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SOCIETY OF INDEXERS IN AUSTRALIA

All correspondence regarding The Society of Indexers (England), The Society of Indexers in Australia and the *Newsletter* should be addressed to H. Godfrey Green, 35 Rosedale Road, Glen Iris, Victoria 3146.
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*Absente auxilio perquirimus undique frustra,
Sed nobis ingene indicis auxilium est.*

NEWSLETTER

NUMBER NINE

FREE TO MEMBERS

OCTOBER, 1974

NEXT MEETING

Miss ~~Margery C. Ramsey~~^a, Principal Librarian of the State Library of Victoria, will describe the activities of the State Library in the indexing field at the next meeting of the Society, Tuesday, October 22, 1974, beginning at 7.45 p.m. in the Conference Room of the Library of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, first floor, 368 Swanston Street, Melbourne. ✓

This follows the informative explanation of what a publisher expects of an indexer by Mrs. Lee White, the Publisher of Australian literature for the MacMillan Company of Australia Pty. Ltd. at the last meeting of the Society. Members were unanimous in their appreciation. Her talk forms the supplement to this *Newsletter*. ✓

NEW MEMBERS

WE WELCOME the following members this month: Mrs. Lynne Hayes, Librarian, Frenshan School, Mittagong, N.S.W.; Mr. E. Topperwien, Librarian, Prahran College of Advanced Education, Prahran; Miss Rosemary Allen, Head of the Library Studies Department of the Footscray Technical College; and Mrs. Cathleen S. Pivec, Head of the Department of Library Studies at the Whitehorse Technical College, Box Hill. ✓

YOU ARE INVITED to come and bring a friend to hear Miss Ramsey and to share in the discussion, coffee, biscuits and fellowship that follows. Please say you will come! ✓

To Members in Victoria

FILL IN AND RETURN THIS SLIP ON OR BEFORE 15 October, 1974.

Mr. H. Godfrey Green,
35 Rosedale Road,
GLEN IRIS, VIC. 3146

will*

I will not* be attending the meeting of the Society of Indexers in Australia on 22 October, 1974.

will*

I will not* be bringing a guest to this meeting.

(signed)

* strike word(s) which are not applicable.

WHAT A PUBLISHER EXPECTS OF AN INDEXER

An address by Mrs. Lee White, the Publisher of Australian Literature for the MacMillan Company of Australia Pty. Ltd. to members of the Society of Indexers in Australia in the R.M.I.T. Library Conference Room on Tuesday, 13 August, 1974. ✓

FIRST let me preface my remarks for the evening by declaring that my publishing experience has been limited - although that word seems misleading - to the field of general publishing. My primary concern has always been with those books designed for release in general book outlets and I am therefore, neither qualified nor inclined to comment on the more exacting expectations of an educational publisher towards an indexer.

Dr. Samuel Johnson - who can always be relied upon to provide an apt quotation - once stated that 'I would rather be attacked than unnoticed. The worst thing you can do to an author is to be silent as to his works'. If the good Dr. Johnson had been moved to comment on the lot of indexers I believe he would have apostatized that 'they should rather be unnoticed than attacked and that the best thing one can do for an indexer is to be silent as to his works'. For if an index satisfies all the demands of publisher and reader it appears to be virtually taken for granted. While the users of the book will undoubtedly feel a warm glow of relief when the index proves satisfactory and intelligent, it is only when it fails in its task that attacks - usually howls of wrath from public, reviewers and publishers alike - descend on the indexer. A good index presents a classic case for the proverb 'Silence Is Golden'.

In seeking this serene utopia, a publisher expects an indexer to fulfil a number of often unstated requirements.

