Whither IATUL 1986-1990? (Reflections of a former President)

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Introduetion

I was introduced to IATUL in 1979 by Michael Hill (Director of the Science Reference Library, London) and was invited to present a paper at the Eighth Biennial Conference in Enschede that year. I was much impressed by the friendliness of the distinguished library directors I met here sixteen years ago. Sven Westberg was IATUL Secretary and made me feel very much at home and Nancy Fjällbrant recruited me as a scribe to share the task of recording questions and answers of delegates for inclusion in the Conference Proceedings. This was a considerable task and Nancy put in much time transcribing the notes into meaningful prose. In 1981 I was elected to the IATUL Board and then in 1985 I was asked to host the 11th Conference in Oxford. We had a memorable meeting, based on Keble College, discussing the future of information resources for science and technology. Otto ter Haar, then President of Elsevier, was one of our guest speakers and observed that there was then no evidence of a likely future reduction in the scientists’ demand for hard-copy serial publications. He was responding to our invitation to predict the future of primary scientific journals up to the end of the century. That contribution, which I read again when preparing this talk, reads as fresh today, ten years on, as it did back in 1985. In spite of the success of Paul Ginsparg in establishing an e-mail receipt and delivery service for storage and discussion of original papers in theoretical physics, and many other projects offering on-line journals, there is - as yet - no significant reduction in the number of primary hard-copy scientific journals available in major (e.g. "national") libraries, although
rising costs and frozen budgets have reduced the number of current titles held in most Universities of Science and Technology.

I would like to contribute this essay to the celebration of our 40th Anniversary by looking back at developments during my years as IATUL President and, five years later, reflecting on what we achieved during that period.

**Regional Groups**

I was elected President of IATUL in 1985 after three years as Secretary and, on taking office at the beginning of 1986, inherited an Association already strongly based financially with a good representation of members in Europe and North America. We recognised that we were poorly represented in the developing world and in South-East Asia, particularly Australia, New Zealand and Japan. There was a risk that we would acquire a fixed identity as a European rather than an International Association. During 1985 our North American members had begun to show a renewed interest in our meetings and a grand tour was arranged by Berry Richards, Richard Widdicombe, Jay Lucker and Elmer Smith which enabled my wife Joan and I to visit many US and Canadian campuses during the month of May 1986. This led to a significant increase in the North American membership; since then there have been regular regional meetings in USA and Canada and our first Biennial Meeting there in 1991.

Nancy Fjällbrant visited Australia and China in 1985 and reported back that there was interest in establishing a regional group in Australia. This was pursued by Richard Leadbetter and Don Schauder and resulted in our first regional meeting, held at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, in August 1988. While in Australia we discussed with IATUL members the possible establishment of a Regional Group in Southern Africa but this has proved more difficult to arrange and so far has not been formally constituted.

The Regional Groups have provided a welcome opportunity for IATUL members to meet during years in which there is no international conference and I hope we shall be able to continue publishing reports of their meetings in *IATUL News*.
Inter-library co-operation in Europe

In 1984 I was invited by DGXIII to participate in a NATO Advanced Study Workshop in Luxembourg, to comment on the Schwenke Resolution to establish a European Library. The Resolution was amended by the European Commission and led to the establishment of a major research and development initiative on the advancement of library automation particularly in Southern European countries.

Working with other International Organisations

I represented IATUL interests as a member of the IFLA Science and Technology Libraries Section during the period 1985-1993 and was Chairman for the four-year period 1987-1991. This IFLA section was established after IATUL was founded and it was largely at our instigation that it was formed. There were (and still are) many librarians in science and technology institutions which do not qualify for active membership of IATUL. For example, librarians in schools and colleges which do not award degree level qualifications may not hold membership of IATUL at a level qualifying them to serve on the Board.

The Sci-Tech section of IFLA was intended to provide for the inclusion of this library sector in international conferences. It succeeded in this endeavour but was still dominated by the larger University and State libraries. Nevertheless, the projects and workshops held at Conferences were valuable in offering expert advice and training for librarians from developing countries. At the IFLA conference in Tokyo in 1986 we noted that there were twenty IATUL members present and we held an informal reunion. This was much appreciated, giving us an identity among the two thousand delegates which had not been recognised for some time previously. (Even though IATUL was recognised as an International Association Member in its foundation year).

It was decided to submit a proposal for an IATUL reunion on a regular basis at future IFLA Conferences and this was accepted by the Executive Board. The first of these
was held at the 1987 IFLA Conference in Brighton, England. Also, we entered into an agreement for mutual co-operation between the two organisations which still exists.

**ICSU**

In 1986 the IATUL Board decided that our Association should seek a forum in the International Council of Scientific Unions and a successful application was made which was approved unanimously by the General Committee of ICSU at its meeting in September that year. Our main input to the work of ICSU has followed my appointment in 1990 to membership of the ICSU Press.

