

19TH UKSG ANNUAL CONFERENCE

KEELE UNIVERSITY, 15 - 17 APRIL 1996

Each year the UKSG funds library school students to attend the Conference and asks them to submit a report to the Committee on their experiences. These reports show that they find the opportunity of meeting a cross-section of the serials community, both at work and at play, instructive and enjoyable. Rebecca Eyres of Manchester Metropolitan University gives a good summary of the various aspects of the Conference.

A spring Monday morning, and I found myself making the familiar journey onto Keele University's beautiful daffodil swathed campus. This particular journey was special, because I was not going as a student, as I had in the past; or taking my husband to work - now a frequent trip. This time I was to be a conference delegate at the 19th United Kingdom Serials Group Conference and Exhibition. After taking a look at my room - far more luxurious than when I had been here as an undergraduate - I set out to explore the exhibition. I was impressed with the number of displays set out in the exhibition which was soon buzzing with librarians, agents and publishers, all eager to try out the latest packages in the rapidly advancing world of serials technology.

The Conference was opened by Will Wakeling, Chair of the UKSG and Allan Foster, Director of Information Services, Keele University, who gave the keynote speech. He outlined the key issues in the electronic information services market, emphasising the vital role of quality control and the need for added value to be provided by publishers in their electronic products. After describing the problems and trends in both corporate and academic institutions, he highlighted the role of librarians in managing document collections, disseminating information, providing current awareness services, enabling better access to content, and contribution to the development of information. He insisted that information is an undervalued asset, and that strategies of provision must be driven from the mission and goals of the organisation. Users must be seen as customers, and investment must be made in IT hardware and software to enable the provision of electronic data to be integrated into the traditional service. The reduction of funds and increase in technology means that librarians must be prepared to move from the 'just in case' style of information management to the 'just in time' approach. He envisaged that the

Three regular attenders get together on the Sunday evening

Liz Stevenson, Heather McEwen and Diana Winchester



future would involve the recruitment and development of new multi-skilled professionals to formulate and manage an information strategy and negotiate the terms of service contracts both within and beyond the institution.

After lunch we were into the first of four themed sessions of talks. The first was on a topic that all academic serials librarians were anxious to hear about - the UK pilot site licence initiative. The talks were given by Bahram Bekhradnia, Fred Friend, John Merriman and René Olivieri, providing the full range of perspectives from HEFCE, librarians, subscription agents and publishers. Bahram Bekhradnia outlined the background to the initiative. He explained that three publishers were involved: Academic Press, Blackwells and IOP Publishing, and that HEFCE had negotiated two models of site licences. Both involve a payment made by HEFCE to the publishers based on the payment they gained from the HE sector in the previous year. Serials are then made available to HE institutions at a substantially reduced price, with a re-charge payment being made by the publishers back to HEFCE. This arrangement covers both electronic and paper versions of the journals. The trial is to last for three years, after which it is hoped the scheme will be managed by the HE libraries through a body such as SCONUL.

Fred Friend began his speech by stating that the single most important influence on the library budget has been the pricing by publishers of scientific journals. He claimed that in addition to the detrimental effects on libraries, the publishing

industry would suffer from the success of academic journals as academics found the costs of publishing in them too high and moved towards more self-publishing. The doubts of librarians must be addressed, as libraries would make considerable financial savings from the scheme. He hoped that the cycle of price rises and cancellations would be broken, and that barriers to the flow of information would come down. There was a need to restructure the system of information publishing. The site licence initiative does not do this, but attempts to improve the existing system.

John Merriman gave a colourful talk on the position of subscription agents in the scheme. They were genuinely worried about the possibility of losing revenue as a result of the scheme. He also made the point that agents had not been fully consulted and the timing of its introduction had caused considerable problems. He felt that there was a future for agents, as libraries need them to be involved in the move towards increasing numbers of electronic serials as well as hardcopy.

René Olivieri gave us a lesson in economics, using a series of graphs and diagrams to explain how the pricing of serials worked. He concluded that, although there were still many questions to be answered on site licensing, the advantages were clear, particularly the stabilising of prices and the collaboration between publishers and libraries.

The formal part of the first day came to an end with a series of product reviews, with publishers



A quiz team gets its head down

and agents all eager to demonstrate how much better our libraries would be with the addition of their latest products.

