
A drop in the ocean



Andrew Kennedy
Head of Library,
The Oceanography Library,
Proudman Oceanographic
Laboratory, Liverpool
(www.pol.ac.uk)
Tel: 0151 795 4864

E-mail: annn@pol.ac.uk

Apologies for the rather cheesy title to this piece, but it seemed a vaguely appropriate (if somewhat self-deprecating!) way to convey my modest role within a world-class research institution. The Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory (POL) is based in Liverpool and specialises in:

- global sea-level science and geodetic oceanography
- wind-wave dynamics and sediment transport processes
- physics of estuarine, coastal and shelf sea circulation
- marine technology and operational oceanography.

POL is a wholly owned research centre of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC); other such centres include the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), the British Geological Survey (BGS) and the British Antarctic Survey (BAS).¹ POL, along with NERC's other sites, has its own dedicated library. The Oceanography Library is situated on the second floor of the Joseph Proudman Building;² it is modest in size and houses around 25,000 to 30,000 items (including uncatalogued archival material).

As well as serving the information needs of its 'indigenous population' of scientists, the Oceanography Library serves the students and staff of the University of Liverpool;³ indeed, the university's marine science collection is housed within POL. Moreover, the university's connection with POL does not end there: both institutions use the Innovative Millennium catalogue; POL scientists generally enjoy an honorary status within the university (frequently giving lectures and participating in seminars); and university staff also participate in meetings and committees at POL – such as the Oceanography Library user group (OLUG).⁴

I began work at POL in December 2006 as assistant librarian. Having come from a very different background,⁵ I was both pleased and daunted by the multiplicity and diversity of the tasks awaiting me in a research council library. In addition to the usual library work that I was familiar with – such as cataloguing, inquiry-handling and subscription-management – POL introduced me to the world of ERMS,⁶ NORA⁷ and RMS;⁸ as if this wasn't enough, I quickly had to become conversant with OPMs,⁹ PSREs¹⁰ and a myriad of other acronyms and quasi-acronyms!

Further challenges resulted from the fact that my academic background was in the humanities (specifically, philosophy). Oceanography, of course, has its own specialist journals and key publishers, which were largely unknown to me. Being 'chucked in at the deep end' (excuse the pun) with management of the journal subscriptions afforded the perfect opportunity to quickly become au fait with the fundamentals. Indeed, given the relatively manageable scale of POL's library operations, I quickly developed in numerous, hitherto uncharted areas – such as performing staff appraisals, participating in the recruitment process and attending NERC-wide meetings.

Amongst other things, becoming Head of Library in 2008 has enabled me to appreciate the value of consortial negotiation. As a participating member of the Research Council Libraries and Information Consortium (RESCOLINC), NERC (and therefore POL) enjoys a substantial discount with such heavyweight publishers as the Nature Publishing Group. NERC libraries have even successfully presented themselves as a consortium in obtaining favourable rates with Elsevier and its Science Direct packages. The library's fiscal pressures have also been alleviated by its contribution to NISC's (National Information Services Corporation)¹¹ Marine, Oceanographic and Freshwater Resources online database and CD-Rom – I upload quarterly updates of POL's holdings and we receive welcome royalty cheques.

However, I would not wish to give the impression that being a librarian at POL is all stress and financial circumspection! The organisation provides a number of interesting and surprising opportunities for all its staff (including information professionals) to take its science to the general public. For example, POL has annually held an ocean-awareness weekend at the Blue Planet Aquarium in Ellesmere Port; scientists (and non-scientists) staff stalls explaining their research and answering questions (all helpers also receive

a free family pass for the weekend). I personally had the genuine pleasure of helping to staff a POL area at last year's Tall Ships event in Liverpool; the event – which included numerous displays and interactive features – was a huge success and culminated in a presentation evening aboard the tall ship *Alexander von Humboldt*.

The future of libraries (whether they be research council, higher education or public and so on) is unclear; this is both in terms of potential economic constraints and the changing nature of information delivery. However, there are a number of areas that I anticipate POL's library services will enter. Self-issue/return (specifically utilising RFID technology) is a very real possibility for the future as users demand extended opening hours and library staff are required for other duties. User education, I suggest, will also play a more significant part in the Oceanography Library. Self-issue/return and user education may be viewed as old-hat by the higher education community, but they have been deemed superfluous at POL until fairly recently.¹² Finally, in light of NERC's strategic proclamations,¹³ it seems highly likely that there will be an increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary research; this, to some extent, is mirrored in the publishing world,¹⁴ and it is certainly reflected on my bookshelves – my latest acquisition being the eleven-volume *Treatise on Geophysics* from Elsevier – the price of which certainly wasn't a drop in the ocean as far as my book budget was concerned.

REFERENCES

- 1 CEH and BGS have multiple sites across the UK – in locations such as Lancaster, Wallingford and Edinburgh; NERC also has collaborative centres, such as the National Oceanographic Centre Southampton (NOCS).
- 2 Joseph Proudman was the inaugural director of the Tidal Institute and Liverpool Observatory, taken over by the Natural Environment Research Council in 1965 to become part of the Institute of Oceanographic Sciences (IOS). In 1987 IOS was renamed the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory, a fitting tribute to an inspirational scientist who combined observational studies with theoretical models to advance our understanding of ocean circulation and tides. Proudman's scientific methodology underpins much of the current work of the laboratory today.

- 3 Students and staff from other local further and higher education institutions can be catered for by arrangement.
- 4 The university is also very accommodating when it comes to POL staff attending relevant training events or sessions; similarly, POL provides induction sessions for undergraduates and postgraduates.
- 5 I had previously worked at Cambridge University Library for several years in various library-related roles. The UL – as it is known in Cambridge – is a wonderful institution, but its vastness (as a legal deposit library) inevitably engenders a high degree of compartmentalisation with regard to one's role within the organisation.
- 6 The Electronic Records Management System used by NERC has been created by the Australian company Objective. *Inter alia*, NERC expects this technology to ease its work burden whilst it is dealing with the implications of the Freedom of Information Act (2000).
- 7 NERC Open Research Archive is the organisational digital repository for NERC-funded, or part-funded, research output; the most typical deposit is post-print research papers – deposit is mandatory. See <http://nora.nerc.ac.uk/>.
- 8 Resource Management System, developed by *ChangePoint* – the software provides a framework in which tasks and functions can be appropriately assigned to the 'projects' encountered in one's work environment.
- 9 Output and performance measures – an annual statistics-collection exercise for central government to help the latter calculate future funding for research centres.
- 10 An annual survey of knowledge-transfer activity within the public sector research establishments – this seeks to ascertain the sources of funding for projects taking place within the research centres.
- 11 NISC, Inc. was relatively recently acquired by EBSCO Publishing.
- 12 Possible reasons for this include the high level of computer literacy of POL's scientists and the growing number of POL staff (including an increasing number of postgraduate students).
- 13 For example, see 'Next generation science for Planet Earth'; see <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/publications/strategicplan/documents/strategy07.pdf>.
- 14 See, for example, Nature Publishing Group's new journal *Nature climate change*.