Australian Society of Indexers
NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

Indexers need to stay abreast of the latest technological developments. Some do it by going to conferences: see the report on the UK conference by Kingsley Siebel on pages 2-5.

As the world's slowest typist, I am always on the look-out for labour-saving devices. For the first time, part of this issue has been put together using an optical scanner.

Optical scanners open up a new can of worms for editors and proof-readers. A small percentage of errors is expected, but you can't predict what form they will take. Some errors are easy to spot, especially with the aid of a spelling checker, e.g. 'ASCII' became 'ASCH'; 'Gremlins' became 'Gramlins' and an errant line of text jumped between columns to leave part-words like 'ing' and 'omated'.

However, some 'typos' (scannos?) were extremely hard to pick, e.g.'war-torn' became 'war-tom'; footnote markers just disappeared completely. Mistakes that fool the scanner can often also fool the human eye; and it is hard to spot characters which are completely missing. For some quirky examples, see the poem on page 5.

Also this month, we have our first-ever cryptic crossword. It has an indexing-editing-books emphasis and should challenge your literary skills. Good luck!

Steve Sunter

MEDAL DINNER

The Australian Society of Indexers Medal for 1992 will be awarded at a dinner to be held on Tuesday, October 13. The name of the winner will be announced, together with details of runners-up. A certificate will also be presented to the successful publishing house. The winning entry together with the runners-up will be on display. The dinner includes a 3 course meal & drinks.

VENUE: Graduate House
University of Melbourne
224 Leicester Street
Carlton Vic.

TIME: 7:00 for 7:30 pm

COST: $30.00 per head, all incl.

RSVP Ian Odgers (03) 418 7275 or Isabelle Mentha (03) 418 7222 by Tuesday, October 6, payment in advance to The Secretary, Australian Society of Indexers, GPO Box 1251L, Melbourne, 3001. Please advise if vegetarian required.

Canberra to give birth?

Following a successful weekend workshop on back-of-book indexing, plans are afoot to start an ACT branch of AusSI. There are already 20 Society members living in the area. An inaugural meeting is planned for October 22 (venue to be finalised). There will also be a workshop on the "nuts & bolts" of database indexing. Also, a demonstration of back-of-book indexing software is being organised in conjunction with the Canberra Online Users Group of ALIA for Saturday, November 14.

Contact:*GeraldineTriffitt* (06)246 1177

SOCIETY OF INDEXERS (UK) CONFERENCE 1992: Report

This report was presented at the annual general meeting of the NSW Branch of AusSI, held at Sydney, September 16.

The Conference was held during the week-end of 17-19 July in England's historic walled city of Chester. AusSI was represented by Josephine McGovern, John Simkin and Kingsley Siebel, but we also found Jo Rudd, an expatriate, who will be returning to Australia soon.

Gremlins in encyclopedias

A Friday evening reception provided an opportunity to meet old friends and make new acquaintances. After dinner, Prof. David Crystal, President SI, kicked-off with 'Gremlins' using his experience with the *Cambridge Encyclopedia.* There were the human errors that turned legend into absurdities, or 'creations' of the software (human intervention vigorously denied!) that duplicated an entry which made Lazarus rise twice; the omission of a line between 'Nigel Lawson' and 'laxatives' which implied that the Chancellor of the Exchequer could not do without them to solve his economic problems.

There was also the perfect entry for the USSR which was overcome by rapidly changing events which required several hundred entries and cross-references to be changed to USS, and again shortly thereafter to ICS. Prof. Crystal was scheduled to speak for 30 minutes but the peals of laughter induced him to go on for at least an hour - quite an entertaining start.

Friday was bright and sunny but Saturday dawned dull and cloudy. This did not stop the keener ones having a swim before breakfast. They must have known that the day's business would be heavy going.

International standards

Ex-President Ken Bakewell reported that IS0999 seemed to have got bogged down, but Janet Shuter (member SI) volunteered to undertake a draft which found favour with the Committee, and this International Standard for Indexers is expected early in 1993.

