Indexes reviewed

Edited by Christine Shuttleworth

These extracts from reviews do not pretend to represent a complete survey of all reviews in journals and newspapers. We offer only a selection from quotations that members have sent in. Our reproduction of comments is not a stamp of approval from the Society of Indexers upon the reviewer’s assessment of an index.

Extracts are arranged alphabetically under the names of publishers, within the sections: Indexes praised; Two cheers!; Indexes censured; Indexes omitted; Obiter dicta.

Indexes praised

**British Library:** Indexers and indexes in fact and fiction, by Hazel Bell (2001, 160 pp, £16). Rev. by Mary Madden, Update 1(8), Nov. 2002.

Attractively presented, it would make an ideal gift for librarians, indexers and anyone passionate about knowledge and its organization. There is, of course, an excellent index.


The index of names of people and places is a welcome addition, permitting the reader not only a rapid means of locating subjects of special interest to him or her, but also providing the student of sixteenth-century history an invaluable analytical tool.


In many ways, the most useful aspect of the book may be the exhaustive index, seventy-three pages, each of which has three columns. Readers of this journal who may happen upon this work will be well advised to consult the index in order to avoid endless scouring of pages that might possibly contain something of interest to them.


The list of sources includes a large number of scholarly works and archives, yet no references are given for the countless quotations and items of information, and one of Wordsworth’s most important quotations on his brother, ‘When, to the attractions of the busy world’, is several times quoted and paraphrased without its title ever being mentioned (though it can be found by scanning the index).


The Internet has in fact just caught up with Robert Boyle: Michael Hunter’s most recently completed labour is an on-line edition of Boyle’s “work-diaries” (www.bbk.ac.uk/Boyle/workdiaries). And the precedent now set by the Athanasius Kircher Correspondence Project (www.sul.stanford.edu/depts/hasrg/hdis/kircher.html) suggests that one day, all major new editions of correspondence may be electronic only.

For the time being, however, we should be grateful that a publisher such as Pickering and Chatto is willing to produce such a superbly old-fashioned edition – old-fashioned, that is, in its attention to layout, footnotes, indexing and sheer readability. The new technology is still too new to match this: the Kircher edition, though impeccably up-to-the-minute and Californian, is awkward to use, and the electronic edition of the Hartlib Papers, issued on CD-ROM in the mid-1990s, became technologically obsolete so quickly that it has just now had to be issued all over again. These modern keepers of the flame have done their work so well that it strongly deserves, one feels, to be kept in such a durable form, with no risk of disappearing in an electronic puff of smoke.


Particularly useful is the detailed contents page beginning each of [the] sections, and the index which contains about 1,500 terms.


His annotations and his subject index also aid those seeking to locate articles on a specific topic or to limit working bibliographies. The subject index is comprehensive enough to cover issues as particular as ‘Africans and Elizabeth I’, ‘pedagogy’, or ‘rape’, and matters of as broad interest as ‘colonialism’, ‘cross-dressing’, ‘gender’, or ‘patriarchy’. ... Those modern keepers of the flame have done their work so well that it strongly deserves, one feels, to be kept in such a durable form, with no risk of disappearing in an electronic puff of smoke.


Use of broad subject genre (e.g. Human Interest) means that it is worth checking the indexes for authors that you otherwise may have thought were excluded.


... an achievement of which William W. Fortenbaugh, Eckart Schurtmpf and their international team can be justifiably proud: 176 items scrupulously edited, fully correlated with past collections, exhaustively indexed, a typographical delight, and provided with careful facing translations.


The only seriously disappointing feature of the volumes’ otherwise excellent and thoughtful annotation is the manner of identifying individuals within the documents. Footnotes provide full identification and biographical information about individuals the first time a reference to them appears. But, after that, there is nothing to confirm whether ‘Cousin John’ is John Carroll, S.J.; a different John Carroll, or indeed some other John altogether, unless one turns to the index and finds a page number corresponding to the reference’s location....
The index is superb. The editors do not neglect the little features easily overlooked, but of immense aid to the user, such as listing variant spellings or nicknames for individuals and boldfacing citations to their biographies. Nor do the editors neglect the more sophisticated techniques behind good indexing. Larger main entries are broken down into intelligible subentries, intelligibly phrased. And the content – appropriately like the content of the documents themselves – is expansive, articulate, and inventive. Entries include almost every feature of eighteenth-century life and thought that might be of interest to historians, whether lay or professional, such as individual crops, medicine, and even weather.

