

# Heriot-Watt 1992: Student's-Eye Perspectives

**UKSG 15th Annual Conference,  
Heriot-Watt University,  
30 March-2 April 1992**

The narrator of David Lodge's *Small World* (1984) had already warned me of the conference beast:

But they were stuck with each other for three days: three meals a day, three bar sessions a day, a coach outing and a theatre visit — long hours of compulsory sociability; not to mention the seven papers that would be delivered, followed by questions and discussion. Long before it was all over they would have sickened of each other's company, exhausted all topics of conversation, used up all congenial seating arrangements at table, and succumbed to the familiar conference syndrome of bad breath, coated tongue and persistent headache, that came from smoking, drinking and talking five times as much as normal.<sup>(1)</sup>

And here I found myself in Edinburgh, thanks to a bursary and without so much as a large 'S' for student on my lapel badge, one of nine library students at the conference among a record number of nearly 500 UKSG conference delegates. Thirty-four organisations were exhibiting library and publishing services and products and tempting us with free gifts, chief of which was the presentation book from Springer-Verlag. John Urquhart, to the accompaniment of incessant rain, christened it "the conference of the technological problem", and here I was enjoying it. The failure of the fixed and roving microphones provided a salutary reminder of the danger of relying too heavily upon technology. A native of Edinburgh, Morag Nisbet touchingly apologised for the weather, and wisely preferred saying 'SSL' to the sibilant 'Scottish Science Library', which would have played havoc with our ears. Water and technology seemed the touchstones of the four days. Eric Davies' joke about the

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Titanic, and Richard Coleman's notion that our childhood familiarity with water will resemble our future relationship with computer technology — we notice it only when it inconveniences us — brought them neatly together.

The various stratagems speakers used to cope with that swarm of acronyms which seems to plague the librarianship and publishing professions invited admiration. Barrie Stern confided that ADONIS in fact stood for nothing at all, but got the company a usefully early entry in title indexes. Marcia Tuttle, editor of the *Newsletter on Serials Pricing Issues*, declared simply, "I don't like initialisms" (...NOSPI?), but admitted her fondness for "nicknames" instead. Nicky Whitsed was eloquent in her unpacking of LANs (local area networks) and WANs (wide area networks). Morag Nisbet confessed that FOSSIL was decided upon even *before* it was filled out to become 'Forum of Scottish Science Information Librarians'. Indeed, one speaker exercised his right not to play the game at all by pronouncing the Joint Academic NETWORK acronym as JANET, rather than the familiar, friendly and mnemonic JÄNET. I was impressed.

Thirteen papers in all, plus excellent seminar sessions ranging from David Brown's 'Journal contents online' to Beryl Morris' 'Stress management', an annual general meeting, and a final 'What if....?' panel discussion, added up to a packed and varied schedule.

Serials librarians and publishers heard how, in scientific literature, books have

given way to research articles, as the editor of *Nature*, John Maddox delivered the keynote address to answer his own question, 'What is the literature for?' *Nature* receives about 100 unsolicited manuscripts every Monday morning, and increasingly the language used in them is impenetrable. Simplicity, logic, and force characterised Einstein's clear, verbal statements of 1905. Recently, *Nature* felt it necessary to publish an author's long covering letter explaining the contents of his paper in preference to the paper itself! Insidiously, as institutions begin to determine their employee's career advancement according to the number of articles each publishes per year, pride and deceit have established themselves as tools of the scientific author's trade. John Maddox's talk was engrossing and as provocative as his title.

John Akeroyd of South London Polytechnic, Richard Coleman of Richard Coleman Associates, and Godfrey Lance of Bristol University spoke on networking. John explained that sharing among libraries works best when there is no "giver-taker relationship", while he stressed the simple truth that users do not care *where* their documents come from, as long as they receive them. Richard left us wondering whether users would care *how* they receive their documents when he entertained us with a stunning *Theaterstück*. Enacting his claim to being "not a very refined publisher", he stuffed a wooden block into an envelope and dispatched it by throwing it across the hall. More seriously, he illustrated the considerably lower costs of electronic over conventional publishing, and questioned how an author might gain control over the fruits of his intellectual labour once he has surrendered his article to a journal. Godfrey reminded us that the typical library user is not computer literate, and recommended that the librarian be the one to teach undergraduates study-support skills. However, users would need never even *visit* the library, he said, once terminals are ubiquitous outside the building!

