chairman of the Society, paid tribute to him for having maintained the journal’s high standards to gain it international respect; he was made a Vice-President of SI. The anniversary issue was edited by E.J. Coates, former editor of British Technology Index. The rest of volume 11, beginning with the report of the International conference, was edited by Hazel Bell, who remained editor for 18 years.

International relations

The international theme continued through the volume, with a report of the 1977 AGM of ASI and an account by Alan Greengrass of its founding; ASI established its H.W. Wilson Company Indexing Award, publishing the criteria in the April 1979 Indexer. The following year, Clyde Garrow reported on a survey of Australian indexing undertaken to determine indexing services and possible areas of collaboration there. Brenda Miller wrote again about indexes of children’s books in Australia, and Harrod reviewed the Australian Government’s Publishing Services’ Style manual as ‘the best of any such book published by a government department for the guidance of editors and printers’ (Harrod 1979). IASC was formally affiliated to SI on 1 January 1979, and Mary Dykstra, a founder-member of IASC, gave an account of it to an SI meeting in May (Dykstra 1979). S.O. Oyesola described the development of library and information services in Nigeria (Oyesola 1979), and, noting, ‘The sun rises on indexers’, Gordon reported the founding of the Japan Indexers’ Association in Tokyo on 3 June 1977, with its quarterly journal (Gordon 1978 c).

Death of Knight

1978 also saw the death of Norman Knight, aged 87, in August, just a month after the conference he was so delighted to attend.
The April 1979 *Indexer* included an obituary notice (Greig 1979), and a selection of tributes. His book, *Indexing, the art of*, was published in 1979 by Allen & Unwin, with a foreword by the Rt Hon. Harold Macmillan. Piggott reviewed it in *The Indexer*: ‘The book is dedicated to the Society. It will be valued by members not only for its personal associations but also for its professional advice’ (Piggott 1980).

**Society administration**

1980 brought another conference, ‘Indexers in a world of change’, held in Cambridge, and addressed by SI’s new President, Robert Collison, on ‘The future of indexes and indexing’ (Collison 1981). Gordon, who had resigned as Secretary after five years, addressed the AGM in May on ‘Confessions of an ex-secretary’, and made pertinent observations on the administration of SI. ‘One of the most difficult enterprises that people undertake is the running of a professional organization by amateurs. We are professional indexers, and this is our professional organization.... The Society has never had any staff, in the accepted sense of the term. It has been and is run entirely by volunteers. ... We have almost reached the point where the only way in which more members can make time to do Society work is by sacrificing some of the time they are able to set aside for their own indexing work. Even if willing to do this, they often cannot afford to do so. ... The voluntary principle combines with some of the more undisciplined aspects of democracy to complicate the difficulties, not only of staffing but also of management in general. ... We are an extremely democratic and entirely voluntary co-operative ... To me, it’s something of a miracle not only that it works, but that much of the time it works so well.’ (Gordon 1980).

**The Wheatley Medal**

The award of the Wheatley Medal ran more smoothly during these years. For 1977 it was awarded, at the International Conference, to T. Rowland Powel for his index to *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 1901-1960. Ten indexes had been nominated, and the ‘unusual decision was taken to commend two indexes as well as make the award’: those to Hamilton Bailey’s *Emergency surgery*, by SI founder-member Hebe Jerrold, and to *Halsbury’s Statutes of England* by Con Banwell (winner of the Wheatley Medal for 1974) (Harrod 1978). For 1978, only eight indexes were submitted, and none was considered of high enough standard to merit the making of an award (Christophers 1979). For 1979, 21 indexes were nominated, and two medals were awarded, both to SI officers: to Ken Bakewell, former Chairman, for indexing *Anglo-American cataloguing rules*, and to Annette Surrey, Clerk to the Board of Assessors, for *Circulation of the blood*. For 1980 there were only twelve nominations; the award was presented to Laurie J. Taylor for the index to his own compilation, *A librarian’s handbook* vol. 2 (Christophers 1981).

The Wheatley Medal for 1981 was awarded to the *Analytical index to the publications of the Institution of Civil Engineers*, January 1975-79, compiled by J. Edwin Holmstrom (Harrod 1982). A month after the announcement, Dr Holmstrom died, in his 85th year. His obituary notice, by Collison, appears opposite the announcement of his Wheatley Medal award.

