

UKSG Annual Conference 2012

The diaries of the sponsored students



UKSG offered four free places for students to attend the 2012 Conference, made possible with generous support from Elsevier, whose contribution is very much appreciated. Those eligible to apply were students enrolled on Library & Information and Publishing degree courses, and the successful applicants were (left to right as photographed against the River Clyde): Stuart Lawson (University of Brighton), Jennifer Lovatt (Oxford Brookes University), Gopal Dutta (University of Sheffield) and Lydia Lantzsch (Oxford Brookes University). The four have allowed us to take a peek at the diaries they kept during the conference. The extracts below give us a flavour of the event including the plenary and breakout sessions, the debates and the stamina of those who kept the dancing going!

Day One: Monday 26 March

Gopal Dutta:

The first thing that struck me about UKSG was the scale: as Tony Kidd explained in his opening address, this was the largest conference on record. The location at the cavernous Glasgow SECC, with a beautiful sunny riverside backdrop and the construction of a new stadium also lent a somewhat epic feel to the proceedings. Tony reminded us of John Merriman, founder of the UKSG Conference, who died last year, and his stated aim of “getting librarians and publishers together to iron out the controversies”. What followed over the next three days definitely lived up to this notion. And what better way to experience the full force of the crowd than to be called up on stage at the very beginning, to stand in the bright lights in front of nearly 700 people and have our photos taken?



'It was all a bit dizzying ...' Tony Kidd, outgoing UKSG Chair, opening the Conference in the packed Lomond auditorium at the Scottish Exhibition + Conference Centre (SECC), where all the plenary sessions were held

It was all a bit dizzying and I was glad that Stephen Abram's barnstorming opening session was a quick follow up. It all felt very American and 'motivational': I was half sceptical and half inspired. Stephen was telling me things that I felt I already knew, but it was presented in such an engaging way that it made me think about the value I've added to people's experiences in the libraries I've worked in and how I might make this value count for more in the future. But I'm not sure how receptive some librarians will be to his idea of making users aware of the staff more. It sounds like a good idea and lots of library staff are outgoing and gregarious, but, from my experience, many are happy to remain 'behind the scenes'. Maybe things need to change?

Stuart Lawson:

Martin Paul Eve of the University of Sussex followed with a great talk on open access (OA) and how librarians can organize to restructure academic publishing and eliminate the for-profit element. This certainly resonated well with my radical side, and Martin provided a lot of thought-provoking comments.

Many academics are angry at publishing practices – they feel that they do all of the work, and don't see where publishers add value. But the system is actually distributed: turn this into an advantage, take responsibility and organize. By taking control of the publishing process, we can change the power relationships. This is the kind of disruptive thinking that I think is going to cause major restructuring of the academic publishing system over the coming years.

[An article by Martin Paul Eve, based on an updated version of this presentation, appears in this issue.]

165 *Lydia Lantzsch agreed with the concept, but has some reservations:*

... how do young academics and researchers factor in this model? Will they be awarded the necessary grants to do their research? Also, who guarantees the quality of an OA journal? What happens to the reputation factor? That is, will gold OA journals provide enough prestige? After finishing my PhD I would love to publish in an OA journal, but will I be able to afford it?

Jennifer Lovatt:

The session I felt was most valuable on day one was hosted by Ben Showers from JISC and I agreed with several of his points: how important it is to allow students to be creative without barriers, that data should be promiscuous and spread thousands of copies, that librarians should free up more time to spend acting on data rather than finding it and that the role of shared academic knowledge bases will grow in the near future.

[An article by Ben Showers, based on this presentation, appears in this issue.]

Lydia Lantzsch:

I went to the breakout session by Ruth Jenkins of Loughborough University and Alison McNab from De Montfort University on 'Mobilising your e-content for maximum impact'. Mainly based on personal experiences and case studies of other university libraries, this session provided insights into the challenges and barriers of delivering mobile library access to end users. Jenkins and McNab found that, although on campus much is available, access to full texts off campus is limited at best. Also, although publisher apps tend to be qualitatively good, the user has to know which publisher publishes which journal in order to download the right app to access the journal they want; a simple but potentially fatal barrier. The list of challenges continues with the unanswered need to link mobile content with resource discovery software, such as Primo or Summon, and reference software such as Endnote or Mendeley, the bottom line being that the market is still fluid and much can be done to improve the user experience.



