

Catalogue & Index

Periodical of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Cataloguing & Indexing Group

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Editorial

Welcome to Issue 162 of Catalogue & Index.

With information services and professionals facing the constant threat of closures, budget cuts and job losses. C&I felt a good start to the year would be a celebration of the very honoured and respected talent of cataloguing!

A recent initiative began by two very motivated individuals is the high visibility cataloguing campaign. Venessa and Celine set up the *High Vis* project to recognise and promote the hard work all you metadata maniacs provide in means of bibliographic management and to give a voice to back room catalogue creationists. It's refreshing to read about how our traditional skills are valid and extremely important within the digital age.

The Chair of Cataloguing and Indexing, Stuart Hunt, wades in with a very thought provoking and impassioned shout out for metadata workers to get involved with CIG. Helen Garner discusses the great benefits of RFID in helping tidy up your collections and Jennie-Claire Perry talks about the skills of a peripatetic cataloguer and how life on the rota can glean useful skills and create wider professional networks.

Lynne Dyer expounds upon what a cataloguer is an expert on and how your skills with data can be useful in other roles within an information service. Esther promotes a new way of networking using social media sites and creating virtual professional contacts.

Sarah Maule gives an account of a new professional's experience into the heady world of cataloguing and Rachel Clare, gives the perfect example of our traditional skills being utilised by institutions for repository building and creation of metadata. We also have some words of interest from new professionals and information students rounding up this issue of C&I.

To conclude, this is my last issue as Editor of C&I. I'd like to introduce our new Editors, Cathy Broad and Heather Jardine who take over the reins from Issue 163. Give them a warm C&I welcome!

I've had an absolute blast reading all your intelligent and insightful articles, it's been a great experience...keep on truckin'!

Penny Robertson, Editor



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High Visibility Cataloguing: promoting cataloguers promoting themselves

Céline Carty, Venessa Harris & Anne Welsh (The High Visibility Cataloguing team)

[High Visibility Cataloguing](#) is a new initiative that aims to promote the role of records creation and management in all information sectors, with an emphasis on providing good news stories wherever possible. At her keynote speech at the CIG Conference last September, Bidy Fisher - then-President of CILIP - spoke about the role of cataloguers in the core of the library profession. She also made an impassioned plea that library advocacy should start with our families and the people around us: “tell them what you do”, she exhorted. Individual blog posts calling for examples of ways in which cataloguers have raised their profile^{1,2} eventually led to the creation of the High Visibility Cataloguing website as a central port of call for exploring positive methods of advocacy for cataloguing.

Our aim is to identify ways to make cataloguers and the work they do more visible to the rest of the profession and the wider world as well as demonstrating that the fundamental skills of cataloguing and indexing form the core of the profession, which remain crucial in the changing landscape of library and information work in the years to come.

In an article for the February 2011 issue of CILIP Update with Gazette, David Bennett stated that:

“The role of the cataloguer is becoming more visible as cataloguing services change to support evolving institutional objectives through the development of personalised teaching and research support services, digital collection promotion and institutional repository development”³

On an enquiry desk, a librarian can only help one person at a time, whereas each one of the catalogue records created during a cataloguer’s career helps library users and staff every time it is called up and “if that’s not return on investment, value for money and - buzziest of all buzz words - impact, I don’t know what is”⁴.

The examples in this article were collected from comments on the personal blogs as well as in response to a “High Visibility Cataloguing” post on the CIG Blog on December 7th 2010.⁵

Communicate, communicate, communicate

A common theme was the importance of communication with colleagues from other departments of the library. This communication works in both directions and cataloguers may need to create opportunities for this kind of interaction. Firstly, there were a number of people who mentioned holding some kind of “outreach” event – inviting people on tours of the department, holding cataloguing workshops for non-cataloguing staff, even offering cataloguing training for staff who would be able to gain new skills while helping with a cataloguing backlog for example. Lynne Dyer of De Montfort University held “open days” which showed library staff the entire process, from ordering, receipt, invoice payment, cat & class, local input, processing to the shelf. She states that this helped dispel the myth that “[they] just walked into [their] local bookshop, bought the book and then left it to fester in the “backlog” for months”! Even a more general workshop on cataloguing processes and how data quality can affect users’ ability to find what they are looking for could help to demonstrate the important role played by cataloguing. All of these initiatives can help cataloguers but also serve to forge valuable relations with staff from other departments.

If something on this scale seems like a lot of effort to a smaller cataloguing department, then maybe some other kind of communication might work. Julie C. Swierczek, a solo cataloguer at McKillop Library, Salve Regina University, Rhode Island, wanted to find a way to “get out of the backroom” and so she set up a blog⁶. She blogs about new acquisitions she is cataloguing, gives tips on searching the catalogue as well as awarding her “Cataloguer’s stamp of approval” to certain items. She readily admits her readership is not huge (3,000 hits in the year since she started, mostly from local colleagues) but she regularly gets positive feedback, especially when

she posts more of an opinion piece. It is just another way of being noticed and making sure that her colleagues gain some appreciation of what she contributes to the library.

The “embedded cataloguer”

As well as inviting staff in to see more of the work of the cataloguing department, some cataloguers reported actively looking for opportunities to collaborate with staff, listen to their needs and trying to solicit specific feedback. Gina Solares of the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California feels this helps to demonstrate that she is approachable and, crucially, that she is there to support the work of her public service colleagues. Some respondents described this as becoming an “embedded cataloguer”, shadowing staff in their everyday work to better understand their needs, intervening with system librarians to change OPAC display if it will help guide people to the most useful search tabs. Working on the systems side is a great way to bring the value of cataloguing to the fore: Esther Arens (Leeds Library & Information Service) states that working on data conversion and design for a new OPAC helped her convey to colleagues in IT the need for good quality data in the catalogue in order to make use of all the new features of the OPAC.

