

# 18th UKSG Annual Conference

University of Exeter, 3 - 5 April 1995

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## THE STUDENT VIEW

*This year nine students were awarded UKSG sponsorships to attend the Annual Conference. From their reports submitted to the Committee it is clear they found the experience of meeting a cross-section of the serials community, both at work and at play, instructive and enjoyable.*

*We considered this report by Andrew Hampson of Loughborough University to be an excellent summary of the various aspects of the Conference.*

There may be better venues than the Peter Chalk Centre at The University of Exeter, this year's location for the UKSG Conference, but I'd like to know where they are. The pristine facilities and beautiful surroundings combined to produce a stunning first impression when I arrived as a student delegate, keen to hear about the ways in which people in the serials information chain intended to navigate a passage through the current period of 'turbulence'.

With the conference reduced to three days, there was no time to waste. Delegates were braced in their seats as Derek Law of King's College London introduced an identity parade of serial killers and their associated crimes. He suggested that electronic resources don't seem to solve the problem of unacceptably high costs and offered a word of warning to publishers that higher education institutions could reclaim their intellectual property by retaining copyright and communicating research results electronically over SuperJANET. An update on the work of the Follett Implementation Group for IT was provided in the areas of electronic journals, site licensing and decentralised document delivery while the need to find new ways of training information professionals and end users for the Internet was insisted upon.

The emphasis on training to adapt to new technologies and meet the demands of constant change in the working environment was continued by Ann Lawes of TFPL. Librarians are faced with the need to take on business attitudes, and to retain flexibility by developing transferable skills. The downsizing of organisations has resulted in increased workload on individuals. Personal time management skills, are a priority. The theme of empowerment was taken up, with the future for libraries being seen in terms of cross-functional teams working on specific projects.

I was informed that the evening entertainments are usually based on a cultural theme taken from that part of the British Isles the conference finds itself in.

Monday evening diverged slightly from that aim, but with no less success. Chris Beckett hosted the first ever UKSG quiz. If there had been any doubts about the interest likely to be expressed, they were soon dispelled by the sight of about twenty packed tables glowing with intellectual vigour. The wonders of technology were turned to good use as questions and answers, both eclectic in nature, were conveyed around Devonshire House Refectory at the speed of light. For those who failed abysmally, there were wooden spoons; to those who excelled, medallions were presented. The rest of us were content with our anonymous mediocrity which we hugged to ourselves, like thermos flasks.

The theme of Tuesday's papers was 'The Changing Economic Environment'. John Cox of Carfax gave a publisher's view. In assessing the past, he saw 1975 as a watershed, when research activity, and hence article output, doubled, but library budgets did not. There was no way libraries could keep pace. He saw such pressures

increasing as research assessment exercises drive academics to publish more. Defining a place for publishers in the twenty first century, he focused on responding to the needs of authors and readers. Reductions in delays, particularly of the peer review process, were needed and electronic publishing could help in this. He stressed the need for reasonable profit, fair dealing and access to information for libraries. Responding to Derek Law's proposition that higher education institutions should retain copyright, he called it "a daft idea". He argued that the loyalty of scholars is subject centred, not institution centred.

The atmosphere created by this provocative paper did not diminish as Chris Beckett of Blackwells presented a deliverer's view of the economics and future of document delivery. His perspective on the attitudes adopted by those in the information chain towards document delivery was that users are happy, but naive; publishers see it as a revenue opportunity; libraries perceive it as both a nuisance and benefit; and subscription agents see it as a threat and then an opportunity. That the future of document delivery is inextricably linked to the opportunities and threats presented by electronic publishing seems undeniable. It was suggested that this would create new groupings of value adding functions, with the major problem being "cracking the branding issue". The problems faced by subscription agents were seen to multiply, as the

management of site licences becomes increasingly complex.

These issues were raised in the workshops. Discussion CD-ROMs licensing agreements centred upon establishing a consensus about the content of such agreements in order to resolve the conflicting demands of all parties. As long as publishers can control the number of simultaneous users there seems no reason to impose geographical restrictions on multi-site networks. Many questions were posed in the workshop on electronic journals looking at coordination, funding, and responsibility for such documents. The issue of longevity was a real concern and means of archival storage and access needs to be developed.

