

# Editorial

The bulk of this issue is taken up with papers from the UKSG's 15th Annual Conference held in Edinburgh at the beginning of April. For those of you who were unable to attend, I can assure you that it was a fascinating event with a range of speakers who sparked off debate about all the most important aspects of serials and their future.

The Keynote Address to Conference was delivered by John Maddox, Editor of *Nature* and addressed the basic question – what is the literature for? Unfortunately John Maddox' paper is not available for publication in *Serials* but he spoke of the indispensable part the literature plays in scientific advance but warned of the dangers which beset the scholarly information chain. These centre on two issues: the increasing prevalence of jargon and insensibility in the use of language; the shift in the role of academic literature away from the genuine role of communication and the sharing of discoveries to a short-term and potentially corruptible means of assessing the employability of individual academics.

The programme which followed this auspicious start was full and varied. In this issue of *Serials* we have only been able to include a first batch of the papers. These have been grouped together in this issue for the synergy of their content and a further selection will be put together for subsequent issues. My apologies if a paper you particularly wanted to read doesn't appear here.

Two themes aired at the conference are included. The first of these is the role of networks. John Akeroyd leads with a discussion of the impact of networks on libraries, tracing the development of these, the uses to which they are now being put, and some possible future developments.

Richard Coleman looked at the impact of networks on publishers. It must be admitted that the printed page cannot begin to do justice to Richard 'live' – his presentation included a graphic depiction of the relationship between publishers and libraries. However, what he says is stimulating enough and paints an interesting and, inevitably, controversial picture of some publishing possibilities.

Networking databases is covered by Godfrey Lance from a user's perspective and it is salutary for all of us working with serials to ponder how our current roles might be replaced by a direct interface between users and databases. The challenge must be to ensure that the enabling function we currently fulfil continues in whatever new form the database revolution may bring.

The second theme covered is that of the

specialist user of serials. Three papers were presented of which two are available here. Frances Tait of the BBC showed the many and varied requirements of the users of her library from a request for a definition of 'political correctness' when the concept was still a gleam in a Californian eye to details of what a 1920s dinner party would look like. How various serials help answer such questions and the difficulties of knowing what to stock make fascinating reading.

Another paper which cannot match in print the beauties of the presentation is that from Colin Will who describes the work of the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. The slides which accompanied his talk gave visual expression to the importance of the RBGE's work but without full colour cannot be adequately reproduced here.

Other aspects of the Edinburgh conference which cannot be expressed in the journal: the warmth of the Scottish welcome; the perpetual delight of meeting old friends and making new ones; the quite amazing intensity of the rain which fell.

Two papers in this issue are not related to the conference. Firstly, Albert Mullis shares details of the work which is being done by the working party on guidelines for serial publications. This work, which will be so very useful in helping publishers to make sure that all necessary information appears on their journals, is making excellent progress.

The other paper comes from John Merriman and covers the role of the subscription agent. Outlining the benefits which the use of a good subscription agent can bring, John also points out some of the things libraries and publishers do which thwart the reliable flow of journals.

The Profile for this issue is of one of the new Committee members, Ros Doig, whose non-traditional career history as a woman returner graphically illustrates that career and family can mix.

Look out also for the description of the Second European Serials Conference. If you weren't able to make it to the Edinburgh conference, don't miss out a second time. The European event promises to be just as stimulating as the April event and reading about it can't compensate for not witnessing the actual conference. And if you did get to Edinburgh, well, treat yourself and take a trip to The Netherlands to hear more good papers and meet some interesting people. But remember, you'll have to be quick to get your booking in on time.

Anyway, without more ado I turn you over to the content of July's *Serials*. Enjoy it.

**Jonathan Barker**