Book reviews

JOHANNSEN, Carl Gustav and KAJBERG, Leif (ed.) *New frontiers in Public Library Research.* **Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2005. 367 pages. ISBN 0 8108 5039 7.**

In 2001 the editors of this book organised a seminar, held at the Royal School of Library and Information Science in Copenhagen. The research papers presented in this book are resulting from this seminar.

The book covers a wide range of public library issues such as digitisation, library management and valuation, multicultural society, professional identity and library history. The book is divided into six parts each with three or four articles covering a specific subject area. The editors do not claim the book is fully representative of all current Nordic research, but concentrates on a range of specific themes and broad areas of investigation to give a 'flavour' of Nordic research (p. 3). The intended readership of this book is that of researchers in the field of library and information studies generally and those working in, or with an interest in public libraries and public library research. Personally, I am a librarian working in public libraries and I found several of the papers to be of great interest.

The paper by Marianne Hummelshøj looks at the community information available on public library web sites in Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Her paper recognises the importance of access to this information to allow users to participate more fully in society. This is a theme continued in the article by Karen Nowé into citizenship information, in which she describes a project in Citizenship Information (CI) in Gothenburg City Library. The project was the result of a survey in Sweden which stated that Swedish citizens made little contribution to democratic processes due to lack of knowledge and information of democratic issues. The project included 'citizen terminals' and a librarian 'citizen guide' to help users navigate the information available to them. The library also held talks from different agencies.

The article describing Oslo Public Library's Norwegian Virtual Reference Desk: Ask the Library by Tord Høivik was a particular favourite of mine. It describes the types of questions asked, the take up by users, and evaluates how useful responses to questions were. The article gave a very positive picture of online or virtual reference work, with the VRD allowing more time to be spent on users' queries, giving a higher quality of response, and showing that questions via the VRD often required more professional skills than those questions asked at the traditional reference desk. On a lighter note, p. 46 made me laugh, 'The true mailman will invest hours on inscrutable Christmas cards. The true librarian will pursue a really hard question for days and weeks. Utility be damned. In these professional cultures, successful identification of trivial facts is seen as a heroic feat. Persistence shall prevail'. (p. 46).

I found the three papers discussing library interaction with ethnic minority users very interesting. One in particular includes research using focus groups to inform decisions about how to attract specific groups of potential users, for example in developing digital public library services. The other papers focus on areas of policy and their impact on public library services to those with a different ethnic or cultural background.

Finally, I want to draw attention to the article by Ellen-Merete Duvold about what the public library means to people in everyday life. She carried out a qualitative survey of selected users in a carefully selected public library. Although she has just begun to analyse her findings, they make for interesting reading. They remind us not to take it for granted that we know what our users want, or are looking for. I think qualitative research in this respect is invaluable. I leave you with a quote from this article, about the need for public libraries, 'If the latter hypothesis…is true, the need for the public library should

increase rather than decrease – not only because it is a center of information but also because it represents one of the few remaining public spaces not dedicated to shopping' (p. 270).

Victoria Lagus
Community Development Librarian
South Tyneside Libraries
viki.lagus@southtyneside.gov.uk

PACE, Andrew K. *The ultimate digital library: where the new information players meet*. Chicago, American Library Association, 2003. 168 pages. ISBN 0-8369-0844-6.

The author describes the topic of his book as 'libraries and vendors'. He is currently Head of Systems at North Carolina State University (Raleigh NC), having previously worked for a library system supplier on the helpdesk – the 'dark side to the profession" and then as a product integration specialist. This experience enables him to provide an insight into the activities of both libraries and vendors, indeed how libraries can learn from their private sector counterparts is a major theme. The vendors considered here are library automation companies, online service providers and Internet companies.

The book includes a brief history of library automation, charting the change from librarians as gatekeepers of information, to libraries as gateways to information, which is increasingly no longer under the libraries control. The whole area of how to 'handle the description of and advertise ownership of local and non-local electronically available resources' is discussed. Developments from online service providers such as Ebrary, Questia, Amazon and Google present challenges to library practices. These services may variously offer full text searching of digital resources, peer reviews, fuzzy matching, spell checking etc. They demonstrate how digital innovations from dot.com companies could be used to enhance traditional library catalogues.

Pace advocates the use of business models for digital library services. He emphasises that digital tools exist to enhance the services of libraries not to replace them. He discusses project management and business model planning including product smothering, orphaning and neglect. There are sections on licensing and fair use, ownership versus access, what happens if the vendor goes out of business and tips on how to make vendors listen. There is a timely chapter on patron privacy and user anonymity which discusses privacy dangers in user profiling and advises on how libraries should be managing privacy issues.

In conclusion Pace posits some radical ideas on how libraries should learn from their corporate counterparts when it comes to creating, delivering and supporting digital services by hiring appropriate IT staff, embracing new technologies and adapting to business models. There are two appendices, one listing Internet companies, library automation vendors and information organizations and the second a library automation vendor survey. A bibliography and Index are included. Where appropriate plenty of figures and diagrams illustrate the text. Section headings make the book easy to both read and to dip into.