European scene

Pat Booth is well-known for her contributions to *The Indexer;* she is also the honorary training manager for SI. She spoke of her efforts to break into the European Community to explore opportunities for cooperation after 1992 - the year of the EC. She found that there were forms of information communication in Europe but no organised bodies (with some exceptions) or formal recognition of a need for indexing as it is known in the UK. She found that representational indexing was undertaken by some companies and government departments to satisfy their internal filing needs. These people were called 'documentalists' rather than indexers.

There were many problems in view of the number of languages, for example EUROVAC is a thesaurus in nine languages, which demonstrates the difficulties of the structure of these languages. There are a few publishers who are presently using British indexers, and ideas for further activity are beginning to emerge.

Drusilla Calvert (of Macrex fame) titled her talk 'E acute and all that' which illustrated the technological problems for indexers dealing with Europe. Even the standard ASCII set of characters was not quite suitable as European conventions were different from country to country. The UK is attempting to harmonise qualifications amongst the professions and trades through the National Vocational Qualifications Board (NVQ), and harmonisation with Europe will bring new problems.

English usage

Next came a most enlightening contribution out of a mystery title 'Why bother with a Corpus'. Gwyneth Fox was in charge of the "Cobuild Project" sponsored by the Birmingham University and Harper Collins, publishers. Its purpose was to study

modem usage of the English language by using corpus evidence rather than intuition.

The corpora was built around common words and the object of the study was to find out how best to explain the use of the language to non-English speaking persons. They found for example that 'the' was used about once in every eight words, whilst 'of' was used in every four. The verb 'said', the nouns 'time', 'thing', and the word 'may' were also quite commonly used.

Some words like 'give' or 'take' derived their meanings from the words which followed each. For example,'take' had no meaning of its own but 'take a look'; 'take a walk; or 'take this trowel to the brick-layer' each had a meaning derived from its usage and its sense. 'Thing' was used as an object (this thing), or, in an abstract sense forming a preface (the funniest thing is that ...).

There was typical usage of phrasal verbs like 'set in' (depression, panic, frustration or decay... may 'set in'). There were some descriptive words like 'taciturn' which the study found more frequently described men rather than women, and it was also often used in conjunction with another adjective (tall and taciturn) rather than on its own.

There were figurative words like 'voracious' used to describe more than one sense (appetite, reader), and there were new words coming into modem language which had a different meaning in the past. 'Gridlock' was formerly a military term meaning 'unlock' but was increasingly used in the last three years to mean a 'blockage'. Crowds, budgets and people were said to be 'in gridlock'.

This study brought a financial return in the form of a BBC *Dictionary of Usage*, a *Cobuild English Dictionary* and a *Cobuild English Grammar.* Each of these books gave a contextual explanation of words rather than a definitional meaning as in normal dictionaries and were more useful for teaching English to non-English speakers.

Whilst being one of the more serious sessions this was quite an education and succeeded in building up the tone of the conference.

AusSI preview

John Simkin seized an opportunity to present the case for an International Australian Conference in 1995. Not only did he extol the pleasures of Melbourne but he whipped up some enthusiasm for a large attendance from the UK and elsewhere, so that the US and other representatives may carry the message back. We then mixed with delegates and took every chance to encourage as many individuals as possible to give this serious thought. By the end of the conference there were quite a few who were considering the possibility of a visit down-under.

The proverbial index

Clive Priddle (ex-Penguin books) followed lunch with his light-hearted 'Brief note touching the Proverbial Index'. It was not only Shakespeare who used the term 'index' in its proverbial sense, but so did Sherlock Holmes' Dr Watson who turned it into investigation of clues rather than analysis of documents. Clive kept us in a jocular mood with his incredible tales (some of which may be true) of personalities and events giving rise to the many problems between indexers and publishers. This was a difficult act to report but was much appreciated by all who applauded his clever wit. His final serious solution was to provide camera ready copy to the publisher - but I can think of proverbial events which could happen even then.[1]

Beat the experts?

