BOOK REVIEW

Using the chemical literature, a practical guide/by Henry M. Woodburn. New York, Marcel Dekkar, 1974. viii, 302p. (Books in library and information science, ed. by Allen Kent, vol. 11).
ISBN 0-8247-6260-6 Pbk $ 14.50
[Reviewed by B Guha]

That the literature of Chemistry has attracted more the attention of librarians, documentalists and users alike is amply indicated by the existence of a number of well prepared guides and other compilations on the use of chemical literature. The present guide is a further indication of this attention and concern. However, this handy guide has some distinctive features of its own which make it an extremely useful compilation.

First of all, the author has been able to provide the most uptodate information. In fact Chemistry can claim many 'firsts' in documentation services and application of documentation techniques and experimentation. As a result the picture is ever-changing. Hence, from time to time, it is necessary to survey the field and present not only a current view of the field but also depict how and when the changes have occurred. As for example, it is said, some of the changes, innovations and experimentations of even the most well known and widely used access tool of Chemistry, viz., the Chemical Abstracts (CA) are not immediately detected or known to many users. Many users of CA are not aware that the present CASSI is a continuation of ACCESS which was again a continuation of the less fashionable title the List of Periodicals Abstracted. Similarly, the difference between the General Subject Index and the Chemical Substance Index of the CA are also not immediately appreciated. This type of practical hints regarding not only the CA but many more tools are available in the publication.

Secondly, the author of this guide has been a teacher of Chemistry for over 50 years. He supervised the research and thesis preparation of a large number of research students and it is from this experience that he became actutely aware of the problems in the use of chemical literature. This rich experience has gone to fill in the three hundred and odd pages of this publication. What is most gratifying is the fact that Professor Woodburn has produced a tract which is not only useful to all research students but contains excellent materials for librarians, documentalists, and teachers who have to help research students in their literature searches.

The publication has 17 chapters covering almost every conceivable aspect of the Chemical literature and its use. There are chapters on Nomenclature-structure correlation, collection of physical data, Beilstein's Handbuch der Organischen Chemie, Gmelin's Handbuch der Anorganischen Chemie, Abstracting Services, Scope and use of indexes to Chemical Abstracts, Retrospective searching, Microform publication, Availability of translations, Patent literature, and Computer-readable material. Most of the chapters are very informative and would be extremely useful to research workers, science librarians and information workers alike. Each chapter is supported by a list of very useful references. All these are very appropriately preceeded by a chapter on Library Classification system.

The author has emphasised in the Preface that "the book is a practical guide and not a bibliography of sources ... written from the point of view of the individual rather than that of an institutional literature-searching department, since the author believes that personal literature searching will be needed for a long time." Incidentially, it may be mentioned that the above view on personal literature searching is shared by many scientists of the passing generation in India. Some of them would not believe that the librarian or his staff could help them in this work. But Professor Woodburn has to pass on this piece of advice to young chemists, ... he should establish a good relationship with the science reference librarians. These are almost always highly trained persons, very knowledgable in the area of information sources, and anxious to assist any serious questioner." He says further, "... the chemist should learn something about the organization of material in the library he will use most often." So far as the first suggestion is concerned, it may be said librarians have been given hardly a better credential by a scientists than this. The second suggestion, if followed by all library users will surely help the librarians to provide better service.