Above all, he expects intelligence. This is not intended to be a derogatory comment about an indexer's intellect. But a publisher is asking an indexer to place himself in the shoes of the reader and to list references which the reader is likely to desire. Of course, it is the publisher's duty to guide the indexer into those shoes; he must, for instance, advise the indexer on whether the book is intended to appeal only to experts on the particular subject, or whether it is seen as acting as a general introductory and guidance text. But from there on the indexer is on his own and expected to exercise his own common sense. And this is merely a matter of constantly bearing in mind that an index is a tool, a tool specifically designed for the book's particular type of reader. For instance, the purchaser of a straight-forward Australian gardening guide could reasonably be expected to be an average reader interested in establishing or maintaining an Australian garden. Since it is a guide, he will more than likely, be seeking practical information. The indexer is expected to shape his work accordingly and the index should abound in such references as 'Bulbs - when to plant' or 'Trees - how to prune'. From a publisher's point of view, there seems little merit in indexing a passing reference to the maze at Hampton Court, nor indeed does it appear very helpful to have a reference stating 'Planting Times' followed by numerous page references. Yet there is such a garden guide on the market, though it is one of the less popular ones. I shall not pass judgement on whether this is a direct result of the index or a reflection on the book's contents.

FURTHER, with the employment of common sense and intelligence, an indexer can have the satisfaction of turning an ugly duckling into a swan. Many a rambling text which has proved the despair of the editor, has been converted into a useful guide by a sympathetic indexer who has been able to identify the useful information in the text and index accordingly. Maybe the result of that is the reader then has to cope with the author's logorrhoea but at least he has the satisfaction of knowing that the indexer has guided him to a likely area of information.

It is in this field of interaction between editor and indexer, that the publisher hopes - no doubt optimistically - for a further enlargement of the indexer's work. In small publishing houses - and I think it is fair to say that within this context all Australian publishers are small - a general editor can be called upon to work on a number of books on widely varying subjects. Wildlife, sociology, gardening, art books - all may be passing across the editor's desk at the same time. Under these conditions, no editor can be infallible and whilst the publisher expects reasonable editorial reliability, it is of course out of the question to expect every name, date, time and place to be checked.

Yet when it comes to selecting an indexer, some attempt is usually made to choose a person with a knowledge of or interest in, the subject of the book. It stands to reason therefore that the indexer may well find himself in the position of detecting errors which have escaped the editorial eye. Here, let me make it very clear that we are not asking the indexer to act as proof reader, nor to assume editorial responsibility. But an indication from the indexer that a certain fact may be wrong or that, in the course of indexing, he has discovered a variation in spelling, can save a torrent of tears after publication. Some years ago a book was published which omitted a hyphen from a proper name, and accordingly, the index reference was listed under the final barrel of the double-barrelled surname. The gentleman concerned was most irate and the withdrawal of the entire print run appeared imminent until some pretty nifty work was done in printing an erratum. The matter was later mentioned in passing to the indexer who jeopardized his continued existence by admitting the omission of the hyphen had not escaped him but that he failed to report it 'because he thought the publisher wanted it spelt that way'. It says much for the publisher's forbearance that the indexer continues to reside amongst us and ply his trade.

When an indexer possesses some knowledge of the book's subject, a publisher asks that the indexer utilizes that knowledge. A careful and precise index can do much to ensure that the text satisfies the requirements of the reader.

THERE is a further area of co-operation between publisher and indexer. Ideally indexes should be as exhaustive as the market requires but it may be that, because of pagination problems, the publisher finds it necessary to limit the extent of the index. If this should occur - and the indexer would be advised of the difficulty at the time of commission - then the index should be kept as tight as possible. The indexer may find it possible to mark certain entries with pencil, so that if it runs over, the publisher knows such entries could be dropped. Alternatively, he may resort to a larger use of sub-entries, thereby avoiding a multitude of major references. Control of extent is always a difficult area for publishers and no indexer is happy to have his wings clipped by being told he must reduce the length of his index. When this does occur, we ask that the indexer appreciates the problems facing the publisher, and that he is prepared to co-operate with good grace.