This is an engaging book. Authoritative, informative, thought provoking and witty. I found myself nodding my head in agreement, groaning and even laughing out loud whilst reading. I'm sure many readers will recognise Pace's 'worst-case scenario', in which the reserve stock room functions as 'the libraries pasture – a unit in which to place librarians and staff with little desire to embrace technological change'. Perhaps the only group who will not enjoy reading this book?

Chris Levey
Goldsmiths College Library
University of London

Pioneers in library and information science.
W. Boyd Rayward [Issue Editor] Library Trends 52 (4). University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

The title of this volume of biographical studies should really be 'Pioneers in Library and Information Science in the USA'. Twelve of the fifteen contributors come from the United States, and all but one of them are concerned primarily with people and events in that country. Indeed, Boyd Rayward, in his introduction to the volume, notes that non-US contributions were partly included for the light they could throw on developments in the USA. He comments usefully on the different approaches that contributors have employed, and provides a brief guide to biographical sources of value for historians of library and information science.

Marcia Bates describes her memories of library school life in California in the 1960s, outlining the syllabus and the books that were then available. This is one place where a comparison with contemporary practice elsewhere - for example, the new syllabus being developed at the City University - might have been interesting. One important point that she makes is the continuing value of early research work in the information field. Unlike now, funding was then available for extended investigations that were not expected to have an immediately applicable outcome. As a result of the current funding ethos, some of the early studies do not have recent parallels. Her memories are complemented by a paper by Hansen, who looks at the establishment of library schools in California. Their appearance was accompanied by long debates about the appropriate syllabus - not least the balance between theory and practice. Those must have been tense times: all the three leading protagonists that Hansen mentions died from heart conditions.

Three of the contributions are concerned with Jesse Shera and his colleagues, and their role in information science. All three papers draw helpful comparisons with the contemporary situation in Europe. Hardly surprisingly, the idea of 'social epistemology' is to the fore in these discussions. Zandonade traces the evolution of the concept after Shera, whereas Turner is mainly concerned with emphasizing the importance of Margaret Egan in the original development of the idea. The tendency for subsequent writers to cite Shera, rather than Egan, has parallels with citations of Salton's work on the vector space model for information retrieval. In a contribution entitled 'The most influential paper Gerard Salton never wrote', Dubin shows that Salton did not develop the method at the time that most people have supposed. He comments:

> In giving credit to Salton for the vector model, a number of authors cite an overview paper titled "A Vector Space Model for Information Retrieval", which some show as published in the JASIS in 1975 and others as published in the Communications of the Association for Computing Machinery (CACM) in 1975. In fact, no such article was ever published.

Much of the early interest in library and information research centred on classification, and this is reflected in several of the papers. A Canadian contribution by Clare Beghtol looks at the work initiated in the late nineteenth century by the British librarian, James Duff Brown. She notes that his emphasis on a flexible classification which could take account of interdisciplinary changes has a modern ring about it. This paper might be useful reading for British library students, since there have been recent queries in CILIP's journal, *Library and Information Update*, asking whether any of them still recognise his name. Elsewhere, the importance of classification studies in the UK, and especially of the ASLIB Classification Research Group, is noted. So Phyllis Richmond asks Shera whether something similar to the CRG might be started in the United States. Another concern is the problem of getting to grips with computers in libraries, and related to it is the contemporaneous debate between librarians and documentalists. Cragin provides an interesting discussion of Foster Mohrhardt and his attempt at reconciling traditional library activities with information science. Mohrhardt recognised that differences did exist and emphasized the need for joint work on the introduction of automation in libraries.

The remaining contributions are mainly concerned with the history of public and children's libraries in the USA. Jumonville and Gunselman deal with the setting up of public library systems in Louisiana and Oregon, respectively. Kimball writes on children's librarianship, and Kester on school libraries. What these papers bring out well is how much these developments owed to dedicated female librarians. In the USA, they seem to have been treated somewhat better by their male colleagues than was Suzanne Briet at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. Her pioneering activities there are described in a paper by Mary Niles Maack. Alistair Black's contribution discusses national planning for public libraries in the UK, as exemplified by the work of Lionel McColvin. The report that McColvin produced during the Second World War was wide-ranging, envisaging a centralised welfare-state kind of approach to public libraries that fitted in well with the ethos of the time. The failure to follow up this approach is seen by Black as being a major disappointment of the post-war library world. In view of the current problems associated with centralisation and the welfare state, however, it might possibly be counted as a blessing in disguise.

There is plenty in the history of libraries that illustrates the importance of having the right person in the right place at the right time. Many of these biographical studies underline the point, but they also illustrate the contingent nature of much library development. What exactly happens in a particular historical context can depend on factors beyond anyone's control.

Jack Meadows