

THE STUDENTS' VIEW OF THE UKSG CONFERENCE

A compilation of reports from Anne Dimond of University of Bristol, Jennifer Godfrey of Loughborough University, Claire Leach of University of Wales Aberystwyth and Qammer Naveed of University of Northumbria

Why were we there?

Claire writes: At the turn of this year I had never even heard of the UK Serials Group! Having worked for many years for the University of Edinburgh Library, in the library at the Western General Hospital, I decided last year to embark on an MSc course in Library and Information Studies. I am currently studying at the University of Wales Aberystwyth by distance learning. I am, however, familiar with serials. No one working in a medical library could fail to become immersed in both print and electronic versions of serials. Then, studying by distance learning, one becomes dependent on the reliable electronic delivery of information. The sponsored student places to the UKSG Conference were posted on Aberystwyth's computer conferencing system, the distance learners' method of keeping in touch. Not only was this conference up my street it was also on my doorstep, so I applied. The fear and trepidation only set in once I gained a place!

Jennifer writes: The usual scan of the postgraduate notice board at the Department of Information Science, Loughborough University revealed a new notice: that from the United Kingdom Serials Group announcing the opportunity for students to obtain sponsored places to the annual conference in Edinburgh. My interest was immediate; an aspect which I had found interesting from my MA course in Information and Library Studies was the shift from paper to electronic journals in the information world, the consequential effect on copyright and the

changing role of the information professional in the face of these developments and I hoped that the conference would give me additional insight into these. Equally, as someone who would be entering the information profession soon, I welcomed the chance to meet new people from my chosen career. My application for a place was successful and I eagerly awaited my trip to Edinburgh.

Qammer writes: This year, during my MA/MSc Information and Library Management course, I saw the application forms for the UKSG conference to be held at Edinburgh. Being a student from a third world country, I did not have any idea what UKSG was, or even what business they were in. The brochure with the details of the conference made me wonder, if there was any possibility for me to attend this conference. Being a full time student, with loads of assignments and a dissertation (in the same area), made me want to attend this conference. The contents of the programme were important to a student. Being a working librarian as well, I wanted to explore this rapidly changing part of librarianship. I was aware that academic knowledge is a bit different when it is implemented in the real life, and so I thought it would be worthwhile attending the workshops. My aim in attending this conference was to gain the experience of other professionals/experts who were already working in this area. I thought that this conference could give me a chance to listen to real life problems with an opportunity to discuss them with the experts.



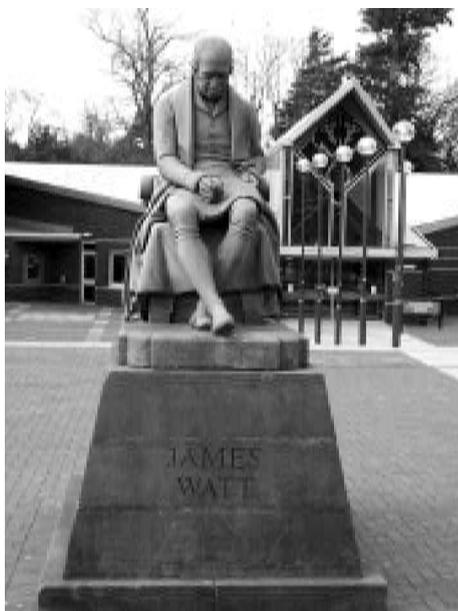
Above, Zuzana Helinsky (Prenax) and Albert Prior (Swets Publishing Services)



Right, prize draw winner Clare Harman, of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, one of six 'free place' students

Anne writes: Earlier this year UKSG invited students from UK library schools to apply for six sponsored places on its annual conference in Edinburgh. Having been informed that this was the conference to go to in the library world, I decided to put in an application and was lucky enough to be selected for a place. I had three reasons for wanting to attend:

- The main theme of the conference seemed to be focussed on electronic publishing – an area that is central to librarianship and which is fraught with unresolved issues and challenges – a good opportunity for me to hear what other people think on such subjects as free access to scholarly communications, changing research practices, access to archived material.
- I am a part time masters student at University of Bristol, fast approaching the time when I have to select a dissertation topic. I hoped to find some inspiration at a conference where so many areas were being discussed by such a wide variety of people.
- Finally, I looked on the conference as a way of meeting people in a variety of roles from



James Watt

around the country. Meeting and talking to others, sharing experiences, learning about their career paths, this was an area that I could see would be both beneficial and enjoyable!

