# UKSG@40

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*"In 1975 it appeared to me as an ex-librarian that the profession itself was neglecting serials terribly. There was little communication among serials librarians in Britain and perhaps we ought to try an experiment … I believed we needed to have something for all interested in serials whether they are librarians, competitors, publishers or whatever."*

These were the words of John Merriman, then Director of Blackwell's, reflecting on his role in conceiving UKSG which formed part of his conference closing speech in 1983. It was one of the treasures found in the UKSG archives as part of the research undertaken by UKSG into the UKSG@40 film which will 'premiere' at the 40th anniversary conference in Harrogate.

Out of John's idea (and with the help of Albert Prior from Swets and Brian Cox from Pergamon) came the formal incorporation of UKSG and an inaugural meeting at St John's College in York.

It's hard to believe that UKSG is celebrating its 40th birthday. What an achievement! For those of us who have been around since the early days it has evolved into an amazing success story. My first encounter with UKSG was when I was a newly appointed serials librarian at Loughborough University (where we were manually checking-in serials on a Kardex). It so happened that the second conference was held in 1979 at Loughborough University, so I was approached to help with the organisation. It might be hard to imagine now, but it was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s that the first text-based electronic library catalogues (OPACs) were adopted by libraries. They were not replaced by Web OPACs until the 1990s. It was also a time of rapid expansion of publisher-owned journals and changing relationships between commercial publishers and learned societies. Times indeed were changing.

In 1980 the theme of the third conference at South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education was 'Automation and Serials', a recurring theme during the 1980s. The conference was attended by probably just over 100 people – but, even at this early stage, barriers were being broken down and all participants seemed eager to learn from one another. And so the conferences continued and the numbers continued to grow, although it remained a fairly relaxed and informal meeting with late night parties where delegates brought along guitars for entertainment. Indeed UKSG even had its own choir and a conference song. From the middle of the decade the group also began to run one-day courses and a short newsletter was published for distribution to members (by post). A big decision was taken in 1988 to begin the publication of the UKSG journal, Serials. The first issue appeared in March and it was edited by John Merriman. It has to be remembered that all through this decade all the work was carried out by committee volunteers – the group had no paid staff until around 1990 and, by then, the UKSG conference was an established feature on the information landscape.

I became Chair of UKSG in 1990. One of my first tasks was the appointment of a paid group Administrator, Jill Tolson, who worked for UKSG from 1989 to 2000. Lots of things were happening in the serials world. The first commercial e-journals appeared. Publishers were working hard to create new business models around print and electronic titles. Jisc was bursting into action and one of its first initiatives in the serials arena was the Pilot Site Licensing Initiative (PSLI) which led to the formation of NESLI and large UK-wide consortia deals. All this changed the relationship between libraries and publishing around such areas as archiving, dissemination, discovery and preservation of journal content and was reflected in the UKSG conference programmes, Serials, and short courses. The conference was becoming so successful that only a handful of university venues were able to accommodate it and it moved between Heriot-Watt, the University of Manchester, Exeter and Keele. It was also attracting a significant number of non-UK participants and for a few years UKSG hosted three European Serials conferences, one in Dublin and the other two in the Netherlands.

In 1997 the Google.com domain was registered. The world of libraries and publishing was about to be turned upside down. By the noughties, libraries and publishers were focusing on technology to improve all aspects of their business – communications, working practices, and service delivery. What followed was a decade of improvements to resource discovery systems, standards and protocols around providing access to e-journal content in competition with the popularity of Google. It was also the decade when open access (OA) became a talking point with the Budapest Initiative in 2001 and commercial OA business model development started. Electronic content was quickly becoming the norm and the race to develop content, platforms, functionality and content control intensified. UKSG was in the thick of things. In 2006 the group started work on the TRANSFER code of practice, which continued until 2014 when it transferred to NISO, and 2008 saw the launch of the UKSG/NISO KBART working group to improve library holdings metadata. All this innovation and excitement was disseminated on a regular basis by the highly respected UKSG journal, Serials (now published as Insights), which I co-edited with Helen Henderson for over ten years, as well as the fortnightly Serials-eNews (now published as UKSG eNews) which Helen and I initiated.

From 2010 onwards there was a massive growth in new products and services to support the higher education community in general and specifically the research community. Measuring research quality and impact and the management of big data led to numerous new stakeholders in the knowledge community and established intermediaries such as subscription agents struggled to find a role. Some have survived but others have not. The physical entity of the journal is no longer as important in the new technological landscape where users interact between content (from journals, books, multi-media, etc.) seamlessly. No doubt current UKSG members will see even more major changes over the next five to ten years.

Writing this short editorial has made me feel very old! So it's time to stop and say finally a big "Happy 40th birthday, UKSG, and here's to many more decades of innovation and success".

[With thanks to Sarah Bull / UKSG for use of the UKSG@40 film timeline; Helen Henderson, Jill Tolson, Albert Prior and Brian Cox.]