Both papers in the afternoon session confronted the problematic choice between 'just in case' and 'just in time', as related to collection management. Geoffrey Ford of the University of Bristol described how market forces have burst into universities, creating situations for which coping strategies have to be found. The devolution of budgets to academic departments has flung them into a purchaser-provider relationship with their library. The financial consequences of academic decisions on information provision has resulted in "deficit subjects". Access rather than holdings

*During the Conference Dinner in the Great Hall of the University, delegates received fraternal greetings from October Ivins, NASIG President, and Peter Bongers, Chair of the European Federation of Serials Groups*



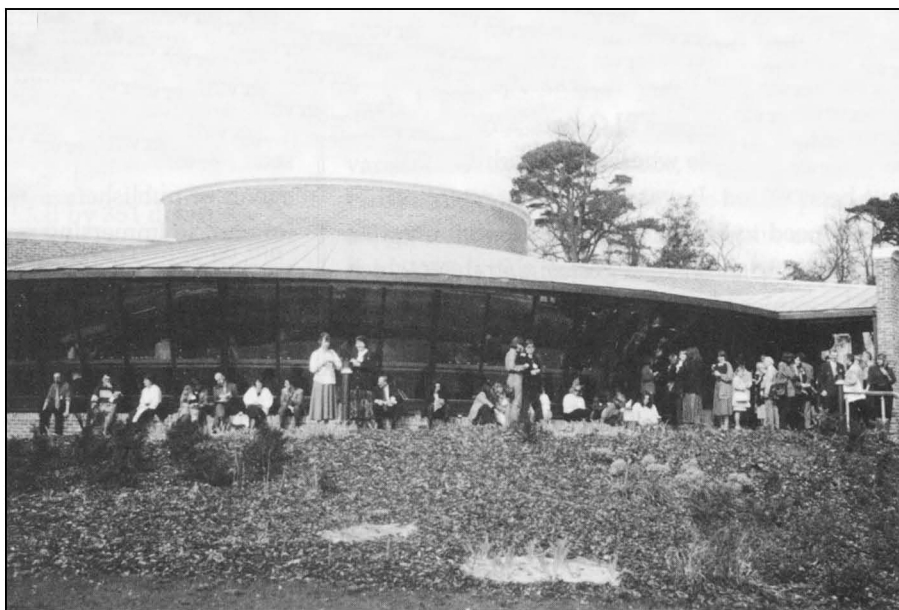
is one way to cope. A rough calculation suggested that 19.3% could be saved on periodicals by using inter-library loans.

The experiences outlined by Roger Brown of SmithKline Beecham showed that the grass is certainly no greener on the other side. Corporate library budgets have been squeezed as the companies they serve strive to cut costs. This, coupled with advancing technology and higher customer expectations, is driving change. In response, SmithKline Beecham are building an Information Centre at their Harlow site where access to information through document suppliers is seen as the way ahead.

Tuesday evening we found ourselves back in the cultural melting-pot with a barn dance that followed the conference dinner. For those first-timers amongst us who dreaded to think what participation might entail, our suspicions were ultimately confirmed: it's about making a fool of yourself. There was no barn, no bales of hay, but the band, complete with accordion and fiddle, gave it that authentic note. It could have been the exertions of the day, or the twirling of too many partners, but as the Great Hall was transformed by the swirling disco lights, I thought I saw a shadow slink out the doorway - Hardy's ghost perhaps?

The final morning of the conference was structured around 'The Serials Life-Cycle'. In the opening session, Linda Bennett and Paul Bowker of the University of Huddersfield combined to propose a new framework approach to serials publishing. The roles of, and relationships between, publishers, librarians and booksellers were analysed in a series of value chains. It was suggested that business performance could be improved through collaboration. A value adding analysis proved that new roles overlapped current boundaries. Revising the business

process, a Role Activity Diagramming model was produced which could have an impact on serials publishing. What resounded for me in this paper was that we should never rest content with what we've got. All of us should scour our routine activities for new ways and best practice which can improve the cycle that goes on round about.



*Delegates enjoying the sun outside the Peter Chalk Centre during a break in proceedings*

By this stage in the conference no-one could but be aware of the impact financial constraints are having on all sectors. Thalia Knight of the British Library of Political and Economic Science described the practical implications of this when it comes to implementing a serials review exercise. The cost of surveying users has to be considered as this can eat into the savings made by cutting subscriptions. Above all users need to be informed about what is happening and why. The process is staff intensive and methods of monitoring serials usage are problematic. In assessing the move towards access rather than holdings, we were reminded that "holders" are required to supply the documents. It leads to the central questions: what are the parameters of responsibility for such libraries? And who will pay? This serves to highlight the need for a systematic, national acquisitions policy with individual libraries collecting, in depth, in select areas.

