

**British Computer Society
Information Retrieval Specialist Group**

18th Annual Colloquium on IR Research

**26-27 March 1996
Aytoun New Building
Manchester Metropolitan University**

The 18th Annual Colloquium of the British Computer Society Information Retrieval Specialist Group will be held on 26-27 March, in Manchester. Information Retrieval is concerned with methods of providing access to large, relatively unstructured, data repositories. Much of the work addresses ways of describing and matching the content of stored information and the information needs of users. The Colloquium papers report on research in-progress in this area and reflect current issues in IR research and development. This year topics include IR agents and networked information retrieval; digital libraries; automatic indexing; IR models; IR systems, applications and evaluation.

The colloquium aims to encourage the exchange of ideas and discussion among the IR community in an established informal and convivial setting. Active participation is welcomed and participants will have the opportunity to discuss research ideas, raise questions and obtain feedback on their own research activity.

The conference will take place at the Aytoun Building of the Manchester Metropolitan University. This is situated in the city centre, within walking distance of the main railway station linking into the major national network. Details on travelling to Manchester are attached to the booking form.

Full program on page 2



**ESSIR, MIRO, Mira, a
Great Success**

The European Summer School in Information Retrieval (ESSIR), and the MIRO and Mira working group meetings held in Glasgow in September were a great success, as many readers will realise since they were there. This picture of Peter Ingwersen was taken on the boat to the Isle of Arran.

More revealing photos on page 8

New IR Book Series Announced

Kluwer Academic Publishers recently announced an Information Retrieval book series. The first collection of monographs, edited collections, and advanced texts to cover the many aspects of this field.

The volumes in the series will be aimed at practitioners and researchers, including graduate students and advanced undergraduates. In order to publish material that is timely and reflects the state of the art, the series will focus on books of moderate length and relatively narrow scope.

Possible topics include IR models, evaluation of IR systems, multimedia indexing and retrieval, IR and networks (including the Internet), digital libraries, natural language processing for IR, indexing

and classification, information extraction, feedback and learning in IR, unstructured information and uncertainty in database systems, multilingual systems, hypertext, interfaces for information access, information visualisation, and file organisations for text. Topics such as information policy, economics of information, and standards may also be appropriate.

Prospective Authors: If you have an idea for a book which would fit in this series, Kluwer would welcome the opportunity to review your proposal. Should you wish to discuss any potential project further or receive specific information regarding our book proposal requirements, please contact either Bruce Croft or Scott Delman. Please enclose a short bio with your proposal.

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The BCS IRSG is sponsored by



Health Libraries & Information
Network

Colloquium Programme

Tuesday 26 March

11.00 on Registration
12.30-1:30 Lunch
1.30-1:40 Open

Session 1 Networked IR and Agents

1.40-2.10
INTERNET Challenges for Information Retrieval
Jeremy Ellman and John Tait, University of Sunderland
2.10-2.40
Co-operative Information Retrieval in Digital Libraries
Michail Salamapasis, John Tait & Chris Bloor, University of Sunderland
2.40-3.10
Using Clustering in a WWW Information Agent
John Davies, Richard Weeks & Mike Revett, BT Laboratories
3.10-4.00 Coffee Break

Session 2 Automatic Indexing

4.00-4.30
Conceptual and Contextual Indexing using WordNet-derived
Lexical Chains
M.A Stairmand and W.J Black, UMIST

Session 3 Research Questions: an Open Session

4.30-5.15 Topics/ Speakers To Be Announced
5.15 AGM
7.00 Weston Guest Bar
7.30 Weston Restaurant

Wednesday 27th March

Session 4 Inverted Indexes and Stemming

9.00-9.30
On Concurrency Control for Inverted Files
A. MacFarlane, S.E Robertson & J.A McCann, City University
9.30-10.00
Stemming of Latin Text
Robyn Schinke, Mark Greengrass, Alexander M. Robertson &
Peter Willett, Sheffield University

Session 5 IR Systems and Evaluation

10.00-10.30
Some Performance Measurement Problems in Operational Evaluation Testing
Michael Keen and Roslina Othman, University of Wales Aberystwyth
10.30-11.00 Coffee
11.00-11.30
Information Retrieval for Clinical Medicine: A New Agenda
Martin Gardner, University of Glasgow

Session 6 Logical IR Models

11.30- 12.00
The Use of Logic Information Retrieval Modelling
Mounia Lalmas, University of Glasgow
12.00-12.30
Formalising Intelligent Information Retrieval Agents
T.W.C. Huibers and B. van Linder, Utrecht University
12.30-1.30 Lunch

Further details from:

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CLOSING DATE FOR BOOKINGS 14th March 1996



Richard Sutcliffe enthralled by a speaker at last year's colloquium. And that was just the lunchtime conversation.

Major IR journal contents and abstracts available on the Internet

The contents and abstracts of Information Processing & management, Journal of the American Society for Information Science, and Journal of Documentation are available from the following locations:

IP&M:

`gopher://ukoln.bath.ac.uk:7070/11/
BUBL_Main_Menu/E/E2/E2EI06`

JASIS:

`gopher://ukoln.bath.ac.uk:7070/11/
BUBL_Main_Menu/E/E2/E2EJ02`

J Doc:

`gopher://ukoln.bath.ac.uk:7070/11/
BUBL_Main_Menu/E/E2/E2EJ05`

Mark Sanderson

The Informer is now accessible via the Web

Issues of the Informer are now available as PDF documents on the Web so you can view them directly using your Web browser. All the URLs contained in the text are clickable too!

PDF (Portable Document Format) is the file format used by Adobe's Acrobat software and is much like PostScript in that it provides platform-independent, geometrically-defined page descriptions that look great on screen and also print out a treat. It is useful for creating documents where the author wants to ensure that they look exactly the same to every reader, unlike HTML documents which are interpreted by your web browser so what they look like depends on which browser you are using and how you have configured it. PDF scores over PostScript because it is a more standard 'standard', has good built-in compression, enables the author to enforce levels of security (password, read-only, no copying of text, no printing, etc.), and allows clickable text selections or regions to be defined as anchors for within-document, between-document, and Web links.

To view the PDF files you will need an Adobe Acrobat viewer which is available for all major platforms and is free since Adobe are trying to make PDF a standard document interchange format so they can sell lots of copies of the software that enables you to create and edit PDF documents. You then instruct your Web browser to use the Acrobat viewer as a helper application to display any PDF files you link to.

Alternatively, and far more sexily, you can use an Amber plug-in. Amber is the name Adobe have chosen (why do they have to keep making up new names?) for their latest version of PDF which is specially designed for inline display by Web browsers. This means that instead of launching a helper application to display PDF files your Web browser will be able to display them directly, in its own win-

dow. Although this doesn't sound like much at first it means that PDF documents will be as manageable as normal HTML but, since they are much easier to create, PDF could take over from HTML as the format of choice for most Web documents. Just think about it. Any existing document that can be output as PostScript (such as your old research papers) can be turned into PDF just by running the PostScript through the Acrobat Distiller and can then be enhanced with link anchors and security using Acrobat Exchange. Of course you have to buy these two pieces of software (although the distiller is increasingly being bundled with other purchases) but it means that you can easily create Web documents that you know will look exactly the same to all readers and you don't have to write HTML or muck about with separate files for all the GIFs and JPEGs. Pretty cool I'd say. Mark Sanderson had his techie, anorak-wearing tongue hanging out when he was explaining it all to me anyway so it must be good.

