

Libraries Rewired, Code Node London, 10th November 2023

Having recently taken up a role as Digital Services Librarian with Falkirk Libraries, I have been looking for events and training that will help me develop in the role. In particular I've been interested in things that would increase my knowledge and skills in terms of digital leadership and developing change management processes.

This event sounded like an exciting opportunity to learn about emerging technologies, their applications in libraries and how to lead and manage change in this area, offering a good mixture of theory, advice and a chance for hands on experience. However, the cost was more than my employer could afford to cover. So, I took the opportunity to apply to the CILIP Professional Development Fund for support and was lucky enough to be successful.

My trip started with a long train journey via Glasgow, having opted for the cheaper route to help my funding go further. A great opportunity to catch up on some reading, but the trains are definitely more comfortable on the East Coast line.



In typical Librarian fashion, when my train arrived in London, I went straight to the British Library instead of my hotel! I always enjoy a visit there, but luckily their card machines were not working, so I saved myself a fortune.



Having opted to stay at a hotel close to the venue I didn't have far to go in the morning (plus got to see Tower Bridge at night). The Code Node is a fairly big place to hold a conference. It was set up nicely, with pastries, yoghurt and fruit available for anyone that hadn't tackled breakfast before arriving. The main room was upstairs, with smaller rooms, exhibitors and refreshments downstairs.

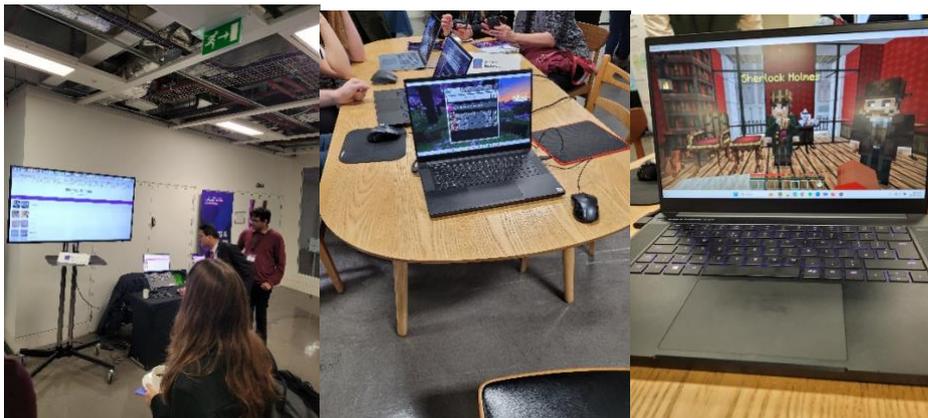
Welcome and Keynote

The day started with an introduction by Cilip CEO Nick Poole, followed by a keynote speech by Bill Thomson of the BBC. Bill gave an interesting talk on the AI Change, and being a philosophy undergraduate had some thoughtful opinions on AI. The thing he said that has stuck with me is that human level thinking is not the same as human level consciousness.



Adventures in Tech in the Digital Solutions Lab

The coffee break was a chance to visit what was billed as an Adventure in Tech in the Digital Solutions Lab. However, in reality this was stalls that you would see at most conferences, with many familiar suppliers. It was marketed very well in the lead up to the conference, but I don't think this aspect quite lived up to the billing. Although there were demonstrations from Blockwork (who work in work using Minecraft) and the University of Oxford Visual Geometry Group (demoing an image search engine). These were two that I hadn't seen anywhere else and had interesting applications. Camden Libraries were also there demoing VR but unfortunately the timing of the practical sessions clashed with the talks. Having spoken to them though I know that they are putting them to same use that many of our library colleagues in Scotland (such as East Renfrewshire) have been doing for a while.



Gaming in the Library

I love gaming and it's something that Falkirk Libraries have offered on and off over the last few year, so I had high hopes for this talk. I wasn't disappointed, Ash Green, Systems Technician at Goldsmiths University Library was a very engaging and interesting speaker. They've been involved in lots of

different things and were able to point us to practical tools that could help us to use games to create connections. This was the highlight of my trip.

Ash was followed by James Delaney of Blockworks who spoke about the Uncensored Library which is a very interesting project undertaken by his company. They've created a library in Minecraft where people can access free press and information that is censored in their country.



Harnessing AI and Machine Learning – Sue Attewell, Mia Ridge, Daniel van Strien

This was partly about applying Natural Language Processing to access library collections. I probably misunderstood what this was going to be about. It was more geared towards those working in research/special/university libraries and I didn't take anything away that I thought I could apply in a public library setting. It did help me to better understand the differences between Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.

Doing More with Data – Luke Burton, Dave Rowe, Kate Lomax

There was some useful stuff in here with Kate Lomax highlighting that gathering qualitative data is just as important as the quantitative. They also suggested some useful toolkits to look up and even name checked Cilip Scotland's very own Kirsten MacQuarrie in relation to a lightning talk on using a toolkit to measure our carbon footprint. Kate also recommended the Cilip Digital Leadership for Libraries eLearning, which I am definitely going to complete.

Dave Rowe had some thought-provoking things to say on using data to better understand our services. This has made me think about the type of data on my service that I have available, but just as importantly, the data I would like and how I go about gathering it.

Ethics and Emerging Technologies – Closing Session. Nick Poole, Sue Attewell, Bill Thompson, Liz White, Tom Shaw

This was a really entertaining and thought-provoking way to close Libraries Rewired. There was some really good stuff on unconscious bias and whether we can reform models to compensate and empower indigenous populations to take control of digital collections.

There was also a good discussion around digital rights, the expansion of digital literacy and digital utopia/dystopia. One of the final things said is something that has stuck with me, Sue Attewell said *“AI isn’t going to steal your job, but someone who knows more about it and embraced it might”*.



Conclusion

I enjoyed this trip, and it is something I would not have been able to do without the support of the Professional Development Fund. There were some very informative sessions and I’ve taken away many ideas, particularly around gaming in the library. I also plan on undertaking the Cilip Digital Leadership for Libraries eLearning.

Attending Libraries Rewired and finding out what’s going on around the country has also highlighted for me how well Scotland’s library sector is doing in terms of technology and its practical application. Being involved in the things like Cilips and the SLIC Digital Champions Network gives me access to information and support from colleagues in the library sector and I don’t always appreciate quite how cutting edge some of the things we do in Scotland are. Maybe we’ll see more of our colleagues from Scotland speaking at a future Libraries Rewired.

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