Indexing Wesley’s Journal and Diaries

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In 1960 a ‘Wesley Works Editorial Project’ was launched with the aim of publishing a new, scholarly edition of the Works of John Wesley. Known initially as the ‘Oxford Edition’ and published by Oxford University Press, it was taken over in 1984 by the Abingdon Press of Nashville, Tennessee, and given the new title of ‘Bicentennial Edition’. To date, 16 of the projected 34 volumes have been published.

The volumes are grouped in several ‘units’, the latest of which to appear contains Wesley’s Journal and Diaries in seven volumes, under the authorship of Dr W. Reginald Ward and Dr Richard P. Heitzenrater. Much of the delay may be blamed on the fact that the final volume included a general index which took many months to complete, even though draft indexes to the earlier volumes had been prepared as each one appeared. A complex index of the length required by a seven-volume work such as this requires extensive checking and editing in the closing stages, and all concerned were determined that the indexing should be worthy of both the text and the high standard of editing. That Volume 7 has now been available since early in 2003 may come as a surprise to many, in the absence of either effective publicity or serious reviews in Britain. (Things may be different in the States.) What follows is no more than the musings and jottings of the compiler of the General Index which accompanies an extensive ‘Bibliographical Index of Works Cited’ and an ‘Index of Scriptural References’ in Volume 7.

The indexing involved a great deal of consultation with Dr Heitzenrater, the William Kellon Quick Professor of Church History and Wesley Studies at the Divinity School, Duke University, in his dual capacity of General Editor of the new edition of Wesley’s Works and editor of the Diaries themselves. Over a period of about two years, email enquiries and responses shuttled back and forth across the Atlantic in very considerable numbers and with a speed and efficiency that would have been impossible before the advent of electronic communication.

In one respect this index was considerably more straightforward than those compiled for earlier units in the new edition. The Journal contains very few references to theological or other abstract concepts, and the Diaries still fewer (if any). So for once they presented no great problem. Instead it was the complexity of the material, rather than its profundity, that provided the main challenge. It was necessary, for example, to differentiate between several layers of material: (a) the text of the Journal, (b) the parallel text of the Diaries, (c) references in the editorial footnotes which were not explicitly mentioned in the main text, and (d) material in the list of errata at the end of Volume 7, correcting what was found in the earlier volumes. This last category was dealt with by adding ‘[e]’ to the volume and page number of the original reference.

Most of the problems arose from the intensely concentrated nature of the Diary text. This made it arguably impossible to index, but to have shirked the task would have left readers (or, at the very least, a minority of serious students of Wesley’s life) bereft of access to potentially important information. There are, nevertheless, places where the index breaks one of the golden rules of indexing by making selective and, one hopes, judicious use of ‘passim’. (This occurs almost exclusively in the Georgia diaries, where Wesley is encountering some of the settlers in Savannah or Fort Frederica on a daily basis.) The alternative to ‘passim’ would have been unhelpfully long strings of references to more or less consecutive pages of the Diary, on each of which the person was mentioned at least once, and often several times. In dealing with this aspect of the Diaries I effectively jettisoned another sacred cow of professional indexers, by refusing to differentiate between incidental references to a person or place and more substantial ones. It is axiomatic among indexers that good indexing is not indiscriminate, but spares the reader from looking up ‘trivial’ or uninformative references. But, as any historian knows, the distinction is an impossible one to draw, especially when it is a primary source that is being indexed, since as much depends on the context of the reference as on its actual occurrence, and even more depends on the purpose for which the entry is being sought.

