

CILIPS President Blogs

Between 2010 and 2012, the CILIPS Presidents wrote blogs for the CILIPS website. Here is an archive of the content.

Audrey Sutton (President 2013)

Welcome to my blog!

Monday, March 4, 2013 at 3:44PM

What a pleasure it is to welcome you to the first blog post of my presidential year.

I am delighted and thrilled to be beginning this journey and I look forward to meeting many of you in the course of 2013.

However, the fact that I'm writing this means that Peter isn't, and I'd like to begin by paying tribute to the best past president I could have imagined.

Professor Peter Reid has set a standard for the Presidency this year which will be hard to match. His focus on the profession, in what has been an unusual year, and the impact he has made by sharing his wisdom and humour with us during his many visits and conference attendances has revitalised and inspired many of us. CILIPS finds itself in a new position this year, in no small measure due to Peter and our colleagues on the Policy and Resources Committee, and thanks to them we can look forward with confidence.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with Peter this year for the benefit of library and information professionals in Scotland.

It is also with pleasure that I look forward to working with CILIPS' new vice president, Robert Ruthven, Director of Library Services at Caledonian University. Robert and I have known each other since we were both young and enthusiastic school librarians. At least we're both still enthusiastic!

All in all, I'm very lucky to be working with such a good team, and with Cathy's support, I'm sure it will be a good year.

Plans are now almost complete for the CILIPS 2013 conference, thanks to Cathy and her team. I've been astonished to see up close what conference organisation really entails and I've been humbled in the process. A huge thanks to all concerned.

The theme of this year's conference is, "Libraries Making a Difference." I've been keen to use this opportunity to remind all our stakeholders just how important libraries are in the current economic, political and social climate. At a time when prioritisation seems to be the mantra, we will be providing all the arguments as to why libraries should continue to be a priority, and set them in the context of early intervention, prevention and community empowerment.

As well as looking forward to our own conference I'm also pleased to have been invited to a number of other events and conferences in the coming year. The opportunity to learn from the work colleagues are doing across the United Kingdom and Ireland will undoubtedly inspire us all and I'll do my best to share this with you in the months ahead.

Thanks to all of you for visiting my blog and I'll be back with an update soon.

Audrey

Peter Reid (President 2012)

Dr Audrey Sutton, CILIP Scotland President 2013

Tuesday, January 22, 2013 at 9:51AM

The last duty of the outgoing president is to introduce his successor and for me this is a very real privilege.

I have known Dr Audrey Sutton for many years since we were both undertaking doctoral research at RGU and we completed our PhDs within a year of one another. Subsequently, I have had many professional links with Audrey and I always look forward to my visits to North Ayrshire when we spend a not inconsiderable amount of time, usually over dinner, putting the world to rights.

Audrey is quite simply a remarkable person and I count her as one of my dearest friends. She is someone who is held in the highest respect by her peers in the library and information sector in Scotland and, indeed, beyond, for her commitment to the provision of high-quality customer-focussed services and for her creative and imaginative approaches to delivering services.

From my regular visits to North Ayrshire, I have had a number of opportunities to observe how Audrey managed the library service and how she has innovated in service delivery. She has successfully combined the ability to provide the practical management of services with wider strategic thinking. It is this combination of

talents that has taken her on to her new role with its wider remit for community and cultural services.

Audrey has provided consistently clear and effective leadership of her team. The respect in which she is held by peers elsewhere is mirrored by those who work with her in her own organisation. It has always been clear to me – and no doubt to most of you here – that she has earned respect and loyalty from all levels of staff in a quite extraordinary way.

This is done, in my opinion, in two ways; firstly, Audrey provides an unambiguous and lucid sense of direction; secondly, she is one of the most effective communicators I know and her ability to get on with everyone ensure that commitment and enthusiasm are maintained by those around her.

Many of us, myself including, have often benefitted from Audrey's advice and wise counsel. Audrey is one of the most incisive and insightful people that I know.

CILIP Scotland is very lucky to have Dr Audrey Sutton as its president for 2013 and I know that she will inspire us with her vision, her dedication, her enthusiasm and her sense of fun over the coming year. She will also have, walking two steps behind her, an inestimable consort in the shape of Harry and I look forward to some references to Mr Sutton on the blog.

It is my pleasure to welcome Dr Audrey Sutton as President of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland.

Reflections on the year

Tuesday, January 22, 2013 at 9:47AM

It is difficult to believe that my Presidential year has come and gone. It passed so quickly but it is full of the most wonderful memories of visits made and people met.

A year ago, when we met in the Scottish Parliament building, I was slightly daunted at the prospect of taking on the presidency particularly as I had a very hard act to follow. Alan Reid was, quite simply, a superb president in 2011 and it was a great honour for me to succeed him.

I chose *Enriching Society* as the theme for 2012 and this was because I felt it summed up what libraries do. They are catalysts for change and enhancement in a way that is perhaps quite unlike any else. I also chose that theme because I felt it was important, when the economic situation is so gloomy, that we celebrate the contribution which our services and our people make to wider society.

I have to confess that I felt I was living up to my reputation as a late-developer in that I didn't seem to manage to do very much in the first couple of months of the year. This was primarily because of the day job; February and March are my busiest teaching months.

Once that was over and done with, however, I had much more time to devote to Presidential duties. I must acknowledge my sincere thanks to my colleagues at RGU and, in particular, to Professor Rita Marcella, my Dean, for their support over the course of the year. I was extremely lucky to be able to spend so much time away from the office. And, speaking of offices, I want to thank everyone in the CILIPS office, Elaine, Rhona, Cathy, Gillian and Morag for everything they have done for me over the year. I couldn't have done it without them.

I would like to outline some of the things which I have done over the course of the year. In April, I was delighted to be asked to open the dinner at the LILAC conference which was being held in Glasgow for the first time. This was a wonderful occasion and the Presidential chain provoked many admiring glances and covetous looks I can tell you. I think I was lucky to get out there with it intact. Or, unlucky depending on your point of view.

Rhona and I went over to Belfast later in April to attend the joint conference of the Library Association of Ireland and CILIP Ireland which was held in the luxurious Merchant Hotel (I can thoroughly recommend it). I spoke at the conference on the challenges for professional education in our sector and was, sort of, wearing two hats that day. One of the things which struck me particularly about this conference was the very positive atmosphere and upbeat view of many people, despite very bad economic times. I must thank our colleagues in Ireland for the kindness and their hospitality.

I was delighted to be asked by LocScot to lead their Study School Day in Perth at the end of April. In May I had a lovely evening with Central Branch at Bridge of Allan Library (to which I returned in July for its official opening).

Also in May, I made a presidential progress around North Ayrshire Libraries and I am very grateful to Audrey and particularly to Paul Cowan for devising a wonderful programme for me. I blogged extensively about this and saw many things that impressed me, not least the wonderful Macmillan volunteers in Saltcoats and the wonderful kids at Irvine Royal Academy.

I had the great pleasure of also doing Meet the President events with East Branch in the National Library of Scotland and the North East Branch at Aberdeen Central Library and these were really good and lively events.

Our annual conference had an excellent programme and I think the decision to move it to Dundee more than paid off with lots of really positive feedback about the venue. I thought the conference was excellent and want to thank the team in the office for all their work. I think most Presidents only fully enjoy the conference after it is over because you are so busy during it. It was, however, an excellent event.

Immediately after conference I had to go to Newcastle to do external examining at the University of Northumbria but I managed, on my way back North, to make a visit to East Lothian where I visited the new library in Dunbar, helped launch the ebook lending scheme and then visiting the John Gray Centre in Haddington.....and you all know how much I loved that.

Over the summer I re-engaged with real life in my garden, located just north of the village of Ambridge and over that period you were subjected to ever more surreal blog postings about, amongst other things, German spies and Land Girls. I must say that I have enjoyed doing the blog immensely and will be transferring to a new platform shortly so please keep reading.

After the holidays I had the great pleasure of attending the official opening by Her Majesty the Queen of the new Sir Duncan Rice Library at Aberdeen University and that was a very special day.

The Autumn Gathering in October, which was an unqualified success and for which I would like to pay tribute to Cathy. After it, I had one of the high points of the year and that was my trip to Orkney. I was particularly grateful to Gary Amos and his team for the time they spent with me. The highlight was undoubtedly opening Orcime, the Orkney Crime Fiction Festival and I had the great pleasure of introducing Ann Cleeves, the author of the Vera Stanhope and Shetland Quartet novels. Ann is a great fan of libraries and librarians and would be only too pleased to speak at our events in the future and I hope we take her up on that.

I spent a very pleasurable time in the Borders with Margaret Menzies and her team and I much enjoyed my trip down there as it is part of Scotland I am very fond of and know particularly well. Later in November, I undertook a meet the President for the staff of my own local library service in Moray and that was a real pleasure for me. I have spoken before about the debt I owe to Jessie Leslie, who ran the library in my village when I was a child so it was particularly good to be back in the service that has given me so much. My final visit, in mid December, was to the University of West of Scotland, Ayr Campus, courtesy of Gordon Hunt.

I'd like to end with something that I mentioned on the blog after I'd made the trip to the Borders. Ruth Fry, the librarian at Peebles High School said something that has really stayed with me. She told me of her own daily protest against apartheid when she worked in Cape Town: that she dealt with people in the order that they queued and didn't give preferential treatment to the whites. There is metaphor for our profession there – it is all the little things that we each do in library services that make such a difference to so many people's lives. Over the course of the last year, I saw countless examples of these little things – and indeed lots of examples of big things too – happening right across Scotland and each one of them demonstrated the endless capacity of our profession to enrich society.

The last year has been the most enormous privilege for me. I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of the engagements that I undertook as President and I will look back with tremendous fondness and gratitude on 2012. I want to end by thanking all our CILIP Scotland members for giving me the opportunity to be president for the year and for their unfailing kindness to me over the last year.

I would like to end by congratulating Cathy Kearney on her appointment as Director of CILIP Scotland and am sure you will all join me in wishing Cathy well in her new role.

As I mentioned above, I am going to continue to blog and the new one can be found at <http://www.the-librarian.blogspot.co.uk/>. Please keep looking at it and chipping in with comments. I have moved all of the content of this blog across to it.

Happy Christmas

Friday, December 21, 2012 at 7:08PM

Well, dear readers, it is finally the Christmas holidays. This week has been exceedingly long and exceedingly busy but it is now over and the holidays begin here. I particularly like the Christmas holidays because work closes down and the never-ending flow of emails stills to a trickle because virtually everyone else is off too. I also like the fact that it is possible to sit down in the afternoon and read a book or watch a film without feeling the guilt I would if I did that during the summer holidays when I should be out doing something in the garden. So there are boxed sets a plenty and I know that Santa is calling in via some of my favourite bookshops before visiting in a few days time. He always comes to me via Bokus in Sweden and whatever comes from there is a real treat, feeding my obsessions with the Bernadottes (google it dear readers). I am planning to blog some good old-fashioned observations on some books over the holidays so watch this space. In the meantime, I'd like to wish all of you a very Happy Christmas.

Happy retirement Elizabeth.

Thursday, December 13, 2012 at 9:20PM

One of the things that you will have realised by now, dear readers, is my unbounded admiration for the members of our profession working hard across the country to deliver excellent and community-focussed information and library services. We are, I believe, a profession with quite exceptionally talented people in it; people who make such a difference to their communities.

Friday 14th December marks the retirement of one of these exceptionally talented library professionals who has, throughout her career, made such a difference to the communities in which she has served. I am, of course, talking about Elizabeth Farr who retires from Stirling Libraries this week and to whom I want to pay the warmest of tributes.

I first got to know Elizabeth through going to our annual conference, back in Peebles days. Since then I have been fortunate to visit Stirling Libraries on a number occasions and Elizabeth and the team have always made me feel so welcome.

But, Elizabeth's outstanding contribution is not centred around making befuddled professors feel welcome. No, it is centred around her passionate commitment to libraries and their life-changing capacity. She is a consummate information professional; consistently promoting the centrality of public libraries in society, maintaining the highest standards of service delivery and seeking new ideas and ways of enhancing provision. And still, she finds time to advocate for our profession, be a fantastic manager, a wonderful colleague and friend to many as well as simply being a lovely human being too.

Elizabeth has quite simply been a star in our profession and I know those of you who know her will echo my sentiments. Elizabeth, you will be so much missed by your colleagues in Stirling and, indeed, right across Scotland. However, you go with much love and good wishes from all the friends you have made throughout our profession. Enjoy retirement Elizabeth.

Creative industries at UWS in Ayr

Thursday, December 13, 2012 at 9:02PM

On Tuesday this week, I visited the new University of West of Scotland campus in Ayr at the invitation of Gordon Hunt who is both University Librarian and Director of Campus Services for Ayr. This is a most impressive building which sits on a beautiful river-side campus. I was incredibly grateful to Gordon for asking me

down to see it and it was rather nice that my final presidential visit should be to Gordon as he and I have known each other for many years and he was, indeed, our external examiner for a number of years.

I really liked the building which looks large on the outside but is, in fact, enormous when you get inside; the tardis like deception being achieved by it being built into a slope down to the river Ayr (in much the same way my own Aberdeen Business School building is). I was particularly struck by the way in which the central atrium really works as a space and has a clear link to all the other parts of the building (this is something which isn't true of the atrium in Aberdeen Business School). The use of wood is also very impressive.

The new Ayr Campus has lots of wonderful facilities; particularly impressive is the creative industries spaces with many television and radio studios and performance space. Of course, from the perspective of our own creative industry (and indeed libraries, museums, galleries and archives are now included in the creative industries), it was gratifying to see the library at the very heart of the building. It has long been argued that the library is at the heart of the university and so it was good to see that in a physical manifestation as well as a metaphorical one.

I was shown round the library by Neil Buchanan, the campus librarian, and it is a really nice space, designed with users in mind with clearly identifiable zones of activity. I loved the orange ends to shelving which gave a distinctive, warm and welcoming feel and I am delighted to say that despite it being the last week of term, there were plenty of students busily working away in it. Thank you Neil and thank you Gordon for the time you took this week in showing me the excellent campus you have. *

In the evening, I had the great pleasure of dinner with Audrey Sutton and Rhona Arthur at the Harbour Art Centre in Irvine. That was a real treat. We had a lovely meal and a wonderful chat which ranged right across our professional activities and generated lots of really good ideas.

CILIP Scotland you are exceptionally lucky to have someone of Dr Sutton's talents as your incoming president for 2013 and I will say more about that anon.

* PS Gordon - the Aberdeen Business School Christmas Tree is bigger than your one. But, hey, it wouldn't be Aberdeen if it wasn't!

Bibliotheca Moraviana

Friday, November 30, 2012 at 9:48AM

Yesterday, I had the great pleasure of doing a 'Meet the President' with staff from Moray Libraries. This was a particularly enjoyable event since this is my 'home' library service. I was first introduced to the whole notion of the library as a very small child and had such fondness for it (and, indeed, the library assistant who ran it) that my love of libraries has endured over the intervening years. The local heritage service has been something of a second home in particular.

Yesterday, I met with the senior staff at Elgin Library and outlined what I've done over the course of my presidential year, the places I've been and the things that I have seen. I spoke about the things that have particularly impressed me during my travels like the Macmillan partnership in North Ayrshire, the newly-refitted library in Bridge of Allan, the John Gray Centre, the 120th birthday party for Aberdeen Central Library, the Crime Fiction Festival in Orkney and the Heritage Hub in Hawick. I also spoke particularly about the capacity that libraries have for changing lives and how we as librarians are central to this. I know I was preaching to the converted but I think there was enthusiasm for and agreement with the things I was saying.

We had a good discussion about branding and marketing of libraries and why it is sometimes difficult for us to get the message out to the people who need to hear (i.e. policy- and decision-makers). I mentioned something which most of us are familiar with, the elevator pitch, the fifteen seconds of soundbite that we should have stored to use when we are with someone who "needs to know" or is in a position to help or influence on our behalf.

Being in Elgin Library as President of CILIP Scotland was a strange phenomenon for me because, as a student, I did my placement there and little did I imagine that I was return, years later, as the bearer of the presidential chain. Now, obviously, dear readers, you will consider me very slightly biased in my opinions of Moray Libraries because I have grown up with them and still use them. So, forgive me as I launch into a paean of praise.

I have to say Moray has an excellent library service which has, over all the years I've known it, continued to innovate and to look really creatively at how to enhance and expand the service provision. The Learning Centre is one obvious example of this and the range of learning and educational opportunities available through the library is excellent. I love the feel of Elgin Library, the range of stock and resources and I have to say I love the Mobiles too and love seeing them with their distinctive images trundling round the byways of Moray. Even doing right back into the early days of automation, the creation of the service's online Local Studies Index [LIBINDEX](#) was a considerable innovation and, indeed, I have on the

bookshelf in front of me one of the late Mike Dewe's books on local studies from the 1980s which contains an chapter about LIBINDEX.

I've been delighted to be involved with the various initiatives to enhance the local heritage provision in Moray which I have mentioned previously. I know it is very much "my thing" and I risk boring people by banging on about it. However, it is worth saying that Moray has an exceptionally fine local collection, probably one of the top five in Scotland and that is why it is so important to see a new and really exciting strategy emerging for its future development. All the more so because it is so linked to economic development, partnership working, social inclusion and all the other priorities which are so rightly at the heart of the agenda for our local authorities. It is also a really commendable project because it brings together so many of the key business stakeholders in the area.

The Moray staff team, most of whom I've know for a long time, is so committed and enthusiastic. They continue to drive the service forward. They are also really good reflective practitioners, learning from what they've done and using that learning to enhance the service further. Alistair and Sheila Campbell run a great service, with a great team of colleagues. The people of Moray love their libraries (me included) and we are all very lucky to have excellent provision. Moray Council also demonstrates not inconsiderable foresight in recognising the crucial place which libraries have in their communities and using strategically to deliver so many of the key policy agendas and services.

A day out of Hawick is a day wasted *

Saturday, November 24, 2012 at 6:09PM

When summer smiled on sweet Bowhill,
And July's eve, with balmy breath,
Waved the blue-bells on Newark heath;
When throstles sung in Harehead-shaw,
And grain waved green on Carterhaugh,
And flourished, broad, Blackandro's oak,
The aged Harper's soul awoke!
Then would he sing achievements high
And circumstance of Chivalry,
Till the rapt traveller would stay,
Forgetful of the closing day;
And noble youths, the strain to hear,
Forsook the hunting of the deer;

I did, dear readers, warn you that I would lapse into the world of Sir Walter Scott and those are my favourite lines from the output of the great man. Well, I have just

had the most splendid time visiting the Scottish Borders Library Service. This was part of the country I really wanted to come to visit during my year as president. I spent many happy childhood holidays in Kelso and know this part of the country very well indeed and, rather like Orkney, is a part of the country I'd quite like to live in.

I am eternally grateful to Margaret Menzies and all her team for organising the visit and for the amount of time they gave up. I am always very aware of this when I make any of presidential progresses around the country. It is always lovely to be made to feel so welcome wherever I have visited.

After meeting some of the team at Library Headquarters in Selkirk, Margaret and I went to the Heritage Hub in Hawick. This is part of the [Heart of Hawick](#) Project which has seen the regeneration of this part of the town. The [Heritage Hub](#) is the home to Borders Archives, next door is the Tower Mill which has been transformed into theatre-cum-cinema with coffee shop, exhibition space, and tourist information and the third part is the Borders Textile Towerhouse. The three buildings are beautiful and the modern additions of glass atria look stunning. At the Archive I was taken on a tour by Ian Brown, Cultural Services Manager for Scottish Borders Council and Julie Baird the Assistant Archivist. I saw the Hawick Missal, a recently discovered piece of thirteenth century monastic chant which had incidentally been performed the night before. The Heritage Hub is wonderful and must surely be the envy of many of other towns and authorities. It reflects very well on Scottish Borders Council's foresight in recognising the value of archives in pulling in heritage tourists. Hawick is very lucky indeed to have three such a wonderful facilities at the end of its main street.

Then it was on to Hawick Public Library where Julia met us and showed us round. This is a Carnegie library but has remarkably flexible, open spaces for a building of that vintage. The [Bookbug](#) session was just coming to an end as we arrived and a long stream of young mums with babies in prams were leaving the library. How fantastic it was to see so many participating in this. This has been a real success story for Borders Libraries with sessions regularly over-subscribed.

We then called at Selkirk Library which has the distinction of being in the old jail. Surely this must be unique in Scotland. Inevitably, such a building poses challenges for the delivery of a twenty-first century library service in terms of access and layout. Morag, who is currently looking after the library Selkirk, is about to start our Masters course in January.

Then it was back to headquarters for lunch with Ian, Keith, Gill, Norman and Cameron. In the afternoon, we visited the library and Peebles High School. Now this was one place that I had mentioned to Margaret as being somewhere that I particularly wanted to go. My reason for this was straightforward: Ruth Fry, the librarian at Peebles High, is quite simply one of the best ambassadors for our

profession; her enthusiasm for the role of the library in the life of the school is infectious and you only have to spend a few minutes in her company to realise how central a part of the learning community the school library is.

I have previously blogged about the role, value and impact of school libraries and the school librarians on students and their attainment but there is something more that is also apparent at Peebles and that is the impact that it has on the lives of those who use them. Ruth was telling me about a student who has Asperger's Syndrome and how she asked him to do a Friday talks in the library about what is like to have the condition. It was hugely successful and it allowed him to explain to others the reality of the condition. That takes bravery but it also takes trust and demonstrates more clearly than any performance indicator the impact that Ruth has on the students in her school. Sean, the student in question, has been asked to do the talk again in other venues. She also told me of someone else, brought to reading because of a trip to the Edinburgh Book Festival she organised and how that student felt his life had been changed because of it. Decision-makers please take note: school libraries are all about young peoples' lives and life chances.

Ruth, thank you for your time this week and please, please, just keep doing what you do and, Peebles High, you have a fabulous school librarian. You said something else that has really stayed with me and that was your comment about your own daily protest against apartheid when you worked in Cape Town: that you dealt with people in the order that they queued and didn't give preferential treatment to the whites. There is metaphor for our profession there – it is all the little things that we each do in library services that make such a difference to so many people's lives.

It was then back to see the library in Melrose and it is lovely. It was a former draper's shop but has been refitted into a really nice space with a great area for children and, as with every other library in the Borders, super art work from the kids themselves. Margaret and I ended the day in with a meal at Marmion's (is commercial advertising permitted on this blog?) which is just round the corner from Melrose Library. This is place I haven't been at for about fifteen years but had very good memories of it and the meal didn't disappoint in any way.

So, what did I see in the Borders? Well, I saw a fantastic library team and I emphasise the word **team**. There has been a restructuring recently and some significant changes to the delivery of provision including co-location with other Council functions but this team is giving it their all and are demonstrating their commitment to and enthusiasm for library services across the region. The Heritage Hub is a gem; yet another 'must see' for our profession. Bookbug is a real winner with the community and it, like the other school and public libraries I visited, are changing lives. Thank you Scottish Borders and keep up the good work.

On Friday I went, under my own steam, to Kelso – a place I know so well – and

then went on to Yetholm. That was a wee bit emotional as I'd always been there with my father and, by coincidence, today is the fifteenth anniversary of his death so there was something a bit poignant about that. Afterwards, I went to the new Sir Walter Scott Visitor Centre at Abbotsford which I loved, all glass and wood and not at all incongruous next to the House itself. Finally, I went back to Hawick to have lunch with my good friend James Sugden at Johnston's new visitor centre, shop and restaurant and very good it was too. So, I returned home a happy president absolutely delighted with my visit and, to paraphrase Sir Walter, pleased to sing of achievements high in Borders libraries.

* A well-known Hawick proverb

Touring libraries, controlling documents, anticipating the Borders and having birthdays

Thursday, November 15, 2012 at 7:35PM

Yesterday, we took this year's MSc Information and Library Studies students on two library tours. In the morning we visited the new Sir Duncan Rice Library at University of Aberdeen. We were divided into three groups and taken round by Susan McCourt, Elaine Shallcross and Janet MacKay, all of whom did their librarianship course at Robert Gordon and, indeed, I taught both Elaine (in our first cohort of distance learning students) and Janet (who did the full-time course). The students were very impressed by the new building and the presentation given. Susan was very interesting and showed both the philosophy behind the building and the university's aspirations for it. I seem to have spent a considerable amount of my time up there over the last week.

Then, in the afternoon, we had our annual visit to the Central Library where we roam all over that equally fabulous building. We began with a presentation from Susan Bell charting the development of the library and how it has changed over its 120 years (and yes, before you ask, Marcus Milne was mentioned). We were then in four groups for this visit and the students especially appreciate seeing all the behind-the-scenes areas and hearing from staff what their role entails. We ended with a presentation from John Grant about the current priorities for the service before a question and answer session led by Fiona Clark. Altogether it was an excellent day and one which was very beneficial to the students.

Today I have been involved in discussions about various short-course developments. We have recently launched one of these (five credits worth at undergraduate third year level) called Document Control Foundation. This is basically introductory training for those working in document control in the energy sector (primarily in the oil and gas industries). It struck me this morning as the meeting to discuss this was finishing that this aspect of information work is one

that I haven't touched upon at all on the blog and yet Information Management work in the oil and gas sector is a crucial component of our professional life here in the North East.

The Document Control Foundation course was born out of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) which our department had with a local company called the Amor Group. Amor provide technology and information solutions to a wide range of firms including many in the energy sector up here. They also were behind technologies used for online check-in by some well-known airlines and for many of the systems used at Scottish airports so I suspect you may well have used their products without ever knowing it. Amor does a lot of work in supplying document controllers for the energy sector and the central plank of the KTP was the formation of the [Information Management Energy Forum](#) which brings together practitioners in this field and also seeks to share good practice and develop suitable training.

This was lead by my colleague, Dr Laura Muir, together with the KTP Associate appointed for the project, Fionnuala Cousins. We struck gold in the appointment of Fionnuala who has been the driving force behind the forum and its activities. The KTP formally ended in February but the partnership is still very strong and I appointed Fionnuala an Associate Lecturer within the Department as soon as the project finished. The [Document Control](#) module was (along with an annual Benchmarking exercise) one of the most tangible outcomes of this KTP and, although only launched in May, we will have had nearly one hundred students complete it by the end of the year. We are very proud of the success of the KTP project and are working hard on building on this.

The oil and gas sector in Aberdeen has a bewildering array of information professionals working within it and many of them are our graduates. One of the key things about developing this kind of short-course training is actually listening very carefully to the sector and to what the businesses in question require. This has been central to the approach that Laura and Fionnuala have adopted and it has paid dividends and we fully expect to carve out a very distinctive (and, indeed, unique) niche for IM educational provision with this. We will be developing short courses in other areas too but the energy related ones are a particular achievement.

Next week, I am delighted that CILIPS Policy and Resources Committee is coming to Aberdeen for its November meeting and I am looking forward to welcoming everyone to RGU for that. Our campus is something of a building site at the moment with our huge new teaching building (and new library) going up and it is now about six months from completion.

At the end of next week, I am off down to do a presidential visit to the Borders and this is something I have been looking forward to enormously. I am very grateful to Margaret Menzies for organising a super programme for me. I have a great love of

the Borders as I spent many wonderful family holidays in Kelso as a child and my love of that part of the country has never diminished. I may even break into the Lay of the Last Minstrel when I report back on my trip on the blog later. I am delighted that I can also manage to find time on Friday next week to visit the new [Johnston's Visitor Centre](#) at the mill in Hawick. This was very much the creation of my very good friend James Sugden who was, until recently, their Managing Director (he also holds an Honorary Doctorate from RGU). We are having lunch there on Friday so next week promises to be a real treat on a number of levels.

Now dear readers, I am having a day off tomorrow (an almost unheard of thing for me during term time) as Mrs Reid has a special birthday tomorrow. I do, of course, mean my mother and not the other Mrs Reid, of Penicuik, a lady much renowned on this blog last year for keeping the Immediate Past President on the straight and narrow. I am very grateful to the Penicuik Reids for their good wishes for the impending birthday :o)

Working smarter. Adding value.

Friday, November 9, 2012 at 8:44AM

Well, dear readers, I have neglected this blog shamefully over the last couple of weeks. It has been incredibly busy times with the day and this week has been one of those horrible periods where I haven't just been double-booked, I've been triple-booked. So I'd leave one meeting early to go late to another and then leave it to see someone else whilst in between trying to do something else. Anyway, it is often a bit like that for all of us.

Yesterday, however, I was very firmly in one place, at one event for the whole afternoon. It was the [Grampian Information](#) Annual Conference held in the Craig Suite at the Sir Duncan Rice Library at the University of Aberdeen. This is the sixteenth annual GI conference and we are quite proud that we have managed to sustain this organisation and its conference over all that time. Like many such organisations, GI is entirely made up of volunteers from every library and information sector who come together to organise cross-sectoral events, training and the conference. We do, however, employ a part-time executive support officer Amelia Davies who does a huge amount of the spade work particularly with our events.

