Memories of an Editor

Hazel K. Bell

Hazel Bell describes the development of *The Indexer* during her time as editor from the '70s to the '90s.

L. M. Harrod

The 21st year of the Society of Indexers (SI), 1978, was dramatic. Leonard Montague Harrod, who had been editor of *The Indexer* for fourteen years, suddenly resigned, because of family circumstances; at the same time his deputy editor, Mary Piggott, had sustained head injuries in a traffic accident and could not take over editing the journal. A new editor was urgently needed. Neil Fisk drew up a 'Reasonable specification of an ideal Editor for ''The Indexer'''; a call for nominations went out, accompanied by a list of requirements for the post; and I (an SI member since 1964) volunteered. My only editorial experience was with our local consumer group's magazine and the newsletter of National Housewives Register (both voluntary posts), but I found that I loved editing — assembling the parts, tailoring them, and arranging them to form a coherent whole — and eagerly seized the opportunity. After an election at the May 1978 AGM, I was appointed editor of *The Indexer.*

My predecessor in the post had given me five pages of instructions couched in spidery handwriting, so difficult to read that they could not be referred to for quick guidance, covering: Proof reading; Payment to contributors; Extracts from Reviews; Reprint of Extracts from Reviews; Despatch; Print order; House style; advertising rates. To know how long an article might prove in print, I had to 'cast off' by counting the characters in each of ten lines and multiplying the average by the estimated number of lines in the typescript. Makeup was done by cutting up the galley proofs with scissors and pasting them with Cow Gum onto page grids.

In July 1978 SI held its first international conference, in Roehampton, South London, where I met Norman Knight (then in a wheelchair), as well as two speakers who were to become, in my view, the greatest contributors *The Indexer* has had: William Heckscher and Hans Wellisch, born respectively in Germany and Austria before the rise of the Nazi Party, both by then residents of the United States, and university professors. The conference was also attended by representatives from the American Society of Indexers, which had affiliated to SI in 1972 (Dorothy Thomas), from the Australian Society, which affiliated in 1977 (Jean Hagger), and the Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada (Peter Greig), who all read congratulatory messages on SI's Coming of Age. Peter Greig had several meetings with SI Officers, and the affiliation of the Canadian Society to SI was settled during that conference.

Hans H. Wellisch

Volume 11(2) of *The Indexer*, the first issue under my editorship, was due for publication in October, and I had the Proceedings of this major conference to prepare for inclusion. The paper given by Wellisch, 'Early multilingual and multiscript Indexes in Herbals', ran to 22 pages, including 10 illustrations, each with a caption, 21 footnotes, and 45 references with superscripts.[1] I had never laid out anything so complicated — and indeed haven't since!

The instructions my predecessor had given me did not cover my particular problem: editing a journal from a house with no spare room, and with three young children. I was able to devote attention to the journal only during the hours when the children were at school. I would spread typescripts, proofs, typewriter and tools over the dining table, clearing everything away as tea-time approached. The journal production schedule was changed to avoid

William S. Heckscher

G Norman Knight

Peter Greig

its busiest period coinciding with school holidays. The children tried to help, knowing they must not touch my papers or make noise during my phone calls, and doing their best to deal with these efficiently themselves when necessary. I came home once to find that my young daughter had taken a booking for an advertisement for a thesaurus, helpfully ascertaining and noting down for me, 'It's a sort of book'.

Then, just as we finally went to press with the *Indexer* issue including the 1978 conference proceedings, Norman Knight, SI's founder-President, died. So after all the trauma of getting my first issue into print, my next, Volume 11(3), had to include an obituary and tributes for Knight. And we had to redesign the journal cover to take in the affiliation of the Canadian Society.

Editorial Board

Hitherto the production of *The Indexer* had fallen under the aegis of the Publications Board. In May 1978 John Gordon, SI Secretary, proposed to set up a separate Editorial Board, to deal with Content, Layout, Copy preparation, Copy-editing, Proofreading, 'Extracts from Reviews' and Volume indexes; also, under 'Management', to control Distribution, Non-member subscriptions, Stock control, sales of back numbers, Bound volumes & binders, Adverts and Sales campaigns. The Board would be *required* to meet twice yearly 'to do a post-mortem on the last issue and make proposals concerning the next issue'. As well as Editor, Deputy Editor, Treasurer and Secretary, the Board was intended to include a Journal Subscriptions Officer, Journal Business Manager and Advertisements Manager. Filling the last two proposed posts was never achieved.

