



— AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF INDEXERS —
NEWSLETTER

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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 type-setters' 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

Dr P Rich
Dept. of Education
University of WA
NEDLANDS WA 6009

Mrs R Winspear
17 Fordholm Road
HAWTHORN VIC 3122

DEADLINE - AUGUST ISSUE

Contributions should reach the
Editor, GPO Box 1251L,
Melbourne 3001 by 10 Aug 1991.

A CURIOUS INDEX

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 represent-
ation - 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 post-
modern 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

Shirley Purchase, ed. The
Australian Writers' and
Editors' Guide (Oxford
Reference). Melbourne, Oxford
University Press, 1991. 383 p.
\$24.95 rrp.

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 f 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 discursions 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).

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Membership of the Society is open to persons and institutions engaged in indexing or interested in promoting the objects of the Society. The annual subscription, due on 1 January each year, is \$20; a half-yearly subscription for entry after 1 July is \$10. All material appearing in the Newsletter is subject to copyright but may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes, provided that appropriate acknowledgement is made. This publication is indexed and abstracted by the Australian Clearing House for Library and Information Science for Australian education index and Library and information science abstracts.