

The personality of the indexer

Hazel K. Bell

Hazel Bell considers the personality of indexers as it is popularly supposed to be and as it is ideally prescribed in texts, and presents some real-life examples.

Judy Batchelor, a most distinguished member of the Society of Indexers, once admitted ruefully in its journal that there is a widespread, most unflattering, not to say distasteful, popular idea of indexers:

It has been suggested often that there is a common indexerly nature; indeed that indexers may be fixated at one of the less attractive of Freud's psychosexual stages: that we see disorder as a sort of obscenity, that we censoriously deny the natural overflowing abundance of life and grasp at logical hierarchies as a way of reducing the boundless universe to something that will fit the mean smallness of our timid mentalities. (Batchelor, 1985)

Can this be so? Is this the general image of the indexer? It is difficult to gauge how indexers are generally regarded, as we are such obscure creatures. We are rarely professionally acknowledged, as we have been complaining for decades. Nowadays we are even denied existence: surely we have all been told, when asked at a social occasion what we do, and giving a truthful reply, 'But don't computers do all that?' To show that we are not mere ghosts in the machines, we must assert our individuality.

Media appearances

Where are images of indexers to be found? Just occasionally in the media. An early one in *The Nation* proposed that convicts should be set to indexing books, one suggested advantage being 'That the kind of labour proposed is peculiarly suited to the reformatory idea, being incomparable for teaching order, patience, humility, and for thoroughly eradicating the last trace of the Old Adam in whoever pursues it'. (Drazan, 1980)

More recently Philip Hensher portrayed indexers flatteringly in the press, declaring that 'Indexers, in general, are admirable, scrupulous people who undertake a task demanding great skill and intelligence' (2004a). Oh, yes, yes! But, he suggested, 'the resentment which a really professional indexer might feel towards a slapdash and casual author could turn into a wildly misplaced megalomania'; and he also observed, 'The potential for revenge and mockery in indexing is very high.'

Indeed it is. Perhaps the opportunities offered by compiling an index may bring out the worst qualities of the personality. Here, for example, are some of the 140 subheadings under **Reagan, Ronald Wilson** in *The clothes have no emperor: a chronicle of the Reagan years* (Slansky, 1989). The bare hostility of these entries surely tells us something of the personality of this indexer as well as his politics:

blames Carter
blames Congress
blames the media
blames miscellaneous others
cancerous pimple called 'friend' by
disbelief by public of
gloating by enemies of
improbable letters of support cited by
inability to answer questions of
macho bluster of
misstatements by
mistakes admitted and not admitted by
provokes unintended laughter.

Another example of sheer vindictiveness manifest in an index is in the memoirs of Margaret Cook (1999), published after her husband had left her for a younger woman. The subheadings under **Cook, Robin** include:

outbursts of temper
guilt transference
heavy drinking
weight problems
sexual difficulties.

Fictitious indexers

Images of indexers most commonly appear in fiction, presented by authors – members of almost the only profession that recognizes that indexers really must exist. How disappointing, then, that fictional representations of indexers are so very unflattering – I hope I can say, unjust. Fiction shows indexers diffident and genteel, or devoted primarily to domesticity, in some works of lady novelists; fallen pedants, such as the drunken father of the classic butler in Parkinson's *Jeeves* (1978); even frankly insane like the megalomaniac Charles Kinbote, self-appointed editor and indexer of Vladimir Nabokov's purported poem, *Pale Fire* (Nabokov, 1962).

Overall, the attitude to indexers in fiction is distinctly patronizing. 'Some donkey work that didn't involve intelligence but that had to be done' is how Elizabeth Jane Howard's heroine envisages the task (1956). Barbara Pym makes frequent reference to 'a thankless task' allotted to authors' wives or female friends. Angela Thirkell's aristocratic indexer displays merely amiable incompetence (1950). Indexers in detective fiction are seen as: 'a strange sort of chap. Fussy. Methodical'; 'a meek man who drinks when he can get his hands on it'; 'the man was not responsible in the higher sense' (quoted in Batchelor, 1984). Altogether more flattering is the description in the BBC drama series *Accident*:

'It's a job that demands enormous powers of concentration and a superhuman ability to discard the irrelevant' (Jenkins). True, true, cries the real-life indexer.

