



## People's John Jardine

Was it John Jardine's mother who thought he might one day be a bishop? An encouraging aunt did comment that he had the right nose for it. Well, John did not become a bishop, but instead became a well-known and highly respected member of the information profession. He was also the editor of *Insights'* People's page for 25 years, watching and reporting with satisfaction people's progression in their careers.

He retired this year at UKSG – and your Editor caught up with him to ask how his career as a subscription agent all began. John explained that he had been a long-term PhD student, writing (no doubt) definitively on 'The Function of Ancient Mythology in Modern American Poetry, with reference to Ezra Pound and Charles Olson', a subject he found fascinating and which covered many of his interests. But children came along and John felt it was time to get a proper job.

John tried teaching in a South London school, at the time of the Brixton riots. His pupils clearly liked him and wanted to help him out, offering to get him anything he wanted when they looted the local Dixons the following Friday. John realized that being a city teacher was not his calling.

Together with his brother-in-law, a talented artist and cartoonist, he decided to try publishing. They had a great idea for a series of children's books, but were slightly worried when they learned that the first print run would cost £30,000 – more than the value of his house. However, he persevered with the publishing plan and went to the London Book Fair to find someone to warehouse this great stock of books. There he met John Bailey of Bailey Brothers & Swinfen, who told him: 'What you are planning won't work and, when it hasn't, come and be a sales rep for me'.

John thought this was a horrible idea, but John Bailey was right, and John joined as a sales rep on £6,500 per year – rather less than the £8,000 he had been earning as a teacher in London. John's new role – one which he grew to love – began in 1983. He enjoyed travelling round the country and the fact that in those days you were trusted to get on with it. He particularly liked the independence: 'You had a credit card and no one could get in touch with you; no mobile phones in those days.' Most of all he loved visiting the librarians in all the universities and research libraries. 'I like librarians and I found the whole sector fascinating – seeing how education and research underpinned the whole culture and prosperity of the nation', he explained.

John says that he would not have been effective as a genuine 'lean and hungry' salesman, but clearly he has a talent for building relationships. As John explained: 'Subscriptions are a long-term game; you couldn't go into a library and expect to come out with an order for journals. You had to develop a long-term relationship.'

'Subscriptions are a long-term game'

John had been with Bailey Brothers for seven years when it was bought by Swets. 'I came along with the furniture', John explained, 'so I didn't have to go through Swets' daunting psychometric testing, which might well have rumbled me. I thought psychometric testing was a clever idea, though it clearly wasn't foolproof!'

John's career continued with Swets, at an exciting time for subscription agents: 'People then had time; you could go out to meals, talk about lots of things, learn what librarians needed and how they thought the industry should develop. We were all facing the same problem of getting the material to the end user. Swets was in a position to do something about it – they could invest in systems and new processes. The advent of digital had some big pluses. The agents were able, as Paul Harwood put it, to act as "information warehouses". The publishers then were quite happy to provide agents with files of their content as long as they could guarantee it would only be accessed by the right people. This helped draw the community together.'

Yet the advent of digital also had its downside for subscription agents. There were significant extra costs: staff training, developing new systems to administer e-journals, often running parallel to the legacy mainframe systems which had been designed for paper. Nevertheless, some great benefits flowed from automation, for example from agreeing EDI standards: orders and renewals that had previously taken six weeks to key on old systems could be uploaded in a matter of hours. Subscription agents then played a crucial role as intermediaries, serving the publisher as well as the library – and they still do.

There were exciting and hopeful things going on in the library world at that time, including the Pilot Site Licence Initiative (PSLI), a project that eventually led to the development of Jisc's NESLI2. John said it was fascinating to be involved and watch new ideas and services hatch and evolve through discussions with key players in the publishing, library and subscription agent community. In those days, Swets in the UK was led by Albert Prior and Paul Harwood, both of whom had begun their careers as librarians and who were especially able to understand and anticipate what libraries and end users needed and how to meet those needs practically.

The advent of the 'big deal' at that time had a big impact on the community. It started with Academic Press (later bought by Elsevier). John explained: 'It was very tempting to libraries because, if they spent, say, £100,000 with a large publisher, then for another 10 or 20% the library could access all the publisher's e-journal output. But then of course the libraries (and end users) were "locked in", which raised a whole new set of issues!'

Publishers still wanted to work with agents because agents did things that publishers didn't do. An agent's customer service contacts acted in effect as remote members of the library staff and became integrated into the library's workflows. Nonetheless, publishers started growing their own sales forces, increasingly wanting to get in front of the decision makers in libraries.

'agents did things that publishers didn't do'

Other major changes for agents over the last 30 years include the reduction in the commission publishers paid the agents. John explained that in the early 80s, agents could expect 12% from publishers in commission and a further 4% handling charge from libraries. Publisher commission across the board is now below 5%, leaving little room for error. Also, the rise of academic purchasing consortia increased pressure on margins as did the emergence of national consortia like Jisc Collections, SHEDL and IReL, which effectively act as new intermediaries. These factors, along with a general economic contraction, have made

for 'interesting times' for agents and, of course, libraries. John believes that intermediaries still play a vital role in the information chain and a more sustainable business model will emerge.

For John and all at Swets, the demise of the company in October 2014 was a sad and difficult time. Swets was very customer focused and staff were horrified to have let down their customers. The experience made John appreciate the importance of visionary leadership and the need to have more than one string to your bow. He points to other players in the field who eye the horizon and who are able to invest and develop products and services for the future.

