

Editor's notes

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Oxford (and Cambridge)

Here, finally, we have the proceedings of TUG 2000: TUG's annual meeting in Oxford ("the other place"). It may seem odd to have a Cambridge-based editor of an Oxford conference: but you may not understand why this would be remarkable, so I shall bore you all with a little academic history (some of it decidedly personal...).

My decision, of which of the two "old" English universities¹ to grace with my presence as a student, was made on the basis of deep academic consideration. Cambridge, when I first visited over the final weekend of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, was beautiful under a frosty, clear sky; I spent two nights at the home of a school friend, whose father was a don of long standing, and all was wonderful.

When I first visited Oxford in early 1963, the weather was foul — windy, wet and cold; I had hoped to spend time with a friend from school, but he had left town for the weekend. Over all the years since, I've never had the opportunity to "get the feel" of the city: on each visit I've either had no spare time, or the weather has been bad.

Which is all terribly... characteristic. The University of Cambridge (in something approaching its present form) was probably established by dissident Oxford students getting on for eight hundred years ago. Ever since, Cambridge people have been *expected* not to know about Oxford, and to despise all of Oxford's doings. We're supposed to despise their style of poling their punts², and to disparage their academic achievements. And vice versa.

I've never really believed in this silly caricature, so a week to get to know Oxford, based in the centre of the city, in weather as good as we get nowadays (with global warming apparently already upon us and bringing even more rain in our summers), was a real treat.

¹ There are other universities almost as venerable as Oxford and Cambridge in these islands, but I didn't know about them in 1963

² Which in fact are of a completely different design from those we use in Cambridge, so *would* be poled differently

The meeting

We have to thank the local team (led by Sebastian Rahtz and Kim Roberts) for a splendidly run conference. The college seemed to me ideal for the sort of "small" conference that TUG runs: compact enough that everyone could feel they were on top of the whole event, and yet spacious enough that we could spread out and feel comfortable. The social events (notably the reception in the University Museum) were splendid, and Kim's arrangement for those that wanted to go to an open-air dramatisation of Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass" was inspired (for this member of the audience at least, despite less-than-ideal weather).

A strong cast presented an intriguing set of papers, with meat for every taste in the T_EX world. For me, the highlights were Mike Vulis on his V_TE_X/G_EX system, discussion of the achievements and future of the PDF_TE_X and Omega projects, Don DeLand's demonstration of his interactive courseware, and (of course) Frank Mittelbach's paper on directions for the L^AT_EX output routine (which was voted best paper of the conference).

The papers

I took over preparation of these proceedings at a late stage, and from the start I experienced problems. Neither I, nor the printers that Kim Roberts had chosen, could print one of the pages of Kostin & Vulis' paper for the preprints: I don't believe I've ever before seen conference proceedings with an apology for the absence of a page for that reason.

The papers that follow represent much of the best in the conference, but there are sad omissions: none of DeLand's presentation of his use of IBM's techexplorer, the A_sT_EX, the PDF_TE_X or the Omega presentations is here represented. *TUGboat* hopes to present a detailed account of PDF_TE_X in a future issue, but we can do little but hope for papers covering the other topics.

The difficult papers Two papers presented particular technical difficulties, since both of them demanded use of the technology they described.

Alex Kostin & Mike Vulis described $\text{V}\text{T}\text{E}\text{X}$, and their paper included demonstrations of the capabilities of $\text{V}\text{T}\text{E}\text{X}/\text{G}\text{E}\text{X}$. I suppose we could have faked the effects, but the simpler course seemed to be to install and use a copy of the free (Linux) version of $\text{V}\text{T}\text{E}\text{X}$. The installation itself proved very simple, but (as mentioned above) there were problems with the output. $\text{V}\text{T}\text{E}\text{X}$ produces its output of the paper in PDF, and the problem with the output wasn't apparent in Adobe's Acrobat Reader, merely when that program produced printer output. Interestingly, PostScript output of the troublesome page also defeated Adobe's Acrobat Distiller, so that at the time of the meeting I suspected a bug (that I couldn't at the time characterise) in the Acrobat suite. The bug was in fact in $\text{V}\text{T}\text{E}\text{X}$'s failure to detect some infelicity in the data for one of the paper's diagrams, and has long since been corrected; the preprint of the paper was an ordinary $\text{L}\text{A}\text{T}\text{E}\text{X}$ document that used a series of `\includegraphics` commands on images of the working pages of the paper, and had an apology in place of the rogue page. The paper presents itself in glorious TEX nicolour; which you can't see in these proceedings, but which will be visible when the paper appears on *TUGboat*'s web site.

Frank Mittelbach described the outcome of experimental work on the algorithms desirable for a future version of $\text{L}\text{A}\text{T}\text{E}\text{X}$: this is another in a long series of papers on directions towards the mythic $\text{L}\text{A}\text{T}\text{E}\text{X}3$ and in most respects is the answer to the

average maiden's prayer. However, the version I worked with couldn't deal with the (old $\text{L}\text{A}\text{T}\text{E}\text{X}$) construct `\twocolumn[⟨stuff⟩]`, which is how the *TUGboat* class creates paper titles in a proceedings issue. So after much agonising, we have decided to set the paper with the title set separately, so as to demonstrate that the code he describes "works" (in so far as it does!).

Regrets

I need hardly repeat that I'm deeply ashamed at how long it has taken me to produce these proceedings: even now they wouldn't be with you had it not been for editing support from Barbara Beeton and the continuing sterling work done by Mimi Burbank behind the scenes. (In particular, Mimi's taken on the rôle of "Robin's conscience", prodding me every so often on the necessity of getting on with it!) The time since the meeting has been very full (I've moved house, for example), but the delays have, I admit, been mostly of my own making.

Several of the presentations at the conference have not resulted in papers in these proceedings (we print the pre-conference abstracts in these cases). Most of the presentations are sorry omissions from these proceedings, but we will perhaps pick up matter to publish in future editions of *TUGboat*. The lack of the papers comes as an awful warning to us all: we *must* attend the annual meetings to keep up with what is going on with TEX and its related technologies.