Alternative access to serials information was the topic for Loughborough University's Eric Davies, North Carolina University's Marcia Tuttle, and the Director of ADONIS, Barrie Stern. Eric detailed the Ei Reference Desk experiment at Loughborough's Pilkington Library and he posited that an Ei network could mark a return to an age when journals would no longer be needed, as researchers become like Newton and other early scientific scholars, sending each other letters. It was precisely this new age set-up of people talking with each other electronically as never before which interested Marcia. Her electronic newsletter had given her "900 new friends", and whenever its contributors meet for the first time, they already know each other from their electronic communciations. Barrie explained to us ADONIS's two-year trial period to attempt to treble the capacity of their CD-ROMs. For quality's sake, 10,000 not 15,000 pages per disc was recently settled upon for commercial output.

Morag Nisbet told us that the National Library of Scotland, the only UK legal deposit north of Cambridge, receives about 5,000 science serials titles for its component Scottish Science Library, yet still must spend most of its scientific grant on purchasing more. Frances Tait's library at the BBC, in contrast, takes about 300 journals in total, yet must satisfy an incredible 10,000 enquiries every month. (It relies heavily upon BLDSC, she confided.) Colin Will of the library at Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden delighted us with beautiful colour slides, and detailed a periodical selection procedure whose three main criteria are: journals relating to the staff's own research interests; those containing work from staff; and those of "major interest". Jane Borcherson of Goldman Sachs International spoke on the specialist use of serials within an international investment bank, illustrating her paper with survey results answering such questions as: if you were only allowed to

read one newspaper and/or journal what would it be? (*The Financial Times* usually.)

The two final papers concerned CD-ROM: Geoffrey Smith's 'Newspapers on CD-ROM' (British Library Newspaper Library), and Nicky Whitsed's 'Networking CD-ROM' (Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School). Geoffrey provided us with one of the conference's most interesting papers, as he explored the benefits and drawbacks of this storage medium, currently used for five UK newspaper titles. (Did *you* know that newspapers' cartoons and advertisements are excluded from these archival CD-ROMs?) He hopes to see CD-ROMs increasing their storage density and allowing a facsimile approach to permit the digitization of the page image. Nicky believes that: "Discs can be controlled by a password; regrettably, people can't!" She apologised for her enrheumed voice (it was probably all that rain), but her information

slides were the best I saw. Finally - what emerged from the panel discussion? Principally, that serials are far too expensive!

My UKSG clip-board and literature provided a very professional touch to a very professional conference. Delegates were indexed, helpfully, according to author and title entry... I mean, surname and organisation. The company was stimulating, the food excellent, and the haggis properly addressed at the conference dinner. I would like very warmly to thank Margaret Graham and the UKSG for my place at their fifteenth annual conference. My only regret? That Blackwell's *didn't* provide their display of Morris dancing on April the first.

### Reference

1. Lodge, David. *Small world: an academic romance*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, p.4.

The UKSG Conference in Edinburgh seemed an ideal opportunity to gain a "real life" perspective on serials librarianship. For, hard though they try, library schools cannot teach everything. So off we set . . . three intrepid Postgrads from Newcastle Polytechnic.

#### Day 1

Arrival (Heriot-Watt is wonderfully easy to find). Parking (no problem). Registration (all beautifully organised). Tea . . . what tea? (Oh well everything else was perfect).

The reception for "first time" delegates provided a good starting point for the conference. It was encouraging to see that a huge number of other people were first timers too. Meanwhile the exhibitors were busy setting out their wares in the rooms surrounding the auditorium. The exhibition was officially opened and browsing began.

#### Day 2

The Keynote address was given by John Maddox the editor of "Nature". His thesis

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being that scientific literature is inseparable from science and that it provides a historical record of its development. The proliferation and the impenetrability of modern scientific literature however together with the pressure on academics to publish are causing the scientific record to be corrupted.

There then followed a series of three papers on the impact of networks for libraries publishers and users. This was followed by a further three papers on alternative access to serials information; the Ei Reference Desk project at Loughborough University the ADONIS project and electronic journals and newsletters.

We were offered an enticing list of workshops including: "Networking C.D. ROM" "Electro-copying and copyright" "The impact of the electronic journal on the serials industry" "Shared serials

databases” “DTP, libraries and suppliers; automated links” “Journals contents on-line” and “How good is your office environment”. the workshops attended on CD-ROM networking and automated links were opportunities for sharing experiences and self help.