The theme of yesterday's conference for **Working smarter. Adding Value.** We had an excellent programme and a very good turnout given how difficult it is for people to get away and how difficult it can be to get the money to go to conference events. All in all, the GI executive committee was very pleased with the way the event went.

Our first keynote was Jens Thorhauge, formerly the Director General of the Danish Agency for Library and Media, now part of [Kulturstyrelsen](#). Jens gave a truly inspirational talk, looking at what they have done in Denmark, the cooperation and collaboration, the way they have responded to government policy, the philosophical and societal challenges they face. One phrase he used that really appealed to me was that "universal access to publications is the peak for the analogue library" and the new conception of the digital library must be much more. He also showed how various initiatives such as the Danish Digital Library has become a provider of information for business and for public administration. There were also some really interesting models for the design of library space and services which will be of much interest and relevance to audiences beyond Denmark. Everyone, from every sector, learned so much from Jen's talk. We were exceedingly lucky and pleased to have one of Europe's most knowledgeable and experienced library policy-makers.

We then had two parallel sessions. One was Gordon Hunt, Director of Campus Services (and formerly University Librarian) at the University of the West of Scotland speaking about shared services. I am looking forward to going down to see this in practice at the Ayr Campus in December on what will be my last presidential visit. Our other parallel session was given by Alison Hunter of East Lothian Libraries and was on marketing and branding. Alison shows some of the really imaginative things that East Lothian Libraries have done. I think everyone was particularly impressed by the branding for the John Gray Centre and also Lennox the Lion, the mascot for the children's service. I particularly loved the tie in to Lennoxlove and its book festival and the library service's use of "Lennox loves....." Really, really clever stuff we can all learn from. All credit to Alison, her library service team and East Lothian Council's imagination.

Then we had our final keynote, Steve Yorkstone, LEAN Consultant from Edinburgh Napier University who took us through aspects of Lean in a very informative and entertaining fashion. He focused on a reshelving project in a university library and gave numerous examples of how so many of our organisations become bedevilled by processes that are needless, even pointless and are only perpetuated because "it has always been done like that". Steve was a terrific finale to our day and undoubtedly gave much food for thought as we return to our own organisations.

So Grampian Information may be a relatively small organisation but (and I know I am biased) it punched well above its weight, yet again, with a superb half-day conference. If you haven't made it up to a GI conference then please try to sometime. We have direct trains from Edinburgh and Glasgow now :o)

Newcastle, Labour History, Land Girls and the heart of Recusant Scotland

MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2012 AT 6:13PM

Last week I was again down in Newcastle, external examining at Northumbria and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Is one supposed to say that about work? As you will know, I like my little trips down to Newcastle. The externals and some of the staff from the university had a very pleasant dinner on Wednesday night and then Professors Deans, Gorman and Reid retired to the bar of the hotel and put the world to rights. On Thursday evening, after the Assessment Board itself, I went out to dinner with my great friends Julie McLeod and Ali Pickard and, again, we put the world to rights. We agreed that it would probably be prudent for me not to blog about our discussions. What I will say is that I really like the atmosphere at the University of Northumbria and that I am so fond of meeting up with Ali and Julie.

On Friday, I drove up to Penicuik where I called upon Mr Past President Reid and Mrs Reid. I am delighted to report that Mrs Reid is in good health and is mightily relieved at not having to polish the chain. I am sure that you will all recall fondly Mrs Reid's mentions on the blog last year. We were joined by Elaine ahead of going into Edinburgh to present Honorary Membership of CILIPS to Dr Ian MacDougall. This was a most pleasurable task. We called upon Ian and his wife and had a lovely time with them and Ian is very much on the mend. Ian is a true scholar and he was awarded honorary membership for his outstanding contribution to social history, oral history and for recording the lives of working people across Scotland. His work with the Scottish Labour History Society is truly inspiring. So, he is a wonderfully worthy recipient of our honorary membership.

Interestingly, my weekend also involved the history of working people too. You may well have seen that the Duke of Rothesay recently unveiled a memorial to the [Land Girls](#) and yesterday I took my mother to see it. We were thrilled by it. It is a stunning piece of steel sculpture and just makes you smile. It is fabulous and beautiful and we in Banffshire are delighted that it is on our home turf. It has been described in the press as being "at Fochabers". Well it isn't. It is at Clochan, or rather between Clochan at Preshome, in the heart of the area known as the Enzie.

The Enzie (pronounced 'Ingy') is an ancient territory, a Lordship of the Gordon family and the Marquess of Huntly, Chief of the Gordons, is also the Earl of Enzie. The Enzie is a beautiful stretch of countryside and is one which inspires deep spiritual affection in all who know it. Part of this is because it is the heart of old Roman Catholic Scotland and has the two oldest Post-Reformation Catholic churches in the country: St Ninian's at Tynet and St Gregory's at Preshome (pronounced "Prizome"). In the eighteenth century, there were more Catholics in the Enzie than in the whole of Glasgow and, for virtually two hundred years, all of the leaders of the Catholic Church in Scotland came from the district.

Both of these churches are astonishingly remarkable buildings. [St Ninian's](#) is, in fact, built as series of simple cottages and was constructed as a clandestine church during the years of penal persecution. Inside, it is extraordinarily beautiful, being very plain and simple but with a lovely altar and lovely pedimented door frames. It is

still used. [St Gregory's](#) is no less astonishing as it is first purpose-built post-Reformation Catholic church in Scotland and its baroque architecture would not be out of place in an Italian piazza. Instead it is in the middle of field tucked away up a single-track road in deepest Banffshire.

Equally impressive is St Peter's in Buckie, which was supposed to be a cathedral, hence it has two spires, but the seat of the Bishop was moved to Aberdeen. Interestingly, most people in the west end of Banffshire, the Parishes of Enzie and Rathven, have a wonderful mix of ancestry that is Catholic, Episcopalian and Presbyterian and, with only a couple of exceptions, the various denominations have always rubbed along wonderfully well, unlike some other parts of the country. There are still, in the Enzie, lots of recusant families, the Geddes family at Tynet, the Murdochs at Windsoer, the McDonnells at Tulloch, the MacLeans at Cuttlebrae, the Greens at Slackend and many others who have all held true to the 'old faith'.

Remind me to get onto the subject of Peter Anson one of these days. He wrote the history of St Ninian's at Tynet and called it the "Banffshire Bethlehem". But Anson is another story.....

Shout about school libraries

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2012 AT 9:52AM

Many of you will be familiar with the work of my colleague, Professor Dorothy Williams, who has devoted the last twenty years to research connected with information literacy and with the impact of information on users in various sectors, including school libraries. Many of you will also know that Dorothy has been one of the biggest influences on my professional career and her friendship is one of my most important and most valued.

Those of you who know Dorothy will know that she is passionately interested not just in the way that we deliver library and information services but the value and impact that they have for those who use them. Some years ago this led Dorothy and her two research assistants to examine the **Impact of School Library Services on attainment and learning**. Two separate reports were issued: one concerned with primary students and the other with secondary students. It is instructive to look briefly at the findings which I summarise below:

- library provision can contribute to academic achievement, particularly in reading literacy
- the contribution to learning is dependent upon quantity and quality of collections and access to further resources and support from outwith the school environment;
- librarians who are qualified, experienced, proactive and confident in managerial, collaborative and instructional aspects enable student learning opportunities;
- enabling resource use at the point of need (flexible scheduling) and integration into the curriculum is an important service for promoting learning, however it is found to require whole school support for effective implementation;
- school library provision is dependent upon clear guidelines and standards, staff development training and support from a regional authority that has links to both library and educational departments;

- the public library and SLS sectors in the UK are beginning to examine the links between student learning and academic achievement in relation to library provision;

There are some very interesting points there, not least that school libraries can contribute to attainment and librarians who are qualified, experienced, proactive and confident in managerial, collaborative and instructional aspects **enable student learning opportunities.**

So, there is plenty clear empirical evidence about the value and impact of school libraries and librarians and we, of course, can supplement this with lots of evidence from our own personal experiences. Why then do some authorities seem to think that school libraries – which offer such potential for advancement amongst our young people – are a suitable target for budget cuts?

[North Lanarkshire Council's current consultation](#) on cost savings includes the following:

Cessation of Education Resource Centre

This saving will be delivered by the cessation of the education resource Service (ERS). The ERS provides a curricular resource service to all educational establishments. Resources available support all aspects of the curriculum but are of particular value to the primary sector in many aspects of learning topics and programmes. The service also provides supports to primary establishments to develop and maintain library provision in each of the establishments.

Total savings: £368,000

Staff savings: 9FTE

Review of school librarians

This saving will be delivered through a review of school based librarians. The review will focus on the priority for the delivery of school based library services which predominantly focuses on support materials for learning and teaching purposes particularly within the context of the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence.

Total savings: £56,000

Staff savings: 0FTE

This is depressing in the light of what we know about the impact of school libraries. The [School Library Association \(Scotland\)](#) has organised a lobby of the Scottish Parliament to take place on Saturday 27th October, two days before a lobby of the Westminster Parliament by school librarians. As education is a devolved issue it was felt it would be better for Scottish School Librarians to take the case directly to Holyrood. The lobby will take place outside the Scottish Parliament at 11.00 am. A number of authors and MSPs have indicated their support.

The lobby is trying to achieve the following:

We believe that access to quality school library provision, including a specialist school librarian, supports children and young people's learning and achievement across the curriculum. We encourage HM Inspectors to reflect on the impact of the school library during their inspection and encourage the Scottish Parliament and local authorities to recognise the importance of the school library in developing lifelong learning skills in our children and young people. We would therefore ask the members of the Scottish Parliament to oppose cuts to school library services and individual school librarian posts

As a professional community, let us get behind this lobby and give it our support. There is a [Facebook page](#) about the lobby and follow the SLA hashtag [#shoutabout](#). Let's remember what Dorothy's research found: librarians who are qualified, experienced, proactive and confident in managerial, collaborative and instructional aspects **enable student learning opportunities.**

Orkneyinga Saga

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2012 AT 1:32PM

It will come as no surprise to any of you that I had a wonderful time in Orkney and was made to feel extraordinarily welcome. It is just over two years since I was last in Orkney and it was a great pleasure for me to go back up during my presidential year. The flight arrived bang on time at Kirkwall and I was met at the airport by Gary Amos.

I think the library and archive in Kirkwall is one of the best facilities of its kind and it is staffed by a really dedicated and enthusiastic team who have a great sense of purpose and a shared commitment to driving the service forward.

My first meeting, over coffee, was with Gary's line manager, Karen Greaves and we had a good chat about the pressures which local authorities face and how they impact on library services. We also spoke a good bit about PLQIM and its value as a quality enhancement mechanism. For Orkney, there is a very real example of this in the new reference room in the library which is a really good space mixing IT and a very good range of traditional reference materials. As you know, I have an affection for reference books so I liked this very much indeed.

At lunchtime, Orcrime 2012 was kicked off by Broth and Breid and the 'Toxic Tomato' soup was very good indeed. This was packed and indeed Orcrime events are all but sold out. Afterwards, Ann Cleaves announced the winners of the Orkney Crime Fiction short stories and it was lovely to see the looks of delight on the faces of the winners. One of the things that was apparent from this event and, indeed, from everything I saw in Orkney, is the extent to which the community values the library and is right behind all that it does.

Gary took me on a tour of the whole building and everytime I see the Search Room and, particularly, the Orkney Room I am in awe. I think the Orkney Room must be one of the finest library spaces in Scotland and what a super atmosphere it has. It is, to use that great German word, so gemütlich. Then it was off to Stromness to see the library there. This building is soon to be replaced by a really exciting new library and I am definitely going back up to see it when it is opened in 2014.

When I returned to Kirkwall, I was interviewed by the one-and-only master of Twitter, Stewart Bain who recorded the interview for YouTube. Your President duly rambled on about libraries and their place in society as is his wont. Stewart is, in my opinion, a legend for the way in which he has really made social media work for the library and I think what he has done is quite simply phenomenal.

In the evening, it was my great privilege to be introducing Ann Cleeves who was the first speaker at Orcrime. Ann and I had been on Radio Scotland together earlier in the year but this was the first time we had met face-to-face. She gave a really wonderful talk about the development of her Vera Stanhope novels, how she approaches writing and the whole process of turning novels into television programmes. She was just superb; entertaining, informative and really enthusiastic. The whole audience enjoyed it every bit as much as I did.

I really hope that Orcrime becomes an annual event and it really demonstrates the imaginative approach of Orkney Library that we have all come to appreciate and value. I think it is just so encouraging for our whole sector that the smallest library authority in Scotland can demonstrate such dedicated staff, such engaged users and such a strong commitment to doing new things.

So, dear readers, I had a lovely time in Orkney and enjoyed every minute of it. I cannot thank Gary, Karen, Stewart and all the fabulous team in Kirkwall and Stromness enough for going out of their way to make me feel welcome and for the time they gave up showing me around. Oh yes, and if you haven't visited Orkney.....why not? It's a really special and magical place and its library service and staff are pretty special and magical too.

Looking northwards to Orkney

MONDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2012 AT 12:44PM

The last few weeks have been hectic as they always are with the start of semester and the new intake of students. Fortunately for me my team is very well-organised and things more or less went according to plan. So I am now three weeks in to my module, Managing Library Services, which is delivered to the distance learners. In this module we look at all aspects of the management of services from planning through implementation to evaluation and impact and, of course, there is a good deal about service development planning, financial management and human resources too. I enjoy this module because I get the students to work on a case-study where they have to plan the delivery of various services, look at rationalisation and restructuring. I deliver the same module on-campus to the full-time students next semester and find that I have always learned so much for our distance learners and their experiences out in the workplace.

This week I am heading up to Orkney which is a great treat for me and I am very much looking forward to it. I am very grateful to Gary Amos for the invitation to Orkney and for organising my programme. My visit will coincide with the opening of Orkney's first crime fiction festival, [Orcrime](#). I'm looking forward to my Broth and Breid at 12 noon on Thursday which will see the kick-off of the festival. In the afternoon, I'm going to Stromness to see the present library and the site of the new one. Then in the evening I will going to hear Ann Cleeves talk about her work,

including the soon-to-be-televised Shetland series. Ann and I have been on radio together but were in different studios so I'm looking forward to meeting her in person.

Autumn Gathering of the CILIPS clan

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2012 AT 2:23PM

I think it is fair to say that our annual Autumn Gathering was an enormous success. All the delegate places were sold and there was a fantastic buzz about the Carnegie Conference Centre in Dunfermline all day. The office staff did a magnificent job in organising this event and in putting together a really interesting programme with great speakers.

The Autumn Gathering has established itself very quickly as one of the most vibrant events on our professional scene in Scotland and this year it very much lived up to that reputation. Our day opened with Biddy Fisher who provided an excellent philosophical overview of information literacy and gave us much food for thought. It was a great way to kick off the day.

The programme was very carefully crafted so that there was something for everyone, regardless of which professional sector or background you come from. That is the hallmark of a good event as far as I am concerned. In the parallel sessions the focus remained on literacies and, judging by the volume of tweets and the informal feedback, people came away stimulated and with many ideas to apply in their own organisations.

In the afternoon, we heard from Hannah Gore from the Open University on their incredibly dynamic platform, Social Learn which, again judging by the chat afterwards really caught the imagination of delegates. Afterwards three more parallel sessions and I took myself off to hear Thomas Connelly speak about the John Gray Centre (no surprises there then).

Our day was rounded off in spectacular style by Dughall McCormick who gave a wonderful presentation on literacies in a primary education context about the importance of teaching kids how to be really savvy in an online environment. This was delivered brilliantly, with much humour but with many serious messages. Some brilliantly funny videos were included including one about a poor individual whose exploits in setting light to his farts went viral (bad choice of words there) online. Never before have so many librarians been so enthralled by flaming farts as today. Dughall was brilliant and he has won himself many fans in Scotland today.

So, overall, I think we can be justifiably proud of our Autumn Gathering and as Dughall predicted say it was the best ever.

Her Majesty the Queen and my birthday

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2012 AT 8:21PM

Well, what a busy it week it has been. On Monday it was the Aberdeen Local Holiday so I had a day off. This was very good since it was my birthday. But, in reality it wasn't a day off because I went to attend the official opening of [The Sir Duncan Rice Library](#) at the University of Aberdeen. The library was opened by Her Majesty the Queen accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh. The event was superbly organised, the atmosphere was fantastic and, as ever, I met many old friends. I am

full of admiration for the work of my good friend Chris Banks and her team (particularly my other good friend, the incomparable Wendy Pirie) for the way in which they accomplished the whole "new library" project. Aberdeen University has ever right to feel justifiably proud of its new library which is a stunning piece of architecture by the Danish firm [schmidt hammer lassen](#). I have to say that it was terribly kind of Aberdeen University to lay all of this on for my birthday and it was especially kind of Her Majesty to come along too.

Tuesday saw me at an Executive Meeting of Grampian Information where we discussed many matters including training events for the coming year and about our forthcoming [Annual Conference](#) which is to be held at the Sir Duncan Rice Library and which also features a Danish angle in the form of Jens Thorhauge who retired earlier this year as Director of the Library and Media Agency in Denmark and who is arguably one of Europe's most well-informed and knowledgeable library professionals. At the risk of conflicting interests, Grampian Information has some very competitive pricing for the conference and we would love to see colleagues from elsewhere in Scotland. Our other keynote is Steve Yorkstone with Gordon Hunt and Alison Hunter doing the parallel sessions.

Wednesday saw me in Glasgow for some meetings. Then on Thursday I was up in Elgin doing a workshop with some of the library staff in connection with the re-development of local heritage services which I have mentioned previously and what a productive and creative session it was too. Lots of good ideas flowed from this and I was delighted to be joined by my former PhD student Dr Kate Friday whose research looked at the online behaviour of family historians. This was followed by a project management meeting connected with the same project. In the evening I had another of those local history talks....this time in Oldmeldrum.

Today I was doing a mid-way viva for one of our research students and that was a really, really stimulating way to spend the morning because the discussion was so animated and enthusiastic. Fantastic to see a doctoral candidate with such a great grasp of their research. I was impressed.

The week ended with a birthday lunch with friends and colleagues and it was absolutely lovely. I am lucky to work with such wonderful people and, indeed, always have been lucky in this respect. A number of bottles of Pouilly Fuissé - my favourite - flowed at Malmaison this afternoon. I received some lovely and very generous presents including, from my mother, a librarian's dream present - a complete set (29 volumes) of the original Dictionary of National Biography.

Next week looks set to be every bit as busy with our own Autumn Gathering at the Carnegie Conference Centre in Dunfermline which is an event I look forward to every year and this year's programme is very interesting with something for everyone. I am looking forward to hearing as many of the sessions as I can manage. As ever, there will be lots of people to catch up with and I'm really looking forward to seeing Biddy. I'm delighted that our CILIP CEO, Annie Mauger, is coming along too. So, see you there I hope :o)

Now, that's what I call a Duchess

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2012 AT 8:29PM

I have written before about my affection for Northumberland and, in particular, my love of Alnwick which is probably my favourite town. So, I was very sad yesterday when Mary Manley - of Barter Books in Alnwick - tweeted that the [Dowager Duchess of Northumberland](#) had died at the age of 90.

What an extraordinary person Elizabeth Northumberland was. She was a debutante during the last season before the War but left that world of unbelievable privilege behind to serve in the WRNS both as a codebreaker and then at sea, dodging u-boats and torpedoes (and, as you know from a previous post on that subject, I have nothing but admiration for those who served at sea during the War). She came back from the WRNS having learned much and felt she had become a person in her own right rather than being, as she put it, "somebody's daughter or somebody's sister". More that sixty years of charitable and community work followed. Yes, that's what I call a Duchess.

The Northumberland family have close ties to Fochabers. Duchess Elizabeth's mother-in-law was a 'weel-kent' face in this neck of the woods because she was Gordon Lennox of Gordon Castle and had a house in Fochabers. She was a regular at Gordon Chapel and I have a photograph of the congregation in the 1950s which includes her.

Duchess Elizabeth died on Wednesday "after a lovely walk in her garden" according to her son. I can't think of a better way to go.

Some reflections on email

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2012 AT 6:50PM

I suppose that it must be getting on for twenty years since I first sent an email. In the mid-1990s, it was anticipated that email would become the cheapest, most effective and most efficient means of communication ever invented. Little did anyone imagine (save for those with great powers of foresight) the way in which it would come to dominate our lives. Given the amount of time that many of us (all of us?) spend dealing with emails I doubt very much whether we would still see it as being quite so efficient and it certainly isn't cheap in terms of staff time. Of course, I'm not denying the enormous benefits of email communication but it is something of a curse too. This week I've had some cause to be irked by email; not so much the content of messages as the way in which it is often used.

Earlier this year I did a little experiment with email. It was during a relatively "quiet" week just after the Christmas holidays. Last thing on the Friday afternoon, I went to my sent items and counted that I had sent some 94 emails that week. Now, admittedly, this week in January was not your average or typical week; it was very quiet because term had not yet started and some people were still on leave. I looked at those 94 emails and all but 13 were responses to other people's messages. So, I had only initiated 13 emails myself across the week. I also looked at the time I'd sent them and found that one quarter were sent outside the normal nine-to-five routine. I

have not replicated this during more hectic weeks but I'm sure the ratio would be broadly similar. Have a go yourself sometime.

The fact that 81 emails were replies ties in with the thing that irked me this week. For it occurred to me earlier this week the extent to which our workload can be tipped on way or the other by the contents of our inbox. For example, I have been almost back to back with staff annual appraisals this week with maybe an hour or so each day with no appointments. That sounds fine; that was the time I could catch up on other "stuff". Well, no it wasn't because on a couple of the days I switched on the iPhone over breakfast to discover emails which necessitated fairly big amounts of work with, of course, no warning that they were coming and deadlines that were very tight. Interestingly, they had come in between 10.30pm and 6am.

Now, I am the first to admit that I am obsessive about email and have an "empty inbox" policy (there is a single email sitting in there at the moment and I am already getting a nervous twitch). And, this is, of course, making a rod for my own back; so too do smart phones which mean the email - either work or personal - pops up immediately wherever you happen to be. So yes, I am my own worst enemy.

Now, dear readers, at the risk of sounding like Disgruntled of Port Gordon, here are some of my real email irritants and I'm sure you will both recognise them and, indeed, empathise with them too.

1. **The curse of CC-** Person A has a question which Person B will know the answer to. Person A emails Person B and copies Person C in (either because they want to be seen to ask the question or because they are generally awkward). Person B replies to Person A and copies to Person C (just for good measure or because they want to be seen as knowing the answer or because they want Person C to confirm it is right). Person A thinks of another question or isn't convinced by the answer so emails back Person B (copied to person C). Person B replies again (still copying to Person C) and so on until such time as Person A replies to all with the words "Thank you" or both A and B decide they don't know either the question or the answer and they should have emailed C in the first place. And we all know these chains can go on and on and on....
2. **Clear my inbox syndrome** - this usually occurs after 4pm weekdays but in serious cases symptoms start at around 3pm, particularly on a Friday. Sufferers of this condition fire off a barrage of emails to others in order to ensure that their desk is clear (or, rather, inbox is empty) before they head off for the evening or weekend. Contrary to popular misconceptions about academics heading off early on a Friday, I have noted a marked spike in email sending in the second half of Friday afternoons. Additionally, these clear-my-inbox messages often result, when replied to, in an out of office message.
3. **Compulsive forwarding** - Why do some people who are on the same distribution list as everyone else feel the need to forward on messages to others? Often these are forwarded with no message other than "Sent from my iPhone/iPad".
4. **"I've sent you an email..."** - Person Y sends you an email then either meets you in the corridor or, worse still, appears at your desk to tell you that they've sent you an email.
5. **"It's my priority so it WILL be yours too"** - this sort of relates to what I mentioned earlier about the way in which your day, no matter how carefully planned, can suddenly be scuppered by the arrival of messages which take you away from what you had planned to do. This is the sender almost dictating the workload of the recipient and often, I think, too little thought is given by the sender about the things the recipient might be involved in and where, on their scale of priorities, the thing that is "so urgent" lies. I had a good example of this when I was off on holiday (and, yes, more fool me for looking at the message); the umpteenth draft of a report came into my inbox at lunchtime on the first

Monday of my holidays and the email accompanying it contained the fatal words "....and I need this by the end of the day so that it can be sent first thing tomorrow morning....."). Yes, indeed, thank you so much.

6. **Size is not everything-** Recently I had an email with fourteen attachments for a meeting (not a CILIPS one I hasten to add). A mixture of Word files and Excel files. One nice PDF (or, at a push, two) would have been much nicer. I also had another lovely attachment of 27MB. That buggered up the email nicely. How they managed to send it I have no idea.

So, there you have it. A real whinge about email. I'm sure some of my moans will be shared by many of you. Meanwhile, if you do have any comments, queries, questions or suggestions please do drop me an email at p.reid@rgu.ac.uk

The Spirit of Moray

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2012 AT 7:29AM

Last night I had the great pleasure of attending the opening of the annual Moray Book Festival in Elgin Library. It was a nice to be at an event like this on my home turf, in the public library that perhaps I know better than any other. This year's festival is called "Spirit of Moray" and the opening session last night was very special indeed.

After the welcome from Alistair Campbell and the official opening by the Convener of Moray Council, Councillor Stuart Cree, the opening session was David Urquhart in conversation with Andy Simpson on Malt Whisky as an investment. The event was packed as you might expect. David Urquhart is the joint Managing Director of [Gordon and MacPhail](#), the famous whisky merchants based in Elgin and is a great authority on the subject. He is also one of the most entertaining, erudite and community-minded people it is possible to meet and Gordon and MacPhail regularly sponsor events such as this (and, indeed, many others). David retires from the role of managing director later this year. Andy is an expert in all things whisky, he writes widely on the subject and his knowledge has led him to create a valuation tool for malts.

Inevitably, we got a few samples to partake of; including a 60 year Glen Grant. This is a very special malt because it was placed in cask on 2 February 1952, four days before the King died, some has been bottled this year to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Grenville Johnston, the Lord Lieutenant, informed us that the commemorative decanter containing the precious nectar is being delivered to Buckingham Palace today. According to David, each of the nip of it was worth, approximately, £400. I'll never taste the like again.

So, once again, Moray Libraries brought together fantastic speakers to open the Book Festival which is such a crucial part of the library calendar. Everytime I visit Moray Libraries (and here I'm speaking as a library professional as well as a local resident), I am struck with how central they are to the local community, they are at the heart of delivering a wealth of services and facilities that the local authority needs to provide. They are engaged, enlightened, fun, informative and meeting every possible user need. Actually, the libraries could be said to be the Spirit of Moray.

Where did the long summer holidays go.....

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2012 AT 1:16PM

Well, I am afraid that the Presidential Blog has been neglected a bit of late. As you might have guessed, September is a slightly chaotic time in the life of an academic as all those things that you had planned to get done during the "long" summer period suddenly crowd in around you ahead of the return of students. Indeed, the students have started reappearing this week for Freshers and Induction with actual teaching beginning next Tuesday. So, your president has been gainfully employed doing the day job over the last few weeks.

I was supposed to be at CILIP's Big Day in Newcastle last week. This was something I had been looking forward to but, unfortunately, a family issue arose which meant that I couldn't make it and I was bitterly, bitterly disappointed to miss it. Tonight I am off to the opening of the [Moray Book Festival](#) in Elgin, an event which I spoke at last year. I've been out doing a number of local history talks over the last while including one on the Earls of Aberdeen to Ellon Historical Society and another on the use of the Census in Local History (as opposed to family history) to Aberdeen and North East Scotland Family History Society. I think I have something like twelve or fourteen such speaking engagements over the next year and have bookings right up to September 2013!

Next Monday, I am attending the official opening of Aberdeen University's wonderful new library. It will be opened by Her Majesty the Queen and there is a lovely programme of events across the day. I will, of course, be wearing the Presidential Chain although I fear it might not compete with those rather sumptuous ones which Her Majesty has as part of the Order of the Garter or Order of the Thistle ;o)

I am in the midst of doing annual staff appraisals at the moment so these two events are very nice diversions. Not, of course, that I don't enjoy doing annual appraisals you will understand. With that, it is time for the next one. Oh my cup runneth over.

A busy week arranging a busy month

FRIDAY, AUGUST 31, 2012 AT 11:57AM

It has been a busy week. We had an Assessment Board on Tuesday and Jon Purcell, the University Librarian at Durham and one of our external examiners, was up here for it. It is always good to catch up with Jon. The rest of the week has been devoted to getting some articles amended for publication. One is in the final proofs stage and so it was just minor typographical corrections but the other one needed some more extensive changes and, as ever with amending journal articles, once you start making changes you inevitably make more major ones that you had intended.