“Jill” describes herself as working in a “medium-large” public library service. She instigated annual visits by cataloguers to every branch in order to let branch staff know who the cataloguers were, what they did and how they could help staff in their everyday work. They also took a simple survey of staff’s awareness of cataloguing policies, what they liked/disliked as well as any requests for change. As a result of the survey, some changes were made to cataloguing policy and then the cataloguers were able to follow up on this the following year. All good communication, plus some great PR (asking for suggestions and acting on them) which helped make other staff more comfortable asking questions when they found a problem regarding the catalogue. An added bonus was that it helped to demonstrate the value of having an in-house cataloguing department.

All this communicating with colleagues requires an “open door” policy and a quick response to requests or questions from other staff, which does sometimes require more investment of time in explaining cataloguing policy or helping non-cataloguers understand why some things cannot be changed. Hopefully, though, this extra time is well-invested if it leads to better relations with colleagues from other departments as well as a deeper realisation of the value of the catalogue and of cataloguers.

Getting involved in library-wide projects

Cataloguers also have a valuable role to play in library-wide projects. Lynne Dyer mentions that the institutional repository pilot scheme at De Montfort University was run by the cataloguing team, with metadata entered by cataloguers. At Warwick University, Christina Claridge described a great initiative where cataloguers were involved in the student orientation programme. They created a bespoke record which could demonstrate multiple locations and loan types as well as highlighting the extra functionalities of the catalogue (such as book cover display and citation information). They chose a work with a misleading title to show that the title is not the only relevant or useful information in a catalogue record. The cataloguers’ involvement extended to training other staff, an opportunity for a more informal conversation that allowed staff to ask questions about the catalogue. Non-cataloguers commented that it was a good opportunity to hear about the catalogue from a different point of view and the whole project obviously raised the profile of cataloguing team library-wide with staff as well as students.

Beyond the library walls

There are also opportunities for cataloguers to move beyond the walls of their own library and talk about their skills and contribution more widely. Esther Arens wrote a post for the Voices for the Library website⁷, a library advocacy group, discussing the need for cataloguers and the importance of their work.

Gary Green (Surrey County Council Library Services) speaks regularly at “Mashed Library”⁸ events. These are informal “unconference” style meetings around the UK which “bring together interested people and doing interesting stuff with libraries and technology”. Mashed Library events provide a forum for people who work in libraries and with library data but who are not necessarily cataloguers. Gary created the Surrey Fiction Book Map⁹ from catalogue data, with the aim of promoting library stock. He argues that as a cataloguer, he knows “the intimate details of data in the catalogue records, how the data is structured, how I can pull out that data and make the best use of it outside the catalogue to pull people back into the catalogue”. The kind of mash-ups that Gary has created along with current discussions about linked data and open access are all examples of areas where cataloguers can make a huge contribution, indeed many already are. However, it is perhaps worth highlighting more emphatically how much these new ideas about the future direction of library data have in common with the core fundamentals of cataloguing work.

A high visibility future?

At a time when “doing more with less” seems to be the mantra, it can be hard enough to keep up with the essentials of our daily work without taking on any more. We hope that among the great examples shared by cataloguers offer practical and feasible suggestions for promoting cataloguing and the value of cataloguers, however short of time we all are.

The High Visibility Cataloguing website was intended to provide as a single place to share the kind of examples given above (and in the rest of this issue of C&I). We are delighted that so far we have had an international response and hope to keep sharing ways in which we can demonstrate the value of our work and promote our contribution as cataloguers to our colleagues outside the cataloguing “echo chamber”. Our aim is to promote debate within the cataloguing world but also to reach out and promote cataloguing to librarians who do not work in that field. We believe that making cataloguers more visible is also an important step towards making their contributions more valued. Please do come and visit the website and share your ideas or examples of cataloguing promotion.

References

- 1 Venessa’s blog post <http://bit.ly/scarletlibrarian>
- 2 Céline’s blog post <http://bit.ly/thingblogging>
- 3 CILIP Update with Gazette, Feb. 2011, p. 23
- 4 Comment on <http://bit.ly/thingblogging>
- 5 <http://bit.ly/cigpost>
- 6 <http://mckillopcataloger.wordpress.com/about/>
- 7 <http://www.voicesforthelibrary.org.uk/wordpress/?p=438>
- 8 <http://www.mashedlibrary.com/>
- 9 <http://bit.ly/surreybookmap>

Sometimes I get the impression that people think cataloguing is all about 5 x 3 cards and having no personality. And that is just within the profession. Lord knows what the non-library world thinks we do. We, in CIG, all know that things do not stand still and that our working lives have changed considerably since we first started working in libraries. This is not confined to the more mature amongst us, but is a fact of working life for us all, from newcomers to old stagers alike.

What is it about our work that makes us, to a large extent, invisible? Why do we get the impression that, in many cases, our work is not valued? Is it because we have, for the most part, been confined to the backrooms and basements, of our libraries? Is it because we practice arcane arts that only the initiated can comprehend? I don't think so. Perhaps we haven't always been vocal enough. Self-promotion and cataloguing are two concepts that don't always go together. But that is where CIG comes in.

