September 1999

Sir Charles Chadwyck Healey-President- Chadwyck Healey

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Recommended Citation

Gilson, Tom (1999) "Sir Charles Chadwyck Healey-President-Chadwyck Healey," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 11: Iss. 4, Article 14.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3534>

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ATG Interviews Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey

President, Chadwyck-Healey

by Tom Gilson (Head, Reference Services, College of Charleston Libraries) <gilsont@cofc.edu>

ATG: Starting twenty-five years ago with a reprint of the Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, Chadwyck-Healey has become a multimedia powerhouse with a worldwide presence. How did it happen?

SIR CHARLES: In 1970 I was the Editor in London for **Johnson Reprint Corporation** which was owned by **Academic Press**. By this time, the hardcopy reprint business was in decline so I started to look into microfilm as an alternative reprint format. The economics of reprinting in microfilm were very attractive, but Johnson was not interested so I decided to set up my own company, which I did in January 1973. The original objective was to publish hardcopy reprints, research material on microfilm and microfiche, and publish some monographs, especially in art history. Although, we did publish a few monographs and some very successful reprints, our main business quickly became microform publishing.

ATG: But, eventually you began publishing in CD-ROM as well?

SIR CHARLES: We began to consider the possibilities of CD-ROM in the mid-80's. I had seen the first prototype CD-ROM at the ALA MidWinter Conference in San Antonio in January 1984. I had also worked with **Bill Buchanan** on the REMARC project, in which the **Library of Congress** shelflist was converted into machine readable form to provide electronic bibliographic records for retrospective conversion projects. This helped me to learn a lot about cataloging and the whole world of automation and retrospective conversion which was such an important issue in the mid-80's. I also met a lot of Chief Librarians for the first time, people whom, as a publisher, you don't necessarily meet.

By the middle of the 1980's, I was becoming increasingly conscious of the limitations of the microform medium and CD-ROM offered a very exciting opportunity. It also felt good to be publishing in a medium that people liked and were excited about themselves. It challenged mediated online services like **Dialog** which had such cumbersome and archaic search commands and offered databases in a form that people could search themselves with minimal instruction. You could say that CD-ROM was the catalyst that democratized electronic information and put it into the

hands of the end user. It also enabled publishers such as us and even book publishers to publish electronic information for the first time without becoming dependent on the rather monolithic online intermediaries.

ATG: When did you realize that online publishing was also a viable option?

SIR CHARLES: By 1994 librarians were beginning to ask for Chadwyck-Healey products to be delivered online. They no longer wanted CD-ROM which, frankly, surprised me. We started to develop client/server software when a consultant asked why we were not using the Internet. We immediately abandoned six months of programming work and realized that using the Internet would enable us to go "online" earlier than we had envisaged. A breakthrough in my thinking came while I was on a plane going on a vacation to Australia in May 1995 when I had become very concerned about the possible illegal copying of our literature databases on CD-ROM.

ATG: You are speaking of making copies of the entire disk on to another disk?

SIR CHARLES: Yes, I was worried about large-scale copying of our databases. I realized that if we put our CD-ROMs online we could protect our proprietary rights. If we took a number of databases in the same subject area, such as literature, and added bibliographic and other reference information, we would in effect be creating links from one database to another which would greatly enhance the overall value of the collection. We could also add links to other Web sites. If a user then tried to download large amounts of information from such a Web site, while they might be able to do so, and would then have

continuing access to that information, they would have cut all the links to the other parts of the database. What they would end up

with would be a sterile piece of data which would not have the dynamic value that information contained in a constantly edited and developing Web site is going to have. Four years later I can say that this is exactly what has happened except that we are still not aware of anyone trying to download large amounts of information from **Literature Online**. But **Literature Online** is in a constant process of development with the addition of new material on a monthly basis and the creation of new links all the time. This is the value that we

offer to subscribers, not a collection of static databases but a sophisticated entity which is constantly in development.

Because of the amount of work we had to do on normalizing some ten separate databases, up to then published only on CD-ROM, it took us eighteen months to get **Literature Online** launched on the Web. In the meantime, we were able to more quickly launch **Periodical Contents Index (PCI)** on the Web at ALA in June 1996. Within twelve months, all US purchasers of PCI on CD-ROM had switched to the Web edition.

ATG: But Periodical Contents Index covers more than the Literature Online Database.

SIR CHARLES: PCI covers all the subjects in the humanities and social sciences in that we are creating a database of contents page information for every issue of every journal of significance in English, American and all the main European languages up to 1991. This means that we have the complete run of each journal from whenever it started, and one or two even start in the eighteenth century. It is currently ten million records and we add one million new records each year. So far we have covered about 2,800 journals but there are many thousands more journals to come.

ATG: Why does the indexing stop at 1991?

SIR CHARLES: Because after 1991 there are other contents page indexing services, like **UnCover** and **The British Library's Inside Information**. What is missing is the information for the older material. We will almost certainly link to one of the current services so that users will be able to search contents pages information up to the present time.

ATG: Today Chadwyck-Healey publishes in microfilm, CD-ROM and on the Web. How do you decide which format is appropriate for which product?

SIR CHARLES: It depends on our customers and what they want. CD-ROM is still in demand. There are libraries in the US that want large collections on CD-ROM so they can feel that they own it. Of course they also want Web access which we provide at a nominal fee.

ATG: So the demand for CD-ROM relates to the issue of paying for ownership not just access?

SIR CHARLES: Yes, very much so. The CD-ROMs may not be used since the libraries also have Web access, but they want to own something tangible. I believe that librarians

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ies will gradually move to buying access as they need it, but this will require a fundamental change in the financial structure of ARLs.