We were brought back to earth by the 'Pit your wits' session that followed. All attendees had been provided with two documents to be indexed and brought to the Conference. It gave us a chance to 'have-a-bash' at the 'experts' who provided their version of the perfect index! Not surprisingly there were almost as many

solutions, views and opinions as there were delegates and the object of the exercise prevailed. As much advice and a number of do's and dont's were offered to the experts as was given to the audience. There was no award and no winners, but by this time the comment around the conference was that it had progressed from good to better with each session.

Workshop sessions

Workshops came hard on the heels of this: [Chemistry; medicine]; [law; history] and [multi-volume indexing; non-text information] were offered. This provided everyone with difficult choices to move from the first/second of any one, to the first/second of the other of the options. The half hour permitted for each of the workshops was probably only half the time that may have been allowed as we had only warmed up before the whistle was blown.

Danish display

Saturday evening's after-dinner session was an exposure of Hanna Albreshtsen of Denmark entitled 'Design of a Computational Tool to Support Indexing for Information Retrieval'. She presented the concept that by the use of information retrieval subject indexing can be accessed and automated. This is a project presently being investigated by Computer Resources Intervention (CRI) of Denmark by using a software system called SIMPR^2. Unfortunately my technical skills and understanding of this difficult presentation was insufficient to do her justice.

Hanna was fairly confident that she may be able to start a group of indexers in Europe, hard on the heels of Dr John Gibson's small group in (war-torn) Yugoslavia, which he hopes can be revived.

Newspaper indexing

'From hot metal to cool plastic' was the first of the Sunday sessions. Reg Readings (of Reading) and of Research Publications Ltd (part of the larger Thomson International Group) moved quickly from the time of handwritten slips and hot metal typesetting to computerisation and the use of CD-ROM for distribution of indexable information. His illustrations were the production of the monthly indexes to *The Times, Financial Times, Le Monde* and other newspapers on a global scale (including Melbourne's *The Age).*

Reg recruited young intelligent people under 30 for training for this special type of indexing. Their earliest training was the indexing of obituaries and they then progressed to other subject specialisations, guided by a rather rigid set of headings (e.g. 'leading articles' rather than 'editorials') to meet moving times and usages. He outlined the progress of these indexers from slips in 1973, followed by the use of scanners and the introduction of dedicated Star software in 1981. Part of this system required only the entry of codes by the indexer; the system then took over and spelled out the word or phrase or heading required.

The product was not just headings and subheadings, but a heading followed by a brief abstract of events or individuals. It would appear to be a profitable venture for the publisher and Reg no doubt enjoyed his work as he kept us on a high note throughout his talk.

SI business

The Society's business session was an open examination of the problems arising from its rapid growth with which the present voluntary workers could not cope. Betty Moyes was examining aspects for updating the Constitution. An appeal for more activity like the formation of area-groups, public relations, paid workers, training and NVQ was made by Elizabeth Wallis and Claire Troughton both of whom (among others) had given many years of voluntary service. This brought forth a healthy response of awareness and a vigorous discussion for the need for cultivating relationships with related bodies including authors and publishers.

Indexing software

At the end of the conference the Cindex and Macrex Groups had sessions of their own which were well attended and which sorted out common problems and at which suggested improvements were promised. A Macrex Version 6 is on the cards for 1993.

Altogether a successful conference and a great tribute to Connie Tyler and her band of helpers in the NW Group.

Kingsley Siebel

1. See 'Hazards and Stars' *AusSI Newsletter*, 15(8): p.1.
2. Hanna has sent me a copy of the overview paper on the SIMPR project and I will lend it to anyone who is interested. She adds, 'Am longing very much to see you all again in Melbourne '95 - I've started to inform colleagues in Scandinavia.'

Spellbound

I have a spelling chequer
It came with my PC;
It plainly marks four my revue
Miss takes I cannot sea.
I've run this poem threw it
I'm shore your pleased too no;
It's letter perfect in it's weigh
My chequer tolled me sew

Nor Man VanDal

LETTERS

Argus people

I wish to correct an error in the (otherwise informative) article on the indexing of the *Argus* newspaper in the August issue of the newsletter.