The index’s treatment of slavery deserves special mention, because it is part of an overall approach that leaves historians of this critical subject with an insurmountable debt of gratitude to the editors. Slaves are indexed by name, and noted as such in parentheses, along with birth dates when possible. The Papers of George Washington follows the same format. The Papers of Henry Laurens, to show an alternate format, indexes all slaves under ‘Slave names’ – less respectful perhaps to the spirit of the individuals, but, ironically, more useful to the reader who can’t be bothered to scan an entire index for distinct names.

Two cheers!


The collection provides a thorough index, although a few of the subject listings seem counterintuitive. The frequency of typographical and other small errors suggests the work did not receive the diligent editing it deserved.


The only part of this book that I can criticize is the index, which relies on broad headings; the many useful descriptions of individual reference books are indexed under subjects and not by title, so there are no entries under White book, Red book, or Black index: the half a dozen blank pages at the back of the book could have been used to extend the index. The extended coverage of electronic sources is evident throughout, and there is a full index of websites from about.com to yell.com


Lists of abbreviations are not given in [The Guinness book of answers]. … Chambers manages to hide them in the index under ‘Common abbreviations’ with nothing in the As. A common fault of both books is a lack of indexing of the country section, so that the details of such things as currency or GDP are not revealed. … The index in the new Chambers is very much fuller than in the first edition, and copies [The Cambridge factfinder] by indexing all the personal names (but would we really look there for Larry Hagman or Fleetwood Mac?) … The NATO alphabet (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie), not indexed, is given with pronunciation, and tells you that Q for Quebec is pronounced key-bee.


There is no topical index to the stories; there is an index of speakers and another of the Indian nations represented, both of which would facilitate research focusing on specific people or tribes.


Her index is extensive, but does not include matriological subjects such as deësis and Mary with the protective cloak (what German Catholics call Schutzunterschleiermadonna).


This is a fine piece of scholarship that has much to contribute to the rapidly growing field of research into the historical context of opera. Its indexing follows the continental style (separate indexes by title and name), which gives us a very good guide to specific works and artists but is almost useless for finding topics. Given the nature of this book, a subject index also would be useful.

Indexes censured


To my relief (and [Sir Hans] Sloane’s fury) Handel at the height of his powers suddenly put a buttered bun on a mediaeval manuscript of untold worth. Handel’s name is not in the index.


Given the volume’s hefty price tag, one might have wished for more from Ashgate. The lack of a bibliography is to be regretted, particularly given the coherence of the articles gathered here. The volume’s index is strangely thin – it is curious that in a work that devotes some 150 pages to early modern demography, terms like ‘plague,’ ‘fertility,’ and ‘mortality’ do not figure in the index.


The eight-page index with which Linden concludes the volume is likewise unreliable; although indexed items do appear on the pages indicated, randomly selecting pages in the text, and then checking to see if all the items on those pages were indexed, revealed that a considerable number of them were not. Unfortunately, such inaccuracies and omissions undermine Linden’s efforts and authority.


I found few mistakes, and only have one serious gripe: there are no plant names in the index, so if you want to look up apples or Narcissus, you can’t.


The over seven-hundred pages of the text provide a wealth of information. Navigation is difficult, however. Political history and foreign relations are spread over two chapters and customs and culture over three, as are religion and ritual. And yet, the index is hardly exhaustive: there are, for example, no entries for nin’yō, henushi, Bifukumon’in or Ike-no-zenni. Not every term is scrupulously identified as contemporary or as a much later neologism (e.g., sōhei or yagū hijiri). The text needs editing; there are typos and mistakes. Nevertheless, these are minor irritations. This volume remains an indispensable resource for all students of Heian Japan.


… the index is satisfactory except that the numeration slips by a page after Chapter Seven. [Surely not the indexer’s fault.]

