

Slidelights

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

Editorial

Face-to-face encounters will become available for all members of the Society of Indexers in September when, for an all-too-short day, a conference to which one is obliged to travel in person will reconvene for the first time in four years [see p 4]. Unvoiced thoughts along the lines of "oh my lord you've aged" will doubtless abound. But the opportunity to share the same air as one's peers will be an almost forgotten pleasure for many, and a brand-new one for recent course graduates who lack a local group.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and indexers are nothing if not resourceful. When social mixing began to slide off the menu, we resorted to communications online. The Zoom meeting became the method of choice for keeping in touch, for sharing grievances (and sometimes pleasures and triumphs), and for checking the facial expressions of our fellows. That this platform has established itself in our particular culture is undeniable. Some members have as many as three regular Zoom gatherings that they may attend and already there are conventions as well as a history to relate [see pp 5–8]. Some local groups have kept afloat solely thanks to the screen, and others among the moribund might care to consider whether an afterlife is possible if somebody in the locality will just take the initiative and set up a Zoom.

That this has transpired can have come as no surprise to members. After



LEFT TO RIGHT: Liz Cook, Barbara Hird, Moira Greenhalgh

all, the indexing profession is unusually collegiate. The InfoScipedia website, which declares itself "the world's largest database of information science & technology", defines collegiality as "mutually beneficial disposition of colleagues or peers toward each other, characterised by behaviours such as sharing, thoughtfulness, timeliness, reciprocity, helpfulness, and honesty". That sets the bar suitably high, but we clear it effortlessly.

Other professions where freelancers predominate may not be as collegiate as ours. Writers, actors, musicians, designers, producer-directors and others find themselves in more obviously competitive markets than we do, given that indexing falls into many particularities, some of them quite discrete. And we are a profession of characteristic longevity. We know each other for years.

Witness **Moira Greenhalgh**: "**Liz Cook** joined the Society very early, attending a London meeting in 1976. I met her at the first Bristol conference in 1983 and **Barbara Hird** joined the gang at the first Chester conference four years later. As freelancers we didn't have work colleagues but what the Society of Indexers has given us are long friendships".

JULY 2023

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

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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

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or 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](#)

**October 2023 *Sidelights*
Copy deadline**
Friday 6 October 2023
(for electronic distribution
mid-October)

Presidential Musings

It's squeaky bum time. As I write this, I'm about five months away from the deadline for my next book, which has reminded me of Leith's First Law of Literary Production. To wit: it's always easier not to be writing a book than to be writing one. Also, in blithely contracting to produce a history of children's literature, it is possible I have bitten off more than I, or anyone, can chew. People dedicate whole academic careers to this stuff. Every time I chat to people about the project, I find them gratifyingly engaged and keen to talk about their own childhood reading (good sign) and they always mention some author I've missed out and am instantly convinced needs to be included (aargh!).



I think I've already passed the contracted word count (good sign); but looking at my scheme of the text, I'm still only about two thirds of the way through covering the ground (aargh!). Anyway, mustn't grumble. Leith's Second Law of Literary Production states that it's always better to be writing a book (or, still better, to have written one) than not to be writing one.

One thing that helps keep me on track is, of course, thinking about the eventual index: "Samuel Whiskers, wheelbarrow of (questions over size)"; "flagellation: see White, TH and Kingsley, Charles"; "Fauntleroy craze, impact on clothes choices and childhood mortification"; "Blyton, Enid: Beaconsfield dinner-party needle with Alison Uttley"; "racism, mahoosive: see all children's writing before about 1990". It pleases me greatly to imagine the book's quirky discoveries and silly speculations set down with grave solemnity in an index. Of course, that also fills me with a special kind of proleptic guilt. I know that one of the reasons the professionals of your trade are put under such pressure is authors delivering late and/or rewriting right up to the wire. And though I'm not saying I will be one of those useless authors, I'm not feeling 100 per cent confident I won't be, either. Sorry. Just, y'know, saying.

Sam Leith

Society News

Executive Board Report

The Executive Board met on 9 May and 23 June. Planning for SI's conference has been the focus of discussion and activity during this second quarter of 2023. The conference will be a one-day in-person event in Leeds on Tuesday 26 September.

Melanie Gee and **Ruth Martin** shared their experiences of joining EB, and Melanie used this experience to compile 'Answers to your questions about becoming an EB member', which is available on the SI website. An induction plan **p3**

CONGRATULATIONS TO

New Fellow of the Society – FSocInd
Beverley Winkler, Radlett, Hertfordshire

p2 ☞ has also been prepared for use when new directors join the board.

Ruth Martin has conducted a survey of later-stage students and newly qualified indexers to gather their views on career preparedness

and their transition to indexing work. The results will be shared later this year and will be used to shape the resources and support offered by SI in the future.

Tanya Izzard delivered the Marketing report, including informa-

tion about an advertising campaign planned for autumn 2023, which will focus on the training course. EB discussed the options for print and online advertisements.

