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COLLETS

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A Week in the Life

By Jonathan Waring

Jonathan Waring is a director of COLLETS, a company of retail, library, import and export booksellers based in Wellingborough and London, England. He is responsible for the company's library supply activities in the U.K. and overseas and it was in this capacity that he came to attend his first Charleston Conference in 1989. He also co-ordinates computer development within the company and as a director takes an interest in all aspects of the company's work.

JUST ANOTHER WORKING WEEK

MONDAY

7 AM ... that damned alarm clock! Why is it I'm always dead to the world on Monday mornings but wide awake on Sundays when there's no hurry? (Psychologists reading this please refrain from replying!) I stagger downstairs to engage in that very English ritual, making a pot of tea for my wife and son (t'other son is at Hull University). Slightly more awake I return to bed with a mug of tea and lie there in a heap mulling over the forthcoming day's activities. Today I'm off to Birmingham to a seminar organised by the Medical Information Working Party of which I'm a member. The idea of these events is to create a better understanding between medical librarians, booksellers, serials agents and publishers. I am unsurprised to find the latter poorly represented; why is it so difficult

to get publishers to take an interest? Anyway, it's always good to meet ones competitors, many of whom are regarded as friends, so the day goes well.

In the evening we have a special meal for our son's 16th birthday, washed down with a bottle of blush Zinfandel—the bad habits I pick up in the States!

TUESDAY

A little more lively than on a Monday. Usual tea ritual followed by breakfast. I remember that my car has played me up the previous day and that I'm heading for the garage first thing. I curse General Motors (West German branch) because for the second time in three months the differential bearings have given up on a fairly new car.

The ten mile ride to the office is quite an embarrassment with the diff positively screaming at me and I am relieved when I finally reach my office. The euphoria is short-lived when I see the heap of paper that has arrived on my desk during the two days that I've been out. So that's why I never get to take the six weeks annual holiday to which I'm entitled!

There's so much to do at present—apart from routine work there's the next trip to America to organise. We're exhibiting S.L. A. and visiting existing and potential customers, not to mention arranging exhibits at various U.K. library conferences.

Somehow hometime comes around very quickly and this evening I'm really ready to become a "couch potato."

WEDNESDAY

It's board meeting day so the morning passes very fast preparing for the fray. Also I've allowed myself the luxury of going out visiting customers for the next two days and as my car won't be ready I waste a bit of time organising a hire car.

A short meeting is held to discuss plans for our stand (booth) at the forthcoming London Book Fair where we will exhibit Collets varied bookselling activities.

The board meeting is a 'special' to discuss our five year business plan for Collets' London bookshops. There are particular economic problems to consider at the present time; the old 'rates' (a property tax) is being replaced by a new 'business rate' and (surprise, surprise) it's going to cost us a lot more. Together with a forthcoming rent review and in common with many other Charing Cross Road booksellers, we're going to have to sell a lot more books just to stand still—quite a challenge at a time when the Government is squeezing consumer spending. Added to this, the manageress of our 'flagship' International Bookshop has just resigned, so discussion is pretty lively and a number of major decisions are taken.

After the meeting I tidy my desk and gather myself up to go visiting librarians and head off to collect my hire car.

THURSDAY

I leave my Northampton home (around 60 miles north of London) and head off down the notorious M1 motorway. I listen to the local commercial radio station 'spy in

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the sky' and am relieved to hear that all is well on this motorway and in fact make my first port of call at Kingston Polytechnic south of London in one and a half hours—good going! (N.B. A polytechnic is much like a University as regards the level of study, degrees awarded etc. However, our universities have always been much more research orientated than the relatively new polys.) No great problems encountered here and after a short while I am back out on what is turning out to be an unusually spring-like February day. I move on to a further education college. Here there is an interesting situation which is affecting a large number of college and school libraries in in the capital, namely the abolition by the government of the Inner London Education Authority which made the mistake of being a left-of-centre organisation during the lifetime of a right-of-centre government. These establishments are being handed over to hues and there is much uncertainty regarding future funding.

Next to a college of technology which covers every level of teaching from the equivalent of fifth form senior school work to degree level; I reflect on the distinction between different types of colleges and think 'what a muddle'!

On to sunny Brighton where the beaches turn out to be closed to some Middle 'eastern freighter'!

In the evening I meet up with the manager of our Library supply for a very pleasant meal with the Head of Library Supply Service who has been travelling in the West Country and we go out for a very pleasant meal with the Head of Learning Resources of Brighton Polytechnic and the former holder of that position who has been travelling in the West Country who has now become an Assistant

Polytechnic Director. The restaurant "Il Teatro" lives up to its excellent reputation.

FRIDAY

It's going to be another very pleasant day weatherwise. No, we British don't only talk about the weather! Although I have to say it has been unusual with semi-hurricanes, lashing storms, and now this warm stuff. Last night's wine is getting to me and I decline the waiter's offer of a full English breakfast!

My first call is at a college along the coast where we supply a textbook shop. Then on to Brighton Polytechnic to see the Acquisitions Librarian. In the past this library has been a very good customer with a big capital investment programme, but today the talk, as in other establishments, is of budgetary pressures etc, etc. Never mind, looks like they're going to "rationalize out" a number of their suppliers. With a bit of luck we'll stay in and will benefit from receiving a larger share of the cake.

I take the M1 motorway London bound and wish that it was always as empty, and head for a South London higher and further education college which has been struggling for survival. The buoyant new Head of Library Learning Resources is a long standing customer of Collets from two previous jobs and certainly has ideas which would help put the college on its feet. After a light Indian meal I head homewards. I thank heaven for the great weather—it's 65 degrees in London—as it takes me three hours to do a journey largely similar to the one that took only one and a half hours yesterday! God bless the M1! Still, it provides thinking time... I think I don't want to face my desk again on Monday! ☘