

# Indexing published letters

Douglas Matthews

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*A personal view of the pleasures and pride derived from indexing volumes of published letters, using examples from the author's own work and beyond to illustrate the particular challenges of the genre.*

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Thinking over several decades of indexing experience, it seems relevant to ask (1) which index has given me the most pleasure; and (2) which has afforded me the most pride. To the first question I can answer without any doubt: for pleasure, the *Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Booth and Mehew, 1994–5); for pride, again without any doubt, *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (House and Story, 1965–), still in progress, on which I have been intermittently working for some years. Both are substantial, multi-volume works, and in what follows I try to convey something of both the pleasure and the pride of my involvement with indexing letters, concentrating particularly on these two works. I also refer briefly to other volumes of letters I have indexed, notably the final volume of the English translation of the *Letters of Marcel Proust* (Kolb, 1989–2000) and the *Letters of Kingsley Amis* (Leader, 2000). And in conclusion I examine a number of other notable indexes to published letters.

## Published letters – distinctive features

The title of this article, 'Indexing published letters', should be defined a little more exactly; it refers exclusively to the collected letters of single individuals, what one might call single-source letters, and not to collections of letters from several or many individuals, such as 'Letters from evacuees in the Second World War', or 'Letters from Swedish immigrants in 19th-century USA'.

What follows contains as much of my reflections on indexing in general as on indexing letters, but first I must try and outline what is distinctive about this kind of indexing. All our work is, of course, contingent; it cannot claim to be original since it most evidently rides on the back of the work of somebody else. I have often thought that indexing is like taking a particular view of a landscape; but not like a painter or a photographer, or even a mapmaker; more like placing sets of signposts. Our function is to point to what is already there. Our special skill is to work out what is important enough to deserve a signpost in the first place, and then to make that signpost as clear, specific and helpful as possible. The text of the book is our landscape, and it is that which determines what we should do. So I shall need the reader's understanding if I seem to concentrate as much on the matter as on the index that it generates.

But first, what is distinctive about published letters? In their original state (before they are collected for publication) they have no cohesion at all. They can be discrete and separate, unrelated to each other, and cast in a variety of voices because they were aimed at different people. They

only attain any kind of unity when collected and arranged. In the London Library,<sup>1</sup> there is a very large section, containing maybe 90,000 volumes, called simply 'Biography'. This is an easily understood category, and one that should gladden the hearts of all indexers, because it is arranged in one single alphabetical sequence under the names of the biographees. Was it Eric Bentley (the creator of clerihews) who said that while Geography is about maps, Biography is about chaps? (I must add, of course, chapesses.) But the category is pretty wide-embracing, taking in not only straight 'Lives' by one person about another (or collectively about others), but also of course autobiographies, and extending to related forms such as diaries, journals and – in common with many libraries – letters. So there is the broad category. If we can accept that letters form a branch of the biographical tree, that is a convenient starting point.

In fact, published letters can come in various forms, from the intimate and personal to the professional and business, and even extend to such historically important publications as military despatches. They can be brief and simple and fun, like P. G. Wodehouse's (Donaldson, 1990),<sup>2</sup> or massive and solid and wide-ranging, like the *Correspondence of Horace Walpole*, which extends to 43 quarto volumes in the Yale edition (Lewis, 1937–83), with the Index alone taking up five fat volumes – surely a team project, and telling you everything you need to know about the contents, and a good deal more besides. That is a work to be consulted from time to time, if only to restore one's sense of humility. I return to it later.

## Biographies and letters compared

Yet if we think of biography as treating a person or persons as the subject, letters are perhaps awkwardly placed here, and for several reasons. In a sense, the subject of letters is not really the writer of those letters. They may mention themselves very little, and yet of course practically everything they say is a kind of personal revelation. Merely reading them can sometimes seem intrusive, though we know that often enough the writer will compose and send letters knowing very well that they stand a fair chance of being made public at some stage, preferably posthumously. Think of that amiable, reflective series of volumes of letters from Rupert Hart-Davis to his retired former teacher, George Lyttelton. And indeed, in the recently published Kingsley Amis letters (Leader, 2000), we find Amis writing to Philip Larkin: 'What a feast is awaiting chaps when we are both dead and our complete letters come out'. And he was

probably right, at least as far as his own letters are concerned: they are a feast.