It was then I discovered the energy and stamina of the UKSG delegates. An hour's breathing space and it was time to head for my favourite building on the campus, Keele Hall, for a pre-dinner drinks reception. After dinner came the event we had all been waiting for with a mixture of anticipation and dread - the famed quiz. I joined friends on table nine, where Meg's Army prepared for battle, with me as chief scribe. We didn't win, but we maintained a reasonable position throughout and were by no means too dispirited to spend the next three hours on the dance floor.

The second morning began bright and early (for some of us, at least!) with breakfast at 07.30 and the first of the day's product reviews at 08.35. We then divided into appropriate groups for workshops. For me, this meant an informative discussion with a good mixture of agents, publishers and librarians on the problems of measuring journal usage. After coffee it was time for the second of the themed paper sessions: 'exploiting intellectual property'. Toby Bainton, Secretary of SCONUL, gave a fascinating talk on the flow of information and copyright. He worried publishers and academics by suggesting that the traditional signing over of copyright from academic to publisher was not legally binding as in law the copyright belonged to the university - as the employer. This was to provoke an interesting debate at question time. He suggested that in future universities would take greater control of the material being published by their employees, thus changing the traditional pattern of information flow.

Bernard Donovan continued the copyright theme by outlining the copyright myths held by librarians. He went on to question why the HE sector should be special in copyright terms. Publishers do not want copyright for control, but in order to prevent piracy and thus maintain the quality of information. He complained that the Library Association is undermining copyright by demanding that librarians have free access to all publicly

available databases. The notion of free access to electronic information is a misconception as the hardware and management of the delivery systems was being heavily subsidised by the HE sector.

After lunch there was another opportunity to divide into smaller groups for workshops. This time I had elected to join the group on the 'claims triangle' in which Carryl Allardice chaired presentations and a discussion between publishers, agents and librarians on their perspectives of claims and what role they expected each of the other parties to fulfil. I think this was enlightening to all concerned, although questions were raised to which no-one really knew the answers.

Back at the Westminster Theatre it was time to hear Charles Oppenheim's account of the latest developments in citation research. He drew our attention to the strong correlation between the number of citations a department has and its level on the RAE scale. He then suggested that citations would be a cheaper form of assessing research than the measure currently used, the message being that 'citations do count'.

The afternoon concluded with Peter Stubbley's description of journal exploitation at St George's Library of Sheffield University using display. He pointed out that librarians must exploit serials to their full potential if they are to be worth subscription costs. He explained that in

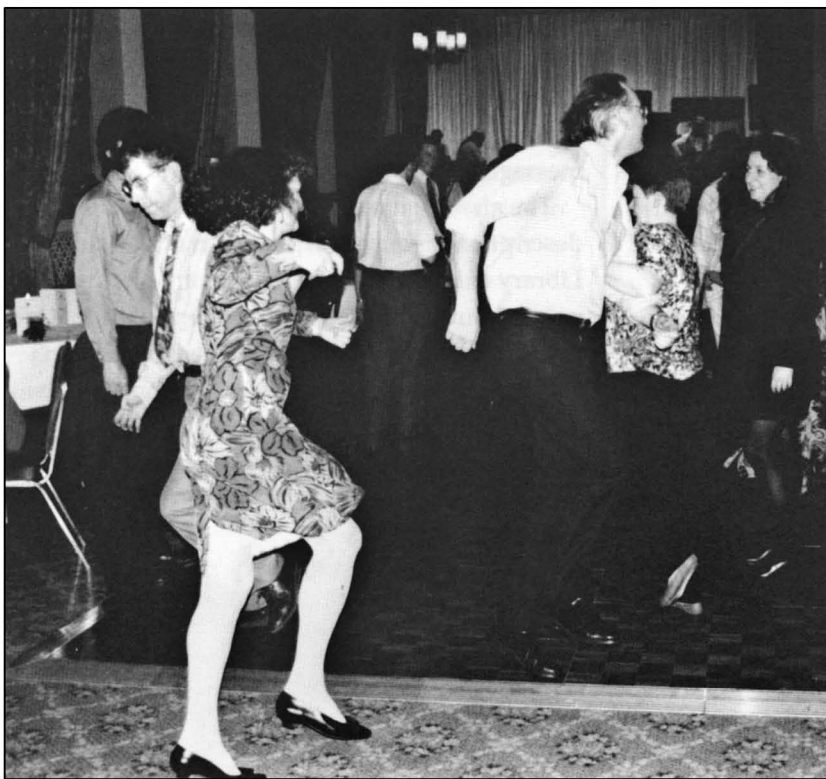
*Julia Gammon, President of NASIG,
brings greetings from the USA*



St George's this had been done by creating a separate area near the entrance to the building, specifically for the display and perusal of current issues. He finished by setting us thinking about the forms which electronic journal display might take and highlighting the problems of current systems which will need to be addressed in the future.