PDF viewers and the Amber plug-in are available along with the PDF versions of the Informer (including this one) from our Web site although the plug-in is currently available only for NetScape 2.0 on either Macintosh, Windows95 or Windows NT. Why not take a look at it now and see what you think. You will be able to follow all the Web links and if you print out the PDF files the quality, particularly of the photos, will be much better than the cheaply printed version you are holding in your hand (unless you're currently looking at the PDF version of course).

Many thanks to Mark Sanderson for instigating all this.

Mark Magennis (editor)

CURL OPAC Project

The CURL OPAC Project has been funded by JISC, through the ISSC, for three years to develop the union catalogue database owned by the Consortium of University Research Libraries into a national academic OPAC with associated document delivery

services. The OPAC service will be implemented in several stages, the first of which, providing fairly basic facilities, is scheduled for April 1996.

Further information is available from:

<http://curlopac.ac.uk/curlinfo/>
Shirley Cousins <s.a.cousins@mcc.ac.uk>

European academic libraries to offer journal articles over WWW

Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, is the first to sign an agreement with Pica, Centre for Library Automation in Leiden, on electronic access of full text journal articles within the WebDOC pilot project initiated by Pica.

A number of Dutch and German academic libraries will cooperate with commercial publishers to offer their endusers access to electronic journal articles.

Publishers will deliver SGML-headers of journal articles containing bibliographic data and abstracts. From these data, Pica will build a catalogue (WebCAT) linking to full text articles stored on local servers maintained by the information providers or on a server at Pica's. For the time being, document formats are restricted to Postscript, PDF, HTML and TIFF-images.

Documents will be made accessible via WWW-browsers to end users who are registered at one of the participating libraries. End users of libraries that are subscribing to journals Kluwer makes available in WebDOC will have unlimited access, whereas a pay-per-view system will apply for journals to which there is no subscription.

Pica is building the technical infrastructure to arrange access to WebCAT and to the document servers including the accounting mechanisms which control the access.

WebDOC will run for an initial trial period until the end of December 1997. At that time, the project will be evaluated and will be continued if the results are as planned. More than a dozen University libraries in Germany and the Netherlands have so far agreed to participate.

<http://www.pica.nl>

Katharine Sharp Review

The Katharine Sharp Review is the first peer-reviewed electronic journal featuring scholarship and research by students in the field of library and information science.

<http://edfu.lis.uiuc.edu/review>

There is also an electronic mail distribution list <curl-opac@mailbase.ac.uk> to which you can subscribe by emailing mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk with the message 'join curl-opac'.

Graduate Summer School in Librarianship and Information Science

An International Graduate Summer School in Librarianship and Information Science (IGSS) was first held in Aberystwyth Wales in 1973. IGSS aims to provide an opportunity for librarians and information professionals from all over the world to discuss matters of common concern and learn of recent developments.

IGSS is held at the Department of Information and Library Studies at the University of Wales Aberystwyth in conjunction with the School of Librarianship and Information Science at the University of Pittsburgh, USA. In 1996 there will be two summer schools running in parallel. The Summer School on Electronic Libraries (directed by Lucy Tedd) will cover recent developments which enable the worldwide access of information via the Internet, the growth of multimedia information systems, electronic document delivery systems, the role of librarians in making their users aware of all these developments and the impact on traditional library services. The Summer School on Health Informatics will cover planning and implementing health information systems, resource management, electronic patient records, telemedicine and health-based resources on the Internet.

The schools will take place in Aberystwyth from 24th June to 13th July 1996. The comprehensive fee covering registration, tuition, accommodation and a 3-day study tour will be £1800 sterling for the Electronic Libraries Summer School and £2200

sterling for the Health Informatics summer school. Here are some comments from IGSS 95:

"We gained a lot of experience of multimedia and the Internet"

"Good package of continuing education"

"The lectures were well organised and the lecturers were very friendly"

"We had ample opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences"

There were 20 participants at IGSS 95 from a wide range of countries including Brunei, Colombia, Greece, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia, Norway, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Tanzania and Thailand.

Joyce Wallace,
IGSS Administrator,
Department of Information and Library Studies,
University of Wales Aberystwyth, SY 23 3AS.
email: zyo@aber.ac.uk

IEE Library catalogue now available on the Internet

The IEE (Institution of Electrical Engineers) Library was founded in 1880, and now holds some 65,000 books and pamphlets and over 3,000 periodical runs. The British Computer Society Library was joined with the IEE collection in 1977 and full services are offered to members of both organisations. The collections of the Institution of Electronic and Radio Engineers and the Institution of Manufacturing Engineers were incorporated into the Library when the Institutions merged in 1988 and 1991, respectively. The Library covers all aspects of electrical engineering, electronics, manufacturing and control engineering, computing, information technology, telecommunications and related subjects such as physics, management and history.

The IEE Library Online Catalogue con-

tains the title, author(s), publisher, publication date, and keywords for each book, report, pamphlet and conference proceeding held in the Library. Entries for the periodicals held are not yet available, but it is hoped to add these fairly shortly.

Two World Wide Web search interfaces are provided:

- A simple word search form, where the word can be an author's surname, word in the title, keyword or publisher;
- A field search form for restricting the search to title word(s), author(s), keyword(s) or publication year(s).

In both interfaces search results can be sorted by author or date, as well as by 'closeness of match'.

Appointment in IR at Sheffield

The Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield, U.K. is seeking to strengthen further its current research programmes in information retrieval.

Candidates for this position, which will be at the Reader or Professor level, depending on experience, should have a strong, demonstrable record of publication and funded research in any aspect of computational information retrieval. Examples of possible areas include (but are not restricted to): statistical models; multimedia systems; networked information retrieval; natural language processing or artificial intelligence approaches; and the integration of information retrieval and database management systems.

The Department of Information Studies is a predominantly post-graduate department with Masters programmes in Information Management, Health Information Management, Librarianship, and Textual Retrieval (the last jointly with the Department of Computer Science), and is developing a new Masters programme in Information Systems (again, jointly with Computer Science). It offers joint honours degrees at undergraduate level with the Management School, and is developing new single honours programmes (BA/BSc) in information management. The Department has strong research and teaching links with other Departments in the University and has a doctoral programme with 30 full-time Ph.D. students.

The research strength of the Department has been recognized in the award of the highest research rating in the last two national Research Assessment Exercises, and offers strong support for the development of personal research agendas.

Informal enquiries regarding this position should be made to Professor Peter Willett, Director, the Computational Information Systems Research Group

email: p.willett@sheffield.ac.uk
phone: (0)114-2825083
fax: (0)114-2780300
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/academic/I-M/is/home.html>

The IEE Library Online Catalogue can be found on the IEE home page at <http://www.iee.org.uk/>

- John Lindsay



Formed

COGS without wheels, wheels without axles

By John Lindsay

If you blinked a couple of times over the last year you'd have missed a meeting in Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre, addressed by a minister, in which the future of Britain was up for grabs. Well that is slightly overstating the case, but when the Central Computing and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) (also calling itself the whatsit for government information systems) started holding open meetings to discuss the way forward on the information superhighway, one might be tempted to think that this is a sea change in British politics. I mean, when ever before has the government asked you what you thought it should be doing? (The answer of course is nothing: it should dissolve itself).