This morning I'm working at home as I have to go to a family funeral this afternoon unfortunately. Next week I am taking my final bit of leave for the year (our holiday year follows the academic session so runs from October to September). That said, I will be going into work on Tuesday as we are hosting a CREDO/Edina/Scran training event and it will be lovely to see the ever-wonderful Anne Kail up in Aberdeen for it.

The following week I'm off to Newcastle for [CILIP's Big Day](#) and it will be really nice to be able to attend that and, I believe, that I am to present ACLIP certificates to some Scottish candidates which will be excellent. When I get back I'm speaking to Aberdeen and North East Scotland Family History Society about the uses of the census for social and community history (i.e. not for genealogy).

This week I've also been making arrangements for my trip up to Orkney in October. I am thrilled to be going back to a place that I really love and I am so grateful to Gary Amos for inviting me up. I am really excited to be returning to Orkney. Gary has prepared a really great programme for me and my visit will coincide with the [Orcrime Festival](#) and I'll manage to attend some of that including, I'm delighted to say, the session with Ann Cleeves. I really like her books and was on Radio Scotland with her earlier this year but we were in separate studios so didn't meet.

I wonder how many of you spotted our own Audrey Walker on the BBC 10 o'clock news last night? It was a report from the Paralympics - where Audrey is volunteering - and there she was, ringing the bell in the velodrome! Well done Madam Treasurer!

How the Reichsmarine saved my dad

FRIDAY, AUGUST 24, 2012 AT 8:31PM

At the risk of being a bore (...perish the thought I hear you declaim), I'd like to continue on the theme I started last Sunday. The story of Vera has provoked a good bit of interest. I'm not surprised because she tends to have this unerring ability to stimulate curiosity. However, I'm not going to add to Vera's tale but I'm going to tell you another slightly bizarre Second World War story and about the other German who looms large for me.

During the Second World War my father served with the Clan Line in the Merchant Navy (the ones who really deserved the medals as a retired Royal Navy Commander said to me once). During the summer of 1942, he was serving on the [Clan MacWhirter](#) which was en route between Bombay and Hull. By the end of August it was the central Atlantic and had fallen behind the rest of the convey it was part of. On August 27th, it was more or less completely separated from that convey and it was spotted by a German U-Boat, U-156 which was under the command of Reichsmarine ace [Werner Hartenstein](#). At approximately 1am, two torpedoes were fired by U-156 sinking the Clan MacWhirter.

A number of the crew, including her master, Captain Masters, was killed but the rest - my father included - managed to get into lifeboats. Then, the most extraordinary thing happened. The U-Boat surfaced and the commander, Werner Hartenstein, appeared and gave them their co-ordinates (200 miles from Madeira) and told them to head south-southwest before the submarine disappeared below the surface again. For eight days, in the baking heat of August, they were in open lifeboats, some crew (particularly the Indians) were badly injured. Eventually, a Portuguese destroyer, the Pedro Nunes, spotted the little lifeboats and picked them up. They were skin and bone and in a pretty bad way. I have an envelope of photographs, taken by a Portuguese officer on the Pedro Nunes, showing them approaching and then rescuing the crew, my dad among them.

However, it was Hartenstein that my father always believed he owed his life to. At 1am in the morning, not knowing their position, in the aftermath of their boat having been blown to bits, they would have stood no chance had he not surfaced to give them co-ordinates and directions.

About ten days after Hartenstein had sunk the MacWhirter, the incident for which he has become famous occurred. In September 1942, he torpedoed the Laconia. He was horrified to discover the ship was carrying civilians (in addition to British troops and Italian Prisoners of War) and mounted a rescue which led to an extremely controversial stand-off and ultimately to Admiral Dönitz's Laconia Order (forbidding rescue at sea). Hartenstein's humanity and compassion was a problem to both sides; his superiors wanted to pursue total war whilst it was inconvenient for the Allies to have a German officer display these qualities when the propaganda war was at its height. The story eventually became an international bestseller and a very successful (and indeed faithful) film. The wikipedia [article](#) on the story is quite good.

Hartenstein was killed in action the following year. Funny to think that one of the Reichsmarine's most celebrated, decorated and skilled commanders saved my dad. And, he never wavered in his gratitude to **Korvettenkapitän Gustav Julius Werner Hartenstein, Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross**.

Vera Erikson: my femme fatale

SUNDAY, AUGUST 19, 2012 AT 9:25PM

How many of you, I wonder, believe in ghosts? I ask because I am haunted regularly by the ghost of a woman by the name of Vera Erikson. Except that wasn't her name or at least it wasn't her name other than for the inconvenient period in 1940 when she was arrested for being a Nazi spy. She might have been Vera Schalburg, Vera Stravritzka, Vera de Cottani, Vera di Chalbur, Vera de Witte....in fact Vera Anything. Vera visits me regularly and frequently arrives unannounced and often entirely unwanted. She has done this since I was a child and you will, of course, appreciate that being stalked by this woman can be exceedingly irritating. No matter what I do to try to rid myself of this ghost, she continues to appear and, I fear, will be a spectre that haunts me for all eternity.

Let me explain and some of you (Alan and Susan for example) will know about this. I live in the old police station in the village of Port Gordon and I've lived here all my life. I am currently typing this in my study which used to be the police office, through the door behind me is the passage which led to the two cells. Few people ever spent a night in those cells, save for the occasional drunk and disorderly. However, this tiny little village police station attained enormous notoriety on 30th September 1940. On that autumnal day, the village bobby, Bob Grieve, was amazed to receive a telephone call first thing in the morning from the stationmaster, John Donald, who reported some strange (in all senses of the word) people at the village railway station.

Bob Grieve went up to the station and, sure enough, there were two very out-of-the-ordinary individuals there. They had tried to buy tickets for "Forrest" (meaning Forrest), their shoes were wet and they were decidedly foreign in manner. Although claiming to be Danish refugees they were, in fact, both German agents. And, the

remarkable thing was (no sexism intended) that one of them was a woman. And that woman was Vera Erikson. Bob Grieve detained them and took them to the Police Station and to the very room I am sitting in now. Later, when joined by his superior officer, John Simpson, he searched their luggage and found a pistol, a knife and radio equipment. The pair were indeed German agents and that lone village bobby had arrested them.

They left the village shortly afterwards and were eventually taken to London. The third person in the gang (who had gone to Buckie alone rather than coming to Port Gordon with them) was arrested at Waverley. About nine months later a trial was held at the Old Bailey and the two men were found guilty and sentenced to death (and were executed a month later). The court had been told, however, that "Madame Erikson would not appear". The assumption widely being that she had turned King's Evidence.

However, the tale is a good deal more complicated than that. Vera was of Danish-Russian extraction and her family had fled the Bolshevik Revolution and settled in Jutland. Later she became a ballet dancer performing, amongst other places, at the the Folies Bergere and became hopelessly addicted to drugs. Still later she was recruited to the Abwehr (mostly to escape the mad and criminal White Russian aristocrat she had become involved with). She may have been sent to spy in London prior to the War, she may have compromised some British establishment figures (in a Mata Hari way), she may have had a child, she may have been recruited by the British, she may have been a double-agent. In fact, she may have been all of these things and so much more.

She disappeared after the War after being deported back to Germany, or so say the files in the National Archives. She probably never went near Post-War Germany and almost certainly had a new and highly secret identity and lived out the rest of her days in England (the Isle of Wight seems to be the most favoured location). Most of the evidence suggests she died in 1993. However, the sheer intrigue of, and misinformation about, Vera makes her incredibly enigmatic and attracts enormous interest (try googling Vera Erikson). She also attracts conspiracy theorists by the bucket-load and I suspect if you listened to some you would find out she had a hand in the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

You will understand that I have a very real interest in Vera because she once sat where I am sitting now. I'm often asked to do talks to local history groups about "the Port Gordon Spies" and I always try to be careful to stick to the facts that we do know; that said, I do cover the speculation about her and her later life without endorsing those things that we cannot confirm.

Vera, my femme fatale, has appeared again today because I've had an email, out-of-the-blue, with some new and very different facts which are not at all clear to me at the moment. Are they correct? Are they reliable? Oh Vera.....here we go again. How is it possible for the ghost of this German agent to continue to exert such a hold on me?

In the old kirkyard at Rathven, about three miles from here, there is a memorial stone which has the words "Eternity. How long?". Yes, Vera, please will you answer that question.

Olympic gardening, Episcopal socializing and George, don't do that

FRIDAY, AUGUST 10, 2012 AT 8:32PM

I think that you will have suspected, by my absence from this blog, that I have been enjoying my summer holidays a great deal. I have had the most relaxing time imaginable. Not, I hasten to add, lazing about, but gardening. I have spent the best part of each day for the last three weeks out in the policies and I am thrilled with my efforts. The garden looks really good now and I am a wee bit gleeful about the transformation since the middle of July. It always does "come good" but sometimes living so close to the sea means that your best efforts can be destroyed with a single northerly wind and salty spray. This year that hasn't happened. I think there have only be two days where rain prevented me getting out at all. All the other days have been a mixture of shower-dodging, fine or even glorious. The Moray Firth coast lives up to reputation of having a different climate from elsewhere. This week has been in the glorious category and as I write this I'm looking out at the sea which is like a mill pond across to the mountains of Sutherland.

Of course, I've also been caught up in the Olympics and what a terrific spectacle they have been. We, in Moray, are particular proud of Heather Stanning who one a rowing gold and who comes from Lossiemouth (which I am also looking out at across the bay). There have been so many highlights from Chris Hoy to Mo Farah, Katherine Grainger to Jessica Ennis, Nick Skelton, Zara and all the other magnificent sports men and women. And, of course, Usian Bolt....the list goes on and on. And, I have to say, the BBC has done a fantastic job. Michael Johnson is a brilliant pundit in my opinion and he has really added immeasurably to the commentary.

I've just finished reading a wonderful gem of an autobiography which I bought in Leakey's bookshop in Inverness about ten days ago. It is called **The rich spoils of time** and is by Dame Frances Campbell-Preston. She writes absolutely exquisitely and paints such a beautiful picture of her life. She was a lady in waiting to the Queen Mother but that part of her life is not at all the focus of the book. Her descriptions of the War years are as good an account as I have ever read and her absolute candour about events and people is refreshing. I was drawn to it because I knew she was Reggie Grenfell's sister and, dear readers, as we all know Reggie was married to the one and only Joyce. I have to confess that Joyce Grenfell would be very high on my list of fantasy dinner party guests.

This weekend is going to be very busy indeed. We are celebrating the return of our priceless stained-glass windows to Gordon Chapel with an open day tomorrow and a service of rededication on Sunday. I've mentioned these windows before so I won't drone on about them again beyond saying they were all designed by Edward Burne-Jones and made by William Morris and Company. They were all installed as memorials to various members of the Gordon Lennox family.

We have a large number of guests attending on Sunday including the Lord Lieutenant, Grenville Johnston and his wife Marylyn, councillors past and present, the Marquess of Huntly (the Chief of the Clan Gordon) and the wonderful people from NADFAS Moray and Banff Branch (National Association of Decorative and Fine

Arts Societies) who did a sterling job a few years ago as church recorders compiling an annotated inventory of the church under a scheme run by the V&A. My friend Marion Yool masterminded it and ran it with the same military precision she displayed when running the WRVS.

So the Episcopalians of Fochabers and the surrounding district will be out to impress this weekend. (Please, no jokes about it being the "English Kirk". I've heard them before and, if you are really unfortunate, I will bore you lifeless with the nuances of Episcopal history). My morning coat has been out airing....I just hope it hasn't shrunk in the wardrobe as garments have a habit of doing....

Return to real life.....in Ambridge

TUESDAY, JULY 17, 2012 AT 7:29PM

Well, dear readers, I am now on holiday and during this month I begin to remember what real-life is all about and, hopefully, by the latter part of this week I will have convinced myself that what I spend the other eleven months doing is somewhere in a parallel universe.

I have done a good bit of pottering around the garden - which is my idea of bliss; although I have yet to tackle the jungle that has grown up behind one of the hedges thanks to all the wet weather we've had. I know there are two or three days of heavy-duty weeding ahead of me although not tomorrow because I fear we have more rain forecast. Never mind, some progress has been made and this afternoon was spent cutting the hedge which runs round the turning circle at the garage door. It is about twelve feet high and at least eight feet deep in places and, even if it doesn't quite rival Meikleour, it is quite a tricky job reaching those stubborn branches right in the middle at the top.

I am eagerly anticipating the arrival of a flagpole which has been ordered and paid for and should come this week sometime. It goes without saying that having an AB postcode put the cost of delivery up considerably (in fact almost tripled it) and I noticed that Dundee and Perth postcodes are treated as "Scottish Highlands and Islands" for delivery purposes by the company I ordered it from. Hmmmm. Given that the company I am dealing with is based in the East Midlands, I would have thought Perth easier to get to than, say, Penzance. Sorry, folks, but this issue is getting to be a real bug-bear for those of us in AB or IV postcodes.

My flagpole will be located near my summerhouse, a wonderful Scandinavian piece of kit I installed about four years ago down in one of the corners of the garden. It faces west so from late afternoon it gets the full sun (if there is any sun, of course). During the holidays, everything stops at 7.00pm when it is time to retire to the summerhouse and tune in to an everyday story of country folk.

And what a terrifying week it has been in Ambridge with the ongoing intimidation of David and Ruth Archer (to prevent David giving evidence in a court case) reaching new heights with the barn at Brookfield being set alight. Tonight, there was another surprise when Elizabeth (David's sister) turned up at Brookfield to see how they were all coping. Relations have been glacial between David and Elizabeth since poor old Nigel (Elizabeth's husband) fell off the roof of Lower Loxley and was killed. She

blamed David as he had been on the roof with Nigel at the time, trying to take down a banner. Could this be the start of a rapprochement?

I should add, by way of conclusion, that the programme I am alluding to is, of course, a **documentary programme** and everything you hear on Radio Four between 7.02pm and 7.15pm each evening is a synopsis of real life. Whilst it does amaze me that all these people have allowed this fly-on-the-wall documentary to last for sixty-two years, I cannot believe that there are actually some listeners who think they are actors following a storyline. ;o) Parallel universe or what?

The genetics of the librarian

THURSDAY, JULY 12, 2012 AT 11:50AM

This afternoon I am off to Glasgow as I am speaking at the [Health Libraries Group's annual conference](#) tomorrow morning. This has been a long standing invitation; in fact, ironically, the invitation was the last email I replied to before the Christmas holidays and the event itself tomorrow is the last engagement before my summer holidays. I am looking forward to it. My presentation is called "the genetics of the librarians" and it will look at the changing role of the information professional. I am, of course, going to view this from the perspective of a library school academic and ask some questions about the nature of people drawn to the profession, the nature and content of what we actually teach and its relevance to the ever-changing work environment and I'm going to ask some questions of ourselves and what we as a profession look like. Some of these are themes that I touched on in Belfast and they are things that I am very interested in. However, I think that I can also tease out some of these issues from a practitioner perspective too given all that I see and hear when I'm out and about and, particularly, what I've seen during this presidential year.

The programme for the conference looks extremely impressive with tremendous diversity in the range of topics being covered and many prominent speakers. One of the most impressive aspects is that there is a clear focus on value and impact (as you'd expect) in many of the sessions. I think other parts of our professional sector can learn a lot from health libraries in this respect.

On a completely different note, it has been our graduation ceremonies this week; always a very pleasant time as it is so rewarding to see students mark their success formally. For me, this year's highlight was the graduation of one of my PhD students, Kate Friday or should I say **Dr** Kate Friday. Kate has been looking at how family historians use the web for their research, how it has revolutionized genealogy and what the implications are for local studies collection in all of this. So, obviously, all themes very close to my own heart. I think it would be good in due course for Kate to share some of her findings with members of LocScot and I'm sure she'd be delighted to do that. And, while I'm on my familiar hobby-horse of local studies, can I just draw your attention to the new [JISC Mail list](#) that Thomas and Roana have established. If you are into local studies, please sign-up.

Education, Salvation and Damnation

THURSDAY, JULY 5, 2012 AT 7:02PM

Well, dear readers, the two events which I mentioned yesterday turned out to be really lovely as I knew they would. Despite torrential rain and thunderstorms in the Stirling area yesterday, the reopening of Bridge of Allan Library was a fantastic occasion with lots of people turning out. I am very grateful to Elizabeth Farr for inviting me to this. I really do like the whole look and feel of Bridge of Allan library and I particularly like the quotations around the walls, especially the RLS one about the Allan Water. How apt.

It was lovely to be able to catch up with people and have a blether and it was particularly good to see Robert Ruthven back for the event. Poor man, he has to deal with academics now he's University Librarian at Glasgow Caledonian and we all know what they are like. Robert's legacy in Stirling is brilliant. What a great team the staff in Stirling Council Libraries are. They are always so motivated and positive and committed to giving a first-class service. There are so many people in that service that I count as friends and not just professional colleagues. Robert is, of course, always characteristically modest about his role but I'll pay tribute to him and say what a sterling (every pun intended) job he did in giving leadership and vision as well as creating and fostering a first-class team of highly professional staff. Robert, Elizabeth and Sheila are all librarians I hold in seriously high regard; their commitment and dedication shines through the service in Stirling along with that from all their other colleagues. So, yes, Bridge of Allan library's reopening was a great occasion and I wish it every success.

Today, I was at a birthday party - the 120th birthday party for Aberdeen Central Library. Many of you will know this building well. For those of you who don't, it is located on Rosemount Viaduct in the city centre. Next to it is St Mark's Church and beyond that is His Majesty's Theatre. This venerable troika is known affectionately in the city as "Education, Salvation and Damnation". Hence the title of this posting.

The party was very well attended by staff past and present, members of the public and civic leaders including the Lord Provost who opened proceedings and made three long service presentations to staff. He launched the publication of a lovely little book celebrating the anniversary. Then, I'm afraid, the proceedings went down hill for yours truly was invited to speak. On such occasions I am reminded of something the curator at Chatsworth House once said to me; he described the late Duke of Devonshire's talks to groups visiting the house as "His Grace's twenty minutes of inaccuracies". Well, I hope I wasn't **that** bad today. Anyway, here is a summary of what I said. Some of it you may have heard before!

The 1890s was, of course, a felicitous time to be considering a new public library building because of the keen interest of the millionaire philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie had been born in Dunfermline in 1835. His family emigrated to the United States in 1848 and his first job was in a bobbin factory; later he became a telegraph messenger and steadily rose through the ranks of that company. Eventually, he went into the steel industry and ultimately created, after a series of mergers and takeovers, US Steel, one of the biggest and most successful companies the world has ever know. His wealth at its peak has been estimated at around \$300 billion in contemporary values.

Carnegie had some very fixed views about wealth and philanthropy and famously declaring in his book **The Gospel of Wealth** that **a man who dies rich dies disgraced**. As a consequence, he was determined to use his enormous wealth for the greater good of society. He had a strong attachment to learning, self-improvement and education and these formed a cornerstone of his philanthropy. Libraries played a key part because of the affection and gratitude he had for the libraries he himself had been able to use in his formative years. He had an underlying philosophy to life which explains much about the man. He said that a man should:

- Spend the first third of his life getting all the education one can;
- Spend the next third making all the money one can;
- And spend the last third giving it all away for worthwhile causes.

Carnegie was clearly no soft-and-cuddly philanthropist. The acumen he had shown in building up his business empire was more than matched by his approach to funding libraries. Virtually all of 2,509 Carnegie Libraries built across the English-speaking world were built using a tried and tested methodology, called the Carnegie Formula. This required recipient towns to make a contribution matching that of the donation. Additionally, he required the town to:

- Clearly demonstrate the need for a public library
- Provide the site for the building
- Provide annually ten percent of the cost of the library's construction to support its running costs; and
- Provide a free service for all

It was Carnegie's staunch belief that the recipient towns had to show an ongoing commitment to maintain and enhance the library. Without that, he would walk away and, indeed, on some occasions, did just that. Aberdeen, however, embraced Carnegie's ideals and committed itself to his formula because there was, amongst our Victorian forefathers, a real sense of the worth and value of a free public library. So, on Tuesday, 5 July 1892, the great man himself attending by the worthies of Aberdeen came to the official opening ceremony.

At our CILIPS Annual Conference in Dundee last month, I invoked the memory of Carnegie. It was, by coincidence, the day on which the Olympic Torch Relay arrived in Dundee and I reminded our delegates that Carnegie had used the symbol of a torch for his libraries. Indeed, a torch was often carved in the stonework above the entrance or incorporated in the decorative scheme internally, although interestingly not here. Carnegie, however, saw the analogy clearly: libraries were to be beacons of learning and education and hope for the community.

And, in the intervening one-hundred and twenty years this library has continued to carry that torch brightly, now supported by branches throughout the city and, in many cases, sharing services with schools and being integrated into the heart of the cultural well-being of this city. Some great characters have presided over this institution and they have seen it change and flourish.

Alexander Robertson was, in 1899, succeeded by the redoubtable GM Fraser who was to preside as City Librarian until 1938, an extraordinarily long and fruitful

tenure. There a wonderful photograph of him in the local studies collection, looking every bit the urbane sophisticate with a pair of lorgnettes perched on his not inconsiderable nose. Fraser was succeeded by an equally remarkable character with an equally long tenure. Many of you know the high regard that I hold Marcus Kelly Milne in. His reign as City Librarian took us to the end of the nineteen-sixties. As an aside, it is remarkable that in its first seventy-five years, there were only three City Librarians. During Milne's time, the torch shone very brightly in spite of the inevitable challenges of the Second World War and its aftermath. I have previously written about how Milne saw a time of crisis as an opportunity to innovate not least in the introduction of his **Books you can borrow** a current awareness bulletin he started in October 1941. Truly necessity was the mother of invention.

And since Marcus Milne, the service has continued to evolve and adapt. Technologies not even dreamt of one-hundred and twenty years ago are now central to all that we do and Carnegie would have been bemused by the notion of using the library from the comfort of one's own home down a telephone wire or on the move using something called Wi Fi. That's said, there is much which he would still recognise and approve heartily of. Not least that the City of Aberdeen has continued in its steadfast commitment to his formula of supporting the building he gave.

Today, Carnegie library buildings are not without their challenges but this one remains a beacon in our city. Libraries are, as Carnegie intended them to be, transformational spaces, places of hopes and dreams, expectations and reality, help, support, education, fun, learning, enjoyment and so much more. They are amongst the most trusted public spaces in the community with some studies showing as many as 85% of people saying that the library is their most trusted public service. Aberdeen Central Library is all of these things and so much more.

There are two final things I would like to say. Firstly, I have dwelt on some of the people who have had an impact on this place and I'd like to say a little more about that. Those inspiring characters from the past who did so much to establish this place in the hearts of Aberdonians are more than matched by today's team led by Fiona Clark. They are continuing the process of development and enhancement to ensure a library service that meets the demands of the twenty-first century whilst remaining true to Carnegie's fundamental beliefs.

The torch is in the safe hands of a superb library team. But, there are other people to mention too. And they are, of course, the users for whom, over the generations, this place has come to mean so much. This is a focal point for our city in architectural terms of course, but for the countless thousands who use it this place is also a focal point in their lives and the impact that this building, its services and its staff has had is truly incalculable.

Finally, I am going to return to Marcus Milne for some closing words. In his Public Library Annual Report for 1941-42, he began his introduction with some words of Vladimir Ilych Lenin; a most unlikely bedfellow for Mr Milne but the quote is apposite:

"Let us see the pride and glory of a public library....in the magnitude of book circulation among the people, in the number of new readers enrolled, in the speed

with which enquiry for any book is satisfied, in the quality of books lent for home reading and in the number of children led to good reading and the use of the library"

Indeed, the Pride and Glory of **this** public library is clear for all to see. Thank you Mr Carnegie. Thank you Aberdeen. Thank you all who have worked and used this place. Long may education, salvation and damnation dominate Rosemount Viaduct. Happy Birthday Aberdeen Central Library.

Ok, so I know you've heard about my esteem for Marcus Milne before and, yes, I've used the Lenin quote before too but both were very right and fitting for today. So, these last two days, have given me more reasons to Love Scottish Libraries (as if I needed more).

Pastoral idyll Aberdeen style

WEDNESDAY, JULY 4, 2012 AT 10:24AM

I am sitting in my office looking out at what can only be described as a very dreich Aberdeen morning; the fog which seems to have enveloped the north-east for the last three weeks is as thick as ever and it is drizzling persistently. Added to this, I have diggers, drills and lorries making a noise below my window as building contractors do work on our car park. Altogether, therefore, it is a pastoral idyll that I am looking out at. Not.

It has been a while since I last posted mostly because I've been caught up in the day-job and it has been a hectic two weeks and I see time slipping through my hands ahead of my holidays at the end of next week. Normally, I'd be saying roll-on the holidays but this year I'm wondering how I can fit in a couple of extra days to get various things done ahead of my leave.

I have, amidst this frenetic fortnight, managed to achieve something immeasurably satisfying, namely a major clear-out of the office with stacks of stuff put into recycling and a good tidy-up. My office now looks respectable again (but I fear it won't last once I come back from holidays). I am rather delighted to have fallen heir to a complete run of the Library Association yearbooks which are now very neatly arranged in my office (I know, I am showing how sad I am).

One other thing that I did during this fortnight was have lunch with two people that many readers of this blog will recall with great affection, Douglas Anderson and Mike Head. Doug and Mike were, for quarter of century and more, the backbone of the library school at RGIT and many of you were doubtless taught by them and, of course, Mike was President of the Scottish Library Association in 1984. What we all describe as "the old gang" Mike, Doug, Dorothy Williams, Robert Newton, Rita Marcella, Liz Davidson (our school administrator in the 1990s) meet up a couple of times a year to reminisce over lunch about Dewey Decimal, Ranganathan, AACR2 and other such cerebral matters. I should add that is not "old" as in age.

In about an hour, I am heading off down to Bridge of Allan for the official reopening of the library there and I am very much looking forward to it. Avid readers will recall that I was down there in April for the Central Branch "Meet the President" which I much enjoyed and I am looking forward again to seeing all my friends in Stirling

Libraries. And, then, after that I have an evening meeting in Stirling itself at which the Immediate Past President His Excellency Mr Alan Reid will be present. I know Alan is having a tour of the new library in Dunbar and the John Gray Centre in Haddington today and, as you know, I was so impressed by these the other week. I look forward to hearing Alan's take on them this evening.

Tomorrow is also a busy day. Not only do we have a visitor to the Department from Austria but then, at lunchtime, it is the [celebration of 120 years of Aberdeen Central Library](#) and I am looking forward to this very much and I have my speech all prepared. I do fear, however, that as in Dundee, the Lord Provost's chain will out-do my one. I really think CILIPS should get something more like the Order of the Garter ;o) for the President. Funny how this job turns every president into a connoisseur of regalia.

I will be posting up details of both the Bridge of Allan visit and the Aberdeen Central Library event towards the end of the week.

The Hollywood Librarian

FRIDAY, JUNE 22, 2012 AT 3:27PM

After all the excitement and activity it has been back to the day job this week. It has included interviewing for staff and a round of meetings. I also found myself spending much of Tuesday refereeing proposals for one of the research councils which I do fairly regularly as a member of their Peer Review College. It's always interesting but always takes you much longer than you think it will.

On Wednesday evening, Fiona Clark, head of Aberdeen City Libraries, and I did an "Interview Skills" workshop for Grampian Information. It was, I think, a good evening and I hope those attending got something out of it. Yesterday afternoon I was out again at a Grampian Information event held at the James Hutton Institute here in Aberdeen. This time it was the Annual General Meeting of GI followed by a screening of the [Hollywood Librarian](#).

This was, I think, the third time that I had watched but if you haven't seen this film let me tell you briefly about it. It is an American documentary (filmed in 2006 and 2007) about what we do and how we make a difference. It is incredibly poignant and moving and I defy any librarian to watch without having a tear in the eye at particular moments. It is largely self-narrating with librarians doing the talking, occasional contributions from users and Ann Seidl, the writer and director. In between the talking heads are wonderful clips from Hollywood films, all portraying librarians in every conceivable stereotype that we have ever been accused of.

Amongst the inspiring librarians including is the incomparable [Nancy Pearl](#) and if you haven't come across her then check out some of the [YouTube](#) clips of her. She is also the inspiration for the famed Library Action Figure doll. There are school, academic, public and special librarians galore in the Hollywood librarian, every one being utterly incredible in their work. One special person worth mentioning and to whom the film is dedicated, is Peg Hepburn Perry (1920-2006) a formidable woman,

a great librarian and also the sister of Katharine Hepburn the movie star. Peg appeared briefly in the film and was described, after her death, as the "[Hippest Shusher](#)".

Hollywood Librarian is a very cool portrayal of our profession.

Meanwhile in Newcastle and East Lothian.....