As for intrusiveness and embarrassment (not normally seen as a professional hazard for indexers), how toe-curling is the following, from that High Victorian taste-maker and guru, John Ruskin, writing to a distant female cousin who effectively became his housekeeper and guardian (so not even a lover or close relative). This is not actually from collected letters, but from a very recent biography which made heavy use of Ruskin's letters, and quoted extensively from them.

And for the nonsense letters they are the only relief I have for a moment in the day, from the infinite pain of seeing – and thinking – in Italy – Oos poo wee Donie – so ired – and so – tick – and so eerie – and so fightened – and so – only – dat if he hadn't his wee mamie to [illegible] him – he don't know what he oud do. (Hilton, 2000)

This is not the only example, for at times of stress Ruskin would fall into this style. It seemed to me sufficiently important to merit a mention in the index, as revealing something significant about Ruskin's strange mental state. So, under the name of the recipient, Joan Severn, there is a subheading 'JR writes to in baby-talk', followed by the page numbers. This is an unusual example of how style, rather than topic, can be given an entry.

And this, inevitably, brings us to a most obvious and salient fact about letters, unlike other forms of writing: there are always at least two people involved, the sender and the recipient. And so to the first distinctive indexing feature of published letters and in some ways the easiest: the list or index of correspondents. Sometimes this is presented as a separate index, as with the Dickens letters. The most recent volume (vol. 11), is one of the shorter ones, though still extending to some 540 pages, and the index of correspondents takes up six pages, set in double columns. It is the plainest listing, with page numbers only, and no attempt at subdivision. This is one type of index – more of a list – where strings are unavoidable and perfectly acceptable. At its crudest it is a guide to the relative importance of Dickens's social and business contacts at this period of his life (1865–7). By contrast, the Proust letters combine references to correspondents in the single general index, and this is also the case with the John Betjeman letters (Lycett-Green, 1994–5). In both, the references to correspondents as recipients are distinguished typographically, using in one case bold type for the page numbers, in the other, italic. The nature of these entries, which is almost invariable, indicates only the number of the page where a letter begins. Reviewers beware: using the index to count the number of letters to a particular correspondent is not necessarily any indication of importance, because there is no quick way of seeing the length of a particular letter. In some publications, the letters themselves are numbered, and in some indexes the letter number, rather than the page number, is given. However, the letter number is insufficiently precise in its locating since a single letter may extend over several pages, so this practice is not to be recommended for the general index.

A second way in which letters differ from objective biography is that there is no necessary narrative flow. In her

valuable monograph, *Indexing biographies*, Hazel Bell (1998) makes the narrative element almost the defining feature, though of course no life is lived in quite the ordered way that a biography presents it. It unfolds chronologically, and only when it is over can it be seen to have a structured form with a mute beginning, a significant middle and an inevitable end. I think it was James Thornton who said how lucky it was for indexers that the alphabetical sequence of subdivisions – birth, career, death – also follows the chronological order. He was nearly right, but to add a little digressive note, how many biographies actually start on page 1 with an account of the death and funeral of the subject? It can make for a good curtain-raiser, but presents problems if the index itself is to be arranged in order of occurrence.

### *The role of the editor*

The ordering, then, is a kind of artificial imposition. Published letters are usually, but not always, arranged in chronological order, but however they are arranged, there is always a chronological sub-arrangement. So a kind of narrative does emerge, and it is at this point that the text editor needs to be introduced. Letters do not gather themselves together. They have been sent to many different recipients, so they are widely dispersed, and they have to be collected. Once collected, they have to be arranged, deciphered, perhaps selected and, vitally, annotated. The editor effectively assumes the role of biographer, identifying figures, places and events, explaining meanings and contexts. The indexer then has what almost amounts to two related texts to cope with: the letters themselves and the editor's notes and comments.

