

# Sldelights

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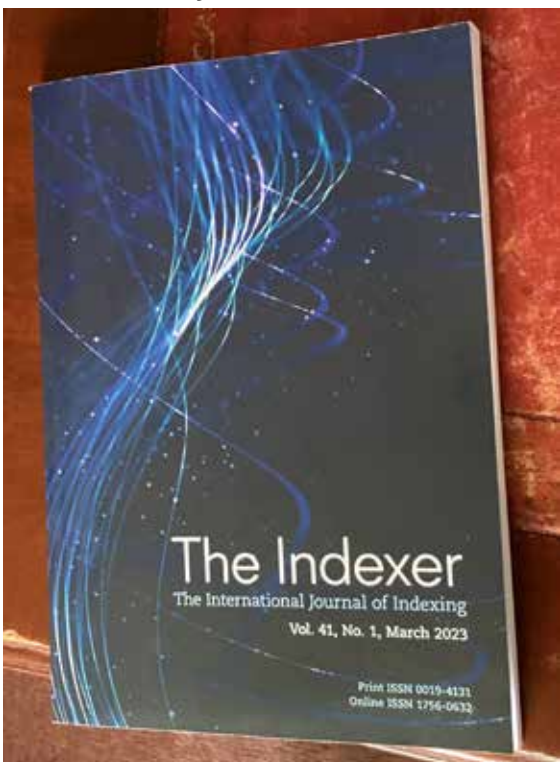
NEWSLETTER OF THE  
society of  
**indexers**  
information from A to Z

## Editorial

The March hard-copy issue of *The Indexer* was sent out unprecedentedly with no wrapper around it, just a label stuck to the back cover. **Susan Tricklebank** posted about this on Sldeline, noting that “the danger is that damage may have occurred”. A 25-comment thread ensued. Much of the debate concerned whether alternative packaging fashioned from cornstarch might prove to be sufficiently biodegradable. But some did report disappointment with the state of the unwrapped journal that reached them: “rather the worse for wear . . . mangled . . . a bit battered . . . dog-eared”. No less an authority than the immediately previous *Indexer* editor, **Maureen MacGlashan**, declared it “not a good idea”.

The present *Indexer* editor, **Mary Coe**, has not engaged with the Sldeline thread, so *Sldelights* invited her to respond, specifically to Susan’s post, which we had thought to run as a Letter to the Editor. There was no intention of referring to Sldeline because there would be no grounds for assuming that *Sldelights* readers had seen it. For practical as well as editorial reasons, we could not reproduce the thread in *Sldelights*. Hence any suggestion in our coverage of a conversation going on elsewhere would be unsatisfactory for our readers.

However, Mary wanted to allude to the Sldeline thread. And she



cited “naked mailing”

– a phrase we thought

needed to be unpacked (if that is not an inappropriate term in the circumstances) – which she felt she had “explained in my editorial in the December issue of *The Indexer*”. In fact she despatches the matter in two sentences in the penultimate paragraph on the second page of the editorial. It could hardly be thought of as a prominent announcement of the change.

Further, Mary didn’t address the question that *Sldelights* put to her directly – a question that we felt arose logically from Susan’s post – which was: “will you be prepared to replace any copies damaged in transit?” All she concedes is that “to date I have received very few reports of damage”, which will be no comfort to anyone who numbers among that “few”. We are recommended instead to email her at [editor@theindexer.org](mailto:editor@theindexer.org), which implies that there is as yet no general principle about the replacement of damaged copies.

A further complaint in the thread concerned the address label stuck to the “naked” copies. These do not easily peel off, but white spirit will disperse the gum residue. What a bother, though. We only wish our fellow publication well.

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*Sidelights* April 2023

Editor: W. Stephen Gilbert, Meadlands,  
Pickwick, Corsham, Wilts, SN13 0JD  
email: [sidelights@indexers.org.uk](mailto:sidelights@indexers.org.uk)

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[The Society of Indexers](http://The Society of Indexers)  
Woodbourn Business Centre  
10 Jessell Street  
Sheffield S9 3HY  
tel: +44(0)114 244 9561  
fax: +44(0)114 244 9563  
email: [admin@indexers.org.uk](mailto:admin@indexers.org.uk)

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All enquiries should be directed to the  
Office Manager or to the Secretary,  
Philippa Jevons, at the above address  
or [secretary@indexers.org.uk](mailto:secretary@indexers.org.uk)

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Missed an article in *Sidelights*?  
Back issues and the cumulative  
index for 2006–2015  
are [on the website](#)

**July 2023 *Sidelights***

**Copy deadline**

**Friday 7 July 2023**

(for electronic distribution  
mid-July)

## Presidential Musings

When first I had the honour to join the Society as Hon Prez, I learned pretty quickly what must be the number one misconception that civilians have about indexers. "Ooh," they say. "Can't all that be done by computers these days?" And so, as I have come to imagine, there is a boilerplate drinks-party conversation that will be wearily familiar to many SI members. It will touch on the difference between an index and a concordance, on the difference between substantial discussion and passing mentions, on the trickiness of sorting Buckingham the town from Buckingham the Palace from Buckingham out of Fleetwood Mac, and so on. Explaining all this over and over again, it has long seemed to me, is the indexer's cross to bear in social situations, just as the novelist's is "should I have heard of you?" and the GP's is "Oh, you're a doctor! You see, I have this funny rash. . ."



But in the past few weeks and months, I've started to wonder if that stock conversation will be changing. Even leaving aside the more lurid Skynet type anxieties, AI is moving scarily fast. Lots of things that computers couldn't previously do – capturing emotional tone, discussing abstract issues in ways that make it at least appear that they've been understood, or making photo-realistic images of every US President dressed as a WWF all-in wrestler – they now can. Even the voice transcription software I use for interviews these days does a section-by-section subject précis without even being asked.

All these things – well, except perhaps Rasslin' Jimmy Garfield – seem to me to edge closer to those indexing tasks that so far only a human mind has been able to do. Are you indexers watching ChatGPT and the like, then, with apprehension, as something that will make your roles redundant? Or with delight – as a tool that will make your roles easier, and empower human indexers rather than replace them?

Maybe, in the long term, it's the former. But that goes for all of us. For what it's worth, I have a hunch that indexers will hold out longer than most. The ones who really want to look to their laurels are copywriters, designers, and, um, journalists. Heigh ho.

