

The Indexer: past, present and future

Maureen MacGlashan

The Society of Indexers (SI) was established in 1957, its journal, The Indexer, following in 1958. At first little more than the SI house journal or newsletter, it developed over the years into what it now proudly calls itself: 'The International Journal of Indexing', published on behalf of all the indexing societies. It has grown from the 28 pages of its first, bi-annual, issue to the 48 pages, quarterly, of today, and has moved from the cutting and pasting that comprised so much of the early editorial task to full online publication. Despite predictions from time to time that there was a limit to how much could be usefully written about indexing, the flow of good material has now continued unabated for some 50 years, always topical but always representative of its time. From the beginning, The Indexer has aspired to the very best contemporary journal practice. That remains the challenge for today.

The Society of Indexers (SI)

1957 is an important date in the history of indexing, for this was the year which saw the establishment in the United Kingdom of the Society of Indexers, so far as we are aware the first such surviving society to see the light of day. It was greeted with a fanfare in *The Times* (then the British newspaper of record) of 8 May 1957:

There are far too many societies. But plenty of people will readily supply a list of half a dozen that can be dispensed with in order to make room for the newly formed Society of Indexers. Here is a necessary body if ever there was one. The first of its aims should surely be that every non-fiction book should have an index There should be plenty of material for the 'papers and notes on the subject of indexing' which the Society hopes to issue. They should make interesting reading. But without any disrespect to future authors it is safe to say that the part of the Society's publications which will be most eagerly scrutinized will be its own index.

From newsletter to international journal

Over the years the Society has indeed issued various 'papers and notes' on the subject of indexing but, for present purposes, the most relevant of these is undoubtedly *The Indexer*. Volume 1, issue 1 appeared in March 1958, in a smaller format than we use today (at 180 x 235 mm approximating to today's B5) and with just 28 pages. It too opened with a fanfare, this time in the shape of a letter from the then Prime Minister, Sir Harold Macmillan. He writes:

I am glad . . . to send a message to the Society for the first issue of *The Indexer*. . . .

In summoning up remembrance of things past, I can recall indexes in great variety, from the humdrum but invaluable list of names and pages, to those so majestic that they occupied a whole volume to themselves . . . I know, too, how often an author, whether he knew it or not, was indebted to an indexer for pointing out errors,