### Day 3

The main part of the morning was taken up by three papers on three very different specialist libraries that use serials: The BBC The Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh and Goldman Sachs Interational.

The library of the Royal Botanic Garden was also one of the afternoon visits offered. A beautiful library built in the 60s housing many botanical illustrations monographs and serials. Unfortunately the gardens were closed due to high winds but the illustrated volumes displayed more than made up for the grey weather.

### Day 4

The two papers presented in the first morning session focused on CD-ROM, the

first on the role of CD technology in libraries that deal with newspapers; the second on networking of CD-ROM sources.

The final part of the conference was devoted to a panel discussion on a variety of What if..? questions.

The questions and answers that came up in the discussion were a distillation of many of the conference themes. The problems that librarians, serials agents and publishers face in coping with the implications of a burgeoning literature, limited library budgets and rapidly advancing technology. The serials business is changing rapidly. The “e” journal is now a serious possibility although issues such as bibliographic control and legal deposit must be tackled before electronic serials become the new form of grey literature.

The UKSG Conference is indeed an ideal opportunity for a student of librarianship as it provides a much needed insight into the real world. I would like to thank the United Kingdom Serials Group for their generosity in providing me with a place and I hope that future students will find the conference as useful and as stimulating.

I was delighted to be chosen for one of the student places on the UKSG Conference. Initially, I was a little nervous about attending, but fortunately I knew a few people already and soon made more friends. Once I had found my room, I congregated with several others for tea in the ‘Microbyte’. Later, at the reception, I met Margaret Graham and the other student delegates. Hazel Woodward also formally welcomed us to the Conference, which was a nice gesture. At dinner I met even more people, since the arrangements were informal. By the time I went to bed I was exhausted, but looking forward to the next day.

The Conference programme was packed and had been well organised. The Exhibition was interesting and I found the demonstrations particularly useful, such a

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the development to the British library’s Serials on CD-ROM. The keynote address by John Maddox assessed some of the problems facing serial literature, such as the pressure on academics to ‘publish’. These problems and his views on the opportunities offered by new technology recurred throughout the Conference, so the address served as a good introduction.

Networking formed the basis of three lectures. John Akeroyd briefly defined networking, which was useful. He went on to assess the impact of networking on policies, users and library structure. Some were positive, such as ease of budgeting and monitoring, and the fact that users can handle the equipment without a mediator;

others were negative and there was concern at lack of standardisation between search languages and techniques, as well as the impact on copyright, inter-library loans, and the need to restructure and reskill staff.

Richard Coleman's lecture concentrated on the impact of networks on publishers. His practical demonstration was amusing, especially with reference to handling by Royal Mail! It was suggested that hardcopy journals might die out altogether and that institutional publishing might replace commercial publishing for journals. Such comments were discussed later in further lectures. Godfrey Lance, in his lecture, suggested that the use of networks could bring an end to libraries altogether, with users working at their own terminals. It was an interesting idea, although I am not sure if I agree.

After lunch, the lectures turned to alternative access to serials information. Loughborough's experiment with the Ei Reference Desk was fascinating, especially when results indicated that searches by users alone were not as effective as they could be. The ADONIS lecture by Barrie Stern was especially interesting, since new improvements were suggested, such as producing sub-sets of information, or a Current Contents service. Marcia Tuttle's lecture on the Newsletter on Serials Pricing demonstrated the problems with starting up an electronic journal, but I felt her view that electronic publishing will mushroom was valid.

Later on in the afternoon, I attended my first workshop. I had chosen the ergonomics workshop, which I enjoyed immensely. We discussed the impact of the new EEC Directive and I think everyone went away much more conscious of potential health hazards in the office environment. The group was quite small, so we all got a chance to join in the discussion, which was sparked off by a series of 'worst possible scenario' slides.

By the time the workshop finished, I was full of ideas and new information. It had

been a busy day, but had not ended. After a quick shower, I met up with some others to catch the coaches to the Civic Reception at the City Chambers. We had a few hours there in lovely surroundings, with stunning views. Unfortunately, the food ran out — maybe the caterers did not think that librarians ate much! On the coach back to the University, we had a surprise tour of Edinburgh, which was great. Our driver was intent on giving us all the intricate details, such as showing us the bathhouse where Mary, Queen of Scots used to bathe in wine, which was later rebottled and sold to the peasants! Back at the campus there was a disco, which was a matter of survival of the fittest. I limped off to bed at about 1.30 am.