The meeting was, however, a revelation. Partly because senior civil servants and politicians were publicly capable of presenting themselves as completely ill-informed, clueless dunderheads so past their sell-by date that a bag lady would turn them down, reducing the audience at times to gales of laughter. But partly also in that there did seem an openness which in thirty years of politics I've never come across before, except in the GLC shortly before its abolition.

The CCTA had launched open.gov as a web server and quickly improved early innocent attempts at providing an information server. As they added Verity topic and Muscat as IR engines it began to look too as if there might be a technology here which was actually going to change the way government is conducted as well as what it is about.

It wasn't long though before the circle of state librarians (what a name, circa Moscow 1930) met to work out how they could regain advantage, the Treasury set up its own server, and all the flitters of closed government shadows could be seen behind the venetian blind.

The meeting decided to set up a series of consultative open groups (COGS) to discuss the way forward and the issues. These have been functioning ever since but raise a number of questions. Open.gov would imply that everyone can be part of it. But I

have limited bandwidth and I really am not interested in the opinions of 50 million people. Secondly I'm unlikely to be convinced that anyone who has power over me will be paying any attention to what any of us think anyhow.

The Bangemann report rather gave the impression that the suppliers of telecommunication services were going to call all the shots. Even a senior commission official was prompted in the BCS Unisys lecture to suggest that there might be alternative scenarios. His lecture was posted on the bcs www and was followed by a discussion with contributions inter alia from Ian Ritchie, Vice President of the BCS and moi, on uk.bcs.misc., which is notably failing to turn into an effective forum.

Horace Mitchell in a discussion on one of the cogs, suggested the following segmentation

1. "suppliers" of internet and related core services (in which one would count CompuServe and AOL)
2. "practitioners" whose main business is adding value to Internet core services (e.g. web weavers, online marketing consultants etc. and of course the other interested practitioners, i.e. legal practitioners)
3. "online business users", for example those using the www etc. to market goods and services

4. "corporate subscriber users", for example enterprises and virtual enterprises, membership groups etc. using the networks to facilitate their everyday affairs
5. "individual subscribers" using the nets to communicate with others, to buy products and services, for entertainment etc.

(email discussion copied to me - no citation).

Interestingly missing is a framework for an information economy so anyone can sort out the pricing, costing, charging, paying and funding of any of this, which will produce the glorious price of £31,860 for access to INSPEC, the database of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, and that is citations and abstracts only incidentally!

Even more important is the absence of any sort of regulatory mechanism for resolving disputes short of the court where you can imagine the fun of a lawyer explaining to a judge the significance of a url. The unspeakable in pursuit of the inedible as Oscar might have remarked.

And most important still is the limitations on our information retrieval capacity. But to hear more of that you'll have to come to the colloquium!

John Lindsay on Internet censorship

Friday and Saturday 9th & 10th February saw the first concerted action on the Internet. The US Congress had inserted into the Telecommunications Bill a line on "censorship" of the internet, which is now going to be contested in the Supreme Court by the American Council of Civil Liberties and the American Library Association. But to show opposition, and possibly potential influence, web owners were asked to black out their pages for two days. The tally seems to have been something like *nK who did.

While I have a bit of a political problem with unelected admins taking political action on my behalf without my consent, I have a bigger problem with attempts to censor by any state. My support to my PhD students who didn't even feel they had to ask my permission.

Anyone reading the newspaper will have heard of the spat between the Bavarian State and CompuServe over porn and the Internet [see page 10]. Anyone attending committee meetings of the BCS IRSG will know that I have been fighting within the Technical Board of the BCS in opposition to attempts to legitimate censorship. This issue isn't going to go away and I'll return to it in a future Formed!

Should there be a UK NLP Society?

Yorick Wilks

The two pieces that follow, from Karen Sparck Jones and myself, respond to a short session at a Sheffield meeting on January 5th (on architectures and environments for NLP), which was devoted to the possibility of founding a new society for Natural Language Processing in the UK.

The session itself was rather inconclusive, and its chair allowed no straw vote to be taken to assess the level of support in the audience. Since then I have had emails from those who said the audience as a whole was much more pro the idea than those members of it who argued fervently against the notion, and who felt therefore frustrated that this could not be expressed in any semi-democratic form. No doubt others have had other emails one way or the other. I was considering setting out the situation and what led to the session in the first place only in the report on the meeting to EPSRC/DTI who supported the overall meeting. Then I received Karen's piece in which she reconsidered the situation from the point of view that SALT should be more responsive to the NLP community rather than starting a new organisation. She had intended it to be sent to those at Sheffield, but I then asked her, and she agreed, if I could circulate it via SALT along with a brief piece of my own setting out what caused the session to be held in the first place.

The Sheffield discussion summarised and a minimal case for CLUK

Yorick Wilks

The notion of an NLP-UK society (or CLUK: Computational linguistics UK from now on, because that acronym got an airing at the meeting in Sheffield and may have stuck for better or worse.) came to me, via a remark by Mark Tatham, the SALT Group Chairman, when he said that NLP should get its act together in some way because, from a DTI point of view, it looks less well organised than the speech community, who organise as a chapter of the Institute of Acoustics.

I give the origin because it shows, more clearly than anything else could, that CLUK would not be "anti-SALT" or "anti-cooperation with Speech". Sub-groupings can organise around their own proper interests and that may make them better, not worse,

collaborators with neighbouring groups, as perhaps in any upcoming speech and language initiative.

At the Sheffield meeting, those who spoke for CLUK stressed the need of a society that a) was not governmental in nature, and b) reflected the full range of NLP interests, including those like MT, information retrieval and extraction, and lexical work which are the most industrially orientated parts of NLP, yet have no day to day relationship to speech work at all, except through specific joint projects. At Sheffield, Nigel Birch of EPSRC said it would some times be nice to have a semi-official NLP group to consult about various issues. An important point not stressed at the Sheffield meeting was that, of its very nature, the SALT committee is a body with a finite life span dependent on grants: its origin is in a government funding programme that simply no longer exists. When it stops the speech community has somewhere else to go, NLP does not, on a UK level, unless it attempted to recolonise AISB, but the interest gap is probably too wide.

All that might seem straightforward but, as always, nothing actually is. At the meeting the issue got tied up with a quite different question of whether such a move would be an implicit criticism of SALT, what it does, how it is run, and its democratic mandate. All that is a red herring: SALT has an utterly different basis (financial, temporal) and mandate from anything being proposed here. I candidly admit that my motive in putting the suggestion to the Sheffield meeting was quite independent of SALT and not at all critical of it: I had been away for 10 years, have never knowingly been to a SALT meeting - it was simply not a group that impinged on my work, life or consciousness at all, though I suppose it does now and I should find out who is on it exactly. What became clear at Sheffield is that some people are very determined to defend SALT as the focus of NLP attention and determined if they can to stop CLUK. I was utterly naive not to have realised this.