Good editors, when they have done their job properly, assume much of the research that the indexer must often undertake in works of narrative history or straight biographies or critiques. For example: who is this Lord Salisbury mentioned on p. 62, and is he the same as the Lord Salisbury mentioned 80 pages later? That reference to the Prime Minister in 1873 – who was he? And is that misquotation deliberate, or should it be notified to the proof-reader for correction? One of the pleasures of this kind of indexing is that the indexer can feel part of a team, telephoning the text editor if something is not clear, and perhaps even adding a clarification of his/her own, from personal knowledge. The editor of the Amis Letters, Zachary Leader, wrote a long piece in *The Observer* about his role. His diligence and scrupulousness were exemplary, and partly because he was presenting these letters for an American as well as an English readership, so could not take anything for granted. Even so, he missed a few allusions that I was able to supply. One example concerns a short poem by Amis himself, in a letter to Philip Larkin, called 'Farewell Blues'. The final stanza runs:

Dead's the note we loved that swelled within us, made us gasp  
and stare,  
Simple joy and simple sadness thrashing the indignant air;  
What replaced them no one asked for, but it turned up  
anyhow,  
And Coleman Hawkins, Johnny Hodges, Bessie Smith and  
Pee Wee Russell lie in Victor Churchyard now.

Familiar rhythm, familiar ending, but it was not annotated as all other such pieces were. It is, of course, a parody of John Betjeman's poem 'Dorset', with the refrain trotting out euphonious names and the final line 'lie in Mellstock Churchyard now'. My suggested annotation appears in the printed volume, bringing that special glow of satisfaction that comes from being able to make contributions of this kind.<sup>3</sup>

The question of indexing annotations requires an article all to itself. In some published letters the annotations make a sort of linking narrative, and are printed as part of the page, though recognizably separate. In others, the explanatory notes occur at the foot of the page, numbered, and often take up far more of the page than the letter itself. This is notably so in the Dickens letters, where the notes are a separate but vital part of the scholarly apparatus, identifying persons mentioned, giving sometimes quite detailed little biographies, and presenting more of a challenge to the indexer than the actual letters.

## Indexing the letters of Charles Dickens

I came to the Dickens letters part-way into publication. The first five volumes were already published with indexes by other hands, who for one reason or another had been unable to continue. Taking over at volume 6, I inherited a style that for consistency's sake I had to adapt to, and one that was rather elaborate and very detailed. Six volumes later, I hope I have mastered it.<sup>4</sup>

James Thornton (1965) has written informatively about this index and the principles he adopted. The system he created is admirable, and he set high standards for treating these marvellous and extensive letters. There is a range of typographical devices for particular features, which are all explained in lengthy notes at the head of the index in each volume. For instance: 'Footnotes which contain substantial particulars about a person are distinguished by an asterisk, e.g. 123n\*'; and 'the sign ~ is used to show that the reference which follows is linked with the preceding one'.<sup>5</sup> Although there is, as already mentioned, a separate Index of Correspondents, the General Index has a note explaining that 'the names of Dickens's correspondents are printed in capitals'. There are two reasons for these individuals having as it were a dual entry. It does very quickly identify them in the body of the General Index, but more importantly it makes it possible to treat them in the same way as others in the text of letters when they themselves are the subject of comment, or are mentioned by Dickens in letters to other people. Of course, not all the names in the Correspondents' Index reappear in the General Index, only those as explained.

An example helps to clarify this. Dickens wrote several letters to his children, including (in vol. 10) a single letter to his son, Sydney Smith Haldimand Dickens, who was embarking on a naval career, and whom Dickens, in that inimitable way of his, referred to as 'the Admiral'. The letter itself is slight, and of course his son's name appears in the Index of Correspondents, but with just this one page reference. However, he appears nine times in the General Index, with the following subdivisions: 'naval career; at home; CD orders clothes for; death at sea; tutored by Briscoe; CD

writes to; Leech's friendship with'. Just to complicate it further, that subdivision 'CD writes to' is not a reference to his letter to his son, but a mention in another letter altogether saying that he had just written to him.

