EDITORIAL

When Indexers Available came back from the printers there was much rejoicing amongst those of us involved in its production.

There had been a number of delays, not the least of which was the wiping of the typesetters' disk containing the final version. Without a back-up, an earlier version had the amendments patched in, and the poor old proof-readers had to go through it all again. Hence, members may enjoy playing 'spot the error' - a missing page reference in the index perhaps being the most embarrassing, given who we are.

In the circumstances however, we are happy with the final result, which is quite an expansion on earlier editions. Members whose services are listed will be pleased to know that copies have been sent to 124 publishers throughout Australia. Further, Indexers Available will be publicised in a range of newsletters and magazines of interest to editors, authors, librarians etc. (our NSW Correspondent, Kingsley Siebel has written and forwarded reviews to some).

Members who do not appear in this edition of Indexers Available will receive a form when one is circulated to all members early next year in order to provide us with details for the next edition.

Coming up soon is the Society of Editors (Vic) 'Editing Indexes Workshop' - see notice in this issue. Also, we have confirmed the dates for our own 'Introductory Indexing Course' - it will be held on Monday nights, 23 September to 28 October. Details of the venue and cost should appear in the next Newsletter.

The day of the Medal draws ever closer, and at the time of writing, the Panel has received 7 entries from 5 people. Please keep the entries coming in - they will be accepted until Friday, 23 August 1991, the Medal Dinner being approximately one month later (date to be confirmed). We hope to see you all there!

Finally, the first Annual General Meeting of the NSW Branch will be on 28 August, marking their first full and successful year as a separate branch - see notice for details.

Helen Kinniburgh

REPORT OF NSW BRANCH MEETING
10 JULY 1991

A small but dedicated band of indexers braved foul weather to attend the last meeting of the New South Wales Branch, held at the State Library on July 10.

Our guest speaker was Mary Turner who works with CSIRO's Australis databases. The focus of Mary's talk was the database SAGE (Science And Geography Education), which is one of the 27 databases which comprise Australis.

SAGE is a database containing references to 22 popular Australian general science and geography journals,
and is available in CD-ROM and online. It contains some 4,500 records to date.

Mary gave us a brief overview of the indexing process: first, the journals arrive at CSIRO and a secretary records their arrival and prepares a data sheet for each article in each journal. This is a skeleton record which only contains author, title and source.

Next, indexers take the data sheets and journals and create abstracts, descriptors and identifiers for each article. Indexers initially had some difficulty in deciding how they would distinguish between descriptors and identifiers, a problem compounded by the fact that no thesaurus exists for SAGE. However work is now underway on a thesaurus, and the indexers have decided to use descriptors for generic terms, and identifiers for specific terms and geographic names.

Another problem arose with the use of stopwords. It is common for retrieval systems to ignore leading articles and prepositions (a, the, at, of, etc.) in searches, but this convention creates problems in a scientific database which contains terms like vitamin A - obviously one does not want the 'A' ignored in a search! The fine tuning of the software to overcome such problems continues.

Once the indexers have completed the task of supplying abstracts, descriptors and identifiers for each article, the information is checked, and then sent out to data entry contractors for typing onto disk. Data enterers type the information from the data sheets onto disk using Progress software, and then print out the results in batches. This is returned to CSIRO where it is checked against the original data sheets. The corrected data-entry floppy disks are then passed onto the Management Information Services section of CSIRO for downloading onto the mainframe computer. This online updating process occurs monthly.

Twice a year the company Space Time Research receives an ASCII file of the database from Australis. This ASCII file is then sent to the United States for pressing as a compact disc (CD-ROM). Space Time Research also produce the software Superfield which is SAGE's user interface, or 'front-end'. This interface enables users to search and retrieve the raw data in the database in a systematic way. This is also the software which must contend with problems like that of stopwords mentioned earlier. Mary also told us of Australis's work in marketing SAGE. The product was originally designed for schools but public libraries are now buying it in increasing numbers. A collaborative project with La Trobe University is also underway in an attempt to improve the cross reference structures, not only of SAGE, but of all the databases which comprise Australis.

Despite a small audience, constant questions from the floor were evidence of the interest which Mary's talk sparked among those present. We only hope we can offer her some sunshine and blue skies the next time she visits Sydney.

Garry Cousins
NSW President

VISIT TO SYDNEY
BY ELIZABETH MOYS

Elizabeth Moys is the founder of the Moys Classification
System which is used by most law libraries in Australia. She is currently the President of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians, and editor of BIALL's Manual of Law Librarianship.