SATURDAY, JUNE 16, 2012 AT 6:02PM

It has been a busy week indeed. I must confess that it is nice to be home and today has been a very lazy day. I really should have been out in the garden, cutting the grass and doing some weeding but instead I've fuffed about most of the afternoon. Now, I have to warn you, folks, this is a long posting.

The feedback from conference has been very positive and I am thrilled about that. I think we had two very good days indeed. Michael Charlton has provided a really good account of the sessions on his [blog](#) so if you weren't there his posting will give you a really good flavour of the conference. On Wednesday morning, I drove from Dundee down to Newcastle. I stopped off in Alnwick – which is, quite possibly, my favourite town – and called into [Barter Books](#) for a quick look. How I love that shop and how I could spend serious money in there if I were being irresponsible. Unfortunately, I didn't have nearly long enough as I had promised to be at Northumbria University around one o'clock.

So it was back in the car and onwards to Newcastle. Now, if Alnwick is one of my favourite towns, then Newcastle is surely one of my favourite cities. It always has a real buzz about, the people are all so friendly, the late Georgian and Regency architecture around Eldon Square and down Grey Street is beautiful (and how I love Earl Grey perched on his column; he rivals Nelson). Over in Gateshead is the wonderful Sage and Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. And, of course, Newcastle has a splendid new central library which I will be visiting again in September.

The purpose of my visit was as external examiner for the librarianship Masters course at Northumbria University and the afternoon was spent reviewing coursework. In the evening some of the staff of the school took me and the other externals out for a meal. By coincidence, two of the other externals (for the engineering courses, library and information sits within the School of Computer, Engineering and Information Science) are retired RGU people, Jim Penman, formerly our Vice Principal and Norman Deans, formerly head of the School of Engineering. And, the third examiner, Danny Gorman, used to work at RGU too. So it was an RGU take-over.

The following morning it was back to do more reviewing of work and then the Assessment Board itself. After that, my great friends the wonderful [Ali Pickard](#) and the equally wonderful [Julie McLeod](#) took me for lunch at the [Biscuit Factory](#) which is, actually, a contemporary arts and craft gallery. Again, I could have spent serious money there. The three of us had a really good chat and put the world well and truly in order. Of course, in spheres less exalted than higher education, this would have

been described as a good gossip ;o) But, in reality, it was incredibly productive as it is so important for the library schools to stick together and keep in touch with developments.

I spent the afternoon out in Newcastle before returning to the hotel where I composed a suitable quote for Gary in Orkney who had emailed me to say he was preparing a press release on his Golden Book Stamp Award. Then in the evening Ali and I went for a meal. Ali Pickard is just one of those life-enhancing people and to spend time in her company is always the greatest of pleasures. Ali is academically superb and is really student-focused but is a great and active researcher too.

Friday morning saw me drive up to East Lothian to visit the super new library in Dunbar and the [John Gray Centre](#) in Haddington. Dunbar was my first stop where I was met by Alison Hunter and Thomas Connelly who had very kindly organised my visit. The new library in Dunbar is in the Bleaching Fields Community Centre. It is a lovely piece of design and the library is bright and airy, a terrific space with lots of wood and glass. The curved passage way as you enter from the atrium of the community centre is painted wonderful Massey Ferguson red. I love this library; it's a great space and so welcoming. It was very busy too with all the PCs being used, by users right across the age spectrum; I noticed one lady was creating a poster for the Methodist Church coffee morning. Lots of children were in the kids area, running about, making a noise and choosing books. And not a sssshhhhh in the place.

Of course, needless to say, there are several former RGU students in East Lothian libraries including Rachel Dykes who completed the distance learning course a couple of years ago. However, you should have seen the look on my face when I saw Grant McDougall who studied at RGU but who was also at high school the same time as me. East Lothian Council's cabinet member for Community Wellbeing, Councillor Tim Day, was there too and the new [audio ebooks download facility](#) was launched. So the Presidential Chain got another outing and might well end up in the East Lothian Courier. Dunbar Library is fantastic.

Then it was on to the John Gray Centre in Haddington which I had awarded a Golden Book Stamp at the Conference Dinner on Monday. Now, dear readers, the John Gray Centre is a must-see venue. I want bus and train loads of you going to Haddington. The building has been renovated fantastically and the glass atrium is juxtaposed beautifully against the original listed buildings. This is co-location of services at its very best and is certainly an exemplar, a model for how to combine library, archives, local studies and museum. The library is a wonderful space; it was full of people and I overheard one young mum saying to another "I'm in the library all the time". Cool. One thing I really loved in the library is that the end of the shelving units have really great images of the East Lothian landscape.

Then it was upstairs to museum. Alison, Thomas and I were joined by Alex Fitzgerald, the council's Records Manager. We toured the museum and I am completely bowled over by it. The mixture of artefacts and interpretation is just right; the layout is superb; the graphics and branding are excellent (as they are throughout the building). I am particularly impressed by the engagement with the community that is obvious throughout the displays; schoolchildren have created a fantastic ceramic-tile map of East Lothian, a walking group for people with anxiety and

depression have taken super photos of various local scenes and some members of the community have their chosen topics explored in displays. This is as good an example of a local museum as I've seen. Then it was on to the archive and local studies. As you can imagine I was in my element. Again, a great space and the archive repository upstairs is incredibly impressive.

So East Lothian. I think your libraries are just fantastic. Loads of people happily busying themselves in them; wonderful, smiling enthusiastic staff; and the John Gray Centre, well what can I say? Absolutely stunning in every respect. This is a model for the rest of the country. Enriching society? Go and look at East Lothian libraries.

And, I will be back. Poor Thomas will have the family historian from hell when I turn up to find out about some of my ancestors who lived for a time in Prestonpans in the eighteenth century.

Libraries: torches for the community

TUESDAY, JUNE 12, 2012 AT 9:52PM

Well folks, here we are. Your President sits here utterly exhausted. He is still in Dundee as he is off down to Newcastle first thing tomorrow morning and it made no sense whatsoever to go north tonight only to go south again. I did, somewhat naively, imagine that I would find a few spare moments here and there during the conference to tweet or, even to make the odd (odder than usual?) blog posting. How stupid was that? If I am feeling tired then I guess that Elaine, Cathy, Rhona and Gillian must be feeling doubly so. That said, I think we can say that our annual conference for 2012 was a success on so many different levels. I found the last three days (for it started for me on Sunday evening) really enjoyable indeed and I will elaborate on the principal reasons for that in a moment.

Before I do I would just like to reiterate some of the things that I said in the concluding remarks and single out the speakers in both keynote and parallel sessions who made our conference what it was. Klaus Tochtermann got us off to a fantastic start with so many interesting ideas and I heard many people discussing geocaching later in the day. Norma McDermott rounded everything off superbly this afternoon and, no doubt, winning herself even more fans than she had already. And, of course, Steve Wheeler gave us such an entertaining presentation, full of ideas that I imagine many of us will hasten away to try out. It was also really important to hear from Rosemary Goring about the significance and centrality of reading at the heart of the library.

We had superb speakers in our parallel sessions too and these contribute so much to the success of any conference because they enable the sharing of ideas and experiences amongst peers. And that, as we all know, is right at the heart of what makes a good conference. So many people contributed to make our conference special and I would like to thank them all.

What made it really special for me? Well, that is an easy one to answer: all of you. You came along, you were supportive, you were engaged, you were enthusiastic, you were participative, you came from all sectors, all levels, all ages. You are Scotland's library

community and you are brilliant. One of the things that I love about our professional life in Scotland is the intimacy of it. Our profession is close-knit in the best sense of that phrase.

So CILIP Scotland, thank you very much for making our conference what it was. I ended by referring to libraries as Andrew Carnegie saw them, beacons of learning and education in the community (and I extend that to all types of communities and environments) and he, of course, used the symbol of the torch, carved in stone above the door of many of his libraries. An appropriate analogy for the day that the Olympic Torch entered Dundee. I spoke also about my friend [Gregor](#) who was about to carry that torch over at Cupar in Fife. Gregor is a beacon for his friends and family. I'm delighted to say that Gregor had a great day carrying the torch (and I promise carrot cake next time I see you); I think we had two great days carrying ours too.

City of Discovery

SUNDAY, JUNE 10, 2012 AT 12:29PM

Well, here we are on the verge of CILIPS 2012 Conference and excellent the programme looks too. I'm delighted that we are taking this year's conference to Dundee and our venue looks good. We have a range of really interesting speakers in both the keynote and parallel sessions and there should be plenty of time for networking with friends old and new. We are delighted that we have a large range of exhibitors at the conference, significantly more than we had originally anticipated for.

As you will imagine, I have a folder crammed full of copious notes of all the things that I have to do and say at various points. As a bear of very small brain, please be tolerant of your president should he become befuddled at any point. Hopefully, I will manage to get through it unscathed. I have polished the Presidential Chain and very nice it is looking too ;o)

So, let's enjoy CILIPS Annual Conference and celebrate how library and information services enrich our society. I'm looking forward to seeing lots of you there, and please come up and say hello and tell me how lovely the chain looks.

Fit a rare efterneen

SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 2012 AT 7:03PM

Es efterneen, I maun hae gaun throuw tae Aiberdeen. E day wis e "Meet the President" we e North East Branch. A pucklie o ye will hae jaloost thit a cos it wis Aiberdeen n e North-East branch thit I'm claikein awa in e Doric. Es for e rest o ye, ye'll aa hae thocht thit I jist hiv haen an affa mishanter we ma keyboard n the wirdies maun be comin oot in a richt sotter.

That, dear readers, is what we call Doric and that's the way many of us born and brought up in the North-East were fortunate enough to speak at home or in the playground and some of us still do, of which more anon.

What that opening paragraph says is this afternoon I was meeting the North-East Branch at Aberdeen Central Library. As I noted the other day, it was full of friends, many of whom were former students. I spoke about the role of President, some of the things I've been up to and some of the things that I've found really inspiring during the visits that I've been making. We then had a really lively discussion about some of the current issues for our sector. Michael Charlton asked what I thought about the use of volunteers in libraries. A really interesting issue. My answer? Well, they can have a role to play and many libraries use them effectively as, for example, mentors in basic IT training or in local studies projects but they are not and they can not be a substitute for real staff. Apart from anything else who will manage the volunteers and, for example, sort out the problems when a volunteer simply decides they have something better?

We also discussed the co-location of services and, that familiar subject of other agencies being keen to work with us because our brand is so trusted and valued. There was also some discussion about continuing professional development and the mix of skills and personal attributes that the successful librarian or information professional needs. A good, lively debate and the future of our profession is very much in safe hands judging by the people who gave up their Saturday afternoon to come and meet the president. Unfortunately, the President has had a rotten cold all week and was still croaking, coughing and sniffing today.

One of the most distinctive features of life in the North-East of Scotland is Doric, that wonderful, lyrical form of Lowland Scots that is spoken up here in various forms. For many unfamiliar with it, the dialect, vocabulary and accent can often seem impenetrable. For those of us brought up with it, the Doric is a cherished part of our cultural inheritance. But, my word, how it has declined since I was a child and I often hear local students going about the campus who just speak what I would describe as a sort of non-descript "standard" Scottish. I was fortunate to be brought up in a household that encouraged its use without that ever prejudicing the importance of speaking correct English (spikkin proper).

There are, however, many great champions of the Doric not least people like the incomparable Sheena Blackhall and Norman Harper whose columns regularly capture the distinctive essence of the north-east. And, my own favour piece of Doric literature? Well, I think you have to go a long way to beat the poetry of [Charles Murray](#) (1864-1941) and, in particular, [The Whistle](#).

External Examining, Conference and Johan Helmich Roman

THURSDAY, MAY 31, 2012 AT 7:48PM

By now, you will know my tendency to include cryptic references in the title of these blogs; you'll have to wade right to the end of this post to find out about Johan Helmich Roman.

Today I was down at the University of Strathclyde, at the Department of Computer and Information Science, where I am the external examiner for their MSc Information and Library Studies course. I'm also external examiner for the same course down at Northumbria University in Newcastle and I have their boards to go to immediately after our conference. The external examiner role is one of the great, unique strengths of the British higher education sector. The external is there not to act as a "third marker" on assignments and exam papers but to ensure that the assignments are fair in the first place, that the marking has been done consistently and appropriately and also to ensure broad comparability in the taught provision because they invariably come from a similar department elsewhere. Most assessment boards wait, anxiously, for the external examiner's comments at the end (I know I always do when the boot is on the other foot back at RGU). In most cases, however, it isn't anything very critical; normally a few little constructive suggestions and a good deal of support and encouragement for the academic staff. I hope I got the balance right today.

Library schools often come in for some criticism from practitioners and, indeed, I tackled this head on in my paper in Belfast which I've already spoken about which I entitled "What on earth do they teach them in library schools these days". Many of you will know I have strong views about this and about the importance of library-school teaching being professionally-relevant. And, I flatter myself that if I hadn't been endeavouring to do that with our curriculum at RGU then I wouldn't have been invited to serve as CILIPS President. However, there are a few important things to add to that statement. Firstly, we can't teach absolutely everything in Masters course and nor should we or else it ends up being training rather than education. An important part of **education** is developing the ability to learn oneself and develop in other areas. Learning to learning in other words. That leads to my second point, learning on the job is also absolutely crucial - our much-vaunted lifelong-learning in fact - none of us were "oven ready" for the world of work when left education whether that was library school or somewhere else and we kid ourselves if we think we were. Thirdly, no part of education can **teach** everything, we can try to enhance or improve some skills (e.g. communication skills or interpersonal skills) but we cannot treat everything like a competency that can be "taught" and "learned". As I say to the students, your qualification will get you the interview; it's everything else about you that will get you the job.

Anyway, enough of that. The rest of this week has been spent on preparation for the conference the week after next. It looks fantastic with great speakers in both keynotes and parallel sessions, loads of exhibitors, a lot of built in fun and something for everyone. I am really looking forward to it. I do fear, however, that I am probably driving Elaine, Cathy and Rhona demented with my queries and questions! I spent all day Tuesday writing up my "bits" and ended up with a lengthy accompanying email of questions for them. As we say up here in the north-east "puir quines".

This Saturday I'm doing my Meet the President with the North Branch at Aberdeen Central Library. Goodness knows why anyone is coming - they've all met me so many times and know what a jibbering idiot I am already and the adornment of the Presidential chain won't change that. Never mind, it will be great fun I'm sure. :o)

When I got home today there was some mail waiting for me. The first was depressing; a statement showing another decline in an investment. Thank you

global economic downturn. The second, however, was much more exciting. It was a CD I had ordered of some music by [Johan Helmich Roman](#), den svenska musikens fader (my Swedophile tendencies to the fore there again). Anyone who likes Baroque music (Eleanor McKay sit up straight) should give Roman a try. He is wonderful but sadly little known outside his native country and recordings are not easy to come by. The one I received today had been ordered from the Czech Republic of all places. Start with the Drottningholm Music.

Libraries enriching society - plenty of that at East Branch

FRIDAY, MAY 25, 2012 AT 11:26AM

Last night I attended a meeting of East Branch at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh. I really enjoy these "Meet the President" events. Again it was lovely to meet friends old and new and, yes, of course there was a good number of former RGIT/RGU graduates in the audience and it was lovely to catch up with them. Thank you so much to everyone at East Branch for making me feel so welcome.

I spoke a little bit about my own background and how honoured I am to be the CILIPS President for 2012 and also spoke about the theme of **Enriching Society** and how it is so important that we talk ourselves out of time of difficulties rather than talk ourselves into more. It is so important that we are positive and upbeat about our profession and about the role, value and impact that libraries have on communities and individuals.

I mentioned some of the visits that I have made of recent months, in particular the trip of North Ayrshire which I have blogged about previously. I mentioned some of the really inspiring things I've seen and people I've met and how each of these visits demonstrates, very visibly, the role that libraries play in communities and how valued they are by the public. I also mentioned how libraries (in every sector) were doing lifelong learning and social inclusion long before these terms were consciously applied by those formulating the policy agenda. In fact, both of these concepts are actually fundamental to what we have **always** done.

To illustrate this, I mentioned John Miller who has researched extensively the Lithuanian community in Scotland and continues to do so although well into eighties (and I'm sure he won't mind me saying that). Mr Miller has directed his own investigations, become an adept researcher and writer and has used libraries fantastically to pursue his interests. He is for me one of the best examples of a lifelong learner, highly motivated, passionate and dedicated to his subject. He is also a wonderful ambassador of his library service and, indeed, a great advocate for everything it does.

As you will imagine, East Branch members had lots of other inspiring examples of things that we've done and people whose lives have been transformed by libraries or librarians. We spoke a lot in the discussion afterwards about how much of a hindrance that the stereotype of librarians is. We also discussed the other fundamental truth of our profession that although a love of books and reading is

really, really important, our profession is **all about people** and that being people person is a key to success as a librarian.

I really enjoyed last night so thank you East Branch once again.

Sometimes, dear readers, your President has moments when he thinks "what have I really done to be worthy of being the CILIPS President" and the old adage "those who can, do and those who can't teach" floods into my mind. In such moments, I'm also reminded of a story about the 2nd Duke of Wellington, the son of the hero of Waterloo. He remarked days after the death of his father: "Imagine people's reaction when they announce "The Duke of Wellington" and only I walk in".

These thoughts are particularly the case when I hear of the excellent things going on in so many different parts of our profession and the enthusiasm with which library and information professionals approach their work. "I love my job" was a phrase I heard several times at East Branch last night and that's just so cool.

Cabers, Cathedrals, Castles and Cashmere

MONDAY, MAY 21, 2012 AT 10:23AM

It has been an incredibly busy weekend. Yesterday was the [Gordon Castle](#) Highland Games at Fochabers, about four miles from my home in Port Gordon. These games used to be one of the biggest highland gatherings on the circuit (particularly in the 1920s and 1930s) but fell into abeyance after the 8th Duke of Richmond and Gordon died in 1935. They were revived last year by Angus and Zara Gordon Lennox who own the Castle. Last year was good but had dreadful weather to contend with. Yesterday, however, was glorious, bright blue skies and warm sunshine all day. In fact, it couldn't have been better. Angus and Zara took over the castle a few years back from his father and mother and they have done absolutely incredible things in a relatively short period of time with the help of a fantastic and dedicated team of staff. It is wonderful to have Gordon Castle right at the heart of our local community once again and yesterday was testimony to that. Before you all ask, no I was competing in any shape or form. We did, however, have a [Gordon Chapel](#) stall selling postcards of our Burne-Jones windows (of which more later in the week) and of course the obligatory home bakes (the President's home-made carrot cake was snapped up quickly I am delighted to report). Well done Angus, well done Zara and well done everyone at Gordon Castle. So, folks, if you are in the Moray area in May 2013 make a point of getting to this great gathering.

Today I am going up to a meeting of the partnership in Elgin which is working to enhance the town's heritage potential. This encompasses a lot of different activities including a "trail" (better word to come) from the site of Elgin Castle through the historic High Street to the Cathedral and then on to the world-famous Johnston's Cashmere factory and visitor centre. All things I am very interested in and Johnstons is another steadfastly loyal supporter of Gordon Chapel as their former Managing Director, James Sugden, was my predecessor as treasurer. However, back to this partnership; this is an excellent opportunity to do something really imaginative in Elgin and part of the planning will be looking at the role which Grant Lodge, the

former library in Elgin, can play. The favoured option being as a venue bringing together local studies (see I managed to get it in), other heritage services and the registrars. A northern John Gray Centre perhaps. Worryingly, I am on this group as an "Expert Advisor" (their words) so I guess I will have to be on top form this afternoon and not do the dotty professor thing.

The two things I've described, the Gordon Castle and the Elgin partnership, have one thing in common: a very real drive and determination to improve and enhance our heritage; to make it work better, be more accessible and, yes, earn its keep as effectively as it can. I am sure both will succeed.

Marking. Lovely, lovely marking.....

TUESDAY, MAY 15, 2012 AT 1:07PM

At this time of year the life of an academic takes a dark turn as the marking appears, as if by magic, on your desk. Anyone would think that we'd actually set assignments for the students to do. The thought of marking is, actually, much worse than the doing it. The piles sit glowering at you until you finally have to rid yourself of all displacement activities (aka top priorities that you'd rather be doing like counting paper clips or arranging your bookshelf in Dewey order) and knuckle down and do it.

Actually, I'm fairly far on with it this year (but, ssshhh, don't tell the rest of the department that) and this is probably down to the fact that things will get busy again on the Presidential front from the middle of next week. So I have been disciplined this year. The one downside of this mark carry-on is that, very unfortunately, I won't be able to make the CILIP Cymru conference at the end of this week. This is a pity as I would have really like to have gone and because Mandy Powell, the Policy Officer in Wales, is one of our former student (they get everywhere don't they?). Anyway, I will certainly be following events in Wales on Twitter #CILIPW12.

One of the best bits of the assessment period is seeing some of the really good and creative assignments that the students produce. I was marking research proposals yesterday. These are, basically, the feasibility study for the topic students will take through to their dissertation. As you might imagine, I have a clutch of ones around local studies but I also have a really interesting one looking at the way the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix is used by library services, after the PLQIM visit, to help drive up quality of provision. A really interesting topic indeed. I've also a lovely one based on one of the special collections in St Andrews University Library, a good old-fashioned (in the best sense) piece of historical bibliography.

There is light at the end of the tunnel with the marking and when you get really creative and really interesting ideas being explored then it is hugely rewarding. Right, I've now got to go off to Aberdeen University's wonderful new library for meeting. I'm also going to meet up with Alistair Campbell of Moray

Libraries in Elgin on Friday to plot some conference shenanigans.....so watch this space. I feel some mischief coming on.

85 procent av svenskarna anser att bibliotek är viktiga för att samhället ska fungera.

FRIDAY, MAY 11, 2012 AT 10:01AM

Kanske några läsare av bloggen vet att jag älskar Sverige. Faktiskt älskar jag också Danmark och Norge. Du gamla, Du fria, Du fjällhöga nord. Du tysta, Du glädjerika sköna! Min kärlek är äldre än Wallander, Brottet, Borgen eller Bron. Fantastic men dessa är. Tack BBC4.

We have always had good links with our colleagues in the various library schools in Scandinavia, particularly at the Royal School of Librarianship in Copenhagen and the Library School at Borås in Sweden. We always have a good number of friends from Sweden come to our [i³ conference](#) here in Aberdeen. As I've mentioned in a previous post, I admire Scandinavian library design but it is wider than that if I'm honest. I like the whole Nordic approach to libraries. One thing I really like is the link between the library research that goes on in places like Borås and the wider profession.

The title of this blog is taken from research done in 2007 by Lars Höglund, professor of library science at Borås, which looked at shape of modern library services. The translation is that **85 percent of Swedes believe that libraries are important for society to function**. That is a really bewilderingly significant statistic. I wonder if this would be replicated here in Scotland.

Some other really important statistics emerge from the [Swedish Library Association's Fakta om bibliotek 2011](#) and I've taken the liberty of translating some of the headlines:

93 procent av svenskarna tycker att bibliotek är viktiga för barns läsutveckling. 76 procent tycker att biblioteken är i takt med den moderna människans behov.
93 percent of Swedes think that libraries are important for children's literacy development. 76 percent think that libraries are in line with the needs of modern people.

Biblioteken är den samhällsinstitution som flest svenskar har förtroende för. 70 procent har mycket eller ganska stort förtroende för biblioteken och endast 4 procent ganska eller mycket litet förtroende.
Libraries are the social institution that most Swedes trust. 70 percent have very great or fairly great confidence in libraries, and only 4 percent fairly or very little trust.

Den yngre åldersgruppen 16–29 år är den som främst använder biblioteket för studier/arbete och som frågar personal om hjälp. Att delta på kulturella evenemang är mest frekvent i den äldre åldersgruppen 65–85 år.

The 16-29 year olds are the main users the library for study / work and they make most use of staff through enquiry mechanisms. Participation in cultural events is most frequent in 65-85 age group.

År 2010 gjordes över 16 miljoner nedladdningar av artiklar ur elektroniska tidskrifter. Det är dubbelt så många som fyra år tidigare. E-boksnedladdningarna har fördubblats på tre år.

In 2010 there were over 16 million downloads of articles from electronic journals. This was twice as many as four years previously. E-book downloads have doubled in three years.

Some really revealing attitudinal and societal statistics there with, arguably, the results on the “big issues” like the role of the library in society or the extent to which libraries are trusted being particularly significant. Similar pictures emerge elsewhere in the Nordic countries. [Grampian Information](#) has achieved a real coup for its annual conference this year; one of the keynote speakers will be [Jens Thorhauge](#) (recently retired as Director General of the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media) and who is certainly the most knowledgeable man on libraries in Denmark. So this interesting Nordic perspective will be coming to Aberdeen on 8th November.

Pride and Glory: Marcus Milne and his vision

MONDAY, MAY 7, 2012 AT 3:02PM

"Let us see the pride and glory of a public library....in the magnitude of book circulation among the people, in the number of new readers enrolled, in the speed with which enquiry for any book is satisfied, in the quality of books lent for home reading and in the number of children led to good reading and the use of the library"

Marcus Kelly Milne used this quote by Lenin in his introduction to the Aberdeen Public Library Annual Report for 1941-42. His timing was impeccable given that the Soviet Union was a key ally during the Second World War. His rhetorical flourish was also impeccable; Milne was no Leninist, far from it indeed, but he was never one to miss the opportunity to use a good piece of prose to advance the cause of the library.

For thirty years until his retirement in 1968, Marcus Milne held sway over the libraries in the Granite City. Arguably some his finest moments came during the Second World War when during a time of extremely adversity, he introduced many innovations. He enthusiastically promoted the Scottish Library Association's policy (of September 1940) encouraging public libraries to make temporary membership easier for those displaced by war or for members of the armed services stationed

away from home. He thought creatively about outreach, sending books to ARP posts and even to HMS Scylla, a frigate adopted by the City of Aberdeen. In October 1941, he introduced **Books you can borrow** a current awareness bulletin providing recommendations for books, arranged by theme and with a lively editorial by himself. Milne managed to make the public libraries in Aberdeen positively buoyant during a time of extreme crisis and left the service in a good position when he went off to become an officer in RAF late in 1942.

When he returned after the end of the War, his enthusiasm was undimmed. Between 1950 and his retirement in 1968, he oversaw the opening of four new branches, the introduction of the mobile library service, a housebound reading service and radically restructured the organisation of the central library. Between 1965 and 1967, he was a staunch supporter of the establishment of a library school in Aberdeen. He was openly critical of the attitudes of the Library Association in London for their perceived hostility to the notion of a library school in Aberdeen. As with most things, Marcus Milne had his way. His career was crowned by being President of the Scottish Library Association in 1967.

Marcus Milne demonstrated that a time of crisis often leads to the best innovations and he certainly showed that during the Second World War. He was a big man with a big personality and was known throughout the profession in Scotland and, here in the Granite City, he was in fact known as "Mr Aberdeen" because he was so active in so many things. He died in 1989 at the age of 87.

The President's Progress

FRIDAY, MAY 4, 2012 AT 1:18PM

This has been a busy but incredibly enjoyable and rewarding week for the President. On Tuesday evening, I was down in Bridge of Allan doing a "Meet the President" event with members of [Central Branch](#) who have been so wonderful in their themed costumes at Branch and Group Day over recent years. Sheila Miller, the Chair of our CILIPS Council, very kindly took me for a bite to eat first and it was a real pleasure to be in Bridge of Allan as my father lived there in the 1950s and was very active at the golf club so I always have felt a real connection with the town.

The Meet the President was in the newly-refurbished Bridge of Allan library and stunning it looks too with great decor and furnishings, turning the library into light, bright space with huge flexibility. I was delighted to see friends old and new at the event and Yvonne Manning welcomed me on behalf of the branch. It was also really great to be welcomed to Bridge of Allan library by Victoria McAra, one of our super talented former distance learning students. I spoke for a while about what it is like to be a library school academic and how important it is for us in the teaching side of the profession to keep abreast of what's happening and to have really strong links with practitioners. I touched on one aspect that I also mentioned at the Irish conference, namely my profound belief that library schools should play a role right throughout a professional's career, not just at the start of it for a professionally-accredited course. I really believe in the importance of the library schools providing all levels

and all types of education, training and continuous professional development from bite-sized chunks of learning through to higher degrees and research activities.

What a fabulous group Central Branch are and it was great to be able to speak to them and then have a really good discussion about some current issues and challenges. Thanks to everyone for making me feel so welcome and congratulations to the brilliant team at Stirling Libraries for making Bridge of Allan library such a lovely and inviting venue.

From Bridge of Allan, I drove on down to Irvine in North Ayrshire. Now, I have to declare an interest here folks. I really love North Ayrshire for many reasons: the coastline, the landscape, the friendliness of the people and also, of course, for Dr Audrey Sutton who is someone I admire (read adore) enormously. I've got strong links with the library service there anyway because I've been known to do local history talks in that neck of the woods and I was really keen to see the full range of things that North Ayrshire Libraries do, so I asked to visit.

