

The foundation of the Society of Indexers

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In 1956 G. Norman Knight (1891–1978), a freelance indexer of 30 years standing, knew of no-one else in that line of work. He had taken up indexing as a part-time activity in 1925, in addition to working as a civil servant and writing innumerable letters, articles and books on freemasonry and chess. He placed an advertisement in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 28 December requesting anyone who was interested in forming a society for indexers to write to him. He received several dozen replies and then hosted 'several discreet luncheons' at the Civil Service Club, of which he was a member, to sound out some of those who had replied with a view to providing an initial complement of officers for the Society. The Society of Indexers (SI) was formally inaugurated at 10.30 a.m. on Saturday 30 March 1957, eighty years after Henry Benjamin Wheatley had founded the first professional association of indexers, the Index Society. The Index Society had merged with the British Record Society a few years later and a representative of this society was amongst the sixty-five people present at SI's inaugural meeting, as well as representatives of Aslib and the Library Association. One of the founder members, Professor William Hechscher, even flew in from Utrecht expressly for this event.

At first the Society was run from the homes of various officers, but as it grew in size it moved out to offices, first in Mermaid Court near London Bridge which it shared with SFEP (Society of Freelance Editors and Proofreaders) and later to a series of locations in Sheffield. Our current office is still in Sheffield in the Woodbourn Business Centre, and run by our full-time office manager. At first the Society was run by a Council, but as the membership increased this was replaced, in 2004, by a smaller Executive Board based around directorates and a larger Consultative Committee which represented the grass-roots membership. At the same time more of the administrative work was undertaken by full- and part-time staff in the Sheffield office. In 2007 the Society celebrated its 50th anniversary and became a company limited by guarantee, which meant that the Executive Board became a Board of Directors which had to run the Society in accordance with the Companies Act. The Consultative Committee continued to meet until 2010, when it was disbanded.

One of the main aims of the Society is to promote excellence in indexing. To achieve this it set up a training course, the first of these being a series of six lectures in 1958 in London. A correspondence course run by the Rapid Results College was established in 1973, followed ten years later by a Book Indexing Postal Tutorials (BIPT) course. The first edition of the Society's distance-learning course, *Training in Indexing*, was published in 1988 and has been updated several times, with the online version launching in 2010. Workshops have been held in London, at regional group meetings and as part of SI's (now annual) conferences, and have also been available online since 2013.

Over the years SI has produced a number of publications. The most important of these is *The Indexer*, a learned journal which first appeared in 1958 as a biannual publication, moving to quarterly publication in 2008. From 2019 it will be produced by Liverpool University Press. The Society's newsletter started life as a typed sheet of A4: it was renamed *Sidelights* in 1996 and has been issued four times a year since then, moving to electronic delivery in 2015. *Indexers Available*, a list of qualified indexers designed to help editors find an indexer, is another publication that went electronic. It was first published as hard copy in 1982 and then became available online in 1998 when the SI website was established. In 2004 the hard copy version was discontinued and the online directory was relaunched in 2017 as the Directory of Professional Indexers when the updated website went live.



Awards are also important to the Society. The first award to be created was the Wheatley Medal for an outstanding index, established jointly by the Library Association and SI in 1960. The Carey Award (for services to indexing) was established in 1977, followed by the Bernard Levin Award (for services to SI) in 2000 and the Betty Moys Prize (for the best newly accredited indexer) in 2002.

The Society has had to keep pace with the breakneck speed of technological advances, with its members moving from indexes composed of entries on hand-written slips of paper delivered to compositors to indexes written using dedicated and sophisticated software delivered by email either as free-standing Word documents or in a variety of embedded forms. A newsletter entitled *Microindexer* was published between 1983 and 1994 to help ease the transition from keeping slips in shoe boxes to computer files. The latest innovation has been the creation of a National Indexing Day, first held on 30 March 2017 to mark the Society's diamond jubilee.