This example also gives an opportunity to discuss the use of intimate names in correspondence. The indexer must be alive to this, and be able to identify, say, 'The Admiral' as this young Dickens, and to have some way of dealing with it in the Index. After all, a reader following up a reference in the Index to Sydney Smith Haldimand Dickens will reasonably expect to find that name on the page. If it is not there – bafflement. The simple device, of course, is to add the epithet or nickname to the heading, so that it reads: 'Dickens, Sydney Smith Haldimand (CD's son; 'the Admiral')'. One must be alert to this kind of intimacy, and the effect on the indexer is to feel drawn into a close familiarity with the subject. It also raises the question of just how many cross-references to make for the purposes of identification. It seems reasonable that with, say, a Prince of Wales, who may be referred to in that form for part of a book, and then after succeeding to the throne, be known by his regnal name, to place all the references under the one form, but to cross-refer from the other. And the same with women who change their surnames on marriage, so that in different places in the text they occur under different names. But what about nicknames, pet names and familiar names of the kind already mentioned? In published letters they are likely to be very common, and the indexer performs a useful function by giving alternatives in the main heading, with selective cross-references whenever these are thought to be helpful.

Some of Thornton's features have been consciously modified, and others discontinued, but without disturbing the main principles and structure. This has always been where the earlier style seemed over-elaborate, or more easily dealt with in other ways, such as cross-referencing. For instance, to avoid a straight run of page numbers in a sub-entry under a main heading, he used the device of adding a descriptive word, often a quoted word, in brackets after the page number. For example, in the entry for Catherine, Mrs Charles Dickens, there is the subheading 'Courtship and marriage', which runs:

comments on her feelings and sentiments (see *also below* Cross)  
61 ('coldness'), 79 ('anxiety'), 87 ('forebodings'), 97 ('unjust'),  
99 (his 'pleasure' in not being with her), 104 ('amiable and  
excellent'), *ib.* (CD to love her 'once more'), 109 (his letters  
'stiff'), *ib.* ('objection' to CD's riding), 110 ('distrustful')

This is extremely complicated, and although these quoted words do help to locate the reference on the page, it seems here that the Index is usurping the function of the text itself: it has ceased to be a signpost and has become an abstracting service. In more recent volumes, therefore, this particular feature has been simplified, for reasons both of brevity and practicality.

My pride in this enterprise arises from my close association with one of the great publishing ventures of our time. It has so far taken about 35 years to reach the stage we are now at, and the standard of the editing has been of the highest. It has been a privilege to have been part of the team, and as the years have gone by to have been welcomed into it. My view

of the role of the indexer (of any book) is that he or she should have a kind of supporting editorial part to play. By the time a book has reached proof stage, and has been passed to the indexer, it will have been scrutinized by any number of people, but the indexer is probably the first 'outsider' to read it and, indeed, to read it very closely. Simply by virtue of the fact that we record as we read, we must notice inconsistencies, inadequacies, infelicities, grammatical solecisms, wrong facts, misspellings, superfluous repetitions, punctuation errors, misnumbered footnotes, misattributions, impossible dates, and a variety of imperfections of one kind or another. It is surely part of our function to point these out – often with diffidence – and this is what I mean by claiming that the indexer is part of a team.

The Dickens letters have been a long time a-hatching, partly because more and more letters keep turning up, partly because there are so many and they extend over such a long period. So the collecting, editing, publication and indexing have been spread over many years. I am staggered by them and by the man himself. I may not have learned to *like* Dickens any more as I have worked through these letters, but I am astounded at his industry and energy. In a writing life covering some 35 years he turned out these thousands of letters, sometimes as many as five or six a day, and practically all written in his own hand, except on the rare occasions when he was ill, and had to dictate to a daughter or to Georgina Hogarth, his sister-in-law. At the same time he was raising a large family, editing two journals consecutively, attending meetings on matters of public importance, acting on stage, travelling backwards and forwards to Italy and to France, where he spent a great deal of time, giving those exhausting one-man readings all over this country and widely in North America, helping Baroness Burdett-Coutts with the management of her Home for Homeless Women, serving on the Royal Literary Fund, patronizing London clubs, and, just a small matter, writing a score of the greatest novels the English-speaking world has ever known. A driven man. For relaxation he would sometimes walk from central London to his home at Gad's Hill Place in Kent, a mere 30 miles or so.