What exactly is proposed. Sheffield was imply a sounding and no formal pro-

posals were put to the meeting, but I would guess something like this:

- a minimalist society with no subscription, just an email interest membership (there are many US parallels) and no mailing costs, but possibly an email/WWW newsletter if someone will run it.
- any meetings held are on a self-funding basis, like COLING conferences, so there is no treasurer either.
- its remit would be the full range of interests of NLP, which would include collaboration on language+speech projects, but those would not be its core raison d'être as in SALT. (ditto Industry).
- its committee to have frequent turnover and to be elected by email votes (counted by scrutineers not standing for office and of impeccable reputation). It might have to avoid a dignified board of the Great and Good in NLP, because one of the subsidiary but telling arguments against CLUK at Sheffield was that the G&G are overcommitted and exhausted and will not back anything that will end up asking them to be on it.

As I wrote above, I walked naively into this, feeling vaguely pro it but really wanting to test the waters and see if I wanted to argue for such a society. The vehemence of the Sheffield meeting, and the way the session was steered so that support could not even be tested, got me more interested in exploring the option. Anyone interested in doing something about it should contact me by email (yorick@dcs.sheffield.ac.uk). All it needs is a couple of energetic people under 40 to get it off the ground.

SALT/CLUK - Trying to lay an egg

Karen Sparck Jones

While it emerged at last week's Sheffield meeting that it was not clear there was overwhelming support for a UK language(text)-

as-opposed-to-speech society (and whether this would be primarily motivated by political lobbying or by intellectual comradeship needs), some of the points made in support of the idea reflect failings in the present set-up that do need to be overcome. Some of these may be failures due to misunderstanding or lack of information, others may be more substantive, but both types need to be positively addressed. The suggestions which follow start from the two premises 1) that it is worth trying to develop an existing organisational structure which has been shown in the past to have some positive advantages in order to overcome present lacks, rather than can it altogether; and 2) that having multiple organisations, especially rather 'special-purpose' ones, both makes heavy demands on peoples' time for 'community service' and is liable to create intellectual divisions rather than foster intellectual interaction.

It may well be that the single joint organisation, namely SALT, cannot be made to serve some very necessary purposes - for whatever reason, personal or institutional - but I believe we should try out the following before either sidelining it or closing it down altogether and going out with brand new nesting boxes.

Thus, taking it that SALT has something of an official character but is far from being a quango, and that it has in the past and can therefore in the future serve both as a channel for lobbying and an umbrella for intellectual activities; but nevertheless recognising that it is felt to be too unrepresentative and/or heavy-handed about S*PLUS*L, I believe that it should (and in fact can) be refreshed/revamped along the following lines. This renewal is desirable both because the original funding background to SALT (Alvey then JFIT) no longer applies and changes are happening, also because the science and engineering of S&L, (and especially, in the present context, L) has been changing. However I emphasise that the suggestions below are ones which presuppose just that kind of grass-roots push that was called for in the proposals for CLUK. Equally, I accept that if they are ruled out - as ultra vires - by the SALT Committee or SALT terms of reference, then we have to think again; and I also accept that if they can't be made to work in practice, we need to return to the CLUK idea.

My suggestions assume that we can rely on the present very useful administrative underpinning of the SALT mailing list etc., and take advantage of the fact that you get goods from SALT without having to pay a subscription. The suggestions address the questions of how might we have meetings which allow for more theoretical, less 'vul-

garly technological' etc. etc. interests, and also interests of an exclusively or at least primarily language(text) but NOT speech sort. These questions are raised because it is believed to be, or is actually, the case that SALT meetings must always be aimed at both SnL and if they are not reasonably well attended by both S and L people get black marked in some way. (It may be noted - though this was not mentioned - that there could well also be an analogous presupposition that SALT meetings should always address industrial as much as academic interests, draw attendance from both sides etc.; and that as this is false and/or over constraining, this point needs to be handled in the same way as the S v L one.)

Now if we look back over the whole history of SALT (and indeed into some preSALT history), we find quite a rich range of meetings. Setting aside what may be called official-reports-on-all-current-funded projects meetings - for which there is an entirely proper annual or biennial place - we find there have been some more upstream (towards theory) meetings, more downstream ones, more speech-oriented ones, more language-oriented ones. All the meetings are open to anyone whether with S or L interests, and rightly so for good intellectual as well as political reasons. But naturally, if one wants meetings on specific themes, and this is a primary sort of workshop as one can't forever be having all-comer-topics mishmashes, then one has to look for what may be called S&L theme even-handedness as a property of SALT meetings ONLY over a period of time. Of course sometimes one has a specific 'lets find out what each other does' meeting, but meetings can't all be like that. Now if one looks back over SALT, I see the sort of even-handedness mentioned, and I see no reason whatever why SALT meetings cannot continue to have this property, and be encouraged to have it. (Whether S or L people actually attend meetings can have a similar local unevenness, but global evenness.)

Moreover, I see no reason whatever why SALT cannot wave a rather large umbrella over a range of meetings of different types including, for example, ones devoted (in the style of some other bodies) to doctoral students' work, and ones which are ad hoc initiatives by some particular concerned bunch of people, or which meet the kind of one-off 'new key topic we want to have a work in on' meetings of the kind defined by AAI Symposia rules, or meetings that are jointly put up with other bodies e.g. IoA, LAGB (that would do very well, for instance, for some of Nick Ostler's areas like UK minority languages).

A good strategy to manage this kind of

thing would be to have ground rules (of the kind ACL has for Workshops) so e.g. everything is publicly advertised, one doesn't just have ones own personal claue etc. etc. - the obvious kind of rules - but also to include in them two levels of 'SALTness' corresponding to the two levels of ACL endorsement. These are 'support' which combines formal sponsorship and financial assistance; and 'sponsorship' which covers only formal endorsement but carries no financial commitment. Of course the nature of the financing may be quite different - the important point here is that with formal sponsorship alone there is more flexibility for a range of meetings with different forms and targets in either theme or audience, and for joint meetings etc.

For the same reason, in relation to lobbying: we should take advantage of the fact that we have a larger community body - SALT - to do some of this for us (as it is currently with the Programme Working Group Document for EPSRC), where we gain both because it represents a bigger body count and those important areas of work that involve both SnL. At the same time there is nothing to stop any bunch of people who feel sufficiently steamed up to get together a 'blast', to which they may seek to give weight (independent of intrinsic content) either because it is clearly the product of a whole raft of weighty people (e.g. all the Professors in all the Universities), or because, while it has a more specific content - in the present case L without S - it is nevertheless endorsed by SALT as representing an important component constituency. I cannot see any reason why where there is a 'one-side' matter e.g. speech databases for S, a proposal to a funding agency for action on this might not be prepared by some SALT subgroup and also endorsed by IoA or vice versa, and similarly for some purely text-based concern, get SALT endorsement. Noting Nigel Birch's comment that it would be useful to have some Language representative body to consult, I still think it would be better to have this linked to SALT in some way than totally disjoint.

But really, the bottom line for everything I've mentioned, is that I think we can do better than many people feel we are currently doing in 'sustaining community' just by using some apparatus we've got, BUT this all relies on people actually picking up possibilities and running with them. My prime recommendation is only: try using the existing running track first, and don't rush prematurely off into the bush to hack your own path because you don't much like the look of the guy beside you on the track.