John Gordon

The new Board met for the first time on 1 November 1978, with five members present and apologies from three more. A schedule for the April 1979 issue was established; hours at which telephone calls should be made advised; functions of members of the Board defined; content and design of the next issue, which would include the volume index, discussed. The Secretary's list of 111 complimentary copies of Vol. 11(2) to be weeded: 'No review copies in future, except of special issues to selected recipients. ''Exchange'' copies to be checked to ensure that two-way exchange is operating'. Form letters would be designed; Journal Liaison Officers of the Affiliated Societies collaborated with; and a report of a symposium on indexing technology 'updated immediately prior to final copy date of issue in which it will be published'.

The Board had no Chairman at first; then David Lee became its first Chairman, in 1982-84, succeeded by Tony Evans, then Ian Crane from 1993-95.

David Lee

Ian Crane

Colleagues

Many SI members cooperated to produce the journal.

Deputy editors working with me were: Mary Piggott 1978-80; Lucy Pollard (Cecil Robertson's daughter) 1981; G P Bartholomew 1982; David Lee 1982-84; Tom Norton 1984-87; Margaret Cooter 1988-93.

For the full term of my occupancy of the editorial chair, the Revd. Norman Hillyer edited the 'Extracts from Reviews' section. We redesigned it, giving it new subheadings, beginning with Indexes Praised and Indexes Censured. I had suggested Indexes Condemned, but Norman did not wish to condone condemnation, and proposed the more lenient term.

Mary Piggott

Philip Bradley of Dundee took over the editorship of book reviews on retiring from his full-time job in librarianship and education, writing that he considered himself fortunate to be asked to do so: 'I happily accepted this offer and it has given me enjoyment, and an occupation, since 1984 ... it was satisfying to be able to carry on in an area with which I was familiar.'[2] He continued in this office under my immediate successors as editor. He described his attitude and policy over reviewing thus:

Margaret Cooter

> I worked out ... what the aims should be ... the kind of books covered were to be: Indexes and books related to indexing; books relevant to indexers (e.g. reference books); books of interest to indexers.... One of the purposes of reviewing books is to bring to the notice of readers the existence of books which might otherwise escape them.[2]

And he offered advice to reviewers as to how they should proceed, what consider.

In 1979 SI joined the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers, a body composed of the publishing arms of learned societies and professional institutions. We were members of group A, the smallest category: those societies spending less than £10,000 a year on publications. SI was one of the few members that had no premises. Fellow institutional representatives asking where I was based and being told 'at home', would look politely surprised.

Lack of Society premises also entailed solitary working. In such homeless societies as ours was then, officers were dispersed, rarely met, which led to poor communication and weak cooperation. There could be no quick consultation, as by popping into the adjacent office: telephonic communication, yes, but small societies have to watch expenses carefully. Long-distance calls on behalf of SI should be made only in off-peak, cheap-rate periods – that is, out of office hours, when the home-based try to lead their home lives, their working papers put away. Such conversations could be only one-to-one; no substitute for group encounters at the communal workplace – or today's email! Relationships could not develop easily and smoothly, as in day-to-day contact. I had once been instructed to keep a deputy editor (of another publication) living miles away informed of all stages and developments of the production: but on reading her disconcerted, 'your letters keep pouring through the letter-box', decided this was overkill.

Philip Bradley

Printers

It was a part of the editorial mandate to deal with printers.

The first eight volumes of *The Indexer* were produced by Rowling & Sons of South West London; Vol. 9, and the first three issues of Vol. 10, by R. Ward & Sons of Gateshead, Tyne and Wear. Harrod then took a firm in St Albans, near to his home in Harpenden, as *The Indexer* printers, and I dealt with them over the production of Volume 11 and the first three issues of Vol. 12; but I lived beyond the distance within which they would deliver, and when, in 1980, they suffered a union go-slow, I changed to a printer in Hertford, closer to me (and with the splendidly appropriate address of Caxton Hill), and remained with them through my remaining editorial years.

Indexing *The Indexer*

It had been the practice for the final issue of each volume of *The Indexer* to include a volume index, prepared for each volume by a different member of SI, so in 1979 the fourth issue of my first *Indexer* volume (the third issue that I was to edit) had to include the volume index – and I had to find someone to compile it. (I was well aware that this commission might not be the honour it appeared: my predecessor had once telephoned me and asked me to prepare the index to the current volume. Overwhelmed, I gasped, 'I think you ought to ask someone else!'. With a remarkable lack of tact, he told me, 'I've already asked everyone else'. I declined the commission.)

It was over the indexing of volumes of *The Indexer* that I came thoroughly to understand and even empathise with publishers' impatience with indexers …

John Gordon later wrote a splendid article on the variations of the *Indexer* indexes, including:[3]

For just over two decades it was editorial policy to give each volume-indexer extensive freedom to display his/her personal virtuosity. Each compilation has its own special qualities, revealing fascinating variations of style, of technique, of decision-making; it has indeed been said with pride that these indexes are living proof that indexing is an art rather than a science. Truly ... they demonstrate how widely individual indexers may vary in the solution of particular problems, and how numerous such permitted variables are.