In CIG we believe passionately in what we do. We know and understand the value of knowledge organisation. CIG has always promoted and propagated good practice in cataloguing, classification, and all the areas our members are working in. When I look at the type of work our members are doing I see a great variety. Some are working in rare books cataloguing, some never go near a print resource, working entirely with electronic media. Some are taxonomists, some information architects, some are working on institutional repositories. The list is seemingly endless. But there is always a common ground: The skills and expertise of our profession. And these skills are just as essential today as they have always been, perhaps more so.

As a manager and recruiter of staff I am constantly amazed at the variety of skills and experience that candidates bring to their job applications. And this is just as much true of the applicant seeking their first professional post as it is for the more seasoned applicant. I can always see where our skills are needed. Web-site design? You need someone who understands how information is organised and described. Implementing a next-generation catalogue? You would be foolish not to speak to the people who best understand your data: your cataloguers. Implementing a digital preservation strategy? You need someone with metadata skills. So why isn't this always happening? Why is it sometimes under duress that we are involved in projects such as these?

Libraries, and library managers, are often looking for the silver bullet or the panacea that will cure all ills. Such is the case, for example, with shelf-ready materials. Whilst these undoubtedly improve our efficiency and help us better meet customer demands, it is often seen as an excuse to do away with the cataloguer. My suggestion to managers who think like this is to point out what this freeing-up of highly skilled staff can bring to a library. By releasing the cataloguer from the low-hanging fruit, their talents can be deployed on those projects and areas where they are needed. That tantalising juicy fruit just out of your grasp can be reached if you employ the right staff to do so.

It is very tempting, in our technology rich culture, to imagine that we can do away with people. Technology has the ability to free us from drone work. But technology is our tool, we can pick it up and employ it to best serve the needs that we identify. Even within the metadata world we, too often, focus on the technical standards that enable interoperability between diverse platforms and services, without thinking about the content standards themselves. If we can share data and metadata but the content of that metadata is inconsistent, how does that benefit the user experience? This is a perennial problem. As we make more commercially-derived metadata direct available to our users along side our own local metadata, what kind of user experience are we providing? All too often I think the answer to that is 'inconsistent'. I challenge any

library running a vertical search discovery platform to show me a truly harmonised and controlled index. It isn't done. But it can be done. If the commercial providers of the metadata we purchase or license also employed the skills of the cataloguer. So our skills are needed 'out there' as well as 'in here'.

And that brings me back to CIG. CIG exists as a forum, or network of, like-minded souls who have the same concerns but may not always speak the same language. We know and understand the value of the work we do. We also know and value the knowledge and experience of our colleagues who can help and advise us when we reach out into new territories. CIG as an organisation is cross-sectoral. We have members working in every sphere of library and information work. Recognising the common threads that run through all our work enables us to think both analytically, breaking down a problem, and synthetically, spotting patterns and similarities in what we do.

We need to make ourselves more visible. We need to be our own champions, because no one else will be. For this reason CIG is happy to put itself behind such initiatives as the 'high visibility cataloguers'. Telling ourselves and others about what we do gives us new insights and arguments for why we should be involved in areas that employers might not immediately see. It shows the variety of environments we can and do work in. It also shows the skills that libraries would be foolish to jettison. To get rid of a cataloguer (or whatever title you give to the role) is truly to throw the baby out with the bathwater. So, employers, this is CIG speaking: value your cataloguers. You don't know just how good they are and how valuable their work is. And, cataloguers, don't be afraid to move into new grounds, trying out new things, learning new skills. Your knowledge organisation hinterland is a key asset to you and your libraries.

CIG Visit to

Anthropology Library, British Museum

5th May 2011

Issue 163 of C&I

The main theme is RDA

To submit articles or enquire about the visit get in contact with the CIG(S) committee.

A misshelved book is a lost book: using RFID to improve the student experience

Helen Garner, Sheffield Hallam University

At Sheffield Hallam the annual student survey usually contains comments about material being difficult to find on the shelves. Users also ask about material they can't find at the help desk and are advised to fill in a "missing item" form which results in a manual check of the shelves. Some items still cannot be found, and are made "missing" on the library catalogue. Errors between the spine and location labelling and the item display in the catalogue were thought to be one possible cause. Any book that isn't where the catalogue says it should be is effectively lost, so having introduced RFID tagging to the book stock in 2009, we wanted to use RFID technology to perform shelf-quality checks. In fact, this was a strategic priority of the Learning and Information Services annual plan. Funding was obtained for a temporary 18.5 Information Assistant post to work in the cataloguing team so we could systematically check the shelves. This project initially ran from November 2009 to July 2010 and continued April to July 2011 to complete the project.

The work involved using the Millennium create lists function to produce text files of book stock with a specific Dewey range which could be checked against the shelves. A second text file list was produced each time to perform background checks for exceptions e.g. missing items, billed items, in transit, claims returned etc. Each list would contain around 10,000 records as this would generate about the right amount of work for an 18.5 hour post. In terms of workflow, it was really important that we liaised closely with the shelving team as they needed to get the section to be scanned into near perfect order. If we asked for too large an area to be tidied, the students would have messed things up before the scanning was complete! The text files produced were transferred into the 3M Digital Data Manager program and exported into a memory card, which was slotted into the Digital Library Assistant device (the scanning tool). When exporting files into the 3M software, a number of records would be rejected due to data errors e.g. it would reject invalid barcode numbers, barcodes with a lowercase x and could not sort correctly if there was a space before the Dewey number. I was able to tidy up some issues using a Global edit tool but some records needed to be dealt with off-line and removed from the list. These errors needed to be resolved otherwise the scanning process would not work correctly. It also highlighted the need for staff to take extra care when adding or amending certain data.