Yorick Wilks <yorick@dcs.shef.ac.uk>

A Grand Day Out

The IR Fest, held in Glasgow in September attracted a huge number of incredibly famous international IR researchers who got up to more than just research (did anyone actually do any research?). These photos were taken on our day trip to the Scottish island of Arran. Curiously enough, this particular picture appears to show someone punching Peter Ingwersen in the face whilst Ulrich Thiel looks on, not doing a thing about it.



If these photos have managed to print properly, which is extremely doubtful, you will see a group of four people here standing in the middle of nowhere looking completely shagged out. Arran is a very picturesque island containing a large pointy mountain called Goat Fell. Not deterred by this largeness and pointiness a number of the best IR brains attempted to show that they also had the best IR legs by climbing it. Not everyone was successful, including this bunch of no-hopers who went no further than where this picture was taken (somewhere near the bottom, but okay, it was a long walk in). To save embarrassment they won't be named, although two of them can be seen somewhere else on this page (one of them twice) and the other two are from Singapore.

I really hope this particular photo comes out well because it's very moody. The lone IR researcher walking home at the setting of the sun. You can almost feel the weariness in his legs, taste the pint of beer waiting for him, and even hear a dog barking in the distance. As it happens it was taken at the very start of the day so don't have any illusions. However, I expect that the combination of hours of digital processing in Photoshop, a 600dpi laserwriter, and whatever the BCS use to print the Informer (a cheap photocopier or one of those children's printing kits with the rubber stamps I think), will have rendered it as a large dark grey blob with a large white blob above it. This is of course done purposefully so that you will rush off to your Web browser and take a look at the stunning PDF version (see the article on page 3)



NIST releases public domain Z39.50 client/server and PRISE 1.0 search engine

The Written Natural Language Processing Group at NIST is making available a public domain package of source code and documentation (Z39.50/PRISE 1.0), which includes a basic Z39.50 UNIX client/server pair integrated with the prototype indexing and search engines (PRISE) developed by NIST.

The server is designed to isolate the search engine from the details of the Z39.50 protocol and to minimise the effort needed to interface the server to natural language search engines other than PRISE.

The NIST PRISE system treats documents and queries as lists of words and responds to a query with a list of documents ranked in order of their statistical similarity to the query. PRISE uses algorithms based on tf.idf weighting as discussed in Harman and Candela. 1989. "Retrieving Records from a Gigabyte of Text on a Mini-computer Using Statistical Ranking" in the Journal of the American Society for Information Science 41(8). pp. 581- 589.

The goals of the current work with Z39.50 include:

- To promote the availability of information retrieval services by publishing source code for a working Z39.50 client/server
- A set of building blocks to give commercial, academic, and government IR developers a head start
- To provide an enhanced, user-friendly version of our PRISE application within a Z39.50 interface

The client/server conforms to Z39.50 versions 1 to 3 (as of Final Text for Review) and supports Z39.50 document-level keyword, document-level phrase, document-level proximity, and field-level key-

word searches. The ZClient, has a graphical user interface with highlighting of query terms in document display. When used with ZServer/PRISE, it will present a list of matching query terms for each document displayed and highlight matching terms when displaying a full document. Dependencies are BSD 4.3 (aka SunOS 4.1.x), Tk 3.6 / Tcl 7.3 (available from NIST ftp site), sgmls parser (available from NIST ftp site), X11 R3 or later.

PRISE supports 3 varieties of search against whole documents and fields: keywords (stemmed, order-independent), phrase (not stemmed, order matters, whitespace/SGML-tags ignored), and proximity (not stemmed, order-independent, whitespace/SGML-tags ignored). PRISE interprets free-form natural language input as a series of keywords and builds a list of documents ranked in order of their relevance to the query. All field-level queries and document-level phrase and proximity queries are implemented by scanning these documents. PRISE indexes SGML-tagged text of TIPSTER-sized document collections (about a million).

Documentation is available from <http://potomac.ncsl.nist.gov/over/zp1/main.html>. Contact Paul Over (over@nist.gov) with copy to Willie Rogers (wrogers@nist.gov) for information on obtaining Z39.50/PRISE 1.0 by ftp.

European Governments Agree to Ban on Strong Encryption Products

The 34-nation Council of Europe has agreed to outlaw strong encryption products which do not make keys available to governments.

The policy was approved on the 8th September at Strasbourg by the Council, and coincides with an attempt by the European Commission to propose a pan-European encryption standard. The Council - unlike the Commission - has no statutory powers to enforce its recommendations. However, Peter Csonka, the chairman of the committee that drafted the document (and an administrative officer at the Council's division of crime problems) says that "it is rare for countries to reject Council of Europe recommendations".

The proposal would make telecomms operators responsible for decrypting traffic and supplying it to governments when asked. It would also "change national laws to enable judicial authorities to chase hackers across borders".

Opposition to this measure was expressed by Mike Strezbek, VP responsible for European telecomms at JPMorgan, who said that his organisation "will challenge any attempt to limit the power of our network encryption technologies very strongly".

Czonka said that the Council had given consideration to business interests but had tried to strike a balance between privacy and justice. However, "it remains possible that cryptography is available to the public which cannot be deciphered. This might lead to the conclusion to put restrictions on the possession, distribution, or use of cryptography".

Ross Anderson (comp.risks)

Oxford Text Archive

The Oxford Text Archive is a facility provided by Oxford University Computing Services. It has no connection with Oxford University Press or any other commercial organisation and exists to serve the interests of the academic community by providing low-cost archival and dissemination facilities for electronic texts.

The Archive offers scholars long term storage and maintenance of their electronic texts free of charge. Since 1976, it has managed non-commercial distribution of electronic texts and information about them on behalf of hundreds of users world-wide.

The Archive contains electronic versions of literary works by many major au-

thors in Greek, Latin, English and a dozen or more other languages. It contains collections and corpora of unpublished materials prepared by field workers in linguistics. It contains electronic versions of some standard reference works. It has copies of texts and corpora prepared by individual scholars and major research projects worldwide. The total size of the Archive exceeds a gigabyte and there are over 1500 titles in its catalogue.

The full catalogue is available in paper form by post (first copy free, £5 annual subscription), in electronic form in plain text, SGML or HTML. Note that this lists all the texts in the Archive. Not all the titles listed there are available over the Net. Some are available only to local (Oxford)

users; some require you to get permission from the Depositor first; some are readily available from other Web sites.

All texts which are publicly available from the Archive's FTP server are first converted to a standard format. This format conforms to the recommendations of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), and is therefore an application of ISO 8879, Standard Generalized Mark Up Language (SGML) (as is HTML).

Texts are currently available by anonymous FTP from <ftp://ota.ox.ac.uk/pub/ota/public>.