*Sam Leith*

## Society News

**CONGRATULATIONS TO**

**New Accredited Indexers – MSocInd**

**Susie Marques-Jones**, Ammanford, Carmarthenshire

**New Advanced Member – MSocInd(Adv)**

**Ruth Martin**, Lamothe-Goas, France

**New Fellow of the Society – FSocInd**

**Nic Nicholas**, Chatham

## Executive Board Report

The Executive Board met on 16 January and 17 March. Planning for National Indexing Day was central to EB's discussions during this first quarter of 2023. Publicity was launched on 1 March, with bookings arriving through the month, culminating in the online event for publishers on 30 March.

Another discussion point common to these two EB meetings was the SI Conference 2023. It will be a one-day in-person event in the autumn. Venues have been investigated and further details of the date and loca-

tion will be announced soon.

The new SI blog has been launched by Marketing Director **Tanya Izzard**, with the first series published on the website on Fridays during March and publicised on social media. The series is addressed to clients and potential clients, describing the stages of commissioning an index. The publication dates and subject matter were chosen to lead up to National Indexing Day. There will also be a blog post about National Indexing Day to round off the series.

**Rachel Gee** reported back on the presentation she gave to twenty members of the Association of Freelance Editors, Proofreaders and Indexers of Ireland (AFEPI) in February. The presentation focused on the training course to encourage editors in the group to consider training as indexers.

The minutes are available in full on the SI website. The next meeting of EB will be at 13:00 on Tuesday 9 May.

*Lyndsay Marshall, Minutes Secretary*  
[LM.indexing@gmail.com](mailto:LM.indexing@gmail.com)

## Behind the Chair

Spring has brought some welcome sunlight and warmth to us recently, perhaps tempting more of us outside and away from our computers and work. It also makes us more open to invitations to face-to-face gatherings, and I am pleased to see some local groups have been taking the opportunity to plan more events. As you will see in the short report about EB activities, we have been discussing an in-person conference for later this year, which will give us a welcome opportunity to gather once again.

Outreach to people beyond our own community of indexers is also hugely important. There are three main strands to this: encouraging the publishing industry to use professional indexers; encouraging more people to join the Society, do the training course and establish themselves as professional indexers; and encouraging a wider appreciation about indexing. The National Indexing Day event was targeted at the first strand, the publishing industry, and was useful in allowing some publishing people to hear more about us and what we do – see **Ruth Ellis'** report for more details [p5]. Also for this strand, **Rachel Gee** has spoken to the Association of Freelance Editors, Proofreaders and Indexers of Ireland (AFEPI), and will shortly be speaking to Edinburgh University Press.

In the wider context of the public understanding of indexing, **Tanya Izzard** will be talking with **Dennis Duncan** at an event in collaboration with the Biographers' Club at Hatchards in Piccadilly in May. Dennis is also appearing as part of a panel at the London Library Lit Fest

Phillips' *No One Remembers Pontypridd: The Forgotten Story of the 1893 National Eisteddfod of Wales* (the next link has the choir singing).

In a more academic context, later this year **Hazel Bell** will be presenting a paper about her work with biographer Jeremy Wilson to



looking at anthologies, encyclopaedias and indexes (this session will be livestreamed). Both these events are also informal opportunities for the idea of indexing as a career to be aired in public.

Of course, we also get to celebrate our successes if we are invited to publishing events. **Paula Clarke Bain** recently went to what must be the only book launch to have featured a Welsh Male Voice Choir at Pontypridd Museum for Sheldon

the conference 'Writing Lawrence and his World: Jeremy Wilson and the Art/Science of Biography' at Magdalen College, Oxford.

If anyone else wants to share information about events they have been invited to or attended because they are an indexer, please let **Paul Machen** in the office know. If you've been asked to talk about indexing and aren't sure if it is something you want to do, I am sure EB can help you out with advice, information ↻ p4

p3 and moral support. And of course, stories of how the event went will be welcomed by

the editor of this newsletter. I hope myself to be reporting in the next issue on an event I have been invited

to later in April.

Nicola King  
[chair@indexers.org.uk](mailto:chair@indexers.org.uk)

## On Joining the EB

Let me introduce myself ... I was invited to attend EB meetings after participating in the 2022 National Indexing Day online event. I didn't give it a lot of thought, if I'm honest. I've always been curious about 'behind the scenes' things – I'm one of those people who will buy a DVD on the strength of the extra features – so I was not averse to observing a meeting or two and discovering the sorts of decisions that go towards running a small professional society like the Society of Indexers. But I guessed that I would soon be asked to assume some responsibilities, so I needed to find a reason for volunteering to become a fully-fledged board member.

Luckily, it wasn't too difficult. I joined the SI as a student in 2018, and what has impressed me from the first is the willingness of members

to help their colleagues with advice and practical assistance. I have notes from SI members that I use to this day to solve software or indexing problems. It may sound pious to say that serving on the EB is my way of giving back, but it is nonetheless true that I owe the Society a debt of thanks.

How my role on the board will develop remains to be seen. As yet, I still feel like a cog that somehow has to be fitted into an already smooth-running machine. But as a relatively new indexer myself, I am especially interested in matters affecting the Society's student and new professional members, so if anyone from these groups would like an issue raised at board level, do please get in touch.

Ruth Martin  
[ruthmartinindexing@outlook.com](mailto:ruthmartinindexing@outlook.com)



Ruth Martin

## BS ISO 999:1996 – Review committee

The Executive Board of the Society of Indexers would like to formally thank **David Green** for his representation of the society on the committee working on updating the British standards for indexing.

Ever since ISO 999 was published in 1996, the BSI Committee which oversees the development of indexing standards has been recommending that ISO 999 should be updated/revised to accommodate online media, which includes websites and e-books. The general update process is to convene a working subgroup and co-opt outside experts to it. The Society of Indexers has been represented on this working subgroup for

the past eight years by David Green, who is now standing down. This has created an opportunity for someone different to represent the society.

We are looking for a volunteer to join the British Standards Institution's working subgroup on behalf of the SI's Training Course Committee. Meetings of the BSI subgroup are conducted online on the BSI eCommittees website. Although up to now this has happened infrequently, there was a new initiative in the latter part of last year to co-opt new experts onto the working group. Once a chair has been found, the level of activity is likely to increase. The role of the SI representative is to ensure that the

views of the Society of Indexers are raised during the course of the ISO 999 review and to influence current standards development by defining the future needs of UK indexers. This is carried out by reporting the ideas and work of the BSI to the Training Course Committee and collating the response of committee members to be fed back to the BSI working group.

If you would like to volunteer or ask for additional information, please contact me at the address below or **Paul Machen** in the SI office.

