

'Discursive, dispersed, heterogeneous' ...

indexing *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

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In 1990 I wrote a hatchet job in *The Indexer* about the 1935 edition of T. E. Lawrence (TEL)'s account of the Arab Revolt of 1916-18, the classic *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Bell, 1990). Jonathan Cape, his publisher, had rushed this out after Lawrence's sudden death, with the text being indexed as it was set. For 684 pages of text there were just nine pages of index, divided into 'Index to place names' and 'Personal index'; no subheadings or topics were included. Names were given at their barest – 'Joyce', entered simply thus, was not a lady of the desert, but properly 'Joyce, Lt.-Col. Pierce Charles'. Headings were attended by many lines of undifferentiated page references.

Jeremy Wilson, the foremost scholar on Lawrence, author of his authorized biography, and editor and publisher of volumes of Lawrence's letters, saw that article, and through the succeeding years, when I compiled the indexes for those volumes, often referred to his intention to challenge me to provide a proper index for *Seven Pillars* when he produced the volume himself. In 2003, that time and that challenge came.

More – the 1935 edition of SP had (but) 250,579 words. TEL's version published (in six copies only) in 1922, had 334,566 – and this latter was the one that Wilson reproduced. The printed text made 813 pages, plus prelims, illustrations and appendices. Many were the problems it presented for indexing, even beyond such length.

The author himself had described *Seven Pillars* in these terms, in a letter to Charlotte Shaw (Lawrence 1923):

... it's more a storehouse than a book – has no unity, is too discursive, dispersed, heterogeneous. I've shot into it, as a builder into his yard, all the odds and ends of ideas which came to me during those years ...

And he proved himself no indexer's friend in the matter of consistency. He wrote in his preface to the 1935 text:

Arabic names won't go into English, exactly ... There are some "scientific systems" of transliteration ... I spell my names anyhow, to show what rot the systems are!

Well, thank you, Colonel Lawrence.

Moreover, TEL had originally intended to index the book himself. Wilson thought that one reason for his abandoning the plan was that he realized how much information the text lacks – full names, ranks, places, dates. By assiduous research in the archives of World War I, Wilson discovered and supplied much of it; new and valuable information regarding the course of the Arab revolt. The (full-page, eventually) introductory note to the index began:

In *Seven Pillars* Lawrence frequently provides a surname only. He also claims to have disguised identities, particularly of minor characters. Despite this, comparison with contemporary documents shows that a large number of the names are real. In many instances it has been possible to add further information here, such as initials or forenames as well as rank and regiment. The ranks given, however, are indicative only, since there were many changes in rank, and temporary ranks, during the Revolt. Generally, the ranks given were held towards the end of the war.

As for the Arabic names – so many, so variously presented, so lacking in distinguishing detail! A retired diplomat was consulted as to these, striving to correct and standardise spelling, while I provided what glosses I might to distinguish Abdulla from Abdulla, Ali from Ali.

Thus, both personal and place names, the sole type entered in the despised 1935 index, caused much grief to the indexer of 2003. But there was much to be indexed besides. Of the content of the book, E. M. Forster, reviewing the 1935 edition (which he described as 'as big as a bible'), outlined the course of the Arab Revolt, and commented (Forster, 1935):

That is what the book is about, and it could only be reviewed authoritatively by a staff officer who knows the East.

That is what the book is about, and *Moby Dick* was about catching a whale.

For round this tent-pole of a military chronicle T.E. has hung an unexampled fabric of portraits, descriptions, philosophies, emotions, adventures, dreams. ... He has also contributed to sociology, in recording what is probably the last of the picturesque wars. Camels, pennants, the blowing up of little railway trains ...

So there were many types of index entry to be added to the 1935 version: a miscellany of topics deriving from military history, with the movements and components of the various national forces, and theory, the course of the Arab Revolt, international politics, geology, Eastern travels, Beduin life and tribes, and TEL's personal agonies of the soul as well as his daily life in Arabia.

TEL had provided chapter headings and running titles in the 1926 subscribers' abridgement of *Seven Pillars*, printed in small capitals above the text in the 1935 edition. Many of them seemed to provide a perfect summary of the page's contents, such as:

IMMORALITY OF BATTLE – STRANGENESS AND PAIN – DETACHMENT – ARABIA PROPER – THE PROBLEM OF POPULATION – NOMADISM IN ACTION – TIDES OF WANDERING – GROSSNESS OF TOWNS – PREACHING – FREE-WILL – FUTILITY – LUXURY AND GAIN – FIGHTING DE LUXE

I had observed in my unfortunate article about the 1935 index:

Barely basic indexes at the back of the book contrast with detailed subject analysis of the text found atop each page. What subject headings and subheadings are here, had they but been assembled and properly arranged in the index!

So, now was the moment for me to do just that: incorporate in the index the author's already devised terms for what he meant to convey in or by particular passages. In went those quoted above, as main headings or subheadings as appropriate. The entry for the Hejaz Armoured Car Company included these subheadings: MOTORING JOYFULNESS; TOURING ABOUT; LUST OF SPEED. When one camel bears TEL on an amazing journey across frozen snow and over a ridge after a deep fall, his page-heading is A CAMEL'S GLORY. The subheading in the index for this camel included GLORY as an unexpected sub-sub.

It was essential to make it clear that these terms of TEL's reproduced in the index were of the author's own devising. They were printed in SMALL CAPITALS, as in the original text, with an explanation included in the index's introductory note.

Not all the chapter or page headings could be used: many were ironical, or could be understood only in actual conjunction with the relevant text. For instance, King Hussein takes great pride in his captured Turkish brass band. He telephones a party of British officers visiting his son Abdulla in Jidda, and has the band play while the officers

called solemnly one by one to the telephone, heard the band in the Palace of Mecca forty-five miles away ... Storrs expressed the general gratification, and the Sherif ... replied that the band should be sent down by forced march to Jidda, to play in our courtyard also.