The second evening was even more energetic than the first. The conference dinner provided an excellent opportunity to relax and make new friends, but the calm did not last long. No sooner had we finished our coffee and it was up on the dance floor for the famous UKSG barn dance. For those still upright after a breathless two hours of energetic dancing the disco was back to play us into the next morning.

Julie Gammon, President of NASIG, in hot pursuit of Will Wakeling, Chair of UKSG



On the final morning every minute was precious with six speakers and a panel discussion to be fitted in before lunch. Chris Rusbridge began with a presentation on 'Electronic Journals in the eLib Programme'. He outlined the variety of projects currently taking place and went on to draw our attention to the issues of sustainability,

publishing and delivery costs, and the acceptability of electronically published papers in the academic world. The key issues from a librarian's perspective seemed to be 'to catalogue or not to catalogue', 'preservation' and 'copyright'. He also raised the important question of whether electronic journals can obtain enough commitment to keep them alive for hundreds of years, highlighting how vulnerable and fragile this form of publishing could be without careful planning.

Damien Keown gave us an insight into the publishing of an electronic journal - *The Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. He described the history of the journal and its publishing format. The most notable aspect is that there are no issues; each article is added to an archive and a new volume is started each year. This method reduces pressure on editors by eliminating the need for publishing

deadlines and reduces the time between submission and publication. He emphasised that this form of publishing was only possible because of the presence of the Internet, as there is no intention to produce a paper version of the journal.

The area of learned societies, publishing and electronic journals was addressed by Alan Singleton. After a description of the way some of the main scientific learned societies were moving towards electronic publishing, he highlighted some of the major issues which need to be considered: firstly, the Internet, which still has problems of access, speed and delivery; and secondly,

the question of loss of revenue resulting from multi-site institutions no longer needing to subscribe to multiple copies.

The final delivery of the session was of journals of the future by Howard Nicholson. He drew our attention to the possible radical changes in the nature of scholarly communication resulting from

electronic publishing. He suggested that in future texts would be shorter and take the form of notes and letters rather than full-length scholarly articles. The electronic format will allow for full-text searching so that information workers will have to adapt to new smaller units of information and rapid retrieval systems. Future publications will be more interactive with a greater potential for non-commercial publishing. The role of the librarian will be to train people in accessing remote information and provide the equipment to do so, rather than the information itself. He finished by explaining the management issues libraries will need to address if they are to take advantage of the improved efficiency of scholarly communication systems which the new forms of publishing will offer.

The morning ended with a vivid, shocking and memorable presentation from David Hayman and Graham Matthews on disaster planning. David Hayman had been in charge of the Disaster Recovery programme in the aftermath of the Norwich library fire. His pictures and descriptions emphasised the enormity of the tragedy and most importantly helped us to focus on the issues which would arise after such an event, particularly the importance of a policy for dealing with the media, health and safety issues for staff on-site and the service running

elsewhere. Graham Matthews highlighted the importance of risk assessment, planning and training. Many librarians left the conference wondering uncomfortably whether they were in fact adequately insured, whether budgets would allow them to install canopies over the shelving and whether all those archives were really best placed in the basement after all.

There was just time for a last look at the exhibition and a quick lunch before the coaches left for the station, and for those fortunate to have the time, the visits. I joined the small and friendly party going to Little Moreton Hall, a local sixteenth century manor house. The visit was enhanced by the spring sunshine that had finally broken through the rain and had the unexpected addition of a Granada TV crew filming *Moll Flanders* in and around the Hall. The guides were fascinating and no-one minded having to halt their afternoon tea and remain motionless while the cameras rolled.

I would like to thank the UKSG Committee for providing the opportunity to attend this conference, and Peter Lea of the LIS department at MMU for drawing it to my attention. I hope to be back in the future!

Rebecca Eyres
Manchester Metropolitan University