Rachel Gee  
[training@indexers.org.uk](mailto:training@indexers.org.uk)

## SI Awards

In 2022, EB reviewed the criteria and processes for making SI awards. As well as clarifying award criteria, we

wanted to encourage nominations from SI members for the various awards in our gift. This article

explains how you can get involved with the nominations process.

SI offers three awards made p5

**p4** ↻ by nomination: Honorary Life Membership, the Bernard Levin Award and the Carey Award. All awards are agreed by Executive Board and usually announced at the AGM.

Honorary Life Membership is limited to a maximum of ten awards at any one time; it can be awarded both to SI members and non-members. It is awarded for exceptional service to the Society or to the advancement of good indexing. Current holders of Honorary Life Membership are listed in each year's [Annual Report](#).

The Bernard Levin Award is presented for outstanding services to the Society of Indexers, and the



ABOVE: Bernard Levin (1928–2004)

RIGHT: Gordon Vero Carey (1886–1969)

activities and achievements that might constitute exceptional or outstanding service to SI or indexing include:

- publication of writing on indexing, or other forms of public engagement that promote the society or the profession
- leading or contributing to training and professional development
- leading or contributing to problem-solving or redevelopment of SI activities and services

These might have occurred during formal leadership work or through informal activity. They could result



Carey Award for outstanding services to indexing. These awards are not necessarily given annually; awards are made in response to nominations to EB. Recent recipients of the [Bernard Levin Award](#) and the [Carey Award](#) are listed on the SI website.

The criteria for the awards are described in full on the website, but

from long-term service, or shorter-term activities with an extensive impact.

If you've identified someone who you think should be nominated for an award, you can complete and submit the [nomination form](#). Make sure they haven't already received the award concerned by checking the

website: indexer longevity means this is quite possible. Please don't discuss your nomination with the nominee, as this spoils the surprise. But you could collaborate with other members to compile the nomination. The key part of the form is the rationale. Review the criteria for the award you have specified, and consider how your nominee has achieved them. Give specific details of activities, successes, publications, events or achievements. What is it that is particularly *exceptional* (Honorary Life Membership) or *outstanding* (Bernard Levin and Carey Awards) about your nominee and their contribution? How have they gone above and beyond?

EB will use your rationale statement when considering the nominee for the award, and it will also be the basis for the citation when the award is formally announced. There are examples of citations on the website for the Bernard Levin and Carey Awards, to help you think about what to include. Once you've written up your nomination, send it to [chair@indexers.org.uk](mailto:chair@indexers.org.uk), who will arrange for EB to consider it.

As well as rewarding the efforts of individual award winners, making these awards allows us to celebrate, in public, the expertise, professionalism and achievements of our members and the wider indexing profession. It helps us demonstrate the reflective way that we work and the active way in which we develop ourselves. It's an excellent way to promote SI, indexers and indexing. So if there is someone whose efforts you think should be rewarded in this way, please do consider making a nomination.

Tanya Izzard  
[tanya@tanyaizzard.co.uk](mailto:tanya@tanyaizzard.co.uk)

## National Indexing Day

We were optimistic this year that we would be able to hold an in-person event in London for publishers. Early in January we started to plan for it. We worked out what we were going to present and who would be doing

it, we set up the event ready to open for bookings on the website and we prepared marketing material. Just as we were about ready at the start of February to make the announcement and open the ticket booking, the

RMT announced their strike dates and unfortunately for us one of them was 30 March. Rapid discussions took place and we decided we had to move the event online.

We adjusted the planned ↻ **p6**

**p5** presentation down to two hours split into two sessions, with three speakers in each hour. We also debated whether we should charge for the event and in the end decided it should cost a nominal sum. This was because we were giving attendees twice as much material as the more conversational hour we'd had last year, and we were also including information that exists in some of our workshops. We also felt that a payment would mean they would attend, having made a financial commitment.

We launched the event with our usual marketing plan and bookings began to slowly come in. And then, of course, the strike was cancelled. By this time it was too late to change plans, nor could we expect those who'd already paid to switch to an in-person event; some weren't even UK-based. We continued to promote the event and more bookings came in, including some from Bloomsbury, UCL Press, and CUP.

Somewhat disappointingly we ended up with fewer than a third of the numbers we had attending last year. There are probably several factors that caused this. It's possible that the cost (only £10) put some off, but some editors told me that they just didn't have the spare time to attend because they were busy preparing for the London Book Fair, which was taking all their focus after several years of publishers not being there in-person. Additionally, the current vagaries of Twitter meant that it wasn't as useful a channel for promoting events as in the past (more on that later in this report).

Even so, with our planning and a thorough technical rehearsal, the event itself ran smoothly on the day, with each speaker handing over to the next on time, and the material flowing logically without repetition. **Ruth Martin** was our

Zoom host and managed the admission of participants and fielded the Q&A sessions at the end of each hour. **Sam Leith** welcomed everyone to the event, and we then went on to listen to **Rachel Gee** making the case for indexes and human indexers, using example entries from **Paula Clarke Bain's** index to **Dennis Duncan's Index, A History of the**. **Nicola King** then talked about what it takes to be a professional indexer and gave a more detailed look into how to find the best indexer for a text in our directory. I then talked about briefing the indexer, discussing what each party needs to know before coming to an agreement. After a Q&A session and a brief break, we went on to the second half of the event with **Tanya Izzard** discussing how an author/editor can review a completed index. I then spoke again on the decision-making process when it comes to indexing new editions. Nicola King finished off with a review of the further resources and workshops we could offer and there was a final Q&A session. Those attending were positive about what they gained from the event.

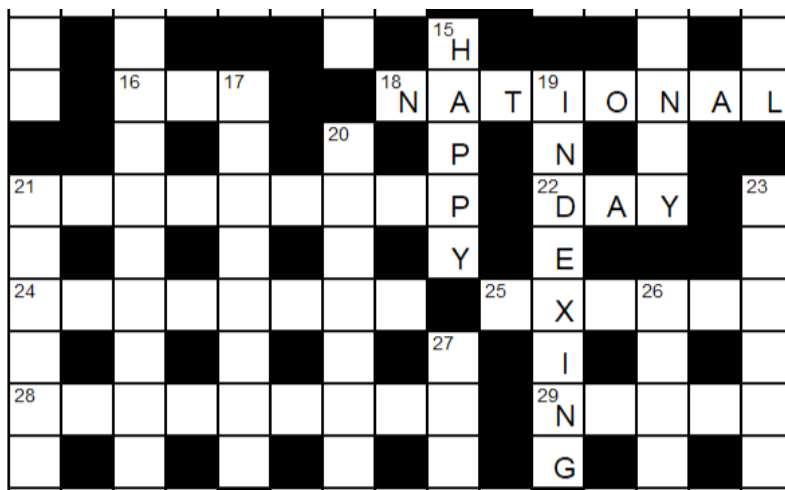
This was only one part of the day; we also celebrated #indexday across social media. Tanya Izzard as marketing director has now taken over the social media accounts on LinkedIn and Twitter, though I am still in charge of the less important Facebook. Since I knew that National Indexing Day can be quite intense in terms of monitoring the various sites, we decided to take turns in

managing the accounts throughout the day. This made it far easier than having one person trying to keep on top of all of them. Tanya scheduled themed posts to go out throughout the day which meant that we could focus on responding to posts from other people.

