

# 17th UKSG Annual Conference

UMIST, Manchester, 11 - 14 April 1994

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## THE STUDENT VIEW

*Each year the UKSG offers sponsored places for students. This year twelve were invited. They found the Conference interesting, instructive and enjoyable. Meeting a cross-section of the serials community, both at work and at play, was particularly helpful. We are pleased to publish the report submitted by Steven McDonald which summarises the various aspects of the Conference.*

With Manchester bathed in spring sunshine the choice of UMIST as venue for this year's UKSG Conference provided an ideal setting. Pleased to have been invited to attend as a student representative I was looking forward to hearing lively discussions that would provide a more 'real' context for my studies and give me plenty of ideas to pursue in my dissertation. As delegates we were warmly welcomed by Albert Prior and at the opening Michael Day, UMIST Librarian, assured us that the conference themes would reflect the concerns of all those involved in the 'information chain'. Even Monday's keynote address, 'Energy from waste materials' may have prompted some librarians to devise lucrative schemes for income generation!

Much of Tuesday, however, focused on resource management issues and several speakers discussed the impact of continued funding constraints. Ian Snowley led us through the process undertaken at MAFF of negotiating book and serial supply contracts as part of the Government's move towards market testing. Although this process was deemed beneficial in terms of cost savings and improved service, points raised later in the workshop on subscription agents sought to challenge the efficacy of such an approach particularly with

respect to the time taken. Subscription agents also criticised the lottery-like nature of some tendering exercises where service quality seemed to count for very little. This was felt to be especially acute in the growing number of cases where the tendering decisions were often outside the influence or control of the librarian. This stimulating workshop concluded with a plea to information professionals to ward off such threats.

The perennial problem of attempting to meet growing demand with diminishing resources was addressed by Sheila Corrall who argued that the problem has been compounded in recent years by the proliferation of electronic sources which have altered the parameters of collection management. A New Access Model was put forward in which 'free' core services are differentiated from fee-paying on-demand ones. Although this presents information professionals with many challenges it is also an opportunity for us to practice our particular skills.

Not surprisingly the recently published report of the Joint Funding Councils' Libraries Review Group (Follett Review) featured prominently in this session. Alasdair Paterson addressed human resource issues in academic libraries 'through the figure of the legendary Nellie' while Thomas Graham's paper highlighted its major recommendations. It was interesting to hear the emphasis upon resource sharing between institutions in the areas of acquisitions and provision for researchers. For as well as raising copyright and pricing issues one likely outcome is a changing role for subscription agents. The need to find more efficient and cost-effective ways of delivering resources to users should provide opportunities to move away from straight

document delivery and towards acting as intermediaries or information brokers, especially for electronic products.

The theme of Wednesday's papers was electronic communication and we were given insights into its many and varied forms. In 'Publishing via the network' David Pullinger described how the InterNet was providing new modes of access to and delivery of information. Developments at the Institute of Physics Publishing included the transmission of colour and mathematical displays. But whilst users can clearly see benefits of these innovations, the challenge is to realise similar potential with regard to the large scale publication of scholarly electronic journals. This would appear unlikely while there is insufficient material of the quality currently submitted to the print-on-paper journal.

Steven Harnad addressed this issue of electronic quality control in more detail in his entertaining and provocative paper. He argued that the principle of peer review was no different for electronic journals, it was only the perception of the InterNet as an anarchic wilderness that discouraged many researchers from publishing on it. Convince them of the Net's "papiral similitude" so the argument goes and the real advantages of this new medium - the interactive potential of peer commentary - will be unleashed. The success of electronic publishing as a serious and viable channel of scholarly communication is probably not in doubt, but I am sceptical about the level of support within the academic community especially given the pressure researchers are under to publish in prestigious (printed) journals.

Continuing the theme Anne Ramsden gave an account of the prototype electronic library system (ELS) at Milton Keynes. A large image and text database of course materials is available to students and staff via their desktop workstations. The project's initial success is largely dependent on computing and imaging technologies, but as these advance attention will focus on the students' reactions. Early evidence presented suggested that while the ELS speeded up document tracing it also impeded in the search for answers within articles when compared to hard copy. For those keen to see the potential of electronic communication realised, these more

deep-rooted cultural factors perhaps represent greater obstacles than the development of the original technology.

Completing the session Tony Addyman gave further evidence of the electronic explosion when he explored the InterNet. Perhaps not a topic for the faint-hearted, we were guided through the many gigabytes that comprise this vast 'space' that attracts up to 20 million users worldwide. We were introduced to Archie and Veronica as just two of the tools available to access this enormous information resource and given the reassurance that at least one benefit was its ability to keep you better informed than your tutor! For me though the InterNet remains an unfamiliar entity, shrouded in jargon and rather daunting to use. Being part of the "biggest thing" on the planet will require a great leap of faith.

