Letters

Vitruvius and early English dictionaries

Professor Bella Hass Weinberg’s article, ‘The index of a sixteenth-century architecture book’, in the April 2003 issue of The Indexer, is written in the clear, objective, scholarly style of all her other work. Indeed, I found the article fascinating, as it reminded me of the methods used by early English lexicographers.

The indexing methods of 16th-century books such as Vitruvius’s probably served as models to the first English dictionaries, the earliest of which is thought to be Robert Cawdrey’s A Table Alphabetical, published in 1604. Note Cawdrey’s title, which could have been modeled after Vitruvius’s Tabula de Vocabulis. Cawdrey’s work was largely limited to foreign words, specifically those borrowed from Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French. This and other early English dictionaries were essentially dictionaries of hard words. Since many of them were etymological dictionaries, it occurred to me in reading Professor Weinberg’s paragraph on Greek entries (p. 144) that the interfiled Greek words in Vitruvius were perhaps intended as etymologies of the Latin words. That, at least, may have been one of the reasons for their inclusion.

Some of the English glossaries of the 1600s were alphabetized in first-letter, two-letter, and even three-letter order. They were usually lists of Latin words with English glosses. Lengthy explanatory definitions, as those in Vitruvius, were never found; the longest would consist of five or six words. But many glossaries included incipits or subheadings. Other similarities probably exist, but I don’t have the texts to check.

Sol Steinmetz, New Rochelle, NY

Wisden Cricketers’ Almanack

In ‘Around the World’ in the April 2003 issue, passing reference is made by Christie Theron to Wisden Cricketers’ Almanack. He mentions that he ‘read recently that a complete set can put you back R10,000 or US$1000’.

Alas, the underlying information is not right. There is a considerable market in early issues of Wisden and a well-known expert on the subject suggested in conversation that a complete set would retail today at around £60,000 to £100,000, depending on condition. This assumes the set did not contain any of the reprints of early issues, although they themselves have become minor collectors’ pieces. Naturally most value lies in the 19th-century almanacks, with those for two particular years selling for over £1000 each. Wisden for recent years have been printed in quantities such that supply has been closer to demand, but even now some of the issues published during the second world war (when print runs were limited) will each readily command over £100, again if in good condition. As with so many items that are collected, condition is really everything.

In recent years the publishers have introduced colour photographs(!) and for the 2003 edition, a photograph of a contemporary player on the cover (!) and (!!). Naturally these breaks with tradition have caused much angst within the ranks of the true believers.

Wisden has always covered the whole world of first-class cricket, but with an emphasis on matches played in England. A recent development is Wisden Cricketers’ Almanack Australia, which reached its 5th edition with the 2002–3 issue.

Two indexes have been published. One covering the years 1864–1943 was compiled by Rex Pogson and more recently one covering the years 1864–1984 was compiled by Derek Barnard. No doubt many enthusiasts have compiled their own personal indexes. Curiously neither of the published indexes was greeted with fanfares of trumpets and the later one, in particular, did not sell well; a copy can readily be obtained today at well under its original price.

Ian D. Crane, London

Literature on indexing

‘Indexing is not a field that has generated a vast quantity of literature’, asserted Ruth Pincoe, opening her article, ‘Apples, pears and oranges: three important books on indexing’ (The Indexer 23(3), April 2003). I must dispute this, in the light of my own research when asked by the editor of LOGOS: The Journal of the World Book Community to compile a bibliography of books on indexing. He wanted a list of not more than 18. I found great difficulty in reducing the titles to be included to that number, and wrote an introduction to the bibliography explaining the grounds on which another 23 named books were excluded. And there were still more not referred to – as well as the entire mass of articles written on indexing continually and profusely appearing (witness the current-awareness bibliography that appeared for ten years in The Indexer). Oh, indexing has generated a vast quantity of literature indeed!


Hazel K. Bell, Hatfield

A taxing request

To help us develop a more useful index, please let us know if you have any ideas for index entries. See ‘Comments and Suggestions’ in the ‘Introduction’ for the ways you can reach us.

Note to index in US Internal Revenue Service, Publication 560, Retirement plans for small business