Lyndsay Marshall, Minutes Secretary
LM.indexing@gmail.com

Behind the Chair

My, doesn't time fly when you're having fun? In the last issue, I ended my piece about book launches and other events indexers attend with the teaser "I hope myself to be reporting in the next issue on an event I have been invited to later in April". Where did I go? I went to Buckingham Palace. Well, the Queen's Gallery, not the actual palace bit they live in. Why did I go? As the indexer in the editorial team from the Royal Collection Trust, I was invited to a Private View of [Style & Society: Dressing the Georgians](#). Was it nice? Yes, it was absolutely lovely, and I didn't want to go home.

This was the first post-Covid exhibition for the Royal Collection Trust, and the boat was well and truly pushed out. The team members were all very excited. The author of the accompanying book of the same title, Anna Reynolds – Deputy Surveyor of the King's Pictures, but actually de facto Surveyor because they don't have a Surveyor in post apparently due to redundancies during Covid – was excited; she had around 200 people invited and I think most of them must have made the effort to attend. After leaving our coats in the cloakroom, we were guided up the stairs where a line of waiting staff were offering flutes of lovely champagne. As people flowed in, the waiting staff offered lovely warm hors d'oeuvres and topped up our glasses.

For me, the point of going was to meet the author and the editorial team, which I duly did. And then I got to look at the lovely paintings close-up. I have indexed a few



well-illustrated books for exhibitions, and however well I know the subject and the material under discussion, I am often surprised by the scale of the thing when I see it in the flesh. So the highlight of the exhibition for me was the stupendously large [coronation portrait of George III by Allan Ramsay](#). It is bigger than life-size: you can see all the detail of the ermine cloak and the figuring of the gold silk. I am also always surprised what painters can make you think you are seeing – it is obviously just shades of yellow when you get close to. And the other thing was the [teeny tiny miniature of the left eye of Princess Charlotte](#).

There's lots more to see in the exhibition; it is well worth a visit.

Meeting people in real life that you've only otherwise met via the keyboard is a great thing to do. I'm hoping to join the up-coming visits by the Three Choirs and London groups, and of course I'm looking forward to the Conference in September.

Nicola King
chair@indexers.org.uk



Conference 2023

By the time you read this, booking will be open for our one-day conference in Leeds on Tuesday 26 September. This will be the first time we have met in person since 2019. We have therefore designed the programme to make the most of being together in person, with plenty of time for networking and exchanging ideas. Rather than plenary sessions with speakers, we are concentrating on sharing the knowledge we have built up within our membership. This also allows us to set a particularly good value price for attending. We want to encourage attendees to expand their indexing practice by exploring areas they may not have worked in before.

This will be the first time we have held our conference in Leeds, chosen for its position on the rail network and the quality/price of the venue we are using. The conference will be a full-day event, including lunch and refreshments, at The Terrace. This is a modern, purpose-built meeting space in the newer part of the business district, a short walk from Leeds train station and the Park & Ride bus stops. It has its own outdoor space, and hot and cold drinks are available all day.

The conference page includes links to full details of the programme

and useful travel/hotel information. For those arriving the day before, local member **Ruth Ellis** will host a walking tour of the city centre in the afternoon, taking in the major architectural and historical sights. There will also be the opportunity to meet up for a meal in the evening.

The conference kicks off with registration from 09:00 and a networking icebreaker session will begin at 09:30. The official opening is at 09:55 with our President **Sam Leith** giving us an online welcome. We then head straight into an interactive session where discussion groups will take a guided tour through working with four types of clients, identifying

common themes and highlighting different approaches. The rest of the morning is taken up with parallel sessions allowing you to dip a toe in embedded indexing, look at strategies for indexing new editions, or explore methods for editing an index.

After a buffet lunch we move on to shorter presentations looking at different index formats. **Mel Gee** discusses her first foray into indexing a collection of letters, **Sue Goodman** discusses the challenges of highly illustrated books, and Ruth Ellis looks at the particular requirements for children's books. Another set of parallel sessions includes one aimed at students/newly 



Bring the outside in: expand your indexing horizons

Annual Conference 2023

Tuesday 26 September

The Terrace, Wellington Place,
Leeds LS1 4AP

society of
indexers
information from A to Z

p4 ☞ qualified members on the business aspects of indexing, led by **Lyndsay Marshall**. Alternatively, you can get moving with some gentle stretches to keep you mobile during a working day. Or you can join **Paula Clarke Bain** and find out more about her venture into cross-word settings and how wordsmithery doesn't just apply to indexing.

The final session will look at all the different opportunities for continued professional development, with contributions on their experiences from various Society members. It will also be a chance to identify any gaps in what the Society is offering in this field and discuss how these might be filled.

Afterwards, for those staying on a little longer, we will convene to a local drinking establishment, and (if enough



interest) then on for another meal.

The executive board hope that you find this to be a lively and interesting programme, with something of in-

terest to everyone. Please book your places soon as numbers are limited.

Executive Board

Zoom reports

Talking about the past

In 2020, during the Coronavirus lockdown, I ran three Zoom meetings on indexing history and the past, seeing this as a temporary measure while we could not meet in person. But one of the few good things to come out of the pandemic is that Zoom has proved a great way to get people together who live miles apart, find travelling difficult, or are just short of time. Although it's not the same as meeting face to face, it's a lot better than not meeting at all.