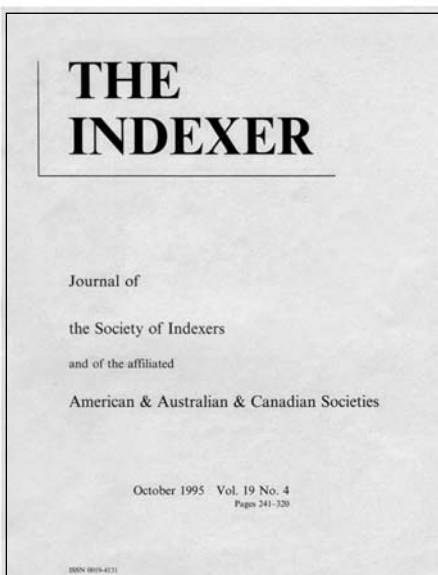
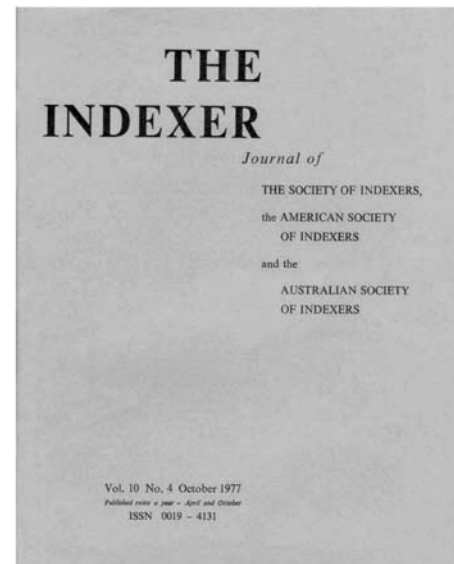
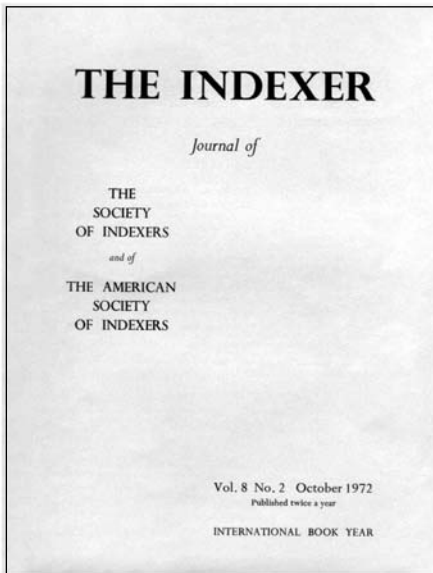
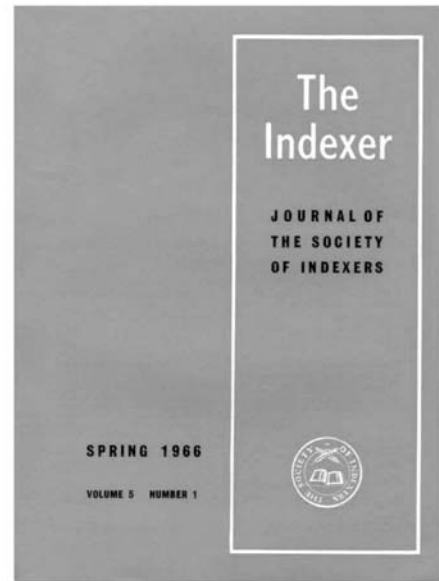
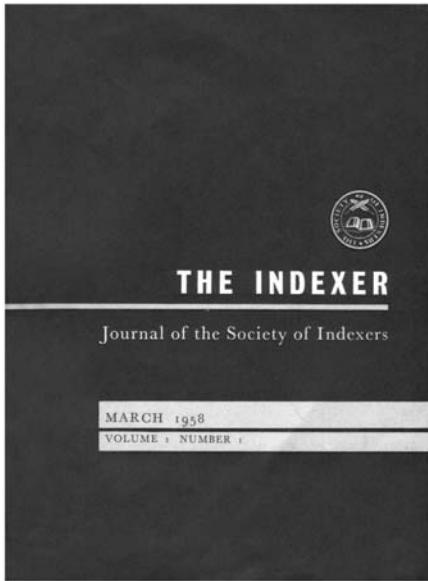
discrepancies, or repetitions that had otherwise escaped detection in the proofs.

It is perhaps not surprising that he quoted with particular relish the instruction reportedly given by Macaulay (one of the great British historians, but not of the Tory Prime Minister's political persuasion): 'Let no damned Tory index my "History".' Like *The Times* leader of the previous year, Macmillan saw every prospect that the Society of Indexers would have the opportunity of doing 'valuable work in upholding the standard of indexing and in bringing its practitioners into touch with those who require their services'.

Fifty years on, *The Indexer* has developed from those tiny beginnings as 'the Journal of the Society of Indexers' (1958–71), turning by 1979 into 'the Journal of the Society of Indexers and of the affiliated American & Australian & Canadian Societies'. In 1999 it became quite simply 'The International Journal of Indexing'. The British Society of Indexers retains responsibility for publication of *The Indexer* and for the appointment of the editor, but it does so on behalf of all the affiliated indexing societies who are entitled to a say in policy, and whose members figure increasingly as contributors, as guest editors and as members of the production team. (For a detailed breakdown, see Catherine Sassen's article in this issue of *The Indexer*.) The International Agreement of indexing societies which includes a section on *The Indexer* and is due for revision in March 2009 can be found at www.theindexer.org/files/25-3cp2_16.pdf. In the run up to that revision, consideration is being given, in consultation with all the societies and networks, to ensuring that *The Indexer* is genuinely international not just in terms of content and readership, but also in the scope it offers for input on editorial and production policy.

