Of conferences and carpets

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Most of us came by train and plane to the conference, but David Parkes of Staffordshire University came by car using a 1962 road atlas (I once used a 1932 electricity map to get me into London – it worked). However, David gave up at Salisbury, if I remember correctly, as the journey was beginning to take too long and become rather tortuous, but he got to UKSG 2016 in time to deliver his light-hearted but erudite performance, 'The psychogeography of libraries'!

In his talk David explained how the library induction he gives to his students has evolved from a hobby (he is a geographer) into his teaching and research, for which he has now been awarded funding. Anyway, the purpose of his introduction to the library is to help new students to gain a sense of place, belonging, familiarity and comfort in their new surroundings, namely Staffordshire University, and to orientate themselves by performing various exercises, such as:

- compile an A-Z of the library (one student presented David with a dictionary – smart!)
- devise a campus map board game – results have produced graduation being defined as 'Mayfair'
- leave a happy/uplifting message in a book (using a paper insert)
- look at an unrelated subject's reading list and finding a book from it on the library shelves

This particular style of library induction seems to suit his students, many of whom have come to university as a result of the widening participation (WP) initiative.

David's presentation was peppered with references to authors/artists/philosophers: Kevin Lynch, Colin St John Wilson, Bruno Zevi, Charles Dickens, Crab Man (I was still laughing – to myself – en route to the Dream Circus on this Exeter academic's demand to "treat your supermarket as a museum"), Guy Debord, Alan Moore, Arthur Machan, John Steinbeck, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jorge Luis Borges, Beatrice Warde, Simon Patterson, as well as groups/collectives: the Loiterers Resistant Movement, the Situationists, the Walking Artists Network.

I wish I had David Parkes showing me around my university; I know the library (which I suppose is just as well) and Senate House, but trying to negotiate the rest of the so-called 'egg box' buildings of my 1960s university and its labyrinthine innards is still a stumbling block. David come south!

There was a suggestion that David would do a walk on Wednesday around Bournemouth. That didn't happen, so I went off to do my own psychogeography of Bournemouth, and to look at Mary Shelley's grave as recommended. After encounters with rather disturbed and batty Bournemouth residents I found the grave.

Mary Shelley's grave, St Peter's Church, Bournemouth

I also found Lewis Tregonwell's tomb. Turns out he is the founder of Bournemouth and hence the names – Tregonwell Hall, Tregonwell Suite, Tregonwell Bar, Tregonwell Corridor – at The BIC!

Tomb of Lewis Dykmore Grosvenor Tregonwell, St Peter's Church, Bournemouth

I got interested in floor surfaces whilst in Bournemouth as a result of nearly falling over on the slippery paving at the top of the Lower Gardens on my first day. I particularly wanted to share this walking surface with UKSG members, for future reference when you are next down at conference in Bournemouth. Avoid, particularly when it is raining, as it is lethal!

Pavement tiles in The Square outside the Obscura Café, Bournemouth

I took many inadvertent snaps of tarmac! Fortunately the carpet at the BIC didn't see me prone to falling over!

Carpet, Bayview Suite 2, The BIC, Bournemouth

The carpet in the Tregonwell Bar made me think of hotdogs, to which I am not partial. I seem to be digressing . . .

Carpet design, Tregonwell Bar, The BIC, Bournemouth

Donna Lanclos was the main draw for me in applying for this conference. I had been inspired by the cognitive mapping work on learning spaces that Donna, an anthropologist, had carried out at UCL. I had based the cognitive maps on library use in my dissertation on her principles. So I couldn't wait to hear her talk, 'Ethnographic approaches to the practices of scholarly communication: tracking the mess of academia'. As she said, analytics will never capture the lived experiences of students; these lived experiences cannot be got to by analytics. Donna stressed the importance of researchers/library staff talking to students after the mapping exercise, emphasising that this was the most crucial part of the process, getting them to explain their map, their motivations and choices. This was really good to hear as, having been doing my own cognitive maps with students, it really is so fascinating to gather the different and unique responses that participants voice. Donna's comments were also good methodological fodder for my dissertation! She showed delegates examples of cognitive maps from her research on learning spaces, demonstrating that learning spaces are not institutionally bound; one student identified one of her learning spaces as being on the bus. Donna's research methods provide the human scale, or the "messy practices" as she calls them: as she demonstrated with an academic's map of learning spaces, Yale represented pizza!

