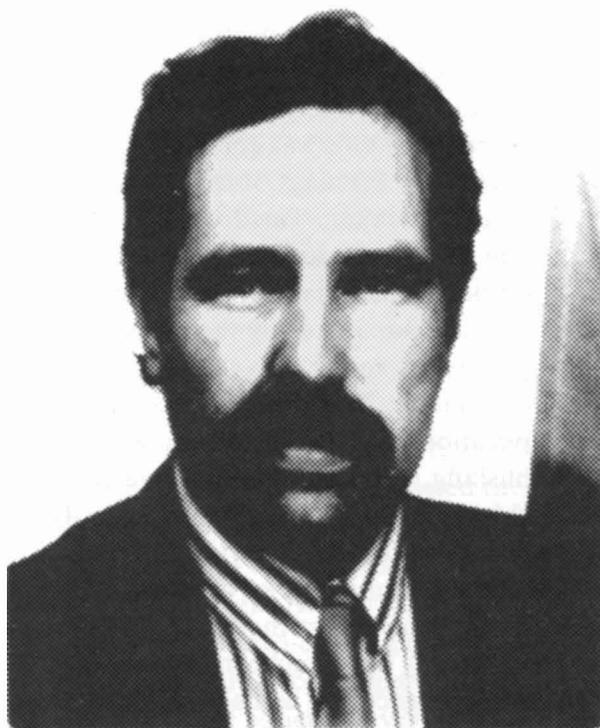


Profile — Brian Hackett



Brian Hackett

Brian, who joined the UKSG Committee earlier this year during the Annual Conference at Heriot-Watt in Edinburgh, is Library Systems Manager at the University of Huddersfield.

Born in Battersea, London amid the bomb sites that still existed after the war he was very much a town kid, not seeing a cow in the flesh until the age of five whilst on a holiday at a dairy farm on Ilkley Moor. After getting into line behind a herd of milkers going through a gate he learnt two very important early lessons. Firstly, that it is important to learn quickly in a new environment, and secondly that there is much to be said for the advice in the old song — not to go without a hat on Ilkley Moor.

After a largely pointless but oddly endearing classical education he proceeded, via Hull University and Leeds Polytechnic, to his first professional library post. This was in a public library on an island, where

the highly-charged Chief Librarian impressed his singular concept of library management upon him.

As a guide to staff management he would tell of a man who had tied six kittens to the bumper of his car which had run into a ditch. When passers-by told him that his plan was unlikely to succeed he replied “But I’ve got a whip”.

Little did Brian realise, listening to this homily, that twenty years later it would be government policy.

From the island Brian moved to an East Coast town where he worked in a branch library on a large out-of-town estate where entertainment was hard to come by.

In an attempt to brighten long winter evenings the local youth would occupy itself rounding up stray dogs into packs which they then proceeded to release into the local library. Brian realised with disappointment that his library school training had included almost nothing on canine management, leaving him ill-prepared for the task before him.

After a short undistinguished spell as a cataloguer, he moved to Hull College of Higher Education, later Humberside College of Higher Education, later still Humberside Polytechnic, now University of Humberside, where he set up a Bibliographical Services Unit.

It was here, following a 3-hour introduction to computers, that Brian first began to think about automation as a means of solving some of the problems relating to serials control and resolved, whilst driving to his mother-in-law’s house in Knaresborough, to ask for the services of a programmer. Fortunately a new programmer, David Amyes, had just been appointed and by the end of 1979 a system for serials check-in and overdue reporting had been developed. It was a very simple system by today’s standards but it should be remembered that the computers available at

the time were shared by dozens of users and offered less power than a Nintendo Game Boy!

The system went live on January 1st 1980, the first day of the decade during which library computing really got into its stride. After some revision and improvement the system was seen to work, and soon attracted the eagle-eyed attention of the UKSG Committee who invited Brian to give some talks on the subject to other serials librarians.

In 1988 he moved to Huddersfield Polytechnic (now University) to become Library Systems Manager, a job which carries a range of responsibilities beyond the BLCMP computer system and includes accountability for the building and its facilities — there are days, he feels, when Library Cisterns Manager would prove a more appropriate title.

In the last four years BLCMP has developed a serials module as part of its integrated system and, now that the staff have completed the tedious conversion task, they are able to display full details of receipt and predicted arrival dates on the on-line catalogue for most of the library's journals.

This represents a sophistication almost undreamed of in 1979 and an excellent service for readers. At the same time it increases pressure on staff to get journal issues on to the shelves with minimal delay.

Brian's first visit to the UKSG Conference was in 1990 since which time he has become increasingly interested in the future of document supply. He believes that, as a result of rapid developments in network technology and hardware, the face of academic libraries in particular will change dramatically in the coming decades.

“It can't be long before computers have the look and feel of a book. Once you can read a computer in bed then the barriers between monographs and journals will break down. The required articles, chapters or whatever will be downloaded in return for a royalty payment. The role of the librarian will be as a finder of information and facilitator for transfer, or perhaps as a custodian of the fringe material.”

Brian doesn't see the end of the profession just yet, though, as there are plenty of people who will still need help to find the 'ON' switch. Nevertheless, at least one of those lessons learned at the age of five will doubtless prove useful.