**UNESCO**

Individual members of IATUL were instrumental in fostering an interest in the user training in library and information work. At our first European seminar, held in France in 1987, Yves Courrier outlined the principles of the work of the PGI Division following the creation of the Unisist programme in which IATUL was a prime mover. Elin Törnudd (my successor as President of IATUL) was President of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Council for the General Information Programme (PGI) and of the Bureau of the Council 1981-88. Our relations with UNESCO have since developed on a more practical level through the granting of research contracts for user education as well as the education of librarians and information specialists.

**IATUL publications**

The publication of scholarly papers has been an important IATUL activity since the early days of our Association. However, the two main series - *IATUL Proceedings* and *IATUL Conference Proceedings* - were published irregularly and there was no other
medium for communication between the Board and the membership at large. After the Oxford IATUL meeting in 1985 and a proposal from Pergamon Press to take on printing and marketing our publications, we sought advice from Oxford University Press who recommended that we should produce a regular quarterly periodical to cover all news, conference proceedings and special themes. This led to the production of *IATUL Quarterly* volumes 1-5 (1987-1991). These twenty issues form a valuable archive of IATUL activities covering the years mid-1986 to mid-1991 and shadows the period of my Presidency of IATUL. I have drawn on these volumes extensively in preparing this paper, as will be immediately obvious in the list of references. After the initial five-year period OUP decided to give up all but purely academic journals and declined to renew our contract.

In seeking an alternative it became clear that a commercial publisher would not be prepared to take on the journal under the favourable terms accorded by OUP and so the Board decided to revert to the former pattern and publish under its own control (as it were "in house"). Thus we have *IATUL Proceedings* - new series, the first volume of which contained the papers presented at the 14th Biennial Conference held at MIT in 1991, and *IATUL News* produced by Nancy Fjällbrant at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg. We are very proud of our reputation and the fact that our journals are fully abstracted by the major abstractors such as LISA, Bowker and The British Library.

**Essay prizes**

Our constitution has allowed the awarding of essay prizes ever since it was first drafted in 1960. Records show that few of these were awarded during the years 1960-1985. These prizes, which included free attendance at a Conference or Regional meeting, were intended to encourage young librarians in our member institutions to prepare and present reports of studies and research projects. Starting with the 1987 meeting in Helsinki the IATUL Board established a regular commitment to offer a prize each year and this initiative has been moderately successful. I say "moderate" since, although a
suitable entry has usually been found of sufficient merit for the award of a prize, these have usually been identified at the time of the meeting at which the paper was presented and not entered in advance in response to the announcement of an essay competition.

Staff exchanges

There is great expertise distributed throughout the staff of our libraries and we can provide the best opportunities for training young librarians in most developed countries. The concept of staff exchanges was intended to facilitate the training of librarians from developing countries and there have been a few examples of successful visits, particularly from China and Hungary. In fact the 1987 IATUL Essay Prize was awarded to Wang Jiabin who was a visiting scholar at the National Technological Library of Denmark. However, funding for the support of exchange visits is hard to get and International Agencies are slow to recognise the importance of this activity.

Developing our Archives as a permanent record for posterity

The records of a Learned Society, particularly an international association, are of considerable importance to historians. During my term as President, the IATUL Board decided to start permanent collections of published and manuscript records. These tasks were entrusted to Dieter Schmidmaier and myself. Dieter undertook responsibility for cataloguing all traceable IATUL publications and I was given the task of identifying and storing the IATUL manuscripts, particularly minutes of Board meetings and correspondence. We were aided in our tasks by the fact that most of the former Presidents were still alive and records (if they existed) were traceable. I look forward to hearing from Dieter Schmidmaier how complete is his collection. My collection, which covers the period from 1960 to 1991 at the end of my term as a Board member, is housed in the Radcliffe Science Library in the University of Oxford. I hope the
current Board members will consider how this activity should be placed on a
permanent basis. It is unlikely we shall ever have a permanent address for the IATUL
office and, clearly we do not want to transfer existing collections every time there is
a change of officers. Therefore, it seems necessary to establish machinery to ensure
the continuation of the collection and a permanent record of the nature, extent and
location of the collections.

Acknowledgements

In conclusion I would like to express my gratitude to our host and President of the
IATUL Board - Dr Gerard van Marle - for inviting me here to join in our fortieth
anniversary celebrations and to his predecessor Professor Elin Törnudd who succeeded
me as President during 1990 and undertook to continue the initiatives we had instituted
during my presidential years. Also, I wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance
I have received from two former members of my staff at the Radcliffe Science Library
- Miss Barbara Challenor and Mr Theo Dunnet - who share the credit for the ordering
of the IATUL archive at Oxford.

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