In fiction too, it is held that an index discovers the indexer's personality. A woman in *Cat's cradle* claims to read character from an index: 'Never index your own book,' she warns. 'It's a shameless exhibition to the trained eye' (Vonnegut, 1963).

Philip Hensher's novel *The Fit* (2004b), has an indexer as its main character, whose personality may be illustrated by the fact that when he reads the letter his wife has written on leaving him, what strikes him chiefly is that she has twice misspelled the word 'possessive'. He is literal-minded: he tells us, 'My mother once told me that I was one for changinghorses in midstream. I did not know what she meant, as we lived in Bromley where there are no streams or horses.'

In 1996 the Registrar of the Society of Indexers received a telephone inquiry from a researcher working for a playwright who wanted to know about indexers. He asked what are indexers like, what sort of personalities are they? She did her best to answer. Later, she went to see the resulting play, *Sweet Panic*, by Stephen Poliakoff, performed. She reported:

The subject explored professional arrogance. A child psychiatrist offends the mother of an emotionally disturbed boy she is treating, and refuses to recognize that she could be mistaken. The boy's mother has been an indexer, and her analytical, logical mind makes her determined to show the psychiatrist that she is not omniscient. The interpretation of the character was interesting; perhaps not particularly likeable, but demonstrating powers of concentration, deduction, logical thinking, consistency and persistence which could certainly be viewed as infuriating if it was directed against you. (Wallis, 1996)

Prescriptions for personality

So having seen what indexers are generally supposed to be like, let us consider the qualities officially supposed to be needed by them. Textbooks listing the necessary qualities to become an indexer include personal characteristics as well as skills. Gordon Carey proclaimed that 'The best indexer is he who is most generously endowed with common sense' (1951).

Robert Collison wrote that 'The personality of the indexer is never far behind the index. A careful study of any particular index will reveal something of the indexer's own outlook' (1954). And 'Index-making is only interesting to those people who really like an orderly approach to life For those who prefer variety and the unexpected, indexing may easily prove an unwelcome burden, or at least an unpleasant shock' (Collison, 1962).

John Thornton listed these 'faculties of a born indexer': 'an orderly mind, infinite patience, and the

ability to approach the book from the readers' angle' (1965).

The specification for an indexer in the 13th edition of the *Chicago manual of style* (1983) is daunting indeed:

Whoever the indexer is, he or she should be intelligent, widely read, and well acquainted with publishing practices – also level-headed, patient, scrupulous in handling detail, and analytically minded. This rare bird must – while being intelligent, level-headed, patient, accurate and analytical – work at top speed to meet an almost impossible deadline.

Bernard Levin's idea of the personal qualities of an indexer may be gauged from one of his gracious printed acknowledgements to a book of his: 'The index is again the work of Oula Jones, of the Society of Indexers, who has brought to what is always an exacting task, and too frequently a thankless one, all her skill, patience and good humour' (1984).

Nancy Mulvany prescribed a combination of skills and personality:

Indexers must work in a detailed, careful, and accurate manner, must possess the rare commodity of common sense, and sound judgement, must possess an array of deductive and inductive thinking skills, distinguish between relevant and peripheral information; understand implication. Must be able to empathize with both the author and the readers, thoroughly digest the intentions of the author, and anticipate the needs of the readers (Mulvany, 1994).

Hans Wellisch included in his classic textbook a section 'Personality and skills of indexers':

Successful indexing does not result from a knowledge of basic rules and techniques alone; it also needs a certain flair for the task, as well as intuition, and these cannot be learned but must be traits of an indexer's personality. As in all truly creative vocations, truly outstanding indexers are born not made (Wellisch, 1991).

