



An overview of Cardbox Plus in the Department of Agriculture and Food Library

by Mary Doyle, Librarian, Dept of Agriculture and Food

As ours is the largest of the Government Libraries, I am almost ashamed to admit to the Dept of Agriculture and Food being so late in entering the computerisation arena. Having a Computer Division in the Department proved a disadvantage in this regard initially, though it has since proved to be a big advantage. The disadvantage was that the scheduling of computerisation within the Department was out of our hands and, in a large grant-paying Department like ours, the Library was low on the list of priorities.

We did not however simply sit back. Over the years we examined our requirements and made out a draft list of what we wanted of a system and this we continually added to as other ideas occurred to us. We looked at as many library software packages as possible and further added to our list of requirements on the basis of the strengths and weaknesses of various systems. Thus when computerisation began to seem a definite possibility we had a ready-made specification of our requirements.

It was our plan, together with the Government Libraries Group, to decide on a package which would be suitable to all Government Libraries and this is still under investigation. In the meantime our Department moved the goalposts, and animal health and the control of the movement of animals became the major priority: all the resources (funding and staff) of the Computer Division were to be devoted solely to that for at least two years.

Staffing in the Library had by now been reduced by three because of the Government embargo on recruitment to the Civil Service and the Library was in chaos. Catalogue cards were indeed being produced at regular intervals but there was nobody to file them away, so even the time spent preparing them was a complete waste. There was a huge back-

log of items to be catalogued and of periodicals to be registered and circulated.

By this time I had seen an evaluation version of CARDBOX PLUS and was very impressed with its versatility and its capabilities. As a possible interim solution it had some major advantages:

- it was very **cheap** — £350 sterling.
- it was very **flexible**.
- it was **simple to design** (no input required by Computer Division beyond the initial installation).
- the **data could be transferred** to another system when the time came.
- we were about to invest in CD-ROMs and would need a PC anyway.

As a result the Computer Division, which was very aware of our problems and extremely helpful, agreed to purchase a single-user version of CARDBOX PLUS.

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of the very helpful CARDBOX PLUS consultant (whose normal telephone support is free of charge), we have found the solution to one of our problems in this area.

Our catalogue also includes fields to facilitate ordering of publications. Thus when we order a book we enter as much cataloguing detail as possible, together with ordering data and supplier's address etc. We usually use a previous order to the same publisher and duplicate it, changing the publication details to create the new record, thus saving a lot of typing. Within CARDBOX PLUS we have designed a template which includes the basic order text and indicates where the contents of a given field in our record should appear. Having entered the order data in our record we simply call up the relevant template and print the order. This is just one example of the use of templates, which we use for all kinds of standard letters — orders, claims etc. The order section of the record also includes fields for invoice details and using these we prepare instructions for payment to be sent to Accounts Division (F4 forms and facing sheets). Using the templates we were able to match the layout of the printed originals (on which Accounts Division insisted), so you can see the template facility is very versatile.

Notes on our Periodicals Database

In designing our Periodicals Format we made full use of a particular feature of CARDBOX PLUS — the Extra Text field. The basic indexed fields — Title, ISSN, Location etc — are on the main screen. Included on this also are indexed fields for Date Due and Overdue. The issues, which are not indexed, are entered in the Extra Text field as they arrive and the Date Due field is accordingly amended. If an issue is found not to have come this is entered in the Overdue field. Using these fields we can check for overdue and missing items. Using a template we can then issue a claim notice. We also use the Extra Text field to archive details of previous years' payments. This can be batched when new payments are being entered.

We include our circulation lists in one of the indexed fields but we use the field simply to keep the lists up to date. When lists are amended we print them and paste them to a circulation form which is then photocopied. We find this faster than printing off lists as our printer is quite slow. The ability to keep our lists up to date is a big advantage.

Many of the library packages we looked at had difficulty handling different mailing addresses. We, for instance, order and pay all periodicals purchased by the Department, though the periodicals themselves may be posted direct either to HQ or to offices and laboratories around the country. Many pre-

defined periodicals management packages have difficulty with this, which is surprising, as we are not unique. However with CARDBOX PLUS there was no problem.

Remaining Databases

There is nothing of particular note in our other databases with perhaps the exception of the Loans Database. This could have been included on the Catalogue database but we decided against it for two reasons:

a) it would take up too much space and, more importantly

b) so much of our stock is not on the system and we do not have the time to catalogue it fully. We therefore enter an abbreviated record on the loans database.