The checking process involved carefully wandling the DLA device across each shelf and then reviewing the results on screen. The errors would mostly show as "not on database" as they did not belong in that sequence of stock and would not be in the search file. This would happen when the spine labelling and shelf -mark number didn't agree, if the book belonged to the other site library, when the book no longer had a catalogue or item record and number of other data issues. It would also happen if the RFID tag hadn't been correctly programmed. All of these issues could generate problems for our users in terms of locating material or issuing material.

From November 2009 to July 2010 we were able to check 221,000 items of stock. The number of errors was not particularly high (an average of 3%), although certain areas of stock were worse than others. Older material, infrequently borrowed material, sections which may have been reclassified or transferred from a different location all cropped up as problem areas. Often the spine label and shelf mark data did not agree and so the book needed to be checked and amended, with only complex queries going to the cataloguers. It was interesting to see just how many books we discovered that were no longer on the catalogue but were occupying valuable shelf space. This was an unintended but useful output of the project.

Background

The University of the Arts London is Europe's largest specialist provider of arts education. Consisting of six colleges, the University currently offers seven main library spaces (shortly to become six with the move of Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design to a new campus at Kings Cross), an archive and special collections centre, and the Learning Zone - a flexible work and study space carrying only core texts and providing access to computing and software facilities to students from all colleges. Registered library users can visit any of the sites to use the collections and to borrow items, which can then be returned at any University library.

The move to peripatetic cataloguing

With such a wide variety of spaces spread across the capital, the provision of consistent library and information services presents a clear challenge. Following a restructure of Library and Learning Resources in 2007, the decision was made to centralise the management of cataloguing and classification in the new Resources & Systems team, based at the London College of Communication but providing bibliographic services and electronic resources to all the colleges. Prior to this, cataloguing and classification had been carried out in the individual colleges using a wide variety of standards and classification schemes and it was anticipated that the new workflow would encourage de-duplication of tasks and allow college-based staff to concentrate on service delivery. Two trained staff members from the Resources & Systems team currently work as peripatetic cataloguers, moving between the sites according to a rota based on cataloguing volumes, adding stock to the library management system using cataloguing procedures agreed by cross-college consultation alongside local classification schemes. The cataloguing rota is managed by the Senior Cataloguer who is based in the Resources & Systems office.

The benefits of peripatetic cataloguing

As a peripatetic cataloguer at the University of the Arts London I have had the opportunity to work at five of the six colleges and have experienced both the benefits and the drawbacks of this method of working. The main benefit of peripatetic working is an increase in the profile of cataloguers within the department. Rather than being hidden in a back office, the current rota system enables cataloguers to work more closely with academic liaison staff in the various college libraries, becoming part of the library teams as well as being part of the central Resources & Systems team. College library staff at all levels are now not only more aware of the cataloguing process but also know who they can contact if they have a cataloguing issue to resolve or need expert advice on a metadata question. In single-site libraries this may not necessarily be an issue but when trying to co-ordinate practice across multiple sites, it can certainly be a problem knowing exactly who to approach, especially for non-management level staff who currently have limited contact with their colleagues working in the other library spaces.

The enhanced profile that cataloguing staff have enjoyed through peripatetic working has also brought with it opportunities for the cataloguers to participate in cross-college projects, including the current project to select a resource discovery platform, with the non-peripatetic members of the Resources & Systems team drawing on the cataloguers' more in-depth knowledge of the individual needs of each college library. Cataloguing staff have been invited to participate in college library team meetings and team building days, something that would not have happened had the cataloguers not been a physical presence in the site libraries. The forging of professional relationships across all grades of staff has brought undoubted benefits outside the acquisitions and metadata workflow too. Last year cataloguing staff realised a need for a peer support system for new professionals within the University libraries and, with the help of the librarian at the London College of Fashion, began a Chartership support group, bringing together staff from all sites to support each other through the Chartership process. Last but not least of course, one of the main benefits for the peripatetic workers is that they get to eat seven times as much cake as the office-based staff!

The future at UAL

A recent review of technical services at the University recommended further streamlining of our acquisitions and cataloguing processes, with the peripatetic cataloguing rota coming to an end this summer. This will certainly help move us closer to achieving consistent cataloguing practice, enabling the two cataloguers to liaise with each other and with their line manager about procedure more easily. This workflow change has also prompted much-needed discussions across the service about potential standardisation of processing levels, classification and acquisitions procedure, all of which have the potential to save time and money before the stock reaches the shelves and will also help to give students across all the colleges parity of experience in the library. In addition, time will be saved by not needing to manage a complicated rota system for the peripatetic staff. This is currently a major part of the Senior Cataloguer's role as all time taken by staff training, sickness and annual leave needs to be balanced out across the colleges.

By increasing the visibility of cataloguers through peripatetic working, relationships have been forged that will prove valuable in ensuring that the new centralised acquisitions and metadata workflows meet the needs and expectations of the academic liaison library staff in the University's colleges. Keeping these relationships up will be an important part of making sure that college staff do not feel excluded from the new processes and that they feel able to raise any issues and ideas with the staff in the Resources & Systems team. On a personal level, whilst being peripatetic has been a physically tiring and sometimes complicated experience, I will definitely miss the close working relationships I currently have with my college colleagues. Oh, and obviously I'll miss the extra cake too!