**Overseas activities**

In 1980 Peter Greig, IASC’s Past President and SI Liaison Officer, sent *The Indexer* a three-page account of the Canadian Society’s activities from June 1978-9 (Greig 1980). The first contribution from New Zealand appeared in the form of an account by Gerald Fowler-Bassett, SI’s only member there, of legal proceedings he had taken to achieve payment for his indexing work (Fowler 1980). This was followed by similar tales of defaulting publishers in the UK, and legal advice on the subject from SI’s Legal Consultant (Bell 1980).

Hans Wellisch of ASI continued to provide full, excellent papers for *The Indexer*: ‘The alphabetization of prepositions in indexes’ (Wellisch 1980); ‘“Indexes” and “indexing” in encyclopedias’ (Wellisch 1981 a); ‘From the 17th century: a German instruction in indexing’ (Wellisch 1981 b); ‘More on indexes in encyclopedias’ (Wellisch 1982); and ‘“Index”: the word, its history, meanings and usages’ (Wellisch 1983). These, further, stimulated lively debate in the journal’s correspondence columns (in which he himself participated: Letters to the Editor 1981, 1982, 1983). In 1980 also appeared his *Indexing and abstracting: an international bibliography* (published by ABC-Clio 'in co-operation with the American Society of Indexers and the Society of Indexers'; 328 pages), reviewed by Brenda Hall as ‘A comprehensive survey of literature on indexing and abstracting. ... It can contribute much to the advance of standards in this exacting profession’ (Hall 1981), and followed in 1984 by *Indexing and abstracting 1977-1981: an international bibliography*. Professor Wellisch had also been the first recipient of the H.W. Wilson Company Indexing Award, for the index to his own book, *The conversion of scripts: its nature, history and utilization* (John Wiley & Sons, 1978).

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ASI brought news of the 1981 Wilson Indexing Award, won by Catherine Fix for her index to *Diagnosis of bone and joint disorders*.

IASC’s *Bulletin* ceased to be bilingual in 1982, when a survey found that only 50% of its membership was primarily French-speaking. Its 1982 Annual Meeting was held at Ottawa.

**Training**

A survey of various developments connected with training covered the revision of the SI correspondence course administered by the Rapid Results College, the establishment of the Supervision Scheme, the Register, and the Working party on Technology (Gordon 1981).

**The coming of the computer**

Discussion of the computer, its inexorable advance, and its implications for indexers, continued. Gordon, as SI Chairman, wrote a guest editorial on the subject in October 1981: ‘Beware — computer at work’, announcing SI’s Technology Working Party, intended to protect members ‘both against “cowboy” salesmen and against being made redundant by the swift advances of technology’ (Gordon 1981). Judy Batchelor wrote a most endearing ‘Letter to a computer from a free-lance book-indexer’ to open volume 13 of *The Indexer*: ‘You could not have invented teacosies or IBM or love, though you can provide, with elegant and infinite fluency, models of fabric—
patterns, budgetary control or divorce-statistics. I promise not to think of you as a typewriter that can do tricks. I'll try very hard to re-program myself" (Batchelor 1982). A. Campbell Purton reported on the use of a microcomputer as an aid for the freelance indexer, with a guide to the choices of systems suitable for indexing work, in April 1982 (Purton 1982). The journal's first advertisement for 'Indexing programs for microcomputers', placed by Dr Purton, appeared in the October 1982 issue.

SI Silver Jubilee

1982 was SI's Silver Jubilee Year, and also, as Collison noted in a guest editorial, Information Technology Year in the UK (Collison 1982). This anniversary was celebrated with congratulatory messages from the affiliated societies, and an appropriately decorated cake at the AGM (Gordon 1982). At this meeting, the President presented the Carey Award to Leonard Montague Harrod, in respect of his work in developing indexer training and establishing official British and International Standards for Indexing, and his 14-year editorship of The Indexer (Pearson 1982). There were retrospective articles in The Indexer: the contents of its 12 previous volumes were reviewed (Bell 1982).

References

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