

PROFILE

EDWIN SHELOCK

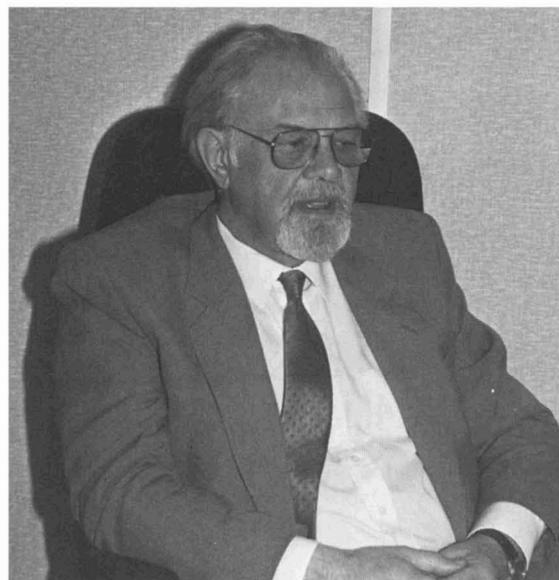
The Distribution Centre at Blackhorse Road, Letchworth is an address well known to me, but one which I had not had the chance to visit. Somehow it seemed a little incongruous to find the Royal Society of Chemistry's main publications distribution point in the middle of an industrial trading estate in suburban Letchworth, but all was revealed to me when I went to see Edwin Shelock, the Director and General Manager of the Distribution Centre.

Edwin is a well-known figure in the publishing world, particularly in learned society publishing and increasingly amongst librarians, not least through attendance at the UKSG conference and other seminars and meetings.

His time at the Distribution Centre dates back to 1975, but before that his work experience included completely different roles. After leaving Isleworth County Grammar School (he matriculated in the middle of an air raid apparently) he started training as a chartered quantity surveyor but switched directions to become a teacher. Medical problems prevented him from pursuing this career to the full, however, although he was a supply teacher for some time.

His first foray into the book world as a salary earner was when he was "about 26" when he joined W H Smith at Ealing where he stayed "for 2 or 3 years". This was followed by stints with H K Lewis and Blackwell's Eton College bookshop during which he was involved in bibliographical work and library and retail selling.

He then joined Mary Glasgow publishers, when she was setting up her first children's bookshop and this began a period (the year was 1965 or 1966) when he gained considerable all round experience - books, records, journal production, distribution of magazines to schools and publishing in general. After five years or so the need for a new challenge, coupled with increasing changes in the Mary Glasgow company, prompted him to look for pastures new and he moved to Burke House Holdings - a company involved in a mixture of publishing, printing, bookselling, stationery, etc. (publishers of amongst other titles *Aviation News* and *Ryde*



Chronicle). Here Edwin had responsibility for book sales, publishing and a considerable amount of journal distribution to newsagents and retail outlets. It was on a large scale and was a precisely run operation giving him invaluable experience for the time when he moved to the Distribution Centre at Letchworth in 1975.

What (and who) exactly is the Distribution Centre? Basically, it is an address for the Royal Society of Chemistry's operating company, Turpin Transactions. It was set up by the RSC as its publishing and distribution arm, giving it the opportunity to operate commercially and entrepreneurally as a publisher and as a distributor, not only of its own publications, but also those of other learned societies. In its early days it began to offer its facilities, on a commercial basis, to other smaller societies, some of which, as they grew later set up their own publishing and distribution operations. The earliest arrangement was with the Biochemical Society. There are now 21 or so societies using Edwin's services on a regular basis and numbers are growing continuously. Some 48 staff work at the centre and it has a turnover of close to £13m. Societies have a choice of facilities they can use in the full spectrum of publishing "logistics" as Edwin calls it - promotion, marketing, publishing, distribution and subscription fulfillment. Automation plays a significant role in the organisation. Within the concept of the Distribution Centre, Edwin can provide full services to societies, whilst each can still retain its unique publishing identity. For those academics and authors looking for a publisher, Epsilon Press, part of the Turpin organisation and likewise run by Edwin, can in addition provide a full service.