I recently posted an article on [my blog](#)¹ (2011) about possible future roles for cataloguers, ideas that were based on current practice of which I was aware, and on the development of these ideas and expansion into a more technical role. At the time I was writing this piece I did wonder to myself “Why am I writing this? I already do some of these things I’m mentioning, so what’s new about it?” Nevertheless, I did feel there were enough less-well documented ideas to justify the post, so I went ahead with posting it anyway. Now I’m glad I did, as recent conversations have reminded me that not all cataloguers do the same things!

The role of the cataloguer can be quite diverse, and cataloguers can now find themselves engaging with IT in ways that they would previously never have thought possible. I’m sure some of this forward-looking, technology-embracing attitude has come from the CILIP Cataloguing & Indexing Group session on “[Blogging from the backroom](#)”² held in June 2007 (2007). This has encouraged us to get out there and promote cataloguers and cataloguing, and appears to be working, as there is so much blogging about cataloguing appearing on the web that there is now a need for an [aggregator blog](#)³ (2011)

The subject of cataloguers becoming more technical and engaging in the use of web 2.0 services is well-documented elsewhere, so let’s go back to basics and consider one area of library work where the role of the cataloguer can be very different across libraries and institutions: readers’ advisory work. Coming under a variety of guises – readers’ advisory work, enquiry desk work, front-line support, front-facing duties, reference work etc. – such support of users can be carried out by a variety of staff, but it’s only recently that I have come to realise that cataloguers are not always included in this group.

The reasons for not involving cataloguers in this kind of work remain somewhat of a mystery to me, especially since anecdotal evidence would suggest that cataloguers have probably had more information retrieval and other library-related training during their university courses than they have had cataloguing training! I imagine the reluctance to call on this talented group of people is to do with the type of library involved, maybe the physical location of cataloguers who may well be situated at some distance from the library users (ranging from being in a different, but nearby building to being located several miles away), or the type of library service offered, and ways of working that are based on custom and practice.

On the other hand, perhaps the fault is of our own making. Maybe we should stop thinking of ourselves as “backroom bods” - after all, don’t most librarians, whatever their specific role, have some kind of office they retreat to, to undertake all those other duties assigned to them? In a lot of cases, probably yes. So, aren’t those offices backrooms too? Yes! So aren’t we all “backroom bods” when we’re not dealing face-to-face with library users? Yes! And, don’t we all have skills in a specific area of librarianship that complement our reference enquiry skills? Yes! And don’t cataloguers have something very special to offer a readers’ advisory service? Yes!

So what are those special things we have to offer? A myriad of skills, and much knowledge that is potentially useful in a readers’ advisory role, some of which are listed below:

- You have an intimate knowledge of what new items have been added to stock, and quite probably what’s been recently ordered, invaluable when dealing with users requesting items on specific topics.
- You have an intimate knowledge of how to find items on the library catalogue, after all, you put them there, and if you’ve done your job well (which, given that you are a perfectionist, pay great attention to detail, and have well-honed analytical skills, you will have done) then you are best placed to retrieve the item that satisfies the user.
- Are you not intimately acquainted with your classification schedules? When a user is looking for items on a particular topic the exact number just rolls off your tongue, doesn’t it? And, heaven forbid that the online

catalogue should ever go down, but you don't need it anyway because you know where everything is!

- Given your propensity to perfection, will you not deal with each enquiry in detail until all avenues are exhausted and either the library user satisfied, or at the very least referred on to a specialist subject librarian?
- You have a hand in the creation of the library guides on how to use the library catalogue and how to interpret the classification scheme so that items are easily found (you do, don't you?) so you are able to help users at the level at which they need your expertise.
- You're involved in training library staff who are likely to be helping users find material, so you can easily adapt this training to helping users directly.

The list of your attributes goes on and on ... These are just some of the qualities, knowledge and skills that are valuable in dealing with enquiries from users, some of whom just need basic support, others of whom need in-depth help.

So why aren't you on the rota for readers' advisory work?

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Insights by reading and outlooks by tweeting – #catbkchat, a Twitter book club for cataloguers

Esther Arens, Leeds Library and Information Service

In case you are not on Twitter or do not follow other librarians or cataloguers, there are quite a few of us on there. And the latest thing cataloguers have been up to is a Twitter book club. Starting off with a few mentions of a newly published book about cataloguers (Elaine R. Sanchez "[Conversations with catalogers in the 21st century](#)"), now often abbreviated to CC21C) Céline Carty (@cjclib) suggested to have a hashtag and set a date when we would be discussing it. We went for [#catbkchat](#), agreed to divide the book into its sections, and from Section 3 on we used [Doodle](#) to find suitable dates. Sounds simple, is simple. And I suppose, it is pretty much like a 'real' book club.

So what's difference? Well, obviously you can take part wherever you are and whenever suits you. Participants from the UK/Europe usually started off at 10am and US would join in the afternoon and evening. Although I have to admit (shame on me!) that I have never joined a 'real' book club, I suppose the other biggest difference is that you do not have to wait your turn: If you want an aspect discussed just throw a tweet in. It will be picked up and referred to if others feel strongly enough about it too. This has of course lead to tweets crossing over, aggravated by the slight delay between reading something, thinking of what and how to comment (in 140 characters!), typing, submitting it and then waiting for it to appear. But so far, I was still able to follow the threads (helped by [Twitterfall](#), [TweetGrid](#) or [TweetChat](#) which gives only tweets with a chosen hashtag).