Finally, and perhaps most disturbing of all, the author incorrectly identifies one of the most prominent Italian politicians ever, Giovanni Giolitti, as Antonio Giolitti. And the mistake is repeated, twice in the text and even in the index!


In short, by current editorial standards, their presentation of the texts is disappointing and their index, which overlooks important terms such as ‘définition’, ‘écriture’ and ‘étymologie’, as well as omitting Saussure’s references to other linguists, can hardly be considered satisfactory for scholarly purposes.


In sum, while I would prefer more recognition of indigenous and recent anthropological scholarship, better proofreading (especially for inconsistently spelled names), an improved index (including all cited scholars), and an alphabetical rather than compartmentalized reference list, this book is an excellent contribution to the history and historiography of Siberia and Alaska.


Unfortunately, the index amounts to a listing of proper names and institutions (with the exception of the entries ‘students’ and ‘professors’) and does not do justice to the book’s presentation of many issues and topics of historical and historiographical interest.


What a shame that each book is served by an introduction whose design is at odds with the remainder of the book, a nonsensical contents page, an incomplete glossary and an index that contains none of the species or cultivars illustrated!


The book’s user-friendliness is facilitated by a solid index (which, however, includes the striking error of naming Napoleon as ‘king’ of France, p. 877). Unfortunately, the index indicates only persons – no places, not to mention terms or facts. Territories and states can be found only if mentioned in relation to their rulers. A more extended index might have corresponded better with the book’s overall concept.


However, these [Yeats scholars] will not be helped by the index: under ‘astrology’, for example, there are no less than 150 page references but no indication at all what occasion, or aspect of astrology, the pages mention; as an index, therefore, it is useless. Rev. by Brenda Maddox, The Guardian, 27 Oct. 2002.

Overall, the 800 pages are a hard slog. Even Yeats scholars will find it hard to make their way through the textual thicket. Names in the index are followed only by a useless succession of page-numbers, with no thematic subdivisions.


Another way of finding information is an extraordinary index which has no page numbers but gives references to entry-headings to various treatments of the subject, but does not include those subjects which have their own entry, unless they are significant towns or districts. Under this provision ‘Iona’ qualifies in both places, but in the Index there is no reference to the entry ‘Columbia’ (‘anyone would know that’), ‘Adoman’ (‘anyone using this book would know that’) or Diarmait foster-son of Daigre (!). At least the Index is alphabetical; the List of … Contributors is fine if you seek your friends, for it is alphabetical by name, but if you seek the identity of contributor RDA, seek on for you will find him third after RJA.

These peculiarities are not merely a pitty; they are a bizarre obstacle to the wide, indeed popular use which the book and all the effort which has gone into its production deserve.


I have one small grumble. Wanting to see what Bevin’s attitude was to Frank Wise, a Labour MP and the first chair of the Socialist League, I turned to the index to find that two different individuals of that surname had been subsumed under the same entry (Frank with an American Rabbi Jonah Bondi Wise), a reflection presumably of relying on a computer programme.


The editor and publisher might note that the ‘best-known descendant’ of the Roman fish sauce known as garum, ‘the pei salat or pissalat of Provence’ is not on p. 292 as promised, and is not listed in the index.


‘Publishing Law is a comprehensive guide to the law as it affects the publishing process’ runs the blurb, and those of us who have used this excellent book in its first edition naturally endorse the claim. However, on second thoughts, it is clearly not an assertion to accept especially when the needs of academic and professional publishers are primarily considered. A quick look at the index gives the clue. There is no entry for ‘journal’ and no entry for ‘serial’. Actually there should be an entry for ‘periodical’ (see p. 49), so the index is clearly not up to scratch… I have already complained about the index, because it is to my mind so important in a reference book of this type. Otherwise, Routledge as an imprint of Taylor & Francis has done an excellent job on the production.


In My Own Good Time’s index is lamentable, but Barstow will recognise that for what it is, a reviewer’s complaint. [And what about the readers?]


