TUG 2008: T_EX's 30th birthday

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http://tug.org/tug2008

'Twas the night before TUGconf and all through the
  No computer was stirring, not even my mouse. [house
The bags were all stuffed and in boxes for care
  In hopes that the delegates soon would be there.
Attendees were nestled all snug in their planes
  While visions of typesetting danced in their brains.

I dare say someone with more poetic license can make a better shot at it, but by the night before the 2008 Cork meeting the bags were indeed all ready, thanks to Anita and Tyler Schwartz, Arthur Reutenauer and Karel Píška who gave up their evening to sort T-shirts, mugs, programs, and the assorted bits and pieces while registering the early arrivals. We finally headed for a much-needed beer, and bumped into my son and his girlfriend in the beer-garden (just to show that Cork is actually a village of 200,000 people).

The workshops (PSTricks and LaTeX) were very well attended, almost over capacity in one of the rooms, and in addition to the expected content they covered a lot of the vital but informal tips and hints that you only get in face-to-face tuition.

The "Luck of the Irish" brought us excellent weather and wonderful presenters. Everyone did a fantastic job adhering to the schedule and adjusting to all the last minute changes. Thanks to the session chairs, Cheryl Ponchin, Anita Schwartz, myself and our renowned TUG office manager, Robin Laakso.

As the local organiser I couldn't get to as many of the papers as I wanted to, but meeting old and new faces is one of the benefits of conferences, and I always get a lot out of hearing what people have been doing and what they are using T_EX for. Video recordings of many of the talks were made by the stalwart Kaveh Bazargan, so if you could not be present, or for a reminder if you were, visit http://www.river-valley.tv/conferences/tug2008.

The excursions were full of history and beautiful sites. Many would agree that most of us attending TUG conferences do not need to kiss the Blarney Stone for the gift of gab, especially when it comes to our passion for T_EX. However, many of us did enjoy sharing these passionate discussions over Jameson, Guinness and Beamish at the end of each long day. The banquet provided a relaxing evening to enjoy a nice dinner along with the opportunity to learn and enjoy the talents of our user group members outside of T_EX.

A lot has changed since we hosted the 1990 meeting at Cork: fonts, encodings, packages, versions, features, systems, and people (some of us are older and wiser; some of us just older!). Many of these changes were evident in the presentations, and it was good to see so much new work being done. Many of us have had to fend off the "oh, that old thing" response to mentioning T_EX, and perhaps we don't shout loudly enough about all the shiny new features we get to see at conferences.

And a lot hasn't changed: I had occasion to dig out some of the files I used back around 1990, and by changing `\documentstyle` to `\documentclass` and fixing a couple of package names, they worked fine; a tribute to the stability of the underlying design and the work of the maintainers and developers.

Perhaps embarrassingly, some of what hasn't changed still haunts us, although we'd never tell that to the users of InDesign or QuarkXPress or FrameMaker or (gasp) Word or OpenOffice. L_YX is great, but we still don't have an editing interface that non-technical writers can use. X_ET_EX is wonderful but font installation is still a pain. The MiKT_EX-derived package managers are cool, but not yet universal. And we still have people using `\bf` and `\it` after all these years.

Next year we're meeting at Notre Dame, so we have ten months to make some more good changes. And they promise to have visitor wireless access, which UCC didn't, no matter how loudly I screamed. See you there!