

**AGSD (UK)**  
**23rd Annual Conference, October 2007**  
**Personal Reminiscences**

So this was the 23rd Annual Conference! Almost spanning a quarter of a century. I considered myself an old hand but I could only muster eight. A Novotel had been chosen again, but this time in Reading. It turned out to be a fascinating venue, if you could find it. My wife and I decided at first that the architect was either Gandalf or Merlin as only a wizard could build a 175 bedroom hotel in the centre of a relatively small town and hide it so well that it was virtually impossible to find. When we finally found it and went inside, we realized that it had been built by Dr Who. It shared the trade mark Tardis trait of being much bigger inside than outside. We kept our eyes peeled, but sadly we did not catch a glimpse of him.

It was very nice inside and we were given a pleasant room on the sixth floor. Another delegate, also at cloud level was heard to say that she hoped the fire alarm did not go off. A very spooky thing to say in view of subsequent happenings.

The meeting itself was perhaps less cosmopolitan than some previous conferences, although the USA, the Netherlands and Eire were all represented. What pleased me on the first evening was the eclectic mix of GSD types at dinner. In my immediate vicinity, we had a 1, two 2's, two 5's and a hanger-on (my wife). No cliques here.

Normally, my reminiscences would flow seamlessly to the following day. This time, we had to endure a very exciting night. I was deeply asleep when my ventilator alarm seemed to go off. I struggled out of bed to make sure that the tubes were all connected and working. They seemed OK so I thought that I would unplug it from the mains. To my surprise, the alarm continued and I began to wonder if it contained a small battery to keep it activated. By now, I was almost fully awake and I realised that the noise was very loud for a ventilator and that it could possibly be something else. I opened the door to the corridor and saw people streaming down the fire escape. My wife, who is deaf, was blithely sleeping through the racket, so, panicking, I gave her a quick shake, shouting "There is a fire". Like Queen Victoria, she was not amused, and it took a little time to convince her that we should hop it, as she could not hear the alarm. Finally, I reopened the door to the corridor and outside saw a uniformed fireman with a hammer and a very flustered night manager, trying to enter the room opposite. The door then opened to reveal a billowing cloud of cigarette smoke and a very sheepish group of Chinese. They spoke no English and had no idea that they should not have been smoking.

At breakfast, the sole topic of conversation was the false alarm and it was revealed that some wheelchair users had been left unprovided for at the time of the alarm. I know that Sue Del Mar has since written to the hotel, drawing their attention to the potential dangers of a lapse such as that.

The conference itself was a great success. For type 2, Allan Muir had assembled a galaxy of experts and my spies told me that the type 1 and type 5 workshops had been very well provided for. The hotel made up for the fire alarm farrago by providing great bacon butties with the coffee and a superb lunch. Aside from the conference, the weekend provides a wonderful way to meet up with old friends and chat over progress, (or lack of it). For Joyce and I, the conference was terrific on that score.

An awful lot of hard work and planning goes into these junkets. Sue del Mar fully deserved the special thanks given to her at the AGM. We must also thank the type representatives, who arranged the workshops, your executive committee and of course the General Secretary and co-founder, Ann Phillips.

I hope to see many of you at the 2008 conference, but without the benefit of fire alarms.

**Clive Tonks**