The previous edition of Wesley’s Journal was edited by Nehemiah Curnock and published in 1909–16; it became known as the ‘Standard Edition’ and included transcripts of Wesley’s Diaries as well as his published Journal. The new ‘Bicentennial Edition’ similarly includes both Journal and Diaries, but with a difference. Whereas Curnock printed the parallel Journal and Diary texts together on the same page, the new edition prints the Diaries in a separate sequence at the end of the volume. This necessitated giving separate page references to the Diary text. In both editions, Diary references are identified by the addition of ‘n’; while, as a further refinement, in the new edition ‘(n)’ after a page number indicates a reference that is found in the Journal text, but is made explicit only by the accompanying editorial note. (Thus, the reference to John Kyte, whom Wesley mentions merely as ‘the man of Ross’, is indexed as ‘21:296(n)’).
The vast majority of index entries refer either to places or persons. Each of these categories presented its own problems. In the case of the places most frequently visited or mentioned by Wesley, another sacred cow of indexing was sacrificed on the altar of usefulness. By far the clearest example of this is the entry on London. This opens with a very long string of undifferentiated references, to serve the needs of any student wishing to work through all Wesley's visits to the capital. On its own, such a list would be quite useless to any reader searching for a particular visit or incident. It is therefore followed by many subentries drawing attention to such details as the earthquake of 1750, mobs and the relief of poverty. Within this alphabetical sequence is a sub-section headed ‘localities’, under which are listed the many places within London, including parish churches, to which Wesley refers. Within this a problem presented itself in the form of references to ‘the Chapel’ after the opening of Wesley’s ‘new chapel’ in the City Road in 1778. Before that it was easy to identify ‘the Chapel’ as the one in West Street, Seven Dials, which the Wesleys had used ever since 1743; after that, no one could be sure which of the two was referred to, so some cross-referencing was called for, together with a non-committal entry under ‘(the) Chapel’, leaving the question open. (A similar problem arose out of Wesley’s references to ‘the school’ and ‘the schools’ when he was in the Bristol area: were these the ones he established at the New Room, or the colliers’ schools at Kingswood, both, of course, to be distinguished from what became known as ‘Kingswood school’? It is not always easy to determine.)

Clearly, a working definition of ‘London’ was needed, and at an early stage in the project I agreed with the then General Editor to define it as the area north of the Thames that was already built up in Wesley’s day; this left areas such as Southwark and Lambeth south of the river, and places such as Islington and Marylebone, which were still separate villages, with entries of their own; with Westminster also featuring in its own right. A list of cross-references to such places, long since swallowed up by the London sprawl, is given at the close of the ‘London’ entry.

The indexing threw up an interesting detail, correcting the assumption of Sugden and others that the Long Lane to which Wesley frequently refers was the one in Southwark; a careful examination of his movements as recorded in the Diaries makes it clear that it must have been the Long Lane that runs between Aldersgate Street and West Smithfield, not far from the Foundery. There was a later Wesleyan chapel in Long Lane, Southwark, but not until the early 19th century. It was necessary to distinguish Newington in Southwark from Newington Green and Stoke Newington to the north of the City, even though Wesley himself had not done so in every case. Similarly, because some place-names occur several times in various parts of the country, it was necessary to be on the alert for this and to distinguish between, for example, Newport (Glos.), Newport (IOW), Newport (Mayo), Newport (Mon.), Newport (Pembs.) and Newport (Salop). The initial decision to adopt the recent county changes was soon abandoned as it became clear that the situation remained unstable and subject to further tinkering, so that the only safe course was to revert to the county boundaries of Wesley’s own time.

A further hazard lay in the fact that some of the footnotes had been drafted in America by someone with limited knowledge of British topography. Thus to note, under the date 7 April 1743, that Sand Hutton is ‘a small chapelry in the parish of Thirsk’ and that ‘Wesley always spells the name “Sandhutton”’ is to miss the point that Wesley’s spelling is the correct one, distinguishing his destination that day from an entirely different Sand Hutton near Stamford Bridge. The ‘new house at Melcombe’ in which Wesley preached on 6 September 1776 was at Melcombe Regis, now part of Weymouth, Dorset, not the tiny hamlets of ‘Melcombe Bingham’, ‘Higher Melcombe’ or ‘Melcombe Horsey’ to which the footnote erroneously refers. Again, the Winterbourne at which he preached on leaving Salisbury for London on 6 September 1750 was Winterbourne Earls, where from quite early on there was a group of Methodists connected with the Salisbury society, not the remote hamlet in Berkshire again wrongly named in the footnote. Sometimes Wesley himself is the source of such errors, as when he refers to visits to Llandeilo near Carmarthen, but spells it ‘Llandilo’, which is a different place some miles to the west. Such problems of identification could be multiplied, the most problematic of all occurring in Ireland; notably the fact that Pallas, Pallaskeny and Newmarket were all names for the same village in County Limerick, where Wesley visited the Palatine settlement on various occasions. Since there are several other places named ‘Pallas’ and at least three different ‘Newmarkets’ in Ireland, the indexer would have been entirely at sea at this point but for the expert advice of the Rev. Robin Roddie.

