Brian Vickery and the Classification Research Group

THE LEGACY OF FACETED CLASSIFICATION

Origins of the Classification Research Group:

- it can reasonably be said that Brian Vickery was responsible for the creation of the CRG

- it finds its origins in the Royal Society Conference on Scientific Information of 1948, which Vickery attended

- concern for the management of scientific information, its dissemination and retrieval, was one of the major themes of the conference

- this led to the setting up of a 'classification committee' under the leadership of Bernal

- after an unproductive period Bernal invited Vickery and Wells to convene a specialist group

Constitution of the CRG:

- the group was composed of librarians and information scientists – some of the leading names of that and the subsequent period

- there was a mix of academics, researchers, and practitioners

- figures such as Austin, Coates, Farradane, Fairthorne, Foskett, Kyle, Langridge, Mills, Palmer, and Wells, as well as Vickery, contributed to its work

Publications of the CRG:

- there are a number of bibliographic and bibliometric studies of the CRG

- joint publications of the Group are relatively few

- regular (although not frequent) *Bulletins* were published in the *Journal of Documentation*

- three of these contained bibliographies of members' publications

- Vickery is by far the most prolific author, as he continued to be throughout his life

Early themes and lines of research:

- the original clearly stated remit of the CRG was 'classification for retrieval'

- a second element embodied in the 1955 'manifesto' is 'faceted classification as the basis of all information retrieval'

- out of this arises a more developed and specifically British interpretation of Ranganathan's facet analysis

- many of the early publications, particularly Vickery's display a concern with the handling of semantic complexity, with the nature of relationships, and with the understanding of the 'idea, verbal and notational planes'

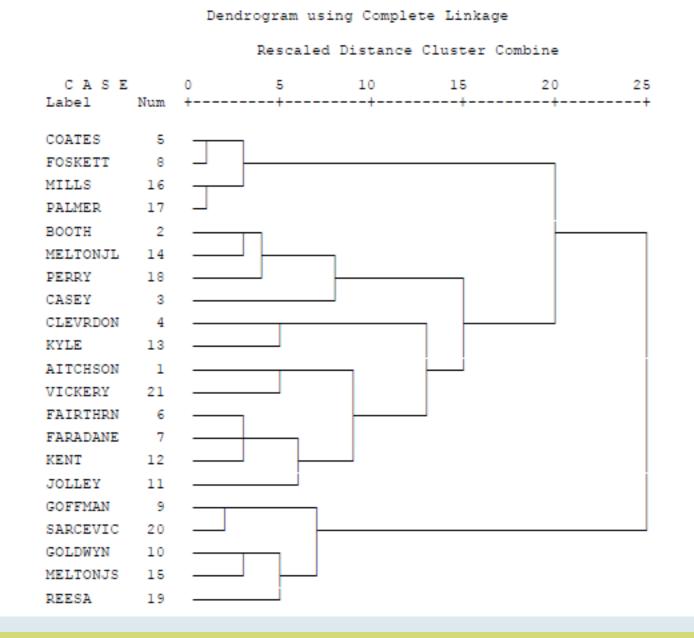# The new general classification scheme:

- in the late 1950s and 1960s the main focus of CRG work was the proposed new general scheme of classification

- several papers were written, and a conference held, on this topic

- a grant from NATO subsidised the original work which never produced a classification, but did result in the PRECIS indexing system

- throughout the 1970s and later the objective was pursued through the revision of Bliss's *Bibliographic Classification*

Divergence of classification and IR:

- during the 1960s 'classification' and 'information retrieval' begin to develop as distinct and separate fields

- this happens in both the US and UK

- it's at this time that Vickery ceases to contribute to the CRG's activities and his name disappears from the record

Factors in the 'split':

- there are distinct 'library' and 'information science' groupings within the CRG

- bibliometric analysis of the CRG publications show quite clear associations of scholars

- at some stage the ideas of 'classification' and 'information retrieval' were uncoupled

- the main group continue with work on a classification scheme and on classification for organization

- Vickery's agenda is somewhat different and he turns in other directions

Dendrogram using Complete Linkage

Faceted classification today:

- over the last twenty years facet analysis has become increasingly important as a methodological approach for all kinds of organizational and retrieval tools

- it features in classification, subject heading lists, thesauri, search interfaces, in taxonomies, ontologies, and semantic web applications

- a number of researchers are attempting to model faceted structures using representation languages and mathematical logic

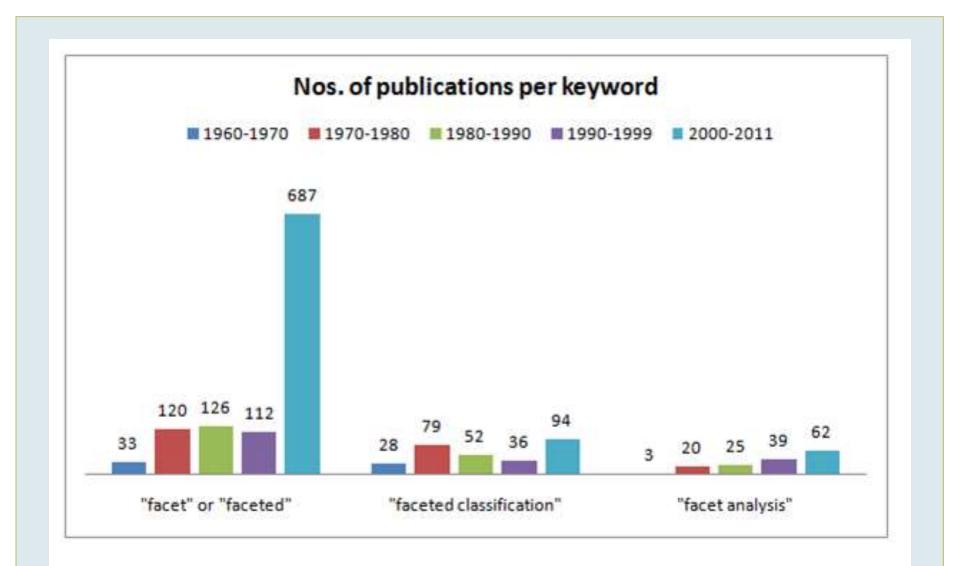- it looks as if 'classification' and 'information retrieval' have been reconciled and re-united.

Nos. of publications per keyword

■ 1960-1970 ■ 1970-1980 ■ 1980-1990 ■ 1990-1999 ■ 2000-2011

Figure 1: Representation of facets in the LIS literature

An evaluation of Vickery's contribution:

- a driving force in uniting and stimulating the study and understanding of classification
- two intellectual achievements:
  - the development of Ranganathan's ideas into a practical tool for scientific libraries
  - clarification of the role of classification within the wider activity of information retrieval

(E. J. Coates)

Faceted classification for information retrieval today:

- faceted approach addresses a number of features of subject domains as Vickery investigated them in the 1950s

- not least is the capacity to manage complexity in a logical, consistent, and predictable way

- this capacity makes it inherently suited to machine management of information, and to the online environment, just as Vickery envisaged

- his work and that of the CRG provides a powerful conceptual basis for all kinds of subject related work.