Editorial

It was with a good deal of uncertainty that I took over from Christine Shuttleworth as Executive Editor of The Indexer, an uncertainty inspired not only by the fact that I already had more than enough to do in my so-called retirement, but also by the knowledge that I had a hard act to follow and that, so far as I was aware, I had few of the relevant skills. Four months later, with my first issue in production and thoughts already moving toward the October 2005 issue, I would still describe myself as a reluctant recruit to the editorial ranks, but with perhaps slightly less of a sense that it would all be beyond me.

The principal qualification I saw myself as bringing to the task was an addiction to The Indexer. Apart from Sidelights it is the one serial publication which, as I have travelled the world, I have carefully stored, issued in, issued out, in such a way that I might actually be able to find it. I must confess that at the beginning, I was better at storing than at reading it: as one new indexer said to me two or three years ago, ‘I receive it gratefully in the hope that one day I may aspire to actually understanding what they’re on about’. In a journal which prides itself on its scholarly standards, which seeks to cover the full range of material of interest to professional indexers and those interested in indexing matters, and which aims to keep fully abreast of technological developments which bring joy and torment to indexers in equal measure, it is probably inevitable that not everybody, all of the time, will be either interested in or find particularly relevant everything that appears in the journal. My aim, like that of my predecessors, will be to achieve a range of content such as to have something to tempt everyone whatever their specific area of interest or level of experience; to continue to make it the sort of journal which, as Professor Bella Hass Weinberg has said, ‘should find a place in all library science collections and in the personal collections of professional indexers and indexing researchers and educators . . . a lively forum on highly specific questions representing a concern for good indexing’.

I have no radical plans to change the style of the journal as it has developed over the years. Changes are likely to be evolutionary and the result of discussions with colleagues, in particular members of the Editorial Board, whom I look forward to meeting in force at the Board’s next meeting, scheduled for 8 July, at the start of the SI Annual Conference in Exeter. Please do let me or your corresponding member know if there are any points you think we should be considering at that meeting.

Even in this issue, there are some signs of evolution. For example, when I was asked whether I would like a review of index-related software for the Reviews section, it was immediately obvious that the time had come to split the reviews section in two, keeping the traditional book reviews, but also including as a separate section more reviews of internet material, hardware and software of special interest to indexers. In this issue we have, under the new rubric, reviews of i-TORQUE and DEXter. Nancy Mulvany and I would welcome suggestions for inclusion in this section, or offers to review. And, reflecting the evident and growing interest in tools to assist embedded indexing in Word, I already have a number of items on the subject promised for the October issue.

As it happens, I am one of those indexers who see the advent of automatic indexing as an opportunity, not a threat, and as automated searching becomes ever more sophisticated, I am convinced that the future, for both indexer and searcher after information, lies in finding some way of harnessing the best of both worlds. It seems to be generally acknowledged in the IT industry that even the best of search engines will only do 80 per cent of the job and that the human skills of a professional indexer are needed to sort out the rest. And as more and more software becomes available to help us in the process – even the dreadful Word tool – so it should become easier for us to make a full contribution. For my own part, I have just embarked with some excitement on the indexing of a volume, regularly updated, which appears sometimes in a hard copy version, sometimes in an electronic version, sometimes both. For the first time I am doing true embedded indexing, but I am also, simultaneously, producing locators for use in the hard copy version. The double task will take longer but not much longer than doing a single traditional index, and the double index will be easily updatable. In anticipation of those who will say, ‘but you really can’t have the same index serving both purposes’, my answer is that that is what I have been asked for. I shall be interested to see what, if any, reciprocating effect working simultaneously in the two environments produces. Will my approach to the traditional index be changed (as to some extent it has been by working on CUP XML-generated PDF files, a sort of halfway house)? And the still bigger question I have is to what extent cognitive processes generally are changing as a result of early exposure to the discipline of the computer: what a thought, that everything we do may be being steadily reduced to that simple concept of ‘on/off’, ‘yes/no’. A binary straitjacket or a binary liberation?