Edwin is, of course, equally well known for his involvement with ALPSP, the Association of Learned, Professional and Society Publishers, an association that is growing in significance and importance. Learned society publishing is, according to Edwin, significantly different to that of 'commercial' publishing. Publishers in societies need to operate commercially and expertly but within the boundaries and constraints of their masters, the individual societies. ALPSP has a significant role to play according to Edwin, not least in the way the larger and more experienced societies can provide help to the smaller and newer societies. It is close to being awarded research funds to enable it to investigate the effect of the availability of STM (scientific, technical and medical) published material on research workers. Such an analysis of how budget restrictions affect the research process for example will undoubtedly be of interest to the academic community and the UGC.

Edwin is also chairman of the Learned Journals Seminar run annually by ALPSP and SPE (the Serials Publishers Executive of the PA). Each year this draws some 130 delegates from publishers, libraries and subscription agents - concentrating on a specific journal topic. The theme of this year's seminar (in early April) is "One Market or Two - Looking at 1992". Equally well known now is the Working Party on Electronic Exchange of Information, of which Edwin is also the chairman. The Working Party is a co-operative venture between major publishers and subscription agents whose aim is to create and maintain standards for the way in which both parties exchange subscription information in electronic form. Already well established is the standard which allows publishers to receive annual magnetic tape renewals from agents for all their library subscriptions. The Working Party is now directing its attention to the exchange of information by electronic mail systems, e.g. for journal price and claims information.

Edwin has admiration for the way in which the UKSG has developed over the years. The Learned Journals Seminar is in fact deliberately timed to take place immediately before the UKSG's annual conference, to enable overseas delegates to take advantage of both. I asked if he felt there was indeed a need for both events and whether in fact the UKSG could serve both purposes. He feels that whilst the UKSG admirably serves its general role as the focal point for serials in the wider sense, the Learned Journals Seminar does however provide the opportunity for a concentrated look by the

industry at a specific serials topic. In global terms Edwin feels that the UK, and London in particular, serves as the ideal location for the UKSG and the Learned Journals Seminar and the aims and objectives they both promote.

Because of worldwide budget constraints, were journal circulation numbers dropping?, I asked. Edwin felt that indeed over the last 10-15 years numbers had eroded, at a rate between 1% - 3% a year. A dramatic example he gave from one of the titles the Distribution Centre handled, was one whose circulation had stood at 5,100 some years ago but which was now at 3,200. However, he now felt the rate of decrease was slowing down and the future looked a little more optimistic.

What of the future? 1992 is close and this will have an effect of harmonising journal prices throughout Europe and possibly a review by publishers of their pricing policies worldwide. Hence the theme of the Learned Journals Seminar in April. Edwin feels that the serials publishing world will not look dramatically different in the year 2000. Secondary journals will increasingly become available in non-print formats but the primary journal will still be at its most popular in paper.

Whilst occupied with all that running the Distribution Centre entails as well as his involvement with ALPSP and the Seminar, Edwin has found time to score a significant success in Russia. He handed me a press release, just issued, announcing the signing of an agreement between Turpin Transactions, Pion Ltd and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR to publish jointly a monthly journal: *Biomedical Science*. The journal will publish material representing the very best of Soviet biological science applicable to medicine and health. The combination of Soviet scientific output and British publishing expertise is the first of its kind and marks a radical development in Soviet science publishing. The agreement is the result of visits by Edwin and ALPSP members to the Soviet Union during the last year. Other projects are planned jointly with the Russians, including a current awareness indexing service with the Russian Ministry of Health entitled *Index to Current Medical Literature in the USSR* which commences publication later this year. A further manifestation of this *perestroika* in Soviet science publishing is the fact that a delegate from the USSR will be attending the Learned Journals Seminar to gain an insight into learned journals publishing in the West.

Albert Prior