At the Dream Circus I was so happy, not because of my delightful dinner companions Ruth and Adrian, not because of the wine, nor the funfair, nor the gymnast on the ribbons moving to Karl Jenkins's Palladio, although I am sure they all contributed, but because Donna generously gave her time and encouragement by looking at and commenting on the cognitive maps I had gathered as

part of my postgraduate research.

Donna Lanclos in action

Anyway, UKSG did consist of more than Donna and David! I commiserated with Carol Ann Borchert, President of NASIG, whose luggage refused to budge from Chicago. The suitcase was eventually reunited with her, so I hope Carol Ann was able to enjoy the rest of her stay, which included visiting Stonehenge and Windsor Castle.

The UKSG conference app was really good and I am glad that this was provided, a very necessary and handy tool. I am sure that much hard work went in to producing it; it was much appreciated, including the tweets and photos, notices for lost property, and location of the taxi phone!

It was both refreshing and amusing to watch video snippets of students interviewed as part of the University of Sussex and Semantico's collaborative study investigating user behaviour on searching and discovery. Student responses included: "I think it stresses me out", whilst a lecturer found the white space alarming, as "you think there is an error, like it hasn't loaded properly". All invaluable comments contributing to the tweaking of the University of Sussex's discovery tool. But Suzanne Tatham of Sussex wasn't going to let us sit idly in her presentation. She asked us to identify the icons found on search results pages. Incidentally, none of us in our group recognised them all.

The conclusion of this preliminary study was to keep things simple and hone the web interface down to the most used functionalities. These results confirmed those reported by Sarah Roughley from the University of Liverpool on the removal of "noise" ie a simpler layout, a reduced number of links, and the removal of less popular facets. This all seemed common sense to me.

Ann Rossiter, the Executive Director of SCONUL, gave us a rousing speech, a snapshot of the current state of "library land" as she dubbed our sector, declaring that, "Libraries are at crunch point" and urging publishers to adjust their business models and improve the quality of service that they provide. Among the pertinent questions she posed was, "What conditions would be needed to stop publishers worrying about sharing?" A fantastic start to UKSG 2016.

But it was back to submerging myself in the past as I was very keen to learn of Gale's digitised Telegraph Historical Archive, 1855-2000, the launch of which was on Tuesday afternoon. I am sure they thought I was after the free champagne, but it was good to hear Sophie Hanbury, Content

Partnership Director of the Telegraph Media Group, talk about the process, her passion for the project, and the permission she had to obtain from the Barclay brothers to digitise the early copies of The Daily Telegraph in bound ledgers that they personally owned.

The British Library's stand was a welcome source of free postcards. Postcards in Bournemouth seemed to me to be quite steep (70p at a touristy shop by M&S and the Russell Cotes Art Gallery, 60p at the Tourist Information Centre) apart from the postcards on sale for 25p in St Peter's where Mary Shelley is buried.

I was amused with Sarah Pittaway's play on the 'selfie' that they have going on in The Hive, Europe's first joint public and university library, encouraging students to post a 'selfie with Reffie', Reffie being the library mascot.

For me, the main challenge of the quiz night was getting in to the building in the first place, as it was with a few other delegates. We were running up and down flights of steps for ages before finding the main entrance!

The quiz night was somewhat chaotic in that whilst those of us with sponsored places were the 'runners', who were supposed to supervise the swapping of papers between tables, the teams frequently swapped of their own accord before we got to them. This confused me greatly! What could have been a very awkward situation was avoided as one eagle-eyed competitor noted that team Rock Stars, or whatever they were called, had been given 25 points out of a total of 20. Some teams were incredibly competitive and serious, which was hardly surprising considering all the lovely prizes that could be won. I think one winner tweeted that it had taken her nine years (or may be it was fifteen) of UKSG quizzes to be – finally – on the winning team. I enjoyed the publishers' logo test. How did I fail to recognise Thames & Hudson's dolphins???!!! This gruelling examination will make me pay more attention to publishers' symbols in the future.

Prizes for the winners and losers at the quiz night

The quiz was difficult, glad I was a runner. The sponsors charmingly rewarded us runners with boxes of very good chocolates. Very kind. I've eaten them all up now.

The beach below The BIC, Wednesday morning

I would say that the conference was a real eye-opener for me, showing how libraries and publishers interact, taking me out of the cocoon of distance learning and my own workplace. It really was a revelation, not least that Dream Circus, still can't get over the size of the venue, the sparkly elephant dangling above Kate Price, and the marvellous entertainment put on for delegates. Thank you, UKSG and sponsors.

Bags back home

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