



The Steering Committee from left: Clare Kahtan, Catriona Picken, Geoffrey Kingscott, John Sykes, Diana Keay and Marti Smith

Aletta Stevens celebrates 25 years of ITI with a personal report on its birth, early years and many milestones



Aletta Stevens is a freelance Dutch translator and proofreader. She regularly writes for *ITI Bulletin*. She ran the Other Associations column in the *Translators' Guild Newsletter*, which continued as News of other Associations in *ITI News*, ITI's first publication.

If you wanted to qualify as a translator in the UK in the early 1980s, where did you go? And was it possible as a non-native speaker of English to take an examination in your mother tongue? These were questions that preoccupied me after I had come from Holland to study English at a British university and pursue a career in translation.

Translators' Guild days

Newly arrived in London with my degree in my pocket, I sat the entrance examination of the Institute of Linguists (IoL), aware that this was only a test of my general skills in English. I was still looking for a specific test of my translation ability and for a qualification that would give me the recognition and status of a professional. Within the IoL I found the Translators' Guild, a division originally formed in 1956 by members practising as professional translators. By 1980 the TG had acquired a considerable degree of autonomy by

becoming a subsidiary company of the IoL, with its own board of management, and its own entrance examination (passed by 30-35% of candidates), the Translators' Final Examination leading to the qualification MTG (Member of the Translators' Guild). Weighed down by a bag of selected dictionaries — the permitted use of which was considered quite novel at the time — I travelled to an examination hall in London and took the newly-introduced Translators' Intermediate Examination leading to the qualification ATG (Associate of the Translators' Guild).

In the TG I found what I was looking for, and much more: a welcoming and active group of some 400 professional translators, both native and non-native speakers of English. Many were highly distinguished in their own fields, role models I could look up to. They included well-known literary translators, one of whom, Patricia

Crampton, had been involved in drawing up the Nairobi Recommendation on the legal protection of translators and translations and the practical means to improve the status of translators, which was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1976. Another renowned member was Ewald Osers, a multi-award-winning translator of poetry and prose in German, Czech and English, and former Chairman of both the TG and the TA (the Translators Association), as well as Vice-President of FIT (1977-81), the *Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs*.

Networking and new technology

My nerves on arrival at my first TG meeting were quickly settled when I was greeted in the friendliest way by a translator who turned out to be working from my mother tongue: Bob Symonds. It was a memorable start. Thanks to the TG, I found the solution to the dearth of translation jobs for mother-tongue speakers of a minority language: freelancing. At a time when in-house translation departments were already shrinking, freelancing provided a whole new outlook. The TG showed us how to promote ourselves, not just by example but

also through practical advice. It was certainly clued up about the latest technology. Through one of the meetings we became aware of something called a dedicated Word Processor, though quite what it looked like and how it worked, we had no idea. Apparently, it took up a large amount of space, as Geoff Samuelsson-Brown, Lanna Castellano and David Harris were able to relate, having each purchased one at a cost of several thousand pounds. At their suggestion that we might double our output if we bought one, there was a drawing-in of breath and a realisation that this heralded a new era. Most of us had started by writing translations out in longhand and then typing them up on a manual typewriter, correcting errors with liquid and paper Tipp-ex. Others had dictated their translations to shorthand-typists. The range of equipment I was taken through in my administrative day job was a microcosm of the rapid changes in technology taking place elsewhere: starting with an electric typewriter I progressed to an IBM golf ball, followed by an electronic typewriter attached to a small screen and tape-streaming device, followed by an electronic typewriter with an integrated LCD screen and small memory, to a Digital Rainbow microcomputer and finally to that most coveted item, the IBM PC, still well out of my financial reach. The Translators' Guild newsletter, the *TGNL*, edited by Barbara Snell from 1976, was an excellent source of information on computer technology as well as developments in a new phenomenon: 'machine translation'.