There are notable editing problems by Stanford University Press. One example is that the reader is informed on at least three separate occasions that Japan secretly attacked Port Arthur in 1904, but just on July 17, and in 1900, not 1899. Likewise, the index is inadequate; for example, it includes references to only thirteen pages that discuss the Boxer Uprising, even though this event appears on a total of twenty-two pages.


For the rich comparative data in the text, furthermore, the index is woefully deficient. But this only means that the book must be read
from cover to cover to mine the wealth of details, wide-ranging analyses, and extraordinary scholarship that are at the heart of this impressive sociodemographic study. [So that's all right, then.]


Yet, too typically of these days, the author has been wretchedly served by his publishers. The index and the footnotes are an utter disgrace – inexcusably so since new technology should long since have made the compilation of each so relatively simple. [Well ...] This is penny-pinching publishing at its most contemptible, yet its most predictable. The author, the reader, the scholar and most of all, the victims of that atrocious epoch, deserve far better.

**Indexes omitted**

Allen Lane: *Orwell's victory*, by Christopher Hitchens (£12.99). Rev. by Crispin Jackson, *The Tablet*, 29 June 2002. [Orwell] would have objected to the high price (£12.99) of this very belated paperback, as well as the lack of an index and bibliography.


If the book is exclusively devoted to the early period of Raphael's painted work, then it should include frescoes and other forms of painting. Instead, we eventually learn, Raphael's wall paintings will be the subject of volume 3, while volume 2 will present a catalog of only the panel paintings by Raphael in Rome. Thus does the first chapter on Raphael's Umbrian beginnings appear to be strangely cursory because, among other things, it omits mention of a fresco cycle so important as Perugino’s for the Cambio, in which the young Raphael is believed to have participated. Because the book lacks an index, it is not even possible to verify that this project is not, in fact, even mentioned.


And my attempts to keep straight names, dates and places were frustrated by the arrogant stinginess of yet another publisher failing to supply an index.


*East Anglia's History* is prodigiously annotated, but since so many essays deal with overlapping subjects it could have done with an index of persons and places . . .


. . . a very large compilation that could be useful if it had an index, although much of the content consists of lists of trivia . . .


Orwell’s are the most important essays of the twentieth century, and reading them – along with his nonfiction books *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia* – will make you a clearer thinker, a cleaner writer, and a more thoughtful human being. This handsome, 1,372-page hardcover volume contains his complete essays (even his unfinished piece on Evelyn Waugh, which is missing from the four-volume edition) and selected reviews and journalism. It also includes an incisive introduction by the brilliant John Carey, but lacks an index – a grievous fault, but its only one.


. . . in a book so stuffed with wonderful perceptions, the absence of an index is particularly keenly felt.

**Fitzroy Dearborn:** *The New York Times book reviews 2000*, Rev. by Gordon Graham, *LOGOS* 13(2), 2002. My only criticism of this work is that while there are indexes of authors and titles, there are no indexes of reviewers. However, this is a small quibble.


The book deals with the Spinifex people of the Great Victoria Desert, north-east of Kalgoorlie [Western Australia] and stretching towards the South Australian border. . . It is a useful book, although frustrating and awkward to get around [*like the desert?*], something which is exacerbated by the lack of an index.


However, no entries appear for ‘Wal-Mart’, ‘Bush’, ‘Clinton’, ‘Nader’, or ‘Sex toys’ in the indexes to either volume – because there are no indexes. Serious (and also semi-serious) nonfiction books demand back-of-the-book indexes to make content more accessible and retrievable. And librarians should be loudly insisting to authors and publishers alike that indexes are necessities, not frills.


There is no index for the 1,300 pages of this edition so far . . . We must hope that when the remaining volumes appear, some of the problems of cross-reference will be eased, and that an index will finally facilitate retrieval of the information at present occluded by the editor’s pernickety mannerisms. We should be grateful for what we have, but it is hard to resist the conclusion that this major undertaking has been irresponsibly flawed, and that an important opportunity is being botched before our eyes.


Shand's publisher, Little, Brown, owe him an apology for the faulty editing and lack of index. He risked his life for this book and he deserves better. [*That's telling 'em.*]


The wonderful book’s only (but major) flaw is its lack of an index – both surprising and disappointing coming from such a fine university press.