In 1981 we were faced with the need to provide an index to volume 12.

Before commissioning the index, the editorial board sent a list of 40 questions about index style to eight prominent SI members, and collated the — far from uniform — replies to form a set of guidelines for *Indexer* indexes which we hoped would later enable a cumulative index to be compiled. Freda Wilkinson, who undertook to prepare the index to volume 12, was the society's very conscientious treasurer, and she made calculations as to the likely cost of providing a cumulative index, concluding that it would simply not be possible for the society to meet it. She agreed that she would keep a record of her hours compiling the index for volume 12, and charge SI's recommended indexing rate for it; but after completing the work, said the hours were excessive and innumerable, and would accept only a small token payment.

The editorial board subsequently battled valiantly to abide by the principle that the society should not exploit the professional skills of its members by underpaying them for indexing commissions, but should pay the full hourly rate for these (although not doing so for any other type of work undertaken on behalf of the society) — but in fact never, in my time on Council at least, was it able to put its money where its mouth was and do so. Our indexers all received only token, inadequate payments.

Freda Wilkinson

Further developments

By 1983 the three affiliated societies as well as SI each had their own newsletter, carrying their national indexing news. *The Indexer* reported these in a new, regular feature, 'Shoebox, International' in which Judy Batchelor, *The Indexer*'s wittiest contributor, provided elegant, detailed, appreciative résumés of all four societies' newsletters.

In 1986 *The Indexer* began what I regarded (until computer searching became possible) as the most valuable regular feature *The Indexer* has provided. Hans Wellisch had published two volumes of bibliography, *Indexing and abstracting: an international bibliography*,[4] reviewed in *The Indexer* as 'A comprehensive survey of literature on indexing and abstracting', and *Indexing and abstracting 1977–1981*.[5] From 1986 to 1989 this current-awareness bibliography was resumed in the form of regular instalments he supplied as detachable supplements for *The Indexer*. In 1993 Jean Wheeler undertook the continuation of the bibliography, which concluded with her part 8 in 1997.

The march of technology

Meanwhile, technology had developed with bewildering speed.

In 1978 we typed noisily on manually operated typewriters, inserting messy sheets of carbon to obtain extra copies. Tiny, flimsy pieces of special paper had to be placed above errors to type over again

Hilary Calvert

Drusilla Calvert

to correct them – each copy separately. Tippex, electric typewriters, and the photocopier were the first, much-blessed, technological miracles to transform my work.

Computers made their first appearance in *The Indexer* in 1965, with a description of their use for the production of technical manuals at IBM.[6] In 1981 — the year I moved on to using an electric typewriter — *The Indexer* expatiated on the difference between microcomputers (described as 'complete computer systems') and microprocessors ('the actual CPU [central processing unit] chips'), describing also mainframe computers, minicomputers (`dedicated to a particular task') and word-processors.[7] Dr Hilary Calvert, an oncologist, computer enthusiast, and husband of a freelance indexer, Drusilla, devised a dedicated program to enable her to do her indexing on computer. This was the first indexing software; it was launched as MACREX at a demonstration at the Library Association in 1981,[8] with an advertisement in *The Indexer* the following year.

By 1983 both the journal and the society's newsletter seemed in danger of being overwhelmed by technical material and discussion among computer users, and a Technology Working Party was formed. It produced the *MicroIndexer*, intended to be a technical supplement to *The Indexer*, hiving off such material from the journal. Its first issue was in January 1983, a single A4 sheet, beginning: 'This is the first in a series of occasional newsletters which will be devoted to the use of microcomputers by indexers'. It ran eventually to fifteen issues, finishing in 1992, totalling 152 pages. Its most prolific contributors were the Calverts and Richard Raper.

On the domestic front, by the 1980s my sons had grown up and moved out, and an erstwhile bedroom became my editorial office, boasting file-lined walls, computers and laser printer. What I most blessed on moving to use my computer was the silence as I keyed in. When, due to breakdown or power cuts, I had to revert to steam typing, the clatter seemed abominable. Then the speed, and the ability to print out extra copies — no more shuffling sheets of grubby carbon paper. Formatting was fun, too, forming electronic layouts on screen, as I later learned to use and love desktop publishing.

In 1990, the fact that ASI installed a society telephone with an answering machine was described in 'Shoebox, International' as 'a giant step in communications'. In the same year, I acquired a fax. By then *The Indexer*'s most enterprising contributors had begun to impress us with formatted printouts, and bewilder us by offering disks. I sent out a letter to contributors, beginning 'We are going to try supplying copy for our journal to the printers on disk, when available in this form', and giving instructions for cooperation with this. At first we passed the disks straight on to the printers, but later I came to appreciate the advantages of being able to add our own corrections; print out extra copies; count words (no more casting-off!), or format copy to appear as it would on the printed pages.

