Book reviews

Edited by Maureen MacGlashan and Nancy Mulvany


It’s always a great pleasure (partly because such a rare event) to welcome a new cumulative index to a periodical, especially an important national journal like this one on Welsh archaeology. It follows the pattern of its two predecessors under the same editorship; their difficult genesis was documented by Moore (2003). The run of indexed volumes now covers, impressively, the years 1846–1980, and mostly both Ms Moore and Ms Davies are SI members, and Moore’s introduction explains the indexing practices used.

I found many things to like in this index, not least the ‘extras’ in the shape of lists of the contents of the annual volumes by year (sometimes handy) and of the annual tour programme booklets, the lists of meetings held and special publications issued. Such things are normally left unfindable. The horrid old volume numbers in Roman numerals have been summarily dealt with by simply ignoring them in favour of year of issue, much friendlier.

Moore’s introduction (p. xxxv) explains the principles used in the index, covering scope (persons, places, objects, topics etc), the thorny and nightmarish problems of Welsh place names (spellings, county-name changes etc) and personal names (where necessary with useful further identification – e.g. Evans, Walter; of Bristol, pipemaker). The Association’s president provides a foreword which explains the compilation method: handwritten slips passed into pages, photocopied, edited, and passed to the typesetter. The consequent onerous task of proofreading involved several hands. Unfortunately archaeologists do not seem to like hunting through old published work, however necessary, so sales are often poor. Hence it is explained that hefty subventions were needed on top of the Association’s own ‘prudently maintained’ Index Fund. The resultant amazingly low prices of the printed volumes thus conceal the real costs in labour and print.

Now to the content. The layout is clear, with attention paid to indents and page turnovers on long entries. (I only spotted one place where the indents had gone badly wrong.) The alphabetical sequence runs straight through, with no cumbersome separation into authors/topics. Place names are entered direct, but not also cross-referenced from county as many people would like (so entries under Cardiganshire are only for the whole county, not the individually named places). Admittedly adding these cross-references would have tidied up loose ends. As one would expect, the cumulated index is more detailed than that for the annual volume, simply because of the greater number of references per entry.

From bitter experience I know how hard it is to maintain consistency over the years, so I have great sympathy with all the workers on this volume. What I do find surprising, however, is that in Moore’s 2003 article he gives no hint that he investigated the available literature on either indexing in general, or archaeological indexing in particular (Lavell, 1981). If he was a novice it was brave to work it out from scratch, but perhaps not best advised. Moore has fought his way through to a good conclusion, no doubt encouraged by the fact that the second cumulative volume he worked on, that for 1901–60, won a Wheatley Medal for its then compiler, T. Rowland Powel. Moore (2003) says he came to realize (as we all should) that ‘the making of any index was a creative contribution to literature’. My strong hope for any future Cambrians’ indexing is that they embrace computer technology (e.g. MACREX, CINDEX, SKY) which would so strikingly and efficiently speed the process, and also assist with checking. So: away with those horrible handwritten slips and the presumably associated shoeboxes!

References


Cherry Lavell, retired archaeological indexer and member of SI


This book is a comprehensive overview of an important area, and the back cover blurb describes it as timely, so it’s sad that the authors have taken rather a dry subject and managed to make it seem very dull indeed.
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Samuel Johnson’s gigantic Dictionary of the English language was first published in 1755, in two volumes of 2,300 pages and over 40,000 entries, weighing some 20 pounds in all. Jack Lynch’s eminently browsable edition, with 3,000-odd entries, is somewhat more accessible, and is recommended ‘unreservedly’ by Henry Hitchings in his fascinating story of the genesis of this mighty work. The Dictionary took Johnson (whom we call Dr Johnson, though his doctorate was not conferred until 1765) eight years to compile, with the help of only six amanuenses, not all employed at the same time. It is surprising, as Hitchings points out, ‘given Johnson’s oscillation between sociability and melancholia, that the Dictionary ever got written at all’.

Hitchings gives special attention to Johnson’s selection of some 114,000 illustrative quotations, for which the lexicographer searched the literature of the past two centuries. They cast as much light on Johnson’s personality as on the words themselves, many of which have not survived in present usage or have radically changed their meanings (Hitchings devotes a whole chapter to examples of the latter). He was as fond of slang terms, such as ‘fopdoodle’ and ‘giglet’, as of arcane Latinisms such as ‘perivacuous’ and ‘vastidity’ (and he admitted to having invented at least three of four of these). Lynch’s selection contains many surprises, including the word ‘hushmoney’ (unhyphenated), which I would have thought a 20th-century coinage.

Hitchings’ book has a general index and an ‘index of words’—that is, words defined or mentioned in the text. I found an odd error in the entry for ‘Browne, Sir Thomas’: the author of Religio Medici, who accounts for nearly 2,000 quotations in the Dictionary, and was much admired by Johnson, who wrote his Life, is conflated with a Thomas Browne, a shoemaker of Lichfield who tutored the young Johnson. Lynch has three indexes, of Shakespearean citations, additional literary citations, and ‘piquant terms’, classified by author—subject (chiefly connected with the highly dynamic nature of both the material itself and its presentation), cataloguing workflow and the alternatives to cataloguing (web lists and context-sensitive linking) are covered. The authors’ style doesn’t make for easy reading. For the first three chapters at least, prescriptive statements follow one another remorselessly, the generalized advice unrelished by real-life example, quotation or even figure of speech, let alone any attempt at humour. Surely not even a how-to-do-it manual needs to be quite so implacably earnest?

After Chapter 5, there is no greater lightness of touch but the treatment does become more practical. Chapters 7 to 9 respectively present detailed worked examples of the MARC 21 coding for three distinct type of issuance: monographs, serials and integrating resources (that is, updating websites and updating databases). For monographs, the classic example is of a born-digital e-book, augmented with shorter examples of an online book reproduction, then an unpublished dissertation. The serials chapter includes a born-digital online-only serial, an online journal also issued in print and a serial discontinued in print, with regular reference to CONSER guidelines. Chapter 9 tackles some well-known websites: cnn.com represents a continuously updating site; usgs.gov, one with unknown frequency and regularity, and weather.com, a computer file. The last chapter looks at two potentially significant emerging trends: open access publishing and the FRBR model for bibliographic control.