So in February this year I launched via Sideline an informal Zoom group for SI members called 'Talking about the past', to meet on the first Wednesday of most months. Topics range from the broad and general, such as using reference sources and indexing proper names, to the more specialised, including so far biography, archaeology and ancient history, and books for children and young people up to undergraduate level. Possible future topics include local history, military history, and the history of art and architecture.

The meetings start at 10:30 and last not more than an hour. There's no advance booking – part of the excitement for me is wondering who



will turn up. All are welcome, from experienced old hands to students, preferably in the later stages of the course, and you don't have to be a specialist historical indexer; even if you index science or medicine you are likely to come across historical material on occasion. Sessions are quite informal; I generally show a few slides to introduce the topic, and then we have general discussion, splitting into breakout rooms if numbers are large, and coming together again at the end.

I have built up a mailing list of 36 people who are sent the Zoom link a few days before each meeting, which is also announced on Sideline. Attendance so far has ranged

between 8 and 19 people. We next meet on Wednesday 2 August, and as it's holiday time and numbers may be low, this will be a free-for-all session where people can talk about a current or recent interesting index or ask for help on tricky problems. Every index is different but certain difficulties tend to recur and we can all help each other and learn something. It doesn't matter what the index is about as long as it has some connection with the past. If you are interested and not on my mailing list, do contact me and I'll make sure you receive the Zoom link.

Ann Hudson

annhudson84@gmail.com

The Indexer

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Editorial
Mary Coe

Obituary
John Vickers, 1927–2023

Articles
Ebooks in EPUB format can (and should) include indexes
Bill Kasdorf

Indexing images in ebooks to make visual content accessible and discoverable to everyone
Caroline Desrosiers

Metatopic musings, Part 2. Metatopic conceptualisation and indexing strategies
Melanie Gee

Structuring book indexes to meet the needs of users
Judi Gibbs

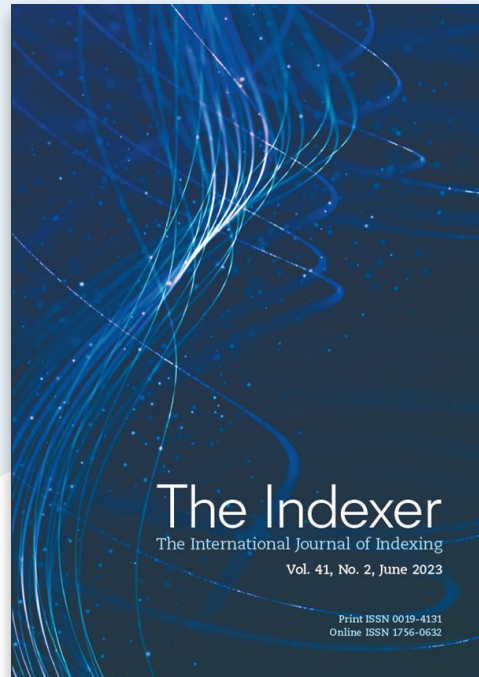
Indexing with Excel, Part 3. Conversions 1
Walter Greulich

The Index of Forbidden Books: is it an index?
Jolanta N. Komornicka

Letter to The Editor
Letter to the editor
Jolanta N. Komornicka

Indexes Reviewed
Christine Shuttleworth

Book Reviews
Heather Hedden | Jan Wright



NOTICE: *The Indexer* will be moving to a new distribution model in 2024.

Quarterly issues of the journal will now be published in an electronic version on the regular schedule. In addition to access to individual articles on the LUP website, the complete electronic issue will be available as a PDF. A printed volume containing all four issues for the year will be distributed in December.

The combined volume will be mailed to subscribers in suitable packaging. It will also be available as a PDF document from the Liverpool University Press website. The new distribution model will enable us to lessen the environmental impact by reducing print runs and paper usage, mitigate the effects of increases in production and distribution costs, and enable subscribers around the world to have convenient and timely access to each issue.

Show and tell

What better way to start a piece about our monthly coffee Zooms than a quick quiz? Spot the odd one out: which of the following has *not* been a topic of conversation in one of these virtual gatherings? The answer – which I shall reveal later – may surprise you:

- dealing with 'keyword' lists
- indexing efficiency
- indexing significant relationships in biographies
- low indexing fees
- strategies for handling quiet periods
- reflecting significant recent world events in the book/index
- jeopardy of indexer assassination
- indexing geographic regions
- receiving payments from abroad
- the relentless pursuit of good news

Some time last year it occurred to me that I rather missed the conversations I used to have with work colleagues, while waiting for the kettle to boil in the office kitchen. We would share small details about our work and our domestic lives, and I would feel that bit more connected. Well, not really. In truth, what I missed was the *idea* of such pleasant conversations. My workplace was a hotbed of resentment, and kitchen encounters were best avoided because someone was invariably sniping about somebody else. Ah, the joys of academia. I don't need to tell you that indexers are a much friendlier bunch of people: if I had a group of indexers waiting for the kettle to boil in my kitchen right now, I'd not hesitate to join them for a bit of a chat – and I might even share my biscuits.

