

Focus on UK Serials Group member

The Serials Section of The Civil Aviation Authority Library, London

Lesley Pearson, Assistant Librarian

The Civil Aviation Authority was formally set up on 22 December 1971 and assumed its full responsibilities on 1 April 1972. The new Authority was to bring together various civil aviation functions previously undertaken by the Department of Trade and Industry, the Air Transport Licensing Board and the Air Registration Board. This division of responsibilities was by the mid 1960's considered to be a source of weakness as far as the regulation of civil air transport in the United Kingdom was concerned. In 1967 the government set up a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Ronald Edwards to inquire into Britain's civil air transport, including the regulatory aspects. The publication of the Committee's findings in 1969 in its report *British Air Transport in the Seventies* recommended amongst other things the establishment of a civil aviation authority. The principle responsibilities of the Civil Aviation Authority are the economic and safety regulation of British civil aviation and the operation - jointly with the Ministry of Defence - of air traffic control services through the National Air Traffic Services. The government, through the Department of Transport, has retained some civil aviation responsibilities including aircraft accident investigation, international civil relations, policy on aircraft noise and national airports development.

The serials section is part of the Reader Services Section of the Civil Aviation Authority Central Library and is responsible for the ordering and supply of all periodical material required by any section of the Authority either in London or at any of its offices nationwide. The budget is administered by the Chief Librarian who has to approve all requests for expenditure on material and maintain a balance between the various departments. At the moment there is no policy of cross-charging departments for their expenditure on books, periodicals, maps, etc. and no specific amounts are allocated to individual sections. Each request is judged on its own merits bearing in mind its usefulness to the Authority as a whole. Currently the section maintains records for some 1,500 different titles of which 1,037 are periodicals, the remainder being made up of

annual publications, statistical material, government publications and U.S. official publications.

Like most serials sections we seem to be all things to all men or if you cannot give the job to anyone else serials will do it. Officially our functions are:

- Opening and distribution of all incoming mail to departments within the library ;
- Recording and distribution of all serials, annuals, directories and statistical material ;
- Chasing missing issues, late deliveries, damaged copies ;
- Maintaining distribution records for bulk delivery items such as aircraft accident reports, aeronautical charts and telephone directories and in some instances do the distribution ;
- Ordering of all new material acquired under the serials umbrella and the reverse dealing with all cancellations ;
- Dealing with all matters relating to payments for serials material received by the Authority at any of its units ;
- Recording and distribution of US Government publications and the scanning of the US Federal Register for items of interest to the Authority ;
- Control and upkeep of files of serial publications ;
- Maintenance of all amendable publications held by the Central Library with the exception of those originating from the International Civil Organisation (these are handled by a separate department) ;

At the moment the staffing of the section comprises one Assistant Librarian, one Administrative Officer and one Administrative Assistant all of whom take turns to man the Reader services enquiry point on a rota system with staff from other sections of the library. Each member of staff has their own area of responsibility such as invoicing, ordering and booking in but by the very nature of the work flow patterns, coupled with annual leave and sickness (not only in the serials section) staff have to be interchangeable. Previously the section also had the services of a paper-keeper who was responsible for the distribution of the mail and

the filing of material returned from circulation but these functions have now had to be absorbed into the serials section.

All records are kept manually using subscription record binders and a Kardex but this is due to be replaced in October 1988 by Dawsons SMS. This will be a stand-alone system as, at the moment, no other part of the library is automated but in due course a fully integrated system may be installed or serials may continue to be treated as a separate entity. No cataloguing or classification of journals is carried out and all back issues of journals are arranged in one alphabetical sequence. Due to constraints on storage space a rigorous retention policy has to be implemented. As we are the major civil aviation library in the country we file permanently all material relating to this field but in other subject areas we have to be more selective about what we retain and for how long. The main consideration when assessing this material is its relevance to the staff of the Authority and how often they need access to it. With some types of material such as airline timetables it is not necessary to retain the whole year only the months in which the summer and winter schedules first appear. Weeding of material is a constantly on-going task and we must be one of the largest users of black binbags in the country! On a more serious note though it makes the maintenance of an up-to-date holdings list a nightmare as retention policies for non-aviation material are always changing but hopefully once our records are fully automated this will be a much easier task.

Very little binding of material is carried out and all that there is originates in the serials section, being mainly material published by the Authority itself and the more important aviation magazines. We try to maintain a second set of material so that when items are away at binding there is no break in the service we can offer to people requiring access to it.

One major headache created for the section is the circulation of journals to other sections of the Authority. At the moment some 460 individual titles are circulated with some titles comprising 10 or more copies of the same issue all needing to be circulated. Each circulation record can have any number of "addresses" ranging from one to twelve or more. These "addresses" may be in the headquarters building in London or at any other unit in the UK or in some instances overseas. The administration of these records is labour intensive as numerous different records need to be amended or each change notified but this will be

made much easier once the records are automated. Currently every change has to be recorded in at least three different places, firstly on the Kardex entry, secondly on the circulation slips which are pre-copied to save time at the dispatch stage and thirdly in our reverse index. The reverse index as its name implies is the reverse of the information that appears on the Kardex entry, it lists alphabetically under the department all the items that are supplied to it. Constant alterations have to be made to the circulation records as the interests of the departments change, or they move rooms or even location, or staff members change.

Memberships of various organisations on behalf of staff are paid for through the serials section which at first sight may appear to be rather strange but as most of these memberships result in the Authority receiving a journal or newsletter which may be of interest to the staff as a whole the logic becomes clear. Also the Authority can make some quite substantial savings on the cost of journals by being a member of the organisation concerned and in some cases, such as aviation enthusiast groups' publications, it is the only way that they can be obtained.

The Authority receives a quantity of mail that is not clearly addressed to an individual or section and, as in many organisations, this finds its way to the library. In some instances a quick perusal of the material suggests the section that it should have been sent to but in some cases, such as foreign material which needs a translation before you can even hope to know what it relates to, a lot of time can be wasted dealing with it. The plus factor of this unsolicited mail however is that it makes library staff aware of what is happening in other parts of the Authority and in turn enables us to help enquirers find the right section to deal with their particular query.

In the foreseeable future obviously the most exciting development for the section is its imminent automation which should see an easing of the clerical workload that currently threatens to engulf the section. No doubt the next few months will see their share of confusion as we transfer all the records from the manual to the automated system and try to sort out all those problems which have crept in un-noticed over the years. Once the transition is behind us hopefully there will be time to devote to other tasks such as binding, which at the moment have to take very much a back seat due to lack of time. One thing is certain though - there is never any danger of running out of work!