There are a number of articles in this issue that describe the use of the computer to help in the generation of indexes or index-type search tools. Jim Irvine (HarperCollins/Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World), Mark Scott (Sweet & Maxwell) and Ann Cameron (Scottish Screen Archive) write about the problems they have had to tackle in making place names, the law and the moving image accessible in all their complexity to the searcher after information. Frances Lennie describes the history and development of CINDEX, a dedicated indexing program familiar to many of us. And John Richardson writes about ‘Indexing Roman Imperialism’ and the contribution a disciplined analysis of the use of words can make to the rewriting of history.

But all is not lost for those of us – and we are still many to judge by the amount of correspondence relating to The Indexer I still need to commit to the care of post offices across the world – who enjoy and attach importance to indexing as we think it once was. I am grateful to Hazel Bell and Oula Jones for the two items covering correspondence.
with Bernard Levin (see the October 2004 issue of The Indexer for Oula’s obituary of him). I find that last letter of his to Oula moving beyond words.

I said at the beginning of this editorial that, four months on, I had slightly less of the feeling that it would all be beyond me. And for that I have to thank above all the remarkable support I have had from my predecessor – never interfering but always there to answer a call for help or gently warn against a possible foolishness, and from my production editor, who does much the same. This, perhaps, I could have expected. But what astounded me was the way in which colleagues around the world (many of them previously unknown to me) leaped into the breach when I found myself, three weeks away from copy deadline, suddenly without two key contributions. Who would have thought that, from a standing start, within 12 hours of sending out an appeal for book reviews I would have had enough promised to make a very respectable showing. Or that, following the sad and unexpected death of Christie Theron (Around the World editor: see the obituary on page 148), Glenda Browne would, in no time at all, have picked up the reins and produced what I think is a particularly rich ATW. (I would like to draw particular attention to the section on the China Society of Indexers, and to congratulate them on what seems to have been an action-packed indexing year.)

So as my first issue of The Indexer as editor goes to press, I find that a job that filled me with apprehension has actually been a wonderful opening to a whole new network of friends, and I have more than ever been confirmed in my appreciation of the way in which, by making indexing my second career, I opted into a truly international professional community, working together to advance our common interests. Perhaps I was right to say yes.

And one final word. The Indexer is for you, the present readers, and also for those readers I would like to attract. It depends on you to keep it a lively forum! So please let me or your corresponding member know what you like, don’t like or would like. And don’t forget that the journal depends on getting lots of articles of the right quality, so if you have something or someone in mind, let me know: and do think laterally. Indexing is about the organizing of material in such a way that the searcher can easily retrieve it. That gives lots of scope.

The October issue is to be guest-edited by the ‘Yellow Spots’, the SI’s collective noun for indexers attending their first SI Conference: any suggestions for contributions to Paula Peebles (paula@p-space.co.uk).

Maureen MacGlashan

---

**SOCIETY OF INDEXERS CONFERENCE 2005**

Connections: Working in the Present – Learning from the Past

8–10 July 2005 University of Exeter

Come to Glorious Devon! Exeter, the regional capital, is a small city with Roman origins, a wonderful cathedral and medieval Guildhall. It was a prosperous port from the 16th century onwards, with some 1,600 listed buildings and a delightful riverside walk, and is easy to get to. The university, just north of the city centre, is set in lovely mature grounds, with a renowned Sculpture Walk. The buildings range from handsome early Victorian to the brand new halls of residence. All rooms are en-suite with double beds, and the dining and bar facilities have views to die for! There are good rail and road connections to Exeter, and you can now fly from Belfast, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool and Newcastle.

This year’s programme will focus on problems in practical indexing, from gardening to images, with interesting speakers, and workshops and sessions for beginners and specialists on many aspects of our work. There will be a chance to visit the Cathedral Library and time to enjoy the company of old friends and to make new ones. If you haven’t been to a conference before, come to this one!

Rooms are available for extra nights before or after the conference, so why not take the opportunity to stay longer and explore further.

Booking form and the draft programme are now available on the SI website: www.indexers.org.uk or from:

Geraldine Beare: tel. 01935 817112, giwriter@beeb.net

or

Auriol Griffith-Jones: tel. 01258 817601, auriol@akgj-index.freeserve.co.uk

For booking queries, contact Sue Lightfoot: slightfoot@macace.net