

# CILIPS Conference Reflections 2024



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## CILIPS 24 Conference: A Perfect (Re)Engagement by Tony Morrice

Having been mostly out of the library and information loop since completing my PgDip in 2017, I was eager to get up to speed with current trends. Where better to go than a library conference? The CILIPS 24 conference appealed to me for its diversity of topics, such as library crowdsourcing, moving image and sound collections, tackling 'fake news' in libraries, and an appearance by our very own Makar, Kathleen Jamie.

Since October 2023 I have been a Library Assistant with the User Services team at the University of St Andrews. My background includes: MA Joint-Honours Philosophy & Theology and Religious Studies from the University of Glasgow; PgDip Information and Library Studies from Robert Gordon University; HNC Professional Writing Skills from Dundee College; experience in public and academic libraries, the arts and leisure sectors, administration, brief stints as a bin man, police officer, and some hospitality. Quite varied (see: character building).

While browsing the conference webpage I saw an opportunity to apply for funding via regional CILIP branches. The process was reassuringly simple and just a few weeks later I was overjoyed to receive an offer of funding to attend the second conference day, thanks to the CILIPS Tayside branch. This was a huge help to me, as working part-time with a young family can make it difficult to attend these types of events – it's not always cheap. So *thank you* again CILIPS Tayside, and I would heavily encourage anyone to apply in the future!

On arrival I was greeted with incredible warmth by the volunteers, given a rundown of events, directions, generally great chat and, crucially, my allocated goody-bag full of conference merch (the *real* mark of a great conference).

The entire day was absorbing and informative, imbued with a palpable sense of inclusivity. One of my personal highlights was *Managing Safe and Inclusive Public Library Services: A Practical Guide from CILIP*, presented by CILIP's very own Yvonne Morris. With enthusiasm and expertise, Yvonne explained the Guide's eleven key principles, bolstered by the most fundamental principle of *don't be scared, but do be prepared* – words that bear remembering. Also offered were practical tips for confronting increasing public hostility and calls for censorship. With a CILIP survey finding that 49% of library workers were 'very concerned' and 33% 'somewhat concerned' about censorship, Yvonne's presentation provided insightful and, more importantly, *hopeful* advice on how library workers can navigate these difficulties with confidence while still providing excellent services.

Another highlight was *Combatting Misinformation in Libraries*, presented by journalist Alastair Brian from The Ferret, with tips for recognising misinformation in a variety of media and understanding its role in a wider context. With traditional media having lost

its monopoly over how we receive and consume our news, we are exposed to information from a sometimes seemingly infinite range of sources and perspectives, which *can* be beneficial but also poses problems – primarily of veracity and intent. As Alastair stated during his presentation, “misinformation is everywhere”, so this session was especially pertinent, prompting delegates to remain conscious of how we consume our news.

The conference came to a close with a brilliant conversation between Makar Kathleen Jamie and writer / broadcaster Alistair Heather, in which Kathleen reflected on her time as Makar and pondered the question of ‘what it means to be the National Poet’, while treating us to some wonderful readings of her poetry. This was a lovely and captivating end to an immensely enjoyable conference, and it included my *Conference Quote of the Day* from Alistair: “Hunting a Makar is like tagging a hawk.” What more can be said?



**Tony Morrice in the exhibitor's hall**





Dr Mia Ridge



Nikki Parchment



Sue Williamson

## Niamh Coutts, Conference Report

I attended the CILIPS 2024 conference as a sponsored delegate for Tayside Libraries. I work in the Local History Department at Dundee Central Library, where I help customers access our collections, and assist with research-based enquiries. I am passionate about making information and collections accessible to all communities through creativity. I have a background in fine art, and enjoy helping visitors, not only access information, but also engage with our local history collections and respond creatively.

I felt the conference touched on some important social issues that circulate the library and information sector. I felt a solidarity with the speakers and professionals that attended the conference and felt heartened that many of the pertinent social concerns experienced in the sector were acknowledged by the speakers.

I was particularly interested in Althea Greenan's keynote speech about her curatorial experience in The Women's Art Library, at Goldsmiths, University of London; a unique collection of works created, curated, and used by women. Greenan described this model as "radical empathy" in the archives, an ideology that considers archivists as caregivers, and which attempts to understand the perspectives of creators, subjects, users, and communities, throughout the archival process.

