History of societies of indexing part 7: 1992–5

Hazel K. Bell

The development of international relations and technology predominated in indexing through the four years 1992–5, as reflected in the four societies’ international journal, *The Indexer*.

The first editorial, of April 1992, was by Ken Bakewell, retiring as President of the Society of Indexers (SI), reviewing the previous five years and outlining his hopes for the future: for a European Society of Indexers, a permanent office and paid secretary for SI, and the development of a code of conduct for indexers (Bakewell, 1992).

**International developments**

The editorial for October 1993 recorded the increase and spread of international gatherings on indexing, as well as communication among the four societies, and with indexers in China, Nigeria and South Africa, all with news of plans to establish societies of indexers of their own (Bell, 1993b). Later in the same issue, indeed, the formal founding of the Chinese Society of Indexers was reported. Articles appeared in the journal on linguistic problems in the Canadian context (Rasmussen, 1992), indexing for the European Community (Chandler, 1992), indexing in Ireland (McLaughlin, 1994) and indexing on the Continent (Robertson, 1995).

**National indexing societies**

For developments within the four national societies, Judy Batchelor’s regular, excellent abstracts of their newsletter reports, ‘Shoebox, International’, had had to close after the huge expansion, in content and in numbers, of the publications of all of them. Instead, ‘Network of Indexers’ succeeded it, with reports to be supplied by each society (Bell, 1992).

**American Society of Indexers (ASI)**

ASI’s first instalment recorded a new ASI press kit, including brochures for publishers and authors, with tear-off order forms for the ASI Register and publications information, and a fourth edition of ASI’s *Education and training in indexing and abstracting*. In ‘Electronic shoebox’ Linda Fetters regularly reviewed software programs for indexing: Nancy Mulvany and Jessica Milstead delivered a devastating critique of ‘Indexicon, the only fully automatic indexer’ as ‘unable to produce a professional quality book index’ (Wolner, 1995). Through the period the reports showed much debate on the question of acknowledgement for indexers. The newsletter became *Key Words* in 1993. ASI’s 25th anniversary was celebrated that year with a conference attended by speakers from each of the other societies and by all of the 25 successive ASI presidents – a splendid gathering!

In 1994 the ASI board of directors decided to cast a ‘No’ vote on the NISO (National Information Standards Organization) draft standard on indexes, on the grounds that it failed ‘to distinguish indexes from related information retrieval devices’ and used ‘exclusionary language’ (Wolner, 1995).

In 1995 ASI membership shot up from under 1000 to over 1300 after an article in *Money* magazine suggested that indexers could earn $50,000 a year. The resultant stress and expense on the administrative office in Texas caused the resignation of the officers, followed by the establishment of a new administrative office (in Phoenix). The office and most ASI board members went online, and ASI arranged to establish its own website on the Internet.

**Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada (IASC)**

IASC celebrated its 15th anniversary in 1992 and produced its first *Register of Indexers Available*. It was working ‘to decentralize its executive and encourage participation from across the country’ (Jacobs, 1995). In 1995 it held its first joint conference with ASI, in Montreal, attended by some 150, with proceedings and tapes made available from the ASI Administrative Office. At the end of the year it set up its (bilingual) website.

**Australian Society of Indexers (AusSI)**

AusSI reported 212 members by 1992, 11 achieving Registration in that year. In 1995 it held its first International Conference of Indexers, in Marysville, Victoria, with visiting speakers from SI and ASI. It also held training courses and Internet demonstrations and established an Internet column in its newsletter.

**Society of Indexers**

For SI, David Crystal served five years as president and was succeeded by Mary Piggott. Ann Hall attended the Woman of the Year luncheon in London in 1994, invited because of her work as an indexer (Shuttleworth, 1994). Local groups developed, and specialist groups for archaeology, earth sciences, genealogy, languages and law.

The last six months of 1995 saw the Society going through a period of change and self-assessment, marked by what politicians call frank exchange of views and robust debate in the columns of its publications, illustrating the wide range of opin-
ions held by members on such subjects as professional status and the value of training (Shuttleworth, 1996).

Awards

A new series in The Indexer, ‘Awards for Indexers’, covered all the various indexing awards then being regularly presented, including the AusSI Medal as well as the Wheatley and Wilson medals each year. SI presented the sixth Carey Award to Ken Bakewell on his retirement after three years as SI President. The parchment averred:

His many and varied works have advanced the science and skills of indexing; his energy and determination have vitalized and inspired the Society. (The Indexer, 1992)

The seventh Carey Award was presented in 1995 to Barbara Britton ‘for selfless dedication to the Society and its Council’ (The Indexer, 1995).

Other awards too were sometimes noted: the Library Association’s Besterman Medal for a guide to the literature, the McColvin Medal for an outstanding reference work, and the Walford award for services to bibliography all went occasionally to indexers. The NFAIS honoured Irving Zarembor, who had aided the development of their technical indexing system; the British Standards Institute Information and Documentation Standards Policy Committee presented Ken Bakewell and Mary Piggott with Distinguished Service Certificates; and the Swedish Royal Academy awarded its 1990 antiquarian silver medal to the first editors of Nordic Archaeological Abstracts, of which ‘the indexing must always be the core’ (Lavell, 1993). Former SI president David Crystal was awarded the OBE for services to the English language and linguistics.

In 1994, ASI set up the Hines Award, in memory of Theodore Hines, the instigator of ASI. This was to be presented annually ‘to recognize that individual who has shown continuous, dedicated and exceptional service to the Society and to the indexing profession’. It was awarded for the first time to BevAnne Ross, who had founded the California chapter of ASI, in recognition of her years of dedicated service to the Society and to the indexing profession; it was presented to her in 1995, a month before her death.