It also struck me that there was something missing between the formal training and development activities organised by the SI and other indexing societies – conferences, workshops, webinars – and the more informal local group gatherings on offer for some of us. The Sideline discussion forum is a great resource if you want a simple answer to a simple question – if you're lucky. (But have you noticed how quickly an individual discussion thread wanders off-topic? It's fascinating to observe). Wouldn't it be helpful to be able to run some of these queries past a group of people over Zoom, in a virtual kitchen? And even if the problem has been resolved by the next meeting, wouldn't it be useful and interesting for other people if you shared your problem and how you solved it? I thought so, anyway.

So, my 'Show and tell/share a problem coffee Zoom' idea came about. I still haven't come up with a better title but at least it does what it says on the coffee cup. I have been running these meetings nearly every month since September 2022, and am gratified that some people who came to the first meeting still regularly turn up. We



usually have between 6 and 12 attendees: a nice size for everyone to contribute if they want to, but it's also ok to 'lurk'. I have over 40 people on my email list, so I suspect that some of you are potentially interested, but perhaps not quite sure what to expect. So here's an overview of a typical coffee Zoom, which happens at 11:00–12:00 on the third Thursday of the month.

First, quick introductions. Not every time, but if I see a new face and that new face indicates they don't know many people, we'll do them. (You will be relieved to learn that we don't have time for any cringe-worthy ice-breakers). Secondly, my relentless pursuit of good news. I do like a good news story to cheer us up and I think it offers a counterbalance to some of the more negative postings on Sideline. Good things do happen in indexing, and I urge you all to make a mental note when good things happen to you. Having said that, I'm not an insufferable optimist. Rubbish things happen too and it's ok to talk about these as well – you'll have a sympathetic audience. Then on to the main business. We typically have one or two big topics to talk about; I always have something prepared but am happy to bump it off for someone else's contributions.

I think most of us have an innate curiosity about how other indexers approach their work. The 'show and tell' aspect of the coffee Zooms provides an opportunity to satisfy this curiosity. Although one person is doing the 'presenting', the conversation soon flows, and we all contribute our own different experiences and insights. So far, just one other person has 'shown and told' but it was very well received, and I hope that more people will feel emboldened to do likewise. The first book index I talked about was the one I later used in the self-evaluation part of my SI Fellowship application. This was a tricky **p8**

p7 ☞ index, and talking about it was a useful way to start my reflective process. I used another meeting to discuss approaches to indexing a book for very young children (something that was new to me), and to run some ideas past people. In other words, yes, this slot of the meeting can be entirely self-serving, and it's there for you to use. Waiting in the wings for future discussion is a book written by Johnny Marr, about his guitar collection. Undoubtedly the coolest book I have indexed, but which left me far from cool at the end of it – rather hot and bothered, actually. You'll have to come along to a meeting to find out why.

The reason I haven't yet spoken about the Johnny Marr book is that more people are now starting to come forward with things they would like to talk about. In addition to the topics listed at the top of this piece, except for low indexing fees (the odd one out – surprised?), some of the other things we have talked about have included whether/how to index the pseudonymised names of participants of research studies, dealing with index 'corrections' from authors, and the use of macros. I think

you would agree that there is something for everyone.

If you're not on my email list to get the monthly Zoom links and information and would like to be, get in touch. If there is a topic you'd like to discuss but you don't want to present as such, just let me know. Incidentally, if you really don't want to say anything at all you can always feign a microphone issue – we won't be any the wiser. But I do encourage people to speak up and contribute if they feel able. If you haven't presented anything before, these Zooms are a low-stakes way to dip your toe into the water: you might even enjoy it, and you might be inspired to host a topic-specific Zoom of your own. But at the very least, once a month, there is an opportunity to join a friendly group of indexers enjoying one another's company and learning from each other. I'm afraid you'll have to bring your own biscuits, but there'll be no sniping, and that's a promise.

Mel Gee

melanie@wordsandindexes.co.uk

Illustration: Tom Gee

My Past Life

Nic Nicholas recalls active and exacting regimes

I've always loved proofreading and editing, but I wanted to try something else, so looked at learning how to index. At first, I wasn't too sure if I would be good enough, so I put it to the back of my mind for a couple of years. Then I took the plunge and have never looked back. The course was indeed challenging, but I was pleased to discover that I had become an accredited indexer in 2015. I quickly received my first commission (via another member – thank you, Sandy) which was a set of documents about a Jewish settlement in the United States. I really enjoyed it and received some lovely comments from the author. By 2017, I was indexing full time as an Advanced Professional Member (with only a little proofreading/editing) and wondering why I hadn't thought about doing it years ago. I decided to apply to become a Fellow via the new pathway and achieved this earlier this year. I recommend it to all members who have had Advanced status for more than two years.

I spent my early years in Belfast with fire drills replaced by bomb drills at school and holidays spent at Portrush. Then my parents decided to move to Yorkshire, where I had the time of my life both at school and Brownies. I had a poem about camping published in *The Brownie* magazine, leading to a report and photo in the local paper (which was probably the last time I was happy to be photographed). Yorkshire winters in the 1970s were a child's dream and my brother and I loved to make igloos (yes, there was plenty of snow) and pelted each other with snowballs on the walk to school across the fields. I hardly spent any time indoors. Sport has also featured heavily in my life – particularly football and ath-

letics. I begged to play football like the boys and gained my 'Coca-Cola Superskills' at primary school. My biggest disappointment has to be missing a summer school with Yorkshire Cricket Club as my father had been promoted and we moved to Cheshire. I also played tennis and was a long jumper, both at county level.

