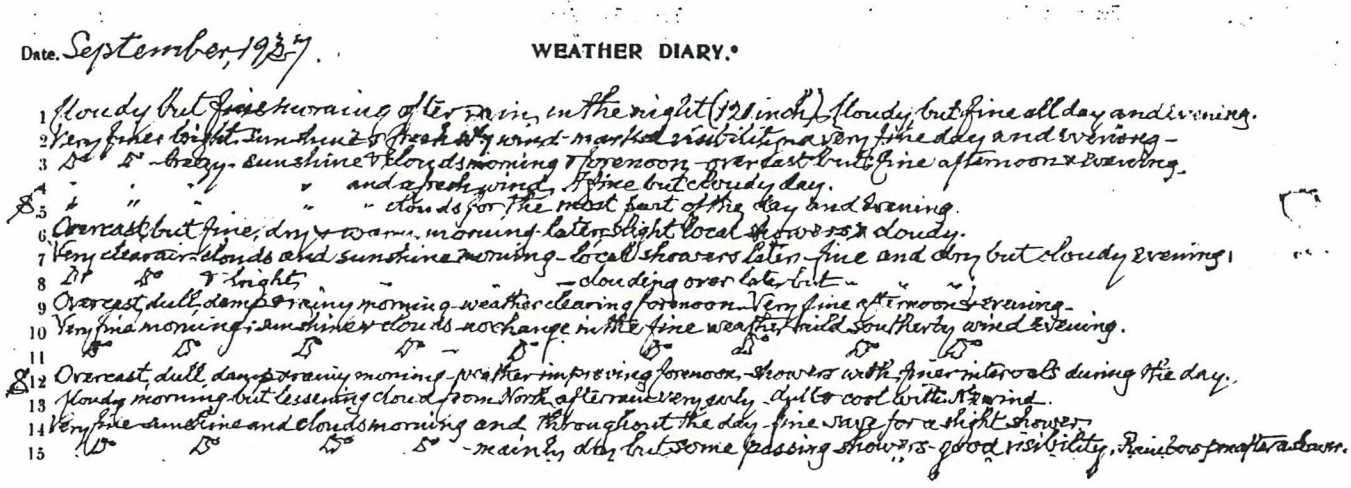
GLINT

GOVERNMENT LIBRARIES INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

Number six August 1989 ISSN 0791–0738



Date. September, 1937. WEATHER DIARY.

1 Cloudy but fine morning after rain, in the night (.22 inch), cloudy but fine all day and evening.
2 Very fine bright sunshine & fresh W. wind - marked visibility a very fine day and evening -
3 D° D° breezy - sunshine & clouds morning & forenoon - overcast but fine afternoon & evening.
4 " " " and a fresh wind, & fine but cloudy day.
5 " " " clouds for the most part of the day and evening.
6 Overcast but fine, dry & warm, morning - later slight local showers & cloudy.
7 Very clear air - clouds and sunshine morning - local showers later - fine and dry but cloudy evening.
8 D° D° & light " " - clouding over late but - " "
9 Overcast, dull, damp & rainy morning - weather clearing forenoon - Very fine afternoon & evening -
10 Very fine morning, sunshine & clouds - no change in the fine weather, mild Southerly wind evening.
11 D° D° D° D° D° D° D° D° D°
12 Overcast, dull, damp & rainy morning - weather improving forenoon - showers with finer intervals during the day.
13 Cloudy morning but lessening cloud from North afternoon very early - dull & cool with N. wind.
14 Very fine sunshine and clouds morning and throughout the day - fine save for a slight shower
15 D° D° D° D° - mainly dry but some passing showers - good visibility. Rainbow apparent evening.

Part of the final page of Sir John Moore's weather register 1869–1937. This last entry (for September 1937) was written a few weeks before his death on 12 October 1937, just before his 92nd birthday.

Remarkable record

In 1859 the fourteen-year-old Dublin school-boy William John Moore began keeping a record of the daily changes in the weather. This was the beginning of a seventy-eight-year long commitment. His observations were being published in *British Rainfall* by 1865, and from 1869 until just before his death in 1937 Sir John Moore, now one of Dublin's most distinguished physicians, sent his daily weather observations into the Meteorological Office in London.

As a physician and specialist in fevers, Sir John was fascinated by the relationship between climate and health. His chapter on 'the influence of season and of weather on disease' in his book *Meteorology, practical and applied*, published in 1894, was an important early contribution to the subject.