Setting the pattern

The 28 pages of that first 1958 issue of *The Indexer* had four pages of editorial material (including *The Times* leader and the Prime Minister's letter), a couple of articles offering advice on indexing techniques, a book review and two pages of 'No index – no comment', a precursor of one of today's



most popular features 'Indexes reviewed', which collects together instances of books identified by reviewers as offering shining examples of good indexes or as falling short on this count. The remaining eight pages were devoted to the business of the Society, including the Constitution and a full list of the 150 or so Society members.

The second issue (September 1958) was rather longer, coming in at 38 pages, with just one page of editorial, but 13 pages of Society business including the minutes of its first Annual General Meeting and a very full report of the first Society training course, held in London and attracting more than 40 participants. The journal also carried articles on the purpose of indexing, on index typography, and on the report of the American Standards Association subcommittee on indexing. And it saw the first letter to the editor.

The third issue saw some all-too-familiar soul-searching, recording (Report of the SI Council for the year ended 31 March 1959) that:

The usual difficulties that attend the production of a new periodical have had to be met; these have, unfortunately, caused some delay The cost of production has been an anxiety, but arrangements have now been made by which this will be very considerably reduced.

(What the arrangements were is not indicated.) Subscription rates at that time were £1.50 (including postage) and bound copies of volume 1 (four issues: 1958–59) were available at £5.50 (including postage). Perhaps it is not surprising that costs were a matter of concern (or rather finding a way of meeting them) if, as it would seem, it was cheaper to buy four bound copies than four single copies.

Scope and coverage

Those who knew no better (and, from my own experience as editor, still know no better) saw no future for a journal dedicated to indexing. Again and again, editors were warned: 'You'll never be able to keep it up; you'll find that by the end of another year you have completely exhausted all the possible aspects of indexing.' Perhaps, but as G. Norman Knight, in reporting one of these warnings in 1969 (*Indexer* 6: 145) went on to say (in alphabetical order, you'll note):

Events have flatly falsified that prediction, because, like chess, the variations of indexing seem inexhaustible. Since then, *The Indexer* has contained a multitude of articles, weighty or gay, on such varied topics as: archive indexing; chain indexing; children's books indexes; citation indexing; computer-produced indexes; cumulative indexing; the design of indexes; documentary indexing; encyclopaedic indexes; foreign surnames; the future of indexing; humorous indexes; legal indexing; masterpieces of indexing; medical indexing; one index or more than one; scientific and technical indexing; telephone directories; the typography of indexes. And this list is nothing like complete.

The range has remained much the same over the years but with new slants on old problems, and new responses in the light of new technology. There seems no more reason now than in 1969 to think the well will run dry. The amount of good material being presented between March 2005 and October 2007 meant the journal shot up from the norm of 56 pages or so I inherited to 72 or even 80 pages. In addition, many issues carried a 16-page supplement, the Centrepiece, covering in detail a particular aspect of indexing in which the 'rules' are far from clear. The four Centrepieces which have appeared so far deal with the matter of non-English personal names (Aboriginal, African click languages, Chinese, Ethiopian, French, German, Dutch and Afrikaans, Italian, Spanish, Tibetan, Turkish, Japanese). Other languages and other subjects are under consideration.

From time to time the editor of the day has clearly opted for a themed approach: in my view this works better in theory than in practice and seems never to have been sustained for long. I find it editorially easier, and more interesting, to draw the theme from the material available for any given issue: juggling the articles into a cohesive order is one of the most challenging but also the most rewarding of editorial tasks.