With the recent changes on Twitter since Elon Musk took over, activity has become more mixed. Some of the high-profile accounts that have previously noticed us have now left the site altogether and there has been a significant part of the freelance publishing community that has moved to the more fragmented Mastodon network. The algorithms for what appears in an individual's feed have changed too, but it's not clear if that has an impact on our visibility. In addition, the ongoing technical issues with the Twitter applications can lead to unavailability (which happened on the day for a short while with Tweetdeck). We are now aiming to increase our following on LinkedIn – indexers with a presence there should see more posts from the Society. This year's #indexday was the first time that we posted more than once on the site during a single day.

Despite the Twitter issues, we still had some good promotion on Twitter, with new material coming from various contributors. You can see the summary of what occurred on both LinkedIn and Twitter in our Wakelet story which is accessible via [the news post](#) on our site. Highlights came from the author and conductor Lev Parikian sharing a thread of amusing indexes, **Lyndsay Marshall** posting her word cloud of places vicariously visited during a year of writing index entries, and Paula Clarke Bain surprising us yet again with [her blog](#) and [cryptic crossword](#) which members will enjoy completing as a souvenir of this year's #indexday.

Ruth Ellis  
[ruth@indexellis.com](mailto:ruth@indexellis.com)



## John Ashley Vickers (1927–2023)

John Vickers, who died peacefully in January, was a life member of SI and one of our oldest and most distinguished members. He won the Wheatley Medal in 1976 for his index to the first volume of *The Works of John Wesley*, published by OUP. He served on the SI Council from 1991 to 1994 and was a frequent contributor to *The Indexer* in the 1980s and 1990s. But one of the penalties of growing old is that you outlast many of your contemporaries, and when I appealed on Side-line for personal memories of John there was little response. He was quite a private person and was not keen on attending conferences and other events, so while some of our older members remembered his name they had mostly never met him. I knew him when we both lived in Bognor Regis in the 1980s, and **Hazel Bell** worked closely with him when she was editor of *The Indexer*. She writes:

I first met John when he spoke – vigorously – at a seminar held during SI's International Conference in 1978; then when he gave a talk to the Society in March 1979, 'On indexing John Wesley'. I was then newly appointed editor of *The Indexer*, so it fell to me to obtain his script to reproduce there – little realising that this was but the first of so many excellent articles he was to supply to the journal.

John was a most congenial companion, and we had much in common beside practising indexing: love of literature, and memories of Bognor Regis, where we had both lived. We exchanged many letters through the ensuing decades – a most enjoyable correspondence. John was a member of the Royal Society of Literature, and took me as his guest to their lectures – a great privilege.

I greatly miss him.

**Glyn Sutcliffe** writes:

To me John Vickers epitomised the vital quality of professional critical thinking and a willingness to challenge established practice with candour. This seemingly rare quality has receded in recent years with the assumption that criticism is construed as either an offence or as unhelpful.

John was not just an indexer, but was described at his memorial service as one of the most distinguished Methodist historians of his generation. But he was never a stuffy academic; his works ranged from the very scholarly to the book on John Wesley in the Ladybird series for children.



*John Vickers receives the Wheatley Medal for 1976, accompanied by his wife and daughter. Photo kindly supplied by John's family*



*A display at John's memorial service of selected books and articles which he had written, edited or indexed. Photo: Ann Hudson*

A full obituary will appear in the next issue of *The Indexer*.

*Ann Hudson*

# The Indexer

*The International Journal of Indexing*

Volume 41.1  
(March 2023)

**Editorial**  
Mary Coe

## Articles

*Making the unseen visible: the reading act*  
Karin McGuirk

*Chop off their head(ing)s! An over-indexing peer review with a French Revolution theme*  
Ruth Martin | Joanna Penning

*Indexing The Indexer, Part 4. Final report and recommendations*  
Mary Coe | Max McMaster | Ann Kingdom

*Finding your first book-indexing job*  
Max McMaster

## Conference Reports

*'Continental Connections': a report on the Berlin international conference, 2022*  
Madelon Nanninga

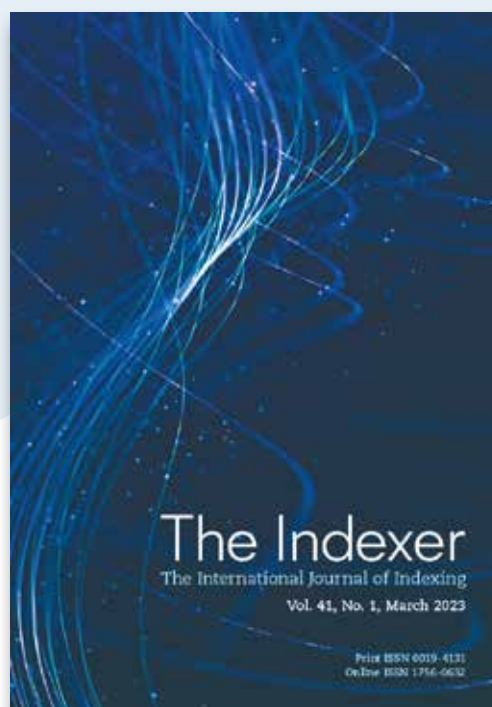
*The best of both worlds? Reflections on the first hybrid international indexing conference in Berlin*  
Ann Kingdom

*The accidental indexer tourist in Berlin*  
Caroline Diepeveen

**Forty Years Ago**  
*The Indexer forty years ago (April 1983)*  
Hazel K. Bell

**Accolades for indexers**  
*Indexing Awards 2022*  
Mary Coe and Ann Kingdom

**Indexes Reviewed**  
Christine Shuttleworth



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## Jonathan Burd on what led to his “mad ambition”

The long hot summer of 1976 can be blamed for my mad ambition to make a career of indexing. It took a little while to come anywhere achieving my goal, like around a quarter of a century, but it was well worth the wait.