A bold new plan

I began to attend regular meetings of both the loL and the TG, unaware that there was trouble brewing. In the years that followed, meetings became more and more heated, and I watched with increasing bewilderment as the loL AGMs threatened to disintegrate into explosive exchanges of verbal fireworks between various members. What on earth was it all about? It became apparent that a member named Harry Cemach, elected to Council in 1983, had set up the 'loL Non-TG Members' Action Group', launching an unrelenting campaign against the Translators'

Guild which he and his followers saw as an exclusive minority within the loL, taking up too much of its funding and excluding most of the loL's members due to its stringent admission procedure. The Chartered Institute of Linguists Centenary publication recounts: 'Within Council, in letters to the journal and in mailings to members, he agitated so virulently that he was accused of treating Council with contempt and was called upon by a majority of fellow-members to resign his place — but he refused!' The TG, on the other hand, was trying to raise the status of the profession, promote the mother-tongue rule, and improve the quality of translations. This clash of interests could not continue: a solution had to be found. The members of the TG put their heads together and came up with a bold plan for a new, independent professional organisation, an Institute of Translation. A Steering Committee (the loTSC) was set up and, after an intense period of work over a couple of years, called an Inaugural Meeting on 19 April 1986.

The inaugural meeting

It was a beautiful Saturday morning when I hurried through Kensington to reach the New Hall of the Royal Horticultural Society where Geoffrey Kingscott was ready to chair the first meeting, accompanied on the platform by John Sykes, Marti Smith, Claire Kahtan, Diana Keay and Catriona Picken. Claire Kahtan, an interpreter of Iraqi descent, had made her apartment in London available to the Steering Committee members to organise the mailing of the Letter of Intent. This crucial foundation document was posted out to a long list of people in industry and government, and to translation, interpreting and teaching establishments across the UK and abroad, together with an invitation to attend the Inaugural Meeting. The letter sought support for the new institute. A freepost address was set up at the Polytechnic of Central London (now the University of Westminster), administered by Suzy Adams. Such was the support for the new idea, from both TG and non-TG members as well as individuals and representatives from the Continent,

Hong Kong and the USA, that the meeting had to be held in two sessions with an estimated total attendance of 500 (the line had to be drawn there, although more tickets had been requested). Messages of encouragement and goodwill were received from translators' associations in many other countries and also from FIT, the *Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs*. By the start of the meeting, contributions to the launch fund had reached £1500.

At the doors we received a handout with the Outline of Constitution and the Application Form. This was just one of the many voluntary tasks carried out by the 18-strong Steering Committee as part of their preparatory work. The idea was to form the UK's first independent organisation for freelance translators and interpreters. Of course there was the TA, the Translators Association (set up in 1958 and part of the Society of Authors), but that was for

'Such was the support for the new idea... that the (Inaugural) meeting had to be held in two sessions with an estimated total attendance of 500 (the line had to be drawn there, although more tickets had been requested)'

literary and published translators. There was clearly a need for a body that would represent people whose primary source of income was translation. The Steering Committee also proposed that interpreters should be invited to join the new body. It was also anxious to include staff translators and interpreters and, perhaps more controversially, translation companies and people who taught translation and interpreting. It was felt that this broad church and inclusive approach would enable the new Institute to represent the sector and achieve greater impact as a voice for the industry. Questions were invited from the floor on who would be admitted, and with what criteria, and many points were debated and valuable suggestions made which would help to shape the new Institute further. There was particular concern about

the inclusion of translation companies and institutions. Speaker after speaker took to the microphone and argued the case so persuasively that, by the end of the meeting, delegates were convinced that this was the only right course to take and we voted accordingly. And thus, the vote to found the Institute of Translation & Interpreting was approved, by both the morning and afternoon meetings. Before leaving, we were invited to make a contribution to the set-up fund, after which we spilled out of the hall into the spring sunshine on a surge of optimism about the future.

Steering Committee

For ITI to come into being, a mammoth task had been performed by the Steering Committee, a powerful combination of exceptionally talented and influential individuals representing different aspects of the profession. The legendary John Sykes, Chairman of the Translators' Guild and previously Council Member of the Institute of Linguists and Editor of its journal *The Incorporated Linguist*, became the first Chairman of ITI. An Oxford graduate in mathematics with a D.Phil in astrophysics, he had run the Translation Unit at UKAEA, the Atomic Energy Authority, gaining a knowledge of some 20 languages, including Russian which he apparently taught himself within weeks. He translated textbooks on physics and astronomy, and joined the Oxford University Press to edit the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* and the *Oxford-Duden German Dictionary*. John was also known for winning *The Times* National Crossword Championships a record ten times, but it was his contacts and practical skills which were invaluable to the fledgling ITI: in the first years he chaired the Councils with authority and wit, and ensured that the ITI had

