This issue addresses how libraries are rising to the challenge of escalating user expectations. Kathryn McKee kicks us off with an article on the implementation of RFID in three college libraries. This has proved popular with the readers, thanks to the 24/7 access, better borrowing facilities and fewer missing books. Claire Sewell and Oksana Yurchyshyn-Smith report back from the CILIP Cataloguing and Indexing Group conference on RDA and how the new cataloguing code helps the user find, identify, select and obtain the information they need. Ed Chamberlain looks at SUMMON, and how it helps today’s resource-rich and time-poor users quickly to find what they are looking for without having to grapple with subject headings and authorised access points.
Emma-Jane Batchelor highlights how the Education Library is reaching out to staff and students through Camtools. We have the usual people pages of course, and Liz Osman rounds off the issue with an exciting account of what she does in her spare time – Hunter Field Target! And librarians are perceived as boring!

IMPLEMENTING RFID IN COLLEGE LIBRARIES

Three College Libraries (Clare, Jesus, and St John’s) implemented RFID this summer. *CULIB* asked them about their projects.

**Objectives**
A key objective for all three libraries was to replace security systems which were reaching the ends of their lives and becoming less reliable. Clare and Jesus were both implementing Voyager circulation at the same time as RFID. In addition to changing to Voyager, Clare and Jesus also wanted to permit self-issue of AV items for the first time in response to student demands via library surveys. They both opted for a ‘red-tag’ system for DVDs (a device that unlocks the case when the item is self-issued) enabling DVDs to be shelved on open access, rather than in the Library office. The introduction of 24-hour borrowing to students, again in response to demand, was the primary goal at St John’s, where RFID was implemented as part of a larger building refurbishment project providing additional and more flexible reading spaces and improving disabled access.

**Practicalities**
In practical terms, all three projects went well. Clare opted to tag their own books. Jesus and St John’s both employed 3M to do the tagging. In all cases tagging was completed on schedule and to the libraries’ satisfaction. Some small issues came up, such as what to do about endpapers with useful information which would be obscured by the RFID tag – Clare’s solution was to photocopy them and paste the copies in over the tag, which took time and glue, but worked. Boxed sets of AV
items were problematic and required workarounds, not quite as satisfactory. Extra work was involved replacing many DVD cases to accommodate the ‘red-tags’. It was noted that borrowers with worn-out or expired cards were directed by the self-issue unit to library staff. While this might be a temporary frustration for the user, it could be useful from the administrative point of view to catch people who needed their cards updating.

Advice to others considering similar projects
All three strongly stressed the value of talking to other librarians who had already implemented RFID, visiting libraries running different systems, and sharing experiences with others currently implementing as the projects progressed. Seeing systems in operation in other libraries could inform decisions on particular details as well as the bigger issues, eg. hearing how noisy the printer was determined one library’s decision not to issue printed receipts from a machine sited in an open plan building.

Other useful tips included:
• Compare several suppliers and their prices (pennies can make a difference if you are tagging 100,000 items)
• Get your dates into the supplier’s diary well in advance and keep communicating
• Set out your own requirements very clearly (there are many options available – don’t be confused by the terminology)
• Prioritise the key things that you need and be prepared to tackle less important things later
• Note that you may need assistance from other departments (eg Maintenance or Computer Support) and communicate with them
• Stock up on chocolate biscuits

Outcomes
Response from users appears to have been positive across the board. All three libraries noted the saving in time now that several books could be borrowed at once. It was reported that students at Clare found the self-
issue system much easier to use, being both intuitive and quick. Anne commented that: “Our students think the new system works by magic!” At Jesus, while there hasn’t been a great deal of feedback, the change was made in response to many demands for an online system and Rhona noticed “A few ‘wows’ when showing new students” and an increase in borrowing of DVDs now that self-issue is available.

