Introduction

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TEX90, meeting in Cork from September 10–13, 1990, was the fifth EuroTEX conference, and the first with which the TEX Users Group was associated as a sponsor. As were the previous meetings in Europe, TEX90 can be counted a success in both the diversity and quality of the papers presented.

The conference facilities were located at University College, Cork (Coláiste na hOllscoile, Corcaigh, to the locals). Opened in 1849 as the "Queen's University", UCC was incorporated as a constituent college of the National University of Ireland in 1908. Long before that, however, Cork was known as a center of learning, and monks gathered there from the 12th century onward (and from Europe and the New World, as a rather confused tour guide informed us). Today, UCC has over 6,500 full-time students and more than 1,000 staff. Among the more famous faculty members was George Boole, without whom the craft of computing would probably be quite different.

A current UCC staff member of some renown in the TEX community is Peter Flynn, the local member of the TEX90 Program Committee; to him we owe appreciation for the very fine local arrangements. Our praise for putting together an excellent program go to him and to the other committee members — Dean Guenther (co-coordinator with Peter Flynn), Peter Abbott, Johannes Braams, Malcolm Clark, Bernard Gaulle, Roswitha Graham, and Joachim Lammarsch. And for additional organizational efforts, we thank Kees van der Laan and Ray Goucher.

The official program opened Monday morning with a lively introduction by Michael Smith, Ireland's Minister for Science & Technology. Not only had he traveled quite a distance to give this talk, but he had also done his homework, and was able to describe how TEX fits in well with the nation's plans for building a strong technological base to attract international commerce. The President of UCC followed with some remarks, including an appreciation for a recent budget increase and other support from the Ministry, and a short history of UCC and George Boole.

After introductions of the attending officers of TUG and the European TEX user associations, the technical program began with a session on databases and hypertext. This appears to be a very fruitful area for research, and one with great promise for TEX applications in specific areas. (Every time I see a demonstration of a multidocument system with hypertext links between them, I want one for organizing myself.) The first afternoon was filled out with presentations on efforts in the Netherlands and the U.K. to build facilities adapted to their local needs. Working Group 13 of NTG (the Nederlandstalige TEX Gebruikersgroep) has been working on building LATEX styles that are more acceptable than the originals are in Europe. Adrian Clark described a prototype system for documenting the Aston archive's holdings for users. These needs may be local, but the results will be much more widely useful.

On Tuesday, the first topic addressed was the æsthetics and practicalities of typographics. This included a discussion by Victor Eijkhout of why a document style designer should not work directly in (LA)TEX, but should be provided with separate tools that express the variables of formatting in a more natural way. The next session presented suggestions for including graphics in TEX, or, in the case of Tim Murphy, turning the process inside out and including TEX in graphics. Just before lunch, we were treated to the next installment of the ongoing saga "Towards LATEX 3.0", by Rainer Schöpf. The last presentation of the day introduced an integrated, documented, public domain TEX system for VAX/VMS. The attendees then proceeded to coaches waiting to take them for a trip to Blarney Castle, dinner, and entertainment by a group of Irish balladeers and a troupe of young folk dancers.

(As an erstwhile folk dancer, I can vouch for their talent and skill, and appreciated that they seemed to be enjoying themselves rather than regarding their performance as just a job to be done.)

Wednesday began with Malcolm Clark recounting all the things that can go wrong with editing and publishing the Proceedings of a TeX conference; how familiar! A short introduction to SGML (the Standard Generalized Markup Language) was followed by birds-of-a-feather sessions, and then by two presentations on graphics and TeX. Alan Hoenig built line drawings in METAFONT and devised a technique for passing back to TeX the information needed to apply labels in the proper locations using the regular fonts; this is a good example of one more use that I suspect Don Knuth never envisioned. After lunch, some more traditional, in fact, *very* traditional uses of METAFONT were described, with Yannis Haralambous presenting old German typefaces (and being acclaimed as the presenter of the best paper at the conference), and Mícheál Ó Searcóid telling the history of the written Irish language and showing his work with the traditional Irish alphabet. The font session was rounded out by Dean Guenther's paper on the International Phonetic Alphabet. After tea and a "guru session", Adrian Clark ended the day speaking on halftone output from TeX.

Thursday began with a description by Nico Poppelier of how SGML and TeX (and several other composition systems) coexist symbiotically in the production system of a commercial publisher; this, I think, is an eminently sensible arrangement, and one that makes the best of the strengths of each approach. The next two papers were more technical, with Amy Hendricksen delving into the nitty-gritty of macro techniques, and Frank Mittelbach offering a shopping list of proposals for extending BibTeX. Two papers directed toward capturing and training new users gave us food for thought. How *not* to write a manual was the topic of Angela Barden's paper, and Konrad Neuwirth, himself a secondary school student (albeit an atypical one), proposed that although TeX is a useful tool, it doesn't teach principles that are appropriate for secondary school students. The final session, after lunch, concentrated on the aesthetics of documents, with one paper a practical course in how to produce a book with fonts other than Computer Modern, the second a more theoretical review of possible page shapes, and the third giving another approach to integrating graphics with TeX.

The technical program was complemented by various social events, support for which was provided by a wide variety of sponsors: Aer Lingus, Apple Computer Sales (Cork), ArborText, Blue Sky Research, Cepadues, the Cork Examiner, Cork-Kerry Tourism, the Cork Taxi Co-op, Guy & Co., Horizon Applecentre, MID/ILG Heidelberg, Northlake Software, Personal TeX, Ronnie Moore Ltd., TeXcel, TeXworks, and UniTeX (Sheffield). Thanks to all of them.

I thoroughly enjoyed my stay in Cork, and found it a most worthwhile adventure. Those of us from the U.S., where TeX began, have both a good example, and a tough act to follow, from this most active European TeX community. TeX is alive and flourishing in this environment, and I look forward to my next visit to a EuroTeX conference.

As a sponsor, TUG has the honor of publishing the *Proceedings* of the TeX90 conference. We hope you agree that this is a worthy volume, deserving of your attention and interest.

Finally, I wish to thank Mary Guenther, the *Proceedings* editor, who has made it possible for me to sit back and simply enjoy this issue.

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