He lists Personality characteristics, including:

Being a rapid, attentive reader of texts, including occasional boring or trivial parts. Being keen on organizing and arranging things in neat and logical order. Being a stickler for accuracy Having a good memory for small details. Being capable of grasping relationships and connections, including those only implied in the text. Being able to work alone for long periods. Being prepared to work long hours if necessary, despite any/all difficulties. The spirit of 'Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!' (Wellisch, 1991)

Exemplary indexers

So that's the sort of person indexers should be. Now let us look at some actual individual examples of the profession, to see how they fit this ideal.

First, the indexer whom H. B. Wheatley called 'the first to use indexes as a method of attack' (1881). In 1698 there erupted a real scholarly row. Charles Boyle had edited and published the letters of Phalaris. Dr Richard Bentley, in his *Dissertation on the epistles of Phalaris*,

showed these to be spurious. Boyle rose most indignantly to refute Bentley's charges, and published a volume by the same title, with the subtitle 'examined By the Honourable Charles Boyle Esq'. In his preface he declared of Bentley, 'He gave me so plain, and so publick an Affront, that I could not, with any tolerable regard to my reputation, quietly put it up.'

To the second edition of this book was added an index, by Dr William King. It is indeed an attack, as Wheatley said: a short index, with only two main headings, to which all the other entries are subheadings and sub-subheadings, the whole rampant with sarcasm. It is headed:

A Short Account of DR BENTLEY
By way of INDEX.

These are some of the entries under 'Dr Bentley':

His Collection of Asinine Proverbs
His extraordinary talent at Drollery
His familiar acquaintance with Books that he never saw

His modesty and decency in contradicting great men
His happiness in confident assertions for want of
Reading
of Judgment
of Sincerity

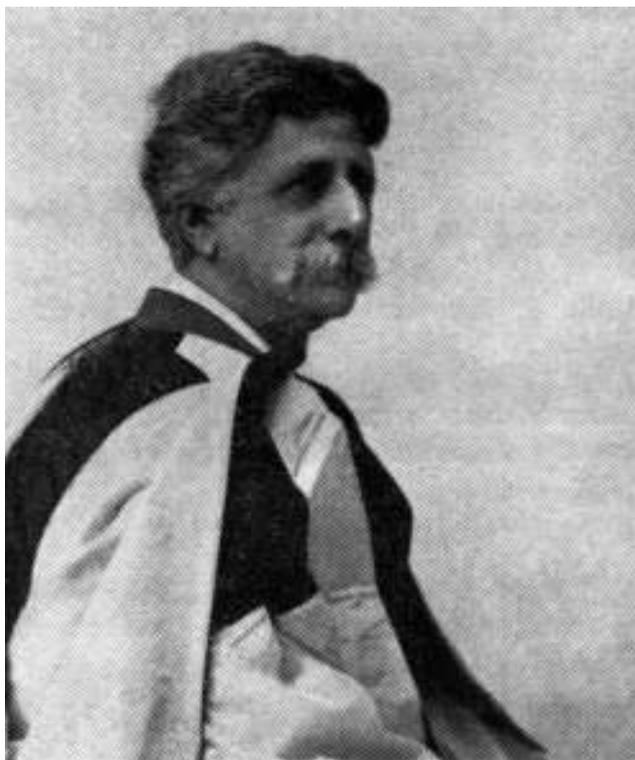
By contrast, Gilbert White, a century later, proved altogether a milder-mannered indexer. He gives a charming picture of his labours in a letter to a friend, writing in 1788:

I have at length put my last hand to my Natural History and Antiquities of the parish [*History of Selborne*, published in 1789]. However, I am still employed in making an Index; an occupation full as entertaining as that of darning stockings, though by no means so advantageous to society. My work will be well got up, with a good type, and on good paper; and will be embellished with several engravings.

It is remarkable enough that there is now sitting at my elbow an Oxford gentleman (the rev. R. Churton) who is deeply employed in making an Index also: so that my old parlor is become quite an Index manufactory.

