

GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Developing a significant collection

Indexing

Historical societies contain a wide range of materials, often not available in other collections.

As well as published books, newspapers, society publications, documents and scrapbooks, records relating to organisations such as local government, properties, schools, churches and businesses are often kept in local history collections.

Indexes of items need to be compiled in order to make the information in these resources accessible to researchers.

An index may be described as a list of terms together with references showing the location of information relating to the term. An index is designed to help researchers locate information easily.

The terms plus location references may be arranged alphabetically as in the index at the back of a book. In a computer index, however, the terms plus location references can be entered in any order to be selected and sorted as required by the researcher.

Computer indexes can be created using

- word processing programs such as Microsoft Word,
- a database such as Inmagic DB/TextWorks,
- a spreadsheet such as Excel or
- specialised indexing software such as MACREX or CINDEX or SKY

Before starting an indexing project indexing guidelines need to be prepared. A decision needs to be made as to format of the index – the index may be printed or it may be an electronic index. Consideration also needs to be made as to how researchers will use the index. Many databases allow the use of combinations of keywords using Boolean search logic so if the end product for the index is such a database it is necessary to be aware of this before starting the project.

Indexers should familiarise themselves as much as possible with the content of the project before starting. This will help when deciding on terms to use for indexing.

Basic rules for indexing include Be Consistent, prepare and use Authority Files for names of people, organisations and places and use a Thesaurus for subjects.

ANZSI - Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers – www.aussi.org – is a useful website for those interested in indexing. ANZSI runs indexing workshops and the Indexing Resources section of the website provides useful information.

The RHSV also holds indexing workshops and the book by John Adams, *Indexing for historical societies* is available from the RHSV.