On Wednesday, I spent a wonderful day seeing some really fascinating, innovative and pretty inspiring things. I must thank Paul Cowan for having organized such a varied and interesting programme for me. I spent time at Library Headquarters and met the team there and saw planned developments for online provision. Then I went out to [Irvine Royal Academy](#) where I met the librarian, the head teacher and some pupils including David and Colt who have been involved in taking pictures of the town to help record local buildings and landmarks. What a great feel the library had and these two lads were so engaging about and engaged with their project. Next it was off to Irvine Public Library which, like Bridge of Allan, is a great physical space and the essence of what a modern library should look like. I always think that if you walk into a library and think it could be in one of the Nordic countries (where they really have got a handle on library design) then it is doing its job and Irvine library is one such building. Here I met Tom, a retired electrician, who has been through a number of the library's computer courses and was in for a chat about iPads. What's all that about lifelong learning? Haven't us librarians been doing that stuff for years? Yes, of course we have, and Tom's a brilliant advert for it.

Then I saw round the Harbour Arts Centre or HAC (of which more later) before Paul took me to lunch in Saltcoats. We then visited Saltcoats Public Library and I had one of the most inspirational meetings I've had in a long time. The library has teamed up with [Macmillan](#) and there is a Cancer Information and Support Service facility within the library staffed two days a week by Macmillan volunteers. I met Mary and Helen, both survivors, both lovely, both passionate about their work, both inspiring and both now are fantastic ambassadors for libraries, just like Tom. What a terrific partnership between North Ayrshire Libraries and Macmillan. Then my last stop was the Heritage Centre, a place I know well and it was a great delight to end the tour with Norma Cullen, one of my former students and a good friend. I had a brilliant time there as you might imagine.

Norma was showing me some albums that she had acquired only last week at the auction of the contents of Blair Castle (the Ayrshire one that is). We were flicking through one photograph album of the great and the good in the mid-nineteenth century and a face jumped out at me. It was Elizabeth Duchess of Gordon who built my church up in Fochabers, [Gordon Chapel](#). Elizabeth Gordon is an ever-present

part of our life as a much poorer copy of the same photograph hangs in the church. So it was a real thrill to see a much better one and, of course, an incredible coincidence.

In the evening, Audrey and Harry Sutton, Audrey's brother John his partner Mel and Marie from HAC took me for a meal at the Harbour Arts Centre. What a cool venue that is and the current photography exhibitions is well worth seeing. Then, we all went to a performance by [Woody Pines](#), a mix of rural stringband meets blues meets ragtime. Four young American guys who are incredibly talented and very, very good.

So, I had a wonderful time this week meeting friends old and new, visiting wonderful libraries, meeting superb, dedicated, innovative members of staff who are doing all the things we should be doing and so much more besides. The adjectives I could use to describe this week could go on and on and they would contain a lot of words like dynamic, creative, inspiring, fantastic etc etc. But, hey folks, that's what libraries and librarians are. So thank you Stirling Libraries, Central Branch and North Ayrshire. You are all enriching society and proving just how damned good our libraries are.

Remember Spencer Perceval

MONDAY, APRIL 30, 2012 AT 6:42PM

I read an interesting little [article](#) by Bruce Anderson in the Sunday Telegraph yesterday and I thought I'd share it. Anderson was pointing out that Spencer Perceval deserves to be better remembered by posterity. Who he? I hear you ask. Spencer Perceval was Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury between 1809 and 1812; he was the only Attorney General ever to have gone on to become Prime Minister and he was, of course, the only the British Prime Minister to have been assassinated, almost two hundred years ago to the day on 11 May 1812. Unfortunately, poor old Spencer Perceval is better remembered for the manner of his death than for his life. I'm on a mission to change this so, go on, read about [Spencer Perceval](#) on Wikipedia. You never know when it might be the answer to a pub quiz question.

Local Studies agent provocateur

THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2012 AT 9:33AM

Yesterday, I had the great pleasure of speaking at the LocScot Local History Day School which was held in the A.K. Bell Library in Perth. Many of you know that I have a great interest in all things local studies so this was an event that I was really looking forward to and it didn't disappoint in any way.

The turn-out was very good and there was evident relish and enthusiasm for the role that our local studies collections play both in library terms but also in terms of wider Scottish society. I was thrilled when Eleanor McKay asked to me to speak at this event and also asked me to be thought provoking. I think I may have ended up putting the emphasis on the provoking but, I suppose, one of the roles of an

academic is to ask the difficult questions and, whenever possible, to suggest possible solutions.

I adopted a quite self-critical approach, looking at our local studies collections individually and the sector as a whole and focussed in on some of the key areas that I think we need to address. These included issues such as losing users to the online providers, online presence and visibility, digital content and also the preoccupation with physical access to physical collections.

Local studies have a long and illustrious history going right back to the Public Library Acts in the 1850s and specific mention of them being made by WHK Wright at the inaugural meeting of the Library Association. Local studies users are the original lifelong learners, self-improvers who undertake intricate and complex, often multi-disciplinary, investigations and demonstrate real enthusiasm for their work.

However, our online presence in the local studies field could be better I'm afraid to say and I was pointing out some key examples such as the number of clicks it takes to get from Scotland's People to a local studies site. I also touched on the fact that lots of our websites speak about the "wealth of information" that our collections have but don't really give a good flavour of that wealth in an online environment. Brand local studies or, as I think, brand local history is also very important and I gave some suggestions on how this might be tackled. I quoted a piece of research done here at RGU, in which one family historian said "I wouldn't have thought of using the public library" and highlighted that we can't expect users to come to us and that we underestimate our users at our peril.

I did enjoy provoking discussion and debate and there was certainly a great buzz during the brainstorming sessions. I was also keen to get the group to think about the alliances and partnerships that could be created and mused about getting displays from events such as Local History Week out into shopping centres and supermarkets and working with companies and organisations through their Corporate Social Responsibility schemes.

So, lots of ideas, lots of debate and lots of discussion about the future of local studies collections which are, in my opinion, our other national library.

Elaine Dunphy

TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 2012 AT 11:50AM

I am sad to report the recent death of Elaine Dunphy who was Chief Librarian here at Robert Gordon University (and its forerunner the Robert Gordon Institute of Technology). Elaine studied librarianship here in the 1970s and I still, in fact, have a copy of the class photos from that time here in the office and it is fair to say that she changed very little over the years. Elaine was Chief Librarian here for many years and during her tenure witnessed huge changes in the shape of services not least from a multi-location campus down to two main sites. She also was Acting University Secretary for a time and was actively involved in a whole range of professional groups including SCURL. She also taught here in the then School of

Librarianship for number of years. Elaine had a long battle with ill-health and died peacefully in hospital last week. I am sure she will be remembered by many.

Brilliant Belfast

SUNDAY, APRIL 22, 2012 AT 12:48PM

I spent three days last week over in Belfast at the joint conference of the Library Association of Ireland and CILIP Ireland. I have uploaded some pictures [here](#). Rhona was there with me and I think it is fair to say that we had a brilliant time. We flew over on Wednesday afternoon to the City Airport which is ten minutes from the city centre and allowed for a hassle-free journey. The conference was being held at the Merchant Hotel which is located in the Cathedral Quarter. This five-star hotel is sumptuous. It used to be the Ulster Bank and the front part is opulent Victorian with a new extension to the rear which is themed art deco. From my room (enormous and with the most extravagant bathroom you've ever seen) I had an lovely view over to St Anne's Cathedral with its modern stainless steel spire, added recently to mark the success of the peace process and which Rhona and I visited quickly first thing on Friday morning.

We had time that first evening to go for a walk around the centre of Belfast. We visited the new Titanic Memorial Garden at the side of City Hall. It is beautifully done, subtle, understated and very poignant with the names of all the victims. We then walked down to the Waterfront Hall, a beautiful round building (something I love). The modern architectural additions to Belfast are, I must say, fantastic and give the city a really modern feel; they do, however, sit very comfortably with some of the equally stunning Victorian and Georgian buildings. Rhona and I were both struck by the use of glass in many of these buildings. It is almost as if architects, designers and those commissioning buildings are saying "we'll use glass now because we can" without any fear of windows being blown out. We then had dinner at a lovely restaurant called Nick's Warehouse and very delicious it was too.

The conference began on Thursday morning with CILIP President, Phil Bradley, talking about social media and how we must embrace it or become irrelevant. Phil made some really interesting observations, not least about where Google goes from here given that the success of Google (as a search engine) means that people leave it as a site as soon as they've got what they were looking for. My presentation was in the afternoon and it was about professional education. I'd a packed house and a really engaged audience and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

In the evening, we went out to Stormont for a ministerial reception hosted by Carál Ní Chuilín, MLA, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Also present was Fergus O'Dowd, TD, the Minister of State for the New Era, from the Republic. Stormont is absolutely stunning; the setting, the landscaped grounds and the sheer impressiveness of the building itself. Afterwards it was back to the hotel for a wonderful conference dinner.

The following day there were some fascinating presentations including ones from Margaret Hayes, City Librarian in Dublin on that city's status as an UNESCO city of literature and Nicky Parker, Head of Transformation at Manchester City Council on their recent library developments.

Rhona and I managed to fit in a whistle-stop tour round the new Titanic Centre which is, again, a fantastic piece of architecture and a really, really impressive heritage centre with splendid use of technology throughout. If you get the chance folks, go!

LAI/CILIP Ireland's conference was super and we were made to feel very welcome. Thank you to Fionnuala Hanrahan, Adrienne Adair and Anne Peoples for everything. Loved the conference, loved Belfast, loved the hotel!

Thank you and au revoir Sheila

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 2012 AT 11:02AM

Reflecting on LILAC last week, it was so nice to catch up with Sheila Corrall at the conference. Many of you will know Sheila from her career as a university librarian or, more recently, as Professor of Librarianship at Sheffield University's iSchool. Sheila is about to leave Sheffield to take up a post in Pittsburgh and I think it is right to pay tribute to her before she goes off to the US.

We were very fortunate to have Sheila as our External Examiner for MSc Information and Library Studies for a number of years. We always have two externals, one practitioner and one academic so that both bases - professional relevance and academic rigour - are covered. Sheila was initially appointed as our practitioner academic when she was University Librarian at Southampton. However, shortly afterwards, she was appointed professor at Sheffield and so became our academic one. I think this is almost unique and what it does emphasise is something that I've always held to be really important in librarianship education, namely that the academic and the professional can and should go hand-in-hand and that the "library schools" are not located in remote ivory towers.

Sheila has been a terrific ambassador for the profession and for professional education and she has been an excellent advocate for the work of library schools over recent years, particularly when she was Head of Department at Sheffield and during her time convening [BAILER](#) (the British Association for Information and Library Education and Research) the group which brings together all of the departments in the UK and Ireland which teaching information science. Sheila has a real understanding of our profession and has done so much good work, in so many areas, to move our sector forward. She has also been a very good friend of RGU and our Information Management department. As external examiner, she was rigorous, clear-sighted and always incredibly fair.

So, it was a great pleasure to catch up with Sheila ahead of her move across the Atlantic. I really wish her all the best for the move to Pittsburgh. Good luck Sheila and au revoir for now.

Right, better get my act together.....off to Belfast for the LAI/CILIP Ireland Conference :o)

The colour LILAC

FRIDAY, APRIL 13, 2012 AT 10:52AM

Yesterday evening I had the great pleasure of attending the [LILAC](#) dinner at the Old Fruitmarket in the Merchant City in Glasgow. It was a fantastic evening and was a chance to catch up with a number of old friends such as Anne Kail from Credo Reference, Sheila Corral from the iSchool at Sheffield University as well as a number of our former students. The dinner, like the conference itself, had a really positive, up-beat buzz and, having been following the Twitter feeds ahead of the dinner, it was clear that lots of creative and innovative idea-sharing was going on. Well done to Debbi and all the organizing committee and thank you for the invitation to represent CILIP.

My part in proceedings was to say a few words of welcome, ahead of the dinner, wearing the Presidential chain which provoked much comment, most of it more flattering than the comment of a friend earlier this week who, having seen a photograph of me wearing it, remarked that I looked like the Provost of a now-defunct county and added, rather pointedly, "like Banffshire". Alan Reid Esquire would have been as mortified as I was ;o)

Information Literacy is, of course, one of the areas where libraries and librarians make an enormous contribution to wider society and I could not agree more strongly with LILAC's own definition of information literacy which highlights it as the cornerstone to learning and an essential skill in the digital age and in the era of lifelong learning. As we all know information literacy is not, just about "finding stuff"; it is increasingly being seen as a key skill for the modern workforce and a skill which consequently has economic, social, cultural and political impact. LILAC's themes emphasise this wider impact of information literacy on society, particularly those looking at IL and the digital future and, of course, IL and employability and both of these topics close to my heart as an academic.

I opened my little speech with anecdote that I've always rather liked and not being a person overly worried about repeating myself, I'll end with it again now. As I was driving down for the dinner, I was reflecting that it seemed odd to be leaving Aberdeen at **lunch-time** for a **dinner engagement** and I was reminded of the story about the late Norman St John Stevas, the flamboyant minister in Mrs Thatcher's first government. He got up to leave a cabinet meeting early and Mrs Thatcher turned on him, enquiring "Norman, where do you think you are going?" He replied that he had to leave early as he was going to a particular dinner that evening. The Iron Lady said "Yes, I'm going to that dinner too but I have two further meetings after this". St John Stevas replied "yes Margaret dear but I take much longer to dress than you do".

I must say, though, everyone had spent a long time dressing for last night's dinner. Thank you LILAC. It was great.

What I did on my Easter holidays.....

MONDAY, APRIL 9, 2012 AT 2:51PM

I was on holiday last week and very enjoyable it was too, apart from the snow on Tuesday. The weather being so foul at the beginning of the week meant that I could stay in, guilt-free, and do some family history. The results of my digging around ended up posing more questions than were answered, but doesn't it always? It's really interesting how so much of this kind of research can now be done from the comfort of home using online tools like Scotland's People or Family Search. I did, however, have to make a trip to the [local studies collection](#) in Elgin to photocopy Arradoul Episcopal Church's parish registers for the 1760s and 1770s (there will be a prize at conference for anyone who can pinpoint Arradoul).

In the course of my research last week, I made quite a lot of use of Ancestry which can be good but it can also be dangerous. Many people who post their family trees on Ancestry fail to do the necessary corroboration of facts, rely too heavily on information online, make speculative guesses and then post them as fact which in turn leads lots of others to copy the same mistake into their pedigrees and errors end up as being presented as truths. I encountered a lot of this last week and it often builds the frustration nicely. The internet has revolutionized the way in which genealogists ply their trade now but it is foolish to assume that it can all be done online. I wonder, however, how well our local studies collections are responding to the new generation of online family historians? Local studies is, as many of you know, something I'm very interested in and these unique collections provide us with a really distinctive picture of Scotland. There is a real challenge here for librarians looking after local collections; how do we get the meat of the collections more widely available (and not just for the family tree brigade important though that is). One of my PhD students, Kate Friday, has recently completed her doctoral research looking at "e-genealogy" and how family historians use the sources and also what lessons are to be learned for local studies collection in this virtual family history world. There are some very interesting results from her study about the visibility of our local collections online and the type of content that is available.

I am going to be tackling some of these issues when I speak at [Locscot's Spring Seminar](#) on Wednesday, 25th April at AK Bell in Perth. The day is about the future of local studies and, I think, a big part of that is going to be about local studies in an online world. Ironically enough, my own home area of Moray has a very good online tool [LIBINDEX](#) which indexes a vast array of local sources, including newspapers and gravestones. But, there is plenty more to be done.

So what else did I do during my week off? Well, I had a couple of days in Edinburgh to see the new exhibition at the Queen's Gallery at Holyroodhouse and pretty spectacular it is too, with one corner of the room having drawings by Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Michelangelo. And, then, the highlight of my sojourn in the capital was a trip to the zoo to see the pandas. I'd been concerned that we might not

see them because of their mating rituals but by Thursday they were back on show. They were adorable and I want one but fear supplies of bamboo in Port Gordon are limited.

This week I'm delighted to be going to the [LILAC Conference](#) dinner in Glasgow. It is so good to have such a big, well-know library conference happening here in Scotland. Then next week it is off to Belfast for the [CILIP Ireland / LAI Joint Conference](#) at which I'm speaking about professional education now and in the future.

Introducing CILIPS President 2012: Peter Reid

TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 2012 AT 10:50AM

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a librarian in possession of a presidential chain must be in want of a blog. Through the good offices of Mistress Hanlon, letting agent in Glasgow, I have now taken possession of the presidential blog from my predecessor, Alan Reid.

I really must begin with an apology for not having been on the blog sooner. February and March are my heaviest teaching months and I have just completed delivering my big Masters module on Managing Library Services which has been good fun, well the students perhaps remain to be convinced about the fun aspect.

I am looking forward to the coming months very much. Being selected to be the CILIPS President is the greatest possible honour and I do sincerely hope to be worthy of the trust that has been shown in me and that I represent our profession to be best of my abilities.

The diary is already filling up with events and I am really excited about attending these and meeting as many of you as I can. Next month, I will be reporting back on the blog about LILAC in Glasgow, the Irish Library Association / CILIP Ireland Joint Conference in Belfast, the Scottish Local Studies Day School in Perth and other events. I also hope to use the blog to give you a bit of an idea about the life of a "library school" academic.

I would really like to pay tribute to Alan for the sterling job he did as President in 2011. He was a superb CILIP Scotland President who exhibited dedication, hard-work, enthusiasm and sheer professionalism at all times. He has been inspirational to all of us and particularly to those of us who have had the opportunity to work closely with him both in Policy and Resources Committee and in CILIPS Council. I would also like to pay tribute to Susan, or Mrs Reid as followers of this blog have come to know her as, who has steadfastly supported our organisation and our events over the last year.

I am also thrilled to have my good friend Dr Audrey Sutton from North Ayrshire as my Vice President for the year and know that she will be a fantastic ambassador for CILIPS in 2013.

We know that times are tough but in choosing **Enriching Society** as the theme for the year, I want us to be able to showcase how good we are as a profession, to shout about the fantastic contribution that libraries and information services make to our communities and to our society on so many different levels. I am confident that through our events, both nationally and locally, we will be able to do that loudly and clearly; National Libraries Day last month was a starting point but let's keep that momentum up and shout loudly about how fantastic libraries (and librarians) are.

Alan Reid (President 2011)

Professor Peter Reid, CILIPS President, 2012

Monday, January 30, 2012 at 4:14PM

CILIPS President in 2012 is Professor Peter Reid. I haven't known Peter for all that long. It was only during CILIPS' conference in 2010 that I met him for the first time. Inevitably, it was in the bar; inevitably, he had a pint of lager in his hand. He seemed like a pleasant chap.

At that time neither Peter nor I anticipated that he would succeed me as CILIPS' President in 2012. Since then I have come to know Peter really quite well. I know, for example, that two great institutions have forged the man, the professional, the distinguished academic that he is.

The first of these was Portgordon Library. Peter is, as some of you may know, a native and continuing resident of Portgordon, a former fishing community on the Moray coast. It was as a regular at his small local library, still in short trousers and Startrite sandals, that Peter took his first steps down the path to his future career.

The other institution which has helped mould Peter is The Robert Gordon University. As a student there he was awarded BA (Hons) in Librarianship; he followed this with a PhD in historical bibliography; thereafter, he was appointed Lecturer in Librarianship, then Senior Lecturer in Librarianship, becoming Head of Department and Professor of Librarianship. And despite the suspicion that he's never had a proper job, you have to be impressed by this pretty unrelenting progress to the top of our profession.

As I've mentioned, Peter's academic research has been in the field of historical bibliography. He is also very active in that of local studies librarianship; indeed,

with his characteristic modesty, he states that he is one of the principal researchers in the field.

And he is, and I know this to be the case because I attended the *Get Moray Reading Book Festival* last year, at which Peter presented an illustrated talk entitled *Adventures in local history* that turned out to be the most wonderful account of the great Second World War Portgordon spy mystery. I have to say that the depth of Peter's research was very impressive, and his telling of the story was masterful.

So, Peter will bring much to the presidency. He is a young man, working with and developing other young people as library professionals. As a teacher and mentor he has a genuine interest and concern for his students. I remember his great delight when, during last year's Autumn Gathering, he received a text message from one of his former students to let him know that she had secured her first professional post. I don't remember having that sort of relationship with my Professor when I studied librarianship, but I was reminded of Chris Pinder's 2010 presidential theme *Mind the Gap*. Clearly, Peter is well aware of the importance of that in guiding and shaping new library professionals, and in helping to develop our professional community.

In getting to know Peter, however, I have discovered that there is a dark side to his character, revealed in what I can only describe as his over-keenness to get his hands on my chain. Nevertheless, relinquish it I must, comforted by the knowledge that we are extremely fortunate in having Peter as our President this year. It will be an interesting one for him; there is much on CILIPS' agenda.

He has my very best wishes for an enjoyable and successful year.

Presidential Report, 2011: reflections on the year for the benefit of my reader

Monday, January 30, 2012 at 3:37PM

It has been a busy year! I've reported my movements, not always seriously I admit, in the presidential blog, there's no point repeating it all, and so I'll try to pick out the main themes of the year now that the fun, for me at any rate, is over.

Probably the most important aspect of being CILIPS President, certainly the most enjoyable, is the opportunity to meet librarians, CILIP members and other library staff throughout Scotland. I'm grateful to colleagues in Central Branch, East Branch and North East Branch who organised Meet the President events.

Attendance at these meetings was, by and large, fairly small, but that allowed us to turn them into discussion events, and I think I'm correct in saying that every single person at each meeting participated and had something to say. There were some highlights – the video link from Aberdeen to Shetland to allow librarians there to take part in the North East Branch meeting was a great idea and proved very successful. What a lively bunch the Shetlanders were, until they told me that my time was up and they were all off to watch *The Apprentice* on TV.

The Central Branch one was....., well “frisky” was how I described them at the time. Downright impertinent at times, if truth be told, but a confident group of librarians who obviously know each other well, enjoy working together and have built a real group strength.

It is such a shame that other parts of the country – particularly the Glasgow and west area, of course, - cannot sustain a CILIPS branch.

The other opportunities I had to meet members were at our conference in Glasgow in June and at the Autumn Gathering. It was great to meet up with colleagues I hadn't seen for some time, and also to just introduce myself to complete strangers (although no Scottish librarian is a stranger really). I enjoyed both occasions very much, as did everyone I spoke to, and this merely confirmed that they are crucial in bringing people together, providing an opportunity for staff at all levels to attend, participate, meet colleagues from other authorities and reinforce our professional community.

In the old days, annual conferences resembled old boys' networks, pretty much exclusive to chief librarians and their committee chairmen. Not any longer and all the better for that, and it augurs well for the future to see so many young professionals at these events.

I was also delighted to receive invitations from several individual public library authorities to meet staff and take part in special activities, including joining a staff meeting in Dundee, opening the Moray Book Festival, speaking at the Alan Ball Local History Awards in East Lothian and returning to Midlothian for several events. There were welcome return visits to meetings of FLAB (Fife, Lothians & Borders chief librarians' group for the uninitiated) and to the ABC Benchmarking Group.

Another means to communicate with CILIPS members has been the President's blog. The new website has been a great step forward, and the listing of the blog

on the home page menu has given it a profile which has undoubtedly encouraged access. I understand that the blog has enjoyed a good hit rate, and I must thank Gillian in the CILIPS office for all her help, and congratulate her on developing such an attractive site.

I was also let off the leash to represent CILIPS at various conferences and other events. It was a great privilege to fly the Scottish flag at both the CILIP Cymru conference and the joint Irish Conference, as well as at the tripartite conference in Tallinn with Finnish and Estonian librarians. All were interesting, but that in Tallinn was especially memorable for the good company and mutual support among an excellent team of Scottish librarians.

There were some surprising invitations:

- I don't know why CILIPS President was invited to attend the Festival of Politics at the Scottish Parliament, but I was and I did attend, and I did enjoy it and I did meet some interesting people, but why – who knows?
- The other surprise was the opportunity to take part in interviews for Readers in Residence posts, funded by Creative Scotland and managed by Shetland Arts.

This representational role gives the President opportunities to contribute to CILIPS' profile and reputation and talk about the importance of libraries.

I enjoyed all these aspects of the job very much, but perhaps the 3 occasions I enjoyed most were:

- the Angus Book Award ceremony;
- the Midlothian Adult Learner Celebration Event for people taking part in The Six Book Challenge; and
- the Get Moray Reading Book Festival.

These were my favourites because they were about books, encouraging people to read, to stretch their imaginations, to learn and develop skills through reading.

My presidential theme for the year was ***Imagining the Future***, which, as I've explained elsewhere, arose from a Christmas night out in 2010 with the school librarians in Midlothian at which I was asked, when too much wine had been

taken, *Do you think that there is a future for us? What do you think that future will be?* So, this theme, while reflecting the impact of difficult times on our professional confidence, was one which, I hoped, would challenge us to think and plan strategically, work with key partners and work together as a profession.

Undoubtedly, there remain issues for us to address, particularly in terms of working together as a profession and of CILIPS' engagement with members:

- those Meet the President events attracted only a very small minority of members;
- I was disappointed that so few public library authorities invited me to their areas to meet staff;
- there were no invitations from the HE, FE, health or other sectors to meet professional colleagues there.

Let's face it, there are members who have, at best, a pretty tenuous relationship with CILIPS, and, of course, winning non-members back into the fold is something which must be given some sort of priority now that CILIPS' income from Ridgmount Street is to be an agreed proportion of Scottish membership income.

Nevertheless, it's clear that many CILIPS members have a clear understanding of the importance of their services; in many places, partnership working is ingrained; there is an awareness that advocacy isn't just something to be done by our professional association and chief librarians, but a responsibility for each and every one of us. So, despite the challenges, wherever I have gone in the last 12 months I have found a confidence and strength in our profession that, often, has surprised and heartened me.

The other main feature of 2011 was the relationship with Ridgmount Street, and the development of the Operational Agreement between CILIPS and CILIP. I won't go into the details of the negotiations: they were long, time-consuming and, at times, painful; the process remains to be completed, of course, and so, to a certain extent, remains *sub judice* so to speak. I am confident that it will be completed satisfactorily, and that both CILIPS' ability to represent members in Scotland and our relationship with SLIC will be strengthened.

As President, I assisted in the negotiation process, but I'd like to pay tribute to those in the CILIPS' negotiating team who brought much energy, skill and commitment to the exercise and gave generously of their time.

Finally, I must extend my very great thanks to CILIPS staff for their tremendous support during the past 12 months. It's impossible to properly express my appreciation.

My Mother, the other Mrs Reid in my life, is now well into her eighties. Much as I tried to explain, she never really understood what this presidential thing was all about; she knew it had something to do with a chain, but beyond that it was a mystery to her. I, however, am fully conscious of what a great honour it has been for me to be CILIPS President.

The future of CILIPS – have your say

Wednesday, December 21, 2011 at 9:29AM

The conditions were not ideal for a chap with life-threatening chilblains. In fact, it was perishing, freezing and downright chilly at Stirling Library Service HQ the other day: the heating system had packed in, but despite that Robert Ruthven, Library Services Manager, and his gallant crew worked on. I understand that Polar Medals will be awarded by their grateful employer.

Heedless of such adversity, however, five members of CILIPS' Task & Finish Group gathered *en masse*, to consider options for the future governance of our professional association.

As agreed by CILIPS' Policy & Resources Committee (P&R), the remit of this Group is "to consider the governance of CILIPS and make recommendations to Council on the future", taking into account:

- our relationship with CILIP;
- engagement with CILIPS' membership;
- the role of CILIPS' trustees and requirements under Scottish charity law;
- affordability; and
- member consultation.

Ultimately, any proposed changes to the way that we currently operate and take decisions will have to be approved by CILIPS' members at next year's AGM or at a special general meeting, so that any new governance arrangements can be implemented in 2013.

If you're not entirely sure how CILIPS is set up and run at present, have a look at the website <http://www.cilips.org.uk/> select "About" from the main menu and then

“Governance”. It’s not as exciting as the cowboy book I’m reading at the moment*, but it’s important to know how your professional association is governed and who’s doing the governing!

Anyway, what the Task & Finish Group has begun to do is consider the role, size and composition of Council and P&R, and, crucially, how to achieve a high level of member involvement, engagement and communication.

To do this successfully, it is vitally important that individual members of CILIPS have an opportunity at all stages to suggest ideas, make comments, contribute thoughts and take part in this exercise.

So, to start the consultation ball rolling, I have been asked to raise this issue in my blog, and I would be really pleased to receive any ideas, comments and thoughts, if only to convince me that someone out there is reading this stuff! Alternatively, of course, you can get in touch directly with Elaine Fulton, CILIPS’ Director.

