From the Guest Editors

Attending an indexing conference can generate some unexpected opportunities. The four guest-editors for this issue of The Indexer were first-time conference attendees – all new or trainee indexers – at the Society of Indexers (SI) Chester conference in April 2004. First-timers at the conference are distinguished by having a yellow sticker on their name badges, and hence gain the (slightly unfortunate) collective term ‘Yellow Spots’. Several of us maintained contact after the conference, occasionally meeting up in various SI group meetings. We must have made a bit of an impression in some quarters, as Maureen MacGlashan contacted us in October 2004 to ask if we would consider guest-editing The Indexer. It was a daunting prospect but certainly a great honour to be asked, so four of us decided we’d accept the challenge.

At the time of writing I (Paula Peebles) have just returned from my second SI conference in Exeter. I thoroughly enjoyed this year’s conference, and was pleasantly surprised at just how many more faces I knew or recognized this time round. I also very much enjoyed meeting the 2005 intake of yellow-spotted newcomers; they displayed a great deal of spirit and enthusiasm for the world of indexing, and I find this most heartening for the future.

The guest-editors have really appreciated the extra contact with indexers in the UK and overseas that the commissioning process has entailed, and all the support and encouragement we have had over the past few months. Slowly but surely, we have made our way from a worryingly blank set of pages to what we hope is a varied and interesting selection of articles. Our general theme is topics of particular concern to new and trainee indexers; we trust these articles will also give reassurance to more-established indexers that standards in, and enthusiasm for, the profession remain as important as ever.

This seemed a good opportunity to ask what is bringing newcomers into the profession and how they set about establishing themselves. The four guest-editors have made a joint attempt at an answer with ‘Why indexing?’. Doing this gave all of us a new insight into our differing backgrounds and skills and our respective routes into indexing. As a complement, Jill Halliday (SI Executive Board member with responsibility for training and professional development) writes of the changes she has seen from the perspective of being involved with indexing for over 20 years, from shoe box to computer. Rohan Bolton’s ‘Diary of a trainee indexer’ details her experiences and thoughts during the two-year period studying the SI training course. It shows the serious nature of the training and the considerable amount of work involved in becoming a professional indexer. All four of the guest-editors are now Accredited Indexers (with three of us passing the SI course since the Chester conference), and we have also all started indexing for clients, so we seem to be on our way.

Hilary has passed her enthusiasm for indexing on to her sister, Gillian Faulkner, who writes of her early trainee experiences in Toronto following the US Department of Agriculture distance education indexing course. Also from the Canadian perspective, Dania Sheldon gives her impressions of attending her first IASC/SCAD conference in Ottawa in June this year. Sylvia Coates writes about her new University of California Berkeley Extension course, including the views of some of her students, past and present. Jane Purton (ANZSI) gives an enthusiastic account of how the mentoring scheme, launched in Victoria in 2003, turned her from ‘shrinking violet’ to confident indexer. Her mentor, Max McMaster, gives his side of the story (as told at the SI Exeter conference). And we are particularly pleased that Do Mi Stauber agreed to rework part of Facing the text (on ‘the real purpose of subheadings’) for us. As new indexers, we have found her book extremely useful as it takes the reader through the actual indexing process rather than just the cold theory.

We also have a clutch of articles on how indexing is, should or might be done. Hilary Faulkner and Wiebke Light write on the methods indexers employ to edit their indexes – a discussion originated by Wiebke’s request for help on the INDEX-L email list regarding her first full-length book index. Hilary is particularly interested in the use of indexing software for data interpretation, and intends to develop this interest further as part of her doctoral research. And Bob Trubshaw (author of How to write and publish local and family history successfully) gives good advice on indexing local history publications.

We hope that you enjoy this ‘Yellow Spots’ issue, and are delighted that we shall be followed as guest-editors (October 2006) by the German (DNI) and Netherlands (NIN) groups. Do let them know if you would like to make a contribution or have ideas for ground they might try to cover.

Rohan Bolton
Hilary Faulkner
Paula Peebles
Margaret Vaudrey

From the Editor

I too hope that you will enjoy this issue, and the noble work done by Paula Peebles and her Yellow Spots team. I think the articles they have put together offer a fascinating snapshot of the indexing profession as it stands in the year 2005. I hope you will also enjoy the other articles in this issue, two of them (Shauna Hicks on using volunteers to index the Victoria Public Record Office archive, and Kate Perry on the Girton College Archive) presenting another perspective on some of the issues raised by Bob Trubshaw. Iain Sandford and his colleagues at the World Trade Organization address alternative ways of accessing information. They also give a helpful insight into the vexed question of indexing across languages. James Lamb clears some of the mystery from the embedded indexing
process. Bill Johncocks goes into greater detail on one aspect of that process and puts us right if we thought that embedding an index did much to make it reusable.

I must pay tribute to two of our regular features contributors, Hazel Bell and Nancy Mulvany, who are signing off. Hazel has written her last ‘Thirty years ago’ for the simple reason that were she to continue she would find herself going round an old course: in 1978 she took over as editor of The Indexer, filling that post with distinction until 1995. The Indexer of today owes much to the qualities she brought to the editorial task. It is a particular pleasure that her departure from the ‘regular’ ranks should be accompanied by the news that she is the well-deserved 2005 winner of the Wheatley Medal (see p. 226). I am sure we will see much more from and of her in these pages.

Nancy has also decided that the time has come to withdraw from the ‘regular’ ranks as North American reviews editor, where she has given such excellent service over the last six years. I’m sure we’ll see more from and of her also. In the meantime, I am delighted to report that Frances Lennie has agreed to take over from Nancy with effect from the April 2006 issue.

Frances has also set an excellent example with her ‘Letter to the editor’ (p. 223) commenting on the review of DEXter in the April issue. Please do think of doing likewise if you feel you would like to have your say, to engage in dialogue on any topic relevant in the broadest sense to indexing. From 250 to 400 words would probably be about the right length.

Helen Litton, The Indexer’s indexer since volume 21, has also decided to make the index included in this volume her last. We are grateful to her for the professional skill with which she has carried out her heroic task.

Other news: we now have an assistant editor, Sue Lambert, who will (to my great relief) be responsible for all sorts of things that I’m no good at (like ensuring that The Indexer website is up to date) and don’t have time for. And we’re dropping ‘executive’ from my title so that I’m now plain ‘editor’.

Maureen MacGlashan