There are other Twitter chats (another library-related one is [#libchat](#)) but they seem to be moderated which would spoil it for me. The very basic democratic manner of [#catbkchat](#) keeps it low-key, so I can dare to give my opinion, ask 'stupid' questions, disagree with others (who might be far more knowledgeable, experienced, superior in the profession), and change my mind after someone made a good point. And so far there has been no inappropriate, let alone offensive, contribution. It is all in good, totally non-competitive spirit.

One question I have been asking myself along the way: Can you have a meaningful discussion of professional matters in 140 characters? Of course, restricting yourself to 140 characters is sometimes not easy but – on the receiving end - I find it rather easy to read. Also, it is probably a good exercise to try to be concise, and if you really must you can always continue a statement over two tweets. (As an opposing example: I stumbled across one of the Talk Group Read over at [LibraryThing](#) and got impatient with the 3rd post already because it was rather long - and off I went. Although, to be honest, I wasn't that interested in the topic either.) – So, yes I think this format is suitable for a thought-provoking exchange of ideas and opinions; in-depth solutions to a particular problem would probably not be best served by a Twitter book club.

Perhaps this has worked so well because the chosen book is rather like what [#catbkchat](#) does: a chat about all things cataloguing. Some twitterati commented that CC21C "seems like a rehash of the last 5 years of AUTOCAT in book form" but judging from the tweets the issues discussed are still not solved and still worth talking about.

Although there is another [#catbkchat](#) about CC21C to come (Section 4 and the Afterword, date on [Doodle](#)) I can already say that I have gained many new insights – by reading this book and by tweeting about it. Perhaps most importantly this Twitter book club made me read properly, not just articles and blogs on the go but a whole book with pen and paper at the ready. Doing professional reading on my own I sometimes find myself agreeing with what the authors say because many of them make a good case for their argument and I just assume that by being published they must be wiser. Bouncing of ideas, however vague, has broadened my perspective, has helped me understand things, has widened my horizon – all this without even leaving my desk, i.e. without any expenses other than my time... ever so important nowadays.

Apart from these benefits to me personally, there are more things that have come out of this, e.g. a [wiki](#) about what skills cataloguers want/need to know in information technology – an aspect of the future of cataloguing that was frequently referred to in [#catbkchat](#). Other 'conversational spaces' for cataloguers which seem to have sprung up at the same time are described at [Céline's blog](#). No one knows yet where these conversations will lead or whether there will be any concrete results but I think they are very worthwhile having. **Come and join in!**

Cataloguing – a view from a new professional

Sarah Maule, University College London student

Embarrassingly, I came away from my first experience in cataloguing thinking “I don’t understand and I never will”. Thankfully, I feel rather different today and, fortunately, I know I am not alone in this feeling. Back in 2007, when I first volunteered in the cataloguing department at my university library (Adsetts Centre, Sheffield Hallam University) my initial impressions were that cataloguing is a challenge and one I wouldn’t ever feel accomplished in. Yet with time, perseverance and guidance I actually enjoy the cataloguing processes and benefit from the experience of picking up a tricky book.

Prior to starting my work in the university library I didn’t give two seconds’ thought to where the information I needed actually came from. I, like many other library users (I assume), did not acknowledge that someone was responsible for all the useful information held on the library computer telling me what I needed to know. This may have been due to a lack of understanding of what it must have been like to use a card catalogue knowing somebody had to produce each card, or the sheer availability of online information in the current age, which makes it easy for people to take for granted the fact that somebody somewhere has put it there.

This all changed when I started to work with a mentor in the library, who organised a rotation within library departments to offer me an insight into how a library works. The cataloguing department went out of their way to introduce me to the fundamentals of a catalogue, how they do what they do, and more importantly, why. It was at this point I started to take a great deal of notice of the catalogue.

I can safely say I had never gained any pleasure from work that required following rules repeatedly, yet I found cataloguing was different: there wasn’t just one set of rules but a variety, each made to apply differently to many items. In addition to this, the process required me to draw on this knowledge and make informed decisions. When I spoke to people about my work in the department, I felt the need to expand on what they thought of as ‘just cataloguing’ and explain the intricacies of the work and how important the role of the cataloguer is. Personally, it was a surprise that the work I have been involved in was motivating and enjoyable as I had never really experienced people talk of cataloguing in this way. Instead, colleagues eagerly spoke about digitisation projects and emerging new technologies, and traditional cataloguing wasn’t portrayed to me as important as other areas of librarianship.

I have found through working in cataloguing departments and seeing cataloguers communicate via blogs, twitter and forums, that it is a profession to be passionate about. The next step is to show others how important the profession is. I have had my eyes opened to the importance of communicating consistent practical information to a library user because without it they would be lost. I am sure the absence of information would cause library users to think about who is responsible for the information they need.

The cataloguing experience I have gained, making part of the Corvey Collection available for online use and retrospective cataloguing at The London Library, has opened up a range of opportunities. Being involved in both traditional cataloguing and a digitisation project has given me experience of a variety of roles and although quite different, both of these projects are vital to their respective libraries. I have found that applying a fresh set of eyes to cataloguing has led to lively discussions in the workplace over standards and practices.

I have felt overshadowed at times by the sheer amount of new professionals in the same position as me who want to gain experience in libraries. Fortunately, the encouragement I received at the Adsetts Centre to persevere with cataloguing meant my cataloguing experience has proved useful and I now possess a transferable skill. The enthusiasm I have been met with within the field has suggested to me that cataloguing isn’t promoted enough within the profession, especially to new professionals. I feel cataloguing needs to be portrayed as something to embrace, not something to be scared of. Within my MA I encouraged fellow students to start looking at OPAC records in MARC format to help them understand how the theory works in practice and gain confidence in an area that they initially found intimidating. Promoting cataloguing to new professionals has sometimes fallen on deaf ears but a small number now see it as a possible career path. Highlighting the current issues and advances in the field is crucial to those within the profession, and also those outside who believe cataloguing to be outdated and a possible area for out-sourcing.