'John believes that intermediaries still play a vital role in the information chain and a more sustainable business model will emerge.'



John was very pleased that EBSCO enabled him to stay in the game for a bit longer and do something for his old Swets customers. John says that he had an amazing send-off at the UKSG conference, commenting how pleased he was not to have tripped up when clambering over the rows of seats in the conference hall en route to collect his gift (pictured with outgoing UKSG Chair, Ross MacIntyre).

Although retired, John is still pretty busy. While he never did get to be a bishop, he is a churchwarden and lay preacher. As churchwarden, he is involved in a major project to transform his Victorian church into a café church and community centre to more effectively reach the coming generations with the 'good news'.

*John Jardine was interviewed for 'Insights' by Lorraine Estelle*

### **Some of John's colleagues have shared with us their memories of his career, and their best wishes for his retirement**

I first met John in the mid-1980s at one of the library conferences (most likely a UKSG conference), when he was working as Sales Manager at the subscription agent Bailey Bros & Swinfen, based in Folkestone. We met up often at later library and publishing events and got to know each other pretty well.

At that time I was Managing Director of Swets UK in Abingdon near Oxford, the recently established UK branch of Swets & Zeitlinger in The Netherlands.

118 In 1990, I was involved in discussions between Swets and Bailey Bros, which led to Bailey Bros being acquired by Swets. A number of Bailey Bros staff moved up to work at the Abingdon offices. John joined Swets at that point and worked as a sales manager from his home in Lewes in Sussex. We were very pleased that he had joined the team, because of his known skills, experience and personality. John quickly got down to travelling the country, building strong relationships with libraries across the UK and The Republic of Ireland, and rapidly became very popular amongst Swets' customers.

John was very far from the typical sales manager, never adopting any form of pressure in his meetings with librarians, and acting in a highly professional and informative way. He is (and was) highly principled, a man of integrity, distinguished and charming, and was very loyal both to Swets and the many librarians he grew to know as good friends. Not only was he hugely liked by librarians but also very popular amongst Swets' staff.

'John was very far from the typical sales manager'

He, I and Paul Harwood would often meet up for an enjoyable dinner when he would be in Abingdon, that involved interesting discussions about the trade and the world in general (some very philosophical) and some good laughs. These 'get togethers' continued after I retired in 2002 and set up Content Complete with Paul Harwood.

It was always a great pleasure to be in John's company.

As is well known, John started the People page in *Serials*, the UKSG journal, in the early 90s, and thoroughly enjoyed his opportunities for liaising with librarians and publishers and hearing about new appointments and job moves. It involved a very considerable amount of work for him and he continued his role, as *Serials* became *Insights*, until his recent retirement.

*Albert Prior*

I've had the privilege of working with some high quality sales people during my career, and I've learnt a lot from a good number of them. Some are just naturals, others work hard at it, know their product or service inside out and go that extra mile to get the sale. John Jardine defied classification.

'John Jardine defied classification.'

I've known John for 25 years and worked with him for 14 of those. In that time, I can only think of a handful of people who generated as much respect and good feeling from colleagues, customers and competitors. It comes from some basic values: loyalty, empathy, openness; all of which John demonstrated in bucket loads. Swets had good reason to value these qualities in John since it helped them retain business for many years, driven in large part by loyalty to him and his customer service colleagues, particularly in the absence of other compelling product or service offerings in more recent years that would keep competitors at bay.

John was incredibly loyal to me personally, to Swets, and his colleagues generally. In the final few months of the company, he worked desperately hard to ensure the best possible safe landing for customers and staff, and it was a real pleasure to work with him again recently during his brief time with EBSCO.

I will remember in particular my first visit to libraries in Northern Ireland in the early 1990s, where John guided us skilfully and confidently around the province at a time when it was not so easy. Also, of course, the affectionate hugs and kisses he always received from female librarians wherever we arrived on visits!

Enjoy a long retirement, John; you deserve it!

*Paul Harwood*

119 Hazel has known John Jardine for many years in her capacity as a librarian and spent many an enjoyable UKSG conference gossiping with him. He is one of the industry's 'good guys' – everyone knows him and everyone likes him. More recently, when we took over the joint editorship of *Serials* (now *Insights*), we inherited a great asset, as John was already a member of the editorial board and using his incredible industry network to provide the People column. We were always of the opinion that this column was the first item in *Serials* that people looked at – everyone turned to the back page first! We did find it rather amusing that John was a little reluctant to adopt hi-tech communication methods – but of course this just added to his charms. We don't think that Facebook and Twitter will ever replace him.

'He is one of the industry's "good guys"'

Have a great retirement, John, and thanks for everything.

*Hazel & Helen*

*(Hazel Woodward and Helen Henderson)*



Finally, John's many clients over the years on his Irish circuit and elsewhere must not be forgotten; they will miss him greatly, and we hope this little pictorial memoir will bring a smile to their faces. Claire O'Brien (University College Cork) helped give John a good send-off at the UKSG conference dinner in Glasgow this spring and is pictured below mid-Gay Gordons: 'We were having a lovely time – he's a good dancer as well as a gentleman!' He is indeed a gentleman and I will miss our discussions over the People page, when conversations which began on the topic of the number of pixels in photographs somehow usually managed to end with philosophical attempts to put the world to rights.

Enjoy your new ventures, JJ, and of course: 'Ciao!'

*Ally Souster*

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