Going back to the beginning: as an intelligent child with mathematical ability that was clear from a very early age, once at grammar school there was never much question that studying maths at Oxford or Cambridge should be my target. My choice of the latter was entirely down to the fact that every year my father had a one-shilling bet with my aunt on the outcome of the Boat Race. He always supported Cambridge – and made a decent profit on his investment in my younger years.

It was also entirely fortuitous that in due course I found myself gaining a place at Trinity College, virtually unaware of its great mathematical tradition until I arrived there. Half-way through my third and final



*Trinity College, Cambridge*

year at Trinity, I had to start thinking about what I was going to do after university, something I had never really considered before. A careers adviser suggested that for someone who liked statistics (about the only branch of high-level mathematics I understood properly) an actuarial career might be a good idea.

Knowing nothing better, I duly started applying for jobs with insurance companies, which nearly all had their head offices in London in those days. One such company, with whom I'd been put in contact by a friend who had worked there in the previous summer vacation, decided to offer me a job, which I gladly took. That was in 1973. By the end of 1975 I had left the job and returned to my parents' home in Staffordshire. I had quite enjoyed the work in the office, but I found I didn't have the dedication to spend several evenings a week studying for actuarial exams, so I got out, but with no idea what else I could do.

Persuaded by my company secretary father to try learning bookkeeping, I found a correspondence course on it with Rapid Results College and started doing that. It was a few months later that I stumbled across something in the Rapid Results College brochure that took my eye. It

was a course they were offering on indexing.

I can't honestly remember how far I ever got with the bookkeeping course, but I suspect it was not far. Instead, I spent much of the summer of 1976 sitting on the canal bank close to home doing the reading for the various lessons of the indexing course.

Then I would go home and do the exercises, sending them off in the post to my personal tutor. Within two weeks my work would come back, marked by my tutor, and with his encouraging comments.

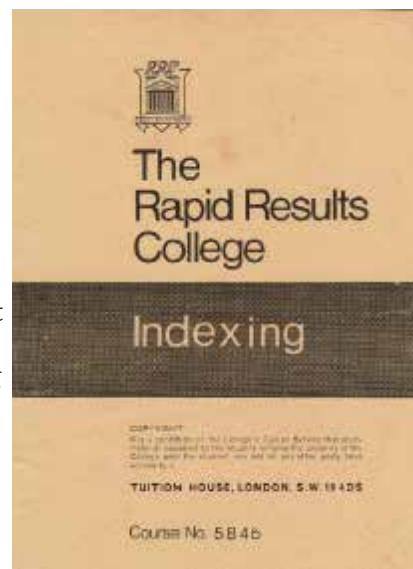
It was around the end of 1976 that I completed the indexing course. I'd decided by then that indexing was the career for me. I started writing to publishers asking for work, but in order to earn some money in the meantime, having depended on my parents for just over a year by then, I thought I would do some temporary clerical work. Such work seemed most readily available in London, so I returned there in January 1977.

Two months later, there was no sign of any indexing work materialising, so I came to the conclusion I needed to find a more permanent job, paying more than I was getting as a temp. I started applying for jobs as a computer programmer. The sudden unexpected death of my father in the April brought another change of plan for me. I returned to live with my mother near Stafford and searched for programming jobs around here (where I still live).

At the beginning of August I started work for British Coal at their main computer centre in Cannock. This was still planned to be on a short-term basis, until I established myself as an indexer. The short-term turned out to be 26 years.

My first indexing work came my way that October, a book on alcoholism and addiction, a subject matter I knew nothing about, but I must have produced an adequate index, because it led to two or three jobs a year from the same publisher for about eight years, until the company got taken over.

Meanwhile, I worked as a systems programmer for British Coal, thoroughly enjoying the work and progressing to be leader of the team responsible for database systems on the IBM mainframe computers used



p 9 ↻ by the company. My attention to detail was a great help in delving deep into machine code to find bugs in software.

Indexing continued more or less as a hobby for me. I averaged about three indexes a year, for a variety of



*Cannock Wood Colliery, Staffordshire*

publishers, through to 1994. I should also mention that marriage in 1982 and the birth of daughters in 1983 and 1986 had a significant impact on my life in that period and ever since.

The privatisation of British Coal at the end of 1994 and the take-over of its IT operations by what was essentially a subsidiary of Philips Electronics resulted in my having to travel regularly to Eindhoven in the Netherlands. I therefore stopped indexing completely for about seven years. During that time I was promoted to manager of the small department I had worked in for many years. (I think they ran out of other people to give the job to).

One of many reorganisations, in which more senior managers moved around jobs in a kind of musical chairs, led to my small department being swallowed up into a larger one, coinciding with the Millennium. I spent the remainder of my time at the company as Database Productline Manager, but I was no longer happy in the job, so I started to wonder about finding a way out. Indexing immediately came to mind.

From May 2001 I began trying to get back into indexing. It actually took about six months to land my first work, but by the end of 2002 I was getting offers from four clients. That Christmas my wife Esther and I agreed that if I could obtain a certain amount of work by

mid-February, then I would hand in my six-months' notice. That duly happened and I actually left my job before the end of July 2003.

By the time of my career move, I had already joined the fledgling SI Wales and Borders local group at the end of 2002. It was reassuring to discover there were real-life people who earned a living from indexing. Esther and I also attended our first SI Conference in Glasgow in June 2003. I should explain that Esther had by that stage decided to train as an indexer. I had cautiously calculated how our family finances would go on the basis of it taking me several years to build up to full-time indexing work, but in reality, I was doing about 30 hours per week of indexing right from day one.

Between 2003 and 2013 I was able to earn a reasonable living from indexing, plus some proofreading, supplemented by a small contribution from Esther from indexing and a much larger one from the exam marking she had returned to. We also attended every SI Conference in that period, and we even attempted to get a local group going in the West Midlands, although with no great success.

One of the attractions of working for myself was that it gave me the flexibility to fit in other things, in particular voluntary work. Since 1999 both Esther and I have been Readers (lay preachers) in our local team of churches, and over the years we also gradually got involved in money ministry, initially offering people help with personal budgeting, then starting a small charity providing free debt advice from 2010.

The beginning of 2013 saw a sudden increase in our debt advice work. Fortunately, this came just after I started, at age 60, receiving my generous pension from my former well-paid IT job. We could therefore afford a reduction in my indexing income from that point on. Over the years, indexing has steadily given way to debt advice, so the former is now down to a handful of books a year, mainly maths books, which I find very easy to do.

