Editorial

There is nothing like a challenge. In the summer of 2003, I was asked to guest-edit this issue of The Indexer and, almost simultaneously, to take on the organizing of next year's Society of Indexers conference in the southwest of England. In each case I accepted with alacrity and without giving much thought to possible pitfalls — once one starts to do that, the temptation is to do nothing at all.

As regards the conference organization, we are still in the early stages as I write, but we have a good team, and I have no doubt all will turn out well in the end.

Guest-editing The Indexer turned out to be much easier than I had expected; the issue was to have an English theme, and several articles had already been promised. My thanks to all the contributors for their cooperation. Most indexers I know work full-time at indexing, and asking anyone to give up precious time to write an article for nothing is not easy.

This issue is, for me, particularly interesting, as it has a good historical and, yes, an English feel to it, despite a couple of 'rogue' contributors, one of whom comes from north of the border and another from the other side of the world. All, of course, are welcome. First I would like to mention Douglas Matthews' article, an informative account of a huge project, namely his index to the works of Daniel Defoe. Some 44 volumes are envisaged, grouped around politics and economics, travel and history, satire and fantasy, religion and novels. Hazel Bell discusses indexing T.E. Lawrence's Seven pillars of wisdom, while Philip Bradley gives a delightful picture of his work as reviews editor for The Indexer over a period of 20 years.

David Lee has two articles, one covering indexing societies, and the other on 'the other Wheatley', namely Benjamin Robert, brother of the better-known (to us, that is) Henry Benjamin Wheatley. Coincidentally, one of the articles I have contributed dovetails nicely with both of these, as it covers H.B. Wheatley's article on 'What is an index?', published by the Index Society in 1879, and recently reprinted by the Society of Indexers.

Richard Munro contributes a most interesting article on military indexing — not a subject that has received much notice — and Auriol Griffith-Jones a short piece on the relationship between indexers and authors. My thanks to all those of you who answered my plea on Sideline (the SI email discussion list) for information on just this subject. Your comments have been noted, and in some instances included.

The final article with a historical bent covers the story of MACREX: here a fine line has had to be drawn between advertising a product and reminding members of the importance of this program to the continuing efficiency of our profession. Drusilla Calvert proved a most enlightening interviewee.

All information that takes away the mystique of the electronic publishing environment is to be welcomed. Glenda Browne's article on indexing the future of information, based on a talk given at the Australian Society of Indexers' conference in September 2003, fills this need. The article by Stuart James, 'Is the future index-linked?', also covers this area and surveys the current environment of indexing and prospects for indexers. It reviews ICT developments in the publishing of printed and electronic books and discusses the past, present and future of indexing for electronic and printed database projects.

Finally, some personal thoughts. As I hinted at the beginning, challenges should be met head-on, and I have always believed that as a professional indexer one should be able and willing to index subjects outside one’s core competence and not stick to the same subject area year in and year out. How boring that is, and how can one grow, change and enlarge one’s experience without taking on something new? Mistakes will of course occur — one can overstretch oneself, believe that anything is possible and that nothing can go wrong because one is 'a professional'. Not so; but to use two quotes I have found useful during the course of my indexing career (anonymous, I'm afraid): 'To live but not to learn is not to live/To learn but not to understand is not to understand, and the temptation is to do nothing at all.' And 'Wisdom comes from good judgement/Good judgement comes from experience/Experience comes from mistakes/Mistakes come from bad judgement.' Can anyone disagree?

Geraldine Beare

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Further details will be included in the autumn issue of Sidelights.