

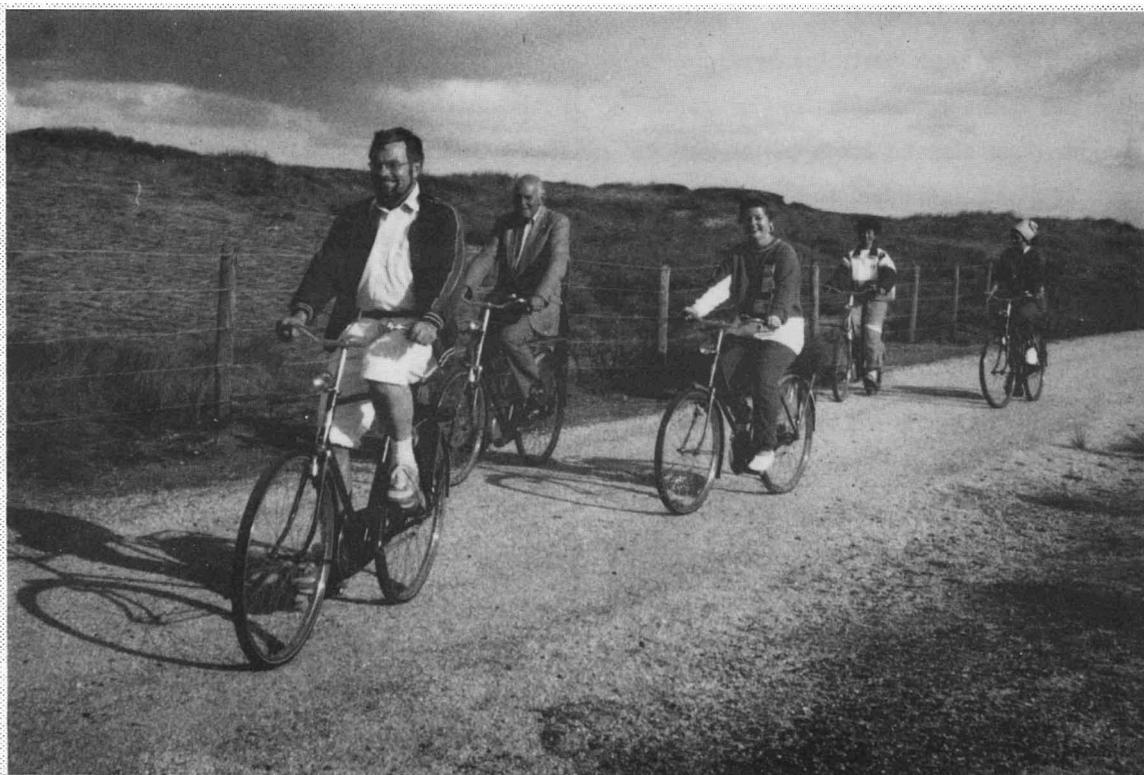
European Conference Report

Staying Upright With ESC

There is something suspicious about Dutch bicycles: there are no apparent brakes. In order to stop you have to peddle backwards. Sometimes, we felt that way about the planning of the first European Serials Conference held this September in Noordwijkerhout in the Netherlands. Everything seemed plain sailing until we approached an obstacle then we had to think how to apply the brakes. As far as the 150 delegates from 22 countries were concerned the frantic accelerations and brakings were out of sight. Professional staff at the Conference Centre were marvellous, good food, brilliant swimming pool and jacuzzi, and girls in reception who actually smiled and talked to the delegates. To this was added the usual UKSG blend of annual dinner, reception and total attention to improving delegate interaction, backed up with a

devout team of local organisers from Swets and generous support from such firms as Gauthier-Villars, Springer-Verlag, Faxon's, Nijhoff, Elsevier, Blackwells.... A most useful additional feature was the sponsorship of individual delegate places by commercial firms which enabled a greater cross section to attend, including six delegates from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Fortunately not everything was perfect; there is still room for improvement. Some of the overheads were awful. One day I am going to come in with my portable transparency-making electronic typewriter and sit between the speakers and their material until they get it right. Otherwise everyone was on their best behaviour; perhaps feeling our way to a greater pan-European view of serials. The key question was, seeing that co-operation between



John Urquhart leads the way on a "suspicious" Dutch bicycle.

librarians, serial agents and publishers had worked very well in the UK could we help spread the concept to the rest of Europe? By the end of the Conference it was gratifying to learn that the Dutch hoped to set up a similar serials industry group, while the Scandinavian model was under active discussion. No attempt was made to create a central organisation, more a working towards a federation of national or regional groups.

Let's get back to the papers and discussion. There was a certain guarded pessimism in the air. Journals as monopolies; hostile economic forces ahead; was the writing on the wall for serials? One of the most stimulating papers was by Irmelin Langermo presenting an agent's view of pricing for Europe. That was the down side. While on the up side Dag Smith of the Book House Training Centre, United Kingdom, represented the possibilities for common standards for education and training in Europe. Mr. Todorov from the International Centre for Scientific and Technical Information, USSR, outlined the perfection of the information systems in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the past which made Gitte Larsen's plan of action for libraries in the European communities sound even more

ominous. These and other papers should be available in the next issue of *Serials*, so you can judge the finer points for yourself.

Well, the Federation of European Serials Groups won't happen by itself. Perhaps now is the time to carry out some co-operative investigations into what really is the future market for *Serials* in Europe in all their forms - hard copy, microfiche, on-line, and CD ROM? What are the levels of serials management in the different European countries? And is the training system adequate? Where are the gaps in materials and systems? We have their addresses - those most eager to come to discuss common problems - so now is the time to structure the way ahead. As a first move it has been provisionally agreed to reassemble in two years time in the same place, with perhaps a larger number of delegates. Are we still too diffident about the vital role that serials are going to play in the future of European information? Perhaps serials are more important than we realise. After all, as Arnaud de Kemp put it, a book is a serial that is only published once.

John Urquhart