Personal references offered rather fewer problems, though once again it was the Diary text that threw up most of the queries, as when Wesley gives only a surname, with no first name. Among the early settlers in Savannah, Mr and Mrs Dean and Mr and Mrs Dearn proved to be different couples, for whom Dr Heitzenrater was able to provide first names from his encyclopaedic knowledge. Similarly ‘Anton’ could confidently be identified as Anton Seifert, especially as he was always found in association with his fellow Moravian Johann Töltschig. It seemed reasonable to assume that Mr and Mrs Jones of Bristol were not the same people as the Mr and Mrs Jones in London. On the other hand, Mr and Mrs Ball of London may well have been the same couple throughout the period covered by the diaries, even though there are no references to them between 1741 and 1783: a Mr Ball was one of the original members of the Foundery society and the gap may simply reflect the fact of the missing volumes of the diary covering that period. Whether the ‘Mrs Lieuliet’ whom Wesley met at The Hague was the same (or related to) the ‘Sister Lieuliet’ who turns up in Rotterdam a few days later remains an unanswered question. But it serves to raise the further question of the significance in Wesley’s mind of the difference between ‘Mrs’ and ‘Sister’. I reached the tentative conclusion that ‘Sister’ may have implied membership of the local Methodist society; but it may denote no more than a degree of intimacy in the relationship, or perhaps have been used of single rather than married women.

The ‘letter from Yorkshire’ which Wesley quotes in the Journal under 4 August 1746 can hardly have been from...
Henry Thornton as the footnote says, since he was not born until 1760, but may well have been from his father John and is indexed as such. It was possible, often with the help of local knowledge provided by correspondents, to identify by name some of the persons mentioned only by their title in the Journal; e.g. the Rev. Jacob Mould of Pebworth in Worcestershire (Journal, 18 March 1768). But other tantalisingly elusive allusions remain. Someone referred to simply as ‘John’ in the Georgia diaries, and a Roger Penry who frequently crops up in the diaries in the 1780s (usually as just ‘Penry’, and invariably on a Saturday evening), may have been servants whose existence is otherwise unknown to us. And who was the Theomachus whose ‘deplorable case’ Wesley mentions in the Journal under the date 16 August 1737? So far he remains unidentified – as do a number of persons whom Wesley identifies only by initials. The easy solution here would have been to omit these faceless ones from the index, and such a course could quite easily have been justified. In the event they were included, but with the initials inverted, to bring them into their right alphabetical position. ‘F. B.’ of Clones (on 28 May 1787) thereby becomes (perhaps slightly unfortunately) ‘B——, F——’ in the index.

Finally, to note one or two questionable features of the lengthy entry on Wesley himself. It is arguable that the subheading on his health, consisting mainly of sub-subheadings listing his various ailments, might have been more accurately headed ‘ill-health’! I still have little idea of the difference, if any, between ‘ague’ and ‘fever’, and am glad to note that I indexed these separately, following Wesley’s own usage, with appropriate cross-references. The equally lengthy subentry on his ‘travelling’ ends with a cross-reference to ‘weather’, and under the latter as a heading in its own right I attempted to list all his main references to whatever the British climate threw at him, from ‘cold’ through to ‘wind’, via a hopelessly long subentry on ‘rain’. My justification for this rather desperate attempt to reflect his travelling conditions over half a century was my recollection of an article on this very topic in the Wesley Society Proceedings some years ago which was so selective and sketchy that I have still not convinced myself that it was not just a parody of what purports to be ‘historical geography’.

The indexing of these volumes proved challenging and arduous, but also rewarding. The real test, however, is how well the resulting index serves users of the new edition. If it proves as useful as Curnock’s index has done over nearly a century, it will have justified its existence.

John Vickers was appointed the official indexer to the Wesley Works Editorial Project in 1970. The first index to appear, to Wesley’s ‘Appeals’, won the Wheatley Medal in 1977. The latest index (with which this article is concerned) failed to be short-listed for the Wilson Award. Email: javickers@fsnet.co.uk

This is a slightly revised version of an article which appeared in Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, May 2005.