Ensuring our professionalism is necessary in years to come: the transfer of traditional skills to other domains

Rachel Care, Metadata Librarian, University of Warwick

If we want our cataloguing skills to remain vital in the digital age, we need to be able to adapt them as the opportunity arises. One way of doing this is to apply our traditional skills to taming the information overload on the World Wide Web. My new role at the University of Warwick allows me to do just that.

I used to be a traditional cataloguer: I was trained in AACR2 and MARC21 in Oxford, and retrospectively catalogued a collection of 19th and early 20th century books stored in an Oxford College's 'Tunnel'. When I came to look for a new job, I expected I would continue to use these traditional skills in a traditional domain. However, I was excited to discover the opportunity to apply my skills to cataloguing not physical books, but electronic PhD theses and journal articles. In my role as Metadata Librarian, I am in charge of creating metadata for each deposit in Warwick's institutional repository, WRAP – aiding accessibility to Warwick's cutting edge research. This fusion of traditional cataloguing skills with modern metadata standards means that I am continuing the cataloguer's central role of producing quality metadata to aid accessibility of resources, but applying it to the very modern context of electronic, on-line materials.

At Warwick we are insistent that our repository should conform to the highest standards in order to enable researchers to easily locate relevant resources. Using the ePrints software, we aim to be as FRBR compliant as possible, and we stick strictly to AACR2 where relevant. All author names are either established Library of Congress authority headings, or conform to these standards, and all entries are given Library of Congress subject headings.

This quality metadata is then being used to shout out to the whole world about the research Warwick academics are performing: the repository is indexed by Google, and new additions are announced both on an RSS feed and Twitter. As my traditional cataloguing skills marry with the Web 2.0 world, I believe I'm doing all I can to keep my skills vital to the modern day researcher.

Decades of PhD theses, whose one hard copy had previously languished in a strong room at the University, are now freely available to the public. And yes, these digital copies could be hosted on-line without my metadata, but its inclusion vastly improves access. For example, search for the Library of Congress classification heading 'speculative philosophy' in EThOS, a service which contains records for all PhD theses in the country, and you will find a list of predominantly Warwick theses. They show up in the search because EThOS has harvested our metadata, and this contains one or more Library of Congress subject divisions.

For me personally, this switch of domain has meant that my skills have adapted and strengthened in different areas of cataloguing. The most obvious of these is my increasing experience of assigning subject headings to sometimes very specific and complex pieces of research by Warwick academics. Topics can range from the 'common envelope phase of pre-cataclysmic variable stars', to the 'history of land degradation in Kazakhstan'. While I still catalogue books occasionally, (it's nice to check I can still remember how to catalogue an invalid ISBN), I believe my skills are being enhanced by this new form of cataloguing.

With more and more focus on the REF and league tables, and with Universities potentially having to fight to attract students in this time of financial uncertainty, it's vital for them to sell themselves through their research. If global dissemination of this research is the goal, we as cataloguers hold the key, and this could help ensure the longevity of our profession.

I've been working as a cataloguer at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies Library for the last ten months, after spending the previous four years working here as a library assistant. Starting work as a library assistant was a planned move. I had studied at this department as an undergraduate, and wanted a job that would let me use my obscure language skills and love of East European literature. Starting as a cataloguer was a somewhat less predictable jump!

After the first few years of library assistant work, I had concluded that this was the right profession for me. I started an MA in Library and Information Studies at UCL's Department of Information Studies. I chose this programme for two reasons. First, I needed to study part-time, and the programme at DIS fit perfectly with my job. Second, I was attracted to the 'traditional' curriculum. I'd seen the work that our cataloguers do, could tell that it made sense to them, but to me it was just impenetrable jargon and code. Watching them work was like being confronted with Cyrillic for the first time. There was a language at work, and I wanted to learn to speak it, but first I had to learn how to read a new alphabet.

I started the degree, but before there was cataloguing there was coding...lots of coding. An entire module devoted to principles of computing, whose final assessment was building a website from scratch. It was interesting, another language to learn, but it wasn't what I'd come for. I filed away my notes on HTML to revise for the exam and promptly moved on to the next thing – cataloguing.

We started with an overview of what cataloguing is, and what classification is. It wasn't something I'd really thought about, but it made sense. One dealt with the book, and one dealt with what the book was about. Object and content carrier. The distinction seemed unimportant until we started dealing with practical examples of cataloguing. Then it was a relief to be able to forget about the book's subject while we argued about how many pages it had.

We talked about AACR2 and RDA, and the practicalities of an international standard. I discovered that my interest in foreign languages and scripts really came into play here. The rules are centred on Anglophone materials, unsurprisingly, but I wanted to know what to do with the books I spent hours shelving every week. I found that many of the same issues I'd come across talking about website building were relevant in our cataloguing debates, from representation of non-roman characters to accessibility issues.

A few weeks after we started the cataloguing module, I had a job interview. The library at which I work had a short-term acting-up post for a cataloguer. I had half of an MA and a thorough grounding in cataloguing principles, even though I'd never worked as a cataloguer. And it turned out that when your lecturer tells you that being able to discuss RDA will be useful at interviews, she's right! I was offered the post and started a week later.