For more information go to:

<http://info.ox.ac.uk/~archive/ota.html>

Internet Newsbites

CompuServe shutdown worldwide access to 200 'pornographic' Usenet discussion groups

In early November 1995, Munich police notified the Bavarian State Attorney's office that CompuServe's German subsidiary offers access to child pornography to persons under 18. A search warrant was issued by the district court and attorneys and police experts visited CompuServe's office. According to the public prosecutor, CompuServe "were quite co-operative". Two days later, CompuServe's German managers published that they "will do anything to support the work of German authorities fighting against pornography in Cyberspace". On December 8th, CompuServe was handed a list of more than 200 Usenet newsgroups to which para. 184 of the German Penal Code, concerned with "pornographic writings", might apply. Para. 184 forbids distributing and giving access to pornographic writings to persons under 18 (sentence 1). In the attached letter from the prosecutor it was said "...it is left to CompuServe to take the necessary steps to avoid possible liabilities to punishment". It was explicitly made clear that CompuServe had the responsibility to analyse which of these fora really offended German law.

The opinion of police and prosecutors is that carriers of digital information could be held responsible for the content of what they are spreading. Up to now, there doesn't exist any law or direction in Germany concerning responsibilities of Internet Service Providers or other online services regarding the contents of what they deliver so judges decide from case to case. This same lack of clarity has also arisen in the USA in cases involving Prodigy and CompuServe. In one case, a moderated group was regarded as being sort of publisher with responsibility for the content, while in another case an unmoderated forum was regarded as being in a similar position to a book-seller, with no responsibility for the content traded.

The problems of applying existing laws is concerned both with the language in which they are drafted and in peculiarities of the formats and technologies used for storage and distribution. For example, it is not clear whether the term 'writing' (evidently meant by legislators as applying to

traditional paper-work) may apply to electronic documents, even in 'virtual form'. Current interpretation in Germany is that 'writing' applies to printouts and also stored files (as they may be printed). Evidently, this may not apply to pictures in RAM just displayed on a screen, as long they are not 'stored' or printed. This may also not apply even to disk cache as long as this is only accessible to the display system. On the other hand, if CompuServe stores such files locally (in Munich) on a mirror-site, and as CompuServe does not differentiate between users according to age (e.g., those under 18), para. 184 may indeed apply if CompuServe can be held responsible for the content of their files.

For more information on this case see SPIEGEL Online:

<<http://www.spiegel.de>>

Netscape security cracked again

An MIT undergraduate and part-time programmer used a single \$83,000 graphics computer from Integrated Computing Engines (ICE) to crack Netscape's export encryption code in less than eight days.

Twyman used the same brute-force algorithm as Damien Doligez, the French researcher who was one of the first to crack the original SSL Challenge. The challenge presented the encrypted data of a Netscape session, using the default exportable mode, 40-bit RC4 encryption. Doligez broke the code in eight days using 112 workstations.

"The U.S. government has drastically underestimated the pace of technology development," says Jonas Lee, ICE's general manager. "It doesn't take a hundred workstations more than a week to break the code - it takes one ICE graphics computer. This shuts the door on any argument against stronger export encryption".

Breaking the code relies more on raw computing power than hacking expertise. Twyman modified Doligez's algorithm to run on ICE's Desktop RealTime Engine (DRE). According to Twyman, the program tests each of the trillion 40-bit keys until it finds the correct one. Twyman's program averaged more than 830,000 keys per second, so it would take 15 days to test every key. The average time to find a key, however, was 7.7 days.

Persistent Uniform Resource Locators

The OCLC Office of Research and the OCLC Internet Cataloguing project have announced the introduction of Persistent Uniform Resource Locators (PURLs). A PURL is a URL, but instead of pointing directly to the location of an Internet resource, a PURL points to an intermediate resolution service. The resolution service associates the PURL with a specific URL and completes the appropriate network transfer. Technically, the PURL resolver does a standard http "redirect" and your Web browser completes the network transfer.

Sometimes URLs do not work because Internet resources move, change names or method of access, or other reasons. Once a URL fails, all instances of that URL (for example, links in a Web document or a bibliographic record) become invalid. A PURL is a "persistent" URL that uniquely points to a PURL resolver. The PURL resolver facilitates the creation, assignment, resolution, and modification of PURLs. The PURL resolver associates each PURL with one URL, and the maintenance component of the PURL resolver enables authorised users to modify the URL associated with a PURL. Thus, the URL can change but the PURL stays the same. A PURL can last longer than any particular URL that may be associated with it. PURLs persist, and all instances of the PURL (for example, links in a Web document or a bibliographic record) remain valid.

A PURL can be assigned once for any given resource/URL. A subsequent change in the associated URL, when recorded using the maintenance component of the PURL resolver, does not require a change to the PURL.

A URL associated with a PURL can be modified but PURLs cannot. Of course, someone has to operate the PURL resolver. The PURL resolver maintenance component is designed to facilitate the upkeep of PURLs. Only authorised users can modify the URL associated with a PURL. The PURL maintenance component allows users to designate authorised users.

The general availability of the OCLC PURL service, which will implement the creation, assignment, and maintenance of PURLs, is soon to be announced. It is anticipated that organisations other than OCLC will run PURL servers. Libraries, government organisations, and publishers are examples of organisations that may elect to become PURL resolvers, either using tools from OCLC or by developing their own.

Journals

IP&M Special Issue on Electronic News

Broadcast news is information about recent events of general interest as reported by newspapers, radio, and television. Electronic news, however, has the potential to be interactive and personalized. While editors and algorithms may define the core content of electronic news, new communication technologies will enable users to have access to supplemental material from enormous archives in digital libraries and to continual streams of newly created data. Electronic news promises to deliver to the reader an "edited" collage of recent events from wide domains in a manner that is both comprehensive and personalized.

The focus of this special issue will be on the research that is leading to the next generation of news systems, i.e., systems that draw current news stories from a wide variety of sources and media and integrate these stories into personalized multimedia "editions" of the news. These systems will be based on switched, high bandwidth, two-way communications networks.

Suggested topics within the context of electronic news may include but are not limited to the following:

Information filtering . Digital libraries .
Multimedia . Agents . Human-computer
interaction . Content analysis .
Hypermedia . Indexing . User modelling .
Categorization

Guest editors for this special issue are Michael Shepherd, Carolyn Watters, and Forbes J. Burkowski.

Authors should submit 3 copies of their manuscript, double spaced, following the style as described in the IP&M instructions to contributors to:

Professor Michael Shepherd
Department of Mathematics, Statistics &
Computing Science
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada B3H 3J5

Submission Date: March 15, 1996
Notification of Acceptance: June 15, 1996

New Journal - Journal of Information Law and Technology

The first issue of the Journal of Information Law and Technology is now online and can be accessed at <http://elj.warwick.ac.uk/elj/jilt/> or <http://jilt.law.strath.ac.uk/elj/jilt/>

This is intended to be a "living" journal which is not merely be text on screen but will include multimedia features and encourage lively debate among readers. The first issue includes refereed articles on the special feature on data protection and a number of other topics. It includes a first ever demonstration of WWW Hansard online outside the Houses of Parliament. As deliberate experiments in consultation, it includes the first draft report of the Second BILETA Inquiry into Information Technology in Legal Education as well as the Issues Consultation Papers of the Lord Woolf Inquiry into Access to Civil Justice.

The project is part of the Electronic Law Journals Project funded under the Electronic Libraries Programme and intends to develop a series of law journals under a single environment.