'Themes' also tended to emerge from the appointment, from 2000, of issue or guest editors. As the then editor (Christine Shuttleworth) wrote in introducing the scheme (*Indexer* 21:153):

For each issue an individual or group, who may be members of the Society of Indexers or of one of the associated Societies in the international group, will be appointed by the Executive Editor to commission articles, but without responsibility for production. We hope that this new arrangement will further increase the international interest and appeal of the journal.

All the societies and indexing networks have gradually been enlisted into the guest-editorial ranks, with the China Society of Indexers taking on responsibility for the September 2009 issue. Guest-editing is not, however, limited to the societies and networks. For example, the October 2005 issue (*Indexer* 24(4)) was edited by a group of first-time attendees at the British Society of Indexers Conference in April 2004. This issue naturally leaned heavily towards the experiences and interests of the new indexer, and proved particularly popular. The great advantage of an issue editor approach is that it extends the *Indexer* network and opens up possibilities for all sorts of new ideas. But prospective guest editors are slow to come forward, largely because they fear what will be involved. They need not. The production side of things is handled by the 'resident' team: all the guest editor needs to do is to persuade half a dozen or so contributors to write an article, and then nurse them through to submission on schedule. The invitation to guest edit is on the table, the best timescale being agreement to take on an issue two years ahead of its appearance: experience shows that it takes that sort of time to get all the bits in place.

What matters above all in terms of the spread of articles is that there is something for everybody, something to read immediately over a cup of coffee (usually, I suspect, 'Indexes

reviewed'), something for the beginner, for the specialist, something that is of no present interest to the reader, but comes into its own two or 20 years later when it is just what you need for your current indexing project. And it is particularly pleasing to get reports of the interest with which non-indexers read the journal. Next challenge: to turn interested readers into paid-up subscribers.

The Indexer: a window on sociological changes

The Indexer offers an interesting window on the changes in the indexing and the wider world. Elizabeth Wallis wrote ([Indexer 25: 229](#)):

I remember the overwhelming maleness of the Society's officers; now it is the exact opposite, almost exclusively female. The men all seemed like elderly clubbable gentlemen to me, and so many freemasons among them.

This indeed is exactly what all those fusty photographs from earlier issues seem to say, and the patronizing tone used toward some of the women involved in the journal would not be well received today. (But I wonder what our successors 50 years hence will be saying about us?) Gender bias in indexing came up quite frequently in the pages of *The Indexer*, as did various job creation schemes in Britain and Canada, designed to turn the unemployed into working indexers. And I cannot resist quoting the following identification of indexing as a suitable task for the literate convict.

Ninety-six years ago in *The Nation* [an American news weekly], a writer calling himself Anobium Pertinax from Johns Hopkins University set the stage with this blast which the editor titled 'New Field for Convict Labor'. He said, 'Let all convicts who can read and write be set, under competent supervision, to indexing books; and let those who cannot, receive the necessary instruction as soon as may be.'

Pertinax then stated these two claims for his scheme; 'That it will not conflict with the interests of any class of



Overwhelming maleness: a photo taken by Robert Palmer from ASI, who visited London and lunched with members of ASI Council to discuss the association of ASI and SI, summer 1970. Left to right: J M Shaftesley, G N Knight, R F Bancroft, L M Harrod, E Wallis, Neil Fisk and John Thornton

laboring persons, or at least any that has a claim to consideration,' and, 'That the kind of labor proposed is peculiarly suited to the reformatory idea, being incomparable for teaching order, patience, humility, and for thoroughly eradicating the last trace of the Old Adam in whoever pursues it.