Gopal Dutta:

The big insight from the talk by Dave Pattern of Huddersfield University was his step-by-step recreation of a genuine library enquiry, showing the frustration that must be felt from the perspective of a user. Dave explained that end users will always take the path of least resistance, sacrificing quality over ease of access, which is a challenge for librarians. The message for me from this session was to think about the library from the user's point of view, putting myself into different shoes in order to come up with better solutions. What I might want as a librarian is different from what the library user might want.

Marshall Breeding was next. His key point, for me, was the insight that many libraries are still trapped within a 'print paradigm', therefore not using their IT systems in the most appropriate way. I could really relate to what he was saying: the last library I worked in based its processes around print resources, even though most of their users access the library in a virtual, electronic way. Adapting to this pattern of usage remains a challenge for libraries: they need to make things work for this new group, without alienating the others who still use the library in a traditional way.

[An article by Marshall Breeding based on his findings from a study examining the major e-resource knowledge bases and their associated link resolvers is published in this issue.]



Electrifying fun at the Glasgow Science Centre, venue for the quiz

Lydia Lantzsch:

The quiz and buffet dinner at the Glasgow Science Centre was great fun and another marvellous opportunity to get to know people and make new contacts. The venue was beautiful, with its walls of glowing lights which gave it an outdoor atmosphere of being underneath a starry sky.

The quiz itself was great fun, although we felt under-informed when naming countries based on their contours. We came up with a 'letter salad' bereft of sense, and ingeniously decided to play around with the letters until something sensible appeared. It turned out the letters were actually acronyms that just needed ordering! Well, the loss of points won our table chocolate bunnies! So, losing was worth it for once 😊



Nail-biting stuff, the quiz questions provided ample opportunity for displaying lack of knowledge of simple geography and tunes from the 70s

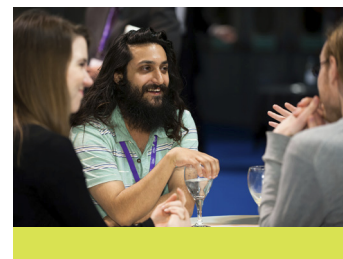


That 'Eureka!' moment when you realize you can identify the Lego logo

Day Two: Tuesday 27 March

Gopal Dutta:

I enjoyed Ross MacIntyre's talk about JUSP, particularly his aside about how spreadsheets are a waste of time and how 'spreadsheet shuffling' should be banned. This seemed to echo Marshall Breeding from the day before: many libraries are still working within a print paradigm. In my last job, I spent a considerable amount of time fiddling about with spreadsheets. On my MA course, I've done a little HTML coding in creating a digital library and can see it is the way forward. However, it was quite a daunting task, even for someone like me who considers themselves fluent across IT applications. Listening to Ross made me reflect upon where I need to think about developing my skills for the future.



Lydia Lantzsch:

The report by Anne Murphy from Adelaide and Meath Hospital was anything but what I expected. I had prepared myself for a very statistics-driven and possibly model-based presentation but not the genuinely heart-wrenching description of how the library had to cope with an astounding budget cut of 25%, instead of an expected 5%. It was inspiring to hear with what initiative and spirit the staff confronted these stifling constraints while keeping a good relationship with the medical staff, no easy feat when cancelling 73 of their journals. Hats off and good luck to you and your team in the future! Hopefully the hospital recognizes and appreciates all your efforts!



