

Bookshelf

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A Century of Science Publishing: A Collection of Essays

Edited by Einar H Fredriksson

IOS Press, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2001, viii+312pp. ISBN 1 58603 148 1 US\$75 / 75 Euros / £48

This compendium aims to bring academic publishers closer to the community they serve: the authors, editors, scientists, and readers, as well as colleagues in the collection and distribution of information. There is also an attempt to cover key trends and innovations that have had an impact in the publishing industry, but there is little that is novel to senior practitioners of the art, for all good publishers keep themselves conversant of change.

The book opens with an interesting, but not very pertinent, article by Jean Galard on Descartes in the Netherlands, and moves on to a brief and very general discussion of academic publishing as it developed up to 1940 (Alan Cook), before an exploration of the factors underlying the growth and the decline of German scientific publishing between 1850 and 1945 (Henry Sarkowski). The historical theme is pursued with looks back at the foundation of Ohmsha, a Japanese engineering publisher (Seiji Sato), Longmans Book Company/Science Press of China (Wang Jixiang), and the growth of the Dutch giant Elsevier, which, with 1600 journals

and a large book programme, now holds about 25% of the world market for advanced scientific and medical information (Einar Fredriksson). The latter company, somewhat embarrassingly, has also managed to generate sizable profits of 20% after tax. Ten years ago, in 1991, Elsevier enhanced its growth by the purchase of another big operator, Pergamon Press, for \$817 million and so acquired some 418 journals, over 3,000 books in print, and much else. Pergamon Press was founded by Robert Maxwell, a major figure in British academic publishing, and, appropriately, a chapter is devoted to his life as a publisher, where the emphasis that he placed upon the importance of good relations with his editors is emphasized. In one such negotiation, Maxwell displaced his representative, Robert Miranda, at the negotiating table and, as Miranda puts it, proceeded to give away the proverbial store, by agreeing to everything the board put on the table. Later, Miranda complained to Maxwell that if he had behaved like that he would have been fired. "Right", came the reply, "now you put it right."

In contemplating the production of learned journals in the United States, Robert Marks shows how growth was initially based upon the page charge system, for this held down costs and fostered circulation growth. That source of income is now in decline, and immense efforts are necessary to constrain costs and maintain the viability of society journals. Marks is an enthusiastic supporter of the subscription system

as providing the best economic model for success. In his eyes, the sale of individual articles, which can be appealing to librarians, will fail to provide sufficient income and lead to even higher subscription prices.

Several authors deal with journal and book publication in Germany after the Second World War. Ekkehard Hundt focuses upon the decline of German as the language of science, and the series of mergers and take-overs in West Germany after the War. The German market evidently has peculiar features, for although major British and American publishing houses established joint publishing programmes with German partners, they were subsequently forced to abandon them. In East Germany, as Hans Kruschwitz relates, the story is much simpler, for academic publishing was largely controlled through the Academy of Science, on the Soviet pattern. This monolithic organization worked well for decades, until political and social change eventually led to privatisation, and the Akademie-Verlag "lost its position as the leading science publisher of an entire region".

A much more personal tale is told by Richard Skaer, in outlining the history of the Company of Biologists, and revealing some of the thinking responsible for its enterprise and success. The Company is a charity that publishes, prints and distributes its three high quality journals and the story holds lessons for us all.

Following a passing glance at textbook publishing in the United States (Yale Altman) and in India (Mohan Primlani and Raj Mirchandani), the successful extension of the publishing activities of the Academic Press and John Wiley into the European market after the War is described by Peter Brown. It is very clear that familiarity with the market was crucial in these endeavours, for both projects were largely driven by leading European expatriates.

With the post-war expansion in the size and number of journals published came pressure for better abstracting and indexing services. In the medical field, the American Index Medicus and the Dutch Excerpta Medica reign supreme and the policies fostering their growth are outlined by Robert Blanken and Pierre Vinken. Their article reveals much about the options adopted by these organizations. Likewise, Tony Cawkell and Eugene Garfield take a nostalgic look at the

creation and growth of the Institute of Scientific Information, with its Science Citation Index and Current Contents. As with some other publishers, the man and his organization seemed inseparable, and with the departure of Eugene Garfield the Institute became just another big corporation.

For information transfer, bits, bytes and pixels are much more efficient than the printed word – provided that those wishing to communicate possess computers. But it has proved to be much more difficult than first appeared to replace the printed article with a computer file. Some of the technical problems encountered form the subject of several articles in this collection, but these do not greatly advance understanding. Nico Poppelier and Einar Fredriksson look back at the impact of computers and communication in publishing and give particular attention to the mark up and structure of textual material, including SGML, XML and non-linear text. Barbara Beeton expands the discussion in covering TeX, but both pieces largely look backward, and avoid forecasting the future. This is perhaps to be expected, for too many prophets have proven false.

The curious narrowing in perspective of writers in this area is beautifully illustrated by Matthew Cockerill's piece on biological and medical publishing via the Internet. To my disappointment, the article is mostly devoted to bibliographic tools and abstracts databases. Several paragraphs are devoted to the distribution of electronic editions of journals alongside their paper counterparts, but do not address the very real problems of publishers in deriving compensatory income from such efforts. BioMed Central (Cockerill's employer) aims to cover its own publication costs through advertising and e-commerce link-ups, which are unquestionably speculative.