One significant feature about the index as planned by James Thornton is that although there is an entry for Dickens himself, it is very limited. Under his name are listed his works (there are hundreds of titles when we include his journalistic articles and short stories) and, most interesting to me, a list of the addresses from which the letters are written. For somebody who travelled as extensively as he did, it is a wonderful way of locating him in particular places at particular times.

This collection of letters aims at total completeness, perhaps an unattainable goal, and resulting in some admitted gaps where a letter is known about but has not been found. So, there is a heading and a date for a letter to John Forster on 1 November 1867, followed by an editorial note: 'mention in next'. And there it is, in the next letter, to Charles Kent on the same date: 'Perhaps you know that Forster's note urges me to propose the Ladies. Don't let it mislead you. I have replied to him. . .'. This of course merits an entry in the Index of Correspondents, despite there being no text to index.

## Indexing the letters of Robert Louis Stevenson

The other great collection of letters that I have indexed, and which has brought me more pleasure than almost any other work I have undertaken, is that of Robert Louis Stevenson. This was a Yale publication and produced in quite a different way from the OUP Dickens. With Dickens, the production proceeded gradually, with letters continuing to turn up, necessitating supplementary addenda at intervals. Also, the editors have always been academic scholars, including Humphry House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson. The Stevenson *Letters*, running to eight volumes, were published over a very short period of about 18 months, because the collecting and much of the editing had been completed before publication began. Furthermore, although two editors' names appear on the title page, this is little more than a courtesy, one having died at a very early stage. The surviving really responsible editor was not an academic but a committed amateur enthusiast, Ernest Mehew, who might almost be described, though not pejoratively, as obsessive about his subject: a man who can tell you off the top of his head what Stevenson was doing at half-past ten on the morning of Wednesday 24 July 1887, and the colour of his necktie on that day.

I have always admired Stevenson as a supreme prose stylist, but the letters were a revelation and a joy. I could hardly bear to wait for the next volume when I had finished one. Reading them, I felt I was in the presence of a man touched with grace. Always ill, sometimes seriously, but never complaining, travelling the world to find a climate congenial to his frail body. Generating benevolence, it was almost a shock to find him quarrelling with one of his friends, W. E. Henley, but even that was because he was defending his wife against an ill-judged criticism. He is funny, learned, romantic, witty, kind and loving, principled and right-minded, tragic and put-upon, but always buoyant. I developed what I can only describe as real affection for him as I read his words, and thought what a privilege it must have been to count him as a friend. An extract from one of his letters helps to convey what I mean (Fig. 1). This was written from his home in Vailima on one of the Samoan islands and dated 29 June 1891, just three years before his death at the age of 44. He addresses it to an American government official stationed on the island, Henry Clay Ide, and it concerns Ide's daughter, Annie Ide, then just 12 years old. Stevenson had heard that Annie was unhappy because her birthday fell on Christmas Day (a rotten misfortune), because it meant that she had only one day of celebration in the year, and that one not even special to her. A footnote explains that US President William H. Taft (who knew the Ides in the Philippines) entered into the joke by formally enquiring whether the birthday was being properly celebrated.

This was another series where the Index of Correspondents was compiled and printed separately from the General Index. A slightly unusual feature was that the volumes contain just a few letters from other people, from Stevenson's wife Fanny Osbourne, and from Lloyd Osbourne, Fanny's son and Stevenson's stepson, and indeed from one or two other people too. These are starred in the

[19 June 1891]

[Vailima]

Dear Mr Ide, Herewith please find the DOCUMENT which I trust will prove sufficient in law. It seems to me very attractive in its eclecticism; Scots, English and Roman law phrases are all indifferently introduced and a quotation from the works of Haynes Bayly can hardly fail to attract the indulgence of the Bench.