Academic Press launches on-line journal library

Academic Press is launching IDEAL (International Desk-top Electronic Access Library), a pilot project that will greatly expand the audience for its journal program. This three year pilot project uses the Internet to increase the accessibility to Academic Press journals by bringing those journals directly to the end users' digital desktops.

IDEAL will be launched in January 1996 with 184 Academic Press journals, adding more than 2,000 articles every month. IDEAL uses an efficient, no-non-

sense approach based on an open non-proprietary modular architecture, allowing Authorised Users at sites within the library networks of the pilot project to view, print, and download complete articles in Adobe's Acrobat format. Authorised users are faculty, staff and students within any licensed consortium of institutions taking part in the project. In addition, anyone with access to the Internet will be able to freely browse and search the IDEAL database of journal tables of contents with standard Web browsers, such as Netscape Navigator.

To create this IDEAL environment Academic Press has formed an alliance with Fujitsu/ICL, who have been chosen to develop, implement, and operate the service. Fujitsu/ICL will run mirrored sites in Europe and the U.S. (and later in Japan and elsewhere), providing high bandwidth, local access, and reliability. The service will use ICL's powerful new object-oriented database tool, which has allowed Academic Press to address the primary issues facing the publishing industry today — names, access control, unlicensed copying, rights management and charging.

John Davis, ICL's strategy director, says "Academic Press has shown great vision in IDEAL. They are the first major STM publisher to address the needs of their authors and readers by providing access to market leading journals direct to the desktop."

Pieter Bolman, the President of Academic Press replied..."With IDEAL we set out to change the nature of academic publishing by creating reliable and fast access to the latest research across the globe. We wanted a partner who understood our business and who we could trust to deliver and continually develop high quality services. The Fujitsu/ICL were the clear choice."

Academic Press, based in San Diego, California, and London, United Kingdom, is the scientific and technical publishing subsidiary of Harcourt Brace and Company, a leading international publisher.

For further information please contact Chris Gibson (0171) 267-4466 in London

Spring is here

This edition of the Informer was to be the Winter edition but it ran a bit late and while I was putting it together I couldn't help noticing that there were crocuses everywhere so I thought "why not make it the Spring edition instead". Must be love.

Mark Magennis (editor)

Conferences

To save space, none of the announcements reproduced here are the full versions. They have all been edited specifically for inclusion in *The Informer*. Although a certain amount of information (e.g. hotels, registration processes) has been left out, nothing has been added.

WVLC-4

4th Workshop on Very Large Corpora

August 4, 1996
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

(In conjunction with COLING 96. Tutorials: Aug. 2-3, Main conference: Aug. 5-9)

This workshop, like preceding ones in the series, will offer an international and general forum for the presentation of new advances and applications in the area of large scale, corpus-based natural language processing.

The fourth workshop will focus on the theme of innovative uses and applications of large corpora.

Large corpora, i.e. corpora ranging anywhere from 10^4 to 10^9 words, are coming into existence for several different languages, and techniques for analysing them are improving. How are these resources actually being used? The workshop encourages contributions that show innovative applications of corpus-based NLP to problems of practical industrial importance.

The theme will provide an organising structure to the workshop, and offer a focus for discussion and debate between researchers and industrialists. We also expect and will welcome a diverse set of submissions in all areas of statistical and corpus-based NLP, including but not limited to:

Robust parsing . Part of speech tagging . Term and name identification . Morphological analysis . Alignment of parallel texts and bilingual terminology . sense disambiguation . Anaphora resolution . Event categorisation . Discourse structure

Submission Deadline: April 10, 1996
Notification Date: May 10, 1996

Eva Ejerhed <WVLC-4@ling.umu.se>
Ido Dagan <dagan@bimacs.cs.biu.ac.il>
<http://www.ling.umu.se/SIGDAT/WVLC-4.html>

KR'96

Pre-Conference Workshop on Relevance in Knowledge Representation and Reasoning

3-4 November, 1996
Boston, Massachusetts

Essentially all reasoning systems use a corpus of information to reach appropriate conclusions. For example, deductive systems use initial theories (possibly encoded as predicate calculus statements) from which they draw conclusions, probabilistic systems use prior distributions (possibly encoded as a Bayesian network) to compute event probabilities, and abductive processes produce explanations based on both background theories and observations.

With too little information, these systems clearly cannot work correctly. Surprisingly, too much information is also problematic, as it too can cause significant degradation in system performance. It is therefore critical to determine what information is irrelevant, to know what can be ignored or downplayed when considering a specific task (e.g. a specific query, or distribution of queries, to the system, or a specific observation to be explained). In some cases, ignoring irrelevant information is needed in order to draw the correct conclusions.

There are many forms of irrelevance. In some contexts, the initial theory may include more information than the task requires, or information at a level of granularity that is more detailed than necessary. Here, the system may perform more effectively if it ignores or deletes certain irrelevant facts or if it ignores certain distinctions made in the representation. Another flavour of irrelevance arises during the course of reasoning: A reasoning process can ignore certain intermediate results, once it has established that they will not contribute to the eventual answer.

This workshop follows the very eclectic

1994 Relevance Symposium, which investigated the notion of relevance across various fields of Artificial Intelligence and Computer Science. The current workshop, however, will focus on the use of relevance in knowledge representation and reasoning, specifically, on understanding different forms of irrelevance, and exploiting this "relevance information" to improve the performance of reasoning systems. Submissions are requested in areas relating to relevance in KR&R, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Speeding up inference using relevance reasoning.
- Relevance in probabilistic reasoning.
- Relevance in explanation.
- Relationships between relevance and belief revision and updates.
- Relevance reasoning as a basis for abstraction and reformulation.
- Using relevance of information to enable drawing appropriate conclusions.
- Applications of relevance reasoning.
- Reasoning about relevance of information, and foundations of relevance reasoning.

Submissions due: July 8
Notification of acceptance August 16
Final version due September 17
Workshop dates November 3-4, 1996

The full CFP is available from:

<http://www.research.att.com/orgs/ssr/people/levy/rrr-cfp.html>

EP96

International Conference on Electronic Documents, Document Manipulation and Document Dissemination

Xerox Palo Alto Research Center
Palo Alto, California
September 24-26, 1996

This conference will be the sixth in a series of international conferences organized to promote the exchange of novel ideas in the area of computer manipulation of documents.

Authors are invited to submit papers describing original research results. Submissions will be refereed by the program committee. Accepted papers will be published, as in the last EP conference, as a special edition of *Electronic Publishing - Origination, Dissemination, Design*. These

proceedings will be available at the conference.

A day of tutorials is planned for September 23, 1996, the day before the EP conference.

The Workshop on Principles of Document Processing (PODP) will be held on September 23, 1996, also on the day before the EP conference. A separate call for papers is being sent out for this workshop. Visit the PODP Web page at <http://www.cs.umbc.edu/conferences/podp/> for further information.