Elizabeth retired from librarianship some four years ago, and since then has been working as a freelance indexer. This has enabled her, as she herself puts it, 'to shamelessly exploit her long-standing contacts with law publishers'.

Elizabeth will be in Sydney during August and has agreed to talk to the NSW Branch of the Australian Society of Indexers on 28 August 1991 at the State Library of NSW. She will be speaking on 'Legal vocabulary and the indexer'. The meeting will take place in Seminar Room 1 on Level 11 at 6.00pm for 6.30pm. All interested persons, members or non-members, are invited to attend. A donation will be requested to cover costs.

Garry Cousins
NSW President

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF NSW BRANCH

The first AGM of the NSW Branch of the Society will be held on 28 August 1991 at the State Library of NSW. The meeting will take place in Seminar Room 1 on Level 11, and will immediately follow the talk by Elizabeth Moys scheduled for 6.30pm (see separate notice). The main business will be the election of a new committee.

All members are cordially invited, not just to elect the new Branch committee, but to hear what promises to be an interesting talk by Miss Moys.

Garry Cousins
NSW President

SOCIETY OF EDITORS WORKSHOP:
EDITING INDEXES

This workshop is designed to cover what editors (and authors) should know about indexes, however, some AusSI members may find it useful to attend.

Max McMaster (AusSI President) will explain the rationale and basic mechanics of manual and computer indexing, and discuss some of the features of indexes for specialist material, e.g. scientific texts, cookery books.

Jill Taylor, an editor with many years' experience as a freelancer and in-house in management positions, will examine aspects of the index in the publication process from the editor's perspective, including allocation of space at cast off, costing and commissioning, and copy editing.

To be held on Saturday 10 August 1991, 9.30am to 12.15pm (approx.) at The Writers' Centre, 12 Parliament Place, East Melbourne. Cost: $40 (full members Soc. of Ed.); $45 (assoc. members and others). Morning tea included.

Enquiries to Diedre Missingham: 509 9009 (w).
To enrol, write to: Editing Indexes, c/o the Training Officer, PO Box 176, CARLTON SOUTH 3053; enclosing cheque, name, address and telephone/fax number.

NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mrs M Bryant
79 Chelford Street
ALDERLEY QLD 4051
Here is a brief piece on a curious index recently published in New Zealand, which attracted some attention from reviewers.

**THE NEW LAND: A PICTURE BOOK**

Works of fiction rarely have indexes, though the examples of Lucy Ellmann’s *Sweet desserts* and of the Grosset and Dunlap edition of Tolstoy’s *Resurrection* are well enough known. In 1990 Bill Manhire, Reader in English at Victoria University of Wellington and a well-known poet and teacher of creative writing, published *The new land: a picture book*, a collection of short stories with a joke index. The index was treated variously by the reviewers, e.g.:

‘A work of fiction with an index is a bit too cute for words.’ (Graeme Lay, *Dominion Sunday Times*, 18 March 1990).

‘The index is itself a narrative of sorts and demonstrates Manhire’s talent for having his way with signs — by strewing them in his readers’ way. A sample from A and B gives us the highly significant “AIDS; Aotearoa; Assassination...; Banks, Sir Joseph; Business Round Table” and the highly obscure “Aarey Milk Colony; Andrew, Archie; Arsenical soap; Bananas simile; Black empty night”. The nouns in Manhire’s stories (proper and improper) often appear in this way — of equal importance, just as to tourists whether the museum is open and where to buy toothpaste often seem equally pressing.’ (Elizabeth Knox, *Dominion*, 10 March 1990).

‘The interest in language — as storehouse, as representation — takes on a level of complete abstraction in the final “story”, a Nabokovian index to the picture-book collection. Purified of realism, the index still functions as another version in its own right, featuring arch clues and some very funny juxtapositions.’ (Douglas Standring, *New Zealand Listener*, 11 June 1990).

‘The index, like the book as a whole and like much of Manhire’s other writing, is full of private jokes, intelligible only to readers with the necessary inside information. Professional indexers may enjoy the deliberate flouting of standard practice, and readers puzzled and frustrated by the postmodern conventions of the book may possibly get some help from the five entries which all have the same location reference, ‘1–113 passim’ (i.e. the entire text). These are: ‘Appetite’, ‘Cannibals’, ‘Memory’, ‘New Zealand’, and ‘Ventriloquism’. There must also be some significance in the long string of undifferentiated location-references after ‘Photographs’ and also in the long list of ‘see’ references after ‘Islands’.