TEL's page heading here is DIPLOMATIC AMENITIES.

Other headings were good jokes, but not transferable to the index. A chapter devoted to the laying of mines on the Hejaz railway to blow up passing trains is headed 'Waiting for trains'. Two trains pass over the mine with no effect; TEL (in Arab dress) then goes to adjust the exploder, and a third train passes, filled with Turkish soldiers who gaze out at TEL squatting by the railway, but take him for an Arab peasant. The delightful headings for these three pages are:

MISS ONE

MISS TWO

THE TURKS MISS TOO

But none of this wit would travel well to the index.

Among all the major, serious topics in the book there are delightful details of daily life and TEL's drily witty observations. It seems extraordinary that for the eighty years since the book was written, these matters have been inaccessible by index, buried in the massive text. Some topical entries are books, coffee preparation, dress, food (including – medically condemned; carried in desert; shot in desert; camels killed for; eating manners), sunsets.

Other unexpected entries are:

fish: as 'mean' food 158; at Hamdh 225; bombed 338-9; shot 695
poetry: Arabic 114; TEL's enjoyment of 291; TEL thinks of at supposed point of death 326-7; chanted on march 144; *see also* Dowson, Ernest; Kipling, Rudyard; songs; Swinburne, A. C.

Unexpectedly, the longest entry in the index turned out to be that for camels. Some of the subheadings here were:

camels: riding (styles), (while asleep); food, feeding and grazing (learning to graze); stale on TEL; races; practical jokes with; killed and eaten (calf, seethed), (as food); droppings; pull telegraph poles; dislike of isolation; raided; CHARGE; casualties in battle; cross Sinai desert; endurance; night-travelling; rousing; in snow; transport and training of; bombed

One camel unfortunately dies of mange, after TEL points out its condition to its Arab owner, who waxes eloquent about the wonderful veterinary service they will establish after taking Damascus, but fails to treat his animal. TEL gave the heading to that page, SPANISH CASTLES. Very clever, but of course unusable in the index. I substituted

veterinary service, envisaged

The humorous nature of other entries can be discovered only by turning to the text cited. The entry

medical treatment, Beduin: for broken bones; for fever; for snake-bite; for wounds

refers in the second case to 'burn a hole or many holes in the patient's body'; in the third, to 'bind up the part with a snakeskin plaster, and read some chapters of the Koran to the sufferer until he died'; in the record of the last, 'Mifleh brought up to the wounded men the youngest boys of the party, and had them spurt into the wounds with their water, as a rude antiseptic'. As for the first case – no, I really cannot repeat those details here.

There are some passages in the text that might be better remaining unindicated; but I felt censorship should not be exercised in an index. So those following some index entries to the passages cited will find deep unpleasantness. These include

animals: TEL hates

negroes: TEL's attitude to

women: TEL's attitude to

TEL himself was the reporter and narrator of this history, but it was not an autobiography, and I was spared making a full index entry for him. However, there were passages of soul-searching and introspection that could go under no other heading but his name; indeed, PRIVATE TROUBLES was the running head for three pages of the book, and

MYSELF for another eight. There were also references to his written works, and several photographs of him. I gave him this minimalist entry:

Lawrence, Thomas Edward (TEL): PRIVATE TROUBLES 42-4; 30th birthday 678; self-analysis 678-85; private motives and ambition 812-13; diary and notebooks 658, 679, (diary quoted 816-20); *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* 4-5, (and diary 658, 679) [and the illustrations cited]

The sheer length of this history made the minor mentions a particular problem. Running the subheading-less lists of page references together, at the front or end of entries, could provide long strings, out of the chronological sequences of the subheadings. I decided instead to integrate the minor references into the sequences in their chronological places, with brackets enclosing them instead of subheadings preceding them; as for example:

Murray, Lt.-Gen. Sir Archibald: personality 41, 347; General in Egypt 41; heads Intelligence Department 42-3; (53, 98); interviews TEL 100-1; (121, 164, 166, 169, 200, 201); attacks Gaza 202, 237; (239, 340); raids Nekhl 238, 342; sent home 346-7, 427

We had typographical difficulties, too. Small caps were used in the index for TEL's own headings; italics to indicate illustrations. I usually use small caps for paragraph headings, but these were now not available for a second category; and I wanted, in this huge index (50 pages as finally printed, pages 821-870 of the volume) to have the major entries appear in bold type to make them easy to find; but you cannot use bold type in fine press editions.

And of course, it was all done to a tight deadline.

There is to be yet more fun ahead. Wilson intends to publish TEL's war diaries and letters – and to have their index combined with that of *Seven pillars*. Moreover, he runs the TEL website (www.castlehillpress.com), and means to cumulate there online all the indexes I have done to his various TEL publications: *Lawrence of Arabia: the authorized biography of T. E. Lawrence*; *T. E. Lawrence: correspondence with Bernard and Charlotte Shaw Vols. 1 and 2*; *T. E. Lawrence: correspondence with Henry Williamson*; and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

Sometimes I feel that my involvement with T. E. Lawrence is to prove lifelong ...

References

- Bell, 1990. Hazel K. Bell, 'First find your index', *The Indexer* Vol. 17, April 1990, page 11
<http://www.aidanbell.com/html/hkbell/fyi.htm>
Forster, 1935. E. M. Forster, 'T. E. Lawrence' in *Abinger Harvest*, London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1936, pp 165-71
Lawrence, 1923. *T. E. Lawrence: correspondence with Bernard and Charlotte Shaw, 1922-1926*, Castle Hill Press 2000, page 33

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