Yours very truly

Robert Louis Stevenson

[Enclosure]

I, Robert Louis Stevenson, Advocate of the Scots Bar, author of *The Master of Ballantrae* and *Moral Emblems*, stuck civil engineer, sole owner and patentee of the Palace and Plantation known as Vailima in the island of Upolu, Samoa, a British Subject, being in sound mind and pretty well I thank you in body:

In consideration that Miss A. H. Ide, daughter of H. C. Ide, in the town of St Johnsbury, in the county of Caledonia, in the State of Vermont, United States of America, was born, out of all reason, upon Christmas Day, and is, therefore, out of all justice, denied the consolation and profit of a Proper Birthday;

And considering that I, the said Robert Louis Stevenson, have attained an age when O, we never mention it, and that I now have no further use of a birthday of any description;

And in consideration that I have met H. C. Ide, the father of the said A. H. Ide, and found him about as white a Land Commissioner as I require;

*Have transferred and do hereby transfer* to the said A. H. Ide, *All and Whole* my rights and privileges in the thirteenth day of November, formerly my birthday, now, hereby, and henceforth, the birthday of the said A.H. Ide, to have, hold, exercise and enjoy the same in the customary manner, by the sporting of fine raiment, eating of rich meats and receipt of gifts, compliments and copies of verse, according to the manner of our ancestors;

*And I direct* the said A. H. Ide to add to her said name the name Louisa – at least in private; and I charge her to use my said birthday with moderation and humanity, *et tanquam bona filia familiae*, the said birthday not being so young as it once was and having carried me in a very satisfactory manner since I can remember;

And in case the said A. H. Ide shall neglect or contravene either of the above conditions, I hereby revoke the donation and transfer my rights in the said birthday to the President of the United States of America for the time being.

In witness whereof I have hereto set my hand and seal this nineteenth day of June in the year of grace eighteen hundred and ninety-one.

Robert Louis Stevenson  
I.P.D.

[In praesentia dominorum]

Witness: Lloyd Osbourne

Witness: Harold Watts

Index of Correspondents, and a note added at the foot of the list to identify the writer of the letter.

It is a matter of regret that with both the Dickens and the Stevenson, the indexes appear at the end of each volume, which has its convenience, but economics dictated that no cumulative index was possible with the Stevenson, and I fear that may also be the case with the Dickens. Though it was planned at the beginning that there should be such a cumulation, there may only be a cumulated Index of Correspondents, perhaps to appear in the final volume. That, of course, is a publisher's decision, to which we all have to defer.

Incidentally, when starting to index letters it is very helpful to go through them first and list all the correspondents before starting the real analytical work for the General Index, whether or not the correspondents' index is to be separate or incorporated. This is an easy process, as the name of the correspondent forms the heading for the individual letter. Since there is rarely time to read a whole book before starting to index it, however desirable that might be, this reading through to list correspondents does give a kind of preliminary feel for the whole book and a sense of its structure.

## Some other examples of indexes to published letters

So far I have mainly referred to indexes that I have myself compiled, or had a hand in compiling, but like most indexers, I am not too diffident to look at the work of others and learn from them. From the vast range of published letters I have examined a few of particular interest – a revealing and sometimes quite surprising experience.

### *The Correspondence of Horace Walpole*

The monumental Yale edition (Lewis, 1937–83) of the *Correspondence of Horace Walpole* (45 vols plus 5 vols of index) is not a work to be turned out overnight; it was begun in 1937 and reached completion in 1983. Here and there, individual volumes or groups of volumes carry their own indexes, but the cumulation stands by itself as a mighty accomplishment, and daunting to most of us. The Preface to the index starts with this ambitious claim, quoting from the very first volume of all.

'This edition, through its index, hopes to lead the scholar, whether the subject of his research is Dr Johnson or ballooning, to whatever Walpole's correspondence may have to say about it'. [The Editor] envisioned this final index as 'the index to end all indexes'. So not only the correspondence, but his [Walpole's] own footnotes, and also such unpublished manuscripts, and extracts from periodicals, as we have printed in appendices or quoted in our own footnotes . . . Besides hundreds of individuals, this index includes events, objects, publications, and the whole fabric of political, social, financial, artistic, military and literary history so far as it is portrayed in our volumes. There are special group-headings for topics such as Costume, Food, Landscape effects, Law, Medicine, Music, Opera, Painting, Religion, Theatre, War, etc. . . .