Having maintained the same circulation system (Voyager) before and after implementing RFID, St John’s has been able to produce directly comparable ‘before’ and ‘after’ figures on borrowing, which demonstrate that introducing self-issue has had a significant impact. While 4476 items were borrowed (or renewed) during the Michaelmas Term in 2011, 6268 items were borrowed (or renewed) during the same period in 2012. This is a whopping increase of 1792 issues (40%) in just 9 weeks. It will be very interesting to see if this increased level of borrowing is sustained long term. The self-issue unit is frequently used throughout the night. Almost 70% of items borrowed during the Michaelmas Term were issued using the new unit, though a few students continue to prefer to bring books to the desk to be issued by staff. The level of uptake of self-issue gives staff more time to devote to other library services.

It is unsurprising that students growing up in a 24/7 culture and used to touch-screen technology have responded positively, particularly appreciating the ease of use of the RFID self-issue units. While users may
not directly perceive other benefits, improved security systems should ensure that fewer books go missing, and that misshelved books can be found more readily. None of the libraries has yet run a stockcheck, but it is hoped that this will be a quicker and more efficient process using RFID, helping to meet students’ expectations that the books they need will be in their College Library.

The information for this article was provided by Anne Hughes of Clare College, Rhona Watson of Jesus College, and Janet Chow of St John’s College. We are grateful to them for sharing their experiences and congratulate all three on the success of their projects.

“RESPONSIVENESS TO USER NEEDS” (RDA 0.4.2.1): UPDATES FROM CILIP’s CATALOGUING AND INDEXING GROUP CONFERENCE

In September 2012 Céline Carty, Claire Sewell and Oksana Yurchyshyn-Smith attended the conference of CILIP’s Cataloguing and Indexing Group hosted by the University of Sheffield. This is the main national cataloguing conference and takes place every 2 years. There were a large number of very interesting papers over the two days, covering a wide variety of topics. The main theme of the conference was “the value of cataloguing”. This paper presents some of the conference proceedings relating to the growing expectations of users.

Dave Pattern (University of Huddersfield) was the keynote speaker and presented the results of their Library Impact Data Project. Several charts demonstrated connections between increased expectations of readers, library usage and final degree classifications. In general, higher degree results tended to be correlated with more frequent library attendance and greater numbers of books borrowed. Conversely, low library usage was connected with higher drop-out rates. Interestingly, compared with UK students, their EU equivalents were seen to use a far higher proportion of e-resources.
Anne Welsh and Katharine Whaite (both UCL) discussed the hybrid history of our catalogues, which have always combined records of different levels and mixed formats. That is particularly relevant given the ongoing introduction of RDA. Using several BL records as examples, they demonstrated how elements from pre-AACR records “migrated” into MARC. According to the speakers, changes in cataloguing rules in the past did not cause a significant number of users’ complaints.

Lucy Bell talked about her work as a curator of digital data in Social Sciences and Humanities at the UK Data Archive, University of Essex. She presented a JISC project which aims to apply Simple Knowledge Organization System (SKOS) to the Humanities And Social Science Electronic Thesaurus (HASSET). The SKOS-HASSET project is intended to improve the thesaurus’s online presence and join existing management interface and user pages. That is particularly important now when users prefer a simple Google-type, single faceted search/browse interface of powerful metadata.

Michael Emly (University of Leeds) discussed the need for cooperation between libraries in order to avoid the inadvertent disposal of final copies and to preserve important research collections. He talked about the JISC Copac Collections Management Tools Project, which aims to improve collection management decisions based on COPAC data. As a practical step in saving important collections the speaker suggested the use of the 583 MARC field with a note ‘preservation action’ for rare editions.

Céline Carty (Cambridge University Library) presented updates on RDA from the June 2012 conference of the American Library Association. Among others they included:

- On 31 March 2013 LC and BL will convert to RDA
- Canadian cataloguer Chris Oliver is currently ‘re-wording’ RDA; the first portfolio of corrected chapters should be ready by December 2012, the full text – mid 2013.

