

Ryerson Index Inc

President's Report

Presented to the AGM on 17 November 2021

Welcome everyone to our thirteenth AGM as an incorporated organisation.

Five days ago, I uploaded the eight millionth record to the Ryerson website. To say this gave me an immense feeling of satisfaction is an understatement. It is a milestone that was not even a consideration 23 years ago, when we indexed our first entry. To see us reach eight million entries makes me feel both proud and humble – proud to have been associated with Ryerson throughout the journey, and humble to know we have had more than 150 dedicated active indexers during Ryerson's lifetime, sharing the passion to create an Index which I now believe to be the largest online repository of Australian death information held anywhere.

Following the travails of 2020, 2021 has turned into a year of significant achievement for Ryerson, despite the covid-induced lockdowns which many of our indexers have endured. In no particular order, we can celebrate:

- Eight million records! (please forgive me for labouring this point <g>)
- Recommencement of talks given to various Family History Societies, albeit online rather than face-to-face
- For the first time in our existence, we are able to save and index every notice published in all the capital city dailies
- A start on our project to identify Funeral Directors' websites suitable for incorporating in Ryerson

The recommencement of talks to Family History Societies is a very important step in keeping our name front-and-centre in the Australian genealogical scene. My talk to the Queensland Family History Society, followed by a subsequent mention at the workshop associated with the Port Macquarie conference, raised the interest of a number of societies. One result was a large zoom session, co-ordinated by the Newcastle FHS, whereby I spoke to representatives of about a dozen NSW societies in one session, bringing them up-to-date with the latest Ryerson developments.

Our access to the metro daily papers has sometimes been an on-again, off-again affair. The News Corp and Nine papers are not a problem – we have had access to them all for some years – but two cities (Canberra and Perth) have in the past proved troublesome.

The Canberra Times is an ACM paper, and fortunately a deal has been struck between ACM, The National Library, and an American organisation called Global Newsbank, to provide free access to the digital version via the National Library

eResources site. The software used to save this paper is, to put it bluntly, not very efficient, but it at least gives us a reliable supply. For now, anyway.

The West Australian is owned by West Australian Newspapers (WAN). For years it has been freely available via PressReader – at least until this year, when WAN removed all their papers from PressReader without any warning as part of a process to monetize their archive. We have since found that we are able to access their archive of back editions via a 24-hour pass at low cost, and we now do this every two months to download another batch of notices.

In the year ending 30 June 2020 we added 422,135 records to Ryerson, a lower number than we have had for some years, due mainly to the loss of notices as publications reduced, combined with the steadily-declining trend in the number of notices published. The trend continued this year – for the year to 30 Jun 2021, we added 355,615 – a significant drop on last year, and the second lowest yearly total since our incorporation. The drop is a reflection of the full year being subject to the absence of notices from closed newspapers, whereas for the year to 30 June 2020, only the 4th quarter was so restricted. In terms of the number of newspaper notices being published, we are probably now seeing the “new normal”.

However, we continue to increase the number of Funeral Director websites we are indexing, and with more due to start up from 1 January 2022, I hope that we will start to see our annual figures perform a U-turn and start increasing again.

Our corporate sponsorship was reduced this year when two of our six sponsors did not renew – in both cases the reason given was “budgetary constraints”. We have since picked up a new sponsor, and that, together with the absence of any expenses for attending genealogical events, has left us on a sound financial footing. These will go through the financial details shortly.

Last year I said “Our website continues to be one of the most reliable in the genealogical world, thanks to Rob McDonnell’s continued oversight. During the past year we had no recorded outages, a situation almost unheard of in the IT world.” and I can only repeat those words in relation to the current year under review. We are reaping the benefits of having a simple but effective website, and excellent technical support when required.

We are continuing our project to catch up with the SMH Funeral Notices (which were left unindexed on our original pass through the SMH), and this will continue for some time yet, with Robyn Golby, Roy Vickers and Kathy Conroy making inroads into the missing notices.

Back-indexing of *The Age* is our other large current project, and it continues apace, with *The Age* becoming the second paper in Ryerson (after the SMH) to pass one million records. Bob Atkins will cover the details of this project in his report.

Finally, I’d like to express my sincere appreciation to two groups of people. The committee members overseeing Ryerson have done an excellent job in another difficult year, and as all current Committee members have nominated for re-election, I urge members to support them.

The second group is you, the indexers and the looker-uppers. Another productive year from the 100 or so active indexers has been instrumental in us reaching the Eight Million target, and our lookup service continues to be well patronised – possibly too well in some cases. Access to some papers has been restricted to both indexers and looker-uppers at various times due to lockdown restrictions closing repositories, but all of you deserve a big Thank You for a job well done.

So, on behalf of the Committee, I thank all of you involved in any way with Ryerson, and I look forward to another successful and challenging year for all of us.

John Graham
President

Appendix A – Year-on-Year Figures

Looking at the figures for the number of records indexed over the past few years, we have:

Date	Records	Increase
30-Jun-08	1,750,286	
30-Jun-09	2,091,363	341,077
30-Jun-10	2,503,696	412,333
30-Jun-11	3,066,875	563,179
30-Jun-12	3,559,727	492,852
30-Jun-13	3,990,376	430,649
30-Jun-14	4,500,200	509,824
30-Jun-15	5,033,716	533,516
30-Jun-16	5,563,788	530,062
30-Jun-17	6,133,046	569,258
30-Jun-18	6,610,628	486,966
30-Jun-19	7,077,033	466,405
30-Jun-20	7,499,168	422,135
30-Jun-21	7,854,783	355,615