The authors’ presentation gets no favours from the book’s designers. After an inexplicably empty top inch, the left-hand third of each page is reserved for a few sparse and cramped-looking explanatory boxes, effectively wasting several square metres of white space while doing nothing at all to relieve the congested appearance of the main text. This is a solid mass of fully justified type with no blank lines between successive paragraphs. The hierarchy of chapter headings and section subheadings ramifies to no fewer than five levels, but they are distinguished only by typography: no section numbering is provided to assist the hapless reader.

Perhaps these are matters of taste, but the dreadfulfulness of the ten-page index at least is indisputable. Indeed, it is so outstandingly bad that it could be used unmodified as a teaching aid. At least two entries (under ‘Serials’) lack any locators whatever, and one main entry has 12 subheadings, 9 of which point to the same single locator. Several pairs of adjacent main entries do the same. Scores of See also cross-references, many of them also to adjacent entries, suggest the problem of synonym control has not even been considered. Some acronyms are double-posted with their expansions; others are not, while one (‘HTTP’) has both locators and a See reference. Many runs of subheadings lack turnover indentation. At the very least, this part of the book would have benefited hugely from a further totally ruthless editing pass, but one still wonders whether entries like ‘Sources’ or ‘Configuration, See also Administration’ will ever help anyone.

All that said, a librarian needing to manage any aspect of online resources will almost certainly find a full list of the issues to consider and much valuable practical guidance between these covers. But they might do well to arm themselves with a strong coffee first.

Bill Johncocks, freelance indexer and member of SLIG


This is a very beautiful and well designed book. It is described in the blurb as a ‘book of photographs,’ and the photographer is credited as first author. The emphasis is on the visual presentation; however, the text is also a delight and should not be ignored.

This is the story of the herbarium of the New South Wales Botanical Gardens in Sydney. Inevitably it is also a story of the discovery and exploration of Australia’s flora, and hence of the discovery, exploration, and exploitation of Australia. The history of the Gardens is also discussed, and there is something about the notable Melbourne Botanic Gardens. The figure of Frederic Mueller, director in Melbourne and a towering name in Australian botanical history, appears often.

The idea of herbaria conjures images of rather dull, colorless (dare one say, even dusty) specimens. These photographs dispel such preconceptions. The colors of a waratah collected and pressed in 1881 are still vivid, and my own favorite picture is of a luscious indigo water lily collected over 20 years ago, its leaf spread across the page like a Chinese character. The specimen illustrated span the period from Banks’s first collections with James Cook to a 2002 Wollemi pine, one of the more spectacular of recent Australian botanical discoveries.

There is an interesting group of illustrations of albums of ferns and seaweeds. These were seen as delicate occupations for ladies, with an emphasis on artistic arrangement rather than scientific content. The relationship between botany and art, especially
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‘female art,’ is made clear. There is a nice section, though, on women collectors, many encouraged and helped by Frederick Mueller who saw the potential of an intelligent and possibly under-employed workforce spread across the continent and just awaiting his (benign) exploitation.

The text forms a useful introduction to the botanical history of Australia, and includes some introduction to ideas of botanical classification and taxonomy. All the earliest formal collections were, of course, done by Europeans, predominantly men from the UK, and the material taken to English institutions. It is almost moving to look at the first plate in the book of a native violet, collected by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander at Botany Bay in 1770. This specimen spent 100 years in the British Museum before being sent back to the NSW collection and reclassified as a new species in 2003. The delicate thing seems too fragile to support this weight of scientific, political, and practical difficulties so summarized.

Other evocative moments of history are captured in situations such as the specimens collected in Palestine and nearby areas by soldiers during the First World War, or in the interplay between the amateur field collectors and the professional scientist who might have corresponded for decades but meet in person only in old age.

The period of gentlemen collectors and scientific cabinets arrived at much the right time to help support the exploration of Australia. Many of the specimens in the herbarium were part of collections being made for sale to the armchair collectors of Europe. Although not seen by the buyers as philanthropic support, there is no doubt that this eagerness to buy interesting specimens made possible many expeditions and hard collecting work that would not otherwise have occurred. Conscientious collectors made some, often the best, of their work available to public institutions.

The index is a good professional job, if a little light. It is a pity that there are no errors in the text that might have been picked up at copy-editing or proofreading.

In summary, however, this is a very beautiful book which will be enjoyed by people coming from many varied backgrounds.

Jean Darnall BSc, MSc, librarian, registered member of the ASI and a North Queensland gardener


This book on the problems of designing information retrieval systems for multimedia materials is aimed at third year and postgraduate students of information science. I am not one of those, and indeed I think it says a lot for this book that I read it almost from cover to cover (I skipped a few examples of cataloguing systems) on several bus journeys despite the unfamiliarity of much of the material.

The authors address issues of indexing and information retrieval, taking as their starting point the assertion that if systems designed to facilitate these processes are to work effectively, the creators and the users of the systems must share a common language and interpretation. This can be more complex for nonverbal media. This point is well demonstrated by a number of examples of different types of audio and visual media. The authors argue that currently available approaches to multimedia indexing fail to ‘engage with questions about the meaning(s) of documents’ (p. xiii). They suggest that it is the interpretation of a document that should lie at the heart of an indexing and retrieval system, rather than an attempt at objective description.

The authors provide a useful introduction to information retrieval and to multimedia information retrieval. They then move on to a discussion of semiotics, which again starts from a useful introductory base and gives plenty of scope for students wishing to pursue the subject further. They discuss a range of multimedia information retrieval tools and use this to demonstrate the gap they believe exists between narrow descriptions based on controlled vocabularies and the far richer interpretation that semiotics can provide.

The authors review and critique a number of cataloguing systems. Here I must admit I parted company with them for a while since as a social scientist rather than an information scientist, I do not have the background necessary to compare these, and found 40-plus pages of examples hard going. Some explanation of the abbreviations and acronyms would have helped, as there were a number that I could not work out. However, this would not be a problem for the intended readership.

Having presented their review they then present a brief account of Eakins’ and Graham’s system of content-based image retrieval (CBIR). This consists almost entirely of extracts from a report by Eakins and Taylor, and the authors do not really engage with this system except to use it as a lead-in to present their own research into ‘democratic indexing’, which they suggest as an alternative approach focused on user interpretation. Sadly this is a very short part of the text – just 11 pages. I would have liked to read more on this. From the description given, democratic indexing adopts an approach similar to the data-mining strategies used by a number of retail companies to develop user profiles. The approach is obviously in the early stages of development, and the authors are aware that cost elements may have to be balanced against the richness of information that the approach can achieve.