1. RDA training for UL staff will take place in January-March 2013. For college librarians it is expected to happen in June, July and September 2013.
• RDA will not be free, with subscription fees for the Rules themselves and the RDA Tool Kit.
• Developing MARC connections with RDA. For example, the current 260 field of MARC cannot cope with imprint; there will be a new 264 field for product, publisher, distribution, manufacture and copyright date.
• First point of contact for any RDA questions – loc.gov/aba/ralda

Gary Green (Surrey County Council Library Services) reported on his recent project to automate some of the cataloguing and classification processes at his library service. This has resulted in a reduction in the amount of in-house manual work which needs to be done, freeing up cataloguer time for other work. The project has also led to faster processing times for material which helps to meet the increased expectations of users who are demanding their material catalogued at an ever faster rate.

Another theme explored was the role that cataloguers play in making library resources discoverable.

Helen Williams (London School of Economics) described her work adding metadata to institutional repository material. She reported that the same workflows used on print material could be applied to repository material; helping users find the resources they need and showcasing cataloguers’ skills to the wider library.

Katrina Clifford (Kingston University) continued this theme, explaining that although rich data was available for repository contributions this was often not linked to catalogue records. By linking the metadata with the corresponding item in the catalogue Katrina has been able to enhance the ability of users to select the right material for their needs.

Classification was a theme present in a number of presentations.

Neil Robinson began by giving a fascinating insight into his work at the Marylebone Cricket Club Library. Neil was tasked with updating a classification scheme which had been in place since the 1940s so that it better reflected current knowledge. Not only did this provide a way for
him to get to know the collection but it enabled users to identify the resources more easily.

Elly Cope (University of Bath) talked about a reclassification project at the University of Bath, undertaken in response to feedback from users who found the previous mix of systems confusing. The collection has since been reclassified according to the Dewey System, with a positive response from users. In this case users were quick to articulate their needs and the library responded accordingly, leading to enhanced usability for library patrons.

Helen Garner (Sheffield Hallam University) highlighted the need to maintain a consistent display across the catalogue. Due to the range of resources available in the Sheffield Hallam library catalogue, users were having trouble selecting the correct resource for their needs. By making a few adjustments to the department’s workflow Helen was able to better distinguish between resource types in the catalogue, making selection easier for users.

Claire Sewell  
*Senior Cataloguer, University Library*  
*Dr Oksana Yurchyshyn-Smith*

Links to Dave Pattern and others, except Katrina Clifford and Neil Robinson:
http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/special-interest-groups/cataloguing-indexing/pages/presentations.aspx

Library Impact Data Project:
http://library.hud.ac.uk/blogs/projects/lidp/

JISC Copac Collections Management Tools Project:
http://copac.ac.uk/innovations/collections-management/
WEBSCALE SEARCH: A BETTER WAY TO MEET USER EXPECTATIONS?

From a librarian’s point of view, the OPAC or online public access catalogue has given us a convenient way to explore and understand the data we create to describe our collections. The ability to browse works by authority heading or to perform searches on control numbers or classmark is a great tool for quickly locating physical material. The application of Boolean logic combined with a first-hand knowledge of the underlying catalogue data provides a powerful toolset for the skilled searcher.

Yet for our users, especially the newly-arrived undergraduate, OPACs have a lengthy lead in time to get ‘up to speed’ and seem worlds apart from their everyday experience of search, shaped by their understanding of search engines and shopping websites. It’s with this gap between service and expectation in mind that we introduced LibrarySearch, a keyword based search platform for all library collections. Despite its flaws, it has proven popular, now seeing over 300,000 searches a month in term.

Last year we took this concept a stage further, with the trial of Summon¹, a webscale discovery platform that includes a similar experience to LibrarySearch, but on a much wider scale. In Cambridge, Summon has an index of over 200 million records covering our print and online collections. It and its competitor products are a realisation that the library’s collection no longer resides wholly on its shelves. In many ways, it provides a new home for catalogue data. Our bibliographic records sit alongside full text and metadata for books, newspapers and articles in a single index.

¹ http://www.serialssolutions.com/en/services/summon/
In a recent article for the Educause Review¹, Lorcan Dempsey examined the drivers behind the evolution of the library catalogue into such a larger entity. Dempsey notes that users have gone from being time rich and relatively resource poor to the opposite, with little free time and many potential places to look. With this in mind, it seems therefore natural that they would look at the widest possible option first, usually a network level resource such as Google or Wikipedia. Summon is perhaps a library response to this demand, aiming to provide a network level experience.