'It was felt that this broad church and inclusive approach would enable the new Institute to represent the sector and achieve greater impact as a voice for the industry'

ITI NEWS

The Newsletter of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting

Number 1, June 1986

CONTENTS

	page
Editorial	3
The inaugural Meeting of 19 April 1986	5
The signatories to the ITI Letter of Intent	9
Founder members of the Institute	10
Contributors to the ITI launch fund	12
Expressions of goodwill	13
A note on admissions	15
Networking and counselling	17
Regional groups	17
The Translators' Guild EGM	18
Forthcoming events	19

a sound financial basis. A brief run-down of the other Steering Committee members will give an impression of their considerable scope:

It was thanks to Marti Smith, a Swiss-born German-speaking freelance translator, that this impressive team of people, both TG and non-TG, were brought together in the first place; she chaired the Steering Committee. Albin Tybulewicz, originally from Poland, was a translator of Russian scientific journals, and editor and writer of books. Geoffrey Kingscott, Managing Director of Praetorius and publisher of *Language Monthly*, had a

The first issue of ITI News, above, the Institute's first publication, dated June 1986

background in industry and brought with him an insight into technology and a foreign perspective; he would go on to chair ITI's first conference as well as the Professional Standards Committee. Catriona Picken was Head of Translation at Shell, where Anne Naphine was a technical staff translator; Catriona had edited *The Translator's Handbook* and she hosted the IoTSC meetings at her house. Barbara Wilson, from the translation branch at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, represented government departments. The postal labels for the mailing of the Letter of Intent had been produced by Peter Barber, Managing Director of Able

Translations. A financial translator, Chris Percival, had experience as an accountant. As a lecturer at Ealing Technical College (now part of Thames Valley University), Diane Keay represented training establishments. Norman Hutchison was a Scot who applied his legal knowledge to draw up the ITI's new constitution, basing it on that of the TG. The French interpreter Claude Fleurent represented the TTG, the Technical Translation Group at Aslib, the Association for Information Management, organisers of the Translating and the Computer conferences. Then there were Paul Graham, Head of Translation Services for Mannesmann Demag in Germany, and Guy Carr, who was Deputy Editor of the *Translators' Guild Newsletter* and wrote its For Your Information (FYI) column. After a career in the Navy, Robin Inches put his knowledge of foreign languages to use as an abstractor at the Patent Office; he became editor of *ITI News*, ITI's first ever publication.

The final two members of the Steering Committee were two translators still well known to our members today. Lanna Castellano, Irish by birth and married to an Italian, had been a translator in Paris and Naples before working at a NATO agency in London and then as a freelance. ITI members know her from her successful running of the Orientation Course, but we are indebted to her in many other ways. She served on the first two ITI Councils, introduced the language and subject networks, and initiated the Guardian Angel Scheme which evolved into the PSG, the Peer Support Group, jointly devised with Cate Avery. Pamela Mayorcas, currently Chairman of ITI Council and Chairman of the Education & Training Committee, was a staff translator at the European Commission and had worked on Eurodicautom, the pioneering terminology database of the European Commission, now known as IATE (Inter-Active Terminology for Europe). During her leave of absence, ITI appointed her as the first Executive Secretary to the new Interim Council. Pamela remembers: 'Don Ellison, the Head of Accounts at Aslib, made a corner of its library available at Boswell Street

with just enough space for a desk and filing cabinet for me to run the Secretariat. Hannelore Schatz helped type up and cut and paste copy for the newsletter.' In November ITI moved to larger and more permanent offices at 318a Finchley Road, London, after Dimity Castellano (no relation of Lanna), Secretary of the Translators' Guild, was appointed to take over from Pamela as ITI Secretary, a post she would carry out with dedication for many years.