Overall I found this an interesting and very readable book. There is a lot to interest book indexers as well as information scientists. The text is pitched appropriately for final year undergraduate and postgraduate students, although there are some irritating errors in the text that might have been picked up at copy-editing or proofreading stages. I found the index to be rather thin – running to six pages for 200 pages of text – and there are several instances where subheadings would be helpful.

My major quibble is that a book that is only available in hardback at a cost of £35.00 is going to be outside the price range of its target audience. For a student to spend that amount of money on a book it has to be absolutely indispensable. I imagine this text will find its way into a number of university libraries, but I doubt that many students will buy personal copies.

Hilary Faulkner, freelance indexer, PhD student and member of SI


The authors state this is not meant to be a ‘definitive treatise . . . on the subject of how to index correctly,’ but rather a work to promote and encourage discussion on the indexing process. Since last year we saw the publication of Facing the text: content and structure in book indexing by Do Mi Stauber, which was inspired by close
personal observations of her own indexing process. I was curious to see how this book compared. The Stauber book takes personal observations one step further, provides guidelines for developing decisions, and also attempts to put these guidelines within the arena of accepted practice. These two books describe the thinking and decision-making process in writing back-of-the-book indexes from two entirely different, but complementary, perspectives.

Smith and Kells have identified seven primary principles of indexing: audience, analysis, metatopic, gathering, access routes, phrasing, and consistency. It is quite fascinating to follow and compare chapter-by-chapter variations in the indexing process from one indexer to another in each of these topic areas. I think you will find yourself strongly agreeing or disagreeing with the approaches taken or the arguments supporting the choices given. For instance, in the chapter on Audience, I was amused by the use of the quote from Wellisch on what he refers to as ‘request-oriented indexing’ as opposed to assignment, entity-oriented, or mission-oriented indexing in his discussion of ‘Types of indexing’ as a support for considering the audience in the indexing process. If you read on, Wellisch states that ‘This is a highly speculative approach, seeing that indexers cannot reasonably be expected to act as prophets or psychoanalysts.’ Both Kells and Smith give very different perspectives on considering the audience when creating the index.

Smith’s discussion of her approach to the analysis of the use of geography detail in the chapter on Analysis is truly outstanding. It is easy to follow her logical thought processes and see that she is developing a parallel structure to the phrasing for this topic area, which will serve the reader well in intuitively finding information. This same logical, common-sense approach could be applied to other topic areas where you might be faced with treating multi-level jurisdictional places or entities. She is really grappling with a very theoretical concept in a very applied format. She takes us through these steps again with a discussion of the use of the term ‘land.’ She expresses herself succinctly and in very logical, step-by-step terms.

I was also quite taken with her ‘enlightened procrastination approach,’ since it is a technique that I often use when solving problems with index structure, or how to phrase an entry. The authors also use a question and answer format, where each indexer queries the other on the decisions she has made. A lot can be learnt from this interchange of ideas and from reading the supporting arguments for the decisions. By reading and studying the examples and the Q&A sections, the student of indexing can truly begin to understand the indexing process.

The authors suggest that readers obtain a copy of the book they indexed, Better not bigger by Eben Fodor, and also refer readers to their website for copies of the complete indexes, which unfortunately they did not include in the printed volume. However, they have excerpted relevant examples from their indexes to highlight their discussions, and these appear in well-placed sidebars adjacent to the discussions. You do not need the other sources to understand fully the concepts being presented.

In writing this book review, I frequently had to remind myself that the purpose of this review is not to agree or disagree with the points taken or practices discussed in this book, but rather to give you some insight into an evaluation of its usefulness in learning how to index or in building skills in indexing. I do feel the need to caution the student new to indexing to remember that these are two indexers’ views on indexing to help you understand the indexing process. But do keep in mind that some of the ideas expressed will most certainly be highly speculative, and cannot be familiar with the subject of every enquiry. Know it all . . . points to where the answer may be found or the search for information started, and so is well worthy of a place among the enquiry desk collection.

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women workers in shawls?’, ‘What are the rules about when people can go into care?’, ‘Do I live in a flood plain?’, ‘I’m stuck with my homework. Are there any good websites that would help?’, ‘Can you tell me where the cycle lanes in the U.K. are?’

**Considerations** (basic information that should be borne in mind for that subject), e.g. ‘Birds: The most common questions about birds concern the identification of certain types. Make sure your library has some type of guide for identifying birds.’ ‘Engineering: Often users confuse company names with trade names. In most cases it is best to check under both company and trade.’

**Where to look:** printed sources, electronic sources, associations and websites.

**Tips and pitfalls** (what to ask the enquirer in order to narrow the search, and things to be careful about), e.g. ‘Abbreviations & Acronyms: Ask the enquirer for the context in which the abbreviation or acronym was heard or read.’ ‘Atlases & Gazetteers: Make sure you have a current atlas. The changes in the post-Soviet world have made immense differences to countries and you should have an atlas that covers these.’

Curiously, the Society of Indexers is listed as a source only in the ‘Alphabets & Scripts’ section, where there is a paragraph on filing and indexes that includes references to British Standards 1749: 1985 (filing order) and 6478: 1984 (filing bibliographic information). There is no mention of it in the more pertinent sections on ‘Publishing’ and ‘Writers & Writing’, even though the latter has a subheading ‘Indexing’. Unfortunately, the two publications listed under that subheading are both outdated: BS 6529: 1984 (the current indexing standard is BS ISO 999: 1996) and *Indexes and indexing* by Collison, 1969 (there are several in-print titles much more up to date than this).

The index is clearly laid out in two columns, in word-by-word order, with a displayed letter at the beginning of each sequence. It provides access to the major topics covered in the sections, but does not include all smaller topics or related topics, so often requires the user to think of broader or alternative terms. There are no cross-references, presumably because those in the main text were thought to be sufficient. For instance, there are no index entries for ‘learning’ or ‘training’, which are dealt with in the four ‘Education . . .’ sections. For information about ‘catchphrases’ or ‘slang’ the user must think of ‘dictionaries’– there is no index entry for ‘language’ in general; if the ‘languages’ entry is followed up it leads only to the ‘Languages & Translating’ section, where there is a *see also* reference to the ‘Dictionaries’ section (but it is rather a long way round). For ‘hospitals’ users must think of ‘healthcare’, and for ‘industry’ they must come up with ‘engineering’ and ‘manufacturing’ (and the two relevant sections are not cross-referred to each other). No names of organizations, titles of publications or websites are included in the index, but the enquiry desk should anyway have other well-known sources for checking these.