On Wednesday, we were given a lecture on the Scottish Science Library and how it aims to expand its services — without conflicting with the services offered by Boston Spa. The following three lectures were on specialist users. The BBC lecture was especially interesting and I felt that Frances Tait was one of the best lecturers of the Conference. It was a pity she could not have spoken for longer. The range of enquiries and the need for quick information was stressed. Colin Will's lecture on the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh demonstrated the needs of such a specialist library and the inevitable cuts taking place. The lecture on Goldman Sach's showed the range of information taken from serials, such as how the company is viewed by others and news on competitors and trends. It was interesting to note the international variety of titles taken.

The second workshop followed and this was just as good as the first. I went to the discussion on DTP in libraries, which gave me a chance to learn a great deal more about this relatively new technology. We got a chance to see Peter Stubley's 'Mac Powerbook 140' in action, which was brilliant. I had not realised the versatility of DTP and the advantages over WP.

I nearly missed the highlight of the Conference. Originally, I had chosen the

walking tour, but the dreadful weather persuaded me to change to the visit to the Falkirk Bindery of Riley Dunn and Wilson. We had a short slide show and then went round the bindery in small groups. The supervisor who took us round was knowledgeable and enthusiastic and put up with our endless questions. I was amazed at the complexity, skill and time involved. Afterwards, we were given a lovely tea and we got a chance to look at some examples of exceptional hand binding. This is a Company rightfully proud of its work and tradition.

The AGM was followed by a formal dinner. I cannot say that I enjoyed the haggis, but I am glad I had the opportunity to try it! The Scottish dancing afterwards was great fun, whether participating or watching. The piper, musicians and dancers deserved their warm round of applause.

CD-ROMs formed the basis of the two lectures on Thursday morning. Since I visited the Colindale Newspaper Library recently, the lecture by Geoffrey Smith was

interesting. His suggestion that CD-ROMs may only be an intermediate medium is worth considering. Nicky Whitsed's experiences at the Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School stressed the practical problems of installing and using CD-ROMs. This was followed by the 'What If?' Panel Discussion, which I found stimulating, since items from earlier lectures were frequently referred to.

I cannot easily explain the use this Conference has been to me, since the events are still sinking in. The lectures and workshops will definitely help me when I go into my exams. More importantly, though, the Conference has given me the opportunity to meet a variety of different people. Their knowledge, experiences and advice will prove invaluable, especially as I come to apply for jobs. The friendliness of everyone was overwhelming and I would especially like to thank Margaret Graham, as Education Officer, for her warm welcome. Naturally, my biggest thank you is to the UKSG, for so generously allowing me to attend this Conference.

This was the first year a 'first-time' delegates reception had been organised at the conference and it certainly helped to break the ice, and set the mood for the next three days.

Looking through the list of delegates I was particularly impressed with the diversity of establishments and professions represented. It was the best way to gain an insight into the overall profession of 'information work'.

The overriding theme of the conference was the electronic library and the electronic journal, and indeed, in his keynote speech, John Maddox, editor of *Nature*, spoke of "the electronic revolution".

The conference progressed onto the question of networking and its impact on the different information users. Following further discussion on integrated

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workstations and electronic journals, the message of collaboration rather than competition was strong. It was also interesting to note that in the U.S., collaboration has been an important aspect for over a decade, and yet in the UK collaboration is still received with a measure of suspicion. Can this be simply a case of mistrust or is it financial reasons, many organisations will only make their catalogues available for a price in an effort to generate income which is a key feature of many information units today.

It was particularly interesting to obtain a fresh view of the information profession from the U.S. where the electronic library is well advanced.

Despite the weather, the Wednesday visits were well attended and offered the opportunity to see a specialist library in operation. The Royal Botanical Gardens Library enabled me to appreciate that the problems of a specialist library and a public library are very similar.

The exhibition which accompanied the conference was heavy with software and hardware, as publishers sought to demonstrate how fool proof and cost effective their CD-ROMs were, nevertheless, I was impressed with the half hour demonstration afforded to me by MCB University Press.

The 'Electro-copying and Copyright' work-shop on Wednesday, considered the question of whether electronic copying and storage of material was actually covered by the current Copyright Act, or was a new clause needed? Electro-copying quite clearly has great potential for copyright infringement since policing is very difficult.

The whole question of electro-copying has thrown the information world into a

state of confusion, as authors, publishers, librarians and end users muddle through, not knowing whether they are breaking the Copyright Act, how much should be charged to receive a copy of a journal electronically and indeed how to pay for it. Licences were considered but what kind of licence. And underlying all of this was the fear that journals would be reduced in number due to inappropriate restrictions.