Obituaries

Obituary tributes appeared in The Indexer for John Thornton, its editor from 1959 to 1964; for Alison Quinn, winner of the Wheatley Medal in 1965; and for BevAnne Ross.

Technology

On the Internet, the indexers’ discussion group, Index-L, developed. Articles in The Indexer dealing with technical developments affecting indexing covered document image processing (Adams, 1992), CD-ROMs (Goldberg, 1992), document conversion (Galbraith, 1992), the Internet (McFadden, 1994), PRECIS (Jacobs and Arsenault, 1994), postcoordination (Weinberg, 1995), online information services (Dunn, 1995) and hypertext (Forrester, 1995). The journal also began a regular software reviews section. The Wheatley Medal for 1995 was awarded for an index compiled by a team using a specially designed computer database (Matthew, 1995), while the winner for 1992, Elizabeth Moys, was quoted as attributing her success to her computer program (The Indexer, 1996). An article considering ‘the lack of arrangements between authors and publishers for dealing with electronic copy presented on disk’ suggested envelopes printed with special clauses covering conditions of use in which disks might be sent to publishers (Dorner, 1992).

In 1995, ASI’s Key Words had an article on cyberspace and a regular column entitled ‘Cyberwatch’ (Wolner, 1996).

Research

Several articles considered research into indexing, and what was needed. Todd Ross highlighted ‘two key factors that impact on effective indexing: being able to discriminate between significant and trivial information … and applying indexing principles consistently’ and suggested ways for ‘future in-depth discussion and research … and the hope of solutions to these problems’ (Ross, 1992). Ken Bakewell reviewed the field of past research with particular reference to user needs (Bakewell, 1993). David Crystal, then SI president, emphasized the importance of developing the theoretical research dimension to indexing, neglected previously in favour of questions of methodology, and endorsed the findings of Ross (Crystal, 1995). John Farrow perceptively analysed the process of concept analysis in indexing (Farrow, 1995).

Publications

It was a good period for publications on indexing, as was observed in the first editorial of 1993, ‘Indexers as publishers’, which cited many produced by the four societies (Bell, 1993a). ASI had produced seven, as well as transmuting its newsletter into a quasi-journal. SI had published its training course, supplemented by a series of Occasional Papers on special subject indexing (biographical, legal and medical). The proceedings of the ASI 25th anniversary conference appeared in 1993; Nancy Mulvany’s Indexing books in 1994. In 1993, Jean Wheeler undertook the continuation of the regular current-awareness bibliography that Hans Wellisch had provided from 1986 to 1989.

The series established in the journal continued, ‘Indexes Past’ featuring Burton’s Anatomy of melancholy, Lady Cynthia Asquith’s diaries and James Lowell’s Biglow Papers; ‘Index Makers’ featured Sir Edward Cook. The latter series was succeeded by ‘Index Makers of Today’, looking at current practitioners, and covered SI members Geraldine Beare, Drusilla Calvert, Michele Clarke, Laurence Errington, Ann Hall, David Lee, Douglas Matthews, Mary Piggott, Michael Robertson, John Vickers and Elizabeth Wallis; and ASI members Linda Fetters, Frances Lennie, Nancy Mulvany and Bella Hass Weinberg.

After 38 years

By the end of 1995, SI had 952 members (856 in the UK, 73 overseas, 23 corporate). A total of 2679 copies of the October 1995 issue of The Indexer was despatched: 890 in
the UK (1004 to SI members worldwide); 1189 in the US (1090 to ASI members); 155 to Canada (128 to IASC members); 126 to Australasia (104 to AusSI members); 88 to the Continent of Europe, and 78 elsewhere overseas. 332 members); 126 to Australasia (104 to AusSI members); 88 to the Continent of Europe, and 78 elsewhere overseas. 332

This was just 38 years after Norman Knight’s prodigiously fructuous letter to the Times Literary Supplement (December 1956), suggesting: ‘It is proposed to form a Society of Indexers’, followed by the inaugural meeting of

1969 – March 1957. How well had been fulfilled the Latin motto he

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to non-member subscribers, mostly institutional.

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Hazel K. Bell is a freelance indexer and was editor of The Indexer from 1978 to 1995. Email: hkbell@dial.pipex.com

Academic partnership

Homer and his wife Mary are historians, teaching at Harvard, in Jane Langton’s crime fiction, The Memorial Hall murder (Penguin, 1974). As academics do, they are writing a book:

The two of them were taking turns, rewriting the lectures into chapters. Mary was way ahead of him. She had finished all her chapters. She was working on the index. She was clucking at him to hurry up.

Through a chance encounter Homer gets involved in a bit of sleuthing, but continues to make progress on the book.

He was supposed to be finishing the last chapter of the textbook, The Great Cloud Darkening the Land, which was growing out of the course of lectures. But he was bored with the last chapter. It was the index that really captured his interest. The index was going to be the best part. It was going to be the most informative, garrulous, cross-indexed index there ever was. A magnificent index. At the moment the index was only a crawling swarm of three-by-five cards, proliferating all over the table. Homer put his hand into the pile at random and plucked out a single card.

The couple have some unorthodox (if companionable) working methods: after a Saturday walk, ‘Mary turned around to go home to work on her half of the index, with which she was as infatuated as Homer’.

The mystery is solved before their book is published, and reviewed, so we cannot judge the final quality of this so cherished index.

Margaret Cooter, BMJ