(Drazan, *Indexer 12: 27*)

Indexers and the brave new information retrieval world

We might, of course, expect more recent issues to have more extensive coverage than earlier ones of computer-related topics and more recognition of what is going on in the closely related world of information retrieval. Certainly, every recent issue has had several items on such topics, ranging from 'Misbehaving computers' (Jermy, [Indexer 25: 195-6](#)) to 'Annotating document content: a knowledge management perspective' (Ciravegna and Petrelli, [Indexer 25: 23-7](#)) (too difficult for some of us), from 'Web indexing: extending the functionality of HTML Indexer' (Unwalla, [Indexer 25: 238](#)) to 'Google and beyond: information retrieval on the World Wide Web' (Northedge, [Indexer 25: 192-5](#)) and 'The medium is not the message: topic maps and the separation of presentation and content in indexes' (Northedge, [Indexer 26: 60](#)). But the fact is, discussion of the role of the computer in indexing has been on the *Indexer* agenda from the very beginning. Volume 2(1) (Spring 1960) carried a couple of articles on early attempts at mechanized indexing: 'Mechanized indexing of information on chemical compounds in plants' (Claridge, [Indexer 2: 4-17](#)) and 'Some procedures in indexing' (Holmstrom, [Indexer 2: 17-30](#)). Both considered the possibility of computer-aided indexing, but in the end (while adopting some features of what a computer could offer in terms of data ordering and presentation) found the 'feature card' system ('Peek-a-boo' in the United States, 'Sichtlochkarten' in Germany) best met their needs. A year later, there was a short report ([Indexer 2: 123](#)) on the US National Library of Medicine's similar practice.

Mechanized or machine indexing came up again in the form of a review ([Indexer 3: 158-60](#)) of *Machine indexing: progress and problems* (a collection of conference papers on the subject). Among the many problems identified (we are in 1963) is the difficulty of input into the machine:

Assuming technical advances make it economic to input a complete book, the computer will have considerable difficulty in understanding it One major obstacle . . . is cost. The only people who can afford electronic systems are the big manufacturers and universities . . . and the US Government The electronic systems, of which the computer is probably the cheapest, are still uneconomic.

In Volume 7(2) (Autumn 1970), Theodore Hines and Jessica Harris discussed ('Computer-aided production of book indexes', [Indexer 7: 49-54](#)) a program they had developed at the Columbia University School of Library Service:

The identification and expression of indexable matter remain the province of the human indexer. But much of the handling of the entries, of repetitive typing, and of the styling of entries . . . has been shifted to the broader back and faster fingers of the computer. At 1,000 entries per minute filing time and at about 20 pages per minute formatting time, a computer can give you quite a lot We do not think any system we or anyone else may devise can replace any professional indexers. We are convinced, however

Volume 8(3) (April 1973) had several detailed accounts of the use of a computer in the production of an index. Brenda Hall, writing about the production of the index to the *Cartographic Journal* ('A computer-generated index technique', *Indexer* 8: 130–8) concludes:

For very complex indexes, particularly those dealing with very diverse experience, derived over a long period of time, experience . . . has shown that at present it needs a cumbersome system of controls, and at the preparation of the input stage it certainly did not save any indexing time Even the punching of cards took longer than the preparation of a type-script because mistakes took longer to rectify . . . the program is a considerable *tour de force* . . . most of the remaining problems could be removed. . . to bring the end product closer to the standard set by the accurate excellence of the best manually produced indexes.

Michael Green (from the New York-based Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Company) described a system of indexing using tape recorders and punch cards (*Indexer* 8: 139) and Peter Thomas ('The use of KWIC to index the proceedings of a Public Inquiry', *Indexer* 8: 145). KWIC (Keyword in Context), developed in the late 1950s, was chosen as apparently obviating the problems of manual indexing (sorting all those 58,000 cards into alphabetical order!) and of the punched-card system (because of the key-punching time). Volume 13(1) (April 1982) carried a full and careful review (Purton, *Indexer* 13: 27–31) of the available equipment, and discussed the exciting possibility of receiving proofs on a floppy disk and returning the completed index in the same way.

The first advertisement for an early version of Macrex, still one of the leading dedicated indexing software programs, appeared in Volume 13(2) (October 1982):

COMPUTER-ASSISTED INDEXING

Thoroughly tested and documented
programs to run on microcomputers using the
CP/M operating system
AVAILABLE NOW

Capable

Close co-operation between the programmer and an indexer with ten years' experience of manual indexing has produced a package which takes account of the specialized needs of the professional indexer. Layout follows BS3700: 1976.