So, nearly 47 years on from stumbling across a profession I had hitherto never heard of, I have never for one moment regretted taking it up, and I have been happier in my work since taking the plunge and going full-time than I was before. And when Esther and I take a local walk in one direction along the canal side, I still fondly remember the spot where I sat in the sun all those years ago.

## My Neck of the Woods

### Geraldine Begley on the delights of Donegal

I live in the northwest of Ireland, two miles outside Donegal town, in County Donegal. The town has a population of around 3,000 inhabitants. County Donegal lies along the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) which is a tourism trail that stretches for 1,500 miles along the west coast of Ireland from the Inishowen Peninsula in north County Donegal all the way south to Kinsale, County Cork.

Donegal town is 250 miles from Cork, 112 miles from Belfast and 138 miles from Dublin. The town is situated at the estuary of the river Eske where it flows into Donegal Bay. Donegal is surrounded by the Bluestack Mountains, which form a barrier between the south and north of Co. Donegal.

**p10** ↻ If you look for Co. Donegal in a map of Ireland, you could get the impression that it is in Northern Ireland because geographically it is in the



north and it looks cut off from the rest of the Republic of Ireland. However, politically Co. Donegal is in the Republic. County Donegal borders three Northern Ireland counties (Derry/Londonderry, Tyrone and Fermanagh) and just one county (Leitrim) in the Republic.

County Donegal has two names in Irish (Gaeilge/Gaelic). One is *Dún na nGall* which means the fort of the foreigner/stranger. It is believed that the name originated from when Donegal was invaded by the Vikings in the 8th century. The second name is *Tír Chonaill* which means Conall's land or territory. Conall (Conall Gulban) was a son of Niall of the Nine Hostages.

Let me take you on a tour and point out relics which remind me of the history of Donegal. We start at the north of the town, at the entrance block of the workhouse, built 1841–1842, which is now part of the Donegal Community Hospital. In the 1970s most of the workhouse was demolished and a new hospital was built which now has mainly elderly patients. Nearby is the Famine Graveyard where victims of the Great Famine (1845–1852) were buried in unmarked graves. On display is a famine pot which was used to feed gruel to the starving people.

On our way into the town, we leave the Main Street and cross the river Eske. On the right is Magee's factory, which was founded in 1866 and designs and weaves tweed. It sells luxurious fabrics and suits worldwide, with prices outside this indexer's budget. Further along is the Railway Heritage Museum, which has videos and artefacts for train and history enthusiasts. The narrow-gauge railway in Donegal Town ran between 16 September 1889 and 1 January 1960. County Donegal now has no train services; the nearest train station is in Sligo or Derry. The site of the railway station is used as a bus depot.

Heading towards the town centre, on our right we pass Hanna Hats of Donegal, which designs and makes

tweed hats. We cross the river Eske again along a different bridge. On the right is Donegal Castle, which was built by Sir Hugh O'Donnell in 1474. In 1607, the O'Donnell clan leaders left Ireland to go to Spain, during the Flight of the Earls, and burned the castle to prevent it from falling into English hands. However, in 1611 the castle and its land were granted to an English Army captain, Basil Brooke, during the Plantation of Ulster. He restored the castle and added a manor house to the side of the original castle. In 1612 Donegal was granted a royal charter and it developed as a market town.

The Brooke family sold the castle to the Gore family. In the early 18th century, the castle fell into ruins, and in 1898 it passed into the care of the Office of Public Works (OPW). The OPW restored the tower house part of the castle in the 1990s. It is now open to the public and attracts thousands of visitors each year. There are occasional cultural events held there. Prince Charles (as he then was) and his wife Camilla visited the castle on 25 May 2016 as part of their visit to Ireland. The castle is on the edge of the town centre, which is called the 'Diamond', where I grew up. It has three streets arranged into a



Donegal Castle

triangular shape with access roads to the south, west and north. Markets or fairs were held on the Diamond until the 1950s. Nowadays, it is a pedestrian area with seating, trees and flowers. On the Diamond is a twenty-five-foot-tall monument (obelisk) to the 'Four Masters' who wrote the *Annals of the Four Masters* (or the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*), which is a history of Ireland from the Great Flood up to AD 1616. The monument was erected in 1934 and is made from Mountcharles sandstone. Mountcharles is a village about four miles from Donegal town.

A two-minute walk from the Diamond on the quay/pier area, there is an anchor and chain on display. These belonged to the frigate *Romaine* which was part of Napoleon's failed attempt to aid the Irish in the 1798 rebellion. The ship was sheltering in Donegal Bay when it was spotted by the English forces. It cut loose its anchor and fled. Along the pier area there is the 'Waterbus', which provides a 75-minute guided tour of Donegal Bay. Passengers ↻ **p12**

**p11** ☞ get to view Donegal town from a different perspective, and they might even see seals. The times of the tours depend on the tide and weather conditions.

On Donegal Bay, you might spot people training in skiff boats and dragon boats (long boats with a helm at the stern to steer and sometimes a drummer at the bow for the paddlers to keep in time; there can be up to 16 paddlers). I used to go out paddling with the dragons on Donegal Bay pre-Covid and I am looking forward to rejoining this year. It was a great way to meet people and unwind after a day of indexing.

Nearby, on the big pier, there is a life-size bronze sculpture of the chieftain Red Hugh O'Donnell. It was erected in 2007 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the 'Flight of the Earls'. On the left of the big pier are the ruins of Donegal Abbey, which overlook Donegal Bay. The abbey was built by the O'Donnell clan in 1474. The *Annals of the Four Masters* were written in the Abbey and it is believed that Red Hugh O'Donnell is buried there. It was used as a cemetery for generations, and it is the final resting place for my grandparents and great-grandparents. There is a nature walk, known locally as the 'Bank Walk', along the other side of the bay. It is a good place to spot wildlife, birds, butterflies, trees, fairy doors, Donegal Abbey and Donegal Bay.

Donegal is ideal for hill-walkers as there are numerous walks around and you can be in the wilderness in a matter of minutes. There is a way-marked trail called the Bluestack Way, which takes you from Donegal town to Ardara over bog roads, moorlands and public roads. The Bluestack Way has links with the Appalachian Trail and the Ulster Way, which passes through the Sperrin Mountains, the Causeway Coast, Glens of Antrim and ends in Larne, Co. Antrim.

