THIRD MEETING IN 1981
Thursday, 17th September, 7.30 p.m.
at CSIRO, 314 Albert Street, East Melbourne
Committee Room, Third Floor

The Speaker: GEORGE LEVICK, M.Ag.Sc., Dip.Ed.

his topic: UNCONTROLLED AND UNRULY — CAN IT WORK?

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GEORGE LEVICK, Editor of Australian Science Index, has intensive experience in indexing scientific research literature, with a particular interest in agricultural topics. His previous background in both temperate and tropical agriculture provided a working knowledge of how information can be concealed and revealed. Members will recall his comments on the newly established wine research database, last year. The problem of recording and indexing an ever continuing flood of journals and assorted proceedings and reports are familiar to some members. As tertiary journals have increased in scope and size, the need to raise production efficiency becomes more desperate. What happens to the index pages? Are the information seekers satisfied?

"UNCONTROLLED AND UNRULY - CAN IT WORK?"

OFFICE BEARERS, 1981

President: Peter H. Dawe, Chief Librarian, CSIRO, 314 Albert Street, East Melbourne, 3002.

Vice-President: Vera Wicks

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Honorary Treasurer: Joyce Korn

Committee: Clyde Garrow, Jean Hagger, John Simkin

Newsletter Editor: Coryl Muntz

POSTAL ADDRESS FOR THE SOCIETY: G.P.O. Box 1251 L, Elizabeth Street, MELBOURNE, Vic., 3001
AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

TRAINING IN INDEXING

INDEXING COURSES

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST are sought from possible participants in a practical course in indexing now being arranged by the Australian Society of Indexers in association with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, guided by the Head of the Department of Librarianship.

THE FIRST COURSE will begin in June 1982, at the Department of Librarianship, La Trobe Street, Melbourne. Provisionally five weekly sessions are planned, probably in the early evening. Each session will last two hours; one half devoted to indexing theory, the other to practical exercises.

COST OF THE COURSE, including tuition and project assessment, all materials and mid-session refreshments, is $60. Note that 1982 membership is a requirement for participation.

LEVEL OF TUITION will be directed towards those of serious interest in indexing: for example practitioners without previous benefit of formal training and those members with appropriate background knowledge who wish to establish themselves as professional indexers with confidence.

COMPATIBLE PLANNING of small groups participating, of appropriate structure and emphasis is proceeding. If you are interested in taking the unusual opportunity offered by this course, please do supply the information requested in the enclosed form (without further obligation) and return it, by 16th October, 1981, to

The Honorary Secretary,  
Australian Society of Indexers,  
P.O. Box 1251L, G.P.O.,  
MELBOURNE. Vic. 3001
FEES FOR CONTRACT INDEXING

After detailed consideration of information from many relevant sources, the Executive Committee has prepared the following statement and welcomes comment upon the recommendations.

The Australian Society of Indexers recommends that payment for contract work should be negotiated from a minimum rate of $1.30 per 1000 words for texts of low information density.

The rate is based upon equivalent hourly payment of persons employed in fields requiring similar standards of education and ability to those required by an indexer. To this has been added a percentage covering overheads and compensatory allowances. This total has been applied to the time taken to index 1000 words of text, as agreed by several experienced workers. It has been estimated that material with low density of information can be indexed at a rate of some 8000 words per hour, while only about half that rate can be maintained on a text with high information density.

This method, which appraises material to be indexed rather than the 'average indexer' provides a practical guide to basic cost of a project. A specific quote is justified by appropriate sampling. In the course of this operation, most prospective problems become evident. It is unlikely that density and obscurity would attract a price higher than $3.50 per 1000 words of text on the present rating.

On occasions when a project differs from normal book production (e.g. text volume is not measured in words, the work is unusually demanding, or of serial nature) an alternative framework of rates may need to be negotiated.

In any case it is recommended that the terms of an assignment should be confirmed in writing before the work is begun.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- on Accreditation of Indexers
from Jon G. Martindale

The Editor apologises for omission of this letter from the previous Newsletter. It is no less relevant now: the Executive Committee is considering this important facet of the Society, and would be grateful to have comments from other members.

May I support Mr. Borchardt's call for action on the accrediting of indexers. Although the society is apparently making slow progress it appears that it may be worthwhile looking outside "the very small numbers of active members" to get the scheme off the ground.

Once started it would almost certainly help swell the ranks of those active members. As Mr Borchardt suggests it would be self-perpetuating.
DON'T KNOCK THE KWOC

Summary of an address on COMPUTERS AND INDEXING

at the June meeting of the Society

by Keith Davison

Computers have been used in indexing systems since 1957-58 when amongst others, Peter Luhn of IBM produced the basic ideas of computerised sorting, although at that time, no hardware was available for the task. Luhn visualised from the beginning that complete production would be possible: his early indexes included Titles; Authors' names; Figure captions; Citations; Sentences from text. His work was based on word frequency counts of the documents concerned, as a statistical exercise in clustering of terms; a technique that has been widely used since. Nowadays we are familiar with KWIC and KWOC, if not NOC (Notes On Content).

Chemical Abstracts was, in 1961, one of the first journals to publish a fully rotated title index by computer manipulation. From this time, the growth of indexes to periodicals has been very much a product of computer assistance. It was possible to rotate and cycle combinations of terms, e.g. ABCD, BCDA, CDAB, DABC; and it was then predicted that problems of total indexing, of translation and book production would become a prerogative of computers exclusively.