Figure 1. Stevenson's letter to Henry Ide, concerning the birthday of Ide's daughter Annie

There then follows an account of the conventions of the index, one of which is very like the feature mentioned in the note to the Dickens *Letters*:

When an important biographical footnote identifies any individual whose index entries are numerous, its location is usually indicated by a page number in italic type. This is considered unnecessary for famous people who are to be found in all the reference books.

There are then notes on not anglicizing the names of foreign monarchs, ‘but “Leghorn”, “Florence” and a few other place-names are here in anglicized form’.

Walpole was one of the great gossips of all time, but he was more than that: politician, aesthete, patron and writer, and interested in more or less everything in 18th-century England, Europe and North America. The stated aims of the editor are probably the only ones to adopt. Rather like the popular newspaper (was it the *News of the World?*), ‘all human life is here’. This collection also includes letters both to and from Walpole. The arrangement is therefore not primarily chronological but by correspondent, some of whom extend to several volumes, like Horace Mann or Madame Du Deffand, while minor correspondents are gathered together towards the end of the series.

This mighty work is, in fact, one of elegant simplicity: a straight single-sequence alphabetical listing, with subheadings set out line-by-line, also alphabetically, with occasional sub-subheadings, also in alphabetical order but in run-on style. Typographically it is very pleasing.<sup>6</sup> The following is a very simple example of the style, from very near the beginning:

Acacia, acacias:

Arabians worship, 10,156

HW's: at SH [Strawberry Hill], 10,127, 156; covered with flowers, 31,36, 38,90; HW offers to Cole, 1,183,190; HW should not languish under, 31,25; HW to send, to Montagu, 9,177

wind harmful to, 9,177

The alphabetical subdivision is very strict, so that under Boswell, for instance, the titles of his works appear in their alphabetical place. This is one convention that I would not myself follow, preferring to group published works (in alphabetical order) at the very end of an individual's entry.

Other features worthy of mention are the identification by date and (where applicable) title, so that we find ‘Thynne, Thomas (1734–96), 3d Vct Weymouth; cr.(1789) M. of Bath’. There are, of course, cross-references under Weymouth and Bath. While looking at that entry my eye naturally strayed and I was enchanted to find this under the heading ‘Temple, Sir Richard ... considered sensible because of his sensible nephews’. There is also a further sub-entry under Temple, ‘nephews of’, but giving quite different page references from the one above.

### The letters of Cardinal Newman

Staying with English-language indexes, I now turn to the Clarendon Press's 30-volume edition of the *Letters of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (Dessin, 1967–81). Here each volume is separately indexed, and as an example of sheer

self-indulgence it is hard to beat. This is just the *heading* to one entry:

Wordsworth, Charles (1806–92), nephew of the poet and elder brother of Christopher Wordsworth, went up to Christ Church, Oxford, in 1827, where he had a brilliant career. In 1835 he was elected second master of Winchester College, and in 1846 became the first warden of the Episcopalian college at Glenalmond. He promoted Tractarianism in Scotland, and 1852 was chosen to be bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld, and Dunblane. (DNB, xxi, 916), 118, 149

We have to admit that the indexer did abbreviate a little, by missing out the word ‘in’ before the date ‘1852’. This was surely a case of somebody who had not read that note in the Walpole about not annotating people who are to be found in the reference books. It was astonishing to come upon this style of entry in an important work from an academic publisher as late as the 1980s. It is like a throwback to Victorian prolixity, but perhaps it was thought appropriate, considering the dates of the letters themselves.

### Non-English-language indexes

Finally, and believing patriotically that the English-speaking countries have best mastered the art of indexing, I consulted one or two foreign ones. German, first – and I have to say that when they do it they usually do it very well indeed.