Henry Benjamin Wheatley came to be designated 'the father of indexing'. He was the founder-secretary of the Index Society in 1877. His indexes included that to the six-volume Mynors Bright edition of *Pepys's Diary* (1875–79), and he was author of *What is an index? A few notes on indexes and indexers*, published by Henry Sotheran in 1878, and of *How to make an index*, published by Elliot Stock; two works which remained the backbone of the indexing literature until the foundation; of the Society of Indexers.

We may assess his personality from the zeal for work that he seems to have shown in early life, being willing to undertake it for less than reasonable cost. In *The*



H. B. Wheatley

Indexer in 1970, K. A. Mallaber wrote about the 1866 Catalogue of the Board of Trade Library, 'In 1860, the Board of Trade decided that it ought to have prepared and printed a catalogue of its valuable library'. Wheatley, then aged 22, was invited to submit an estimate for the work, and sent one, expecting the number of volumes to be 20,660, separate works 11,854, the cost of cataloguing the works to be 12 shillings per 100, of making the index to be 14,000 entries at 4 shillings per hundred, the whole work to 'occupy about six months from its commencement'. His estimate was for a total £99.2s.

In a strange riposte, J. R. McCulloch, Comptroller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, protested:

Perhaps you will be good enough to allow me to say that I should think that £100 is much too low an estimate of the sum required to produce the Catalogue in question I should apprehend that £350 or £400 would be much nearer the mark.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, the German philosopher, compiled the index to the first 24 volumes of one of the pre-eminent German journals of classical philology, *Rheinisches Museum, neue Folge*, providing four separate indexes totalling 176 pages: indexes of contributors, of topics, of passages from classical literature, and of Greek and Latin words discussed. It appeared in 1871 as a separate volume. Nietzsche rejected what he called the 'slave morality' of Christianity for a society to be led by 'a breed of supermen' whose 'will to power' would set them off from the 'herd' of inferior humanity, and considered that only the strong ought to survive, 'as human sympathy only

perpetuates the unfit and the mediocre'. I do not think he should be regarded as a typical indexer.

At the end of the 19th century we find an indexer of extraordinary arrogance. The prefatory note to the 'Full index of names, topics and opinions' to Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* and *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, in the 1900 volume edited by Percy Fitzgerald, shows great vaingloriousness, as he writes at the head of his index:

This Index, which has been made by the Editor himself, after considerable thought and labour, will, it is hoped, be found clear of the common defects which attend most indexes. No proper or sufficient index can be made vicariously: it requires a thorough acquaintance with the book treated, so as to anticipate by a sort of instinct what topics the reader would desire to search for. Indexes are generally too minutely elaborate, too meagre, or too indefinite. The common meagre index, that fills three or four pages, leaves out everything that the reader wishes to look for, and is too general. I have tried to combine sufficient fulness, without including matter that is altogether unimportant, and I have attempted to give the salient points and topics ... The analysis of the letters, which is conscientiously done, is a novelty, and will, I think, be found useful.

Now ladies appear on the scene. Mary Petherbridge wrote an article, 'Indexing as a profession for women' which appeared in *Good Housekeeping* in September 1923. She tells us of the proper qualities for female indexers.

The very qualities that go to the making of a good indexer are the reverse of those required for obtaining the work. The indexer works quietly in the background; A clever girl straight from a good school, where she has been encouraged to read and think is excellent training material for indexing and its allied subjects. Her mind is wonderfully ductile and plastic. She absorbs information and methods like the air she breathes. It is a joy to guide such a girl and to watch her getting into her stride, turning out her work carefully and methodically, using her critical faculties until her brain works like a keen-edged razor.

Professor F. A. Pottle seems so to have loved his work that he was willing to work for nothing, philanthropically. He undertook the laborious task of preparing for press and indexing an 18-volume set of the papers of James Boswell, in a private edition published by the collector Colonel Ralph Heyward Isham. After correcting the last proofs of the last volume (in 1933), he proceeded to work on the index. Some 50,000 slips were prepared, initially by a team of three that included Mrs Pottle; both Pottle and his wife worked on the slips for nothing, Colonel Isham having had to make many financial sacrifices to achieve publication of the edition, and he and Pottle both appreciating how essential a full explanatory index was if the *Papers* were to be of benefit to scholars.