The Exhibition

Claire: The conference opened at 10.00 a.m. on Monday with registration, and a first chance to view the exhibition. Some of us found spare seats behind a table at the entrance to the conference hall and started to browse through our conference packs. However, we looked far too like a welcoming committee, as we had to keep redirecting people. We obviously had a 'friendly librarians' aura about us. The exhibition was the hub of the proceedings, a central meeting place throughout, with coffee and refreshments served in an almost non-stop fashion. It was at the exhibition that the international and cross-sectoral nature of the conference was most evident. Representatives from different countries, from publishers, subscription agents, libraries and other companies were all present. This coming together of different sections of the information world was a major feature of the conference. I felt a little like someone browsing in an up-market shop, knowing that they have no purchasing power. On the other hand, there were no snooty assistants to contend with and some even welcomed me as a rare end-user.



Left, now what were they plotting?

Right, the disorganised but winning quiz team enjoying the reception



Left: The two Martins (White and Daniels) arguing about semantics

Anne: A large part of the conference centre was taken up with exhibitors' stands. There were many opportunities throughout the three days to view the products and services on offer though I have to say, as a student without access to the serials purchasing budget, I felt a bit of an intruder here! One of the comments made to me by an attendee (librarian) was that relationships between the librarians and the publishers/agents were a lot easier than in other countries and that this conference was the best opportunity to talk to all the major players at the same time. There was certainly a lot of talking going on whenever I braved the exhibition hall and absolutely no fisticuffs. I spoke to several representatives from publishers and agents who were not only there to sell their products but to build relationships with their existing clients, check out their competitors' products and meet up with ex-colleagues (an incestuous business, this!).

I have to admire the stamina of these people – having to give an enthusiastic presentation about your product at 9.00am, after only a couple of hours sleep, must be a key selection technique in the publishing world!

Social Events

Claire: The social side of the conference was excellent, allowing so many people to get together in a friendly atmosphere. I was glad that I decided to stay overnight on the Sunday, thus avoiding the morning rush in my rather busy household. The Witchery tour of Edinburgh's old town was great fun, although I should apologise to the people I barged into while trying to escape from the 'jumper-ooter'. As a resident of Edinburgh, who knew that creatures would leap out, I had no excuse for being such a scaredy-cat. I did calm down enough to thoroughly enjoy the meal provided in the Metro restaurant in the

Grassmarket. Thanks are due to Paul Harwood for getting all six students together at lunchtime on Monday. It was good to meet students doing different courses, including one on the full time MSc course at Aberystwyth.

Following a lovely meal on the Monday evening, I had a great time at the quiz and was relieved that my team did not win the booby prize, despite my inability to answer many questions. I am particularly bad at geography, but the well-travelled members of our team more than made up for this. At least I knew the longest lake in England, so there is hope for me yet. The quiz was followed by the disco, at which the sheer energy of many of the delegates became evident. I did manage to stay up until 1.00 a.m. however. (These late nights explain how I was to be found on the Wednesday afternoon fast asleep on the sofa, with my family scrabbling through a collection of pens, mousemats, mints, post-it notes, a bouncy ball, a rubber 'mouse' and the horribly difficult EBSCO puzzle!).

Tuesday evening brought the annual dinner, ceilidh and disco at Dynamic Earth. I had worried about what to wear, but it was 'anything goes' really. The evening started with a reception and tour of Dynamic Earth and I was struck by the words (such as concurring, sharing) on one exhibit marked 'Social' as they seemed to echo many of the attributes of the UKSG conference. I contacted Dynamic Earth by e-mail and Audrey Falconer informed me that these exhibits were part of the 'Human Animal' section of the Casualties and Survivors Gallery. Having seen the lists of words however, I decided that we also fitted the 'Communicative', 'Inquisitive' and 'Technological' sections and maybe even the 'Cultural' with all the dancing going on. Perhaps these attributes are all helping us to survive in the serials world!

The dinner was very good, I especially enjoyed the dessert, the ceilidh followed this a little too closely perhaps? Dancing the 'Dashing White Sergeant' twice through without a break was maybe a mistake – at least I was not in the middle of our group of three! I felt that the ceilidh changed into a disco rather abruptly, but I do live north of the border and I don't think that this feeling was echoed by all. By the time I had taken the last bus back it was 2.00 a.m. and I called it a

day – though for some the night was yet young I believe!

