

# GLINT



## GOVERNMENT LIBRARIES INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

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### EDC / GLG JOINT STUDY TOUR

The study visit organised jointly by the Association of European Documentation Centre Librarians and the Government Libraries Group of the Library Association went off very successfully on July 4th and 5th last. Nearly thirty librarians from all over the United Kingdom and Ireland took part. Visits were organised to the libraries at the Commission of the European Communities, the Department of Agriculture and Food, and Trinity College Dublin on the Monday. On Tuesday, the group were taken to see the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, in Loughlinstown, and then those not taking an early flight home visited the Geological Survey of Ireland.

Copies of the 'Directory of Government Libraries in Ireland' and also of 'The Irish Meteorological Office - The First Fifty Years' were

distributed during the visit to the Dept. of Agriculture and Food, and attracted great interest. In fact one visitor, Mary Doody from the DHSS, made good use of her copy of the Directory and paid impromptu visits to our Departments of Health and of Social Welfare.

Most of the visitors had arrived on Friday, July 1st, and took advantage of the weekend to shop and see the sights in Dublin. An informal gettogether was arranged for the Saturday night in Hughes' pub to allow members of the Government Libraries Group of the LAI to meet their UK counterparts, and despite the unexpected lack of background music, it was a very enjoyable evening. Many contacts were established which will no doubt be extremely valuable in the future.

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#### PARTICIPANTS

Ann Selwood - National Library of Wales  
Ann Cornwell-Long - "  
F.W. cornwell-Long - "  
Mary Murphy - Spicers Center for Europe, Leeds  
J. Higgs - "  
Peter Harbord - Durham University  
E. Harbord - Newcastle upon Tyne University  
S. Woodman - Building Research Establishment  
Sharon Glew - Fidelity Investment Services  
Harry Hamman - Foreign & Commonwealth Office  
Francis Carline - Bodleian Library  
Sue Telfer - University of Surrey  
Bernard Mackey - Monopolies & Mergers Commission  
Anne Alexander - DHSS, London  
Elizabeth Doherty - "  
Mary Doody - "  
Surendra Lal - British Library  
Derek Orton - University of Hull  
Freda Carroll - "  
Brian Wilcox - Joint Research Centre Library, Italy  
Christian Olsen - "  
Ian Thompson - University College Cardiff  
Steve Richard - Glasgow University  
Patti Punch - NIHE Limerick  
Tony Ekloff - UCD  
Tim Kelly - Commission of the European Communities  
Aisling Judge - State Laboratory

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## - Choosing the Software -

By

*Aisling Judge*

Although the State Laboratory had no library until my post was created in 1985, books and journals had been purchased over the years, going as far back as the turn of the century. At that time, the State Laboratory was situated in Merrion Street and used the library facilities of the Dept. of Agriculture and also the UCD Engineering Library.

In 1983, new premises were built at Abbotstown and the State Laboratory was not only relocated but expanded and completely revamped to suit recent advances in the science and technology of analytical chemistry. During the moving process, a library committee was formed, whose members did a stock-take and made up lists of all the 'library' material as it was boxed and moved out. These lists were later used as the basis for a library catalogue which was input onto computer. So when I took up my post in 1985 I found a lovely modern laboratory with a network of Apple IIe microcomputers linking most sections, and the bones of a catalogue set up on this using OMNIS, a database management package. There was even a modem link-up to the European Space Agency Information Retrieval Service, a major online database network. My instructions were to build on these foundations and develop a modern scientific library complete with computerized catalogue and online searching facilities. This proved to be not quite as easy as it seemed. Both the hardware and the structure of the systems were inadequate and mutually incompatible.

The Apple computers had been chosen originally for their superior numerical capabilities - ideal for running laboratory instruments - and their office and administration function was seen as a bonus. However, most office (and library) software has been designed for running on IBM-type computers which use a completely different operating system, and very little is available for use on the Apples.

The library 'catalogue' had been created using a Data Base Management System called OMNIS, which I was assured was very powerful and flexible and would do virtually anything! The fact that it would not do what I wanted it to do was for months attributed by everyone (myself included) to my lack of familiarity with the system.

The undoubted power of the system's report generator and sorting abilities belied its poor text-retrieval performance. The reason for this lay in the way the information is stored and indexed by the programme. In order to save indexing space and thus give faster searching, only a small number of fields could be indexed. Even then, only the first few characters of those fields were indexed. Simple searches of one field at a time, with no combinations, was all that was possible under the fast search mode. More complex searches were possible but involved long-winded and error-prone search statements. Once the search had been put into action, it was slow and could not be modified.