By 1992 all four Societies of Indexers had greatly expanded and increased their activities, including their output of newsletters. It was no longer possible to cover all their contents in single biannual instalments, and 'Shoebox, International' was put to rest, replaced by reports supplied by members of each Society, in a new feature called first 'Out of the Shoebox – into the Network', then just 'Network of Indexers'.

Indexer contents

We still lacked a cumulative index to *The Indexer*, and to stand in lieu I greatly enjoyed compiling a classified list of all our major topics from 1958 to 1993. This divided the 564 articles that had by then appeared in *The Indexer* into twelve sections, showing how much we had published on particular topics through the 36 years. The largest section was the one devoted to the practice of indexing, which was itself subdivided into sections, the major ones being indexer/author/publisher relations, and principles and techniques. The other subsections were: aboutness, alphabetization, bias, evaluation, humor, legal aspects, training, and users. The second largest group of contributions was that on subject specialities, 15 of them listed, from archaeology to science and technology. Third came types of indexes, from bibliographic indexing to the indexing of poetry, hymns and psalms, with the indexing of newspapers, periodicals, and their cumulations being most numerous. Then, in decreasing order of numbers of articles – biographies and literary figures; countries and languages; information technology application;

Janet Shuter

Nancy Mulvany

indexing systems, standards and methods; archives and databases; bibliographies and reference works; the history of indexing; services; and design and layout.

The gender balance of contributors had changed through those years. Elizabeth Wallis later wrote in *The Indexer*, reminiscing about the early years of SI, 'I remember the overwhelming maleness of the Society's officers'.[9] Similarly, all journal editors up to 1978, when I began my tenure, had been men; since then, all have been women. Catherine Sassen examined articles, editorials, letters to the editor and reviews from every issue of *The Indexer* published from 1958-2007.[10] She found that women constituted only 11 per cent of all authors in the journal's first ten years, and 21 per cent in the next ten. The number of women contributors then grew considerably in the years of my editorship; from 1978 to 1987 they constituted 41 per cent of authors, increasing to 49 per cent from 1988 to 1997.

Handover

In 1995 it was time for me to hand on the editorial chair, after 18 years, and bewildered by the seeming technological takeover. I found another disadvantage of the single-person office to be that one small head carries so much journal lore; the only one who knows details of the production routine, process, development, the current state. Recalling the five handwritten pages I had been given along with the editorial mantle, I detailed the documentation I thought necessary to represent the production of the journal, set it all down, and passed on to my successor:

A job description for the journal editor; a history of the journal to date; suggested policy for development and future strategies; names of possible colleagues; style sheet; notes for contributors; copy prospects list; advertisements list and rates card; description of the journal for directories; word-counts list; basic make-up (regular features); desiderata for a business manager; classified contents list; list of tributes to the journal. There were also standard letters for: requests for articles; requests for permission to quote; requests for review copies; accepting an article; chasing promised articles; accompanying proofs sent out; querying whether advertisements are to be repeated; returning disks, photos etc. with thanks; regular letter to suppliers of regular features, with their addresses. Most of these were on a disk, which also contained letterheads and my complete address files.

Recalling too the solitary state in which I had taken over the journal, I was deeply impressed that the next editor, Janet Shuter, lived on the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England, with as co-editor Nancy Mulvany of California, the collaboration made possible by email.

I was left with familiarity with the contents of *The Indexer* through 18 years, especially the lighter, quirky items that so many people had sent in, that they had discovered in old volumes or noted in the press. I culled a selection of these, edited and annotated them, obtained copyright permissions, and compiled the entertaining anthology, *Indexers and Indexes in Fact and Fiction*, published in 2001 by the British Library.[12] I had also made many contributions to the journal myself, and now collated the instalments of the history of Societies of Indexers that I had written for it, and some of the features on individual indexers I had interviewed; added to them; and produced the only history of indexers in the market: *From Flock Beds to Professionalism*.[12] Both these volumes stem directly from my editing of *The Indexer*.

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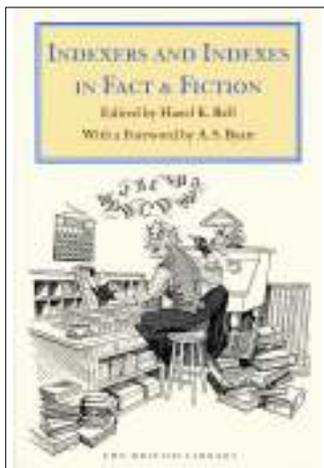
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From a talk given to the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers' Conference, 2009. The full talk can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fnyUsRXmZ4'.