



News from the European Federation of Serials Groups

Third European Serials Conference
Trinity College,
Dublin, Ireland.

27th September 1996

Dear Auntie Sadie,

Just thought I would drop you a line from Dublin as the conference has just finished and I know you like to keep in touch with what's going on.

[Auntie Sadie, now retired, used to be librarian for the Rothwell Temperance Brass Band. Keeping track on the second euphonium part, or rather looking under the bus seats after a concert in Roundhay Park, was her main problem but the combined claiming modules of today's library systems could not have matched her ability to memorise her entire serials cardex. Quoting 10 years of claim rates and price increases on The Bandsman, and Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Weekly was a favourite party trick.]

This was my first trip to Dublin. On enquiring from the taxi driver on the weather forecast, I immediately warmed to the place when he responded, "it often rains in between the showers". The campus of Trinity College is comprised predominantly of 'learned' architecture built around extremely large square billiard tables with no pockets, but shoved in between are a couple of concrete constructions of unknown parentage. In one of these newer facilities was the conference and exhibition. Would it have hurt too much to build in a couple of windows? or perhaps that would have increased the contrast even more.

[Yes, Auntie Sadie was a lady of the world, much travelled courtesy of Wallace Arnold with a natural eye for quality way before Quality Management become a revenue source for consultants.]

You can read most of the papers presented in this or subsequent issues of *Serials*, which is a good job as unfortunately I missed some of them as I was talking to clients on our stand. The opening speaker Peter Vervest 'An overview approaching the millennium' did an excellent job of making us question the status quo, arguing that we must be open for radical change. Yes, not only is nostalgia not what it was but looking into the crystal ball requires new paradigms. The next morning Thomas Hoeren was not able to attend due to illness but John Cox convincingly recited the paper 'Intellectual property and copyright law in the European Union and other major jurisdictions: a birds eye view' in his dulcet tones, correctly deciding that a slight German accent would have been over the top. I liked Patrick Kelly's paper on the IRIS project, honestly describing where they had been successful, namely technically and in library co-operation, and where they had not, namely in the commercial aspects. I was disappointed with David Brown's 'Reinventing the subscription agent' which was based on his commission from the UKSG to write a report on the future role of the agent. Whilst listing various possible players who could fulfil the intermediary role in a fully electronic world he seemed not to favour subscription agents, but did not argue why. In fact the only clear message was that we had to buy the report if we wanted the full story, although his survey of SCONUL libraries is

valuable factual information for all of us, and I look forward to studying this in detail. The couple of results of the survey that he did share with us clearly indicated that libraries are looking to subscription agents to continue their one-stop shopping role in the electronic age. I missed the closing paper of Richard Charkin but understand his lively delivery formed a matching book end with that of the opening speaker.

[Auntie Sadie was ahead of her time in terms of electronic services and was a project manager for the British Empire libraries in action initiative e-by-gum-mail, see www://empire.smirnoff.edu/rothtemp.sun.html]

Product reviews at conferences used to be sometimes boring but as the rate of change increases the format of 10 minute spots worked well giving us a clear idea of the new or updated products presented. It is a shame that one company, although present at the conference, did not enhance their reputation as they declined from giving their planned presentation. I wonder why?

[Kind but firm in her manner, woe betide anyone who did not fulfil an obligation to Auntie Sadie. A mere tweak of her voluminous handbag, which once played a supporting role in an Alan Bennett play, was enough to put the fear of John Wesley in anyone.]

On the social front the highlight for me was the reception in the famous Long Room in the library and then seeing the Book of Kells (not an Elsevier title). I cannot remember visiting a more breathtaking non-secular room. During the speech by the Lord Mayor Provost High Sheriff of Dublin you could hear the proverbial pin drop, but I'm sure that as his accent was so strong everyone was just straining to understand at least one single word.

[Being a ballroom dancing gold medalist I did not mention to Auntie Sadie the Taste of Ireland after dinner entertainment, as it usually brings a tear to her eye whilst remembering her glory days at the Ridings Ballroom Championships in Scarborough.]

All in all it was a worthwhile conference with a good balance of formal and informal discussion. The chair of the federation has been handed over from Holland's Peter Bongers to Denmark's Claus Vesterager Pederson, with a plan to hold ESC IV in 1999 in either Budapest or Helsinki.

Your loving nephew

David Sidebottom

PS. I visited St. Patrick's Cathedral this afternoon and came across an old door with a hole in it dating from 1492 (the door that is, not the hole). Evidently the Earl of Kildare cut the hole and through it stretched out his arm as a token of reconciliation to his sworn enemy the Earl of Ormand who had taken refuge in the Chapter House. By 'chancing his arm' and taking this initiative the two parties were reconciled and peace was restored. What a shame current day Irish factions don't follow this example. Or relating it to the conference, who will be the first publisher to 'chance his or her arm' to offer transaction-based pricing models alongside subscriptions to electronic full text?

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Dedicated professionals gather at the entrance to the University Library