Lydia found Anne Murphy's presentation heart-wrenching but inspiring

[You may read the full version of Anne Murphy's presentation in the March issue of 'Insights': <http://dx.doi.org/10.1629/2048-7754.25.1.44>]

Then I attended the breakout session led by Jeremy York, who presented the HathiTrust, a digital repository based on the partnership of academic institutions in the USA. As a repository, its main goals lie in providing access to material and the preservation of it, which also makes it an excellent and cheap backup for online collections. Although a few international higher educational institutions participate, HathiTrust seems to be mainly centred in the United States, which may also have to do with copyright issues related to the project, which seem still to be a work in progress, especially with regards to books published between 1872 and 1963 (which may or may not be copyrighted anymore depending on various factors). It was interesting to learn that 'hathi' is the Indian word for elephant, an animal that has a long memory. It is also the name of one of the elephants in *The Jungle Book*. I have personally found the HathiTrust website useful for my MA research which was concerned with 19th century, partly US-focused material. It was very helpful to have good material just a click away!

Jennifer Lovatt:

When it comes to questions about library use and the value of library resources, Carol Tenopir has the answers and her talk at the end of day two was particularly relevant to my research project. Before we all headed off to don our glad rags and find some heather for the

conference dinner, she confirmed that academics really do spend a lot of time reading – 22 scholarly articles per month, spending an average of 49 minutes on each, adding up to a whopping 216 hours per year. And that's just journal articles! But only 2% of the reading academics do actually occurs in the library, and award-winning academics and those who publish prolifically read significantly more than the average academic.

[An article by Carol Tenopir, based on this presentation, appears in this issue.]



In a special late addition to the Conference Programme, Carol Tenopir spoke on the value and outcomes of scholarly literary resources

Gopal Dutta:

The conference dinner was lovely, bringing more opportunities for informal networking and also lots of dancing. I was quite impressed with the stamina of the librarians and publishers, as they kept the dance-floor going for several hours. It was also good speaking to some of the publishers over a beer back at the hotel, although it meant a slightly fuzzy head the next morning.



'The Arches', Glasgow, awaiting the onslaught of 700 hungry heather-sprigged delegates

[A photo collage of the Conference Dinner and Dancing follows on the next page]



Day Three: Wednesday 28 March

No better cure, though, than the first presentations on the final day, organized as a debate between Cameron Neylon and Michael Mabe, about the future of journal publishing. I found myself following Cameron's argument and feeling very convinced by the end, then having my opinion quickly flipped around by Michael's even more persuasive statements. The discussion after the debate was also very enjoyable, as was checking the tweets. Whilst I don't use Twitter myself, I found that coming to this conference made me 'get' Twitter in a way that I had not before. I found it really useful to check different delegates' tweets as a way of keeping up with what was going on and finding out which other breakout sessions sounded interesting. The whole point of Twitter is that it is up to the minute and therefore it was a great tool at a large conference, especially for the people like me who did not know anybody else in advance.

Stuart Lawson has a slightly different take on the Neylon/Mabe debate:

The first speaker in the debate, Cameron Neylon *[pictured below right]*, argued that the fundamental things that make up a journal will have to change, in line with contemporary technology.



It is not clear that we still need discrete academic institutions and journals. We usually define a journal article as being a single, 'correct' version of the expression of an idea. But sometimes the best way to transmit knowledge is in smaller units: fragments of research, which can either be used as they are or aggregated to discover new things.

New technology platforms such as Wordpress (as used by PLoS Currents) support possibilities beyond the print paradigm, such as line-by-line peer review. Cameron claims that for asking and answering questions, journals are not the best platform, and publishers are failing to do a good job as filters.

Michael Mabe *[pictured below left]* countered Cameron's argument by claiming that researchers are embedded in traditional mechanisms/structures. Researcher needs have remained the same, so the form has no need to change.

I didn't find Michael's position at all convincing. While a lot of researchers may remain entrenched in the traditional paradigm, many have no need for those methods. As Cameron said, where we will see disruption is where new mechanisms give us what we need quicker. The traditional article publishing process is simply too slow. Michael's questionable historical analogies fell flat for me; people can change their thinking habits quicker than he's giving us credit for. His emphasis on writers' desire for priority recognition also seemed way off the mark because publishing online can leave a permanent date- and time-stamped record of authorship.