However, the most striking feature of OMNIS and the one which finally made me decide that it was totally unsuited to the library's needs, was its use of a fixed field length structure. This is ideal for handling office or accounting information, but just cannot be used with bibliographical information. Imagine trying to decide, in advance, just how many letters your average author or title or subject field is going to contain - and being forced to stick to it? Multiple author or subject fields just could not be handled by OMNIS. So, having decided against OMNIS, I set about looking for a more suitable package which would run on an Apple computer. I followed up those listed in Hilary Dyer's "Directory of Library and Information Retrieval Software for Microcomputers" but none of these turned out to be suitable. They were either too small (would handle only a few thousand records) or too big (scaled down Mainframe packages) and cost too much. I asked around but no-one seemed to be using Apple computers in libraries. I even went on an Aslib course on 'Microcomputers for Library and Information Services' and came back even more convinced that the Apple was being by-passed in favour of IBM compatible computers.

The only thing that seemed to hold out any hope for me was the development of the Irish National Database on PATRIC, which could be connected to with most makes of computer. It looked interesting - the prospect of having a computerized catalogue and at the same time being both database host and user on the National Database network was an inviting one.



However it, too, had its drawbacks. The structure was again the main problem as PATRIC also uses fixed field- and record lengths. Searching was limited to simple instructions with only basic combinations of instructions allowed. (This was in 1985 and there have been great improvements in this area in the latest enhancements to PATRIC since then.) Reluctantly I decided that, however desirable it might be to be part of the Irish National Database, I could not possibly use PATRIC as my sole catalogue. Rather, I would find a package to suit my needs fully, then design a modified version of my catalogue for output to PATRIC.

It was almost 18 months since I'd first started working at the State Laboratory and I was no nearer finding a suitable package when suddenly everything changed. Amstrad had pioneered a very cheap and reliable microcomputer which was fully IBM compatible and which heralded a wave of 'IBM clones'. This made it possible for the State Laboratory to consider purchasing some IBM's at previously unbelievably low prices - and both the Office and the Library were to be allowed access to these machines.

My ground rules were thus completely changed and I commenced my search once more. By then, of course, I had come across a number of attractive packages suitable for IBM PC's so I sought these without delay. They were ASSASSIN, TINlib and INMAGIC.

ASSASSIN uses a structure which is rather similar to DBASE ( and also to OMNIS) in that it is a database management system offering powerful searching, the ability to relate different files to each other and, overall, great flexibility. However, it requires a lot of work in the setting-up stage and seemed rather daunting to someone like me who had very little knowledge of computer programming. Although the field-length is variable, only 9 fields per record are allowed. Finally, searching is complex and not 'friendly' enough for the untrained user.

TINlib is also very powerful and allows both highly sophisticated and basic, user-friendly, searching. It has relational features which allow the cross-linking of records held in different databases and can be used to set up a fully integrated library system encompassing cataloguing, acquisitions, circulation and online searching. The records are variable-length, but screen displays, fields and field labels are system defined. There is a facility for compiling a thesaurus while inputting records and an authority file for checking the preferred formats for author names, etc. In the final analysis, the only point against TINlib was its price.

Not expensive when compared to the giants like Microcairs or BRS/Search, but costly enough when you add up all the bits and pieces. The package comes in four modules, priced at around £2,500 each; or £5,500 for all four together (for the single-user micro version).

To be fair it was only in comparison with INMAGIC that TINlib looked expensive. INMAGIC is far less sophisticated in many respects but does seem to offer most of the features required by a library the size of that in the State Laboratory. There is no need for a circulation element to my catalogue, for example, as material is generally loaned on a semi-permanent basis to the different sections of the State Laboratory. I do need to keep track of the location of material but this is easily incorporated into the basic catalogue. On the other hand, for its price (£1000 approx.) INMAGIC is surprisingly powerful and flexible. The catalogue is based on records of variable length with variable field -lengths. Each record can have up to 75 fields and the first 50 of these can be indexed for fast searching. Even these limits are not really restrictive as one can construct as many multiple-entries (subfields) as one wants and these will all be indexed if the original field was so-defined.

Different methods of indexing are allowed: TERM for searching on KEYWORD for string searches; or a combination of both. Boolean logic is fully supported and the searches are numbered and stored so they can be reused, combined and modified as required. As is usual with powerful search facilities the logic tends to be a bit complex for untrained users, so INMAGIC as it stands is not really suitable for use as an OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue). The suppliers have recently developed an extra package called HEADFAST which uses records created with INMAGIC and offers a totally user-friendly searching facility. This costs £500 approx. to INMAGIC users, and I am presently considering the possibility of adding it to my system as an OPAC. In other respects INMAGIC is very easy to use. The manual is comprehensive and well laid out, with plenty of examples from the sample database which comes as part of the package.

