

CILIP Conference in Liverpool 2nd - 3rd July 2015

Lydia Pryce-Jones, Issue Desk Supervisor at the Taylor Institution
Library, Bodleian Libraries

Lydia.Pryce-Jones@bodleian.ox.ac.uk

Summary - *The following provides an overview of the events I attended and experiences gained as an UKeiG bursary holder at the CILIP conference 2015. It describes the exhibition and focuses on the keynote presentations by David Lankes, Cory Doctorow, Shami Chakrabarti and Erwin James, while also briefly discussing Sue Reynolds and Carolyn Rankin's, Jon Bentley's and Todd Richter's sessions.*

As the conference started quite early on Thursday morning with registration from 8.30am I thought it best to travel up the day before. That was a good idea, as Wednesday and Thursday turned out to both be really hot days leading to train cancellations and delays. But after a bit of a public transport odyssey, I was greeted by a soft and cool breeze in Liverpool and was able to relax in the swish and modern Z Hotel just around the corner from the "Cavern Quarter" where I was very interested to find that The Beatles had played in their early career! A bit of history just outside the front door! So Liverpool proved a great venue both for music fans and for those escaping hot temperatures.

The next day started with registration at the gorgeous St George's Hall, the main conference venue, and I was able to meet Rachel Walker, the other UKeiG bursary winner, and John Wickenden, our sponsor and mentor at the conference, in the exhibition space. The exhibition was situated in the Great Hall, where the exhibitors had their stands to demonstrate and talk about their products and services, and where delegates could network and get in touch with the CILIP Special Interest Groups. In between sessions this is where we met for refreshments and for some fun conference activities such as "Human Bingo" (talk to fellow delegates to find people who match certain criteria, e.g. has used a 3D printer) to win a Virgin Experience voucher, a selfie competition in which Rachel and I gladly participated and the stand award sticker collection to win an iPad (congratulations to [Better World Books](#) for winning Best Stand Award!) The exhibition space was a very busy hub and I used the opportunity to talk with representatives from the Internet Archive about their state-of-the-art [Table Top Scribe System](#) and to learn more about the very worthy [Ideas Box](#), a portable multi-media kit for refugee and vulnerable populations presented by Barbara Schack from Bibliothèques Sans Frontières.

The structure of the conference was very similar on both days with keynote presentations and a selection of breakout sessions both in the mornings and afternoons. Focusing on current key trends, the conference had the following four main themes: Information Management, Information Literacy, Demonstrating Value and Digital Futures. Due to personal interest and because of my research topic, I mainly attended presentations from

Digital Futures and Demonstrating Value in the breakout sessions. In the following I will write in greater detail about these while briefly mentioning others.

David Lankes did an amazing job as the first keynote speaker presenting his “**action plan for world domination through librarianship**”. It felt like a tour de force from beginning to end and anyone ever in doubt about the importance of librarianship received a definite answer - “it is not nice to be a librarian, it is awesome!” Some of that awesomeness is derived from the millennia old history of librarianship, which Lankes asks us to embrace, as there is a lot to learn from and to build upon. Instead of building barriers we should also embrace our differences; whether we work in public or academic libraries or in other jobs in the information profession, we can and should learn from each other no matter what specialism. We should also look at different sectors, beyond our expertise, to bring in new ideas and perspectives. Lankes proposes the following action points to achieve (a peaceful, maybe geeky but definitely awesome) world domination:

- Conquer your own demons
- Control the narrative
- Get invited in by being present
- Never be neutral - always add value

What makes libraries special and distinguishes them from the competition such as Google, Apple and Amazon, is their very *raison d’être*: libraries are a force for the advancement of human science and society (and have been, thinking about proto-libraries in Mesopotamia and Egypt, their role in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance). Here Lankes points out a problem with the definition of “library”; too often it is all about the building when it should be about the librarians and how we connect with our communities. Our mission as librarians should be to “improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in our communities.” To do so, we must recognise the shift in collections (print to digital, owned to rented, permanent to ephemeral) and overcome the service barriers, connecting our communities. So, while we may all still be fond of the physical book, at best, books can spark knowledge but they are not knowledge itself. It is not about what tools we use for knowledge creation but about learning and knowledge creation itself. Librarians are educators that work in the learning business and should therefore use whatever tools necessary. I whole-heartedly agree and finish with Lankes’ proclamation: “Power to the people!”

The next session I attended was on “**how to demonstrate the value of your library**” led by [Sue Reynolds](#) and [Carolynn Rankin](#). This was a very interactive, participative “master class” about how to achieve your goals, which may range from career progression to managing a project in your library. Several set activities were discussed within a group of people closest to you. Thought exercises included answering questions such as:

- Why measure impact? (quality management, comparability, promotion, lobbying, etc.)
- What is your priority at the moment?
- What population are you trying to serve?
- What are you hoping your project or activity or service will achieve?