The final morning of the conference began with two perspectives on community/campuswide information services (CWIS). Michele Shoebridge described how a partnership between the library and computing services at Birmingham University had resulted in a wide range of information from weather news to careers information being made available across campus. It was interesting to hear how the success of the service, which attracts up to 400 accessions each day, has prompted a debate over where control for the service should lie. Currently the library acts as coordinator, but as CWIS become more sophisticated the political considerations are likely to increase as institutions seek to protect their corporate image from free-for-all access. In the second perspective Mary Davies highlighted the role of CWIS in providing access to information sources, current awareness services and electronic document delivery at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund. On this last point we were given further evidence of the cultural barriers to electronic communication, for although 85% of researchers were interested in using electronic journals only a third of these were willing to surrender their printed equivalents.

Picking up the earlier theme of electronic communication, John Lindsay's paper examined the likely implications of the electronic network on the academic community's relationship with publishers and librarians. This paper and the

discussion on publishing trends that followed was useful in bringing together several of the conference themes and for showing the wide range of options represented. The paper looked at how the academic community could use the network and computer-aided publishing to bypass traditional channels and speed up the process of scholarly transmission. However, while this may reduce the burden on librarians, a more serious threat is that the network could be overwhelmed with unrefereed work. In the discussion one delegate asked why it was that printed and electronic journals were so often portrayed as mutually exclusive. A panel member alluded to the possible ulterior motives as to why refereeing procedures hadn't been devised for the network by academics. And on the emotive issue of paper's diminishing role defenders of the printed work argued that both the infrastructure and the critical mass of academics was lacking and that even on cost grounds electronic journals were not necessarily cheaper since 70 % of production costs are taken up by the editorial process.

To wrap up proceedings Alan Marchbank gave a richly entertaining talk on the "Back

Numbers" exhibition running at the National Library of Scotland. Illustrated with many slides and amusing anecdotes, it was a fitting end to the conference programme.

For me it was a highly enjoyable four days not least because the chance to listen to and talk with people representing such a wide range of organisations revealed many aspects of information work that previously I knew very little about. Discussion and debate during the conference also signified how rapidly the world of information changes and the challenges it throws up reassured me too that career-wise I am heading in the right direction.

Throughout the conference I found the atmosphere very convivial. I would like to thank the UKSG Committee and the sponsors of my place for their hard work and support and I hope that it is not too long before I find myself heading for another UKSG Conference.

Steven McDonald  
Department of Information and Library Studies  
Loughborough University  
Loughborough, LE11 3TU



*The exhibition in full swing*



*Hands across the Atlantic*

*Albert Prior greets  
Cindy Hepfer, President of NASIG*



*Dutch and Irish delegates enjoy a chat at the Conference Dinner*

### **Clog Dancing**

The evening entertainments forming part of this year's cultural kaleidoscope included a tuba quartet, a Sixties disco and a dinner & dance in the Town Hall, but none aroused more curiosity than the prospect of clog dancing in the Barnes Wallis Restaurant. Quite what this would entail nobody seemed certain, but surely their clogs wouldn't resemble those wooden things tourists bring back from trips to Holland!?

Towards the end of Tuesday's dinner amid the chatter and clanking of glasses, the speculation ceased when twenty girls prettily dressed in black and white costumes adorned with red frill and wearing solid clogs entered and stood poised ready to perform their first routine. These were the Fosbrook Clog Dancers who, spurred on and cajoled by their leader, brought with them a distinctive northern feel to the evening with their impressive renditions.

The accordion and fiddle music that accompanied the different dances was played by the dancers too, and occasionally simultaneously. Lancastrian and Gaelic traditions were reflected in the 'folk' nature of the performances, and a number were devised by the girls themselves. Many of them were champions in their own right, but it was the ability and versatility shown by all the girls in flitting with ease between the various routines that kept our attention rapt throughout. Having been enthralled ourselves, it soon became clear (to the dismay of some) that enthusiastic applause wouldn't compensate for us not having a go too. And while the merest hint of audience involvement sent some nimble-footed members scurrying to the nearest exit, those less conveniently seated were invited to join the dancers in the middle of the floor.

With faces already red from the prospect of making fumbling attempts at clog dancing we

also had to roll up our trousers, allowing for impromptu nobbily knees and hairy-leg contests that at least diverted attention away from the dancing! Fortunately we were spared the clogs and instead merrily sauntered round waltzing with our partners before twirling them away ready to resume once more. After this interlude it was the turn of the girls and we hastily went off to retrieve a partner. Pretence at order soon vanished though and the choreography degenerated into farce as we desperately tried to keep to the frenetic pace of the music. It was great fun and when the end eventually came we were ready for the bar and just nicely warmed up for the sweaty Sixties bop that was to follow! *Now, how did it go again... swing to the left, swing to the right, do-se-do and clap clap clap...*

Steven McDonald  
Loughborough University

*Fosbrook Clog Dancers*