The manuscript registers which Sir John maintained so meticulously, twice or thrice daily over a period of 68 years at his residence at 40 Fitzwilliam Square West, are now kept in the Meteorological Service Library in Dublin. It is pleasant to record that, like other valuable series of early weather observations (Phœnix Park, Birr Castle and Markree Castle) the registers have now been bound in a handsome set of volumes — thanks to the Government Supplies Agency. They serve as a permanent reminder of a devoted amateur from a bygone age.

Lisa Shields

MICROCOMPUTER SOFTWARE EVALUATION SEMINAR (held jointly with the University and Special Libraries Section)

Along with this newsletter you will find a leaflet describing the series of demonstrations of library software packages culminating in a day-long workshop/seminar on September 28th when those packages will be evaluated.

The demonstrations and seminar will take place in the Department of Agriculture and Food.

Completed application forms should reach Aisling Judge, State Laboratory, Abbotstown, Castleknock, Dublin by 5 September.

UPDATE TO DIRECTORY OF GOVERNMENT LIBRARIES

Also enclosed with this issue is an updated reference list of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all Irish Government libraries, with the name of the present Librarian or contact person.

IN THIS ISSUE

Our Government Libraries

by Oliver Marshall and Mary Doyle

Mr Marshall is the Librarian in the Department of Education and Ms Doyle is the Librarian in the Department of Agriculture and Food.

HOW TO ANNOY A LIBRARIAN IN ONE EASY LESSON

—What do you do down in the Library?
—It must be great to be able to read books all day!
—You must be very fond of reading!
—It's easy to run a library—sure all you do is buy books, stick them on the shelves and lend them out!

The above popular misconceptions are not exclusive to our Government Departments, but they seem to be applied more often there than in most other organisations. We hope in this article to show that the end result of these attitudes is the under-utilisation of a very valuable resource, or in some cases, the complete absence of such a resource.

THE REALITY

The reality of a librarian's life is far removed from the misconceptions quoted above. Librarianship is a dynamic profession, managing one of the most important commodities of our age—*information*. The books, periodicals and other physical forms of literature you see on our shelves are merely the tools of the trade—it is what is in them that matters.

"Librarianship is a dynamic profession, managing one of the most important commodities of our age—information"

What the users see of the librarian's work is merely the tip of the iceberg. The quick response to queries is only possible if the librarian is familar with the work of his or her Department and what is being published in that field. The librarian must not just be aware of current needs but also of developing trends, and stock the library accordingly. The information must then be organised in such a way that it can be retrieved easily.

Libraries are an essential resource in any modern organisation. Their function is to provide the information required by staff to carry out their work effectively, whether it relates to management, policy, market requirements or scientific and technological developments. They give access not only to information held within their own stock but also, through their reference sources and participation in the inter-library network, to information worldwide. Libraries serving a particular organisation, known as special libraries, not only stock the information but actively promote its use by alerting staff as new material becomes available.

Use of libraries can stimulate ideas, solve problems, prevent the repetition of mistakes and the duplication of research. They are, or should be, the focal point towards which all staff turn when they need information.

Mary Doyle

"Use of libraries can stimulate ideas, solve problems, prevent the repetition of mistakes and the duplication of research"

LIBRARIES IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

We would like to be able to proceed from this outline of the role of libraries to an account of the valuable work carried out by all our government libraries. Unfortunately this is not possible, as not all meet the criteria to fulfil their proper function—though this is no fault of the staff working in them. There is no service-wide policy on libraries and no overall library structure within the Civil Service. Each Department has established or is in the process of establishing its own library service, and the perception of the need for or requirements of a library varies from Department to Department.

"There is no service wide policy on libraries and no overall library structure within the Civil Service"

It is encouraging perhaps that most Departments now seem to feel the need for a library, though many are evolving haphazardly with no clearly defined policy. While as early as 1926 the *24th General Report of the Department of Agriculture* 1923–1926 did state:

> *The ideal constantly kept in view is to ensure that no fresh development, no important discovery or invention in the domains of agriculture, stockbreeding, veterinary science, rural economics and kindred matters shall be allowed to escape the Department.*

This kind of observation is rare. While most would share the ideal expressed therein, few appreciate its implications, with the result that they do not provide the resources in either staff or money to make it possible. The reason lies in the misconceptions outlined at the beginning of this article.