DATA ENTRY

It is possible to design very attractive screens using CARDBOX PLUS which makes data entry more pleasant than working with the cluttered screens of some library packages we have seen. Data entry is also very quick, including word processing features such as wordwrapping. It is easy to move between fields, either forwards or backwards or even skipping fields — and you do not have to wait until you get to the end of the record to go back and correct an error. A very useful feature is the ability to duplicate a similar record, e.g. an earlier edition, and simply edit the fields which differ to create a new record. The records are stored very quickly and the words flash across the top of the screen as they are entered in the index.

SEARCHING

Searching is a little slow because only one term can be entered at a time (at a price of £350 sterling there had to be some drawback!). It does however find the matching items very quickly and the search can be modified using full Boolean logic (and, or, and not). It allows for truncation and range searching. Search results can be stored for later use. It is also possible to prepare command files which could be used to store search strategies — we have not actually used this feature yet. A very nice feature is the ability to tag or mark items of interest on a list and choose only these — or exclude them. It is not really user-friendly unless you understand the basic concepts of searching, in which case the prompts at the bottom of the screen are very helpful, but there is no online explanation of searching techniques. The manual, of course, explains searching in detail.

Catalogue of Government publications not issued through Government Supplies Agency (Stationery Office)

We are about to start the preparation of a catalogue of Departmental Publications which are not published through the Government Supplies Agency. This is something which cannot be done without the cooperation of the Librarians in each Department.

The publications in question include annual reports, policy documents, sector reviews, standards, statistics etc. They range from general issue publications, through 'restricted distribution' to 'confidential' reports. Generally they would be for limited distribution, though not necessarily confidential. They might be distributed at conferences or in response to queries. They are often reported on in the media (even the confidential ones on occasion!). However, while they might be widely circulated within a certain circle, libraries might only become aware of them if specifically asked for them, or as a result of a media report or bibliographic reference.

In January 1989 the Dept of Finance issued a letter to all Departments saying that it was desirable

that all these publications should be lodged in the Library of the relevant Department, and that the Librarian in turn should forward details of the publications to the GLG for inclusion in an annual catalogue of publications. A copy of the letter is enclosed with this newsletter for all members who are working in Government libraries.

Some Departmental Librarians have already sent me in their lists for 1989-90 and I am now asking the rest of you to do likewise as soon as possible. I would also ask you to check with all Divisions in your Department to see if they may have issued anything. — *Mary Doyle*

PLEASE SEND DETAILS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO:

Mary Doyle, Librarian, Dept of Agriculture and Food, Kildare Street, Dublin 2.

If you have any queries, please contact me at 789011 x2163

Report of the Hon. Secretary of GLG to the Executive Board of LAI for the year 1990

The Committee met nine times during 1990, and the AGM was held on 11 April at the Dept of the Marine. The guest speaker, Noel Hughes, gave a short talk on 'The green environment'.

The Directory of Government Libraries is still in demand. A second amendment sheet, consisting of an updated reference list of Government libraries and their librarians, was printed in March 1990 and distributed to libraries. Members of the LAA received a copy with their copy of *An Leabharlann*.

A further issue of the Group's newsletter *Glint* (number seven) was published in February 1990. It contained a report on the Group's library software seminar, with evaluations of six software packages, and an article on CD-ROM.

Talks are continuing with the CITS (Dept of Finance) concerning the choice of software (probably Microcairs) for use on an inter-departmental network. The Dept of Agriculture and Food Library hosted a further demonstration/workshop on Microcairs on 6, 7, and 8 November.

Publications by Irish Government Departments (non-SO publications) can be hard to track down: a start has been made on producing a regular listing of this 'grey literature'. — *Lisa Shields*

NEWS AND EVENTS

Software selection

The process of selecting a microcomputer software package suitable for use in Government Libraries is now at the stage where the technical features of the chosen package (Cairs) are being examined in detail. During the Cairs IMS Demonstration last November a meeting took place on 7 November 1990 between members of the Government Libraries Group Computerisation Subcommittee, Dee Marrable of CAIRS and Dolores Rooney of the CITS (Central Information Technology Service of the Dept of Finance) to discuss certain technical questions regarding the software. The main features under scrutiny were:

- Re-indexing and updating speeds
- Maximum database sizes for various hardware configurations
- Networking criteria
- Costs and licencing issues

Further information on these topics as well as details of suitable reference sites are currently being awaited from CAIRS. — *Aisling Judge*

Training course

Anna Gethings and Claire Devlin are organising another of their popular training courses — a two-day workshop on 'Introduction to information and library work', to be held on 23 and 24 January 1991.

The two-day event is designed to provide the basic skills and knowledge required to set up and run an information centre.

Several members of our group have attended previous workshops run by Anna and Claire, and found them very rewarding.

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