I soon made new friends through taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, became a football coach for a local Cub side and took a new weekend job in my local corner shop (literally a 'jump over the fence') where I fine-tuned my listening skills dealing with customers and learnt how to cut 'transparent' bacon – watched over by the beady eye of the owner's Scrooge-like wife. I treated the newspaper boys and girls with the greatest of respect after having to replace one of them on a cold winter's morning. I also worked in my school library when I couldn't play sport at lunchtime. For a fleeting moment I thought about becoming a librarian ... I had always loved reading.

School holiday jobs included being the deputy leader of a summer play scheme – set by a river and led by a group of teens ... what were the local council thinking? All the children enjoyed themselves and survived the experience. I also covered for a dental nurse in my local practice for a number of years. The dentist had a love of motorsport and talked about it non-stop. He lived behind Oulton Park and invited me to a British Touring Car Championship weekend. I was hooked and actively followed the tour around the country for twenty years.

After having spent most of my teenage years wanting to become a police officer (and having subscribed ☞ **p9**

p8 ☞ to the *Police Review* for most of that time), I decided to study history instead. I chose Manchester University over York purely based on the Mancunian music scene ... Needless to say I worked hard and played hard, gaining lifelong friends and a passion for Victorian architecture. Manchester is worth a visit if only for a look at its buildings. Manchester Art Gallery fuelled my love of the Pre-Raphaelites while the John Rylands Library took me to another world.



Inside the John Rylands Library

Having absolutely no idea what path to follow after graduating, I decided to apply for a job as a production planner for an international packaging company. After having an interview and having to sit an A-level Maths paper, I gave no further thought to the job ... I got a B at O-level but really did not enjoy the subject. To my astonishment, the company wanted me to start as soon as possible and I was thrown in at the deep end – from planning the week's production to buying barrels of oil. It was very much a male-dominated environment so being obsessed with football really did help me become part of the team.

This was also the time Apple Mac computers were being introduced to working environments, so off I trotted on a course with a couple of colleagues. It was such a revelation and made my life so much easier when planning schedules. Promotion meant liaising with employees and directors of the company to negotiate wage increases and working conditions. In addition, I became a qualified internal auditor, which involved setting up organisational processes and quality management systems and then ensuring that they complied with the requirements of ISO 9001. I loved the attention to detail required and getting to know each department across three separate sites.

After a few years I got married and we moved to Kent. My new job was as a troubleshooter for a wholesale newspaper and magazine distributor. If there was a problem, I had to solve it. This could be dealing with an awkward client (a regular occurrence) or trying

to work out why a computer wouldn't switch on. Again I was negotiating pay rises and trying to improve working conditions. I then had my first child and became involved as a school governor for two primary schools. My particular interests are still students with special needs and safeguarding. I get a real buzz from the school environment; whether it's listening to the pupils reading or watching the latest Year 6 play which seems to be getting more extravagant each year – children are great improvisers and unless you've seen rehearsals, you have no idea if/when something goes wrong on the night.

Professionally, I wanted to do something to break up my week at home, primarily looking after my daughter. I started editing and proofreading an Ads newspaper at the weekends. It got me out of the house and I soon got used to working with a great team. From time to time, I had to help on the phone, taking advertising texts from the general public. It turned out to be more fun than I had anticipated, especially when it came to teenagers wanting to sell their cars ... their enthusiasm was infectious.

With my first-born in school, I became a production manager for a small American pharmaceutical company. This involved dealing with the MHRA's (Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency) paperwork – no small task. By the time I left to have my second daughter, I was preparing patient information leaflets for those who had a reading age of eight and adding Braille to the package design. Our Managing Director's wife came over from the United States on a regular basis so that she could visit the National Gallery and the Tate Modern to find inspiration for her next artwork. Marsha was extremely knowledgeable and my job was to accompany her.

Around this time, I was contacted by an old friend from my Manchester days and asked if I would like to be a 'tour manager' for a band who were going to spend ten days gigging in the Netherlands. My husband ☞ p10



Census at Bethlehem, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

p 9 ↻ persuaded me to go and so I travelled from Amsterdam to Utrecht, then Maastricht and finally Zwolle. I also managed to see a AFC Ajax game, visit the Van Gogh Museum and my favourite – the Bonnefanten Museum in Maastricht where I saw a copy of Pieter Brueghel the Elder's 'Census at Bethlehem'. This was an image I had spent hours staring at in my childhood home so it was delightful to see a version in real life.

I have been researching my family history for over twenty years. All my family hail from either the island of Ireland or Scotland. My maternal grandfather was an Army Chaplain during WW2 and kept meticulous records of those killed in action, where he had buried

them and also lists of their belongings. He also stayed on after the war as an interpreter. I am also involved with my local history archive and the North of Ireland Family History Society. Unfortunately there was no Census in 1921 because of the War of Independence so I wasn't jumping for joy when the England and Wales Census came out.

I have had the chance to work on a wonderful selection of academic and trade texts. Although my specialist areas are history and politics, I like to work on art and football books and my 'Friday' arts and crafts books which only take a few hours to complete. I feel very fortunate indeed.