In Cambridge, our trial of Summon (branded Librarysearch+) has seen surprising results. There were lots of positives, including good feedback, heavy usage and users discovering material not easily locatable through other means. There were also some negatives. In an environment where users have access to a bountiful number of books, Summons’ ‘out of the box’ functionality made it harder than one might expect to find print material and perform complex tasks.

We also noted that users were not making best use of the tools available to them, causing us to question the intuitiveness not of the concept, but of the interface and the way it presented functionality such as faceted refine. We’ve a number of potential options for improving upon this.

For more information on the trial, there are copious details on the libraries@cambridge service developments blog² with a series of posts outlining the findings of the project and next steps.

Thinking generally, it is my belief that Summon does not represent the ‘end’ of library catalogues, just a stage in their gradual evolution. Much of what made the OPAC useful and relevant to the user can be retained and bettered in such an environment. Discovery platforms fulfil much of the complex functionality of OPACS and with facet based refining, Classmark searching is still possible, although the sheer variety of

² https://libcamdev.blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/
schemes across Cambridge mean that it will never work entirely to our satisfaction. I’d echo the observation that the move towards a network level for finding library materials is for many use cases an inevitable one, given that Cambridge library collections are now far more than the sum of the contents of their collective shelves.

Looking ahead, the next generation of search services may see something of a return to structured data, be it on a far wider scale than a single institutional catalogue. Google is in the middle of a transition from ‘strings to things’, rebuilding its data-structures to understand semantic relationships between the entities it describes in its indexes\(^1\). Facebook is expanding its search to allow users to search across the relationships between people, events and things described in its vast social network\(^2\). Interestingly, libraries are already active players in this space with Cambridge having worked on one of many library linked data projects\(^3\). The successor format to MARC21 will also be structured in this fashion\(^4\). Getting our data accessible to search engines as part of a wider structure or set of structures may allow us better to inter-operate with network level resources, something currently beyond our immediate scope.

With these and potentially other developments on the horizon, it is entirely possible that we will again be reviewing search products within the next two to three years, and doing so on a regular basis. Discovery is a vital function of the libraries of the University. Without the ability easily to find and locate relevant and useful scholarly material, library users will never be able to realise its value to their learning, teaching and research. With this importance comes an imperative to maintain a competitive awareness of new opportunities and be constantly looking to improve our offering.

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\(^1\) [http://googleblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/introducing-knowledge-graph-things-not.html](http://googleblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/introducing-knowledge-graph-things-not.html)
\(^2\) [https://www.facebook.com/about/graphsearch](https://www.facebook.com/about/graphsearch)
\(^3\) [http://cul-comet.blogspot.co.uk/](http://cul-comet.blogspot.co.uk/)
\(^4\) [http://bibframe.org/](http://bibframe.org/)
For now, it is clear that despite the advantages of products like Summon over a catalogue, users will still need advice and to get the very best experience from the service. Hopefully, the ‘lead-in time’ to get up to speed will be shortened, they will have a better, familiar place to start their search and their expectations will thus be better met.

Ed Chamberlain
Systems Development Librarian
Cambridge University Library

MANAGING USER EXPECTATIONS THROUGH CAMTOOLS AT THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION LIBRARY

Who are our users?
Like many Faculties in Cambridge, Education offers University courses for undergraduates and a full-time Master’s programme, with students attending sessions during full University Term. Where course provision differs considerably is in the many part-time and distance Master’s & Doctoral routes on offer; the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) for Secondary, Early Years & Primary trainees which is externally validated by OFSTED; and Practitioner Professional Development courses, all of which are taught for up to 13 weeks per term. As well as a diverse student population, academic and research staff in the Faculty significantly contribute to the improvement of educational policy and practice at both national and international levels.