I believe such a model challenges traditional modes of curation in Western archives, which largely purport a Eurocentric standard; most historical resources were created and curated by white men of privilege. I believe a model of "radical empathy" would translate well in local history collections, as they are designed to preserve the past, record contemporary culture and perspectives, and consider future, inclusive modes of curation. Therefore, it is essential that a collection represent local communities regardless of gender, sexuality, race, or class. Such a model would not devalue the significance of traditional historical resources, but encourage new dialogues around social justice concerns, embedding resources in a contemporary context, whilst generating new stories and perspectives, that may be in turn, be entered into the collection.

At the conference, I also attended the interview with Scottish authors, Sara Sheridan and Eleanor Thom, who similarly described a lack of female representation in archives. When researching character and place, Sheridan described the process of searching for female voices between the lines of male protagonists, when consulting historical resources. Sheridan discussed her work, "Where are the Women?" which reimagines Scottish streetscapes. Streets, buildings, statues, and hills are dedicated to Scottish women, instead of the men they are currently dedicated to. I was saddened, but not altogether surprised, to learn about the huge gender gap in streetscapes that continues to afflict Scotland and the wider world.

Conversations such as these are essential for creating an inclusive, welcoming environment for all communities in libraries. Both sessions discussed the idea of

library workers as empathetic caregivers, a sentiment I find increasingly valid, especially in the time of the cost-of-living crisis. Therefore, I believe a library collection should similarly reflect, not only the glowing achievements of a city, but the struggle faced by underrepresented communities.

I believe the CILIPS Conference is an excellent way to meet other professionals in the sector. I had the opportunity to speak to many individuals and learn about the projects and developments they were undertaking within libraries. The conference also facilitated the exploration and discussion of important, current topics that circulate the library and information sector today. I would recommend attending the CILIPS Conference to those interested in developing their practice in libraries and information, or to those that simply wish to connect with like-minded individuals in the sector.

## CILIPS 2024 by Alex Effinger

Hello. My name is Alex, I am the Sustainability Coordinator at the AK Bell Library in Perth and am very new to the profession of information services. My professional background is in nature conservation, and I worked as a countryside ranger for several years before moving into the community engagement sector. From there it was a natural step for me to start working at the Library, as Libraries are hubs of knowledge, bringing the community together in their shared passion for the written word and for learning. As the Sustainability Coordinator, I am involved with the Lend and Mend Library, The Seed Library, and general issues about sustainable practises within the library. This is honestly the perfect position for me as it combines environmental awareness and education, nature conservation and my love for books and libraries.

As part of my role, I researched the Green Library movement, Sustainability Goals for Libraries and read dozens of articles about how libraries around the world are working with the changing climate and how to optimise the libraries carbon footprint. This research brought me quickly to the Green Library Week Website by CILIP and from there to the CILIP Conference. Once I saw the list of topics on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> of June, I threw my hat into the ring to see if I would get a bursary placement. This was easy enough to do, all I had to do is write a short text about why it would be beneficial for me to attend the conference. As I am not (yet) a CILIP member, this bursary enabled me to go to the Conference to listen to the guest speakers and network with other professionals who are working on keeping Libraries open and sustainable. I met some wonderful people from Dundee University and chatted about how to promote the Maker Space and the Lend and Mend Library. It is great to hear the opinions from others who struggle with the same things as we do. The Conference itself was huge and busy and at the end of the day I was very tired. However, I took home with me some information about an upcoming training course in Carbon Literacy for Libraries, which will be a very useful addition to our Green Champions Programme and the re-writing of our Climate and Sustainability Strategy. I hope to get the training booked for staff later this year. The second highlight was the session about combatting misinformation in the Library Services from The Ferret Fact Check. This session was very interesting and so important today that, again, I am hoping to get this training session booked at our Library for staff to attend. As we learned, Librarians are on place 2 of the top 5 most trusted professions in Scotland and we have to uphold this position! It is not about Censorship but about how to find out if what you read every day is true. This is more important than ever as people are bombarded with information every day and we need to know how to fact check these!

I am so glad I had the opportunity to attend the conference and am hoping I can do so in the future. The application for the sponsored place was easy and straight forward and experiencing the conference was great. I can only recommend trying to apply for a space next year as it will open up a huge network of librarians from all across the UK and it is quite rare to get such an insight into the different ways our profession is carried out.