From the 1940s to the 1970s the novelist Barbara Pym was assistant editor for the publications of the



Barbara Pym

International African Institute in London, including four annual issues of the journal *Africa*, for which she compiled the indexes. Her assistant, Hazel Holt, gives us a picture of her at work:

She would sit crouched over a battered, wooden four drawer card index of antique design She loved the mystique of certain aspects of her job; best of all, she enjoyed the art of indexing. The great on-going indexes were the cumulative, annual indexes for Africa. The real challenge was the Index of Tribes and Languages. I think what she enjoyed most about indexing, apart from the pleasure of putting words into a certain order, was the peaceful, enclosed space an indexer inhabits. It requires a certain sort of concentration: you need to withdraw, as it were, into the world of that which is to be indexed, and this precisely suited Barbara's temperament. (Holt, 1987)

In 1953 Kathleen Coburn, professor in the English Department of Victoria College in the University of Toronto, undertook the editing of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's multifarious notebooks. The indexer engaged for the work was Gertrude Boyle, the retired cataloguer of the Toronto Public Reference Library. Coburn described her as 'my doughty little indexer', and wrote of her as having 'a splendid intolerance of inaccuracy. Her patience was often stretched but never exhausted, and she gave that kind of stern support that only a conscientious indexer can give, correcting my errors or laziness, insisting on decisions when I thought I was too busy to make them, and generally sparing neither herself nor me.' After Gertrude had to give up the work through illness, Coburn wrote, 'the indexing was less provocative' (Coburn, 1977).

The circumstances of the founding of the Society of Indexers indicate the type of people expected to become members. Gilfred Norman Knight, a former barrister and civil servant who had been a freelance indexer for the previous 30 years, but 'not acquainted with a single other person who worked in this field', as he stated, wrote in 1956 to the *Times Literary Supplement* to reach out to others of his kind, beginning, 'Sir: It is proposed to form a Society of Indexers'. In response, he said, 'letters came pouring in', and after 'several discreet rly tone of the



G. Norman Knight

Society seems to have been firmly set by the venue of the preliminary meetings.

As for Knight's personality, when he was presented with the SI Carey Award for Services to Indexing, which consists of 'appropriately worded parchments', he was said to have inspired the Society by his 'energy, dedication and humour', and called 'Indefatigable writer and teacher; Implacable foe of disorder; Champion of exactitude; Indexer extraordinary'.

Gordon Carey, the SI's first president, advocated humility as a prime requisite for indexers. In his address to the SI in 1964 he cautioned members against what he called 'grandiose' notions, admonishing them:

Aren't we just occasionally tempted to forget that our part on the literary stage, essential though it be, is not and never can be a star part?... I'm not immune from this temptation – to think of our calling a little more highly than we ought to think. The longing to create is common to nearly all of us, and some of you, I dare say, may have experienced something of the feeling that often comes to me on the completion of an index – the flush of pride, soon tempered by the thought: 'IF ONLY I could write a book, paint a picture, compose a song, design a building, that will live after me. But no: my creator has seen fit to let me create nothing better than an index.' (Carey, 1966)

But the SI by no means always exhibited such meekness. In 1968 two stalwart members had a mighty row in the pages of its learned journal *The Indexer*. Oliver Stallybrass, a vigorous campaigner for the rights of indexers, had advocated 'An unusual method of making a book index': using a thumb-indexed notebook rather than cards. He cited the advantages of this system as being speed of operation, 'compactness, portability, and the absence of such perils as upsetting the file or mislaying cards', and warned, 'a card or wodge of cards left in the Reading Room of the British Museum or

London Library may well sink without trace' (Stallybrass, 1968a).