Jennifer: Michael Breaks, librarian of Heriot-Watt University had prompted delegates to frequent the university bars as money spent trickles down to the library; a suggestion which proved to be whole-heartedly embraced! The pre-dinner reception on the Monday in the exhibition gave me a chance to chat more with my fellow students before it was time to make our way to the Middle Floor Dining Room for dinner.

The meal was tasty and helped by the generosity of our fellow diners from the American Chemical Society who bought all the wine! It was a good opportunity to talk informally to fellow delegates and exhibitors and was a valuable networking experience. The meal was followed by the famous UKSG quiz. Our team entered into it with gusto and I was chuffed to see that we came third. The night then finished with a disco and late bar (much money trickled down to the library!), and although I had determined not to dance, I soon found myself boogying away with Eric Davies of LISU! The night finished past midnight for me and I sleepily got up early for the next day of the conference.

Tuesday night saw the eagerly awaited conference dinner at Dynamic Earth in the heart of Edinburgh. The venue was stunning; glass fronted with a great view of the city, it seemed Scotland's equivalent of the Millennium Dome. The reception was held in Earthscapes, exhibitions ranging from the Tropical Rainforest to the Polar Regions demonstrating the impact of humanity on nature. The dinner itself was then held in Stratosphere, the glass fronted main area and at the dinner table I engaged in enjoyable conversation with Vanessa Whittle, a librarian at the DTI, before it was time for the dancing! Once again, my resolve not to dance was weakened with wine and I danced the night away before getting the last coach back to the campus with a surprisingly large amount of people. So, a late night and another early start, considerably anything but bright!

Anne: Throughout the conference there was plenty of opportunity for the delegates to talk to each other, discuss papers and exchange working practices. Coffee and lunch breaks were generous,

allowing everyone time to take in what they had heard and view the product exhibition. For a newcomer like me, it was particularly heartening to find that there wasn't the cliqueiness here that often mars smaller conferences. The quiz on Monday night for example was an excellent way of introducing people to each other. My team came almost exactly halfway down the field despite some spectacularly accurate guesswork! The disco and late bar were also very effective icebreakers – never let it be said that librarians don't know how to enjoy themselves, though I have to give it to the publishers and agents for endurance at the bar.

Our conclusions

Anne: My three goals coming to Serials 2001 were to learn more about electronic resources, find a research topic for my dissertation and take advantage of the networking opportunity. Did I achieve them? As a learning opportunity the conference was invaluable. Although much of the content of this conference was difficult for me to follow, I learnt a huge amount about the serials community and the issues and opportunities it faces in the coming months. Moreover, I now have a much better idea of how much I DON'T know about serials management! Needless to say, I didn't come away with a dissertation topic defined nicely for me but the experience of listening to the findings of others in their research areas has given me plenty of food for thought and some ideas about framing research and evaluation questions.

As for the networking experience – I was made to feel very welcome not just as a student but also as a participant in the proceedings and found I had much more in common with other participants than I might have initially thought. The only problem was that there were too many interesting people to talk to and not enough time to do it all in! A final word of warning to future

students – don't come by car as you need the train journey home to catch up on lost sleep!

Jennifer: I hoped that the UKSG Conference would expand my knowledge of electronic journals, electronic copyright and the changing role of the information professional, and I was certainly not disappointed. While some of the talks and briefing sessions were hard to follow, the majority were enjoyable and informative and have given me much to think about as I finish my Masters, and to take with me as I start my working life. It was also a good chance to meet other people involved in information work from all over the world. The UKSG conference in Edinburgh was a valuable experience of which I was proud to be a part.

Claire: Thanks are due to all those involved in organising such a great conference, especially Karen Sadler and Alison Whitehorn. The members of staff at Heriot-Watt University also deserve thanks for their helpfulness. Even the wildlife at the University appears to be organised. Many years ago at Lancaster University, there was a triangular sign to warn of ducks on the road (maybe it is still there) but Heriot-Watt appear to train their ducks in road safety. I shall have an abiding memory of a double-decker bus slowing to a halt as three mallard drakes swaggered over the zebra crossing. Thank you to the UK Serials Group for my first experience of a conference, I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Qammer: During these three days sessions, we started days from breakfast with work, then we had pure work, then refreshments with work, then lunch with work. Our days ended with party at work. Congratulations to UKSG for conducting this successful workshop and I wish I were rich enough to be a member of UKSG, which is an "ideal group" for me.