### The letters of Friedrich Nietzsche

I gave my spirits a lift with Nietzsche's *Briefwechsel* (Colli and Montinari, 1975–); again a multi-volume work and still in progress, arranged in *Abteilungen*, each one of which appears in several volumes. This is a work including letters both to and from Nietzsche, and the final volume of each *Abteilung* includes a *Namenregister* – an index of personal and place names and, where appropriate, book titles. Individuals are given identifying dates, and an epithet, usually a profession, post or rank, as:

Schaarschmidt, Carl (1822–1909) Philosoph in Bonn [followed by the page references]

This is a beautifully produced work, by Walter de Gruyter of Berlin, of high scholarly standard, generous typesetting and aesthetically very pleasing. There is very little subdivision, but strings are not normally very long, and what sub-entries there are, are alphabetical; so, for example:

Homer [followed by undivided page references]

–homerisch [ditto]

–Ilias [page references]

–Achilles [page references]

Agamemnon [page references]

Helena [page references]

–Odyssee [similar arrangement]

### The correspondence of Voltaire

And so, finally, to the French, and who else but Voltaire? That celebrated bibliographer Theodore Bestermann set himself the task of producing the definitive edition of the *Oeuvres*, of which the *Correspondance* (published 1953–66) occupies 107 volumes. Originally there was no analytical index as such, but the series is followed by five volumes

covering the whole set in a variety of indexes and keys, of which I cite just a few:

- List of letters chronological
- List of letters alphabetical by correspondents
- List of letters by incipits
- List of unidentifiable, spurious, doubtful and lost letters
- various Calendars
- Key to pseudonyms and nicknames
- Index to annotated words and phrases
- Index of quotations
- List of appendices;
- Classified index of illustrations in *Voltaire's Correspondance*

Phew! However, Bestermann was too good a scholar to leave it like this, and simultaneously included an orthodox General Index, also in five volumes, when the *Correspondance* was issued separately.

## Conclusion

What I have discovered, I think, is that there is considerable uniformity in the presentation of indexes to published letters. I have tried to identify some of the distinctive features, but in fact the principles and the conventions are very much the same as in most 'soft' indexing, of biographies, say, or historical studies. The personal element is dominant and it involves a special kind of intimacy. Style can at times earn a mention. By their very nature letters to and from a variety of correspondents will cover a wide range, as exemplified by Walpole, though he is only the correspondent writ large. Although inevitably the contents of letters will reflect the special interest of the writer, there is no narrow focus in any of the collections I know, and I almost now expect to be surprised by the range of the subject matter. That is one of the rewards of undertaking this kind of work.

In many ways my education really began when I took up indexing. It has taken me into parts of the written landscape I might never have visited. Letters, perhaps, have more of the character of the private garden, with their own secret and individual charms, but they are no less enriching for that.

## Acknowledgement

The author and publishers are grateful for permission from Yale University Press to reproduce Stevenson's letter to Henry Ide.

## Notes

1. Where I spent so many years of my working life.

2. And how I enjoyed doing them a few years ago.
3. Unfortunately, the publication is not faultless. Too late we discovered that everybody (text editor, desk editor, copy editor, proof-reader and indexer) had missed a real blooper, in a note on Alfred Lord Tennyson, getting both his birth and his death dates wrong. And badly wrong, what's more.
4. By a curious quirk, the indexer of the first volume, who established the style and practices, was James Thornton whom I never knew, and who, alas, has been dead for many years. However, I found to my surprise that he lived in the same small town as I do (Lewes in Sussex), and his widow is somebody I have known for many years. It was pure accident that brought this to light, and there is a neat circularity in having the series start and finish in the one place.
5. A practice I myself have used only sparingly in the volumes I have indexed.
6. And perhaps if we are looking for an alternative to the Wheatley Medal, we should consider calling it 'The Walpole Award'.

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*This is a revised version of a talk given at the Society of Indexers conference, Homerton College, Cambridge, 16 July 2000. Douglas Matthews is the former Librarian of the London Library and serves on the committee of the Royal Literary Fund. He compiled his first index in 1957 and, since his 'retirement' in 1993, feels able to describe himself as a full-time indexer.*