The challenge for the Faculty of Education Library team is to understand the needs of users, whether they are full-time or part-time students, researchers or academic staff. The team are encouraged to be reflective practitioners and regularly to evaluate procedures and practices to ensure the service consistently meets user expectations. We work closely with course managers and other academic staff, attending course and teaching team meetings to ensure library provision is synchronised with course requirements, and is accurate and up to date.
**How does CamTools help us meet the needs of such a diverse range of users?**

The Faculty of Education Library CamTools site has been developed as an education portal and we have been using it to provide information to support students since 2008. We are well aware that it is a clunky tool to use and the navigation around the site isn’t intuitive. However, its strengths lie in the flexibility it has given us to provide tailored content and to design clear pages to make it as easy as possible for students to find what they need. CamTools is also embedded within the Faculty and is used by all courses, providing a common platform for students to access course information as well as Library resources.

**Simple design**

Each year we review information available on the Library CamTools site, and we try to put ourselves in the place of the student, looking at the site through their eyes, designing it with their needs in mind. The objective is to ensure information is as clear and simple as possible so students can quickly and easily find what they need. The front page has quick links to ejournals, a specialised database of Education ebooks, a section on Education databases, as well as information on renewing books and a link to LibrarySearch. The unique aspect of the site lies within the different sections for each type of course taught in the Faculty, offering tailored support for assignments, dissertations and research.

**Assignment support**

The Library team work very closely with academic staff to ensure information on reading lists is up to date and accurate. Most courses have interactive reading lists which include links to scanned chapters, ebooks or ejournal articles and to the catalogue to check availability of print books. PGCE students are under considerable pressure to complete assignments at the same time as learning to teach, and we have responded to this by creating comprehensive pages to support each assignment with links to their readings, including off-campus guidance for literature searching. Undergraduate students have weekly readings
and work under tight deadlines to complete their essay so they also require a quick and easy route to resources. For Master’s students, there are specific readings and resources to support their thematic route sessions, with off-campus guidance (including help guides and online tutorials) for accessing online resources and undertaking literature searching.

Teaching with CamTools
We use the Library CamTools site as a teaching tool at initial Library inductions to direct new students to general resources. Online research skills sessions later in the course are geared towards tailored assignment support for PGCEs and to accessing scholarly journal articles for Master’s students. Practical hands-on sessions are also available for most students with an opportunity to search for material independently and to ask professional Library Staff for help.

For undergraduate and Master’s students we have introduced short, termly Library update sessions to increase the opportunities we have both to communicate with, and listen to, the students. At these sessions we use the Library CamTools site to check they are able to find readings and resources, reminding them that the friendly Library team is here to help them, whether they visit in person, or whether they contact us by telephone or email. These short updates, amongst other things, have helped us to develop good relationships with our students, particularly
those on part-time & distance courses who are only in the Faculty once a week or in some cases once a term.

Academic & research staff also have their own Library CamTools site where we offer advice on compiling course reading lists and provide links to the most useful resources to support their teaching and research. We will also visit them in their offices to help them search for journal articles and other literature if they prefer!

*Does the support we offer through CamTools meet user expectations?*
We consistently receive very positive feedback from students through course evaluations, student representative meetings, Library surveys, and via individual comments by email, text or in person. Students really appreciate the quality of service they receive, and value the knowledgeable, professional library staff who help them in their studies & research. However, we cannot always meet all the expectations of our users, for example, the assumption that Cambridge University has online access to every journal title in the world or that the Faculty Library is open 24/7. However, we try to exceed their expectations in other areas which are more within our power to determine, such as ‘customer service’ and tailoring resources not only to the subject of Education but within that to individual types of courses via CamTools. We also offer flexible loan periods for trainees on school placements and Master’s students studying at a distance, and review these annually in the light of any changes in course attendance patterns. This year we decided to abolish renewal limits for all courses to enable students to borrow books for as long as they needed, with the proviso that an item would be returned if another person needed it. Our aim is to make borrowing material as easy as possible for our students to reduce any pressure on them, and we are considering extending loan periods for some courses next year for the same reason.

The information we provide via CamTools is a reflection of our good relationship with academic staff and students of the Faculty. It would not be so effective if we did not create as many opportunities as possible to
interact with our users and understand their needs. We hope to continue this very much valued relationship and to develop information on the Library CamTools site and other appropriate portals for future Education students and researchers.