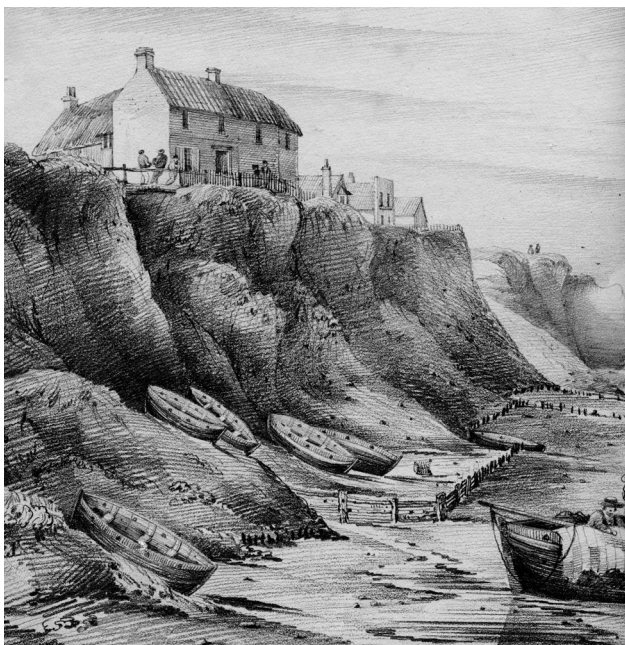
My Neck of the Woods

Christopher Pipe works from Cromer in North Norfolk

Daniel Defoe, in 1724, said he knew nothing Cromer was famous for except good lobsters. They are still caught here, though Cromer is now more famous for its crabs, and until recently many of the fishermen still used crab boats of the traditional Viking shape with bows at both ends. In the days before motors were added to these boats, the fishermen had to be strong rowers (Paul Heiney visited to make a radio programme, and was astonished to find one of the oars so heavy he could barely lift it); the fishermen needed all their strength and stamina when they went out in the lifeboats, as they have done for generations. On one day in 1917, under the famous coxswain Henry Blogg, they spent fourteen hours battling heavy seas to rescue the crews of two ships.



Cromer lifeboat launched for a demonstration on a calm day in April 1884 – imagine rowing on a stormy day



Part of an 1831 drawing by Robert Blake showing the west cliff of Cromer. Note the shape of the crab boats pulled up on the shore and the timbers set into the beach in an effort to offer the crumbling cliffs some limited protection from the sea

These days the town is also famous for its pier (built in 1901, following 500 years of jetties and piers that were inevitably washed away by the sea one after another). It's home to the last remaining traditional end-of-the-pier show (which would have horrified the Edwardian gentry, who thought such things too vulgar for Cromer); its Pavilion Theatre is regularly packed out for this and other shows, including a well regarded annual folk festival and a fearfully accomplished amateur operatic and dramatic group.

Despite the recent loss of some much lamented independent shops, the town centre still keeps most of the supermarkets at a respectful distance, and it hasn't succumbed too much to the wealth and superiority complexes evident in some of the nearby towns and villages. It still seems to be a real town, albeit rather too dependent on holidaymakers.

Some houses have been converted wholly or partly into holiday lets, and a number of small shops have been converted to flats. However, many of the Victorian and Edwardian buildings were originally boarding houses, and before that local families would let out their cottages and live in a shed in the garden if necessary while the holidaymakers were here, so the most recent changes simply maintain a practice that has been going on for a



p10 ↻ couple of centuries.

Visitors come for sea and sand, as some of them did with their parents fifty years ago; or they may just come (as I did) to get away from cities and suburbs and find some peace and quiet, or to walk in the woodlands or along the coastal path. Even today, people newly arrived from big



cities are surprised at how much more relaxed life can be in Norfolk. I once spent a day in August walking twenty-odd miles along the Norfolk seashore (not including Yarmouth or Cromer) and saw only four other human beings, one of them on a horse. A friend living just outside Cromer said he could walk a similar distance inland and scarcely touch a main road, sticking to footpaths and little lanes. ("Why've you got all these *lanes*?" asked one visitor from the London suburbs. "Oooh, we haven't got any lanes in Orpington").

A different class of visitor – seen in a Victorian lantern slide.

[Norfolk Churches website](#) describes them very readably. Some are used for concerts and the arts; the same goes for several of the big country houses and estates.

Cromer was a sea-bathing resort from the 1780s, and was soon 'discovered' by a small group of

↻ **p12**

Outside the towns, those lanes connect villages that once housed farm labourers and tradesmen who may well have looked for their marriage partner no further than their own or the next village. They can still be a bit separate from the world – more than half of Norfolk's villages have no shop at all, and public transport can mean a bus into town once or twice per day, or per week.

Places like Cromer and Wells were always better connected because of their seaborne commerce, which included bringing coals from Newcastle and timber from the Baltic, not to mention fish from both coastal and Icelandic waters.