It is important for comprehensive guides like this to be up to date when published and to be kept current by frequent editions. Enquiry staff will want to add their own annotations as time goes by, so it would have been helpful to include some extra white space for this in the main text.

**Pat F. Booth, freelance indexer, member of SI**


The journal *Logos* is well known and respected in the publishing world, and among its interesting articles in recent times have been essays giving booklists for workers in the various fields of publishing. One strong feature of *Logos* has been to cover all aspects of the book world; another has been the international coverage. The present book brings together these essays by a variety of authors with international reputations in the spheres they write about.

The chapters cover book history, authorship, editing, indexing, production and design, various aspects of publishing including business and marketing, reference, electronic books, copyright, education for publishing, biographies, company histories, bookselling, libraries, reading and book collecting. The authors of the essays were limited by the space available, and this concentrated their minds wonderfully in the choice of (English language) material for the lists. The essays which preface the lists are very varied, and in some cases include additional works they would have liked to have had in their true lists. The idea is that the lists would help in building up one’s own office collection of material. Some authors have not done much more than look round their own offices; others have really gone to town, and used the essay space to write disquisitions on the bibliography of their subjects. The chapter on indexing, by our own Hazel Bell, is a model of following the brief and pushing it a bit further in the critical introductory essay. There are 19 books in her list and over 20 in the introductory essay.

There is some overlap in the recommendations between sections, understandably. Some useful cross-references are provided, though there is no index, which would have been rather hefty. The citations vary in the amount of information given; this is partly a problem of using international experts, who follow their own citation practices, but there will be little problem in tracking down any item, even the journal articles that are cited. Some authors spread themselves in the annotations; others provide a simple list of the books.

The book succeeds in the editors’ aim of providing lists of essential books – I have all but three of the books listed in my most active sphere, though I have worked in almost all the others – but it does go beyond this to intrigue in other areas, and I shall be considering the acquisition of yet more interesting books for my library. I shall be pleased to hear this book sells well, and encourages *Logos* to prepare a new edition in due course, with a bit more evenness in treatment, and perhaps some fresh chapters, for instance in the more technical areas of printing. Some of the thinner chapters need adding to, but I certainly wouldn’t recommend pruning of the more fulsome chapters, like Douglas Williamson’s essay on production and design. This is a most enjoyable narrative bibliography.

**David Lee, bibliographer and former indexer**


In the past, only the rich had the means to accumulate a private library. For ordinary people, there was neither the time nor the money for first editions, subscriptions to scholarly and scientific journals, or private reference services. With the advent of the Internet and the increasing amount of material available on it, the author (a librarian in Connecticut, USA) presents a convincing case for the creation of individual web libraries, tailored to the needs, interests, and even whims of each person who has access to the Internet.

The book is divided into nine subject-specific topics: magazines and periodical indexes; newspapers and broadcast journalism; reference materials; online reference assistance; books; images; art collections, galleries and exhibitions; software; and overall limitations and drawbacks. There are sidebars with professional media specialists, reference librarians, and art catalogers that punctuate the lists of
annotated URLs. The URLs are also collected under their topic areas in the appendix. The book ends with a 21-page index.

Throughout the author explains how to access online collections of digitized journals, periodical articles, and news search engines. He compares free collections to subscription services and outlines their content and usability. He incorporates cost analysis and service features, explains the difference in depth of coverage, and whether citation, abstract, or full text is available. He includes widely known sites such as Medline, the Making of America project, and the Internet Library of Early Journals, as well as little-known sites that make scientific and medical preprints available.

Reading online books may not seem very appealing. Most of us do not wish to read *Alice in Wonderland* online when it is available cheaply and readily in print. But the same cannot be said for the Gutenberg Bible, which is available online through the British Library. And that is the strength of Tomaiuolo’s argument. If you want to read and compare variant editions of sacred texts that are housed in different museums, or examine images of newspaper mastheads from the 19th century, viewing them online is the probably the only way you can do so.

Ready reference sources, such as almanacs, general encyclopedia, medical manuals, dictionaires, atlases, quotation books, religious texts, gazetteers, poetry indexes, directorys, government reports and publications, conversion tools, thesauri, background notes about the countries of the world, factbooks, and translation tools are all available free online. These resources are of special interest to indexers, as they can provide the answers to a number of questions that come up in the course of indexing.

Five specific web reference sites, Librarians’ Index to the Internet, LibrarySpot, Internet Public Library, Virtual Reference Shelf, and RefDesk are discussed, and the author recommends selecting two sites to use as a first stop for reference questions. These sites are the same that are used as ports for numerous reference materials, and in the case of Librarians’ it is much easier to make a response in a short period of time. When I was a reference librarian, I volunteered for both the Librarians’ Index to the Internet and the Internet Public Library, and can recommend them highly.

As with all resources on the web, some of the websites listed in the appendix will change URLs, no longer be available, or will not be kept current. However, once you have been guided through this book to the amount and diversity of the resources the Internet, you will be able to be your own guide.

*Nora Harris, indexer, member of ASI*


If there were any doubt about the enduring nature of the Latin language, it would be dispelled on reading this book. The persistence of the language is remarkable in the face of widespread efforts to phase it out. The Treasury, influential lawyers, and even a school examination board are cited as prime movers in this direction. The use of Latin, it is affirmed, has become almost politically incorrect.

In spite of this, an appendix to the book lists scores of Latin words and phrases which, by reason of their constant use, have become de facto English.

The phrases are often concise, and for adequate translation into English would require wordy and roundabout expression. It is convenient to use short phrases as *non sequitur*, *quid pro quo*, *fac simile*, for these not only avoid unnecessary verbiage but are generally understood.

The book is described by its author as ‘perhaps not *sui generis*’ (again, note Latin’s fewer words). Indeed, it must be one on its own, not falling into an exact category. It is a dictionary which lists words and phrases in alphabetical order, but it is much more than that. It is a work of reference, but it is also a book that is eminently readable, so fascinating are its contents.

Illustrations abound, emphasizing that Latin and its influence are everywhere. Quotations from classical writers. Graffiti on villas and walls of Pompeii. Inscriptions from Hadrian’s wall. Extracts from poems, and several quotations from Shakespeare. Glimpses of Latin in church history, scriptures and music. Its continuing place in law. Its use today as a simple way of expressing everyday things.