This proposal was made the subject of a symposium in *The Indexer*. One contributor was Neil Fisk (whose personality may be deduced from the fact that he spent one entire summer going through the latest edition of the *Oxford English dictionary* to compile a list of misprints – entirely voluntarily, of his own accord). He made the acerbic comment:

I agree with Mr Stallybrass that [Nobody who is incapable of copying a three figure number correctly should be making an index at all] but I would add that nobody who leaves in the British Museum [a wodge of cards] containing the results of his professional work is fit to be out by himself. (Fisk, 1968)

Stallybrass's trenchant counterattack included:

My most formidable critic is Mr. Fisk: the Beeching of the index world, with his refrain of Quantify! Quantify! But then I looked at some of the Doctor's more dogmatic assertions, and wondered if it might not be he who was due for retirement. ... Mr. Fisk must be a one-finger typist As for Mr. Fisk's final crack ... did not the Doctor once leave his season ticket in another suit? (Stallybrass, 1968b)

At the end of his riposte Stallybrass shows an unindexerly (according to Collison) character trait: 'The one attitude I find really stultifying is the rigid adherence to a single method; how tedious any activity, from love-making downwards, can become when practised on that principle!'

Later Stallybrass demonstrated his own severe acerbity, delivering a devastating critique of the index to a French book on America, 'the weirdest and most incompetent index I have ever needed to consult' (Stallybrass, 1974); and in a letter commenting on a Symposium in the previous *Indexer*, writing, 'The layout of Mr. Borchard's dual purpose index, admired by Mr. Collison, seems to me very carefully designed for maximum waste of space' (Stallybrass, 1975).

In 1989 John Ainsworth Gordon, then the secretary of SI, received the Carey award, hailed as 're-invigorator, organiser, consolidator; protector of the standards of the



John Ainsworth Gordon

Society; enthusiast of indexing, supporter of the membership; fiery arguer, innovator of ideas’.

Robert Latham received positive torrents of praise for his whole-volume index to Samuel Pepys’s diary, published in 1983. However, the publisher who acquired the American rights of the edition of the diary, edited jointly by Latham and William Matthews, wrote most disparagingly of Latham’s personality (Frugé, 1993). He seems to have liked Matthews, hated Latham. He described Matthews, the textual editor of the diary, as ‘quick-witted and amusing, brilliant ... with imagination, and a light touch’. But as for poor Latham, Frugé calls him ‘slow, careful, methodical, anxious to control every phase of the project, stretching out the one job to make a life work of it’. He reports Matthews as ‘chafing at Latham’s deliberate slowness, possessiveness, and lack of imagination’, and sums up Latham thus: ‘Once he was [found] “luxuriating” in a list of more than one hundred coffee houses frequented by Pepys. It may not be unfair to say that he had the soul of an indexer.’

In *The Indexer* in 1990 there appeared a startlingly frank obituary for a member of the Society of Indexers, beginning:

Alexander Sandison died ... after collapsing from a heart attack while questioning the Abbey National Chairman at a shareholders’ meeting – doing, as the Chairman of the British Standards Institution Technical Committee, wrote, what he did best. He was a great fighter for causes. His activities as one of the leaders of Abbey Members Against the Flotation achieved national publicity, but he also fought for many causes that should be close to the heart of indexers. He made an enormous contribution to the work of the BSI Committee which I chair I have to confess that at first I occasionally found his many contributions to our discussions rather irritating, but I later appreciated the value of his search for perfection. (Bakewell, 1990)

Another formidable personality in the SI was Dr John Gibson, fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, who became an indexer of medical and scientific books and journals after his retirement. In 1991 he gave a talk to the Medical Writers Group of the Society of Authors, which he gave the title, ‘The author as a pain in the neck of the indexer’. His reasons for this attitude may be found in his article ‘The highlighting/underlining syndrome’ (Gibson, 1988). He defined this as ‘A disorder in which the author of a book highlights (in transparent ink) or underlines a number of words on each page of the proofs and demands that the indexer include all of them in the index’, and gave detailed aetiology, clinical description, laboratory findings, prognosis and treatment for the disease.¹

Professor Hans Wellisch is another of our fiercely acerbic examples, his personality to be judged by his writing. Judy Batchelor reported:

Through the issues of the American Society of Indexers’ newsletters runs the exuberant rhetoric of Hans



Hans H. Wellisch

Wellisch’s castigations of a certain kind of computer generated index. His targets include the uncontrolled reproduction of variant spellings and printers’ literals from original sources, undifferentiated references, space (and purchaser’s money) wasted on reproducing the unused parts of catalogue cards, pre co-ordinated subject heading lists ‘applying the rules of the 19th century to late 20th century information retrieval’, the so called specialist dictionaries whose entries lead not to definitions but to the (often inadequately selected) reference books from which the term has been extracted with no discrimination, the total omission of diacritical marks on foreign names ...

Among other deeply felt sentiments we find the following:

‘How this can be useful to man or beast escapes me ... a frightful example of how the computer will run amok if left to produce an index without any human control ... computerized indexing gone haywire, all in the interests of making a fast buck by producing a pseudo reference book the quick and dirty way ...’. (Batchelor, 1984)

Now an example of an amazingly high achiever in the world of indexing today: Professor Bella Hass Weinberg. I wrote of her in *The Indexer*:

Bella Weinberg is quite simply the busiest person I have ever met. Professor of Library & Information Science at a New York university; editor of the substantial journal, *Judaica Librarianship*; Consultant Librarian of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research; frequent conductor of workshops on indexing and thesaurus design, and consultant in those fields, with a publications list of immense length; as indexer, she started by compiling a bilingual chain index to the classified catalog of the library of the Institute for Jewish Research; her first major book index was a hundred-pager to *History of the Yiddish language*. Within her indexes, she enjoys building a hidden structure, considering the syndetic links most important. She finds her indexing work most time-consuming, often of the midnight hours. Yet, as an Orthodox Jew, she confines all professional activity to six



Bella Hass Weinberg

days a week, never working or travelling on the Sabbath. (Bell, 1994)

Bella shows intense dedication to the task. In an on-stage interview at an American Society of Indexers' conference in 1993 she stated:

you cannot believe the kinds of hours that I put into work ... I have very little time for leisure ... don't have time for novels, don't like television ... my leisure reading consists of publications on paper management I have no plants in my life – nature is irrelevant to my life style. (quoted in Thomas, 1995)

The Carey Award was presented to Barbara Britton in 1995 seemingly on account of her saintliness, its citation reading 'for selfless dedication to the Society and its Council', describing her as 'loyal, considerate and indefatigable; ever ready to respond to emergencies; learned, trustworthy and compassionate; a rock in time of trouble; confidante and supporter of countless members'.

Finally, this story of a rabbi suggests that an indexer with perfect skills must also be blessed with a perfect personality (Weinberg, 2002). The *Weekly Newspaper for Orthodox Jewish News* in 2002 included an obituary of a rabbi who had published quality editions of classic Jewish texts, with indexes and detailed source notes. In the following issue another tribute appeared, asking:

How did he get to publish so many holy books with such beautiful footnotes, introductions and indexes? He added a detailed index to the holy book entitled *The Order of the Sabbath*, leaving us without a doubt that the holy author gave him a special welcome in Paradise.

So what would be the perfect, ideal personality of an indexer? Perhaps, one that avoided the resentment and megalomania attributed to us by Philip Hensher, the vindictiveness of Margaret Cook, the belligerence shown by William King, the arrogance exhibited by Percy Fitzgerald, the savage scorn of Nietzsche, the

dogmatism of Neil Fisk, the contentiousness of Stallybrass, the dullness of the soul imputed to Robert Latham, the pernickertiness of Sandison and the intransigence of John Gibson; and manifest instead the gentleness of Gilbert White, the docility and ductile mentality adumbrated by Mary Petherbridge, the stern conscientiousness of Gertrude Boyle, the humility advocated by Gordon Carey, the philanthropy of Pottle, the peaceful immersion of Barbara Pym, the total dedication of Bella Weinberg, the saintliness of Barbara Britton. If we could show these qualities then we too might make it to Paradise.

