

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.
Phone: 25 3314.

Absente auxilio perquirimus undique frustra,

Sed nobis ingene indicis auxilium est.

NEWSLETTER

NUMBER FOURTEEN

FREE TO MEMBERS

AUGUST, 1975

INDEXING THE FLOOD

AS THE FLOOD of reports pours in an increasing torrent from government departments, the indexing of them becomes increasingly important. Mr. D.H. Borchardt, the Chief Librarian for the La Trobe University, who has considerable experience in this field, will discuss this problem of indexing government papers at the next meeting of the Society in the Conference Room of the Library of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, first floor, 368 Swanston Street, Melbourne, on Thursday, 14 August 1975, at 7.45 p.m.

HOW TO MAKE AN INDEX

INSTEAD of a resume of a talk before the Society, the Supplement to the *Newsletter* this month takes the form of extracts from *How to Make an Index* by H.B. Wheatley, published by Elliot Stock, London in 1902. These extracts have been selected by Miss Anne Godden, Publisher for Thomas Nelson (Australia) Ltd.

To Members in Victoria - You are cordially invited to come and to bring a friend to hear Mr. D.H. Borchardt, and to share in the discussion, coffee, biscuits and fellowship that follows.

FILL IN AND RETURN THIS SLIP ON OR BEFORE 7 August, 1975
to Mr. H. Godfrey Green, 35 Rosedale Road, GLEN IRIS, 3146.

will*

I will not* be attending the meeting of the Society of Indexers in Australia on Thursday 14 August, 1975.

will*

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

(Signed).....

* strike word(s) which are not applicable.

How to Make an Index by H.B. Wheatley, published by Elliot Stock, London, 1902. Extracts selected by Miss Anne Godden, Publisher, Thomas Nelson (Australia) Ltd.

It would be well for author and reader to come to an agreement as to what an index really is. An index may, in certain circumstances, be arranged in the order of the book, like a table on contents, or it may be classified or chronological; but the index to a book such as we all think of when we speak of an index should be alphabetical. The other arrangements must be exceptional, because the books indexed are exceptional.

It is strange, however, to find how long the world was in coming to this very natural conclusion. The first attempt at indexing a book was in the form of an abstract of contents in the order of the book itself. Seneca, in sending certain volumes to his friend Lucilius, accompanied them with notes of particular passages, so that he "who only aimed at the useful might be spared the trouble of examining the entire." Cicero used the word "index" to express the table of contents of a book, and he asked his friend Atticus to send him two library clerks to repair his books. He added that he wished them to bring with them some parchment to make indexes upon.

Many old manuscripts have useful tables of contents, and in Dan Michel's *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (1340) there is a very full table with the heading: "Thise byeth the capiteles of the boc volzinde."

It was only a step to arrange this table of contents in the order of the alphabet, and thus form a true index; but it took a long time to take this step. Alphabetical indexes of names are to be found in some old manuscript books, but it may be said that the general use of the alphabetical arrangement is one of those labour-saving expedients which came into use with the invention of printing.

Erasmus supplied alphabetical indexes to many of his books; but even in his time arrangement in alphabetical order was by no means considered indispensable in an index, and the practice came into general use very slowly.

The word "index" had a hard fight with such synonyms as "calendar," "catalogue", "inventory", "register", "summary", "syllabus". In time it beat all its companions in the race, although it had the longest struggle with the word "table".

Cicero used the word "index" and explained it by the word "syllabus". Index was not generally acknowledged as an English word until late in the seventeenth century.

"At the laundress's at the Hole in the Wall in Cursitor's Alley up three pair of stairs, the author of my Church history - you may also speak to the gentleman who lies by him in the flock bed, by index maker." - SWIFT'S *Account of the Condition of Edmund Curll* (Instructions to a porter how to find Mr. Curll's authors).