Emma-Jane Batchelor  
Deputy Librarian  
Faculty of Education Library

PEOPLE

Congratulations to Joanne Farrant who is the new Head of Acquisitions Administration at the UL, which includes the Journals Coordination Scheme administration. Jeremy Lewis has joined the Library Office. Ros Esche moved from the Tower Project to the Reference Department, where she is a Senior Library Assistant. Helen Grieve left the Reader Services Department to embark on an MA in Library and Information Studies at Sheffield and Liam Austin has joined the team.

Anna Maria Ercolani-Brown, who had been PA to the Deputy Librarian, left to take up a post at Homerton College. The University Archives welcomed Chelsea Carney as their Temporary Graduate Archives Trainee. European Cataloguing bid farewell to Danica Summerlin and welcomed back Joanne Koehler after her maternity leave. James Brigden joined them as a temporary part time Library Assistant. English Cataloguing bid farewell to Agnieszka Drabek-Prime. Agnieszka Kurzeja took up a temporary post in English Collections. Darwin Correspondence bid farewell to Philippa Hardman. Ian Boston left Digital Services and Ben Davenport left E-journals. Materials Processing bid farewell to Oksana Yurchyshyn-Smith. The editorial team at CULIB are sorry to lose her and would like to thank her for all her hard work. She will be missed.
We have had a few retirements – Anne Ashurst, who had been PA to the Deputy Librarian for the last six years, retired. So did Phillida Baldry who had been in the Bindery for forty years! Alan Farrant retired after a career in binding and conservation spanning more than fifty years! On leaving school, Alan took up an apprenticeship with Heffers in Cambridge. Prior to coming to work in the University Library in 1978, Alan had the privilege of working with the world-renowned Sydney (Sandy) Cockerell in his workshop in Grantchester. Alan spent the last thirty years of his career looking after the binding and conservation departments in the UL.

Annie Johnson has joined Homerton College Library from Newnham as Senior Library Assistant. Letty Key has also joined Homerton as Library Assistant.

Having re-catalogued most of the Upper Library, all of the Lower Library, and the older material in the Basement, Allen Purvis has retired from St John’s College. He continues to work 2.5 days a week cataloguing for Peterhouse. Also at St John’s, we congratulate Penny Davies, Library cleaner, for achieving distinction in her MA in Church history.

Joe Sandham, Pembroke’s first Graduate Trainee Librarian is now the Assistant Librarian at Corpus. Rachel Chanter is this year’s Trainee. She graduated at St Andrews and then spent some time working with the curator at Stonyhurst College before joining Pembroke.

Dr Sarah Preston is working part-time at Hughes Hall, cataloguing the Ohtake collection of rare books. This includes small press volumes with fine bindings, works by and about Ted Hughes, and books relating to the First World War Poets. Sarah continues to work part-time as a cataloguer at Sidney Sussex.
Lucie Lang has come to Cambridge from Paris and has been working as a library assistant in the Quincentenary Library, Jesus College, since July 2012.

Dr Anne Cobby, Librarian of the Modern and Medieval Languages Faculty Library for seventeen years, is retiring at the end of March. The Library staff would like to wish her a happy retirement. Jane Devine Mejía will be joining the MML Library as Faculty Librarian in May. She comes to us from the University of Brighton and has a Masters degree in Library Science and a Bachelors degree in History from McGill University, Canada. The MML Library staff would like to extend to her a warm welcome.

At Criminology, Stuart Stone was appointed Librarian of the Radzinowicz Library. Catherine Sutherland is currently acting as Deputy Librarian.

Following the retirement of Shirley Sawtell, Georgina Cronin has been appointed to the post of Senior Library Assistant at the Scott Polar Research Institute. Georgina has been a Library Assistant at SPRI since 2010.