I know it’s Christmas and New Year and you’re busy (and if you think you’re busy, please be aware that it’s Mrs Reid’s birthday in a fortnight as well. How inconsiderate is that!). Nevertheless, this is an important matter which will help shape the future of our profession in Scotland and ensure that it is properly organised to achieve efficient and effective representation of your interests and advocacy for libraries across all sectors.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

* “Blood Bond” by William W. Johnstone for those who are interested, - on loan from Penicuik Library, an excellent facility for the early retired and others.

The London Tube: an idiot’s guide

Monday, December 5, 2011 at 9:10PM

“Do you regularly fly this route?” asked the American gentleman seated beside me. When I explained that I travelled to London only occasionally, he expressed some surprise and said that I seemed to be a confident and well-seasoned airline passenger. I smiled in modest acknowledgement.

He was on his way, via Heathrow, to New York with his daughter. I was bound for CILIP HQ in Ridgmount Street in the company of Audrey Walker, CILIPS’ doughty Treasurer. To be honest, any confidence and well-seasoning on my part probably reflected the fact that Audrey had promised that she would convoy me successfully through the mysteries of the London underground system and some of

the posh parts of London to our destination. I confess it was a bit like being looked after by your Mum – Audrey even paid my tube fare with her Oyster card!

Later that evening we met up with Elaine Fulton in a comfortable London pub to plan our campaign, for the purpose of our visit was to meet with CILIP Council, present a report on advocacy for libraries in Scotland and let them know just what a wonderful job CILIPS is doing in that respect.

Next day, Audrey and I were invited to attend the Council meeting as observers, and so I can report that Elaine's presentation on advocacy in Scotland went down very well indeed.

She explained that a strategic, high-level approach to advocacy is pursued, and that, working jointly with SLIC, key stakeholders and policy makers in Scottish Government, local authorities, the education sector and the NHS were left in no doubt as to the key role that libraries have in delivering learning and literacies and in supporting skills development.

And to sustain the profile that libraries already enjoy and build on the outcomes already achieved, Elaine concluded her presentation with an outline of future advocacy plans. What a dame!

I am also delighted to tell you that with harmony breaking out all over the place, CILIP Council, later in its meeting, went on to approve new funding arrangements for CILIPS for the next three years (more of that in due course).

So, our trip was a most satisfactory one, the Scottish delegation was warmly received, lunch was excellent and, over pudding, presentations were made to a number individuals retiring from Council, and to me! Perhaps I shouldn't divulge what I received in case you conclude that I'm only in this lark for the perks, but suffice it to say that at 40% it's not the sort of stuff you would give to small children and maiden aunts.

Readers will be pleased to learn that Audrey saw me safely back to Heathrow, and I am now a confident and well-seasoned London underground traveller.

Readers in Residence

Monday, November 7, 2011 at 7:11PM

A few weeks ago, representing CILIPS, I joined an interview panel charged with appointing Readers in Residence to work with library authorities in Scotland. The exercise was managed by Shetland Arts Development Agency (SADA).

Readers in Residence is part of Creative Scotland's Creative Futures programme of residencies and related activities designed to *promote the professional development, vision, connectivity and ambitions of Scotland's creative practitioners and organisations.*

There was an amazing response from would-be Readers in Residence and library services - 37 applications from across Scotland. These were short listed down to 13, and after two and a half days (!) of interviews we finally agreed on and selected 5 "residents". In each case the Reader in Residence will divide his or her time equally between developing their own practice and working on behalf of the library service and the communities it serves, in order to encourage reading, support readers of varying ages and abilities, work with book groups, increase access to the library service and enhance the experience of library service users. Phew!

And now that the selection process has been completed, acceptances received and all the usual checks completed, the successful applicants can be revealed as:

Jen Hadfield who will be resident with Shetland Library. She has published two collections of poetry, was short listed for the Forward Prize in 2007 and won the T.S. Eliot Prize for poetry in 2008. She lives in Shetland, working as a writer, writing tutor and artist.

Margot Henderson, a poet, storyteller and community artist, who will work with Highland Council Library Service. She has been storytelling Fellow for Aberdeen and Writer in Residence for The Cromarty Arts Trust.

Maureen Sangster, a writer and poet in Scots and English, who will be Reader in Residence at Carstairs State Hospital Library, having previously worked as a writer, workshop facilitator and tutor in schools, care homes, community centres, art galleries and hospitals.

Ian Stephen, playwright, poet and short story writer, who will work with Western Isles Library Service based in Stornoway where he was born and still lives. Ian has been a full time writer since winning the first Robert Louis Stevenson Award in 1995.

Zoe Strachan, born in Kilmarnock, who will work with East Ayrshire Libraries. She is an award-winning novelist but also writes plays, libretti, short stories and essays, and has held various fellowships.

So, a pretty talented bunch, all skilled communicators, experienced in working with people and bringing a profound understanding of the importance of reading to these residencies.

It's great that, through this initiative, Creative Scotland acknowledges that reading is an essential skill for learning, life and work, and that it expands knowledge and sparks imaginations. It's also significant that the role of the library in fostering reading is recognised, and is vital to the delivery of this project.

This partnership between Creative Scotland and libraries is most welcome and augurs well for future joint working. So, although these residencies will run only for 6 months, let's hope that's enough time for them to make an impact. If they do prove successful, they may be seen as a pilot, a starting point to extend the programme and develop more and more Readers in Residence across library authorities in Scotland.

Glittering Prizes

Wednesday, November 2, 2011 at 1:42PM

I pride myself in thinking that I know how to show a girl a good time. Earlier this week, therefore, I took Mrs Reid on my arm and treated her to a special night out.

The occasion was the Tyne & Esk Writers *Writer of the Year* competition award ceremony at the Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh.

Now, as some of you may know, one of my enthusiasms is the support that public libraries can give to local creative writers. Indeed, one of the most enjoyable parts of my job when gainfully employed was working with writers and writers' groups. So, I was delighted to accept the invitation from Tyne & Esk Writers to attend the *Writer of the Year* event. And, boy, was Mrs Reid thrilled to accompany me!

Tyne & Esk Writers (the name comes from the two rivers – the Tyne and the Esk – which flow through East Lothian and Midlothian respectively) is an umbrella organisation for the writing groups – 8 in number at present – in the two authority areas. Tyne & Esk Writers is generously supported by the public library services of the two areas, and most groups meet in local libraries.

As well engaging a Creative Writer – currently author and playwright, Tom Murray – Tyne & Esk Writers organises regular events, workshops, readings, etc to support local writing groups and develop the work of individual writers. It also promotes annual writing competitions for both young people and adults, with the main showcase event of the year being the adult competition awards ceremony and the announcement of the winner as *Writer of the Year*.

Entries are judged in two categories of poetry and prose by professional writers. This year's judges were prize-winning poet, A.C. Clarke and the poet, fiction and non-fiction author Tom Bryan. Cash prizes are presented to the

category winners and runners-up in Midlothian and East Lothian, with the overall winner being “crowned” *Writer of the Year* and receiving a superb trophy designed for the competition by internationally-renowned glass artist, Alison Kinnaird.

As always, it was an evening of high excitement, with each of the prize-winners taking to the stage, under the spotlights of the Brunton Theatre, to read their successful entries. We were kept waiting for the nail-biting announcement of the overall *Writer of the Year*, however, until after an interval fuelled by East Lothian wine and peanuts! Alison Hunter, that authority’s Principal Libraries Officer knows how to do things in style.

And the winner wasMarie MacPherson of East Lothian for her excellent prose piece entitled *Birth*, featuring rich Scots dialogue and set in Haddington during the aftermath of the Battle of Flodden. In receiving her award, Marie revealed that the piece is an excerpt from a yet-to-be-published full-length novel, so watch out for this in future.

As a bonus, each member of the audience left with a free copy of the booklet containing the full versions of all the winning entries: for at least some of the authors, the first time their work will have appeared in print.

Mrs Reid had just fair enjoyed herself, and the whole evening again demonstrated the opportunities for meaningful local partnerships and the vital role that public libraries can play in supporting local writers and local writing groups.

CILIPS Autumn Gathering

Monday, October 17, 2011 at 6:41PM

CILIPS’ Autumn Gathering took place at the Carnegie Conference Centre, Dunfermline last Wednesday, and if you weren’t there then you missed yourself!

With over 100 delegates attending, the Gathering attracted professionals from all corners of Scotland and from all library sectors, keen to share ideas and good practice, and to learn together.

The day began on an inauspicious note when, in welcoming delegates, I had to admit that I had forgotten the presidential CHAIN! The disappointment of the audience was palpable. And the funny thing was that the last thing I said to myself before sleep o’ertook me on Tuesday night was, “Don’t forget THE CHAIN in the morning”. Anyway, as I explained to the audience, it was Mrs Reid’s fault for not reminding me before I departed for the event.

Despite that, the Gathering was a great success. In part, this was due to the quality of the three keynote speakers. Alex Linkston, former Chief Executive with West

Lothian Council, brought his lengthy local government experience – 45 years with that authority – to consideration of the current financial difficulties facing local authorities, including public library authorities. The message was a clear one – there will be less money in future, trimming services here and there will not be enough when faced with cuts of the order of 20-25%, and so public libraries will have to re-invent themselves, re-model services, explore the opportunities to deliver more IT-based services and engage with an audience, particularly with young people, through developing technologies and facilities. Imagining the future?

Stuart Dempster, who addressed the meeting after lunch, directs the JISC Strategic Content Alliance (SCA) initiative, and is responsible for developing a range of research and policy projects to enrich the emerging UK Content Framework. The SCA is building on the work of the Common Information Environment; working towards a common set of principles and guidelines for best practice that will provide a common policy framework for online content activities across the domains of lifelong learning and teaching, research and cultural heritage. His argument that creating digital content raised questions about access suggested to me that what we need are libraries and librarians!

In between these principal speakers, delegates had a wide choice of sessions covering such topics as e-books, the Learning Zone at the National Library of Scotland, social media, a chance to meet information specialists from a number of different sectors and a session entitled “Librarians not algorithms” (I had to look that one up in the dictionary!).

The final keynote speaker was Gavin Oattes, owner and managing director of Tree of Knowledge, Scotland’s leading motivational training organisation. A former primary school teacher and stand-up comedian (no comment), Gavin is recognised as one of the top speakers in the country. His insistence that we need to be happy in our work, passionate in our commitment to what we do and positive in everything we think and say was inspiring and very funny! What a presentation!

A great way to finish a thoroughly rewarding and enjoyable day which demonstrated, once again, the invaluable work done by CILIPS staff and the importance of having a dedicated team working for members in Scotland!

So, if you weren’t there this year, make sure you don’t miss it next year!

Alan Ball Local History Award

Monday, October 3, 2011 at 2:35PM

When the Provost of East Lothian Council “cordially invites you”, well, you can’t refuse, can you?

And why would the President refuse the Provost's invitation when the occasion was the presentation of the **Alan Ball Local History Award** to East Lothian Council Library Service by CILIP? A civic reception in Haddington Town House last Friday; refreshments; a finger buffet! I had to be there.

The Award, won hands down by Alison Hunter, Principal Libraries Officer and her team, despite some quality opposition from across the UK, was in recognition of the publication of the seven volumes (yes! 7 volumes) of the *Fourth Statistical Account of East Lothian, 1945-2000* – only the second time in the history of the Alan Ball Award that a Scottish publication has won. Some achievement!

The judges described the result as *a monumental work of scholarship with its detailed content matched by excellent standards of physical publication* – fitting recognition of the contributions to the project from over 500 people, and of the editorial skills of Sonia Baker who was assisted by Veronica Wallace, former East Lothian Local Studies Librarian. In fact, it should be reported that Veronica continued to work on the *Fourth Statistical Account* for years after her retirement.

With the publication programme completed, and with the Award plaque safely locked in the now groaning East Lothian Libraries' trophy cabinet, it has to be said that this work is a tremendous legacy to leave future generations who will have a detailed picture of working and living conditions in the county during the second half of the 20th century. For this period of great change, a fascinating record has been created of how East Lothian folk shopped, what they did for entertainment, how roads and transport changed, what home life was like, and of so many other aspects of life in the area.

Elizabeth Melrose, committee member and former chair of CILIP's Local Studies Group, presented the Award to Alison and said lots of nice things about the project to a fair crowd of the great and the good and, most importantly, contributors to the publication. Knowing of my enthusiasm for local history, Alison had kindly asked me along to talk about the value of local history publications. We were all ready for some refreshments after that!

So, many congratulations are due to East Lothian Libraries, and they are not finished yet in the field of local studies. The long-awaited John Gray Centre bringing together local history, archives and museums services under one roof is due to open in Haddington next year.

Get Moray Reading

Wednesday, September 28, 2011 at 4:46PM

With THE CHAIN and Mrs Reid both securely packed, I pointed the car north last Wednesday and set off in howling wind and driving rain (the last of this year's

summer weather) to help launch the Moray Book Festival, subtitled *Get Moray Reading*.

We did stop to cheer ourselves up *en route* with a visit to Culloden, and although the new visitor centre is very interesting and well-designed the weather remained so foul that even the most fanatical of Jacobites wouldn't have ventured out onto the Moor that day.

In Moray, however, the sun was shining, as it always is there, and for the next four days we were able to visit some of our favourite parts of the area, as well as attend some festival events. Indeed, I was delighted at the opportunity to take part in the book festival because I have several personal connections with the area.

My father was born and brought up in Dallas before the family moved to Dundee. I should point out this was Dallas, Moray and not Dallas, Texas, and as I said to the audience, it was a great disappointment that my old man was neither a wealthy rancher nor an oil baron.

Also, many years ago, I worked for five years as a librarian for what was then Moray District Council, and was based in Elgin's former library in Grant Lodge, now sadly boarded up and unused. And, while we were there, my youngest son was born in Elgin, and so the family connection with Moray continues.

Now regular (!) readers of this blog will know that part of the President's job is to attend meetings and conferences and special events, and I've enjoyed this part of the role very much. To date, the two occasions I've enjoyed most have been the *Angus Book Award* ceremony and the *Midlothian Adult Learner Celebration Event*.

And the reason that these have been my favourites is that they are both all about books: encouraging people to read, to stretch their imaginations, to learn through reading and just simply to enjoy books. For these same reasons, the *Moray Book Festival* has now been added to my short list of favourite events of the year.

The *Get Moray Reading* programme featured events for very young children, for school pupils, for adults; it ranged over Scottish history, local history, natural history, travel, sport and lots more. Oh, and it included talks about whisky too! What a surprise.

Probably the greatest strength of the programme was that it offered an opportunity to meet, to listen to and to talk with authors, including stars like Theresa Breslin, Mairi Hedderwick, Iain M. Banks.

Several other aspects of this initiative impressed me. One was its clear declaration of support for Scottish writing, publishing and illustration. Another was the

number and range of the festival's sponsors and partners, including Scottish Book Trust, Birlinn, the local business improvement agency and local businesses themselves - a considerable achievement.

Get Moray Reading seems to have been a great success, not only in terms of the impact of individual events, but in demonstrating the importance of the public library to individual, community and business development.

Many congratulations to Alistair Campbell, Moray's Libraries and Museums Manager, and his staff whose hard work paid off so well.

Finally, I can report that despite the high mileage of the trip the car behaved very well throughout, and so did Mrs Reid.

Literacy and libraries – links in the chain

Monday, September 12, 2011 at 1:38PM

I refer, of course, not to the now-notorious presidential CHAIN, but to the key role that libraries have in improving levels of literacy and, in turn, learning opportunities, employability and full participation in society.

Nevertheless, I did decide to wear THE CHAIN when I attended the launch last week of the *Midlothian Reading Challenge*, a scheme jointly developed by Midlothian Council Library Service and Midlothian Adult Literacy and Numeracy Initiative (MALANI).

For the last three years, MALANI has promoted the Reading Agency's *Six Book Reading Challenge*, and has developed this to include ESOL learners and others. The plan now is to build on the success so far achieved by designing a bespoke reading challenge tailored for target learners and groups in order to:

- encourage learners to read more widely across fiction, non-fiction, Scottish authors, etc;
- build confidence among learners to use their local library and to keep reading;
- encourage learners to read aloud to their children;
- use learners to recommend books to others; and
- make reading a part of the everyday life of learners.

Underpinning all of this is a vision to join up several initiatives in Midlothian and write a Reader Development Strategy as a sub plan of the Midlothian Literacy Strategy, and, in practical terms, the partners have made commitments to take this forward.

Midlothian's Library Service will:

- facilitate library visits and give support to groups of learners;
- run workshops and author visits at times when families can attend;
- provide venues and host discussion groups;
- offer more large print and audio books;
- explore the opportunity to create a reader in residence post; and
- seek to develop a reading buddies scheme.

MALANI will:

- encourage all learners to participate in the reading challenge;
- encourage all learners to join their local library;
- organise visits to libraries with learners;
- purchase suitable reading materials;
- set up additional provision and book groups with partners, including Sure Start; and
- provide specialist training for tutors and staff.

Jointly, the Library Service and MALANI will:

- build partnerships with key agencies to support the *Midlothian Reading Challenge*;
- identify key dates to promote reading throughout the year; and
- seek funding to support reading initiatives.

Apologies for all these bullets, but I do like things neat and tidy!

Anyway, the whole event went off very well, attended as it was by representatives of the Community Learning & Development Service, the great and the good of the Education Division, Sure Start, the odd councillor, Library Service staff, and others - respectful(!?) reference was made to the presence of "El Presidente". This was assisted by the fact that both the Director of Education and Midlothian's Chief Executive spoke of the importance of reading (it seems the Chief is a Walter Scott enthusiast!) before cutting the cake which was, appropriately, in the shape of a book.

So, an important initiative, an example of the virtues of partnership working, and due recognition of the role of the library service and its ability to deliver in local communities.

Presidential fun at the Festival of Politics

Tuesday, August 30, 2011 at 11:11AM

The duties of the President of CILIPS are many and various. All are onerous. Usually, however, I have a fair idea of what I'm supposed to be doing and what's expected of me at events, meetings, conferences, etc. And if I'm not sure, I always have Mrs Reid to tell me.

To be honest though, I didn't really know why I was attending the Festival of Politics in the Scottish Parliament last Saturday. I was asked by CILIP's Chief Executive, Annie Mauger, if I would go along to a couple of events sponsored by the Carnegie UK Trust and attend the lunchtime reception, and I was pleased to do this, of course.

The morning session entitled *Where next for the Arab Spring* was fascinating and particularly topical with Gaddafi being kicked out of Tripoli at that very moment; fascinating, but not directly relevant to libraries in Scotland.

The afternoon debate was a bit closer to home - *Reporting the independence referendum*. This session certainly turned into a lively debate among a panel of media experts with very healthy participation from the full-house audience.

Again, however, it didn't seem directly relevant to our own professional concerns. But then, I began to think about what I had been saying at CILIPS' conference earlier this year. Those of you who were present will recall my inspirational message (and those of you who weren't there will just have to take my word for it that it was inspirational!). Well at least Mrs Reid thought it was quite good.

One of the points I made was that the political landscape in Scotland has changed, and regardless of what the Scottish people are ultimately asked to decide upon in the referendum, and regardless of what we choose as the future direction for the country, it looks like things may be different in times to come and may never be the same again. It is within that political context that we must imagine our future as a profession.

Across all library sectors, we have a role to play in our changing society. With leadership from our professional association in Scotland and working with our strategic partners, we have to carve out that role and convince others of its relevance. Only in this way will we achieve effective advocacy for libraries, and demonstrate the importance of CILIPS to our membership in Scotland in these challenging times.

During the *Reporting the independence referendum* debate on Saturday there was pretty much unanimous agreement among panel members that our friends south of the border, and Westminster specifically, still “didn’t get it”; still didn’t realise the political shift that has taken place in Scotland as a result of the Scottish parliamentary elections.

I suppose we are fortunate: as far as our professional association is concerned, policy, finance and operational matters are already devolved to CILIPS, and this has allowed the Hamilton office to operate effectively within the devolved political arena and in terms of the Scottish agenda.

As our distinctive national political landscape continues to change, our priorities for Scotland’s library sector will only be delivered if CILIPS’ critical role is recognised and supported.

Quote of the week

Tuesday, August 23, 2011 at 12:11PM

Quote of the week (in fact, best quote for some time) comes from Kenneth Roy's article entitled *Why are we so afraid of our own past?* in the excellent online journal *Scottish Review* (23 August 2011). In considering the Scottish Government's proposal to introduce a course of Scottish Studies in our secondary schools, he writes:

I think back to my own education in the banal, stultifying school system, from which I escaped to play golf. Even golf had to be more rewarding than the compulsory rotation of dates, mostly English ones, of events of which I cared little then and care even less now. The dates stick in my mind to this day, unrelated to context or understanding; simply as numbers. That was Scottish education: an institutionalised form of alienation. Jimmy Reid learned more in Govan public library.

Reading and writing and stuff

Thursday, August 4, 2011 at 4:22PM

It’s not very often that *The Scotsman* (still “Scotland’s National Newspaper”) carries two articles about the country’s writers and books and the place of literature in national life on the same day. But that is exactly what occurred in yesterday’s edition (Wednesday 3 August).

On page 27, there's a big article by John McTernan about the angry backlash that the BBC is "rightly" facing over plans to slash the number of short stories on Radio 4. He writes:

Stories are the foundation of civilisation. They are how we understand the world – from the creation myths that explain where we come from, to the daily gossip that allows us to make sense of our own lives and those of our friends and families. We are social beings, and storytelling is part of what makes us human.

And he writes further:

It is no great surprise that it was a Scottish writer [Susie Maguire] who turned a crude spending cut into a principled crusade. Literature is the most important of the arts in Scotland.

What McTernan didn't say, but I'm sure he would have if he had been reminded, was that in local communities the length and breadth of the country, day in, day out, it is the public library service, and the knowledge and dedication of public library staff which provide crucial access to that most important of the arts for the people of Scotland.

And on page 1 (yes, the **front** page!) there was a photograph of Joanna Lumley (I was surprised that she was not described as the "fragrant" Joanna Lumley) under a headline worthy of lesser newspapers – *So you Tink you're a star?* The story below read:

Joanna Lumley takes inspiration from Tinkerbell – in the form of three-year-old Poppy Henderson – as she helps launch a campaign to turn the "home of Peter Pan" into a literary centre for young people.

The "full story" on page 12, beneath another pic of La Lumley (I have the makings of a hack), revealed that, having secured the rights of the Gurkhas, the former *Absolutely Fabulous* star is lending her support to the campaign to save Moat Brae House, Dumfries where, it's believed, J.M. Barrie was inspired to create Peter Pan.

The plan is to transform the house and grounds into a National Centre for Children's Literature, including a Peter Pan experience exhibition, a children's library and opportunities to house literary residencies and arts activities that celebrate and promote children's literature.

Now I quite like some of Barrie's work. Admittedly, you require a strong stomach for his high kailyard stuff like *A window in Thrums*, but I read a number of his shorter prose pieces quite recently – *Farewell Miss Julie Logan*, *The little white bird*, *The twelve pound look* – and really enjoyed them. I've also seen the

play, *Mary Rose*, performed a couple of times in recent years, and enjoyed those productions also.

So, a project to enhance Barrie's profile gets my vote, and the creation of a national children's literature centre is certainly to be encouraged and supported. At the same time, I really hope that in developing facilities and activities at Moat Brae House cognisance will be taken of the role of the library sector and proper recognition given to the superb work in early years' literacy, storytelling and reading being carried out on a daily basis by children's librarians, school librarians and Bookstart co-ordinators right across Scotland.

Let's get those bookmarks out there!

Tuesday, July 19, 2011 at 7:36PM

Fans Readers of this blog will have noticed that from time to time I have mentioned the lovescottishlibraries campaign details of which you'll find at: <http://www.lovescottishlibraries.org/>

Now, as we all know, Scottish people love their libraries. Libraries in all sectors - public, university, school, college, health service libraries and specialist information centres – attract millions of visits each year. And we also know that library services are really important to cultural life and economic development in this country, facilitating access to reading, learning and personal development, supporting study and improving employability.

We are also acutely aware that in difficult economic times people will need their libraries more – to help with job seeking and retraining, to access the internet, to borrow rather than buy.

We all know this, of course, because we are librarians, and I'm confident that every single librarian reading this will have signed the lovescottishlibraries petition against cuts*. I'm also sure that you will all have encouraged your partners, family members, neighbours, and Saturday staff at your local branch of Greggs to do likewise.

Nevertheless, it's important that our users express *their* views about the importance of their library, that they make *their* voice heard, and that politicians and those taking financial decisions about library services are made aware of just how much libraries mean to the people of Scotland!

Hopefully, some of you will have seen the lovescottishlibraries logo and brand being used on the Summer Read promotion in the press and on trains. Now we embark on a new initiative! (Cheering is permitted at this point).

It has been decided by the heid bummers of our profession in Scotland that the production of bookmarks is an effective and value for money way to promote reading **provided** we get them placed in locations other than libraries.

And so (you must have expected this), we need your help to get these beautiful, colourful, quality bookmarks into public venues - no, not libraries, but pubs, hotels, coffee shops, gyms, Fraser's Fruit & Veg, Perth Road, Dundee, the Kelty Greyhound Rescue Centre, the turnstiles at Tannadice Park, etc, etc.... there is probably a long list of possible distribution points, but the bookmarks must be available for the public to pick up.

And, there will be prizes for the most unusual or "light bulb moment" venue (N.B. these are not my words; I do not use such expressions). The only condition is that you keep your distribution activities legal, clean and decent. Then, take a photo and get a signed confirmation that copies are available for the public to pick up.

Copies of the bookmark are available from your CILIPS branch rep. or directly from CILIPS' office in Hamilton. Entries for the "light bulb" stuff – photos and confirmations - should be submitted to your branch rep. or directly to the CILIPS office.

Let's get those bookmarks out there, and increase the numbers on the petition, so we can use it effectively for advocacy and lobbying. 60% of Scotland's population use libraries - let's get their support!

* if you haven't signed yet, I suggest that you do so immediately in case of presidential reprisals!

In the footsteps of St Moluag

Monday, June 27, 2011 at 2:25PM

Now trying to out-bling the Provost is one thing, but attempting to upstage St Moluag is quite another, and so I left The Chain at home for the purposes of the Neil Munro Society (NMS) trip to the island of Lismore on Saturday 26 June.

I'm sure you are familiar with the legend handed down from the sixth century that Moluag and Columba, both natives of Ireland, arrived in the west coast of Scotland looking for a suitable centre from which they might spread the Gospel. Each realised the suitability of Lismore for this purpose and wished to be the first to land.

The story is told that when Moluag realised that his rival's coracle would reach the island first, he cut off one of his fingers (ouch!) and threw it onto the shore, claiming the right to establish his monastery there. Apparently, Columba was not at all pleased and had to settle for Iona instead. Still, things worked out not too badly for him, because few remember Moluag these days.

Nevertheless, St Moluag is still big in Lismore, and his pastoral staff or crozier – carved from blackthorn and known as the Bachuil Mor – is held at Bachuil House by its hereditary keepers, the Livingstone family. Niall Livingstone of Bachuil, Baron of the Bachuil, Coarb of St Moluag, Abbot of Lismore kindly permitted 32 NMS members to traipse through his drawing room at Bachuil House to view the Bachuil and hear a little of its significance.

Our trip also included a visit to the broch at Tirefour: at least 2,000 years old but nevertheless reputed to be one of the best preserved prehistoric monuments in Argyll. The views down the Lynn of Lorn and north to Appin would have been wonderful if only the mist had lifted a wee bit more. Still, the broch and its setting reminded us of Mollie Hunter's novel entitled **The Stronghold** which, one NMS member recalled, caused great excitement among his S1 pupils when he set it for them to read. I confess that I don't think I've read that Mollie Hunter title so I've just requested it from my local library – what a wonderful institution the public library service is!

Our itinerary was completed by a visit to the parish church which gives every impression of being a typical Scottish country kirk, but which probably dates to the 13th or 14th century and remained the cathedral church for the county of Argyll until the 16th century.

NMS outings always have a connection (sometimes a very tenuous connection) with the author himself. On this occasion, the connection was the grave in the kirkyard of Alexander Carmichael (1832-1912) who collected Gaelic hymns and prayers into his famous publication **Carmina Gadelica**. It is likely that many of these had been originally collected by Father Allan McDonald (1859-1905), parish priest in South Uist and, latterly, in Eriskay whom Neil Munro used as the model for the priest/hero of his novel **Children of Tempest**.

There you are now – you can't say you don't learn something from this blog!

Anyway, the fun was over all too soon. The 4.00pm ferry demanded our return to Port Appin, slightly damp but much better for good company, home-made soup from the island café/visitor centre and a dose of literature.

Thanks are due Chairman Ronald Renton whose distinguished command of the operation ensured a thoroughly successful and enjoyable trip.