The problem is that libraries do not seem to be equated with information. The Devlin Report is virtually silent on them. In its important chapter on *The Role and Tasks of the Public Service*, the Devlin Report does recognise the importance of efficient information systems:

> *The working of the systems we recommend and of the ordinary business of Departments depends to a great extent on the efficiency with which information is collected, stored, retrieved and used.* (p. 152).

Unfortunately, there is little suggestion that any reorganisation which might take place to take account of advances in information

Oliver Marshall

technology would have any implications for libraries, or even more importantly, that libraries themselves might be innovators in this area.

INFORMATION "TECHNOLOGIST" VERSUS INFORMATION "SPECIALIST"

Twenty years later, *Serving the Country Better* spends much time on the concept of *information technology*—but the emphasis throughout is on the technology rather than the information. Libraries are not mentioned. Insofar as information is considered, it is concerned with information which is generated internally. Yet much of the information which is required to make informed responsible decisions is generated externally and there is an ever increasing volume of such information. The White Paper speaks of *the technology explosion*, but there is also an ongoing *information explosion* and it is in harnessing this, in all its diverse forms, that the expertise of the librarian lies.

The White Paper allows for special staffing arrangements in respect of information technology:

It goes without saying that (the) technology programme will require an initial but substantial injection of staff resources and associated costs. Starting immediately, information technology will be regarded as a special case warranting exceptional treatment and flexibility in relation to the staffing embargo and other controls. (5.11).

By contrast to this high emphasis on information technology, the first professional librarian was not appointed to the Civil Service until 1974. In the intervening period there have been few additional appointments. Most Departments assign general service staff who are given no training whatsoever. What is not appreciated is that information systems are only as good as the information which is put into them and on how well the concepts are defined.

The efficient and effective harnessing and management of the vast volume of information now being produced is a specialist job and is becoming ever more complex. The qualification which librarians now receive is in *library and information studies*, reflecting the increased emphasis on what was in fact always a library function—the management of information. Because of the rapid pace of change in the field, ongoing training is also essential.

RICH COLLECTIONS

Despite organisational and personnel constraints, many government libraries have succeeded in building up well-developed and valuable collections. The libraries of the Department of the Marine, the Central Statistics Office, the Meteorological Service

and the National Botanic Gardens, to name but a few, are the most important libraries in their field in Ireland. These collections, and those of the other libraries, have been developed not only through direct purchase but also through exchange agreements and the involvement of their parent Departments in international organisations. Of the publications thus held, many are not available elsewhere in the country.

These collections have been given further prominence by the *Directory of Government Libraries in the Republic of Ireland*, launched recently by the Government Libraries Group of the Library Association of Ireland. This group was set up in 1985 to develop and promote the role of libraries within the Civil Service and to foster cooperation between government libraries.

In his speech at the launch Mr Eric Embleton, deputising for the Secretary (Public Service Management and Development), Department of Finance said:

> *I regard the publication of the Directory of Government Libraries as an important initiative and a major first step towards increased sharing of resources. It is a very fine achievement by the Government Libraries Group and illustrates what can be done, over a relatively short period, by a small number of dedicated people coming together in a spirit of mutual assistance and cooperation.*

We hope these remarks will indeed be a harbinger of the future. We look forward to making our resources available to you, our readers, in the years ahead.

REFERENCES

Ireland. Department of Lands and Agriculture. 24*th general report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland* 1923–26. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1927.

Report of Public Services Organisation Review Group 1966–1969. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1969.

Serving the country better: a white paper on the Public Service. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1985.

Library Association of Ireland. Government Libraries Group. *Directory of Government Libraries in the Republic of Ireland*. Dublin: Group, 1987.

Reprinted, by kind permission, from the June 1988 issue of *Seirbhís Phoiblí* (Vol. 9 No. 2, pp 41–45). Some libraries never received this issue of the journal, which is now hard to come by.

Training for Government Libraries in the UK

The July issue of the Newsletter of the Library Association Government Libraries Group (UK) includes 'A framework for training for librarians', drawn up by the Committee of Departmental Librarians. It is interesting not only for the guidelines it sets out on training but also for the evidence of a highly structured government library service in the UK, something which is so sadly lacking in this country.

Copies of the article are available from Mary Doyle, Department of Agriculture and Food, Tel: 789011, ext. 2163