

Ryerson Index Inc

President's Report

Presented to the AGM on 28 November 2023

Welcome everyone to our fifteenth AGM as an incorporated organisation. As we look back on 25 years since Ryerson was founded, we have much to be proud of.

The year to 30 Jun 2023 has been our most prolific ever, with the Index increasing by 581,629 entries. There were a few reasons for this.

1. For the first 3 months of the year, we were still adding backdated records from the NSW Probate Index (NSWPI)
2. Overall, the NSWPI contributed almost 40,000 current records in calendar year 2022 – that is 40,000 records we would not have added in prior years.
3. An emphasis on back-indexing the major Melbourne dailies, and funeral notices from the SMH

This influx of data meant we passed the nine million record mark on 28 June, only nineteen months since we had passed eight million – a fantastic achievement.

However, there is one negative factor which we have recognised – the continual decrease in both the number of regional newspapers being published, and the number of death and funeral notices being published in the surviving papers. Both of these are outside our control, and we can only be reactive to the changes within those groups. Our increasing reliance on Funeral Directors' notices helps in this regard, but FDs are also not immune – two FDs which we index have shut up shop in the past six months, and left their business to neighbouring FDs. Our response to this has to be to keep including further FDs in Ryerson, but here we are hampered by being unable to include FDs who don't have a website archive. In short, we have picked most of the low-hanging FD fruit, and now have to look harder to find suitable candidates.

Our corporate sponsors continue to support us very strongly. As at 30 June we had five sponsors, the same number we had 12 months previously. However, in July and August 2023 we added another 3 (two new, one returning after a change of management), and our financial position is very healthy, as shown in the Treasurer's Report. The lack of recent genealogy fairs in their pre-covid format has meant little expenditure in this area during the year.

We have agreed to join one of our sponsors – Juris IT, a law firm in Sydney – as they introduce a service to allow law firms to identify wills they hold which relate to deceased persons. This endeavour, once started, is expected to provide a small income stream to Ryerson, as Juris IT checks each will against our database. Time will tell if this idea has a market.

One very positive happening is that our exposure to genealogical societies has never been greater. More and more societies are using Zoom to allow visiting guest speakers to present, often at no cost to the Society. I have given six such talks this year to societies in Qld, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania, where only one of them could potentially have been considered for a day-trip and live talk in pre-Zoom times. .

Last year we introduced the concept of Life Membership, generally to be awarded to no more than two people each year, and announced at the AGM. This year, the Committee has agreed that two of our indexers should be so honoured – and they are Julie Ashford and John Nance.

Julie started indexing the St George Leader at the beginning of 2005, and retired at the end of August 2022. That's 17½ years on the one paper. For most of that time (until 2016) it was a 2-day-per-week paper, reducing to a weekly in 2016. Julie was one of our most reliable indexers – she kept delivering, regular as clockwork, and almost always mistake-free.

John started indexing in mid-2005, when he answered my appeal for an indexer to cover the Manning River Times. He has been involved with numerous papers over the years, lately having taken on the Daily Telegraph (every day) when Sybil Jones retired, as well as covering his local Fairfield and Liverpool papers, The Age (2 days per week) and his local Funeral director. Add in some back-indexing, and John regularly produced between 30,000 and 50,000 entries each year. He has been a major contributor to the success of Ryerson.

Congratulations to you both.

Turning now to back-indexing, our project to catch up with the SMH Funeral Notices (which were left unindexed on our original pass through the SMH) continues in the capable hands of Kathy Conroy, Robyn Golby, and Roy Vickers, who continue to make good progress in what is a very lengthy project.

Back-indexing of *The Age* is our other large current project, and I will leave it to Bob Atkins to report on progress – which is considerable.

The Committee recently decided to appoint one of our members to the new position of Social Media Monitor. Given the all-pervasive nature of social media outlets these days, it has become necessary that we keep on top of what people are saying about Ryerson, so that we can correct any misconceptions before they become “fact”. The comments during the year by a “professional” researcher (professional only in that he accepts payment for research, and not because of his ethics) have highlighted the fact that Ryerson’s reputation is our most important asset.

The member appointed to the new position is Shari-Lea McLean – one of our younger members, probably known to most of you, and someone who already has her finger on the social media pulse. Shari will report to the Committee.

Finally, I’d like to express my sincere appreciation to the committee members overseeing Ryerson, who have done another excellent job, especially during the period when I was hospitalised and unavailable. As all current Committee members have nominated for re-election, I urge members to support them.

The second, but probably the most important group, is you, the indexers and the looker-uppers. Our active list has shrunk to 70 active indexers, but your output has increased. Thank you for making Ryerson the success it has become.

The Committee 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
30-Jun-22	8,421,163	566,380
30-Jun-23	9,002,792	581,629