What, in fact happened during the next fifteen to twenty years, was the gradual discovery that it's harder than we expected, in spite of the marvellous advances in technology. The problem can be summarised in a truism which will be fully accepted by all indexers: - "A well written book is easier to index than a badly written one." In mechanistic terms this is equally the case. Indexing projects have foundered on the rocks of syntax and semantics; but work in this field, as well as the ways of examining large numbers of related documents, has improved the outlook.

While this research has been proceeding, we have developed some useful techniques, which I believe have greatly assisted in the measurement of index effectiveness.

Notably in 1966 there was Cyril Cleverdon and the Cranfield Research Project, with his now famous measures of recall and precision and the axiom of their inverse relations (i.e. as the number of retrievals rises, the level of relevance falls.) This research project evaluated both pre- and post-coordinated approaches; and became a major influence on the direction of subsequent work.
Within the concept of exhaustivity, the number of topics, and specifically the level of precision with which the documents are actually indexed was introduced. We also have the purely mechanistic description of pre- and post-coordinate indexing. This together with some excellent work on automatic classification and thesaurus construction is a field I am happy to discuss but is marginal to the topic of this paper.

However, the result of all this work has been the interaction between people and computers: firstly, in the derivation of titles. Scientific journals which have computer produced indexes are selecting meaningful informative titles for indexing purposes. In addition I read recently of two large encyclopaedias for which indexes are generated from entries flagged during text input. Index generating programs are now available in mini database management systems. What I do wish to point out however is that in certain fields we have progressed beyond this point of data assistance and in the case of stored text have achieved complete text retrieval from a computer generated system, although it is costly.

In our rush towards Lancaster's paperless society we have developed an alternative strategy of interactive systems: one which must depress indexers but will, I believe, be of profound significance to our future both as indexers and people.

We had the development of Scientific Title Indexes, meaningful abstracts and production of written indexes. In law however a different problem was faced. Total retrieval of text was essential; some items such as the location of full stops, were critical and the text was written in controlled jargon extremely tightly and relatively concisely. From this field comes also both the requirement and the willingness to pay for such things as case law. In America two systems have developed on a commercial basis: LEXIS and WESTLAW. These systems include a listing of all states operating since 1967, Federal and District Court opinions since 1961, the US Code and Supreme Court opinions since 1938; together with selected tax law. It is estimated that this package cost $30 million to develop and now has a database of over 200 million characters.

These legal systems retrieve full text and like all such systems we have the interest in precision-recall rate appearing. Lawyers generally prefer high recall rather than precision.

I propose to talk in a little more detail about one such system, currently operational in Australia; although originally developed in the United Kingdom. This is the STATUS package. It was developed at UKAEA originally to work on atomic energy legislation. I went to look at this system with a company solicitor in 1972. It was then being expanded from a strictly legal orientation towards the present form of an information package.
Samples of computer printout that have been distributed display the STATUS package in actual use: retrieval of references from a data base of Australian Capital Territory Ordinances. STAIRS is a similar and perhaps more familiar system.

Information storage is accomplished through two main files. The text file is created by the user and contains all documents passed for storage. The second file is an index or concordance, containing a list of all words that have occurred in the text file, together with a reference list for each work. This is automatically updated, with no need for user intervention. The arrangement is more effective than a conventional index of limited size that has been compiled from one point of view: it allows any informed person to interrogate with interactive response. Structure of the text can be dictated by the user and there is a facility for omission of certain common words, e.g. a, and, to. A powerful interactive query language is employed by the operator to define requirements. Basic Boolean logic applies (AND, OR and NOT options) with the use of bracketing.

It is a costly form of storage for book texts; but for a data base of significant size, the system is economically justified by the value of accessibility to its users.

SALVETE

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mrs Kerry A. Herbstreit; P.O. Box 181, Mount Evelyn, Vic., 3796
Ms N. Horrocks; 3 Pentland Street, Ascot Vale, Vic., 3032
Mrs P. Johnson; 17 Radiata Avenue, Baulkham Hills, N.S.W., 2153
Miss T.E.L. Thomson; 1/13 Bertram Street, Gardenvale, Vic., 3185
REVIEWS -- INDEXES MENTIONED

From The Age, Melbourne

13th June, 1981  The Furneaux Group, Bass Strait; by R.M. Fowler (Roebuck Society) - the first of two proposed volumes; reviewed by Dennis Dugan. "... Maps and photographs are collected at the end of the work and an excellent index helps sort out the sometimes confusing wealth of detail."

25th July, 1981  Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman; ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Harper and Rowe) reviewed by Assoc. Prof. E.D. Potts. "Off the Record is of value to almost anyone interested in the history of the United States or in the development of US foreign policy in the post-World War II years. Its usefulness as a reference is marred, however, by an unreliable index. Many important items are not indexed or are not indexed in full."

15th August, 1981  Years May Pass On; by Horace Webber (Caulfield Grammar School) reviewed by John Morrison. "... painstakingly researched, well written, generously illustrated, and designed in excellent taste. To that could be added that the book was worthy of a less trite title and of an index. The latter would have served a better purpose than the register of past and present pupils which occupies more than 40 pages of small type."

5th September, 1981  Explorers of Western Tasmania; by C.J. Binks (Mary Fisher Bookshop, Launceston) reviewed by Dennis Dugan. "... painstakingly researched, ... lavish with maps and illustrations ... The bibliography and double index - bibliographical and general - are comprehensive."