I quickly discovered that the day-to-day reality of being a cataloguer was quite different to sitting in a classroom debating the finer points of the rule of three or whether illustrators deserved an added entry. The post I filled had been vacant for some time before I started, and there was a backlog of new materials waiting to be catalogued and classified. There simply wasn't time to ponder and debate.

Not only that, but the books themselves were in languages I didn't speak. I mostly work with books from and about Central Europe, so I found myself working with Polish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and German daily. Less frequently I'd find myself with a stack of books in Finnish, Russian, or Ukrainian. On a really interesting day I could end up with materials in Greek or Old Church Slavonic! Fortunately my Bulgarian lecturer had insisted that I study Old Church Slavonic when we were covering medieval literature. And equally fortunately we'd had a linguistics class on describing languages without understanding the content.

One of the debates that came up again and again in class was whether there was any merit in learning how to do cataloguing from scratch. About half of the new books I work with don't have records available for

download when we receive them, so I spent a lot of time creating records from scratch. My copy of AACR2 has a permanent home on the corner of my desk, and my Free-Floating Subdivisions is looking decidedly worn.

Of course, I'm still a student, and when I started as a cataloguer the academic year hadn't finished. I took questions of local practice to the chief cataloguer, but brought my weird and wonderful examples to class with me. The Czech conference proceeding on CD-ROM was a particular gem, but I seemed to turn up items that fell outside the normal range of materials on a daily basis. Being able to go back and forth between the theoretical standard and the reality of materials the rules don't really cover has been a great help.

When I'm not working on cataloguing new books, I'm also involved with special projects at the library. We are currently at the final stages of a two year digitization project. Because of the project, I decided to take an optional module in Historical Bibliography. My hope was that the class would allow me to make a useful contribution to the work that we are doing. Two days after our session on collation, we found a book whose pagination was rather quirky. Thanks to the class session earlier, I was able to go through the questionable section and work out that we both had all the pages of the book and that they were in the correct order. A few weeks later, I came across a pair of books with very sparse catalogue records. The records themselves were easy to fix, but they had already been uploaded and needed to be amended online as well. I received an email of the XHTML pages that needed fixing, dug out my 'useless' notes on coding and set to work. It turned out that something I'd considered unnecessary was absolutely essential, and I was glad I'd saved the notes. A few days later, my amended records were online and part of the catalogue.

Throughout my studies, and now as a cataloguer, I've been fascinated by language and description. I'm very fortunate to be in a position where I can use my training and work on projects I find fascinating. At the same time, I'm discovering the links between different parts of the information studies community. My love of rare books and my interest in cataloguing tie in with my newfound love of digital resources. I'll be spending the summer working on a cataloguing dissertation that combines these three interests. I hope that it will be a stepping-stone to a more active role in the cataloguing community as I finish my studies and start looking for new challenges.

At the end of July I will be graduating from Manchester Metropolitan University with an undergraduate degree in Librarianship. I will be a fully qualified librarian; equipped with all the skills needed for a successful career in the libraries and information sector. Recently, however, I have been looking at job advertisements and person specifications for a number of different positions in libraries and have noticed that there are certain areas where I lack relevant skills. One of these areas is cataloguing and indexing.

It seems that practically all library jobs posted on CILIP's online recruitment page require the applicant to have had some kind of practical experience, or, an in-depth knowledge of cataloguing and indexing. After three years of studying on a CILIP accredited course, this is something that I don't really feel that I have.

Cataloguing and indexing was covered quite early on in the course. In the first year we did a module called 'Organising Information', which gave us an introduction to MARC, AACR2, taxonomies and ontologies. We were given practical exercises to complete in seminars that helped to put the theory into context and discussed the benefits of cataloguing information resources. I found this module particularly enjoyable, and it helped to develop my interest in the subject.

Cataloguing and indexing was covered as part of several modules over the remainder of the course, but usually from a theoretical viewpoint. The course is not a vocational training program and it is designed to provide an academic foundation for students to build upon throughout their careers. References were made to metadata standards, and we discussed new developments in cataloguing such as folksonomic tagging, but we did not really build on the practical work we had done in the first year of the course.

In the final year, as part of the 'Library Resources Management' module, we learnt about library management systems. As part of this, we were shown the core functions of a typical library management system and gained experience of using these on the Heritage library management system. We used Heritage to enter bibliographic data about a book, and it was interesting to see how metadata is created using such a system. This was covered in one session, though, and we moved on to a different core function in the next class.

Overall, the course did not give us many opportunities to put the theory we had learnt into practice. While we were taught about why libraries need to catalogue and index their materials, we were not shown how to catalogue and index beyond the basic introduction we were given in the first year. I would be incapable of cataloguing something from scratch, and would probably find it difficult constructing a Dewey Decimal number. These are the kinds of skills that libraries look for when recruiting new staff, and I do worry that I will struggle to get a job unless I do further training.

While it may seem like I am criticising the course, this is not the case. In many respects, it was excellent. The quality of teaching was high and I feel that I am reasonably well prepared for working in a library in the future. But the coverage of cataloguing and indexing is one area that I think needed to have been developed further than the basic introductions we were given in the first year.

In order to develop my understanding of cataloguing and indexing, I have volunteered at a library. This has already enabled me to put some of the theoretical concepts that we were taught about cataloguing into context, and I have gained some experience of basic cataloguing. This practical experience has helped to enhance what I have learnt at university and this suggests to me that the best way to learn about cataloguing is to try it in practice.



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