In the presentation of the index a publisher is looking for neatness, consistency and accuracy. It is probably stating the obvious to say that the index should be typed and double spaced. Please remember that the copy will be marked up for the printer and adequate margins should be left to allow for this. Consistency is a virtue closely integrated with house rules. At the time of commissioning, an indexer should be advised if the publisher wishes him to conform to existing house rules and he should be provided with a copy. Once typed, the index must be checked for conforming to these rules - and for consistency of indexing standards. Thus, if the indexer has established the practice of cross reference for a particular type of index entry (Hospital Benefits Fund - see Medical Societies) then he must ensure that similar cross references are provided for other index entries of the same type (Blue Cross, Order of Druids etc.). This may seem very basic advice, but the lack of consistency in indexing practice is often marked and sometimes gives the impression - a false one, I trust, - that the indexer has either changed personalities in the middle of the task or has performed the task with painstaking efficiency till half way through when time and circumstance forced him to rush to completion.

ACCURACY is, of course, the lynch pin of an index. On receipt of index copy, the editor should do a random check on entries but only if this check reveals errors will every entry be cross checked. It is always a surprise to me that so many inaccuracies do slip through to this editorial stage. Whilst I am sure a good indexer performs the initial transcription with care, it seems to me that many of these inaccuracies creep in at the typing stage and the faults occur when the indexer fails to check his typing against his original cards or listing. This really is a vitally important step. The publisher can only do his best to accurately reproduce the copy with which he is presented. If that copy is inaccurate it is unlikely that the errors will be detected. To select and write index references is only one part of the indexer's task - an equally important part is to ensure that his selection is accurately presented for proofing.

The handling of proofs varies between publishers, and often varies according to the amount of time allowed by the printing schedule. Unless specifically requested, it appears more usual for publishers to correct index proofs within the house against the copy provided by the indexer. The exception to this is with encyclopaedic books where the index plays a major role and represents a large part of the book.

Two final matters are of concern to the publisher: speed and cost. Nowadays, a publisher's path is dogged with delays - labour shortages, paper shortages, shipping strikes all serve to lengthen the gestation period of a book. More and more we look to save time within the areas under our control - the proof turn around time, the time taken to check the blue prints and repros and, inevitably, the time taken to compile an index.

The same story applies to costs - with soaring paper and production charges we seek to minimize the additional costs incurred at editorial stages. I do not intend to enter the thorny debate of how much indexers should charge. However, I would put it to you that with many general books the index is far more a useful accessory than a necessary adjunct. In these cases, if the indexer's fee is too high the publisher is faced with the alternatives of abandoning an index altogether, or of having it compiled within the house. And here it is essential that the Australian Society maintains a fair perspective - though it may prove unpalatable. An index does not sell a general book. True, it may well tip the balance on whether a publication achieves educational use and equally true, there are certain publications such as cookery books which would prove totally useless without an index. But in many cases the lack of an index acts merely as a pin pricking irritant to the reader and not as a deterrent to the purchaser. And in the final analysis, that is the point that will weigh heavily with the publisher. We all see these book reviews that conclude with a plaintive plea of 'but why, oh why, no index?' Well, no doubt it is nice to feel wanted. My point is that publishers do not just 'forget' indexes; whether to index or not is a judgement which is made primarily on the nature of the text, but the publisher is also influenced in his judgement by such factors as time, cost, space and market requirements. And there are occasions when these influences add up to a convincing case for the abandonment of the index.

Having decided that an index is necessary most publishers seem to operate on the principle: get an index as quickly and as cheaply as possible. But of course also the best possible.

IF WOULD APPEAR then that the publisher expects an indexer to be a veritable prodigy of perfection. Intelligent to the point of being psychic, conscientious to a degree of preciseness, neat, consistent, accurate, co-operative; possessing all these qualities, yet panting with eagerness to reveal these charms at a minimum cost and provide the goods in a matter of minutes!

This then, is what a publisher (hopefully) expects of an indexer! We are of course frequently but inevitably sadly disillusioned. But this is alleviated if it is obvious that the indexer has done the best possible job within the specifications. And in the long run that is the crux of the matter. It is the publisher's responsibility to set out the guidelines but above all, it is the indexer's task to work within these guidelines to the best of his or her ability.