Editorial

Indexing in Ireland

Irish publishing, although it has remained small scale, is a vigorous industry, employing about 400 full-time workers and with an annual turnover of almost £40 million. The majority of this publishing is educational and non-fiction, so of course there is a constant, and often unfulfilled, demand for indexers. Major US indexing houses, such as H. W. Wilson and the Institute for Scientific Information, have located in Ireland and found a plentiful supply of subject specialists to train to index in their own house styles.

Despite this, when Julitta Clancy and Helen Litton established an Irish branch of the Society of Indexers in 1991, there was only a handful of trained back-of-the-book indexers in Ireland. Publishers in need of urgent work either contacted indexers in Britain, or got the author to do the index. It took a while to build up membership; we were greatly helped by a grant from the parent Society. A corner was turned in 1997, when the Irish branch hosted the Society of Indexers Annual Conference, at Trinity College Dublin. This raised our profile locally, and we attracted a number of new members, several of whom went on to complete training courses.

To draw the attention of Irish publishers to the existence of a growing number of trained indexers, a regional version of Indexers Available was produced in 2000. The next issue will contain almost 20 names, and we are reaching the stage when an Irish publisher can be sure of finding an Irish indexer whenever necessary. However, as with publishers all over the world, Irish publishers have tight margins. We have to keep our profile high, continually making the point that an inadequate index halves the value of a book.

Training in Ireland is still heavily correspondence-based; training days are difficult to arrange when your membership is scattered over a large area, needing to travel perhaps 150 miles to a central point for a workshop. We hope to concentrate more seriously on this in coming years, because there is no substitute for personal teaching, whether on the finer points of indexing or on the niceties of software packages.

This issue of The Indexer has an Irish flavour, though leaning more to the cataloguing end than that of indexing, and manages to span both sides of the Border. We hope you will enjoy our forays into the Folklore Collection at University College Dublin and the fascinating array of Troubles ephemera held at the Linen Hall Library, Belfast, not to mention Tom Norton’s autobiographical reminiscences, which themselves include elements of folklore. In addition, Irish-born Rodney Brunt contributes an account of indexing in the British security services. Both this and David Lee's article on evaluating indexes submitted for the Wheatley Medal are derived from papers delivered at the most recent SI conference in Sheffield. We are also pleased to be including a further paper in Bella Weinberg’s series on the history of indexing, which provides evidence to suggest that a number of ‘modern’ indexing techniques may have their origins over a thousand years ago.

Helen Litton, Fiona McGoldrick and Ann Stewart, for the Irish group of the Society of Indexers

Indexing awards 2000/2001

AusSI Web Indexing Prize 2000: Patricia Kennedy for Site Index: a Subject Guide to the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency

Hines Award 2001: Linda K. Fetters for exceptional service to the American Society of Indexers


Full details of these awards are available on the relevant society websites (see inside back cover for addresses).