

FIL Newsletter Issue 31

INTERLEND 99 CONFERENCE REPORT

We were both delighted to accept the bursary offered by the Forum for Interlending for us to travel to Durham to attend Interlend 99. Arriving at Collingwood College we confess to feeling a little nervous but were soon put at ease, and would like to thank everyone for making us most welcome. The conference provided a great opportunity for us to meet with professional librarians working in the area of Interlibrary Loans and Document Supply.

Following registration we were shown the way to our accommodation and accustomed as we are to student quarters were pleasantly surprised to find it bright and comfortable, even having our own tea making facilities! We then proceeded to hear Stephen Prowse's welcome speech and the keynote speaker Niels Mark giving a paper entitled "Interlending in the Hybrid Library". Niels Mark stressed the complex nature of interlending services in the future and identified the need for library staff with a broad spectrum of knowledge, technological competence and initiative.

Despite not winning the quiz we thoroughly enjoyed the conference dinner and were able to introduce ourselves to a number of delegates. With dissertations looming on the horizon we were anxious to gather as much relevant information as possible. Our projects were concerned with the promotion of reading, and library services to the visually impaired. We were particularly keen to listen and talk to David Owen and John Godber and learn about "Share the Vision and the Disability Discrimination Act". They argued that it is the negative attitude of everyone else that is the main barrier that prevents the blind and partially sighted having equality of access to information. There is a clear need for the standardisation of library services to ensure materials are available to everyone in whatever format is required. We were most impressed by David Owen's ability to continue his presentation, precariously balanced on a wall, having been forced outside by the interruption of a fire alarm!

Mike McGrath, Stephanie Taylor and Eric Davies chaired a lively discussion called, "Is the British Library redundant? A consideration of the future role of the BL's monopoly on interlending". It was suggested that organisations such as Lamda may represent a threat to the British Library but Stephanie Taylor claimed that they offer a complementary service responding to the needs of higher education and offering customers a range of choices. The real threat to the BL would seem to come from publishers who are now in a position to exploit technological developments.

We enjoyed a pleasant Tuesday afternoon looking round Durham Cathedral and Castle. Escaping from the Castle crypt we indulged in a little retail therapy, and returned to Collingwood College in time for dinner. In the evening a number of workshops were offered, but we opted for "Access awareness : is the community being served?". This developed into an ongoing discussion with John Godber and David Owen about the issues raised at their initial lecture.

The final day began with the chance to learn about a topic which was completely new to us through Malcolm Lewis's talk on key issues in music interlending. This gave considerable insight into the quality and professional expertise of music librarians. He emphasised the necessity to create a national unified online system to ensure the accessibility of music. Considerable debate followed this presentation, and it is obviously an area of interest to many within the library profession.

The penultimate paper was given by Dan Bye from Sheffield Hallam University, and was called "Distance learning : the Internet as a tool for access". Dan highlighted many of the problems faced by distance learners, such as isolation and time constraints, and the social and psychological issues raised by distance learning. He emphasised that new initiatives must be led by customer needs and a hybrid approach rather than driven by new technological developments.

"Nurturing tomorrow's cauliflowers for the information age : professional education and training prospects" was the intriguing title of the final paper. Eric Davies, the speaker, however assured us that, "a cauliflower was nothing but a cabbage with a college education". Leadership, business and communication skills were identified as key requirements for librarians to meet the demands of the information era. He concurred with Dan Bye that distance learning would become an increasingly important phenomenon. Self-development was perceived by Eric Davies as crucial to maximise the full potential of the professional librarian whilst meeting the goals of their employers.

After a most enjoyable and informative three days we headed for the railway station, and home. We consider that the bursary given by the Forum for Interlending has been most beneficial, and we hope that you will continue with this initiative in the future.

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