Simon Cauchi
NZ Correspondent

**BOOK REVIEW**

I have often found myself saying of an index that competence might have become excellence through the expenditure of an hour or so in the Reference Section of a library - clearing up oddments of name and title with a Dictionary of Biography, or place names with a Gazetteer, for instance. The obvious, and no doubt often justified, retort is that it is not every indexer who finds such a project easy, with a deadline looming and a contract that puts a minimum value on hour-effort units.

This Guide might well prove to be the answer, on many occasions at any rate. It is, to put it crudely, a distillation of references intended to provide in dictionary format the answer, or at least an answer, to each of those niggling little questions that would be mere trivia were they not being prepared for appearance irrevocably in print.

Is that stirring seaman's song better described as a chanty or as a shanty? Is the adjective relating to things from Nepal better rendered "Nepali" or "Nepalese"? Is the Victorian Mallee town "Sealake" or "Sea Lake"? Did Our Glad spell her surname with one or two? (The book marks you right for the second offering in each of these cases.)

Incorporated in the single sequence there are also: a most useful dictionary of acronyms; a guide to abbreviations for the better-established academic qualifications; a selection of scientific and technical terms with their abbreviations and brief explanations; a guide, for words still recognisably of foreign origin, to the extent to which they may be considered "naturalised"; and much more of the same indispensable (not -ible) kind.

And all this is not, as we may have feared on reading the title, hidden amongst long technical discussions into matters of typesetting, layout, printing, binding and connected matters; in short, the book does not pretend to be a sort of poor-person's Style Manual, but a source of comfort to the puzzled and perplexed. As the Introduction points out, it is not a dictionary that automatically provides definitions - though meanings are sketched where necessary to avoid confusion. Nor, in the relevant sections, is it an abbreviated Dictionary of Biography - "people with simple, uncomplicated names are not included just because they are well known" (though I note that the fairly straightforward Kelly, Edward "Ned" proved to be an irresistible entry).

As to style, the book claims with truth to be less prescriptive than its pure-Oxford parent - one needn't feel, on using it, that OUP rules the English-speaking world. It has commendably bowed to Australian preferences in admitting a wider use of -ise (over against -ize), to mention just one issue that has been the subject of some lively correspondence in the press quite recently. One could hardly escape the occasional disagreement, of course, and my particular quibble concerns the ease with which the book creates multiple-word nouns by using the hyphen. The justification for "pig-iron" and "sea-horse", where the meaning of the combination is so removed from those of its elements, is beyond dispute; but why "police-officer" (beside "police station") or "heart-disease" (as against "heart failure")?

Regarding coverage, it is impossible on short
acquaintance to bring down a
verdict: I will say that over
the few weeks this review has
been in preparation, the book
has not let me down in any
real-life issue; and it is
hardly fair to test it with
hypothetical questions (it is
no great disgrace to lose a
trick or two when your opponent
has studied your cards!)
Indeed - and I admit bias
arising from my educational
background - I thought that the
coverage of some technical
material was arguably
excessive: for instance, to
include the chemical symbols
for such a large number of
elements. The nature of these
does not admit of "confusion";
being unambiguous, because they
are arbitrary, their only
difficulty lies in one's
knowing or remembering what
they are; and if that were a
sufficient condition of
inclusion, no doubt the Guide
could run to many volumes.

That it does not do so
already is at least partly due to
the ingenious Oxford system
of citing words arising from a
common root: the system is easy
to follow once made familiar,
but this is a case where the
first-time user must not evade
the duty of reading the
preliminary matter. More
generally, the book is well
laid out, with a clear and
pleasant typography; I have not
yet come upon a typist's or
printer's error. Though in
soft-cover, it is robustly
bound, and handles well in use
(though it will not, of course, lie
opened flat).

Altogether, this is an
outstanding work of reference
for desktop use, excellent
value for money, and I would
certainly recommend it to any
indexer.

George R.T. Levick
Vice President

SNIPPET:

True confessions - by public
demand, the index:
The major complaint about
The Andy Warhol Diaries, the
daily account of the late
artist's innermost thoughts and
expenditure (e.g., phone $0.50;
newspaper $1; cab $5), was not
that he shafted everyone he
knew but that everyone he knew
didn't know whether they had
been shafted or not.

The publishers didn't
include an index, so
prospective 'shaftees' were
forced to wade through the
entire 802 pages, a task only
slightly more interesting than
browsing through Hansard.

Warner Books, the American
publishers of the new soft-
cover edition, have now seen
the light. This edition
features an "authorised" index.

Of course this doesn't help
those who have already invested
in a hardcover copy. Perhaps
they could publish the index
separately?

From the Sydney Morning Herald,
27 March 1991. Sent in by
Michael Wyatt (NSW Branch
Treasurer).