The amusing side of the book comes out when oblique reference is made to contemporary events, e.g. *est egentissimus in suo re* (‘he is in dire financial straits’ – as those faced with recent pension difficulties), or *pecunia in arboribus alienorum crescit* (‘money grows on other people’s trees’ – the amount of another’s take-over bid derided).

There are ample cross-references, a bibliography, lists of numerals and Roman emperors, and indexes of English and subject matter heads.

Latin will surely see a revival. The book exudes confidence. Films on themes concerning the Romans and their lives, and features on television have meant a resurgence of interest in the language. Who would have thought that it could embrace football (*pediludium*) – in a Vatican dictionary?

*Britton Goudie, freelance indexer and member of SI*


The very serious purpose of this deceptively entertaining book is ‘to show how the humane values of the Enlightenment have been abandoned or betrayed, and why it matters’. Francis Wheen’s starting point is 1795, with the Ayatollah Khomeini’s ‘Islamic project to turn the clock back to medieval times’, and Margaret Thatcher’s ‘awowed intention to re-establish ‘Victorian values’.

‘Neither’, comments Wheen, ‘could have dared imagine just how successful they would be.’

This is a wonderfully invigorating denunciation of the various forms of snake-oil that have been foisted on the public over the last quarter of a century. Having surveyed inspirational self-help literature, post-modernism/structuralism, creationism, the Nostradamus craze, abduction by aliens, evil empires, conspiracy theories, the hysterical mass grief for Diana, Princess of Wales, and much more, Wheen concludes, ‘[T]hose who refuse to learn from experience, and strive instead to discredit the rationalism that makes such enlightenment possible – whether they be holy warriors, the anti-scientific relativists, economic fundamentalists, radical post-modernists, New Age mystics or latter-day Chicken Lickens – are not only condemning themselves to repeat the past. They wish to consign us all to a life in darkness.’

The index is as subversive and entertaining as the text. Here is a sampling of entries:

Boskey, Ivan: admires greed, 30; goes to jail, 31, 37
Buchanan, Pat: blames Japan, 169; blames Jews, 162; blames Salman Rushdie, 163
Clancarty, Earl of: finds civilization beneath earth’s crust, 136
God: . . . angered by feminists and gays, 183; . . . arrives in America, 158; asked by Khomeini to cut off foreigners’ hands, ix; believed to have created humans 10,000 years ago, 103; could have made intelligent sponges, 109; doesn’t foresee Princess Diana’s death, 154 . . .
Gore, Al. . . . toe-curling motto, 106 [it’s ‘WWJD’ – What Would Jesus Do?]
Greene: ‘not part of Western civilization’, 72—3
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Hill-Norton, Lord: quest for little green men, 136–7, 142
Horsley, Air-Marshal Sir Peter: talks to visitor from another planet, 137, too busy to mention it, 138
Lacan, Jacques: . . . mistakes his penis for a square root, 88–9
Merton, Robert: says markets aren’t too volatile, 272, loses fortune because of market volatility, 273
Moore, Demi: hopes to live for 130 years, 47
tycoons, 29; as heroes, 59, 277–8; sexiness of, 40; superstitions of, 56; wearing socks in bed, 60

There are some strange omissions from the index, including the name of the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (wrongly given on p. 171 of the text as ‘Ronald Niebhuber’). Alan Sokal, the perpetrator of the famous spoof post-modernist article, is included, but not his colleague Jean Bricmont; Paul Feyerabend, but not Bertrand Russell; and so on. And the entry for the President of China, ‘Zemin, Jiang’, should be ‘Jiang Zemin’. But with such riches, it seems rather ungracious to complain.

Christine Shuttleworth, freelance indexer and translator


This recent publication from Blackwells has much to live up to. Its progenitor, Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society, produced by the pioneering social analyst and Cambridge professor of drama Raymond Williams in 1976, was a Copernican text, rightly renowned for providing succinct, workable summaries of the meanings and applications of a range of the most significant terms, from Aesthetic to Work by way of Idealism and Media, for a whole generation of researchers and students in evolving disciplines across the social sciences and humanities. Williams revised Keywords in 1983, adding 21 new definitions, and the editors of this new version are right in thinking that his work is due for another update, although I can’t help but feel that some of the linguistic and epistemological shifts of recent years that they emphasize in their introduction are more transient and ephemeral than they suggest. Williams’ original book was nearly 30 years in gestation; its successor has been a less drawn-out production, and I doubt it will be nearly so influential, or so enduring.

New keywords is not a dictionary, nor even a glossary. It is rather a collection of essays, averaging 1,000 words each, which attempt to chart the evolution of the usage in both academic research and public discourse – though focusing much more on the former – of a number of key words (rather than keywords). While Williams’ work bore the unmistakable mark of a single central intelligence, New keywords is very much a team effort, each essay produced by one of over 60 contributors, invariably drawn from departments of social, communications or cultural studies in anglophone universities.

It is a significantly expanded revision. We now have over 140 entries compared with Williams’s 110, and it has grown from less than 300 pages to well over 400. Some of Williams’s key words have metamorphosed: Humanity is now shared across Human and Human Rights; Tradition has become Heritage; the Masses have been replaced by Mass (as in mass culture, mass media and mass consumption). Approximately 50 of the original entries have been dropped altogether as no longer being key; out have gone Bourgeois, Charity, Creative, Doctrinaire, Hegemony, Medieval, Originality, Peasant, Philosophy, Romantic, Standards, Violence and Wealth. In their place have come over 80 new entries, including Celebrity, Disability, Everyday, Gender, Globalization, Identity, Knowledge, Multiculturalism, Network, Political Correctness, Sovereignty, Tolerance, Tourism, Virtual and Youth.

Some of the changes reflect very specific shifts in the focus of academic research over the last 30 years: Criticism, Existential, Formalist, Naturalism and Sociology are out; Deconstruction, Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernity and Relativism are in. The monolithic Literature has been atomised into Discourse, Information, Narrative, Text and Writing.

Other changes take account of much broader economic and political developments. New keywords is very much a product of the post-Communist world. Communism as an entry has disappeared altogether, though Socialism survives. Conservatism is a new entry, though surprisingly without yet any mention of neo-conservatism. Commercialism has been modernized into Market, and Mechanical replaced by Technology.