The cool rainy weather does not deter people visiting Donegal. The *National Geographic Traveller* on 1 December

2016 named Donegal as the number one coolest destination of 2017. Famous people who frequent the north-west include Sarah Jessica Parker and her husband Matthew Broderick. Pierce Brosnan along with Gabriel Byrne and Helena Bonham Carter have been in Donegal recently filming *The Four Letters of Love*, based on the novel by Niall William.

Donegal town has a link with World War Two when a plane crashed in the Bluestack Mountains. On 31 January 1944 an RAF Sunderland flying boat DW110 was returning after its German U-Boat patrols off the coast of France, when it lost its way in stormy weather and crashed in the highest mountains. Seven crew were killed and five survived. The plane was on its way back to Pembroke Dock, south Wales, but it was diverted to Castle Archdale in Lough Erne, Northern Ireland. Recently, a grandson of one of the survivors (Jim Gilchrist), along with a group of walkers, climbed up to the crash site for the anniversary.

I got into indexing in 2000 because I could not find a job that suited my circumstances (small family/no work locally). I wanted to be able to work at home and have flexible hours. Working from home was quite rare until Covid came along and changed working patterns. I live two miles outside the town with views of the town and rolling drumlins which at the moment are dotted with sheep and lambs. I share my home with my husband, three grown-up daughters who come and go, two cats and one dog. I started off indexing in a spare bedroom and in 2017 I moved my 'office' into a converted garden shed. As I write this, my dog (Odie) is keeping me company. Donegal is a very peaceful place to live or visit with a slower pace of life than in cities. Donegal isn't as easy to access as Kerry and the Lakes of Killarney but the scenery in Donegal is just as good as there and is well worth travelling the extra few miles.



Donegal Bay

Authors can be a nightmare. The most sleep-depriving of them are the ones who can't see why they shouldn't just compile their own indexes. If they are from the outset in a position to do without our services, that's their affair, and indeed we will probably never know. But those who, from their point of view, have an indexer 'imposed' upon them by their publisher or simply by the exigencies of time are inclined to muscle in on our act, to wish to supervise the compilation.

We've all been there. We've all dealt with the author or editor who has prepared a list of 'key words', who wants to see the index in progress in order to grumble about references that we've 'missed', who will never be satisfied with an index designed to serve the reader rather than the particular perspective of the writer/editor. Without the training, authors don't understand the notion of passing references, nor the fine art of indexing vague and complex concepts, nor the unhelpful nature of long strings of locators, nor the need for an overview of the index that embraces the general reader who has yet to start reading the book as well as the specialist wanting to check a half-remembered allusion in an already examined text.

Authors seeking to compile their own indexes put your correspondent irresistibly in mind of campaigning politicians going, as they like to put it, "up and down the country". Were

I, say, a professional dry stone waller, I wouldn't allow within 100 yards of my work some self-important Westminster putz who imagines that a hard hat and a high-vis jacket are the preferred fancy dress of the people, and who, thus attired, seeks to "have a go" at my job for the benefit of a photo opportunity. Indexing, like dry stone walling, is a skill and a challenge and a proper profession. It is not to be taken up lightly for the

convenience or *amour propre* of the untrained.

The passing of **John Vickers** [see obituary, p7] stirred **Hazel Bell** to revisit what she called "that deplorable incident in the 1990s", about which she emailed a handful of those she deemed to be interested parties, including *Sidelights*. Referring to the Council that governed the Society until the Executive Board replaced it in 2004, Hazel wrote:

I was on SI Council . . . [which] commissioned John to write a basic guide for authors indexing their own books . . . At the AGM of 1996 the composition of Council changed, and the incoming Council (no longer including me) rejected [the guide] because of . . . "concern that . . . [it] might result in indexers losing work . . ." This is the first (and only) instance I have known of one Council overturning a decision made by its predecessor. I consider that disgraceful in itself.

It's hard to resist the suspicion that Hazel here allows her dislike of the Council's revised decision to question a venerable right of any official body. Such a body – in this case the SI Council – is sovereign: it is not bound by the policies followed by any previous Council. There is nothing disgraceful about it choosing to pursue a different course of action.

The attentive reader will have gathered from the earlier image of the politician and the dry stone

waller that this writer would seek to discourage non-professionals from trying their hands at professional work. Hazel – slightly weighting her summary of the issue, one might argue – posits "a clear opposition between concern for indexing standards (authors are going to do their own indexes anyway, so let's teach them how to do it properly) and professional interests (we want all the work going for SI members! [her exclamation mark]). It is relevant to recall that the first of the five declared aims of SI on its foundation in 1957 is 'to improve the standard of indexing'; only fifth comes 'to raise the status of indexers and to safeguard their interests'."

That notion "let's teach [authors] how to do it properly" somewhat cavalierly concertinas the long and rigorous weeks of training that professional indexers undergo into – what? – a couple of friendly emails, when there isn't time for the first-time indexer to digest a weighty guide? Is an abbreviated briefing for an innocent author a real contribution to improving the standard of indexing? There is a rather better way of achieving such an improvement and that is to do everything possible to deter virgins from stepping onto the primrose path of self-sufficiency.

Those who have never indexed rarely imagine the whole compass of the exercise. Your correspondent recently compiled the index for an enormous volume packed **➞ p14**

I had long assumed that authors wrote books sequentially; surely, one starts at the beginning and works on to the end, I would have argued. I can only say that in the event that is not my experience. Books for me are jig-saw puzzles: different bits get written at different times and are gradually pieced together. While writing a succession of set pieces on different topics – a particular work, person or event – the larger shape emerges and more treatment suggests itself. Taking the alternative approach, some researchers work through endless research but leave the writing-up to a coherent task at the end.

However, this method is dangerous for the research can become so enjoyable one never gets round to the actual writing. Much better to start fitting together what material one has from the first, and then to use this scaffolding to generate new material. One thus produces a succession of gradually enlarging drafts which can be circulated to an in-group of friends and colleagues for comment and correction.

**p13** with detail. Its author had a particular method of amassing his material – see the extract on p13 – which produced a cataract of repetition. References to material, including anecdotes about it, were retailed not merely once or twice but five or six times, usually (but not always) from slightly differing perspectives, which reduced the opportunities for the patient indexer to select those he thought most pertinent. The result was an enormous and an enormously time-consuming index.

The author, who was fond of mentioning that this was his 33rd book, had previously employed his late wife as the compiler of his indexes. He did not vouchsafe – and was not asked – whether she was a trained indexer, though he did indicate that she had indexed beyond his own output. But how she coped with his profusion of

rehearsed and re-rehearsed references I cannot guess. What seemed clear, however, was that he had no notion of the mountain that his writing built for the indexer to climb.