Easy to use

No technical knowledge is needed. Clear and simple

instructions guide the user at all stages; there are no disasters if the 'wrong' key is pressed; upper-case and lower-case letters and all punctuation marks can be used in entries without any special codes.

Fast

Sorting time is negligible; corrections, additions and deletions are made in seconds; typing time can be reduced substantially; merging of identical entries with different page numbers is accomplished automatically; temporary page numbers are quickly transformed to the correct final page numbers when they are known.

'Natural' language crept in in Volume 19(1) (April 1990) (Korycinski and Newell, 'Natural-language processing and automatic indexing'), was there again in Volume 25(2) (October 2006) (Zargayouna et al., describing IndDoc, a French natural language processing-based program to assist the indexer) and featured in the lively exchanges between authors and indexers on the subject of indexing, first published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in November 2006 and reprinted in *The Indexer* 25(3) (April 2007).

And of course, in due course, discussion turned to possibilities for Internet publishing, with T. G. McFadden warning in October 1994 (*Indexer* 19: 81) that not only did no indexing exist for the Internet, nor was it likely to do so in the near future, but that it was most unlikely that scholars and researchers would rush to publish their findings on the Internet as an alternative to traditional print journals – it had been grossly oversold. Well, that was 13 years ago and how times change, with journals (including *The Indexer*) falling over themselves to go electronic. We all know that if we don't, we are doomed, and no scholar now could conceive of not publishing on the Web or not having continuous online access to what their peers have written.

Editing *The Indexer*

The Indexer has had just eight editors in its 50 years, Harold Smith (1958–9) (resigned 'possibly in pique', suggests Norman Knight (*Indexer* 6: 144) when his favourite feature 'No index – no comment' was discontinued following a near brush with the law), John Thornton (1959–63) (repeatedly lauded for his competence as editor), Monty Harrod (1964–78) ('somewhat strait-laced and Victorian' says Elizabeth Wallis, his assistant editor (*Indexer* 25: 229)), Hazel Bell (1978–95) ('facilitator, innovator, gatekeeper, subversive' according to Janet Shuter, *Indexer* 25: 1) and then Janet Shuter and Nancy Mulvany (1996–9), Christine Shuttleworth (1999–2004) and myself (Maureen MacGlashan, 2004–). We've all had our own style, our own limitations and constraints, our own ambitions. The early editors all seem to have struggled not so much to identify suitable subject matter, but to find someone to write about it and to deliver on time. There was a repeated plea: 'If only you would write for us, we could publish on a quarterly basis.' John Thornton describes it thus (*Indexer* 4: 99–105):

Almost every article was prised out of the author. Many friends were approached, many promises were made . . .

there was no possibility of publishing four issues a year. As it was, I had to solicit shorter items as fill-ups, provoke correspondence, write most of the reviews, and fill in the pages with lists of references on indexing, and similar items. . . . once having obtained the typescript [the editor] hangs on to it like grim death.

No doubt he was not the only editor to suffer in this way, or to wonder, as he faced an empty in-tray, whether he would have enough material to make more than a pretence of the next issue, but certainly during my time there has been no shortage of quality material. Of course, confidence that there is an inexhaustible supply of worthwhile material to write about is not enough – the challenge is to tap into it, and turn potential into reality on the page. But that's what the editor's task is all about.

John Thornton also describes the travails of production and distribution:

We look forward to perusing issues that we have not read in manuscript, edited, proof-read, pasted-up, re-read in page form, and despatched. These duties have been lightened by the ever ready co-operation of our printers . . . and the assistance from my family in pasting address labels on envelopes, stamping them, and inserting the appropriate number of copies.

