

Alan Walker – proposal for Life Membership

Alan Walker has had a distinguished career as a librarian and indexer, and has been a leader in the Australasian indexing world in AusSI/ANZSI official positions, and as a writer and teacher.

Library work

Alan trained as a librarian. He worked at the National Library of Australia, and spent time as the Library's representative in London and as secretary of AACOBS (Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services). He was the Social Sciences Librarian at the University of NSW, and began his indexing career indexing books for academics from UNSW. This was in the late 70s, or the early 80s.

AusSI/ANZSI service

Alan was a member of the Society of Indexers in Australia (1972-76), joined AusSI when it started in 1976¹ and is still a member in 2009. He has held many positions within AusSI. For the NSW Branch he has served as:

- Committee member, 1990-6, 1998-2003
- Assistant Secretary, 1991-2
- President, 1993-4
- Secretary, 2002-3

For the National Committee (now Council) he has served as:

- President, 1997-9, 2001
- Vice President, 2000, 2002

Alan was the program chair for the conferences held in Sydney in 1997, 2003 and 2009. He was instrumental in forging contacts with the China Society of Indexers, attending one of their conferences in the late 90s and hosting their members at the conference held in the ACT in 2001. He has also attended conferences of our fellow societies in the UK and the US.

Teaching indexing

Alan has taught indexing for the University of NSW (School of Information, Library and Archival Studies Continuing Education department), for AusSI/ANZSI and for corporate clients, since at least 1988. Subjects he has taught in NSW, Victoria or the ACT include:

- Basic Book Indexing
- Abstracting
- Web Indexing
- Image Indexing
- Legal Indexing
- Thesaurus Construction.

The AusSI Newsletter noted in 1993² 'In Sydney an equally successful [this refers to a previously mentioned Victorian course] four day indexing workshop in association

¹ Perhaps leaving at some time, and rejoining in 1980, when the first mention of his name appears in the newsletter in a list of members.

with University of New South Wales was presented by Alan Walker, Michael Wyatt and Garry Cousins. Alan Walker also ran a similar course in Canberra.’

The AusSI Newsletter noted in 1994 ‘The Indexing Workshop now consists of three segments, which can be taken individually or in succession. The basic course, Introduction to Book Indexing takes three days, Computer-Aided Indexing takes one day, and in 1993 this was followed by a one-day course on Indexing and Abstracting for Databases.’³

Writing and speaking about indexing

Alan has written for the AusSI/ANZSI Newsletter since at least 1990, when he contributed articles on uses of a word processor in indexing⁴ and working with publishers as a freelance indexer⁵. Other early contributions included articles on indexing photographs⁶ and thesaurus construction⁷.

In 2001 Alan was co-editor of an issue of *The Indexer*, to which he contributed an article on ‘Indexing commonplace books: John Locke’s method’⁸.

Alan spoke at the 1995 conference in Marysville on ‘Maintaining indexing principles while breaking the rules of thumb’⁹ and at the 1999 conference in Hobart on ‘Indexing for school archives: magazine and historical records’¹⁰. He was also an organiser of the highly entertaining Trivia Quiz at the 2003 conference in Sydney.

Indexing medal

The quality of Alan’s work has been recognised numerous times by the AusSI/ANZSI Medal committee. He was awarded the Medal in 1989 and 2007 and two of his indexes were Highly Commended in 1994. Alan is currently the chairperson of the ANZSI Awards Committee.

Medal winner 1989: Alan Walker. *The Penguin literary history of Australia*, by L. T. Hergenhan (Penguin Books, 1988). In Alan’s acceptance speech on presentation of 1989 medal he noted that ‘in the past 7 years I have indexed over 70 books’.¹¹

Medal winner 2007: Alan Walker. *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia: a contemporary source-book*, compiled by Greg Fealy and Virginia Hooker (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006).

Highly Commended 1994: Alan Walker. *Blackstone’s Guide to Australian legal books, 1986–1990*, general editor, Paul K. Cooper (Blackstone Press, 1993) and Alan Walker. *ASC digest*, by Alan Walker, Christine Skourleton, et al (Australian Securities Commission, 1994).

² AusSI Newsletter v.17 (2): 2 (1993). This quote is from the President’s AGM Report for 1992.

³ *AusSI Newsletter* v.18 (4): 2-3 (1994). This quote is from the NSW President’s AGM Report.

⁴ *AusSI Newsletter* v.14 (1-2): 11 (1990)

⁵ *AusSI Newsletter* v.14 (3): 6-7 (1990)

⁶ *AusSI Newsletter* v. 16 (4): 2-3

⁷ *AusSI Newsletter* v. 18 (9): 2

⁸ *The Indexer* v.22:114-18

⁹ Walker, Alan ‘Maintaining indexing principles while breaking the rules of thumb’ *Indexers - Partners in Publishing*. First International Conference of the Australian Society of Indexers, Marysville, Victoria, 31 March - 2 April 1995.