There is nothing unscrupulous about indexers “want[ing] all the work going”. We are the people trained to do it. If we cooperate in its being farmed out to the untrained, we may hardly complain if the work begins to dry up. As the SI president points out [see p 2], there is plenty to fear from the future developments in AI. To dilute the expertise by giving away informal assistance to those who would replace us without the bother of proper learning is a counsel of despair.

*The Locator*

## Local Groups

### London

Five of us met for a Zoom catch-up in March. While a lot has changed since the anxious early days of Covid with all the stresses of home schooling, some things haven't: in this case the presence of friendly cats flitting across the screen. We chatted about recent indexing projects.

**Christine Shuttleworth** is involved with a large index in French to a three-volume collection of Stendhal's writings on Italian Renaissance art where she has to be careful to use the French version of the various artists' names – Michel-Ange in place of Michelangelo and Léonard de Vinci. I have been indexing an interesting book on Afghanistan since the Americans left and the Taliban took over in 2021. This led to a discussion on the importance of maintaining impartiality when you may not agree with some of the views expressed in the author's manuscript. We considered ideas for future in-person meetings and have provisionally fixed to visit the Freud Museum near Finchley Road tube station in June.

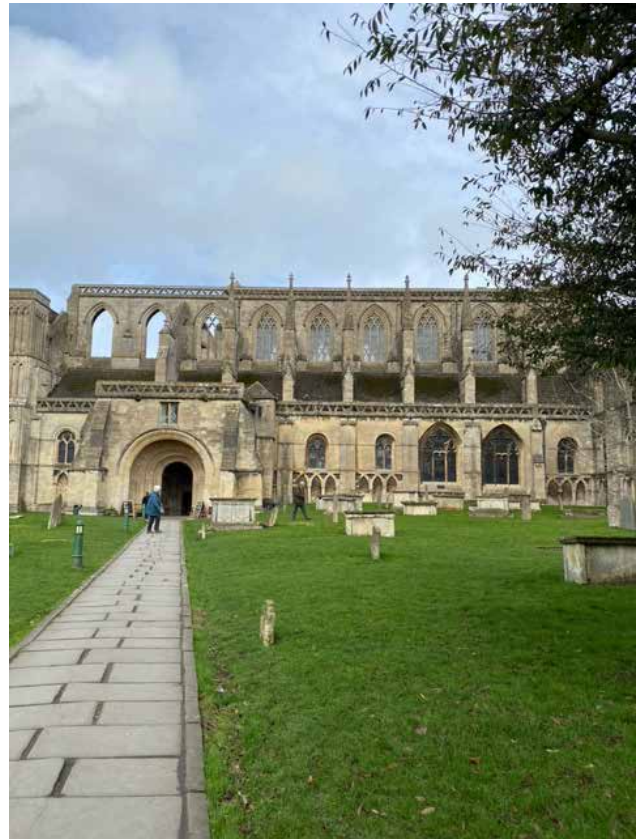
*Rohan Bolton*

[londongroup@indexers.org.uk](mailto:londongroup@indexers.org.uk)

### Three Choirs

Despite all roads to Malmesbury seeming to be closed that day, six of us managed to arrive at the Abbey on 21 March. We always start our visits with coffee and the Abbey café is in the nave of the Abbey with very comfortable sofas. **Steve Gilbert** joined us for the day too, but he has been an honorary member of the group for a while on Zooms. We welcomed **Grace Cartwright**, a new member and trainee, to the group. There was non-stop discussion about indexing and I know we could have carried on through lunch. We were booked at the King's Arms, a tapas restaurant and pub, nearby and we didn't want to be late. There were a few minutes to wander around the Abbey, see the tomb of King Aethelstan and buy some postcards before we had to go, but I definitely would like to go back again and see more of the architecture. I was just too busy talking to take in too much.

If you have never been to the Abbey, it is worth the



*Malmesbury Abbey*

trip through the Cotswolds, but check the road situation before setting off.

Our next meeting is by Zoom on 26 April. The meeting after that is a visit to Cirencester. If anyone wants to join the Three Choirs on these dates, please let me know.

*Pam Scholefield*

[threechoirs@indexers.org.uk](mailto:threechoirs@indexers.org.uk)

# Who's Who

## Executive Board

Chair & Members Services	<b>Nicola King</b> <a href="mailto:chair@indexers.org.uk">chair@indexers.org.uk</a>
Secretary	<b>Philippa Jevons</b> <a href="mailto:secretary@indexers.org.uk">secretary@indexers.org.uk</a>
Vice-Chair	<b>Sue Goodman</b> <a href="mailto:vice-chair@indexers.org.uk">vice-chair@indexers.org.uk</a>
Internet	<b>Ruth Ellis</b> <a href="mailto:website@indexers.org.uk">website@indexers.org.uk</a>
Marketing	<b>Tanya Izzard</b> <a href="mailto:marketing@indexers.org.uk">marketing@indexers.org.uk</a>
Training	<b>Rachel Gee</b> <a href="mailto:training@indexers.org.uk">training@indexers.org.uk</a>
Minutes Secretary	<b>Lyndsay Marshall</b>

## Committees

Conference	<b>Ann Kingdom</b> <a href="mailto:conference@indexers.org.uk">conference@indexers.org.uk</a>
Training Course	<b>Kim Birchall</b> <a href="mailto:training@indexers.org.uk">training@indexers.org.uk</a>

## Office-holders

Office Manager (also Training, Fellowship and Workshops)	<b>Paul Machen</b> <a href="mailto:admin@indexers.org.uk">admin@indexers.org.uk</a>
Training Course Co-ordinator	<b>Kim Birchall</b> <a href="mailto:iccoord@indexers.org.uk">iccoord@indexers.org.uk</a>
Website Content Manager	<b>Ann Kingdom</b> <a href="mailto:website@indexers.org.uk">website@indexers.org.uk</a>
Groups Co-ordinator	<b>Pam Scholefield</b> <a href="mailto:groups@indexers.org.uk">groups@indexers.org.uk</a>
Social Media Co-ordinator	<b>Ruth Ellis</b> <a href="mailto:publicity@indexers.org.uk">publicity@indexers.org.uk</a>
International Representative	<b>Ann Kingdom</b> <a href="mailto:international@indexers.org.uk">international@indexers.org.uk</a>

## The Indexer

Editor	<b>Mary Coe</b> <a href="mailto:editor@theindexer.org">editor@theindexer.org</a>
Indexes Reviewed	<b>Christine Shuttleworth</b> <a href="mailto:indexesrev@theindexer.org">indexesrev@theindexer.org</a>