It is not the case that personal names are usually included only where they refer to politicians or church leaders. Our policy is to include name entries for all prominent individuals and for all authors of letters to the editor. The index includes personal name entries for a wide range of individuals, including all politicians and clergy.

Geraldine Suter,
North Melbourne, Vic.

Indexers Bulletin Board

Those of you who have access to the international electronic networks (e.g. through AARnet) might be interested to know of a bulletin board for indexers.

The owner of the bulletin board is Charlotte Skuster, Science Library, Binghamton University, NY. The board is called Index-L and the subscription address is:
LISTSERV@BINGVMB.BITNET.

In the few weeks I have been a member all the contributions have been from North American indexers. The topics discussed have included the possibility (and desirability) of accrediting indexers, how to persuade authors that the index should be smaller than they want and 'Do bad indexers give the profession a bad name?' The technology for message exchange may be new but the exchanges have a familiar ring !

Jean Dartnall,
Wulguru, Qld

DEADLINE: OCTOBER Issue
News items should reach the Editor ASAP at the address on back page.

Contributions on floppy disks will be especially appreciated where articles are longer than one A4 page (preferably 3.5" Macintosh disk format; Microsoft Word software).

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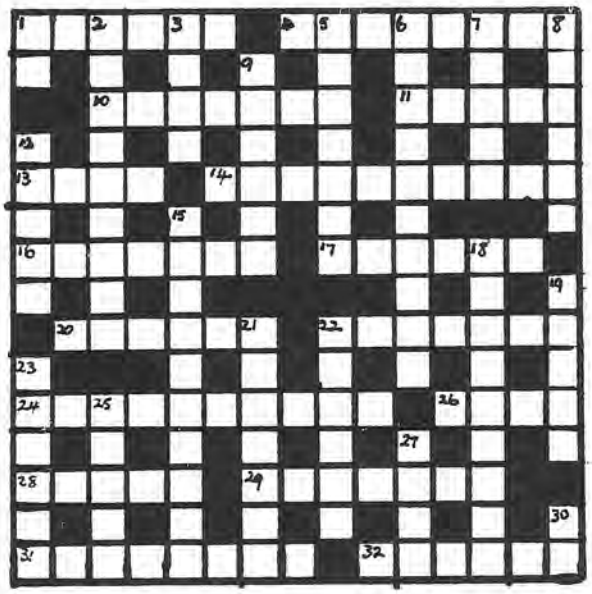

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

(avec aspect littéraire)

Compiled by Marilyn Buchanan

ACROSS

1. He advises the author to ride a different way (6)
4. The sailor's area is not concrete (8)
10. Cross words help readers, too (3,4)
11. In addition a child is raised (3,2)
13. Word for word (4)
14. Mentions that the free screen needs adjusting (10)
16. A polite request is old-fashioned (7)
17. A fool to put on the solution (6)
20. Set back result for the press (6)
22. Increase the length of the sentence (7)
24. Assumed by writers (10)
26. Shape of the bench (4)
28. Sounds as if one studies musical vibrators (5)
29. The case, strictly speaking, is slanted (7)
31. Should be able to read this, maybe very well (8)
32. Kidnapper holds his hat on the mountain (6)

DOWN

1. Ah! To measure the interjection (2)
2. Introduction to print is awkwardly set in iron (9)
3. Penniless English port looks finished (4)
5. Support for indexer's tools in last chapter (4-3)
6. Peer's gate shows the way to every book in the catalogue (5,5)
7. Did Greek authors starve here? (5)
8. Key worker could be tipsy on the tee (6)
9. The whole jacket or only part of it (6)
12. There are periods when these are full (5)
15. For whom the indexer toils, finally (3,3,4)
18. Outgoing person will badly vex. Rotter! (9)
19. Literary thread for the first person (5)
21. Adjust your set but the air has gone (4,3)
22. This herb is easily classified (6)
23. Form of binding which is round but also tapering (6)
25. It happens that the first lady must go to the territory (5)
27. Definitely a watercolour (4)
30. The Queen hesitates (2)

Solution next month