How to out-bling the Provost

Wednesday, June 22, 2011 at 11:13AM

MALANI = Midlothian Adult Literacy and Numeracy Initiative, and it is run by the all-powerful and charismatic Stephanie Heasman who does some wonderful work with learners, emergent readers and individuals learning English as their second language.

Each year MALANI presents a Learner Celebration Event which it chooses to call “The Doooo of the Year”, and which involves entertainment, fun, some very nice cakes and, most importantly, the announcement of learners’ achievements. It’s a great way to finish their year.

This year’s “Doooo” took place on 16 June at Dalkeith Arts Centre which was packed with learners, MALANI staff and tutors, important dignitaries and me.

Why me? Well, MALANI and Midlothian’s Library Service have worked closely for a number of years on a range of different projects, so when Stephanie discovered that I was Cilips President this year she invited me along to present certificates and prizes to those who had completed the Six Book Challenge, the Reading Agency’s scheme to engage new adult readers.

Now, the Six Book Reading Challenge is a bit of a favourite of mine because it’s all about encouraging people to read, to stretch their imaginations, to learn through reading and just simply to enjoy books.

I decided to pull out all the stops for the occasion, and had my hair cut!

Stephanie reckoned I should also wear The Chain. I was very pleased to accede to this request, especially when I discovered that Cllr Montgomery, Provost of Midlothian Council was to take part in the “Doooo” toooo. AND he would be wearing *his* chain - the perfect, and possibly the only-ever chance to out-bling The Provost! I mentioned this to the large audience prior to presenting the certificates, of course.

It all went very well, I am pleased to report. The evening was hosted by a professional storyteller who not only told us a couple of tall tales himself, but then required us, the audience, to compose stories of our own and then read them out! And I had only come for a bit of attention and the cakes!

The big news of the evening was that on International Literacy Day (8th September) MALANI is to launch several reading clubs for Midlothian learners and emergent readers in partnership with the Library Service, and next year plans to develop a Midlothian reading challenge to replace the Reading Agency scheme.

We all went home full of cake and with happy smiles.

Conference capers

Monday, June 13, 2011 at 1:22PM

With Fulton & Partners of Hamilton in charge, nothing could go wrong, and that proved to be the case – Cilips annual conference at The Mitchell last week was a resounding success.

The venue is a good one, allowing for several different presentations to take place simultaneously in various rooms, while the main hall is perfectly capable of accommodating both the well-attended trade exhibition (20 library suppliers had taken stands to meet library sector clients) as well as operating as the principal gathering and refreshments/dining area, including the conference dinner (glittering it was, just glittering).

I have to say that Glasgow's conference support staff and catering staff were excellent – friendly, efficient and helpful. So, many thanks to them; you may not know this, but they all read this blog! I bet you wouldn't have believed that if you hadn't read it here!

The theme of this year's conference was **Imagining the Future**, and as I said elsewhere, in these difficult times, it is more important than ever to gather as a profession, to share ideas and good practice, to learn together so that we can face the future with confidence.

Indeed, many of the speakers had their eyes firmly fixed on the future: Annie Mauger, CILIP Chief Executive, spoke on *Defining our professional future*, while other keynote speakers, notably Erik Jepsen from Denmark and Huw Evans from Wales discussed national, cross-sectoral library solutions. Other strands included digital libraries, the digital economy, digital preservation, social media, apps, e-books and RFID; oh, and reader development was slipped in there too! Thank goodness the catering staff were up to their job – we needed regular refreshment!

Yes, it all seemed to go off very well. In particular, I was relieved that Central Branch had risen to the challenge of dressing to reflect the conference theme. The many regular readers of this blog (are there *any* regular readers of this blog?) will recall my previous report that members of CILIPS' Central Branch had complained that the theme of this year's conference was not at all helpful to them in devising suitable outfits for the occasion. Their pink and purple wigs (they were wigs, weren't they?) caught the futuristic flavour of the occasion, I reckon. Again, special mention must be made of Thomas whose hairpiece was a striking contrast

to his ginger beard. You all made quite an impact - well done Central Branch and thank you!

So, I am pleased to report that professional confidence was not in short supply throughout, and despite all the questioning that we've had to face up to in recent times regarding the role of the library in this day and age, I came away from this conference with the distinct impression that this public examination of libraries in the media has strengthened our profession, that we are more confident in the relevance of our services and that we are planning to develop and deliver services for some time yet!

PS Mrs Reid, who attended to assist with attaching the presidential chain to the presidential person, has asked me to pass on her thanks and best wishes to everyone she met at the conference who made her feel most welcome.

The bunting was up in Penicuik.....

Friday, May 27, 2011 at 4:53PM

Not for the East Branch "Meet the President" event in Penicuik Library last night, but for the installation of the Penicuik Hunter and Lass. Now, as all of you will know, the Hunter and Lass celebration is an ancient tradition stretching back into the mists of the last century. It involves dressing up, horses and unrestrained whooping consistent with other, better-known ridings of the marches in towns throughout the Borders.

If my account of the East Branch meeting is to be honest, then I must report that although all those present had dressed for the occasion, horses did not feature and, disappointingly, there was no unrestrained whooping when I made my appearance.

It was satisfying, however, that about a dozen or so public, school, university and government agency librarians from Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian had undertaken the hazardous journey, with only one of them experiencing minor trauma when the No.15 LRT bus "exploded" *en route*! Their perseverance was well rewarded, however, as I am pleased to say that the buffet which awaited was every bit as enjoyable as that provided by Central Branch members earlier in the week and featured wine (red and white!).

My only disappointment was that there were no representatives of Scottish Borders Library Service present, but I'm sure that Ms Margaret Menzies will explain why when she posts her comments.

Replete and refreshed, we bent our minds to professional matters, and it was interesting that much of what we discussed was similar to topics and concerns that had emerged from other branch meetings – the importance of advocacy and

lobbying; the problem of coping with elected members, among others, who think they know about libraries because they have a personal enthusiasm for eg local history, literacies, etc. It was interesting to hear that Julie, school librarian at Forrester High in Edinburgh, had produced a DVD illustrating and explaining the range of services delivered to students and staff in order to convince a certain local councillor of the importance of the school library. It worked! Apparently, he now says that every head teacher should be forced to watch it! Who reads printed annual reports, we wondered; perhaps more of us should be creating a more visual approach to advocacy.

There was a wide-ranging discussion of the importance of listening to users so we remain relevant and continue to deliver what they need from their library service; of incorporating new materials, including e-books, into the library offer; of building partnerships; of reaching non-users through meaningful engagement (although “I’m sick to death of consultations” declared Philip who does something with Midlothian Library Service).

There was too an acknowledgement of the importance of Cilips, the need for a Scottish perspective in professional matters and the usefulness of CPD opportunities provided by staff at the Hamilton office.

We finished off by discussing the “elevator” pitch idea: if you met Alex Salmond in a lift and he said that he would make large sums of Scottish Government money available to library services, how would you advise him to best use the cash?

I would invest it in lavish buffets at CILIPS branch meetings!

Thank you, Thomas for a beautifully-presented buffet

Wednesday, May 25, 2011 at 5:04PM

I had been looking forward to my *Meet the President* evening with members of CILIPS Central Branch. After all, they do have a reputation for being frisky, for organising imaginative activities to get their members involved in the branch and, at CILIPS’ annual conference, for dressing up appropriately to the conference theme. Many of you will remember Central Branch members’ appearance as superheroes a couple of years ago, as well as the several Bob the Builders who turned up last year! Yes, frisky is the word!

Apparently, they are planning something suitable for this year’s conference, but it’s a big secret, and they weren’t going to share it with me when I joined their meeting in Carmondean Connected, Livingston last night, although they did complain that this year’s theme, *Imagining the Future* had them scratching their heads for a while.

What I was permitted to share was a splendid buffet prepared by Thomas. What he had done with crisps, baby tomatoes and wee sausages was a wonder to behold. Thank you, Thomas!

There were about ten of us present, with a good representation across the library sectors – public, schools, university, and Susan (not an inmate on day release) from HMP Addiewell. We enjoyed the buffet, heard something of Central Branch's recent and forthcoming activities and discussed matters of current professional interest.

I was really impressed with the clear aim of membership engagement that the Branch has adopted. Their idea of "library bagging" along the lines of Munro bagging is a great one, with branch members visiting libraries in their area as part of a walking tour, sharing ideas and meeting staff. The most recent "bagging" included Menstrie, Tillicoultry and Alva libraries – a distance of 8.2 km I was informed! The exercise ended, not surprisingly, in the Tillicoultry Tearoom.

Central branch members also help out in various ways with CILIPS annual conference, which is not only a great help to the Hamilton office staff, but is an excellent opportunity for those who might not otherwise get the chance to attend conference to get involved with the professional association's national activities.

It was pleasing too that everyone contributed to our discussions about managing and delivering services in difficult times and about the importance of advocacy – these people know all about the "elevator pitch"! I sensed also that they were well aware of the importance of their services to their customers, whether these customers are teachers (holiday reading suggestions for teachers – another good idea!), mobile library users or whoever. But they also argued that, as a profession, we need to develop our profile, we need to be more proactive and we need more training in advocacy skills. Tellingly, somebody said that we need to have the answer when we're asked what difference the library makes.

The time flew by so quickly, and it seemed that lights had to be out by 8.30pm prompt, so we were outside in the car park before I knew it. Still, it was a friendly and enjoyable evening, and it's clear that there is a great energy, confidence and a real sense of professional community among Central Branch members. And they're good at buffets!

Seeking refuge and refreshment in the St Machar Bar

Sunday, May 22, 2011 at 1:13PM

Buoyed still by the Angus Book Awards ceremony in Arbroath the night before, I headed further north the following day to Aberdeen for a *Meet the President* with the North East Branch of Cilips.

Being over-punctual, however, we (Sakthi Sithamparanathan, Michael Charlton and I) discovered that we had been locked out of the meeting venue. Well, what would you do? Obviously, we were forced to find refuge and refreshment in the St Machar Bar; we were, after all, in the historic, old campus area of Aberdeen University, and tradition and heritage must be respected.

This proved to be a short-lived respite, however; doors were unlocked and a small, but lively bunch of north-east librarians introduced themselves. As did the four librarians from Shetland who joined the meeting by video conference link from Lerwick! Brilliant!

And what a cross section of the profession they represented, covering both Aberdeen universities, public libraries, the private sector, records management and school libraries. This meant that we had a wide-ranging discussion, much of which focussed on the need to better market our services, to tell people what we do, to get more people to use our services, to use our customers to make arguments for libraries rather than have to defend them ourselves in times of financial stringency.

The point was made that sometimes we do whizzo things for ourselves, and really we should be working in partnership with our user communities, developing a clearer idea of who our customers are, and what they require and expect of us. Perhaps we have still much to learn from the retail sector, especially supermarkets, in that respect. Perhaps too we should be building greater cooperation and planning library services jointly across sectors rather than working in sector silos. And, we should stop saying “yes” to everything and, with input from specialist marketing expertise, clarify what our service offer/product is.

Concerns were expressed that too often we allow others to drive the agenda. The Shetland school librarians argued forcefully, however, that in times of cuts and budget savings, the role and relevance of the library should be explained on a “reputation basis”, that we should be basing arguments on the evidence that the library makes a difference, and that we should be picking our battles to improve our chances of winning the argument. Others felt the library’s role in information literacy is a crucial one, and that if our relevance and reputation are to be persuasive then we should be actively selling that message.

We all should be selling the message, we felt; advocacy isn’t just the job of the professional association, something for the Hamilton office staff; it’s the responsibility also of each individual member of Cilips.

It was reassuring, however, to hear from Shetland colleagues, who are, after all, the furthest away from Hamilton, that they feel that the Cilips office is the first place to turn to for professional support, that it’s easy to contact, that, despite distance,

they can be as involved as they choose to be. Indeed, they described Cilips training as “wonderful”. So, a big pat on the back for Cilips staff from Shetland!

Mind you, I did have to express my disapproval when the Shetland librarians announced that they were coming to the end of their time with us as they wanted to get home to see *The Apprentice*! Still, they had contributed a great deal to our discussions and once they had waved their farewells, we felt we couldn’t go on without them and so decided to wrap up the meeting. I had no option but to head south to take up B&B services provided by my mother-in-law in Dundee!

Many thanks to the Branch for organising the event. Many thanks to those who attended from Dundee, Aberdeen and Shetland and who contributed so much to our discussions.

Angus Book Award, 2011

Friday, May 20, 2011 at 12:24PM

Amid the onerous duties and hectic schedule of presidential life, there come occasions of sheer delight. One of these occurred on Tuesday of this week, when I attended the **Angus Book Award 2011** ceremony at Arbroath Academy. I decided to wear **the chain** so I would be recognised. It worked. *You must be the man from Cilips*, was how I was greeted as soon as I crossed the school threshold!

The Award is a highly successful initiative which has been promoted annually for the last 16 years; so successful, in fact, that it has provided a model for similar awards in several other authorities in Scotland. I was informed of this by librarians I met at the ceremony, and clearly it is a matter of some justifiable pride that Angus’s good idea has been copied elsewhere, but at the same time I sensed that the Angus version is still considered the original and best!

The Award is organised and promoted by secondary school librarians throughout Angus, supported by their colleagues in the public library service. It involves S3 students in the authority’s high schools and academies reading short-listed titles of recently-published fiction for young people, with schools nominating their favourite for the overall prize. Thereafter all S3 students get the chance to vote to decide who wins the **Angus Book Award**.

This year’s shortlist was:

When I was Joe, by Keren David selected by Brechin HS and Webster’s HS;

Ausländer, by Paul Dowsell selected by Carnoustie HS and Montrose Academy;

Wasted, by Nicola Morgan

selected by Arbroath HS and Monifieth HS;

Luke & Jon, by Robert Williams

selected by Arbroath Academy and Forfar

Academy.

The Award ceremony was an occasion of high excitement: hundreds of S3 students attended to support their favourite, and all four authors themselves were present and spoke to the assembled multitude, having already visited schools over a two-day period to meet young people and discuss their work. The ceremony was presented entirely by the students: our MCs for the evening were Danny and Danielle from Arbroath Academy, and student representatives of each school gave a short presentation in support of their selected title and introduced a short film telling us why they had enjoyed it so much.

We were all on the edge of our seats as the winner was announced as*When I was Joe* by Keren David.

As part of my visit, I was able to speak to a number of school and public librarians who had been involved in the Award one way or another, and was uplifted by their huge enthusiasm and commitment. I think that I was particularly impressed by the way that this Award gives the school libraries an important profile within their schools and underlines the importance of the library and its professional staff to the wider life of the school.

All concerned and Angus Council are to be congratulated. Thank you inviting me to attend: I really enjoyed it!

Cynhadledd Llyfrgelloedd Archifau ac Amgueddfeydd Cymru*

Sunday, May 15, 2011 at 8:02PM

No sooner had **Mrs Reid** brushed the dust of Estonia from my jacket and ironed my socks, before I was off again, this time to the Welsh Library Conference in Llandrindod Wells. I'm just back - 8 hours by train and bus! The journey was worth it, however, because the conference was a back to the future experience. Recession? The end of libraries? Not flamin' likely. **Survive and Thrive** was the conference theme, with a number of speakers looking at the brave new world of libraries and the communities we serve.

David Warrender, Digital Wales, talked about developing a digital strategy, identifying trends and themes, rather than accurately predicting specific features of the digital future. He discussed:

- inclusion: 34% of us are still not using digital technology;
- skills: 1 in 6 employers consider the IT skills of employees below the minimum necessary level;
- access to infrastructure superfast broadband for all businesses and households;
- extension of on-line public service delivery; and
- the need to grow the digital economy and e-commerce.

So where are libraries in all this? Well, developing skills, managing information and monitoring the quality of information are all roles for the librarian, and, because of the physical location of our services in local communities, libraries will provide opportunities for social networking.

Phil Bradley, suggested that librarians are attracted to the profession because we enjoyed the power that the job offers! So, if you are up for some megalomania, then be aware that web sites are becoming less important and that we need to reach people by doing different things: using bookmarking, podcasting, weblogs, guiding tools, social media, Twitter. He said (and I believed him) that in future “thought leaders” will be more important than websites, and that all these media will be where the conversations are taking place. And just to prove his point, Phil went on to have an on-line conversation about wibbly wobbly timey wimey stuff with Dr Who (ie David Tenant, the real Dr Who, not the current incarnation). You had to be there.

Cathie Jackson and **Joy Head** from the Welsh Information Literacy project gave us one of the most enthusiastic presentations I’ve seen for ages. Based on work done in Scotland, this is a cross-sectoral initiative which anticipates that information literacy will be taken forward through formal education, the workplace and informal learning in the community. A great opportunity for libraries in so many different ways.

I was certainly ready for a refreshing glass of lemonade at the end of such an exciting day!

On day two, we started bright and early at 10.10am with a presentation by Cilip’s new Chief Executive, **Annie Mauger**. Annie’s enthusiasm and energy are impressive and she fully understands the importance of meeting members, listening to their views and discussing the future with them. Taking the *Defining our professional future* report as her brief, she identified advocacy, membership and continuing professional development as key themes for Cilip to pursue.

She knows that Cilip must be relevant to library and knowledge professionals and that membership must be affordable. She has set a target membership figure of 20,000 by 2020, and announced the “Challenge your Chief” campaign to promote membership among sector leaders. Advocacy and campaigning for libraries will

be developed so that we are not simply responding to stories, but we are taking the initiative to tell the story ourselves. She is clear, however, that every national issue is also a local one to be addressed by all of us in the profession. It is crucial that employers value our qualifications, technical skills, leadership and advocacy skills, and, in turn we have to become more flexible and accessible in the way we work.

Cilip faces significant financial challenges, of course, and the organisation must have a sustainable financial model. Currently, it is reviewing the branch and group structure and changes are inevitable. It was reassuring, however, that Annie recognises that the home nations are not branches, that there is a four country environment and that this gives our profession additional strengths.

The common theme running through several of the other papers was cross-sectoral initiatives:

Judith Keene, Deputy Director of Information & Learning Services, University of Worcester, told us about The Hive, the first fully-integrated public and university library due to open in July 2012. Enormous advantages in this example of service sharing are anticipated, including improved access to funding, increased opening hours, enhanced staff development, excellent location near the city centre and a dozen other benefits.

Sally Wilkinson, Head of Learning Resources, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, discussed things to consider, challenges, opportunities and tips in her talk entitled Can 2 become 1? Lessons from the coal face of library mergers in Wales.

Mark Hughes, Head of Collections, Swansea University, asked why we might share services, what the benefits are and where we (especially the academic sector) are likely to be going next.

So, a very successful, enjoyable and stimulating conference, and especially interesting in having attracted an audience of mainly academic librarians rather than professionals from the public library sector. It's nice to be home though, if only to give Mrs Reid some time to iron my socks again before visits to Arbroath and Aberdeen later this week. Phew!

* anyone know what this means?

The Famous Five in Estonia.....

Tuesday, May 10, 2011 at 9:20PM

Well, perhaps not famous, but there were five of us and we were in Estonia, attending the Twin Cities Conference from 4th to 6th May. There were also quite a number of Estonian and Finnish librarians – this conference was a *ménage à trois*;

oh, and there was one Welshman as well. And, we all gathered in Tallinn to discuss *Public library marketing and public relations today*.

Most of the papers were case studies of successful marketing and promotional activities in authorities across all three countries. There was a significant Scottish contribution, of course. Jeanette Castle spoke on the development of public libraries as community hubs in West Lothian; Audrey Sutton discussed North Ayrshire's *Yesterdays* project and along the way gave her audience a crash course in the Scots language; Alison Hunter revealed the successful branding of East Lothian Libraries and introduced Lennox the Lion (no, not Lenny the Lion, *Lennox*), their new children's library mascot. I chipped in my tuppenceworth on Scotland's national advocacy campaign.

The fifth Scot was Rhona who made sure that we all behaved, held hands while crossing the road and went early to bed. She also insisted that we all sing on the bus, and made me promise that I wouldn't mention that in my blog, but more of that later.

We had much to learn from our Estonian and Finnish colleagues too – the importance of marketing, promotion and advocacy is commonly recognised across all our countries, it seems. Paula Kauppila, Pori public library in Finland, reminded us that we had to be courageous as well as professional in our advocacy to elected members. There were wonderful practical examples of promotion in practice, involving users, winning support for the public library service and demonstrating the continuing need for and relevance of our services in changing and financially tough times. There were lots of good ideas; here's a small selection:

Veronica Linnupuu, Viljandi Library, Estonia, described how they scattered leaves from discarded books among the bare branches of the trees outside the library to promote a special event;

Riitta Taarasti explained her job producing promotional library videos for broadcast via Finnish library web TV;

Virpi Launonen, Mikkeli Library, Finland asked young people what they wanted from their library, and the result has been events, activities, modern seating and scrapping the "silence" rule.

I should also report that Alan Watkin's paper describing the national promotional strategy for libraries in Wales made me realise that we in Scotland still have some way to go and much to learn in that respect. Alan's contribution certainly earned him his honorary Scot status (just for the duration of the conference though).

It's worth mentioning that the entire conference was conducted in English: the chairman spoke in English throughout; all papers were delivered in English; all questions and discussion were in English. And not just that - the standard of vocabulary and pronunciation was probably higher than you would expect in The Crown in Penicuik on a Friday night. I was impressed.

The other aspect of the conference was a series of visits (by bus) to Estonian libraries, both in Tallinn and in two smaller towns. The highlight was the recently-opened Tallinn University of Technology Library which is modern, stylish, spacious and a joy to visit. It has been designed with ambition, vision and an understanding of its importance.

Other memorable buildings were public libraries in Tallinn, Pärnu and Viljandi - all modern, architecturally-stunning, light, bright, well stocked and well-located. Clearly independence has brought Estonia an opportunity to modernise its infrastructure, and, as part of its rediscovery of its own identity, to invest in things of cultural importance, including libraries.

This was an extremely successful conference which was a great privilege and pleasure to attend and participate in; the hospitality was excellent, the atmosphere was warm (although the temperature outside was Baltic!); the organisation of all events could not be faulted.

There were many memorable moments. Audrey Sutton's lengthy discussion with two Estonian colleagues concerning the advantages of thick curtains during the "white nights" of summer was one. Admittedly, there was some confusion about the difference between curtains and shutters. Nevertheless, once Dr Sutton's vigorous hand movements demonstrated the *drawing* of curtains and the *folding* of shutters the matter was soon cleared up.

And then there was the singing on the bus. This was led, of course, by our esteemed Assistant Director doll who explained to our Estonian and Finnish fellow-travellers that it was an old Scottish tradition, and one which required full participation. *Ye cannae shove yer grannie aff the bus (push, push)* was followed, as night follows day, by *The wheels on the bus go round and round*. Fortunately, the microphone was wrested from Rhona's grasp just as she was about to launch into *The Jeely Piece Song*.

We all got home safely.

The Future Starts Now

Monday, May 9, 2011 at 2:01PM

The annual joint conference of the Library Association of Ireland and CILIP Ireland took place at Mullingar, County Westmeath during 13-14 April. It was my great pleasure to attend, and to represent CILIPS at the conference.

The conference theme was *The future starts now: libraries adding value through information and innovation*. Despite the huge economic difficulties facing Ireland, and particularly the Republic of course, the atmosphere of the occasion reflected the positive note of the theme, and was amazingly confident.

Fergus Finlay, Chief Executive of Barnardos in Ireland set the tone from the start declaring that while some public services protect lives, and others save lives, libraries transform lives. Specifically, he discussed the importance of early years literacy and of access to resources (ie books!) and the crucial role of the public library service in this cause.

Cathal McCauley, Librarian, NUI Maynooth, tackled the future head-on, asking, *Will e-books see libraries left on the shelf?* “No” was his answer, but e-books are part of the future and so as a profession we have to educate our users, convince our funders that e-books offer added value and work with publishers to ensure availability of titles through libraries. His message was clear: we need to be innovative, be prepared to take risks and to invest. No problems there then!

Eddie Conroy, County Architect, South Dublin County Council, knows a thing or two about libraries as well. He knows that libraries are repositories of a variety of resources; he knows that libraries are spaces for the community to come together; he knows that library design ideas should reflect retail parallels; he knows that librarians are imaginative, creative and flexible. It was comforting to hear his view that people – real people, library users, citizens – have “got” libraries, and so he is optimistic for the future.

Dr Marian Fitzgibbon, Head, School of Humanities, Athlone Institute of Technology, presented an extraordinary lecture. “We have been too modest for too long”, she said. In these difficult times, we must engage, she explained, but on our own terms; we must know our mission; we must nurture freedom of thought and expression; we must hold to our core values if only because resources will follow values and ideas. This was a powerful and inspiring talk to which this poor summary cannot do anything like justice.

For me, one of the highlights of the conference was an opportunity to visit the award-winning Mullingar public library built as part of new county offices for Westmeath. It is everything a library should be: light, bright, modern, stylish,

packed with books and other resources, incorporating a generous IT suite, local studies area and community meeting room. And really friendly, helpful staff.

The conference and our visit to Mullingar Library confirmed that Irish librarians have a clear understanding of the importance of their services, and that this seems to be shared by partners and users. Undoubtedly, there will be enormous challenges ahead, but Ireland seems to have a vision to carry libraries through to the future.

Postscript

Fans of popular Irish singing star, Joe Dolan, will be pleased to learn that yer man is immortalised, microphone in hand, by a splendid statue right in front of Mullingar Town Hall. A fitting tribute to a local boy made good, and conveniently located for those wishing to partake of traditional Irish hospitality and refreshment in a splendid public bar not 20 yards distant. I can recommend a visit.

A date in Dundee

Wednesday, March 30, 2011 at 2:33PM

It has been a long, long time since I had a date in my home town of Dundee, so my visit there on 28 March was the ideal start to the round of “Meet the President” events scheduled for the run-up to the CILIPS conference in early June.

Due to electrical works at the Central Library, the venue was Blackness Library which allowed me to indulge in a spot of nostalgia as I had attended secondary school at Harris Academy just a bit further along Perth Road. It also gave me time for a short visit to my nephew’s shop nearby – visitors to the city and residents should all shop at *Fraser’s Fruit & Veg and Delicatessen*. I would like to point out that I am not on commission!

After a quick guided tour of the Library, which this year celebrates its 103rd birthday, I met with a group of professional staff from Dundee Library & Information Services. And what an enthusiastic, confident and articulate bunch they were! We had a very broad discussion covering such topics as the range of services and resources now available in public libraries; the value that other agencies – the health service, literacies projects, early years service providers, schools, etc, etc, etc – place on partnership working with the public library service; the profile that had been achieved through recent publicity and, especially radio programmes which have revealed the huge reservoir of public support for the service.

We also talked about the crucial importance of delivering not just a range of services, but services of the highest quality, and agreed that there is a key role for

professional staff in achieving that. Unanimously, we reckoned that the big society was really not the way to ensure services of the appropriate standard! There was too a real understanding of the importance of the role of CILIPS and of the joint working between CILIPS and SLIC to achieve effective advocacy for public libraries at both national and local authority levels.

Connections Service

Following our general discussion, a DVD presentation describing the *Connections* service was screened. This innovative and exciting initiative is based at the Central Library and offers a wide range of multi-sensory materials for loan to carers, family members, homes, day centres, or anyone involved with individuals, or groups, who may need an alternative format so they can participate in the story reading or listening process.

The work done by Library staff with visiting groups of individuals with major learning difficulties is especially impressive, and I was delighted to hear that the project has been submitted to the *Libraries Change Lives* award. This is a service which deserves the highest recognition, and it certainly opened my eyes as to what public libraries can do to reach out to such vulnerable people with whom most authorities have little or no relationship.

And finally from Dundee.....

This wonderful quote from the Dundee Library & Information Services website:

Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend, inside of a dog, it's too dark to read.

(Groucho Marx)

ABC Benchmarking

Tuesday, March 22, 2011 at 8:01PM

I attended the meeting of the ABC Library Service Benchmarking Group at Prestonpans Library on Thursday 17 March. The Group comprises representatives from East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, Perth & Kinross, Stirling and West Lothian public library services; so, a fair number and fair cross-section of Scottish authorities.

It has been meeting regularly since benchmarking became flavour of the month about 10 or 12 years ago, but as other groups have run into the sand, the ABC

Group has kept going strong. The consensus within the Group is that it continues to be a useful and effective vehicle to measure and compare performance, and, most importantly, to learn from the success of others. This is confirmed by the regularity of meetings and by the high attendance level at those meetings. And if you are present to represent your authority, you're expected to contribute to discussion!

During its lifetime the Group has adopted a number of performance measures for inter-authority comparison, and currently information is collected and shared in such areas as library charges, a range of local performance indicators (issues, visits, PC use, requests, enquiries, etc), children's PIs and events & activities.

As well as quantitative indicators, the Group has tackled process benchmarking: it has already considered deposit collection services (ie services to homes, hospitals, sheltered housing, etc), and is currently sharing policy and practice in the field of services to housebound library users.