By medieval times, when Norwich was the second city in the land, Norfolk had 700 parish churches, most of which still stand though some have been declared redundant for Christian worship – Simon Knott's excellent



A Norfolk lane (with informal passing place) near Cromer.

p11 ☞ interconnected wealthy families – Barclays, Birkbecks, Gurneys and Hoares, all of them leading figures in the world of banking. They bought or leased substantial houses and estates in the vicinity, and each year they would decamp from London and Essex for the summer, bringing with them their many children and some of their servants. The advent of the railways in the late nineteenth century brought a different class of visitor who could travel on the Cromer Express from London, or from the Midlands via the railway junction at Melton Constable. When I first came to Cromer a little over 30 years ago, “Leicester Fortnight” (when the factories there all closed for a summer break) was still a

big thing, when Cromer newsagents stocked the Leicester local papers.

In prehistoric times the Thames did a northbound turn through east Anglia and its estuary was here. Mammoths roamed this part of Norfolk, and much work has recently been put into promoting the so-called “[Deep History Coast](#)” stretching from West Runton, three miles west of Cromer, where in 1990 an almost complete mammoth skeleton was found, to Happisburgh, 14 miles south-east of Cromer, where in 2013 the footprints of early hominids were found dating back over 800,000 years – the earliest known human footprints outside Africa.

see also . . .

Earlier in the year, I was discussing with Angela (not his real name) the matter of reduced fees for compiling indexes. He/she proposed that the beginner, the recent graduate of our esteemed training course, may reasonably accept remuneration below the rate recommended by the Society because the skills being offered to the client are inchoate, and the chances that the result will be exemplary are somewhat reduced. A long list of credits, the argument runs, speaks of an indexer’s competence, of a certain reputation among the clientele. Better always to go with the old hand, and hence the junior must settle for a more modest income and wait for the backstory to develop.

This seems to me to be a narrow and conventional view both of recent graduates and of revered veterans. There will certainly be some trainees who possess exactly the natural mindset to be brilliant indexers, and who will shoot out of the traps like greyhounds, keen as mustard and whip-fast. Of course there will be others who need to ease in gradually, picking up technique and skill as they go along. But this is no reason to pay them less. They may have virtues that compensate for a lesser degree of aptitude: diligence, patience, thoroughness. Slow and steady may also win the race.

At the other end of the spectrum, long experience can hardly be depended upon as a guarantee of indexing excellence. Bad habits may be acquired over the years. Corners may be cut out of custom so that they cease to be noticed. Well-worked routines may be apt to ignore subtly differing demands made by different texts and indeed by evolving patterns online. And the demands of concentrated analysis over long hours may take their toll on the older exponent. With age, stamina decreases. Eyesight grows less sharp. Tiredness can lead to errors that go unnoticed – after all, nothing is more challenging to keep focused on than lists of numbers, where a 6 for an 8 or an 8 for a 9 can be so easily overlooked.

The later stages of a storied career may turn out to damage a great reputation. I recall with not a little pain seeing *Resurrection Blues*, the penultimate play by Arthur Miller, at the Old Vic in spring 2006. A titan of post-war American theatre, Miller was rewriting the text up



Maximilian Schell and Matthew Modine in *Resurrection Blues*.

to his death a year before the London production, and two earlier drafts had been mounted to scant acclaim in the States. Kevin Spacey, then running the Vic, hired Robert Altman to direct the production. Were it in my gift, I would add Altman, along with Martin Scorsese, to Andrew Sarris’ movie-making Valhalla published at the end of the 1960s, *The American Cinema* [Dutton 1968]. As it happens, at the time of the release of his British-located movie *Gosford Park*, Altman was the last creative artist whom I interviewed in my career as a journalist, and fascinating he was too. He was a vastly original director who, as was usual among his generation, started out in the theatre, and this was his last ever production of a stage play. A starry cast was led by the great Maximilian Schell, who had taken the acting Academy Award for his defence attorney in *Judgment at Nuremberg*, a fine docudrama now inclined to be overlooked, and a truly magisterial performance. The Miller was, I believe, his last appearance on a stage.

It was almost certainly the most dispiriting evening I ever spent in a theatre audience. The critics were unanimous in their scorn and the limited run ended a week early. The play was calamitously bad. As schematic and pretentious as any first attempt by an over-literary teenager, it was inhabited by clunking cyphers, a shock to encounter from the creator of such complex and ☞ p13

p12 ➤ acutely analysed characters as Eddie Carbone, Joe Keller and Willy Loman. Had it been submitted by an unknown writer, it would certainly have been dismissed out of hand. Altman's direction was a sham-ble, betraying no sense of theatricality, evidently blind to what urgently needed to be deployed to bring this sterile text to life. Schell walked through his role, unmistakably disengaged and suggesting contempt for both play and audience. It was just horrible.

This somewhat extended tangent is by way of suggesting that long experience and regularly lofty levels of accomplishment are no guarantee of a jackpot being hit every time, that those well used to being revered may very easily slip into taking licence for granted. This may happen in any field, not just that of the theatre, but equally not excluding that of the index. We are all human. We all have good days and bad, achievements and failures, and they are not unfailingly clustered at the outset or indeed the twilight of our careers.

So on which occasions is it acceptable to accept a reduced fee? Answer came there: "none". We are trained and tested professionals and we should never agree

to work below the rate for the job. Unless the special circumstances may be clearly measured in quantities of effort (and whenever is that the case?), there are no arguments for taking a pay cut to please a client, whether writer, editor or publisher. Why should it be the indexer, whose overheads are not picked up by a benign employer, who agrees to subsidise the speculator offering the job? Why should it be the indexer, who doesn't earn when falling ill or going on holiday, who surrenders income so that the clients may continue to be paid on their days off?