(valedictory editorial, *Indexer* 3: 134–5)

This vision of paste-pots and stamp-licking families and friends comes up again and again over the years, and for some of the people associated with *The Indexer* in its earlier days seems to be their chief memory. Fortunately, by the time I took over, this cottage-industry approach was behind us and I have a first-rate production team to take most of the pain of getting the journal onto the printed page away from the editor. I am hugely grateful to them all for their skill and their patience.

The Indexer index

It goes without saying that *The Indexer* had to have an index, and an index of quality. For many years, the practice was to invite distinguished members of the Society, many of them Wheatley Medal winners, to undertake this task. 'Editorial policy', wrote the Chairman of the Society of Indexers (John Gordon, *Indexer* 13: 253), 'was to give each volume-indexer extensive freedom to display his/her personal virtuosity. Each compilation has its own special qualities, revealing fascinating variations of style, of technique, of decision-making: it has indeed been said with pride that these indexes are living proof that indexing is an art rather than a science.' But such virtuosity did not necessarily serve the user well, and certainly did nothing to simplify the preparation of a cumulative index, something to which the Editorial Board had been giving much thought. So, following consultation with readers and with a panel of experienced indexers, a clear-cut house style was put in place to which future Indexer indexers would be asked to conform. Readers could now look forward with some pride, Gordon concluded, to an era in which indexing *The Indexer* would exemplify in model

fashion the application of the established principles of the indexing of periodicals.

This remained the ambition and the practice until I took over as editor, though not much progress had been made on the preparation of a cumulative index, the one attempt to prepare such an index, to mark the journal's 40th anniversary, running into the sort of problems which tend to beset a project of this size and complexity. My own surprise, on taking up the editorial role and finding myself responsible for finding *Indexer* indexers, was to discover that the index was not being prepared on a cumulative basis, with each new volume being prepared within a cumulated version with the relevant entries simply extracted for publication as the index to the volume in question. This had been my own approach for several years to various serial publications on which I worked, and seemed the obvious way to go about it. As an interim solution, I decided to take on responsibility for indexing the journal myself, and as part of that task to begin work on compiling a cumulative index. To the extent that the style and coverage of the indexes over the years was indeed homogeneous, as the 1983 Editorial Board hoped, simple merger of the existing indexes should largely suffice, but the less homogeneous the material, the more likely it was that much re-indexing would be called for. This is indeed the case, with re-indexing being the more necessary the further back I go. This work of cumulation has now been completed for volumes 20–25 (1996–2007), with the index being updated with every new issue.

But in adopting this approach, the other major change I instituted was to abandon the volume-by-volume indexes entirely (and indeed any printed version of the index), simply posting the cumulative version to the website. There were one or two protests in advance, but there have been no complaints since. Doing it this way is something which has, of course, become possible only in the very recent past. The advantages seem to me very considerable: a cumulative online index should offer greater consistency, volume on volume, and can be more comprehensive, in particular making it possible to add or amend the index continuously as hindsight notices error, omission or lack of user-friendliness. An online version offers the user the possibility of approaching it as a typical back-of-the-book index, or by a simple search for a word or concept. Cross-references in *The Indexer* index are already linked to the preferred entry, and in time the locators themselves will also be linked to the article to which they refer, a system which will come into its own now that *The Indexer* itself is available online.

An online index also has the advantage that there are no real constraints on length. This means that it would, for example, be possible to go in for a lot of double-posting (i.e. simple duplication of entries under alternative headings), but that makes for a lot of extra work and leaves the risk of introducing inconsistency. Where I am very generous is in a) listing as many terms as possible which users might make their entry point, with appropriate, linked, cross-references; and b) multiple, cross-cutting, listing of an item (so that, for example, an article will appear by title, by author, and (once or more) by subject-matter). And the online index is, of course, available to subscriber and non-subscriber alike.

The next 50 years

This has taken the story of *The Indexer* from its inauguration in April 1958 (issue 1(1)) through to October 2007 (issue 25(4)), thus completing our first 50 years. But this golden anniversary is more than just the occasion for celebration of the past. It is also a celebration of the future, in this our 51st year of publication for 2008 (or to put it another way, volume 26) has brought with it many changes.