The need for cooperation and collaboration to be established nationally was reaffirmed by Valerie Ferris for the National Preservation Office who was concerned with the retention and preservation of serials. Damage has occurred with the increase in document use brought about by improved publicity and access and with age. Online bibliographic sources have made users more aware of what is available in their field. One solution recommended to ensure preservation for access was by providing a surrogate for the original document. The RLG Arts Serials Project is one such example where one hundred titles have been filmed. It was argued that retention policies need to be defined by individual libraries under specific subject categories; a strategy which must be implemented if important collections are not to be lost.

To bring proceedings to a close, Carolyn Sharples of Book Aid International reminded us of the glut of information we have at our finger tips in the Western world. The situation in African universities is far different, where obtaining access to core printed journals is often impossible. There are none on the shelves. She described the contribution of the International Campus Book Link Project in supporting universities in Sub-Saharan Africa by matching UK journal donations to these institutions via a database. There is also a lack of bibliographical information as publishers have abandoned this market. Librarians are unaware of current material due to lack of catalogues. This project

provides a channel for such an imbalance of resources to be redressed.

There was something of interest for everyone in this three day programme. It was a revelation for me to discover the diverse number of organisations involved in, or connected with, the complex world of serials. Although friction exists, professional relationships seem to be characterised by an essential interdependence. Informal discussions heightened my awareness of the possible directions and challenges which I face, teetering on the brink of a future career. No sector - librarians, booksellers, subscription agents or publishers - is standing still. I look forward to immersing myself in the ideas and work that go into forming that 'living stream'.

I would like to thank the UKSG Education Committee and the sponsors for enabling me to attend this enjoyable conference. It should be noted that I'd never have applied for a sponsored place without the UKSG Roadshow visiting my department and raising awareness of the aims and activities of the Group. I hope that, in the words of a certain thwarted comic-strip character, "I'll be back"!



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L to R: Peter Bongers, Chair EFSG, Marja van den Bosch, Secretary NVB Serials Group, with their Dutch colleagues during the Cathedral visit

The afternoon of Wednesday 5 April was devoted to an optional visit to the Gothic glories of Exeter Cathedral and the manuscript treasures of the Cathedral library.

Exeter Cathedral is a comparatively small building with nave and choir of almost equal lengths. It has towers from the Norman Period but was built mainly between 1270 and 1370. It has an unbroken length of vaulted roof over 300 feet in length, which is the longest continuous stretch of Gothic vaulting in the world.

The Library is reached through a labyrinth of mediaeval passages and is located in a small room with barely enough space for the books and

the librarian himself. Peter Thomas was, however, delighted to discuss his collection with the enthusiastic professionals who invaded his sanctuary in small groups throughout the afternoon. Delegates were able to see a collection of incunabula including Anglo-Saxon charters, the Exeter Domesday Manuscript and the tenth

century Exeter Book. This is a collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry and a few rude riddles which are alas intelligible only to scholars of early English. The volume contains one third of all known Anglo-Saxon poetry, none of which is duplicated by other extant contemporary works.

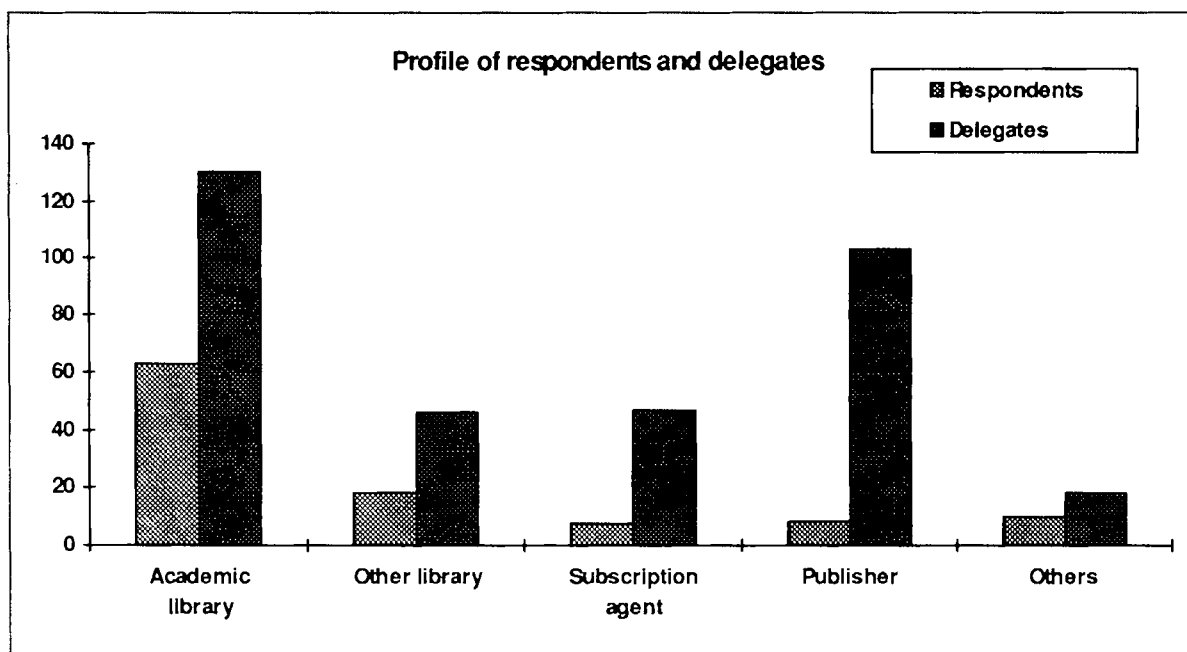
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### UKSG Conference 1995: Conference questionnaire evaluation report