171 A significant number of speakers this year still don't seem to have grasped the fact that there is simply no need to continue as things are, and we're not going to sit still and let the incumbent power agents stay in control of the communication process. Those conservatives who fail to change will be left behind as the revolutionary vanguard reaches critical mass. Speakers like Cameron Neylon and Martin Eve ably represent the new ways of thinking.

Lydia Lantzsich:

I attended a presentation by David Parkes from Staffordshire University about their implementation of an open-source integrated library system (ILS) instead of a proprietary one. The PPT depicted the development and implementation of the open-source ILS KOHA at Staffordshire University Library. Parkes used often entertaining but always spot-on slides – my favourite was the Pac-Man analogy of a labyrinthine library in times of information overabundance with a QR code as background, a ghost of authentication and Pac-Man as student. There are two aspects of the talk that I found particularly interesting: firstly, whatever few demands KOHA didn't offer, the library addressed by using the saved funds from the now void licences of proprietary LMS; and, secondly, the IT Department and Library Department merged with the result that the system is now open and flexible enough to provide all the desired features while still being affordable. A custom-tailored solution that left the audience highly impressed!

Stuart Lawson:

Martin Fenner and Steve Pettifer's breakout session addressed the question of which is the best format to present scholarly information? Despite the debate over whether articles are even still relevant, this session treated the article as likely to retain its general form, saying that an 'article is meant to be a single communication'.

PDFs help to 'keep the minutes of science', working well as a discrete marker for keeping a permanent record. Their stable structure is useful for replicating traditional narrative structure (but that kind of story is not the only kind, as we have been hearing). However, they don't work well on mobile devices. Unlike HTML, they don't reflow, and are bad for linking. But these problems are not inherent in the format, it is a publisher choice. So perhaps the real issue here isn't in the rivalry between the formats but rather in using them intelligently.

The presenters have created a new way to view articles with Utopia Documents, which blends dynamic content with stability. It dynamically pulls and manipulates content while still looking like a PDF. Since there are other more responsive technologies which overcome some limitations of HTML and PDF, perhaps this kind of use will become dominant. Many people still print out articles to read them; I suspect that as screen technology improves, people will have less of a problem with extended screen reading, and we'll see more uptake of innovative solutions like Utopia.

Lydia Lantzsich:

The last session of the conference could have been tiring, but it turned out to be one of its highlights. The ground-breaking study by Dr Christina Templeton, brilliantly presented by Stephen Buck in her absence, gave valuable and enlightening insights into the psyche of elderly unmarried female academic librarians while at the same time meticulously unravelling the emotional and social pitfalls of librarianship. We hope that the study will be published very soon in one of the top journals of its field and we wish both the object of the



Stephen Buck's first foray onto the UKSG stage with co-John Merriman award-winner, Alice Eng, and Ian Bannerman (right) of Taylor & Francis

172 study and its analyst much professional success in the future! – Thank you for a fabulous time! It was a hoot!



Gopal Dutta:

My head was buzzing as I left Glasgow. It had been great to meet so many new people and learn some old and new insights. I particularly enjoyed the social events and liked the way in which they gave people time to talk informally. It was also great to spend time with the other sponsored students, who I'm sure I'll be keeping in touch with. I'm really glad I had the opportunity and will be looking to make it count in my job-hunting quest over the next few months. The main message for me was the idea that librarianship needs to change in order to reflect the new 'web-scale' world we live in, which requires that we move from a print way of thinking. Also, the idea of knowing your users was something I felt was repeated over and over again, by lots of different speakers, so this is something that I will definitely take away. I feel I have a much deeper insight into the library world, different from what I learnt whilst working and also very different from the theory that I'm currently studying.

UKSG 2012 made for a heady mix of different views, completely at odds with one another, but debated in a convivial atmosphere, very much living up to John Merriman's original vision.

Photos of the conference by Simon Williams (www.simonwilliamsphotography.co.uk)

Don't miss the next one!

**UKSG 36th Annual Conference
and Exhibition**

Bournemouth International Centre

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