¹⁰ Walker, Alan ‘Indexing for school archives: magazine and historical records’ *The August Indexer*. Second International Conference of the Australian Society of Indexers, Hobart, 27-29 August 1999.

¹¹ *AusSI Newsletter* v.14 (1-2): 8-19 (1990)

Indexing standard

Alan worked long and hard on the adoption of the international standard on indexing (ISO999) as the Australian standard, and was instrumental in its acceptance.

Life outside indexing

Dr Colleen Chesterman, Alan's life long friend, gives us these heretofore unknown details about Alan.

Alan's parents owned a delicatessen in Corrimal. He became, at an early age, a dedicated slicer of ham, a skill he has carried through his life, keeping hundreds of friends and party guests contented and well-fed for numbers of years.

Alan attended Sydney University from 1958 and was part of the often called 'golden generation' of writers, actors, directors and general stirrers who transformed Sydney. He was a skilful and subtle actor, with a wonderful singing voice, specializing in Gilbert and Sullivan patter roles, revues and Victoriana, and also in serious roles from Shakespeare to Beckett. One of his more memorable appearances was reading a letter sent from the NSW Chief Secretary, Christopher Augustus Kelly forbidding showings of an early Bruce Beresford film, *It Droppeth as the Gentle Rain*, on the grounds of obscenity – Alan had great credibility in this role. Among his more famous Victoriana performances were a heartbreaking *I am just a Poor Blind Boy* and a dramatic *The Night I Appeared as Macbeth*. In Canberra his hits included *An Arab's Farewell to his Steed*; he also diversified into Country & Western and gave a never to be forgotten rendition of *Old Shep* that left not a dry eye in the audience. He still performs occasionally and has been seen at the New Theatre disguised as our last Prime Minister.

Alan graduated as a librarian and moved to the National Library in Canberra and then as librarian in Australia House London. His duties included buying significant Australiana in beauty spots such as Piddletrenthide. He also gained valuable experience in bidding at auction for rare books, and has extended this skill to assist many friends and their children bidding for houses.

In London Alan had a significant relationship with the West Ham Football Club, due not only to the skill of the team but also to his joy in joining in the supporters' song *I'm Foréver Blowing Bubbles*.

He returned to Australia in 1969 accompanied by a collapsible Italian bicycle called Ambrogio, and, early in 1970, rode to Sydney from Canberra on Ambrogio to work at the University of NSW. His Sydney life revolves around his home in Potts Point, investigating local hostelryes, wiping the floor in Trivial Pursuit, watching cricket through the night in the salubrious surrounds of the Sydney Swans Club, being part of the longest standing booking at Rushcutters' Bay Tennis Courts and in all ways delighting his many friends.

Testimonials

Glenda Browne: Alan taught me indexing in my postgraduate library course at UNSW in 1988. Indexing was an elective, and my favourite subject. A few of us joined Alan at the Royal Hotel afterwards, and put down our names as potential 'apprentices'. The next week I started working with Alan. It was the sort of break every newbie indexer needs!

Garry Cousins: Alan was also instrumental in me becoming a freelance indexer. He took me under his wing in 1988-89, as he did others, and showed incredible patience and willingness to teach me the art of indexing. It was through his example that I realised it was possible to make a very genial living as an indexer.

Madeleine Davis: I have had the privilege and pleasure of knowing, learning from and working with Alan since 1995 when I first joined AusSI. I have worked with Alan in various capacities on the NSW Branch Committee, ANZSI Council and on three conferences held in NSW. His vast knowledge of and enthusiasm for the indexing profession is a huge asset to ANZSI and the collegiate of indexers world wide.

Michael Wyatt: In 1987 after a severe bout of mid-life crisis I was introduced to Alan as a possible cure. I was instantly impressed by his friendliness and approachability. He willingly accepted me untested as an apprentice, and unstintingly gave of his time, knowledge and enormous range of skills. Not only was his approach to his craft highly professional and meticulous, but he ran his business in a business-like manner, and taught me much about running a small commercial enterprise, and the importance of maintaining good relations with clients.

Together we established the NSW Branch of what was then AusSI, and Alan has remained the Branch's central mainstay. He has served on numerous ANZSI committees, and represented Australian indexers overseas on numerous occasions. He has been a regular contributor to journals, newsletters and listservs.

Alan has always been interested in the education of indexers, and invited me to teach with him at NSW's first formal book indexing course at UNSW. He served on AusSI's ill-fated Education committee. He is generous in passing on work to other indexers, and sharing his contacts. He is keen to see others rewarded for their skills and efforts, and for this reason combined with his enthusiasm for raising the professionalism of indexing in general, has spent much time assessing indexers for both registration and the Indexers' Medal. To me, one of his greatest assets is his unfailing patience and good humour in the face of opposition and setbacks.

Contributions from John Simkin, Tricia Waters, Garry Cousins, Madeleine Davis, Glenda Browne, Michael Wyatt and Dr Colleen Chesterman.