Rachel Hessey joins the team at the Seeley Historical Library as Senior Library Assistant. She read Archaeology at Durham University before completing an MA in Librarianship at Sheffield. One of the Library’s Junior Assistants, Dr Adam Crothers, has moved on to a more senior role at St John’s College Library and the Seeley welcomed his replacement Dr James Ainsworth, recently a graduate student in the History Faculty.
WHAT LIBRARIANS DO IN THEIR SPARE TIME:
HUNTER FIELD TARGET

Most weekends you will see me don warm waterproof clothing and, with air rifle in hand, head out to various counties to engage in my hobby.

I take part in a number of target sports for air guns (I also have an air pistol) but my favourite, and most frequent pastime is HFT. Hunter Field Target, to give it its full name, grew out of a sport called Field Target, where competitors have to shoot at metal targets, compensating for wind and distance. In Field Target you can use various pieces of equipment to tell you how far away the target is, and to gauge the wind. HFT removes those niceties to create a sport somewhat closer to hunting but without harming any animals.

On a normal competition there will be 30 targets laid out around the course, at distances varying from 8-45 yards. It is up to the wits of the shooter correctly to identify the distance, and thereby where to aim to hit successfully. They also need to take the wind into account, and autumnal leaves are often the best way to do this. Courses are usually set so that shooters move round in a rough circle, so the wind will be changing direction even if it is constant.

The targets themselves are metal, and come in many shapes and sizes, often looking like birds, rabbits and squirrels. Though I have also shot at cartoon ducks, fish(!!) and Christmas trees. The target has a circular section, usually in the middle, but sometimes the head, which is known as the ‘kill zone’. A strike there will result in the target falling over, and a score of two points. For hitting the target elsewhere a shooter scores one point, and a miss scores zero. The kill zones vary in size with the smallest being only 15mm. The pellets we are shooting at the targets are between 4.5 and 5.5mm, so not a lot of room for error!

Most shots are taken lying on the ground as this provides the steadiest position from which to take aim. There will be a wooden peg or a tree
that the shooter or rifle must be in contact with for the shot to be legal. Of the 30 competition targets at least four will be forced positions, where shooters must be in a particular position – either kneeling or standing. These are the most challenging shots to pull off, particularly unsupported standing shots where there is no tree to steady shooter and gun. Scores of 60 (ie a clear round) are rare, and something to be celebrated, but top shooters will be unhappy with ‘only’ 55 points. I’m not quite in that bracket yet, but have a season’s best of 51.

There are different competition categories to cater for the variety of rifle types and shooters. The open category is the most competitive and anyone can enter it, but there are categories to cater for junior shooters, .22 calibre shooters, lady shooters and springer shooters.

My main rifle is made by a Midlands’ manufacturer called Brocock, and is .177 calibre. It is a precharge rifle, which means it has an air cylinder that is filled with compressed air, and this provides the power to propel the pellets. The other common type of air rifle is the more traditional springer, which employs a spring under tension to create the air compression and power. I also own one of these, a BSA Superstar made in Birmingham. Springers are considered harder to shoot as they recoil and are therefore more sensitive to how they are held. For my rifles I do not require a licence, but must ensure they cannot be misused.

You may well be asking why I enjoy this sport? Well, I have always enjoyed games and sports that required a level of precision and accuracy. The satisfaction of a target falling over is hard to describe, but very enjoyable, and I also get to share that joy with my partner when we shoot together. I also enjoy being outdoors and participating in a real community sport. The majority of that community is male, but there is a camaraderie between us all, giving encouragement and congratulations, and also many able to offer expert advice.

There are certainly downsides: the weather can be terrible (though shooting in the snow is really good fun). It is a male dominated sport so
you sometimes have to show you can hold your own, and not mind the odd bit of foul language (though apologies usually follow swiftly when they realise I was in earshot, which has its own amusement). I’m also not a natural early bird, so giving up weekend lie-ins to tramp around a wood isn’t always easy. But the enjoyment outweighs any of this.

And I also quite enjoy being able to surprise people with my hobby. I’m sure the airgunners would be just as surprised to hear I was a librarian as my colleagues are to hear what I do at the weekend.

Liz Osman
Librarian
Homerton College Library

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of *CULIB* will be entitled Libraries and the environment. If you would like to contribute an article, please contact the *CULIB* editors. The deadline for submission is 31st August 2013.