If a parsimonious publisher cannot afford a proper indexer, let the work be undertaken by an outlier who has set up without credentials, or by a program that has yet to learn to tell Napoleons or Caesars apart. It will soon be clear what is lost by failing to pay the going rate.

Members of the Society of Indexers, whether newbies or oldies, damage the market for us all by undercutting their fellows. We may not be unionised, but we need to behave as though we are.

The Locator

Local Groups

Three Choirs

We continue to have Zoom meetings in between gatherings throughout the year. Anyone is welcome to join us to chat about indexing or anything at all.

Our last actual meeting was in May at Cirencester to see the Corinium museum. As usual we met for coffee before going into the museum which is full of Cirencester's Roman history and well worth the visit.

Lunch afterwards was at the Black Horse pub where we had a whole area to ourselves so we could chat over our meal before heading for home. By the time you read this, we will have met again at the Ashmolean in Oxford.

Pam Scholefield
threechoirs@indexers.org.uk

Yorkshire/North West

"The oldest public library in the English-speaking world" is quite an accolade. This title is held by Chetham's Library in central Manchester, which was the location of a meeting between members of the Yorkshire and North West forums on 20 April.

Members attending were **Ann Kingdom, Joan Dearnley, Paula**



LEFT TO RIGHT: Sheree Mosley, Ann Kingdom, Joan Dearnley, Gillian Lonergan and Paula Clarke Bain in Chetham's Library. Picture by Paula

Clarke Bain, Gillian Lonergan and me. Prospects augured well when the

sun came out, the trains ran without a hiccup, and members who ➤ **p14**

LOCAL GROUPS

p13 ☞ wished to eat first met easily at the Cosy Club at the nearby Corn Exchange. Then followed a personal tour with one of the librarians, which was both interesting and awe-inspiring. You could tell it was a



ABOVE: Chetham's Library
BELOW: Medieval door, with cat flap



quality establishment. They even had a 2nd edition of Henry Wheatley's *What is an Index?* available to view. Worth noting is that annual membership of the Society back in the day was one guinea.

The eponymous library is named after Sir Humphrey Chetham, a prosperous and philanthropic textile merchant and landowner. Having never married, he bought the site around 1651. It had fallen into disrepair during the turbulent period of the Civil War, but had previously been a medieval college house. Chetham, who died in 1653, was a great believer in education, and made provision in his will for the site to be used to establish a bluecoat school, a library – the first public library in the North of England – and for five small libraries to be placed in churches in the poorer local parishes.

The tour captured the spirit of the building, much of which predated Chetham's time, with cloisters, a baronial hall, and even medieval cat flaps in some of the doors – a necessary means of keeping rats from the nearby river at bay. The library itself is housed upstairs to protect it from flood and damp. The oldest of the collection is on show in the dark wood panelled alcoves, with two-thirds of its collection in 'stacks'

behind closed doors. Originally, the intention was to house all books in print, but the aim is now restricted to items of local interest. The shelves bear witness to the use of chains which were used to keep the books safely in place. Readers would have to take a stool into one of the alcoves in order to read their chosen text.

One of the five smaller libraries has been bought back by Chetham's library and is now housed in the Reading Room.

Annexed from the Reading Room is a small alcove where Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels met and collaborated in 1845 in their quest to study and improve the conditions of the working classes of Manchester.

Not only is the building fascinating in its own right, but it is still a working building. The historic rooms are regularly used for meetings, and members of the public may attend (having booked an appointment) to read their text of choice. Alternatively, there is an extensive online archive available through their website. Now operating as a charity, the library finances itself through various means including tours such as ours, and is well worth a visit.

Sheree Mosley
yorkshire@indexers.org.uk



Chains being used to bind the front board of a book to the shelf. The books are arranged with the pages rather than the more valuable binding facing outwards.
Pictures by Sheree Mosley.

Who's Who

Executive Board

Chair & Members Services	Nicola King chair@indexers.org.uk
Secretary	Philippa Jevons secretary@indexers.org.uk
Vice-Chair	Sue Goodman vice-chair@indexers.org.uk
Internet	Ruth Ellis website@indexers.org.uk
Marketing	Tanya Izzard marketing@indexers.org.uk
Training	Rachel Gee training@indexers.org.uk
CPD	Melanie Gee cpd@indexers.org.uk
Minutes Secretary	Lyndsay Marshall
Without portfolio	Ruth Martin

Committees

Training Course	Kim Birchall training@indexers.org.uk
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Office-holders

Office Manager (also Training, Fellowship and Workshops)	Paul Machen admin@indexers.org.uk
Training Course Co-ordinator	Kim Birchall tccoord@indexers.org.uk
Website Content Manager	Ann Kingdom website@indexers.org.uk
Groups Co-ordinator	Pam Scholefield groups@indexers.org.uk
Social Media Co-ordinator	Ruth Ellis publicity@indexers.org.uk
International Representative	Ann Kingdom international@indexers.org.uk

The Indexer

Editor	Mary Coe editor@theindexer.org
Indexes Reviewed	Christine Shuttleworth indexesrev@theindexer.org