ATG: But what about microforms? It seems to us that they become more obsolete by the minute. Why continue to publish in such an outdated medium?

SIR CHARLES: First, we have a huge microform catalog of publications, many of which are only available that way. Second, some of our customers want the information in microform. The current *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* are only available in microfiche and a lot of our subscribers would not want it in any other format. They are used to it that way. It fulfills its function and is compact and easy to store. It is obvious that we are in a time of extraordinary transition. There are multiple formats and crossovers, and there will be for years to come.

ATG: Given that Chadwyck-Healey publishes a significant amount of primary source material, how are you ensuring that you will have an archival copy? Do you think electronic storage is a satisfactory archival medium?

SIR CHARLES: I do not think that electronic storage is a satisfactory archival medium at the present time as it has not been properly tested. This is an enormous problem for both publishers and libraries and I do not have an easy answer. At the very least, if we can keep multiple copies of all our CD-ROMs, refresh tapes and properly maintain Web sites in more than one location, we go some way to providing security of access to the valuable information that we publish. But looking ahead several hundred years we can see that this is not a satisfactory solution. However, I do take comfort in the short term that almost all our large databases have been sold on tape to more than one library so there are other competent entities in whose interest it is to also maintain the integrity of this data. However, at the end of the day, the publisher must remain responsible for the maintenance of his own data.

ATG: Although your main stock-in-trade is still fulltext primary sources, with projects like *Literature Online*, you are beginning to bundle them with relevant reference sources, while one of your newest databases, *Know UK* is a pure reference product. Is this indicative of a future trend? How do you view the role of these reference sources within your overall product line?

SIR CHARLES: Reference materials have always interested us. While we publish many primary text collections we have always also published bibliographies and indexes.

One of our most successful early ventures was a reprint of the *HMSO (Her Majesty's Stationery Office) Annual Catalogues of British Government Publications*. We reprinted them because few libraries had all the annual catalogues. It was also listed in "Winchell" (*Constance Winchell's Guide to Reference Books*, the precursor to *Sheehy*, and now, *Balay*). My mentor and former partner, the late **Hans Fellner**, from whom I learned most of what I know about publishing, often said, "Anything in Winchell will sell." Later I discovered that this was not always true, but in this case he was right.

Today, we continue to play a major role in the bibliographic control of British government documents. Since 1988, we have shared with HMSO the responsibility for publishing the *Catalogue of the United Kingdom Official Publications*, (*UKOP*), the British equivalent of your *Monthly Catalog*.

ATG: But *KnowUK* does seem to be somewhat of a departure.

SIR CHARLES: *KnowUK* started out as a guide to information about people and organizations in the United Kingdom, thus we have incorporated the data from standard reference books like *Who's Who*, *The Civil Service Yearbook*, and *The Municipal Yearbook*, which gives detailed information about every local authority in the UK; and lists of lawyers and other professionals, information on the Health Services and the medical professions and extensive information about education. There is also a new database of libraries, museums and archives in the UK. We also sell the text of *The Guardian* newspaper on the Web to libraries, including an archive which goes back ten years. While this is separate at present, it will become possible to search both *The Guardian* text and *KnowUK* at the same time in order to get a broad range of information about an individual in the public arena or about an organization. But in response to advice from public librarians, *KnowUK* is already much broader and contains much information on heritage, amenities, consumer information from the *Consumer's Association* and even a well known series of travel guides called the *Blue Guides*.

ATG: Pricing is always an issue. A database like *Literature Online* is obviously content rich, but the full database may be priced out of range for small and medium-size libraries. Do you plan on offering libraries the option of selecting portions of the database, or does it have to be purchased as a total package?

SIR CHARLES: It should not be out of the price range of most interested libraries.

We are using variable pricing based on book budget and type of library. It will be priced differently to public, academic and school libraries and you can be selective and subscribe to part of the database

ATG: *Chadwyck-Healey seems to do its best to stay on the cutting edge. What new exciting ventures are on the horizon?*

SIR CHARLES: We have already discussed one of our biggest projects, *KnowUK*, but I am also excited about the possibility of digitizing the *Sanborn fire insurance maps* which cover 10,000 cities in the US from 1865 to 1970 and creating an cumulative electronic index to the maps from the printed indexes. We are offering individual states and cities and may allow users to mount them on their own server if they prefer. We are currently planning to digitize the maps on demand and do the index in its entirety and possibly provide it free on the Web.

Another project that we have already started is the creation of a collection of images related to architecture and the applied arts. We are selecting images from books and periodicals in the *Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, the *National Art Library*. Not fine arts, but applied and decorative arts, and the images will be line drawings and half tones, fully indexed and with bibliographic citations. The collection will start with approximately 20,000 images and add about 10,000 images a year. We will also produce an index with thumbnails which may also be freely available on the Web.

ATG: *We had planned on ending with that question but, it almost sounds as though you think of providing the indexes over the Web as a marketing tool.*

SIR CHARLES: Direct mail does not work very well anymore and we need to use the Web more aggressively and creatively to reach our customers and find out how they are using our products. To some extent we have two categories of customers, libraries and library patrons. The libraries, who are so important to us because they make the decisions and have the buying power, do stand between us and the end-user, and I believe that we must use the Web more imaginatively to dialogue with our end users without excluding the libraries. If we can use the Web more effectively to not only deliver but also to improve our products, it will benefit us all, libraries, publishers and most importantly, the user.

ATG: *Sir Charles, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk to us.*

SIR CHARLES: It was my pleasure.

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