Whether viewed in first-order logic and mathematical proof or not, most readers of this journal can appreciate (or deprecate) a book's index. This one produces some surprises: For one thing, although the book is close to 300 pages long, there are only 107 terms in the index and only one of them leads to more than a single locator. For
another, some of the index entries are adjectives and at least one is a verb. In fact, the index is not one’s standard back-of-the-book subject index, but is instead an index to (the definitions of) terms. Such an index is quite useful for a work like this one, but should not be the only index. The absence of a subject index is an unfortunate omission and one of the book’s few weaknesses.


. . . Bird provides a well-condensed and insightful account of the first Chechen war, alongside his description of the early years of Caucasian independence. (This makes it all the more baffling that the publishers have supplied no index – the book could be a genuinely helpful resource.)


In spite of its overall high quality, the book has drawbacks. Its lack of an index will ensure this title a special place among marketing books of the 21st century, while thanks to an annoying mobile phone beeping this lays no claim to being a scholarly edition, these oddities make it bit too relaxed, perhaps?


If there is a drawback to these new editions (which follow the German texts of the posthumous complete works), it is that while they come freighted with stylishly serious introductions, some scholarly pleasure has been repressed in the stripping of their indexes. Gone too is Strachey’s ‘Index of Parapraxes’ from Everyday Life: a minor comic masterpiece, with its laconic entries on ‘child’s head knocked against chandelier’ and ‘handshake combined with unfastening lady’s dress’.


Pieces written at different times and for different purposes or audiences sit side by side, and in one or two cases pieces from different periods on the same topic have been amalgamated . . . Although this lays no claim to being a scholarly edition, these oddities make it hard to use (as does the lack of an index), and the level of proof- correction doesn’t help.


There is a glossary of names, but no index, so this is not the place to look up a god and get basic facts. But this is all to the good; the discursive and relaxed approach makes the book very readable. [A bit too relaxed, perhaps?]


The absence of an index will ensure this title a special place among motoring books of the 21st century, while thanks to the annoying design quirk each chapter starts half way down the page.


This is a very useful collection and the book could be a good reference work for practitioners, educators and students – could be if only the publishers had thought of providing an index. Why do they have such little confidence in the value of the book they have produced?


I am sorry the publishers did not employ a professional indexer, who would not have provided entries like ‘Pope Paul VI’ and ‘Queen Elizabeth II’ and would have provided some subject entries in addition to the (selective) name entries.


The approach is academic but the contributions contain pertinent comments on many subjects which Readers could use in sermons.... Unfortunately there is no index. [The reviewer comments, ‘I actually wrote: “Unfortunately the publishers have not made it very easy to do this because they have not provided an index.”’]


There is no index, an omission that immediately makes this large book less user-friendly.


This volume provides, summa summarum, a reasonably comprehensive picture of how still one more small German city experienced National Socialism. Alas, however, although the essays it prints are fully annotated and draw generously from primary sources (if such have not inexplicably gone ‘missing’ in Passau or are not open even to scholars; see pp. 529, 532), there is no list of these or a bibliography, and worse, no index of any sort. Shame on a university press and the editor.


Finally, a critical biography of over 200 pages and costing £15 should have an index.


And even a book of 40,000 words would benefit from an index.


This is a dense and intensely researched text with a good reference section. It is well structured and the contents pages are first rate. Therefore, it is all the more surprising that it lacks an index, particularly as it is written to be accessible across the boundaries of different specialisms. Two things seem common among specialists who enter into other fields: they do not know their way too well and will be short of time to find it. An index would also add to the value of the book as a reference. It could well appear on the reading list of many a sociology and healthcare course.

Obiter dicta


This excessively colloquial, willfully eccentric book is as infuriating as it is entertaining, right down to the index, which includes such entries as ‘Pop a pill, 326’ (this particular citation points to an aside of Watson’s about how modern readers deal with anxiety).

