The Indexer thirty years ago

Hazel K. Bell

The October 1972 issue of The Indexer, Volume 8, No. 2, with 48 pages, devoted its first seven to the issue of copyright in indexes. The Society of Indexers (SI) Council had set up a Copyright Subcommittee, chaired by John Shaftesley, to try to pursue the matter in the press ... and to seek to obtain counsel’s opinion on the subject. (Whatever happened to SI’s Copyright Subcommittee?) Oliver Sullybrass, in an article in The Bookseller, had ‘taken the fact of copyright in indexes for granted’. This was disputed in a letter to the next issue of The Bookseller from a publisher’s editor, Roger Cleeve, followed by others from Shaftesley, another SI member, and second letters from both Cleeve and Shaftesley, then two more SI members, and finally one from Norman Knight. All these eight letters were printed in full in this Indexer issue, and followed by two pages of Counsel’s Opinion, with his conclusion in bold type: ‘An index is the subject of copyright, independent from that in the appurtenant text’.

Peter Greig and Joyce Tracy reported on ‘Indexing in Canada: local indexing and commercial services’. They stated: ‘Traditional indexing has not achieved the status in Canada which it appears to have gained in Great Britain or the United States’. The first commercial indexing service had appeared in Canada in 1928: the Canadian Periodical Index, issued in mimeographed form by the Windsor Public Library. The two major indexes to periodicals there, that one and Index analytique, represented the linguistic duality of Canada. In 1970 the Bibliographic Society of Canada had formed an Index Committee with the objects of promoting indexing activity and providing information on indexing methodology.

E. L. C. Mullins, winner of the Wheatley medal for 1971, addressed SI members under the title, ‘In Memoriam: H.B.W.’ He outlined the life of Henry Wheatley, and addressed SI members under the title, ‘In Memoriam: H.B.W.’ He outlined the life of Henry Wheatley, and described his How to make an index. Then Mullins turned his attention to the eight winners of the Wheatley Medal, considering each in turn. The first had been Michael Maclagan, an Oxford historian, for the index to his own Clemency Canning; Mullins considered it ‘an admirable example of the sort of index every good historical monograph should have’. Of the second winner, J. M. Dickie’s How to catch a trout, he observed, ‘a splendid index it is’.

Guy Parsloe had received the third Medal for his calendar of The Wardens’ accounts ... 1497–1681, a text that Mullins thought posed exceptional difficulties that Parsloe had ingeniously solved. He pronounced the winner for 1965, Alison Quinn for her modern index to a facsimile edition of Richard Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations of 1589, ‘the most exciting index in the list’, as encountering ‘many and formidable difficulties ... astoundingly generous with its information ... a tour de force’. G. Norman Knight’s index to Winston S. Churchill ... vol. 2. Young statesman, 1901–1919 by Randolph S. Churchill (Heinemann, 1967) Mullins called:

A superlatively fine contribution ... Mr Knight has indexed the first volume also. Examine these two masterpieces of the indexer’s craft ... they have the authentic quality of the master.

The index to the first hundred volumes of the Journal of Anatomy, compiled by Doreen Blake and Ruth Bowden, was hailed as ‘a monumental achievement, testifying to the industry as well as the intelligence of the compilers’. The seventh Wheatley Medal had been awarded posthumously to James Thornton for his index to the second volume of the Letters of Charles Dickens, and the publishers (Clarendon Press) had printed in it a tribute ‘expressing their sense of the loss which his death brings to scholarship in general as well as to this edition’.

Of his own winning index, Guide to the historical ... publications ... 1901–1933, Mullins modestly and drily commented, ‘All committees are human, and to confuse size with quality is a human failing. That my Guide is a sizeable volume none could deny.... For those who enjoy this sort of statistical irrelevancy, its weight is 4 lbs. 6 ozs.’

A filler in this issue seems well to deserve re-exposure after thirty years. John Gross had referred to

an entry in Penguin’s selection from Gide’s Journals:

Defoe, Elizabeth.

Who was she? Intrigued, I looked up the relevant passage in the text, which reads: ‘But with what admiration I read aloud with Elizabeth Defoe’s Colonel Jack!’

Raphael Posner writes of ‘The index of the Encyclopaedia Judaica’ over ten pages, covering editorial decisions, scope, indexing from manuscript, the work system, illustrations, filing, computer stages and problems, galleys and updating, and layout. How strangely the conclusion reads now:

It is clear that the use of the computer did save us a great deal of time. ... However, the computer had no effect on the actual index itself; here there can be, happily, no substitute for the intelligent, informed and educated human being ... Our evaluation of the program indicates that the use of the computer is only justified (from a financial point of view) if: (1) the text to be indexed is, anyway, going to be set by computer; (2) the size of that text is so large as to be unwieldy, and (3) if great speed of production is required. Should any of these three conditions be lacking it is our feeling that as good a job can be done manually and probably at less cost.

The Wheatley Medal for 1972 was again withheld, with two indexes being highly commended: Yves Gerard’s Thematic catalogue of the works of Luigi Boccherini, and J. E. Holmstrom’s to Publications of the Institution of Civil Engineers, 1965–69. The Chairman of the Panel (Ken Bakewell) expressed concern that so few nominations had been made

1. A limited edition facsimile reprint of this was published by the Society of Indexers in 2002.
SI Council’s annual report recorded SI membership of 363, with 98 Registered Indexers (and only 76 requests for indexers received, those chiefly for specialists in scientific works). At the AGM there had been a suggestion ‘that a highly experienced member of the Society might consider setting up a small “stable” of suitable newcomers on a similar basis to that used by barristers in chambers. This could ... ensure that skilled indexers would be available in the future to replace the older ones when they retired.‘

‘Extracts from reviews’ took eight pages. John Shaftesley’s review of Indexing for editors by R. F. Hunnisett (‘This extremely useful book ... highly instructive’) took three, in small print.

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**Letter**

**Without benefit of index**

On 21 May 2002 I wrote as follows to Paternoster Press:

I recently purchased a copy of J. C. Ryle, first Bishop of Liverpool by Ian D. Farley from Wesley Owen, Liverpool.

The contents table concludes with the following:

Index 259

However, my copy ends at page 258.

Do I have an imperfect copy or did you decide not to include an index? If the former, may I return my copy for replacement or, alternatively, can you please send a copy of the index? If the latter, may I express my regret that you have chosen to spoil an important book by omitting such an important feature.

The publishers replied promptly on 24 May:

Thank you for your recent enquiry about the missing index...

Due to time and money constraints we were not able to supply the book with an index. This late change should have been reflected in the contents page, and we apologise if this mislead [sic] you in any way.

K. G. B. Bakewell, Liverpool

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