Scientific communication as a process is considered by Roosendaal, Geurts and van der Vet, of the University of Twente in the Netherlands. Here it is helpful to know the current affiliations of the authors because the chapter is full of philosophical arguments involving models that serve to obscure, rather than clarify, and offers a totally detached view of scientific interchange devoted to theory rather than practice. It was somewhat of a relief to see

that one author is Professor of Scientific Information in the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Science, another a methodologist in the Department of Public Affairs and Public Policy, and the third works in the Department of Computer Science and the Centre for Telematics and Information Technology.

The concerns of librarians are not forgotten, but, while providing intriguing historical perspective (with, for example, a section on librarians as spies), Björn Tell views his profession from the lofty perspective of a senior librarian with ready access to political masters. There will always be a place for such individuals, but the majority of librarians face immense changes and uncertainty.

Subscription agents might also be regarded as librarians in disguise, being deeply involved in collection formation, acquisition, and cataloguing. With the pressures from declining budgets and the shaving of margins, times are hard for such intermediaries, and John Merriman and Rollo Turner are admirably dispassionate in presenting their view from the middle.

The refereeing of papers in journals, or peer review, is constantly under scrutiny by all participants in the system and there are two chapters on this subject. Jaap de Vries, a publishing consultant, regards it as a holy cow and discusses the issues. However, while the system may not be perfect, the fact remains that it is supported whole-heartedly by a majority of

scientists – until a better process of evaluation comes to be devised. One such possibility is outlined by Erik Sandewall and involves open discussion on the Internet about the findings of the article planned before a polished version is submitted for publication. This practice may prove popular in some fields of science, but experience indicates that this approach has little general appeal.

A number of the issues raised in individual chapters are gathered into a coherent whole by Jamie Cameron in discussing the watersheds in scientific journal publishing represented by the post-war growth in journal publishing and the electronic revolution. This is a thoughtful piece that reassuringly asserts in closing that future publishers will largely be concerned with quality control and navigation in the presentation and development of ways of locating relevant research findings efficiently and in a meaningful manner.

There is much of interest in this book, but the final product suffers from the lack of any proper assessment of the realities of the scientific information system, the needs of scientists in the near future, and of any attempt to outline an ideal system. Scrutiny of possible ways of achieving improvement would also have been welcome. Such additions would really have been exciting.

*Bernard Donovan,
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PUBLICATIONS NOTED

Digital Developments in Higher Education: Theory and Practice. Edited by Peter Roberts and Mark Chambers, Cambridge, Taylor Graham Publishing, 2001, 190 pp, ISBN 0-947568-6, paperback £30/US\$55

International Librarianship: Cooperation and Collaboration. Edited by Frances Laverne Carroll and John Frederick Harvey, Lanham, Maryland, USA, The Scarcrow Press Inc., 2001, 367 pp, ISBN 0-8108-3921-0, casebound cloth US\$65

The Library Association Yearbook 2001-2002. Compiled by Kathryn Beecroft, London, 2001, 527 pp, ISBN 1-85604-401-7, ISSN 0075-9066, paperback £37.50

Making Waves: New Serials Landscapes in a Sea of Change. *Proceedings of the North American Serials Interest Group, Inc., 15th Annual Conference, San Diego, California.* Edited by Joseph C Harmon and P Michelle Fiander, New York, USA, The Haworth Press Inc., 2001, 472 pp, ISBN 0-7890-1399-1, casebound US\$79.95, paperback US\$44.95. (These papers were also published simultaneously as *The Serials Librarian*, Volume 40 nos. 1/2 and 3/4, 2001)

The New Review of Academic Librarianship, Volume 6, 2000. Cambridge, Taylor Graham Publishing, 267 pp, ISSN 1361-4533, £70/US\$130

The New Review of Information and Library Research, Volume 6, 2000. Cambridge, Taylor Graham Publishing, 254 pp, ISSN 1361-455X, £70/US\$130

The New Review of Information Networking, Volume 6, 2000. Cambridge, Taylor Graham Publishing, 194 pp, ISSN 1361-4576, £70/US\$130

NEW JOURNALS

Contemporary Spine Surgery, Volume 2, 2001. Monthly, Hagerstown, Maryland, USA, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, ISSN 1527-4268, US\$195 per annum

Current Opinion in Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Volume 1, 2001. Published bimonthly, Philadelphia, USA, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, ISSN 1528-4050, US\$441 per annum

Journal of Access Services: Innovations for Electronics and Digital Library and Information Resources, Volume 1, 2001. Quarterly, New York, USA, The Haworth Press Inc., US\$120 per annum, (also various overseas rates which are higher)

Journal of Gay and Lesbian Information Resources, Volume 1, 2001. New York, USA, The Haworth Press Inc., US\$75 per annum, (also various overseas rates which are higher)

The New Review of Libraries and Lifelong Learning, Volume 1, 2000. Cambridge, Taylor Graham Publishing, 172 pp, ISSN 1468-9944, £70/US\$130

Pediatric Critical Care Medicine, Volume 2, 2001. Quarterly, Baltimore, Maryland, USA, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, ISSN 1529-7535

Serials Reference Services Quarterly, Volume 1, 2001. New York, The Haworth Press Inc., US\$75 per annum, (also various overseas rates which are higher)

CHANGE OF PUBLISHERS

Serials Review, Volume 27, 2001. Quarterly, ISSN 0098-7913, now published by Elsevier Inc. New York, USA, under the Pergamon imprint (formerly JAI Press Inc.)