This one [Leadership] gives barely a nod to messier parts of his private life, notably his bitter divorce from Donna Hanover (who is fleetingly mentioned but then denied a reference in the index). [Shades of the John Major affair], comments Joel S. Berson – a reference to Edwina Currie’s much-publicized remark, ‘The most hurtful thing is to look at John’s autobiography and find that I wasn’t even in the index.’


There is of course an index, but only pedants would approach the book this way. This is one for browsing, with much to learn and enjoy along the way. [Pedants of the world, unite!]


But before reading any of Feeding Frenzy, it is advisable to consult the index, which covers not only the usual ‘people, places and things, but also ideas, obsessions and my own irritating stylistic tics’, so as to include ‘tongues, locking, ‘matching socks and shoes, co-ordinated foot- and sockwear’, and ‘snicker-snick, fateful, of psychosis’. … Just to turn to the index and look up Barratt Homes and read how Self indulged one Friday morning in ‘reverse commuting’ to discover that there existed at least one word that, until then, he didn’t know: ‘flaunching’.

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Contributions of review extracts welcomed by the editor of this section, Christine Shuttleworth (please see inside front cover for further details). Closing dates for the next two issues: 30 May and 30 November 2003.

Different viewpoints

In The Royals, Kitty Kelley’s louche but lively blockbuster of 1997, the most capacious subsection in the index for Prince Philip is ‘and women’ (‘103, 206, 208–10, 216–17, 259, 264, 357, 566, 567–72, 703–04’). Lacey’s emphasis falls the other way (‘supposed romances and flirtations, 162–3, 208’). And there is certainly a moral persuasiveness in Philip’s confidence to a relative: ‘How could I be unfaithful to The Queen? There is no way she could possibly retaliate.’

Martin Amis, review of Robert Lacey, Royal: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (Time Warner, 2002), in the Sunday Telegraph, 2 June 2002

It must be there somewhere . . .

In a letter in The Guardian of 11 May 2002, Professor G. Rex Smith, of Dyserth, Denbighshire, reported:

A student of mine in 1970s Cambridge visited a bookshop to find a particular translation of the Koran. ’Who’s the author?’ asked the assistant. ’God’, replied my student. She checked her list under ‘G’ to no avail. ’Could you please try ‘Allah’ then?’ she suggested. She was last seen running a finger down the As.

Earlier, at The Times, the letters pages during December and January 2001 were rife with reported information retrieval problems. Dr Peter Willis of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, looking for references in a book’s index to Louis XIV, eventually discovered them under Quatorze, Louis.

Some indexes to car manuals appeared to be designed to prevent rather than facilitate the retrieval of necessary information. Mr John Hinde of Escher wrote:

In the index to our car’s owner’s manual you look in vain for computer under C, or for any of the things the computer can tell you about under their initial letters. It’s all there though: under O for On-board.

And Lady Shuttleworth of Carnforth (no relation), looking in the manual for her Japanese car, found ’nothing under P for puncture, T for tyre or even W for wheel. By scanning the manual alphabetically, I eventually found it under I – “If you have a puncture.”

The Rural Dean of Emlyn, Hugh James, reported that page 7 of the Llandaff Diocesan Year Book for 1995 was headed ‘Useful Addresses’, while the following page bore the heading ‘Other Addresses’.

Unusual filing systems supplied much amusement. Mrs Sian Flynn of Woking bought a second-hand filing cabinet containing a file which became her favourite and most used one: it was labelled ‘Old Pending’. Major John Fitzgerald (ret’d) of York had been shown by his company commander in the 1st Battalion, The Royal Norfolk Regiment, how he had cut ‘unnecessary’ paperwork in his office. ’He allowed only two files: “Rugger” and “Other Bumf”.

Mr Edwin Entecott of Nuneaton had a friend who had labelled four filing trays ‘In’, ‘Out’, ‘Pending’ and ‘Too Difficult’. ’The last was to store items which solved themselves if left long enough. They either became out or were dealt with by some smart aleck trying to prove how clever he was. I’ve tried it. It works,’ concluded Mr Entecott.


Papers were everywhere. Many were stuffed into a stovepipe hat. So difficult was the situation that Lincoln had a large envelope inscribed with the message: ’When you can’t find it anywhere else, look into this.’

Christine Shuttleworth, London