There is also very good HELP available onscreen which can be called up easily during almost any application. Inputting data can be done in a number of ways. It can be typed in directly and quite simply, with good editing facilities, each record being indexed as you add it, so it becomes immediately available on your database. However, while doing this all the data on your file is 'open' as it is being manipulated by the



computer as you work and it can be damaged if there is a power-cut or machine failure while you are inputting. So for safety it is better to prepare the bulk of your records beforehand, either using a wordprocessor or the HEADSET package which is specially designed, again by the suppliers, to suit INMAGIC. HEADSET allows for Name Authority checking, creation of duplicate records, running number allocation, etc. - all handy features which most wordprocessors don't support-, and which are not possible when entering directly into INMAGIC. It costs £200 alone, but comes included in the price of HEADFAST.

Records created either through HEADSET or a wordprocessor are then batch added to INMAGIC. Each record is checked as it's added and will be rejected if it does not "look right" or if it seems to be a duplicate of an existing record, unless it is tagged as a replacement.

Perhaps the most powerful part of the software is its report generator. Report formats can be designed to suit most requirements, from Accession Lists to search profiles to budget estimates to catalogue cards! Again, this takes a bit of practice to use efficiently but it is still relatively easy. Records can also be sorted in a variety of ways to enable complex reports to be produced. Finally, because INMAGIC is available for a number of different types of computers (micros and minis) compatibility is not a problem. It is possible to expand from single to multi-user, or from stand-alone to networked versions, without the chore of retyping data.

In the end my decision to purchase *INMAGIC* was based on four factors:

### **SUITABILITY**

The facilities offered by the software suited my needs almost exactly.

### **PRICE**

As a small library, the State Laboratory could not justify the cost of a more expensive package, so cost was a major factor in my decision.

### **COMPATIBILITY**

By virtue of using an IBM clone and MS-DOS, it is possible to download records for sending to other computers or for manipulation by other programmes using the ASCII format. It is also possible to convert records created on other systems to the INMAGIC format with a minimum of fuss.

### **BACKUP**

Head Computeres, the UK agents for INMAGIC are continually modifying it and provide good support and upgrade facilities for users.

### *Reference:*

A Directory of Library and Information Retrieval Software for Microcomputers, - 3rd. edition  
by Hilary Dyer & Alison Gunson Publishers -  
Aldershot : Gower, c 1988 - ISBN 0-566-05586-4

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### **WANTS AND DISCARDS**

Do **you** have a full set of Bound Acts or Statutory Instruments, or do you have duplicates or triplicates which are taking up space and which you would be prepared to pass on to fill in another Library's gaps?

If so, this section is for you.

You should all have been notified by the Government Supplies Agency (Stationery Office) that with a few exceptions, they will no longer stock copies of Acts and Statutory Instruments, and as most Departments receive printed copies of these, they will only provide photocopies in exceptional circumstances.

So, if you need to complete your holdings, please send your list to:

*Mary Doyle,  
Department of Agriculture & Food  
Kildare Street, Dublin 2*

*To start the ball rolling.....*

The Library of the Dept. of Agriculture & Food is seeking a Bound Volume of the **Acts for 1922.** Any offers ???

Requests need not be confined to Acts and SIs.



## VISITS

A visit took place to the Library of the Geological Survey on 27 April '88. The Librarian, Margaret Rooney, gave a guided tour of this potentially fine Library and demonstration of their software package -INMAGIC.

Unfortunately, the development of of the Library over the years has been hampered by the lack of a full-time Librarian. With the departure of Margaret Rooney, after her brief stint, to a new job in Trinity this situation appears set to continue.

## SNIPPETS

Margaret Rooney has recently left the Geological Survey to take up a new job in the Reader Services division of Trinity College Library. We wish her well in her new post.

Catherine Curtis has left the Library of the Fisheries Research Centre on promotion to the Computer Section in the Dept. of Social Welfare. Our congratulations and best wishes to Caroline in her new post.

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## TRIVIAL PURSUITS BARBECUE

For this year's summer outing you are invited to a Barbecue at 89 Killala Road, Cabra West, Dublin 7 (See Map) by kind permission of our Chairman, Aisling Judge.

There will be a charge of £1 to cover salads and wine. Bring your own steak, vegeburger etc. Trivial Pursuits will be on hand to distract you from shop talk!

**DATE: 27 August 1988**

**TIME: 6.00 pm**

RSVP enclosing £1 by 19 Augusts 1988 to : Clare Hannon, Librarian, Department of Energy, 25 Clare Street, Dublin 2.

