Conference Report

Word processors in the library

On the 17th June 1981, in the idyllic setting of Bayfordbury in the Hertfordshire countryside, the National Reprographic Centre for documentation held a one day conference on the use of word processing systems in libraries and information departments. Derek Painter, the Conference Director, had organized a very full and varied programme with 10 speakers. John Whitehead, the Chairman, was given the responsibility of ensuring that all the speakers kept to their allotted span with enough time allowed for questions.

Over 90 people attended, from a wide range of organisations, both users and suppliers of word processors. The keynote paper was presented by Richard Hudson, Director of the South West Automated Cataloguing Project, based at Bristol University. His theme was New Technology in the Library and he covered a wide range of new systems which were finding their ways into the profession. LSI techniques were now making computing viable in ever smaller units and the advent of the microcomputer had brought with it an opportunity for libraries to benefit from the acquisition of commercial software packages for bibliographic, administrative and clerical activities. In conclusion, he emphasised that no one should be afraid of the new technology and every effort should be made to try and experiment with new techniques.

Peter Russell of the Water Research Council described the use being made of an AM Jacquard J100 System to capture records for ASSASSIN input. The same machine was being used to produce a weekly bulletin. Malcolm Gardner, of Esso Europe, on the other hand discussed the communicating/electronic mail facilities of word processors. A network, comprising Vydec machines, was being used to transmit and receive documents on a world-wide basis. Their use as terminals to access mainframe data stores was also described. Martin Rowat of BHRA continued that theme with his description of the use being made of an AM Jacquard J100 for data capture and transmission-both synchronous and asynchronous modes, with mainframe computer. 9 abstracting bulletins were being produced by BHRA.

Peter Goode, of Londreco, described a very effective microcomputer system using the Z80 based CASU Super C with WORDSTAR text editing software for producing technical reports. A similar Z80-based system was described by Ann Pickard, of the Clinical Research Centre at Harrow. Using an IMS8000 CP/M based system, the Fast Access Information Retrieval project team is recording bibliographical details in a central data file of bioengineering literature.
The STATUS information storage and retrieval system was briefly described by Dr. John Scanlon, of AERE, and he elaborated on the use of a DEC VAX minicomputer accessed by DEC word processors using STATUS. A different make of word processor, the U.S. based Lexitron was described by Pamela Harter, of IEA Coal Research. Again ICI's ASSASSIN system was the facility used by IEA, with Lexitron preparing the abstracts for storage in the coal base. ASSASSIN was also covered by Dr. Bill Davison, of Tube Investments, using Wordplex and Wang equipment for the production of current awareness bulletins and eventual storage on the ASSASSIN system.

The final paper was presented by Tim Williams of the Shropshire County Library and he described the use of an AM Jacquard, linked to an IBM Mainframe for cataloguing, ordering and stock control.

At the end of the session the Chairman set up an impromptu forum, with all the speakers being literally bombarded with questions from a very appreciative audience for over an hour.

A verbatim report of the proceedings will be available from NRCd later in the year. Anyone interested should contact Mr. J.D. Painter, NRCd, Hatfield Polytechnic, Bayfordbury, Herts. SG13 8LD, U.K.

John Whitehead