But the most notably numerous changes since Williams’ original edition suggest the development of a widespread cultural preoccupation with the Body (another new entry) and its functions, particularly sexually. Where Williams was concerned almost solely with matters above the waist, if not the neck, we now have entries which theorise Emotion and Desire, emphasize Sexuality (additional separate entries, for instance, under Gay & Lesbian and Queer), and which seek to analyse and contextualize Fetish and Pornography.

For other reasons this book ought to be of interest to indexers, spending as we do our professional lives identifying and selecting key words. It will in fact, though, prove of greater utility to future historians of higher education in the English-speaking world, providing as it does such a clear summary of the turn-of-the-century passions, politics and preoccupations of the academic community (‘a warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships’).

Christopher Phipps, librarian and member of SI


Thanks to television, the world watched the destruction of the twin towers in New York on 11 September 2001. On that same evening, Mozart’s Cosi fan tutte was performed by a travelling opera company at a small East Anglian theatre, providing a brief distraction from the horror of the news. The magic worked until one of the protagonists changed into his traditional and highly penetrable disguise. By coincidence, this happened to be the garb now instantly associated with Osama bin Laden. An almost palpable frisson broke the spell, and returned the audience to reality and its effect on their lives.

In what must surely be his most successful novel to date, Ian McEwan gives us a day in the life of Henry Perowne, a London neurosurgeon who seems to ‘have everything’, but whose world is touched by incidents that at first appear to be too remote for immediate individual concern. He awakes on the morning of Saturday 15 February 2003 to see a burning plane that might or might not be the immediate cause of the terrorist attack on the US on the same day. Henry’s daughter, a teacher, writes in her diary: ‘February 2003 to see a burning plane that might or might not be the result of terrorism. Later, he is affected by a traffic block caused by a terrorist incident and this is then directly connected to the life of one person. He chose an ‘ordinary’ professional man, happy in his relationship with his lawyer wife, his blues guitarist son and his poet daughter. He is an atheist who longs for belief in the endearing power of love. He admires the wonder of the human brain and he wonders about the existence of the soul. On another level, he enjoys squash and fish cookery.

Why review a work of fiction for The Indexer? Chiefly because of the author’s use of several very different taxonomies covering neurosurgery, Alzheimer’s disease, Huntington’s chorea, blues music,
squash and fish. The cumulative effect of this detail is to emphasize that, despite much knowledge, training, experience and wide interests, Perowne is powerless to control unexpected horrors. He uses his brain to heal other brains, but he cannot fathom the workings of the mind. The complex taxonomy of neurosurgery is used twice: at the opening of the book and again near the end. The author could have maintained the reader’s interest and suspend with more simple language, but his careful research has produced a precision that gives a far stronger sense of authenticity, not only to medical indexers who will have little trouble following the procedures. Again with Alzheimer’s disease: the detail contrasts with the lively mother and swimming champion whom Perowne remembers when he visits her in a nursing home. As for Huntington’s chorea, the taxonomy is essential to explain the unusual behaviour of the man who threatens him; he is not the average street thug. The squash game is, again, described moment by moment and gives insight to Perowne’s character: he is desperately keen to win, coming close to an acrimonious dispute with his anaesthetist with whom he has an ideal professional relationship. Even the fishmonger’s slab is described in taxonomic detail which leads to Perowne’s contemplation of moral matters such as whether fish feel pain.

Throughout the minute detail of Perowne’s day, the author frequently digresses to present portraits of his family. As a lawyer, his devoted wife mirrors his preoccupation with fact and practical matters. His enjoyment of sharing a love of the blues with his son makes him realize that he has sacrificed the comparative freedom of a musical career for the dedication to medical science. His daughter, who won a prestigious poetry prize at school, has just published her first collection of poetry, much to the pride of the family but especially of her poet grandfather. In another interview (BBC Radio 4 on 3 February 2005) Ian McEwan said he was writing against the view that science is cold and abstract. Perowne’s literary education has suffered through his preference for science, but at a vital moment in the story, Matthew Arnold’s poem *Dover Beach* is recited, producing an unexpected effect on the man who threatens the whole family. At the same time, it conveys important meaning to Perowne, especially in retrospect when he learns more about his daughter. The reference to the ‘sea of faith’ also provides a contrast with the purely scientific aspect, and brings us back to the question of ‘brain’ and ‘mind’.

The novel ends with one more *tour de force* of breathtaking irony, raising even more questions of morality before Perowne returns home to his sleeping family, completing what must be the most eventful 24 hours of any life. Don’t miss it.

As this is a novel, there is, of course, no index. As usual, the reader could do with one in order to look up incidents and references again later. However, if it were used before reading the book, the plot, especially the ending, would be revealed. It would be an interesting exercise to attempt an index that does justice to the novel without revealing all!

Valerie Elliston, former adult education lecturer, freelance indexer and SI member


This is a beautifully illustrated, easy to read guide to some of the most interesting and significant items in the National Maritime Museum. There are over 300 wonderful photographs, and each is accompanied by an account of its historical significance written by Museum experts. The intended audience could be those interested in maritime history, warfare, cartography, exploration, photography, history, art or astronomy, at either amateur or more specialist level.

One of the criteria for inclusion is those items that are too delicate to be displayed in a gallery, which means that they have rarely, if ever been on display. As well as many objects of historical significance – including globes, paintings and John Harrison’s legendary timepieces – there are some very unusual items. Examples of these include Nelson’s first letter written with his left hand in 1797 after the amputation of his right arm, Nelson’s pigtail, a logbook from a slave ship and a ship’s biscuit from 1784.

The book is organized alphabetically, with headings from ‘Admirals’ to ‘Zulu’ (a class of fishing vessel) which are clearly listed in the contents pages at the beginning of the book. Most of these entries are photographs and accompanying brief descriptions of specific topics, such as ‘Docks and Dockyards’, ‘Elizabeth I’, ‘Portulans’ (charts) and ‘Lighthouses’. There are also more detailed three or four-page essays, for example ‘Travelling to America’ located under ‘T’, ‘The Museum’s Art Collection’ under ‘M’ and ‘The Navy in the Age of Sail’ under ‘N’.

If ever there were to be a practical case study to show that a simple alphabetical sequence does not necessarily give complete and perfect subject access, this book provides it in the form of a detailed, accurate index. It is a comprehensive five-page index clearly presented in word-by-word order, with set-out layout and three columns to each page, covering historical figures, artists, artefacts, artefacts’ owners, boats, ships and navigation instruments as well as historic events such as wars and battles.