Bad indexers are everywhere, and what is most singular is that each one makes the same sort of blunders - blunders which it would seem impossible that any one could make, until we find these same blunders over and over again in black and white. One of the commonest is to place the references under unimportant words, for which no one would think of looking, such as A and The. The worst indexes of this class are often added to journals and newspapers. A good instance of confusion will be found in the index to a volume of *The Freemason* which is before me; but this is by no means singular, and certainly not the worst of its class. Under A we find the following entries: Afternoon Outing of the Skelmersdale Lodge, An Oration delivered, etc. Annual Outing of the Queen Victoria Lodge, Another Masonic MS.

Under B: Bro. Bain's Masonic Library.

Under F: First Ball of the Fellowship Lodge; First Ladies' Night.

Under I: Interesting Extract from an 'Old Masonian's' Letter.

Under L: Ladies' Banquet; Ladies Night; Ladies' Summer Outing; Late Bro. Sir B.W. Richardson.

Under N: New Grand Officers; New Home for Keighley Freemasons; New Masonic Hall.

Under O: Our Portrait Gallery.

Under R: Recent Festival.

Under S: Send-off dinner; Summer Festival; Summer Outing.

Under T: Third Ladies' Night.

Under Y: Ye olde Masonians.

There are many other absurd headings, but these are the worst instances. They show the confusion of not only placing references where they would never be looked for, but of giving similar entries all over the index under whatever heading came first to the mind of the indexer. For instance, there is one *Afternoon* Outing, one *Annual* Outing, one *Ladies'* Outing, one *Summer* Outing, and three other Outings under O. None of these have any references the one from the other.

The two chief causes of the badness of indexes are found -

1. In the original composition.
2. In the bad arrangement.

Of the first cause little need be said. The chief fault is due to the incompetence of the indexer, shown by his use of trivial references, his neglect of what should be indexed, his introduction of what might well be left out, his bad analysis, and his bad headings.

The second cause is still more important, because a competent indexer may prepare his materials well, and keep clear of all the faults noticed above, and yet spoil his work by neglect of a proper system of arrangement.

The chief faults under this second division consist of -

1. Want of complete alphabetisation.
2. Classification within the alphabet.
3. Variety of alphabets.
4. Want of cross references.

These are all considerable faults, and will therefore bear being enlarged upon.

1. *The want of complete alphabetisation* is a great evil, but it was very general at one time. In some old indexes references are arranged under the first letter only. In the index to a large and valuable map of England, published at the beginning of this century, the names of places are not arranged further than the third letter, and this naturally gives great trouble to the consulter. In order to save himself, the compiler has given others a considerably greater amount of trouble. In arranging entries in alphabetical order it is necessary to sort them to the most minute difference of spelling.

Certainly the indexer requires to be born with some of the necessary qualities innate in him, and then he requires to have those qualities turned to a practical point by the study of good examples, so as to know what to follow and what to avoid.

"As a matter of fact, people without the first necessary qualifications, or any aptitude whatever for the work are set to compile indexes, and the work is regarded as nothing more than purely mechanical copying that any hack may do. So long as indexing and cataloguing are treated with contempt rather than as arts not to be acquired in a day, or perhaps a year, and so long as authors and their readers are indifferent to good work, will worthless indexing continue." *

What, then, are the chief characteristics that are required to form a good indexer? I think they may be stated under five headings:

1. Common-sense.
2. Insight into the meaning of the author.
3. Power of analysis.
4. Common feeling with the consulter and insight into his mind, so that the indexer may put the references he has drawn from the book under headings where they are most likely to be sought.
5. General knowledge, with the power of overcoming difficulties.

The ignorant man cannot make a good index. The indexer will find that his miscellaneous knowledge is sure to come in useful, and that which he might doubt would every be used by him will be found to be helpful when least expected. It may seem absurd to make out that the good indexer should be a sort of Admirable Crichton. There can be no doubt, however, that he requires a certain amount of knowledge; and the good cataloguer and indexer, without knowing everything, will be found to possess a keen sense of knowledge.

* *Index to the Periodical Literature of the World* (1892).