The Conference was attended by 351 delegates (including exhibitors). 108 people completed the Conference Evaluation Form and we are most grateful to them for taking the time and trouble to do this.

Fig. 1: Profile of respondents and delegates by organisation

respondents. Assessment of the accommodation varied from excellent to poor, with those in Birks Hall coming off the worst. Since hotels providing a high standard of accommodation are expensive, the UKSG is committed to using university venues in order to provide value for money. In addition universities are constantly upgrading their rooms, with the result that the UKSG will be able to offer all ensuite rooms from 1996 onwards.



One hundred percent satisfaction can always be a goal, but is impossible to achieve. However, with 96% of respondents rating the conference good to excellent, it seems reasonable to conclude that there was a high degree of general satisfaction with the product, particularly when the conference was also considered to have lived up to their expectations by 91% of the

A major factor in determining overall satisfaction is the content of the conference and the fact that 90% of respondents liked the balance of the content underlines the overall satisfaction with this year's conference. Publishers, a group significantly under-represented in the survey sample, gave the balance its lowest rating, with two, of the nine who responded, finding a lack of balance in the content. Individual comments

identified a bias towards the specific problems of librarians and not enough on topics of mutual interest, such as: the relationship between librarians and publishers; what publishers can do to make life easier for librarians, and primary versus secondary publishing. Even amongst the library delegates there was a feeling that academic libraries received undue emphasis at the expense of special libraries.

Given the profile of delegates and respondents shown in Figure 1, the emphasis on library matters, specifically the academic library, has some justification but the UKSG is committed to encouraging dialogue between all sectors of the serials world and for this reason alone the comments from publishers and special libraries express an important concern that merits attention. The section asking for suggestions for topics produced a good list, which identified some weaknesses and will be helpful to the Committee in drawing up programmes for future conferences.

Comments from previous conferences have been acted on and the reduced duration of the conference was an example of such action. The decision to change to three days was supported by 84% of the 100 who replied to this question, with time, rather than finance, being given as the main reason for their preference. Some individual comments did, however, refer to the lack of free time and the rush to get round everything. In view of the widespread preference for the three-days, expressed by past and current delegates, the new format will be retained for future annual conferences.

Although there was some support for reducing exhibition time in favour of more workshops and for combining exhibitions with receptions, the majority of delegates' responses (86%) showed that the viewing time for the exhibition was

considered adequate. Responses from the exhibitors revealed a difference of opinion between publishers and subscription agents. Whilst the publishers agreed with the overall assessment, in three out of the eight replies from subscription agents the time was considered to be inadequate.

Time allocated to the entertainment was appreciated by all but two of the 102 who commented on the social events. The quiz gained overwhelming approval but adjustments may be needed elsewhere, notably in the volume of the music at the disco. Plays, films, recitals and theme nights are a few of the suggestions for future conferences. Some have been part of past conferences, with varying degrees of success, and all of them, together with other more serious ideas, such as evening plenary or workshop sessions, will be considered for future years.

All the comments will be studied very carefully by the 1996 Conference planning committee, and efforts will be made to deal with those problems, over which the committee has control. Other potential problems, such as queues and shortage of chairs at lunchtime, will be added to the growing list of topics to be discussed in advance with the venue administrators. The Conference committee work hard to produce the best conference possible, but the dilemmas they face are well-illustrated by the following conflict of views: delegate A said that we should have more free time and be less intensive, whilst delegate B said that we should be more concise and have less wasted time. Perhaps we have almost achieved the right mix because the majority of views lie towards the centre of the two extremes.

*John Merriman, Editor, Serials*  
*Dennis Pilling, Deputy Editor, Serials*