The Indexer thirty years ago

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The April 1975 issue of The Indexer, Volume 9, No. 3, consisted of 40 pages. K. Boodson opened it with seven pages on ‘Indexing a bibliographical guide’: to wit, a collection of over 4000 abstracts from the literature on non-ferrous metals, for which he had been awarded the Wheatley Medal for 1973.

This issue was much concerned with the Wheatley. An ‘open letter’ from J. F. W. Bryon had been published in New Library World, and was reprinted here, with a half-page introduction (presumably by the editor, L. M. Harrod) commenting:

It is believed that this is a matter of concern to all serious book and periodical indexers. . . . Whether the conditions of making the present award should be altered considerably, or an additional award offered for another aspect of indexing . . . are what has to be decided.

Bryon claimed to be the ‘initiator of the concept of making an annual award to encourage the better indexing of books’, and considered the making eligible of separately published indexes ‘at best distortion and at worst abandonment of the original concept’. He further suggested that it would be preferable to make the award to the publisher, ‘to make appropriate use of its receipt for publicity purposes, and so, possibly, stimulate rivals to emulation’, rather than rewarding the indexer ‘for the quality of his or her work’.

Following publication of this letter, a public meeting on the subject, ‘Awards for Indexes’, had been held to discuss the issues, with a panel comprising Bryon, an indexer, a librarian and a publisher. Bryon spoke first, restating his case at greater length. He also suggested the publication by SI of a booklet giving the criteria for a good book index, incorporating excerpts from British Standard 3700:1064, to be followed perhaps by a *Which*-type survey of recent books, indicating the quality of book-indexing in Britain, and comparing the performance of publishers in a “league table” – and ‘This might in turn be the spearhead of a crusade for better indexes in books . . . .’. He suggested three slogans:

A good index makes a good book better
No subject book without an index
An index finds a book’s good qualities

Bryon also advocated acknowledgement of indexers in books.

K. G. B. Bakewell reported a joint meeting of SI and the LA’s Cataloguing and Indexing Group at which ‘some disquiet about the Wheatley Medal’ had been revealed; one cause for this being the exclusion of ‘certain kinds of index, such as indexes in the areas of science and technology and indexes compiled by a corporate body rather than an individual’ from eligibility for the award. He himself had successfully proposed ‘that every index published in Britain should be eligible for the Wheatley Medal’.

I. D. Shelley, speaking as a librarian, considered ‘the criteria which the Panel have provided for evaluation of indexes have obviously been drawn up with very special care . . . But the application of these criteria to the books in any field would be an immensely time-consuming task.’

Michael Wace, putting forward ‘the point of view of a publisher’, thought that a degree of specialization should be introduced, with an award for the best index to a children’s book, one for adult books in the humanities and another for the sciences.

Several letters were printed commenting on the Symposium on selective indexing in the previous *Indexer*, with a further contribution by Peter Greig. Oliver Stallybrass, acerbic as ever, wrote, ‘The layout of Mr. Borchard’s dual-purpose index, admired by Mr. Collison, seems to me “very carefully designed” for maximum waste of space.’ He also advocated the use of *passim*; the journal’s Hon. Ed. could not forbear to denounce this in four stern paragraphs in square brackets.

Kebrab W. Giorgis provided over two pages on ‘Entry word in Ethiopian names’.

Several official bodies in the information science world were featured in this issue. Fred Blum wrote three pages on ANSI (American National Standards Institute) Committee Z39; Michael Bardwell, two on Documentation Standards at BSI; and Toni Carbo Bearman, one on the National Federation of Abstracting and Indexing Services. There were reports of activities of Cranfield Conference on Mechanised Information Storage and Retrieval Systems; the International Standards Organization Subcommittee on Documentation Terminology; and NATO’s Advisory Group for Aerospace Research & Development. The publication was announced of a cumulative index to *LISA* (*Library and Information Science Abstracts*), 1969–73, and Unesco: IBE’s education thesaurus. The American Society of Indexers had produced a guideline to specifications for printed indexes, which was reproduced in full.

‘Personalia’ reported several books by SI members. President G. Norman Knight had had his fifth book published: *King, Queen and Knight: A chess anthology*; John L. Thornton, a Vice-President, was co-editor of and contributor to *The Royal Hospital of Saint Bartholomew, 1123–1973*; and Margaret Anderson, with her husband, had written a book on the spas of Britain, *Vanishing Spas*. L. M. Harrod had completed the updating of the third edition of his *Librarian’s Glossary . . . And Reference Book*.

‘Extracts from reviews’ ran to four pages, mostly submitted by Bruce Harling. Five books were reviewed.