- What methods would you consider using to gather opinions on impact?

I really liked the interactive nature of the session as it meant meeting new people and exchanging experiences in a collaborative effort to complete the activities (I got some great new ideas for focus groups). Sadly there wasn't always enough time to finish each exercise. The main point that I took away was this advice: start with the outcome (what do you want to achieve) then design a plan to achieve that outcome and always, always measure said outcome!

The second keynote presentation “information doesn't want to be free...but people do” was given by science fiction author, activist and journalist Cory Doctorow. According to Doctorow there are three laws that regulate the arts in the 21st Century:

- Anytime anyone puts a lock on anything you create and won't give you the key, it's not for your benefit
- Fame will not make you rich but no one will buy your stuff if they haven't heard about you
- Information doesn't want to be free

In an ideal world the first cut should always go to the artist/creator, the second to the producers and the third to the retailers/distributors. However, in our digital world companies like Amazon, Apple, Facebook and YouTube have control over the works through digital locks. Digital laws are easily and quickly broken but using digital locks as means of protection results in giving control away to third parties. It also seems that competition in certain markets shrinks, e.g. YouTube now seems to dominate the video market. However, even if information doesn't seem to want to be free, the “internet is the nervous system of the 21st Century” and we should do all we can to obtain and retain democratic access to information - “it's about people not information”. We should be opposed to censorship and surveillance. More focus should be placed on information policy and creating laws that actually protect the creators, free expression, privacy and freedom. Information professionals, librarians, activists and creators should work together to achieve this. After learning about this I will definitely have a look at encrypting my data myself, sad though this is!

The main point I took from [Jon Bentley's](#) session about the “challenges and opportunities of resource access management” is that this is a very hot topic, especially in the academic library environment. His survey results show that seamless user access (benchmark Google search) is ever more important and that overall the library community agrees, in fact almost all respondents said access management is critical. Respondents also agreed that more work needs to be done in this area: improved off-site access and access on mobile devices, seamless access, and overall enhanced user experience.

I was excited to learn about developments in carbon 3D printing in [Todd Richter's](#) session on “creative workspaces in UK libraries”. For example, 3D printers are available for rent in Dundee Central Library and Aberdeen District Library and the project/exhibition space Seventeen hosts [‘MAKE Aberdeen’](#), an “open access digital fabrication workshop, providing affordable access to cutting edge manufacturing technology.” The libraries also offer workshops and training courses for users. Richter points out that librarianship is becoming

a fluid, hybridised term and we “hybrid librarians”. This fits in quite well with Lankes’ statement of using “whatever tools necessary” for the sake of learning and creation of knowledge.

After the sessions Rachel and I went to the **drinks reception at the Museum of Liverpool**. After a moving address by CILIP President Jan Parry, the reception was open and we mingled and enjoyed the party. The venue lent itself to the exploration of the exhibition and we had a great time finding out about Liverpool’s history. We couldn’t resist rocking away to “Yellow Submarine” in a Beatles karaoke box and taking some more selfies. Needless to say, we had a fun evening!

The next day started with the very **compelling keynote by Shami Chakrabarti**, Director of Liberty (National Council for Civil Liberties). The presentation highlighted some of the threats to our democratic society and showed why maintaining our rights is so important. It was very interesting to hear about Chakrabarti’s work and her involvement in high-profile campaigns, ranging from privacy laws to anti-terror legislation. Chakrabarti pointed to the vital role libraries have in upholding democracy: they are a safe, living, breathing civic space for discourse, that needs to be protected and where this discourse, so essential to any real democracy, can be nurtured. More about her work and the challenges facing our democratic society can be found in her book ‘On Liberty’, published by Allen Lane in 2014.

The last session I would like to mention was the very **touching keynote by Erwin James**, author and columnist of The Guardian. It was inspiring to hear how “a good book can change the way you think about life”. James went on to explain from personal experience why books can be key in the rehabilitation process and why prisons could be a valuable community resource.

The conference ended with the **presidential address by Jan Parry** who presented the competition awards and aptly summarised the main themes of the conference. It also included the official launch of the [Impact Toolkit](#), “an online resource that provides practical resources, information and support so members can clearly and effectively demonstrate their value as professionals - and the value of the services they manage and provide - to key decision makers and stakeholders” and which can be found on CILIP’s VLE. Parry’s very fitting closing statement was: “Go out and make an impact!” We shall try ☺

I would like to thank UKeiG very much for their support, which enabled me to attend the conference, something I would otherwise have been unable to do! I would also like to thank John Wickenden for his friendly advice and the two long chats over a cup of tea. It was a pleasure to meet John and Rachel and a very enriching experience overall. I have gained insight into ongoing trends and developments, which has helped me both in my day-to-day work in the library as well as in my library research. Many thanks!

Lydia Pryce-Jones is also a PhD student at the Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies