Although he is not as well known as Audubon, his work is compared favourably with Audubon’s illustrations.

The Kwa-Zulu Natal branch was also very active and held training sessions and an AGM.

i-TORQUE

Nancy Mulvany has produced issue 12 of her successful online indexing newsletter i-TORQUE. It includes a major report on offshoring, as well as a review of the MailWasher program, a Q&A section, and plenty of news and useful links. i-TORQUE is published 10 times a year. More information, including subscription rates, is available at http://www.i-torque.us

The third edition of Hazel Bell’s Indexing biographies and other stories of human lives (no. 1 in the Occasional Papers series) has been produced by the Society of Indexers. At 106 pages it is nearly three times the length of the first edition. It has a new section on indexing letters and fuller treatment of many of the other topics, including the indexing of fiction. There is also a new Appendix, ‘Using the Internet’ by Noeline Bridge.

Castle Hill Press, the publishers of the complete 1922 (‘Oxford’) text of T. E. Lawrence’s Seven Pillars of Wisdom, draw attention on their website specifically to Hazel’s detailed index to this edition – see her article in this issue, pp. 9–11, and http://www.castlehillpress.com/bibliography/2003-sp22-spec.htm. See also the major TEL site, http://www.telstudies.org.

Thanks to all the contributors to this column – please keep the news items flowing in.

Afterword: I bet my whole fortune on the Springboks winning the Rugby World Cup at 2500–1 so that I would be able to retire. I lost everything, so now I am finished with sport and will stick to indexes and books.

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The Indexer thirty years ago

Hazel K. Bell

The April 1974 issue of The Indexer, Volume 9, No. 1, consisted of 36 pages. This was the first issue of the journal to run abstracts preceding the articles. It opened with a nine-page symposium on ‘The inadequacies of book indexes’. Eight members contributed: K. G. B. Bakewell wrote about indexes to books on management, H. B. King on indexes to books for children, John Thornton on indexes to medical and scientific books; Kathleen Binns on what she saw as the causes of inadequate indexes: restrictions of time and space imposed by publishers. Some interesting opinions emerged – that a severely restricted index ‘is worse than no index at all’, and ‘no index to a book is preferable to an inconsistent, misleading one’.

Bruce Harling proposed that ‘An index which takes no account of other indexes in books on the same topic might be regarded as less than adequate’. He urged indexers to look beyond ‘the particular work in hand’ and see ‘the information store not as an individual book, but as a collection’. Rather than individual indexers devising their own ‘inevitably idiosyncratic’ internal classification schemes, he called for consistency and harmonization throughout collections:

If we take the whole problem of headings, cross-references and excluded matter, the situation could be compared with that in which librarians were placed before the production of standardized classification schemes such as the Universal Decimal Classification and the Colon Classification. The existence of such schemes has led to a more consistent approach to classification ... Might not the same sort of approach be similarly applied to book indexing? ... Would it not be valuable if the individual indexer did not have to do all this work himself ... the time might have come for indexers to come together – perhaps through the medium of a sub-committee or working party of SI – to produce their own ‘classification’ schemes.

Harling observed, ‘No method has been discovered for indexing material that is not included in a book but which one might reasonably assume might have been there’ – with the addendum that one might ‘simply give the entry followed by the page number ‘0’, with an explanatory note about this usage at the beginning of the index’.

Also in the symposium, Oliver Stallybrass denounced the index to a French book, L’Amérique et les Amériques (publisher and date not given), as ‘the weirdest and most incompetent index I have ever needed to consult’. For more than a page of the journal he gives detailed substantiation of this claim. It includes:

The idea of indexing concepts rather than words is wholly alien to [this] indexer ... the prize for fatuousness must go to the indexing of the list, facing the title-page, of the twelve volumes in the series to which this one belongs; thus volume 1, L’Homme avant l’écriture, is indexed under ‘écriture’, as well as under its author ... perhaps the most useful wodge of all is the half-column and more under “États-Unis”, which gives no fewer than 198 unadorned page numbers, from 5 (for chapter-headings in the “Sommaire”) to 396 (actually it’s 400), on which page there is a caption for a facing plate that includes the words, “... à Salt Lake City, États-Unis” ... the indexes are no more accurate in matters of detail than their conceptual framework is intelligently constructed ... no fewer than a hundred headings are either wrongly alphabetized or correctly alphabetized under a wrong spelling ... a number have resulted in duplicate or near-duplicate headings.
Charles L. Bernier wrote three pages on 'Index specifications', following The Indexer's first abstract, with much reference to scattering and to syndetic apparatus in indexes. He particularly disparaged 'Cross-references external to the index and in the form of a list or as a “thesaurus”' which he considered place several burdens on the index user. First, he must remember that there is an external source of guidance. Then he must search the list or thesaurus for guidance. This is an extra step. Finally, he turns to the index with the discovered guidance mind or noted (if it is complicated or detailed). For most, if not all, systems with external guidance, there is no guarantee that terms found in the external list or thesaurus will, indeed, be found in the index. Thus, every term in the list or thesaurus is potentially dangling (blind, frustrated). ... The external source of cross-references may have to be consulted several times during a search. ... Thus, cross-references and notes interfiled in the index gives the most convenient product. A specification can be that the syndetic apparatus is interfiled or is external to the index.

Wolfgang Behn and Peter Greig contributed three pages of advice on Islamic filing; T. D. Kuch, two on 'Computer-supported indexing'; and Deborah M. Smith, three on 'Cartographic indexing'.

The editor's preface, and sample pages from the index of Enquire within upon everything of 1888, were reproduced; as were, under the well merited heading, "Bias in indexing", lengthy extracts from an anonymous pamphlet published in 1729 excoriating the index, by John Oldmixon, a staunch Whig, to Tory Archdeacon Laurence Echard's History of England, published in 1718. Lilian Rubin wrote of Nicholas Culpeper's 17th-century British herbal and its index.

Summaries of talks given at the Fall Membership 1973 Meeting of the American Society of Indexers, on 'Indexing special collections', appeared. Extracts from the guide to the awarding panel and others making recommendations for the Wheatley Medal were printed. Society News announced the appointment of an Honorary Solicitor, and 'a trickle of new members from Australia'.

Dorothy Frame wrote to report her indexing, over eight months, of a 20-volume encyclopedia, followed by the bankruptcy of the firm employing her. She entered a claim for payment to the Receiver, and eventually:

I did receive my fee on the grounds that they could not proceed with publication of the work unless they paid me for my copyright, and I signed a contract giving them world rights.

She advised indexers working for small or new firms, and for unusually large jobs, to arrange if possible for progress payments, and to insist on a formal contract setting out terms.

Robert Collison's Indexes and indexing was reviewed (by L. M. Harrod) as a standard textbook that 'has seen through four editions in 19 years'. Reviewing A dictionary of new English, 1963–1972, Norman Knight mentioned that he was 'a paid-up member of the newly formed Queen's English Society'.

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