However one thing is very clear, copyright is a problem, and will continue to be a problem. The information world can either sit back and do nothing and allow blanket unpoliced copying to continue until the Government finally steps in with legislation that will be of no benefit to the information world, or, the information profession can take the initiative, set up its own committees and form its own policies to the benefit of information dissemination, and in this aspect, once again the U.S. appears to be leading the way.

The problem was certainly not going to be solved in a one hour workshop, but at least the discussions have begun.

I conceived the idea of attending this conference as a result of hearing excellent reports of its organisation and interest. So I arrived in Edinburgh, a city I had never previously visited, with a keen sense of anticipation. The programme held out the promise of an extremely stimulating three days and looked forward to the opportunity of listening to some distinguished speakers in the serials world.

My first impression was of surprise at the sheer size of the event. With over 400 delegates from all over the world it was easy to feel rather lost. This was to some extent allayed by the reception for "novice" delegates held on the first evening. There was a welcome opportunity for students to meet both members of the Education Committee of the UKSG and their fellow student delegates. The auditorium was almost full for the first session, an address

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from the Chair of UKSG and a welcome from the librarian of Heriot-Watt University.

The conference got fully under way on Tuesday morning with the keynote speech by John Maddox. He raised many of the points we had discussed in seminars on our course regarding the real purpose of much serials literature, especially when it is used as a measure of academic standing. This must have been particularly gratifying for our course tutor! After this thought provoking beginning the conference turned to the topical question of networking, another subject covered on our course. The highlight here was the entertaining performance by Richard Coleman. I was irresistibly

reminded of Basil Fawlty! It was a pity this first session was marred by sound problems, rendering some of the speeches virtually inaudible. I, a confirmed sceptic on the subject of new technology, appreciated the irony!

The most interesting of the afternoon papers was Marcia Tuttle's on electronic journals. Her appearance emphasised the international nature of the conference and she spoke eloquently on a subject obviously close to her heart. I did wonder though about people outside the charmed circle of those with integrated workstations and electronic mailboxes, if the electronic newsletter ever becomes the norm. This does illustrate one of the real dangers of the ever-increasing pace of technological advance the creation of a divided society between an "information-rich" elite and the rest.

Wednesday morning's session focussed on the specialist user of serials information. Frances Tait gave a fascinating talk on the BBC's use of serials and Colin Will made good use of colour slides in his paper on the Royal Botanic Garden. I then attended an enjoyable workshop on stress management, at which I discovered that I was particularly prone to suffer from stress! It was useful to have the opportunity to talk to other delegates in a smaller group than in the main conference.

The ubiquitously current topic of CD-ROM was dealt with on Thursday. I found Geoffrey Smith's paper on newspapers especially relevant, having used some of the sources he discussed. I concurred with his views on the strengths and limitations of CD-ROM as a storage medium. Nicky Whitsted then described her experience of networking CD-ROM. She rather avoided the question of what service (if any) would have to be reduced to free the resources necessary for undertaking this operation.

The conference concluded with a stimulating panel discussion, considering some possible scenarios for the future. I was particularly interested by Fred Friend's contributions from the perspective of a University library. My own experience had alerted me to the discontent felt by many librarians at the increasing cost of subscriptions. This was confirmed by Mr. Friend's warnings of cancelled titles and rationalisation. The debate provided a fitting end to an interesting few days.

I was left with an overall impression of a conference dominated by the technological imperative of keeping up with new developments. The main themes were the implications of new methods of journal publishing, the continuing upsurge in CD-ROM publishing and the need for serials librarians to constantly review their subscriptions at a time of both increasing costs and financial stringency. I was impressed by how much what I had been taught on my course actually reflected the issues discussed at the conference. The value of the conference was in widening the range of views and offering a deeper insight into the current problems of the serials industry.

The social side of the gathering was of less interest to me personally. The accommodation was excellent but the food only adequate — the Scots do not seem to have entirely caught up with the demands of vegetarians! I found Edinburgh an extremely attractive city — it was a pity the (typically Scottish?) weather rather precluded too much outdoor activity — it snowed on Wednesday! But I was grateful to have had the opportunity to visit an enjoyable, well-organised and very worthwhile conference. I learnt a lot and was confirmed in my interest in working with serials in some capacity in my professional career.