References

- Batchelor, J. (1984) 'Deer stalkers and data banks.' *The Indexer* 14(2), 121–2.
- Batchelor, J. (1985) 'Not quite indexers in fiction (and nonfiction).' *The Indexer* 14(4), 277–8.
- Bakewell, K. (1990) Obituary of Sandison. *The Indexer* 17(2), 135.
- Bell, H. K. (1994) 'Index makers of today: Bella Hass Weinberg.' *The Indexer* 19(1), 51.
- Carey, G. V. (1951) *Making an index*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carey, G. V. (1966) 'The Society of Indexers as a servant of the world of letters.' *The Indexer* 5(2), 78–80.
- Coburn, K. (1977) *In pursuit of Coleridge*. London: Bodley Head.
- Collison, R. (1962) *Indexing books: a manual of basic principles*. London: Ernest Benn.
- Collison, R. (1972) *Indexes and indexing*, 4th edn. London: Ernest Benn (1st edn 1953).
- Cook, M. (1999) *A slight and delicate creature*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Drazan, J. (1980) 'Indexing as hard labor,' *The Indexer* 12(1), 27–8.
- Fisk, N. (1968) In 'Symposium: an unusual method of making a book index.' *The Indexer* 6(1), 9.
- Frugé, A. (1994) 'Publishing Pepys in America.' *LOGOS* 5(2), 67–70. (From *Sceptic Among Scholars*, University of California Press, 1993.)
- Gibson, J. (1988) 'The highlighting/underlining syndrome.' *The Indexer* 15(4), 236–7.
- Hensher, P. (2004a) 'Dishonourable mentions.' *Independent*, 6 July.
- Hensher, P. (2004b) *The Fit*. London: Fourth Estate.
- Holt, H. (1987) 'No thankless task: Barbara Pym as indexer.' *The Indexer* 15(4), 236–7.
- Howard, E. J. (1956) *The long view*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Jenkins, R. Quoted in *The Indexer* 13(4): 257.
- Knight, G. N. (1979) *Indexing, the art of*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Lee, J. D. (2002) 'The father of British indexing: Henry Benjamin Wheatley.' *The Indexer* 23(2), 86–91.
- Levin, B. (1984) *The way we live now*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Mallaber, K. A. (1970) 'An early Wheatley catalogue: the 1866 Catalogue of the Board of Trade Library.' *The Indexer* 7(2), 42–3.
- Manual of Style* (1983) 13th edn. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press.
- Mulvany, N. (1994) *Indexing books*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press.
- Nabokov, V. (1962) *Pale fire*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Parkinson, C. N. (1978) *Jeeves: a gentleman's personal gentleman*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Slansky, P. (1989) *The clothes have no emperor*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- Stallybrass, O. (1968a). In 'Symposium: An unusual method of making a book index'. *The Indexer* 6(1), 4–6.
- Stallybrass, O. (1968b). Letter: 'An unusual method of making a book index.' *The Indexer* 6(2), 75–7.
- Stallybrass, O. (1974) In 'Symposium: The inadequacy of book indexes.' *The Indexer* 9(1), 6–8.
- Stallybrass, O. (1975) Letter re 'Symposium: selective indexing.' *The Indexer* 9(3), 109.
- Thirkell, A. (1950) *County chronicle*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Thomas, D. (1995) *American Society of Indexers oral history*, Vol. 1. Port Aransas, Tex.: ASI.
- Thornton, J. L. (1965) 'Indexing', in *Progress in library science*, ed. R. L. Collison. London: Butterworth.
- Vonnegut, K. (1963) *Cat's cradle*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Wallis, E. (1996) In *Sidelights*, 3rd quarter 1996, 14.
- Weinberg, B. H. (2002) 'Indexes and Paradise'. *The Indexer* 23(2), 82.
- Wellisch, H. (1991) *Indexing from A to Z*. New York: H. W. Wilson.
- Wheatley, H. B. (1881) In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

This article is adapted from an after-dinner speech given to the ISC/SCI Conference, Toronto, June 2014.

The Indexer Vol. 32 No. 4 December 2014 149-155