These include:

- A change to the pattern of volume numbering from a two-yearly basis to annual numbering. It took us 50 years to complete 25 volumes – it will take just 25 years to complete the next 25. The easiest of changes to make, but it should make life simpler for editor and subscriber alike.
- A switch from twice-yearly to quarterly publication. As indicated above, this has been a long-standing aspiration, baulked at first by want of material, and then later by cost considerations, in particular the cost of postage. Postage still remains a factor and will need to be taken account of in the subscription price. Lack of material does not (see above). Institutional subscribers are said to prefer a quarterly publication. Individual subscribers have said they would prefer less more often. And from the editorial point of view, it is much easier to manage the flow of material and to give the journal a topical feel. It doesn't matter nearly so much not making it into one issue if the next is just three months away rather than six.
- *The Indexer* has now been fully digitized and much of it is now online, fully and freely accessible up to three years retrospectively. It is proving immensely popular and has already saved a great deal of editorial time photocopying and scanning. What gaps remain reflects the fact that as yet we have not been able to contact all contributors or their successors for permission to publish electronically. Sue Lambert continues patiently with this task which we hope to complete by the end of 2008, at which point we should be able to move to a fall-back, 'every best effort' position. Should you happen to spot a gap and know the whereabouts of the contributor or his/her successors, please let Sue know (asset@theindexer.org).
- The aim is also to complete a fully linked cumulative index to the whole run from 1958–2008.
- We have moved to online hosting (Ingenta-Connect), giving subscribers online access to current issues (i.e. issues less than two years old), and non-subscribers the chance to buy single articles should they so wish.
- The print version will continue in parallel with the online version, a strong preference amongst individual subscribers. Institutional subscribers, whose preferences differ, will be able to choose either or both.
- Subscription rates have been restructured. As in the past, members of the affiliated indexing societies will enjoy a preferential rate (£26/€40 for four issues including postage), paid either as part of their society membership fee (Society of Indexers and Indexing Society of Canada) or through direct subscription to *The Indexer*. The subscription rate for individuals who are not members of an indexing society is £40/€60, in fact a reduction on

subscription rates of past years. Institutional rates are £120/€180 online or print only, £150/€225 online and print. (These 2008 subscription rates are being held for 2009.)

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In my first editorial, in April 2005 (*Indexer* 24(3)), I said that I had no plans for radical change: what changes there might be would be evolutionary and consultative. Although in some ways *The Indexer* of 2008 is very different from that of 2004, most of the changes have been on the agenda for some time, in some cases (such as going quarterly) for a very long time indeed, and have only been made possible (or, indeed, forced upon us) by the dramatic technological changes of recent years. Even as recently as 2005, the cost of digitizing *The Indexer* seemed likely to be far beyond our budget: two years later the estimate was a mere tenth of the original figure. What some of our predecessors (remember McFadden?) thought was unimaginable has quite suddenly become the norm, the industry standard. All the changes we are making have been designed to serve our readers, to enhance the editorial and production process and to bring *The Indexer* into line with the best contemporary practice amongst scholarly journals. Continuing to do this will be our challenge for the next 50 years.

Maureen MacGlashan read law at Cambridge University (1957–61), and served in the British Diplomatic Service from 1961–98, taking four years out from 1986–90 to help establish the Lauterpacht Research Centre for International Law in Cambridge where she began her indexing career, cutting her teeth on one of the most difficult of indexing challenges: preparing a cumulative index to 45 volumes of law reports, a task on which she is still engaged, although the volumes now stretch to 135. She served as President of the Society of Indexers from 2001–04 and has been editor of The Indexer since October 2004.

This is a revised version of an article which originally appeared in *Information Wissenschaft & Praxis* (IWP) (No. 8/2007), and is reproduced here with the kind permission of the IWP editor.