Full paper received by: April 1

Notification: June 1

Final version received: July 1

Conference Secretariat:

EP96

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<http://www.xsoft.com/XSoft/ep96.html>

ELVIRA 96

3rd International Conference on Electronic Library & Visual Information Research

30 April - 2 May 1996

Milton Keynes

ELVIRA 96 will be the third in a series of highly successful international conferences on Electronic Library and Visual Information Research. Previously we have been delighted to welcome speakers from leading research institutions, the IT industry and publishing. Papers have covered a wide range of topics, including copyright, visual information retrieval, electronic journals, networking and end user issues. The breadth of research activity brought together at ELVIRA illustrates the importance of the electronic or virtual library to librarians, publishers and the academic and research community.

ELVIRA 96 will build on the themes established in the two previous conferences, covering both technical and socio-economic aspects of the electronic library,

as well as providing a forum for the discussion of new areas of development in this fast-changing field.

The conference will again bring together individuals from academia and industry who are involved in the research and development of electronic library theories and systems. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of electronic library development, researchers in other related areas will be invited to discuss their work in the context of the electronic library.

Krishna Patel

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Interactive Media Online

IMAS Spring Conference

Edinburgh International Conference Centre

Friday 15th March 1996

Supported by Scottish Enterprise

Interactive Media Alliance Scotland announces a major one-day conference on current developments and future potential in networked access to multimedia. The central theme is interactive media on-line: the tools, tradeoffs, techniques and temptations of generating, publishing, accessing and using multimedia over a network. Is CD-ROM "the Betamax of the 90s" as Nicholas Negroponte suggests in his recent book? Is broadcast-quality video achievable the Internet? What changes are necessary in designing material for the Web, as opposed to local delivery? What are the legal and copyright concerns, and how can authors' and producers' rights be protected? How will users of the future access and navigate through the vast information spaces which the network will deliver to their front room?

Speakers with wide experience in multimedia tools and technologies will present leading-edge developments, analyse trends, and assess the future. Ground-breaking Scottish initiatives will be described by Mike Spearman of the National Museums

of Scotland, and Norman Grozier of the Scottish Office. Speakers from Sun and Adobe will illustrate the perspectives and possibilities opened up by innovative software tools such as Java and Acrobat, and the potential of cable will be assessed by Philip John of Cable Online. Andreas Whittam Smith will reflect on the essential nature of multimedia, as well as on his move from editing a national daily to managing a start-up multimedia publishing company. Legal expert Chris Millard of Clifford Chance will chart a path through the copyright maze in multimedia publishing, and Jon Meyer from NYU Media Research Lab in New York will describe the powerful and innovative multimedia interaction techniques being pioneered at his unit, and assess the impact of current research by the end of the century. Morning and afternoon panel sessions will provide the opportunity for delegates to contribute to wide discussion of the issues and topics raised.

<http://www.imas.org/imas>

Diary

March 20-23

DL '96 - 1st ACM International conference on digital libraries

Bethesda, Maryland USA

<http://fox.cs.vt.edu/DL96/>

Linda Hill, registration chair, lhill@cesdis.gsfc.nasa.gov

March 24-26

DPC '96 - Digital image access and retrieval. The 33rd annual clinic on library applications of data processing: Digital image access and retrieval

Graduate School of Library and Information Science University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 501 E. Daniel Street Champaign, IL 61820-6211

April 2

Language Engineering for Document Analysis and Recognition, one-day workshop

University of Sussex, England

L.J. Evett, Tel: 0115 9486018, Fax: 0115 9486518, email: lje@doc.ntu.ac.uk

April 15-17

SDAIR '96

Debbie Wallace sdair@isri.unlv.edu

ftp site: <ftp://isri.unlv.edu> directory: [/pub/SDAIR96](ftp://pub/SDAIR96)

The Informer Interview

Once again, a member of the BCS IRG committee goes under the microscope and we are, as usual, horrified at what we find.

Jonathan Furner



What is your position in the BCS IRSG?

Principal Party-Pooping Penny-Pincher (Treasurer).

Quite. So what is your regular job?

Lecturer in Information Services at the School of Information and Media, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. Pretty regular, huh?

What projects or ideas are you currently working on or planning to work on in the future?

1. Winning the lottery, buying Norwich City Football Club, and through guile in the transfer market and extensive bribery of match officials sending them straight back to their rightful position at the summit of the Premiership
2. A book. Top secret stuff.
3. Writing hundreds and hundreds of lectures about online databases for undergraduate students of librarianship.

What other areas of IR are you interested in?

- I would describe my research interests as:
1. Cognitive approaches to the evaluation of IR systems.
 2. Graph-theoretic methods in the structural analysis of hypertext.
 3. IR on the Web.

These are the areas in which I've published stuff, anyway. But to be honest I haven't had much time for research since I left Peter Willett's group at Sheffield to take up my current post at RGU: first year of lecturing and all that. I hope to get a project off the ground 'real soon now', working with David Harper and David Hendry of the School of Computer and Mathematical Sciences here, carrying out some evaluative testing of the novel user interfaces they've implemented with their FireWorks architecture.

What areas outside of IR are you active or interested in?

Serious 'New Lad' culture, man. Footie, beers, bands, the lot. Also I proof-read for England.

What is the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you?

I could say the obvious thing here, which is 'Do you really think that if I was truly embarrassed about something I would choose to let the world know through your illustrious organ?' On the other hand, I could just admit that I shat meself in a restaurant once. You asked.

What was the greatest moment of your career (or what will it be when it finally happens)?

Hitting No. 1 stateside with my lovingly crafted fifteen-minute techno version of the Velvet's 'What Goes On'. Or writing that book, whichever comes first.

What are your main interests outside work?

Erm, haven't I done this one already? Oh I see, the last one was about non-IR stuff that's still work-related... OK, the answer to that one was: libraries. I teach people about libraries. You know, how to stamp books. Alphabetical order, that kind of thing.

What the hell do you committee members do at IRSG committee meetings?

We pass the port to the right. On a scale of 1 to 10, we're off the scale — at the wild end.

Predict the future of IR - what do you think will happen in the next 20 years?

Date: 2016

Scene: The drawing room at SIGIR HQ, Hillhead. Prof Sanderson draws thoughtfully on his pipe, whilst Profs Dunlop and Magennis enjoy a tightly contested game of backgammon.

SANDERSON: Say, hip dudes, do you remember that short geezer with glasses who never used to get his round in at IRSG colloquia?

DUNLOP/MAGENNIS (confused): Nope.

2017: Sanderson, Dunlop and Magennis launch MARK (Machine-based Assistant for Retrieving Knowledge), guaranteeing 100% recall and 100% precision for all searches. IR solved.

2099: DIALOG announce experimental MARK service. (But don't worry: the regular service still lets you use Boolean operators.)

What future directions can you imagine for the BCS IRSG?

Make some money, maybe? Just a thought.

What do you think is the most neglected area of IR?

The bit right in the middle, there look. Other than that, the area of my next research project.

How would you improve the BCS IRSG?

More exposure, more publicity, more members, more events, more parties, more letters to JASIS.

How would you improve the IRSG Informer?

I'd make sure I got sent it, for a start. And I'd make the questionnaire a lot longer. In fact, I'd make it compulsory for every member of the BCS IRSG to complete a six-page questionnaire on their hopes and dreams for the next millenium before they can receive any individual issue of the Informer.

Crack an IR-related joke

Q. What's the IR researcher's favourite flavour of crisp?

A. Salton vinegar.

Q. And their favourite band?

A. Sparcks.