Without an index it would be natural to assume that where the topic is covered by an alphabetical entry, that is the extent of the subject coverage. However, by consulting the index one can discover that while the theme of longitude is obviously covered in the articles on ‘Latitude and Longitude’ and ‘Longitude Time-keepers’, there is also information to be found under ‘Navigation by the Stars’ (located under ‘N’ and ‘Royal Observatory Greenwich’ (R). Similarly, Viscount Horatio Nelson has his own 12-page entry but a look at the index will discover a further seven references.

A particular interest of mine is exploration, where from the index I was led to articles about the ‘North-West Passage’ (under ‘N’), ‘Oceanic Exploration’ (O) and ‘British Polar Exploration’ (P). Although the North-West Passage has its own entry, by consulting the index one finds additional mentions on two separate pages of the article on ‘British Polar Exploration’.

Anyone with a special interest in boats, ships, ceramics, charts and maps, figureheads or silver and silver-gilt will find relevant listings collected together under these subject headings rather than having to flick through the book at random.

There are helpful qualifiers to give additional information: on dates for artists, instrument makers and designers; on the place of origin or type of ships and boats (lifeboat, slave ship, barque, yacht, steam yacht etc.). Good cross-references provide suggestions for additional information that may be of relevance, for example ‘Arctic see North-West Passage’; polar exploration’; ‘commemorative artefacts see also artefacts; ceramics; glass; gold; silver’.

There are a ‘Chronology’ of developments at the Greenwich site of the National Maritime Museum, and a three-page glossary of around 60 terms.

I have only three small quibbles, none of which detracts from the overall enjoyment I found in the book. Some of the subheadings have not been made entries in their own right, so that for material on octants, quadrants and sextants the user must look under ‘instruments, navigation’ to find page references, and the slave trade logbook is listed only under logbooks and not under slave trade. Finally, an entry under ‘stars’ would have been helpful.

The book is well designed, the contents fascinating, and I would highly recommend it as an excellent addition to anyone’s Christmas wish list. It would be a delight to own.

Rohan Bolton, freelance European researcher and indexer

The Indexer Vol. 24 No. 4 October 2005
Book reviews


Everything old is new again. The first edition of Nancy Mulvany’s Indexing Books, published in 1994, has become, at least in North America, a primary textbook for back-of-the-book indexing, and her small blue volume can be found on the reference shelves of most professional indexers. In her preface, Mulvany admits that she undertook the writing of the first edition because, at the time, there was no suitable introductory text still in print and available in the United States. Eleven years later, we have her second edition. While the first edition remains a valuable and relevant treatment of the art of book indexing, it has begun to show its age. It is no understatement to say that a great deal has happened since 1994, both in world affairs and in the publishing industry, and Mulvany’s new volume ably reflects recent developments in our profession.

The intellectual aspect of our work as indexers concerns the creation of the index. While styles and publishers’ preferences shift over the years, the basic process of distilling the subject matter of a book into a written index is essentially the same. My late mother, born almost a century ago, would, I think, have created indexes not much different from my own. Aspects of our work that involve technology are, however, in an almost constant state of flux. This means that any textbook dealing with both aspects will require fairly frequent revision, but much of the change will involve specific portions of the text. The second edition of Mulvany’s book reflects this dilemma. Significant portions of the text have been heavily revised, much of the text needed little revision and, apart from a little tweaking, remains unchanged. That being said, Mulvany has taken note of many comments on the first edition; some of the new or revised text has been added in response to these suggestions and criticisms.

The second edition retains the basic structure of the first. There are ten chapters, beginning with a discussion of the nature of books, authors, and indexers, proceeding through the steps in writing, ordering, and editing an index, and ending with a discussion of indexing tools. Indeed, this breakdown seems sensible, and probably a number of indexing instructors are thankful that teaching plans need not be adjusted for a different arrangement of chapters and material.

The contents page lists not only the chapter titles but section headings as well, and each chapter opens with a contents page listing all the sections and subsections. These lists can be helpful for users looking for a particular section of a chapter. ‘But,’ I hear you cry, ‘they should look in the index!’ They should, and indeed they can; and often do. The subdividing ‘C’ and ‘D’ headings do not stand out as clearly as they might. Such a long discussion in what is essentially a textbook deserves more prominent guideposts. The new left-justified layout for running heads (some in caps) have been replaced with a simple choice between ‘email attachment’ and ‘modem specs (phone number, baud rate, and protocol).’

At 290 pages, the second edition weighs in about 30 pages shorter than its predecessor, and the appearance of the text is a marked improvement. The page length is about two lines longer than that of the first edition, and the line length is marginally longer as well. The page design is characterized by left justification of headings for a cleaner, more streamlined look. Centred chapter titles, headings, and running heads (some in caps) have been replaced with bold sans-serif ‘UC/lc’ headings - text size for B heads and a point or so larger for A heads. Unfortunately the lower headings placed at the opening of paragraphs without a line break do not have the same prominence and are sometimes hard to spot. In a number of instances, new headings have been inserted to further break down a discussion and guide the reader to specific details. Similarly, examples – indented, with a only few points of extra leading before and after – remain close to the text they illustrate, and are given in a slightly heavier font for better visibility.

Such attention to typesetting details may seem superficial, but design is an important consideration for a book that will read intensively by students and consulted for minor details by professional indexers. While poor design will not destroy a text, it will, consciously or unconsciously, annoy readers and will ultimately affect the use of the book.

Indexers who own the first edition of Indexing Books might acquire the second edition if for no other reason than to read the new opening to Chapter 1, ‘Introduction to book indexing,’ which begins with the offbeat statement, ‘I just googled Google.’ Mulvany uses these opening pages to share her ideas on information and indexing in an increasingly technological, post-9/11 world of ‘information overload.’ Members of IASC/SCAD were privileged to hear her tackle these and related issues in her keynote address at our 2004 conference in Calgary, Alberta, and I am particularly pleased to see her remarks in print.

The whole of the Introduction, however, is not new. Although it includes a new discussion of ‘The index as hypertext,’ much of the original text, as in other chapters, is tweaked here and there for improved clarity, but remains largely unchanged. In places, new terms (for example, ‘subheading’ rather than ‘subentry’) reflect optimal usage. Elsewhere, some terms are placed in an explanatory context (for example, ‘Function words’ is added to the heading ‘Articles, prepositions, and conjunctions’).