It may have been flavour of the month many moons ago but the ABC Group takes some licking. (Sorry about that!)

Different Voices

Thursday, March 3, 2011 at 10:58PM

This was the title of a Tyne & Esk Writers (T&E) evening at the Brunton Hall, Musselburgh on Monday 28 February. T&E is the umbrella organisation for writers' groups in Midlothian and East Lothian, and is supported financially and in kind by the two local public library authorities. The event was, in part, a welcome event for the new Writer in Residence, Tom Murray, in part a showcase evening for local writers to read recent work and (largely!) a social evening.

On the strength of previous involvement with T&E, I was invited to *Different Voices* and was delighted to attend to meet up again with some old friends whose work I had seen develop over many years, including the barman for the evening who glories in the name of Billy Graham. Hallelujah!

Tom read some of his own poetry and stories which provoked some questions and discussion, and then each of the writers' groups represented "performed" what sounded like specially-composed pieces mainly extolling the great benefits and pleasures of coming together with other local authors through their own writers' group.

The occasion also provided an opportunity for Colin Will, poet, publisher, librarian and past President of the Scottish Library Association to say a few words about his appointment to the position of Makar to the Federation of Writers (Scotland). I

detected a blush when he declared that the award was a particular honour as it was made by his fellow poets. Colin showed us the Makar Federation shield which he will display on top of his TV for the next 12 months, although his wife Jane suggested that as it so resembles a Blue Peter badge he might wear it on his jumper instead. Many congratulations to Colin – living proof that there is life after a life in library management.

Support for creative writing has for long been one of my enthusiasms, and the great success of Tyne & Esk Writers is a fine example of what can be achieved through partnership with local authors.

Libraries connecting people and communities

Tuesday, February 22, 2011 at 10:55PM

I don't suppose it was official; after all I hadn't been inducted as President for 2011. Despite that Rhona gave me a lapel badge which read "Alan Reid, CILIPS President" so that was good enough for me to attend the launch of a policy briefing in the Garden Lobby at the Scottish Parliament on 18 January.

The policy briefing, entitled *Libraries connecting people and communities*, has been prepared by the Scottish Library & Information Council (SLIC) to outline how libraries are contributing to Scottish life.

The launch event was introduced by Peter Peacock MSP, former chair of SLIC and Honorary President of CILIPS, who articulated a clear understanding of the importance of libraries.

I was particularly impressed by the speech by Louise MacDonald, Chief Executive of Young Scot. Not a librarian. Nevertheless, she knows exactly what libraries are all about, why they are important and how they have changed to remain relevant. She also stressed the importance of knowing where we want to be in the future.

The event also provided the occasion for the presentation of excellence awards to those public library authorities who had achieved high ratings as assessed by the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix.

All in all, a very successful event, especially as it was attended not only by librarians, but by local government elected members and a fair number of MSPs from all parties. The publication of *Libraries connecting people and communities* is timely and will undoubtedly assist local advocacy for library services and exercise the minds of candidates in this year's Scottish Parliament elections.

Induction, 25 January

Following some kind and flattering words from Chris Pinder, President 2010, I was inducted as President and the chain was hung around my neck. Although it fell off my neck shortly thereafter, I persisted with a few words of grateful and humble thanks and acknowledgement of the honour, announcing my theme for the year as *Imagining the Future*.

FLAB meeting, 26 January

I attended (with chain and cakes) a meeting of FLAB – Fife, Lothians and Borders Chief Librarians Group for those of you unfamiliar with the acronym – and was thanked for my contribution (“both edible and verbal” to the group over the years. Clearly they enjoyed the cakes!). There was a strong indication throughout the meeting that despite the anticipated cuts to budgets, these authorities are planning and positioning themselves for the future – looking at e-book lending, shared service delivery, joint procurement, developing new libraries.

Library cuts, protest, 5 February

The brainchild of children’s author, librarian and my former colleague from many years ago, Theresa Breslin, a protest statement concerning the threat of cuts to library services was handed into the Scottish Parliament. The occasion was attended by many librarians, authors, teachers and, crucially, children, who had brought along their favourite books and spoke about what libraries mean to them.

I was supposed to be there, but, unfortunately, had been floored with flu (real flu! I was out of action for two and a half weeks!). Despite that, in my presidential capacity I managed to issue a press statement (curiously this came out from the CILIPS office in Hamilton) which appeared in *The Scotsman* (and possibly elsewhere) in which I said:

All support for libraries and the need for professional and well trained staff is welcome. It highlights the passion which many in Scotland share for their libraries and the rising tide of concern at what the current public service financial cuts will mean. I am sure there will be many more protests of this nature in the next few months.

According to my ghost writer I spoke very well from my sick bed.

Well done, Theresa!

Call Kaye, BBC Radio Scotland, 7 February

In my weakened, flu-ravaged condition I was on my way back to bed when Mrs Reid shouted, “You can’t go to bed, Rhona’s on the radio”. What a tonic! And no

surprise really that so many Scottish library users phoned in to say how much they valued their local library and how they would be lost without it. The chap proposing that public libraries were a thing of the past, should be stripped of their books and other resources and turned into community centres was made to look a little silly when faced with such passion. The programme also featured an interesting contribution from “Elaine from Uddingston”.

Call You and Yours, Radio 4, 8 February

More passion on Radio 4 when Julian Worricker asked whether councils are right to save money by closing public libraries. One speaker taking part in the discussion (didn't catch his name) thought that the public library service had had its day and should be shut down lock, stock and barrel. The Mayor of Doncaster reckoned that was going too far and is proposing to close only half of the libraries in his authority area and is enthusiastic about volunteer-run libraries. When are the local elections in England?

CILIP's Chief Executive, Annie Mauger, showed remarkable restraint, explained that libraries provide vital access to learning, knowledge and literacy resources. Her view was endorsed by the many members of the public who phoned in, including the omnipresent Theresa Breslin. Julian's colleague on the phones told us that she had never received so many calls on any previous subject, and that only 2 of the many hundreds received supported the case for abolition. Are we winning this argument?

Flu update

Despite the heartening radio discussions about the future of public libraries, my condition continued to give cause for concern. Well, I was concerned anyway. As a result, I was unable to don the presidential chain and take part in the PLQIM visit to Fife on 8 February. I was also very sorry indeed to have to turn down an invitation to the official opening of Milne's Learning Centre, Fochabers in Moray. Mrs Reid and I had keenly anticipated a return to a part of the country where we had spent 5 years, but it was not to be. My condition was still too delicate for long-distance travel. I'm sure the opening went well, however, and look forward to Alistair Campbell's account of the occasion.

Lovescottishlibraries

Many thanks to Gillian in the CILIPS office for passing information about the Lovescottishlibraries website. As the site explains:

"financial constraints and budget cuts will affect libraries in all sectors, and this at a time when we know people will need their libraries more – to help with job seeking and retraining, to access the internet, or to skim money off the household

budget by borrowing that expensive text book or latest best-seller. To keep enjoying access to libraries and our services, please make your voice heard for libraries by [signing our petition](#) or have your say about what libraries mean to you in our [guestbook](#). With your help, we can show politicians and policymakers just how much libraries mean to the people of Scotland!"

So, visit <http://www.lovescottishlibraries.org/> and sign the petition which has attracted well over 500 signatures already, and pass on the message to colleagues, friends, etc so that we continue to press the argument that libraries are essential to the health of our communities.

Chris Pinder (President 2010)

Harsh realities

Tuesday, November 23, 2010 at 11:40AM

Great to see Annie Mauger, CILIP's new Chief Executive, at CILIPS Council in Edinburgh yesterday. Heartening, too, to know that she understands the Scottish scene so well. She's still only seven or eight weeks into her role and comes to it with little prior knowledge as she was denied any hand-over through Bob McKee's untimely death.

In the circumstances, a fresh pair of eyes and no pre-conceived ideas is probably helpful as she begins the tough task of pruning CILIP's resources to meet the current economic realities. Annie's clear message was that there is a huge task ahead of her to ensure that the organisation is pruned to operate within available resources and yet remains relevant to the membership. The focus will be on meeting priority targets such as advocacy and lobbying, largely determined by the Defining Our Professional Future report. It is clear that many current areas of operation will have to cease to ensure that priorities are met. CILIP will certainly be much leaner and, it is hoped, much fitter for the purpose of representing the profession to government, employers and other stakeholders in the years to come. Annie will need a lot of support from the membership if she is to achieve what is necessary. From what I saw yesterday, from a CEO who is determined to be visible and walk the talk, that support will be forthcoming.

Yesterday was the final Council meeting of my Presidential year. Having given my Report on my year in office, a kind of 10 minute "state of the nation", I was humbled by Alan Reid's generous vote of thanks which spoke of a Chris Pinder that I barely recognised! As I said in my Report, I owe a great debt of gratitude to

all members who have supported me during the year and, in particular, to Elaine, Rhona and Cathy who between them have made sure that I said and did the right things at the right time - those who know me will understand what an achievement this is!

During my year, I have encountered a lively, enthusiastic and committed membership which I know will stand us in good stead for the future and the challenging times that we face. We have taken steps to "Mind the Gap" and we have ably demonstrated that "Yes, we can!"

What rallying cry Alan Reid commits us to next year remains to be seen but I'm sure it will be a good one!

Dunfermline 1 Aberdeen 1

Friday, November 5, 2010 at 3:03PM

No, not a recent football result but the locations of my Presidential outings in the last couple of weeks! A somewhat hectic final flourish to my year as the mini-conferences that were the CILIPS Autumn Gathering and Grampian Information had me thinking, and making presentations about, managing in hard times and the role and future of the professional organisation...not at the same time I might add. While on the surface the two topics seem poles apart, they are actually inextricably linked for we need a strong, representative professional body to help us, both individually and collectively, through these hard times.

Advocacy, promotion of the profession and lobbying are some of the tools that will help us through. We need CILIP and, in Scotland, CILIPS to lead the way on these if the library and information profession is to be in good shape when better times arrive. The "Defining our professional future" report certainly picked up on what the "librarian in the street" is thinking and, frankly, there's a lot to be done if many of us working in the profession are to be convinced that our professional body is fit for purpose and that there is any value in continued membership. As I explained in Aberdeen yesterday, I do think CILIPS, for whatever reason, is closer to its membership and has already recognised where it needs to channel its resources to help us, and it, survive.

One of the joys of the Autumn Gathering was the presentation of Honorary awards to individuals who have made a considerable contribution to the profession. Present to receive their awards this year were Sheila Cannell of Edinburgh University; Margaret Forrest, also of Edinburgh University, and CILIPS President 2009; and Alistair Campbell of Moray Council. All three have worked with commitment and dedication in their respective sectors and their awards, Honorary Membership for Sheila and Margaret and Honorary Vice President for Alastair, were richly deserved. Charles Sweeney, formerly JISC regional support

centre manager and Chair of the Working Party that reviewed quality standards for FE libraries in Scotland, was also awarded Honorary Membership but was unable to attend.

During my Presidential year I have met many enthusiastic, energetic and dedicated librarians. While we, deservedly, offer awards to individuals I want to close this post by saying that it has been a real privilege to meet so many great people. Most of these will go through their careers without being "mentioned in despatches" and I want to say a big thank-you to you all. Your contribution is appreciated so much.

Up north!

Friday, September 24, 2010 at 2:15PM

The Autumn of my Presidency! In a few short months I'll be passing the chain of office onto Alan Reid's capable shoulders. Where has the time gone?

Up to Aberdeen this week to visit the North East Branch. I was up against the Dons playing Raith at Pittodrie so was very grateful to the hardy souls who made me their first choice. Being naturally modest by nature it did occur to me that a 3 - 2 game might have been more entertaining but I think everyone got something out of my appearance! I was especially pleased to involve the Shetland contingent via video-conference link. It wasn't until about half way through my presentation that someone thought to put the lights on in the room we were occupying so the trio from Shetland could see us in our true colours and not forever think we were sitting in a gloomy blue haze.

We spoke a lot about CILIP's "Defining our professional future" and what it hopes to achieve. We also talked about the relationship between individual members and CILIPS; how it is improving and how much more work still needs to be undertaken. Not for the first time this year I heard how much the Slainte website needs to improve! There is, though, a general positive feeling that CILIPS is on the right lines and that there is a genuine relationship between organisation and member. Of course this can always be improved and communication, both upward and downward, on the range of issues impacting on the profession and on individuals must, and can, get better.

I took the train to Aberdeen. It was pretty full on both legs and I couldn't help noting that most people, young and old, were reading to pass the time. Me too. I ignored the bundle of work I'd brought with me! Naturally, in this age of the electronic resource, everyone was reading a printed book or magazine; not a single Kindle to be seen!

Talking of reading, I've just finished "All the colours of the town" by Liam McIlvanney. A really good novel involving a journalist, a politician and some

pretty nasty criminal characters which is based on an incident in the Northern Irish "Troubles". He is clearly destined to keep the literary family's name alive in the public eye. While I'm talking popular culture I'm also enjoying new albums from Vampire Weekend and Robert Plant...but as an "oldie" I still insist on buying the CD versions!

A problem shared ...

Tuesday, August 24, 2010 at 5:35PM

The gap since my last post is mostly down to my holiday! I mention this because, having spent 3 weeks in the USA, California to be precise, I thought I'd say something about the situation that libraries over there are facing. The saying goes that Britain and the USA are separated by 3,000 miles and a common language. We have something else in common...

You probably won't be surprised to hear that public libraries in the US are facing the exact same problems that we in the UK are facing. Huge budget cuts, restricted opening and closure are the new normal! And like here in the UK, people have been writing articles, signing petitions and holding protest meetings to express their unhappiness with the situation.

An Opinion piece published in the Los Angeles Times in early July stated that in losing libraries "we'll all feel the loss as one of the most effective levelers (sic) of privilege...one of the great engines of democracy begins to disappear." Comparing libraries (and librarians) to other public services the author reckons that "they represent the best civic value out there."

Back in May the location normally associated with movies and movie stars, Hollywood, saw a protest rally against cuts in budget that would eliminate 100 library jobs and reduce opening hours.

Also in May, Queens Library in New York faced the prospect of closing 14 branches and reducing hours in 34 more. Around 300 employees faced redundancy. The Queens library system serves around 50,000 people a day and is used for many purposes: the free computer access is used by job hunters, children use the libraries for homework and new immigrants use them for language and citizenship classes. All of which underlines the value of a library to its local community.

Back on this side of the Atlantic there were two interesting pieces on libraries on the Today programme (August 24th). The first picked up the theme of reshaping library services (in England) to capture lost customers. Volunteer "librarians" running "libraries" from pubs and supermarkets were discussed but the overall conclusion, thankfully, was that this couldn't begin to replicate the value of the

public library service. There were real fears expressed, however, that what we are witnessing is the destruction of the public library service.

This piece was followed an hour or so later by contributions from Richard Charkin, of Bloomsbury Publishing, and author Marina Lewycka. “Libraries are essential to the kind of country we want to live in” and “closing libraries won’t solve the economic crisis” were two statements that appealed to me. Charkin clearly felt that libraries had forgotten their central purpose and should return to their core business of books. As a publisher he would say that but I think he really meant that they should move away from being the hub for all local council services and concentrate on being libraries! With a slight sting in the tail he did conclude by saying that significant savings could be made through better management and more efficiencies!

Mass protests in Doncaster had been mentioned in the earlier broadcast and a quick bit of googling revealed author Alan Gibbons’ blog which tells of his appearance in that city to join people protesting over the planned closure of 3 branch libraries. He tells of a woman who lives near one of the branch libraries but who had not heard of the impending closure. Her few words say it all really: “But that’s where I borrow my books. What am I supposed to do if it goes?”

Football, libraries and leaders

Tuesday, July 13, 2010 at 9:35AM

So the vuvuzelas are silent, the press circus has departed and the TV schedules return to normal. The World Cup is over and Spain is rightly crowned the best football team in the world.

As a football fan I’ve enjoyed the World Cup. Yes it’s had its ups and downs. There were several dull games that were best forgotten but there have been some real thrillers in which individual and team performances have shone through. Argentina looked great until asked to defend; Germany delighted as the counter-attacking team par excellence; Spain’s midfield with their short-passing game was a technical masterclass.

One aspect of the competition that has merited some small attention has had nothing to do with the athletes on the pitch but the managers on the sidelines. These are the guys who always shoulder the blame when things go wrong and, quite rightly, take some of the glory when everything goes to plan.

What caught my attention was the different managerial, or leadership, styles that team managers displayed. France’s Domenech looked haunted as he stood on the sidelines. His leadership skills led, literally, to rebellion which just showed how little team spirit he’d managed to engender! Dunga of Brazil carried a nation’s

expectation of winning...and winning in an entertaining way...but his dedication to “efficient” football at the expense of flair produced neither and he was sacked on his return home. Maradona displayed enthusiasm in abundance; he showed quite clearly his love for his Argentine players but he ultimately failed because his heart ruled his head. He was great fun to watch though!

The guy I loved to watch was Vicente del Bosque, the manager of Spain. No histrionics from him whenever Spain scored, no punching the air and leaping around in celebration. He remained impassive throughout every game, quietly confident in his game-plan and the superior ability of his players. His inner conviction of the ultimate success of his players was deep-seated and founded, no doubt, in his work with his highly talented players over several years and the knowledge that his role was to set out the overall direction, not micro-manage. His players could then be left to do their own thing. Supreme mutual confidence and trust!

So, yes, there are parallels here for all of us who manage libraries and lead others in our organisations. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a professor at Harvard Business School says in her blog, “the leader’s job is to provide resources and support which build the confidence of players in themselves, each other, the team, and the excellence of the surrounding system. Ethics, fair play, mentoring, smooth transitions, continuity, and collaboration should not be luxuries or lip service; they create the margin of victory.”

A 59 year old former Real Madrid player and manager is now my role model!

Cuts, cuts, cuts...

THURSDAY, JULY 1, 2010 AT 10:17AM

The economic storms are well and truly approaching the public sector and many of us are probably about to experience the worst of times. Throughout the UK, reductions in funding will see libraries and librarians fighting for their lives. There is scant compensation in knowing that we are not alone!

For many years we in libraries have been defending ourselves from those who argued that libraries were increasingly irrelevant in the digital age. This has now shifted to defending the need for libraries in the digital age and the cost of running them.

Ned Potter in July's digital **Update** quotes Toby Greenwalt's article in the online paper the Huffington Post: "To know the library is to love the library - but who knows the library?" in which he says that we need to expend our effort on making people aware of what we do so they can make informed choices on whether they need our services. Our supporters will always support us and our critics will always criticise, it's the ones in between, the indifferents, we need to target and get on-board. It seems that despite making tremendous efforts many still believe our services should be cut because all we do all day is shelve books and tell people to be quiet!

I know, because I've seen the letters, that CILIPS is making representations to councils throughout Scotland where library services are threatened. We don't ask for much, just a fair hearing. To quote one communication: CILIPS urges politicians and key stakeholders to seriously consider the wider impact of their decisions on the future of libraries and their customers. In particular we ask that decision making is transparent and grounded in good sense and research. In this way we hope to ensure that a high quality, professional library service that will benefit growth and the economy into the future is preserved.

Time for action folks!

Conference reflections

THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 2010 AT 5:13PM

It's now just over a week since the CILIPS Conference in Glasgow drew to a close and high time to reflect on how it went!

In a nutshell, I thought it was hugely successful with a great variety of presentations and other events to keep even the most critical attendee happy. In many ways there was simply too much going on as making the choice of which strand to attend proved quite difficult at times. Given my working day is spent in a University library I tried hard to plug in to sessions which looked at issues to do with libraries in other sectors and I found this very rewarding.

When the conference was in Peebles the bustle and energy around Branch & Groups Day made that day feel very different from the other days. Not so this year as both Tuesday and Wednesday had a similar buzz with lots of people milling around the exhibition area and then heading off to the various venues. This can only be a good sign for the future as more people than previously feel there is something for them to engage with at conference.

This suggest excellent planning on behalf of the team behind the conference but also reflects the change of location to Glasgow which can be reached much more easily than Peebles. The tone of the conference may have changed in that there are fewer taking the full accommodation package but this is far outweighed by the numbers who attended as day visitors.

Seeing the conference through as President made me more aware than ever of the tremendous amount of work put in by many people to make it a success. While things look like they are running smoothly on the surface, behind the scenes, I can assure you, there are lots of individuals paddling like mad! To each and every one of them I and all who attended conference owe a huge debt of gratitude. Thank you all for your support...it couldn't have been done without you!

Conference 2010

SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 2010 AT 7:24PM

Dear Chris,

Wishing you a successful conference this week at the new venue of the Mitchell Library! Your theme and the programme are sure to get everyone talking -plenty to debate there. I look forward to an interesting week.

All the best, Marilyn

Branching out!

TUESDAY, JUNE 1, 2010 AT 12:12PM

Received a visit from CILIPS Central Branch last week. Rather than me go to them, we reversed the position so they came to me. I rather liked this idea as it gave them an opportunity to meet me in the context of my day-job and to see something of the University.

It also gave me the opportunity not to hog the limelight as I brought in a colleague to show the group round the Library at Craiglockhart which was very quiet as our students departed a couple of weeks ago. I also arranged a visit to the War Poets Collection which was hosted impressively by two other Library colleagues. For those who don't know, the poets Sassoon and Owen met at Craiglockhart during the First World War while the building was used as a hospital for the treatment of officers suffering from shell-shock. The Collection receives visitors from all over the world and I really like the idea of our "modern" University having this tangible link with the nation's history.

The visit concluded with questions, coffee and Danish pastries. The latter provided by the University's catering folk at, I understand, the same cost as biscuits! Can this really be true?!

Welcome to Wales

THURSDAY, MAY 27, 2010 AT 9:55AM

As my trip to Dublin for the Irish conference was "ashed-out" I was particularly looking forward to my next opportunity to get out and about. The Welsh conference in mid-May proved slightly easier to get to as the various train operating companies involved hadn't yet decided there was mileage in using the excuse of the wrong sort of ash on the line! The journey from Edinburgh involved two changes of train and at each one the number of carriages reduced so for the last leg from Craven Arms to Llandrindod Wells my fellow passengers and I were reduced to sharing a single carriage unit. I had something of a scare at Craven Arms as it turned out I was standing on the wrong platform. As the train approached it crossed tracks and I was left to hurry over the footbridge to catch it! In my defence two other people were also caught out by this turn of events!

Having arrived the afternoon before the conference started I was invited to the Devolved Nations Forum. Following hard on the heels of the General Election there was much discussion on the implications of the outcome for the devolved nations as well as for the UK generally. Amongst other things, the remit of the Forum is to assist Ridgmount Street in moving away from an Anglo-centric approach to policy development and practice. While it is clear that progress is being made on this front there is still much to be done as evidenced by some of the papers put forward for

discussion which promoted a UK-wide approach where, in practice, the issues involved were devolved matters.

As to the conference itself, I thought the papers tackled the theme "Hard times, service survival through innovation" particularly well as presentations were up-beat and positive. The stand-out paper for me was presented by Jack Latimer whose contribution "Community archives: a small investment, a long-lasting legacy" showed just how much can be achieved if groups of people have a strong enough desire to set up their own community-based presence on the web. Fascinating stuff and a true public service!

Blogger's block!

FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 2010 AT 11:23AM

Am conscious that it's some time since I last blogged so need to put something together! The true cause was not writer's block in that sense but a combination of a week's holiday over Easter and a huge pile of work to get through on my return.

The Icelandic volcano (of which we hear very little these days) put paid to my trip to Dublin to attend the Irish library conference and also delayed my Deputy's return to work from a holiday in Australia. The benefit of the former was that it gave me more time to deal with the repercussions of the latter! This included wrestling with the delivery of next year's projected Library budget costs based on ZBB principles. Thankfully the University's interpretation of zero-based-budgeting is less robust than others so this wasn't quite the nightmare I'd been expecting. We now wait to see how much less than what we require we're given!

So Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones is the new poster boy for libraries! Early April saw the press latch on to titbits from his forthcoming autobiography in which he apparently expressed an interest in professional library training to help him put his books into Dewey order. How rock'n'roll is that! Keith is quoted as saying that "when you are growing up there are two institutional places that affect you most powerfully: the church... and the public library... The public library is a great equaliser."

I expect it's a little too late to try to get Keith to the CILIPS conference but maybe next year?

My Presidential duties took me to the Scottish Poetry Library last night for a "Meet the President" evening. Having ZBB'd for most of the day it was refreshing to get out and about and meet members of the East Branch. Informality was the tone set for the evening as I was welcomed with a glass of red wine and after some chat told the group a little about myself and some of the issues I was keen to address. I certainly had a really pleasant and enjoyable evening and hope those who were there felt the same! In the context of what I said in an earlier blog I have now been challenged to wear a "Mind the Gap" t-shirt at conference. You'll just have to wait and see!

RDA and all that

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 2010 AT 12:31PM

Attended the CILIP Executive Briefing on RDA on Tuesday 30th March. RDA for those who are in the dark stands for Resource Description and Access. RDA is to be launched later this year and is set to transform cataloguing standards. AACR has, so I was informed, struggled to keep pace with new formats and publishing practices. As a non-cataloguer my attendance at this event was based on curiosity around the impact of RDA. In particular, the impact of RDA on our customers. What benefits would our students and academic staff gain from the University Library committing to RDA? Frankly, I was disappointed as none of the presenters felt this was a topic that merited much thought. There was a lot of talk about RDA's impact on those who catalogue but I thought, and it is a personal observation, that those who navigate our catalogues seeking information should have received a higher profile than they got!

Wandering around Heathrow prior to flying back to Edinburgh I looked in to W.H.Smith and was delighted to see their range of souvenir t-shirts included a "Mind the Gap" one with the underground logo. I was tempted to purchase one but they only seemed to have children's sizes so my idea of wearing the t-shirt with the Presidential chain of office to the CILIPS conference will not be pursued!

Narrowing the gap!

MONDAY, MARCH 29, 2010 AT 4:34PM

The University in which I work recently released the results of its annual Employee Engagement Survey. The survey measures a number of areas including: atmosphere of co-operation, equity, leadership, personal development and overall satisfaction. With a few exceptions the results for Library staff were generally better than the results across the University as a whole. While this is encouraging, there were still a number of areas in which my senior colleagues and I felt that improvements need to be made. Because we know what we need to work on we'll take this on-board and ensure we do something about it.

This led me to reflect on what the outcome might be if CILIPS was to undertake such a thing as a Membership Engagement Survey. I declared at the start of my Presidential year that my overarching theme was to be "Mind the Gap". The gap I refer to is actually several things. It is the gap between CILIPS, as it manifests itself at Directorate and Council level, its membership and perhaps more importantly its non-membership; it is the gap between the considerable number of regional and sectoral library groups operating in Scotland and the gap between these and CILIPS; and, in these tight financial times, it is the gap between resource availability and service delivery.

I wouldn't have adopted this theme if I didn't think it would resonate with the membership of CILIPS. Despite being given the honour of CILIPS President for a year I am also an ordinary punter and have managed with reasonable success to live my professional life without giving much thought to our professional organisation.

Having worked as Junior and Senior Vice President in the last two years I do now have a greater understanding of the politics and issues involved and a much greater insight into the work of the Directorate and the role of Council. And yet....

And yet I am but one individual amongst a membership of many. I might now feel more involved in the work of CILIPS but how many others do? Are we any better at bringing the librarian "on the ground" and the association called CILIPS closer together than we ever were? And if this is a perennial issue what on earth can we do about it?

A few years ago a Vice-Principal at my University responded to a question from a member of staff who was moaning about something or other and had asked "what is the University going to do about it?" by answering "Who is the University?". The point, of course, being that "the University" was all of us and not just the Senior Management Team so by implication the questioner became part of whatever solution was necessary i.e. "What are we going to do about it?".

I do not question the role and function of the CILIPS Directorate. As with any organisation we need people to lead on strategy, to lobby on our behalf, to craft formal responses to proposed regulatory and legislative changes and to do a thousand and one other necessary things. These are important issues but the truth is that most of the membership sees in this little direct relevance to their everyday working lives which are spent within the context of the strategies, objectives, financial parameters and processes of the organisation in which they work.

So, what are we going to do about it? Last year we changed the look and feel of Council. We overhauled the committee structure and we brought in more discussion on relevant issues. This is a start but it is still based on a finite group of representatives (CILIPS Council) gathering together a few time a year in a room. Hardly grass-roots stuff!

I've said before that many of the more active members of our profession choose to devote their energies to areas of professional engagement which they feel they can better identify with. Thus we have some flourishing regional co-operative groups engaged in delivering very real, practical services to the constituencies they represent. If it is to survive as an organisation with real meaning and purpose for its membership CILIPS needs to be seen as relevant ... which leads me back to the engagement survey!

As President I would welcome feedback and comment from librarians throughout Scotland on how we can change CILIPS to better represent and help us.