References to standards have been updated. While the first edition frequently cited BS 3700, the second edition also cites NISO TR03 and ISO 999, and not surprisingly, much of Chapter 5, ‘Arrangement of entries,’ has been rewritten. Readers may well find that wading through the involved discussion of fine differences in the order of characters between the standards and two important style guides3 can be hard going, but a four-column table demonstrating sorts according to these two guides along with NISO TR03 and ISO 999 functions as a useful summary.

Chapter 6, ‘Special concerns in indexing,’ includes a revised discussion on coding of special characters, and ends with several pages of new text dealing with both indexes for translations and single-source indexing. While the latter is a subject of concern for indexers everywhere, the issue of translations is pertinent particularly for Canadian indexers who work with publications produced in both English and French versions. Chapter 8, ‘Format and layout of the index,’ has been substantially revised to cover, among other things, RTF files and related coding issues. The final pages of this chapter are devoted to a valuable discussion of ‘Electronic format,’ which explores the pertinent issues relating to electronic documents, illustrated with references to several experts in the field.

The rather thorny issue of embedded indexing, addressed in a similarly detailed discussion in Chapter 10, ‘Tools for indexing,’ is substantially revised and expanded from the first edition. Unfortunately, this lengthy section (about 14 pages) is placed under a ‘B’ head, with the result that the subdividing ‘C’ and ‘D’ headings do not stand out as clearly as they might. Such a long discussion in what is essentially a textbook deserves more prominent guideposts. The chapter ends with an updated discussion of ‘The future’ – well worth reading.

Now to the back of the book. Gone are the lists of generic and ASCII codes. Most coding-related issues are addressed in the section on electronic coding in Chapter 8. Now we have only two appendices, both of which have been updated. The new left-justified layout for the ‘Index specifications worksheet’ (Appendix A) with each point on a separate line should be easier to use, and the 21st century is duly reflected: modem specs (phone number, baud rate, and protocol) have been replaced with a simple choice between ‘email attachment’ and ‘disk with printout.’ This worksheet provides beginners with a handy structure for review, and gives experienced indexers a model to refine according to individual circumstances.

Several new headings added at the end of the form under ‘Miscellaneous’ might be better placed in earlier sections. For example ‘Endnotes/footnotes: indexable? locator format’ could be moved to each edition.
toward the beginning of the form and the items dealing with sorting details could be shifted to the ‘Arrangement of entries’ section.

The list of ‘Resources for indexers’ (Appendix B) is also updated, but unfortunately is unlikely to remain so for long. While it is particularly gratifying to see the list of indexing societies expanded from four to eight with full contact information for each one,4 a note at the beginning giving the date on which details were verified and suggestions for where to find current information might be a wise precaution.

Throughout the book, references to style guides and publications on various aspects of indexing have been updated. Citations of Words into Type (regrettably, long out of print) have been replaced with recent publications including the new Oxford Guide to Style, and the text is peppered with names of well-known North American authors such as Do Mi Stauber, Thérèse Shere, and Noeline Bridge. Nowhere is this new wave of publication on indexing more apparent than in the reference list, which contains approximately 120 items. More than 80 are new for the second edition; most of these were published in the last ten years.

Nancy Mulvany’s book is widely used as a textbook in North America, and the release of a revised second edition will quite likely ensure its continued popularity. Indexing Books is by no means perfect. Indeed the text sometimes suffers from a slightly stilted style that perhaps might have been smoothed out at the copy-editing stage. Another weakness of the book, as far as an international readership is concerned, is that the text is rather US-centered. But these are relatively small quibbles. I have utmost respect for anyone with enough patience to write, let alone revise, a thorough textbook that covers all aspects of indexing. Mulvany’s pertinent – and at times opinionated – discussions of important issues facing our profession gives this volume an importance beyond the realm of mere instruction.

Notes
1 These contents pages serve as a kindness to the reader who says, ‘I know Mulvany covers this somewhere, I think it’s in the chapter on arrangement, but I can’t quite think where to look in the index.’ Find the chapter, check the contents list, and off you go!
2 The first edition had a much spacier appearance; examples were in a smaller, lighter font than the text and the full line spaces before and after work against the continuity between text and example.
4 After IASC/SCAD changed its mailing address some years ago, our incorrect address remained in print for some years, our correct address remained in print in Indexing Books for some years. It is now correct, but any change we or anyone else make in the next few years will suffer a similar fate.

Ruth Pincoe, freelance indexer and member of IASC/SCAD

Publications received


Roman types

The number’s not yet up for ancient numerals

For architects, film producers, kings, Popes, Olympic officials and families in which males pass their names to their sons, the millennium bug has struck a year early. They awake today [1 January 1999] unsure of the date. For, unlike most of us, this eclectic group still counts in the system in use two millennia ago, dating its documents with an array of capital letters. And now . . . there is a dilemma unforeseen by Caesar or those recording his epics in wide screen celluloid: does today begin the year MM? Or MCMXCD? Or even, long-windedly, MDCCCCLXXXXVIII?

Roman numerals are majestic, elegant and confusing. Some three centuries before the Year of Our Lord (impossible to represent in a system that has no zero), digital notation first took hold: holding apart his fingers and thumb a legionnaire inscribed a V on the milestone. And if Publius owed Claudius 10 sestercies, a double V or X could be gouged on a wax IOU. Larger numbers were difficult. Borrowing the Greek phi to represent 1,000, the Ancients simply added brackets either side of the I, so that 100,000 was written as (((I))). The Columna Rostrata, erected to commemorate victory over the Carthaginians, repeated this symbol 23 times to give the figure of 2,500,000.

The rules are not cast in stone. Bored masons took short cuts, and the subtractive principle caught hold. By the Middle Ages four strokes had been replaced by IV — for everyone except horologists. To this day, the clock stands still at X to IIII.

The system does not add up. Mathematics had to wait for the Arabs. How the Romans crossed hill and dale in such straight lines remains a mystery, as the finest surveyors in the land could not build Britain’s first motorway (the 1001) without curves. But complexity has its advantages. No one can complain that the BBC is repeating old material, for by the time you have begun to work out MCMLXXXVII the credits have rolled past. Lingering in front of a handsome town hall, you have time to admire its lines while you decipher its cornerstone. And if you are called James Baker III, you can always insist that the tax demand should have been addressed to your father or even your grandfather, instead.

Writing a month in Roman numerals could resolve the transatlantic confusion between 6 September and June 9. It would add joyful tension to the lottery if all balls were Roman. And it connects us to our forebears: for though present confusion may last a year, we shall all know what we will celebrate in the year MM.

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