At the Extraordinary General Meeting of the TG held on 14 June 1986, it was decided to liquidate the TG and form a new company, TG '86 (Translators' Guild (1986) Ltd) so that members could continue to use their designations MTG and ATG until ITI was fully established. In the TGNL of October 1986 John Sykes signs off with the words: 'I write to you for the last time as Chairman of the Translators' Guild Ltd., which has now gone into liquidation... For over thirty years the Translators' Guild has helped, and fought, to raise the status of the translating profession in this country. The Institute of Translation and Interpreting will continue with that task. Please give it your support!' The Guild became a dormant body, and in 1989 voted to cease its existence. It agreed that ITI could, if it wished, reserve the right to the name by incorporating the Guild into the Institute; hence the mention at the bottom of ITI's official stationery.

IBM and WordPerfect — empowering the freelancer

Thus ITI, with Juan Sager (Professor of Modern Languages at UMIST) as its first President, was set to embark upon a new era. Coincidentally, I moved out of London to set up as a full-time freelance translator by the end of the year in which ITI was born. Miraculously, it was also the year in which Alan Sugar launched his IBM-compatible Amstrad PC 1512 at £499. Now every translator could afford a computer. Thanks to this breakthrough and the invaluable know-how and advice from the TG ('never start up as a freelance without first building a network' and 'don't work just for a handful of clients'), I was ready to go it alone. All I needed now was to invest several hundred pounds in the word processing

software launched in 1982 which had become the industry standard for the translating profession: WordPerfect 4.2 for DOS. (This iconic programme and operating system — of which the most popular version 5.1 for MS-DOS 3.2 was released in 1989 — would be replaced by Word for Windows in the 1990s, but some users are nostalgic for it to this day.)

Nascent networks

But how isolated would I be working outside London? At that time translators had only the telephone and the post: email and internet would not arrive until the mid-1990s. Yet ITI began to cater for every translator, wherever they lived. Lanna Castellano kick-started the networks with the Italian Network, closely followed by other language networks, as well as subject networks. In 1987 the Dutch Network was set up, with Bob Symonds as its UK convenor. Now I was able to communicate and

'Through one of the (Translators Guild) meetings we became aware of something called a dedicated Word Processor, though quite what it looked like and how it worked, we had no idea. Apparently, it took up a large amount of space...'

meet up with colleagues translating from and into the same language as I was, in both countries. The networks realised that there was also a need for specialisation in languages and subjects, so that new kinds of workshops, seminars and courses began to emerge. ITI continued to guide us through further changes in technology: software improved so that we were able to obtain foreign accents through ASCII codes; presentation made a giant leap when the dot matrix printer was superseded by the laser printer (albeit at an initial cost of just under £1000); and last-minute dashes in the rain to the post office became less frequent when fax arrived on the scene. With difficulty, I lugged my first Brother fax machine home on the train; a heavy and bulky item, it took up a whole corner of my desk. (Years later, I was dismayed to find that the messages on the thermal

paper rolls we bought for it had all but faded.) After the networks, Chris Percival started a Regional Group for the North-East area and a meeting for potential Regional Group coordinators was organised by Robin Inches, then editor of ITI News. In 1989 I was able to join my own regional group, the ITI Western Group, run by Anna George. Local groups were springing up all over Britain: there was no need for translators to feel isolated anymore.

From typed news-sheet to professional journal

ITI's publications kept us informed too. The first issue of *ITI News* appeared in June 1986, the final issue of the *TGNL* in October 1986. In 1989 Mike Shields, formerly Chairman of the TA and publisher and editor of the literary quarterly *Orbis*, was invited by Council to apply his experience and expertise to create ITI's first professionally produced publication. He devised and edited a printed journal, *Professional Translator & Interpreter (PTI)*, which was jointly

'Speaker after speaker took to the microphone and argued the case so persuasively that, by the end of the meeting, delegates were convinced that this was the only right course to take and we voted accordingly'

published with the Society of Authors, with Pamela Mayorcas as Deputy Editor, and ran until issue number 3 in 1992. Then the *Bulletin* came into its own, with Lanna Castellano as its first editor and Bob Symonds producing the copy for reproduction on his Mac with DTP programme, which few translators had. It was photocopied and mailed out from the office. Dimity Castellano recalls: 'I do remember the photocopier getting so hot that it smelt as though it was burning toast, and I clearly remember Margaret Wilson and I standing at the table, stuffing *Bulletins* into envelopes,

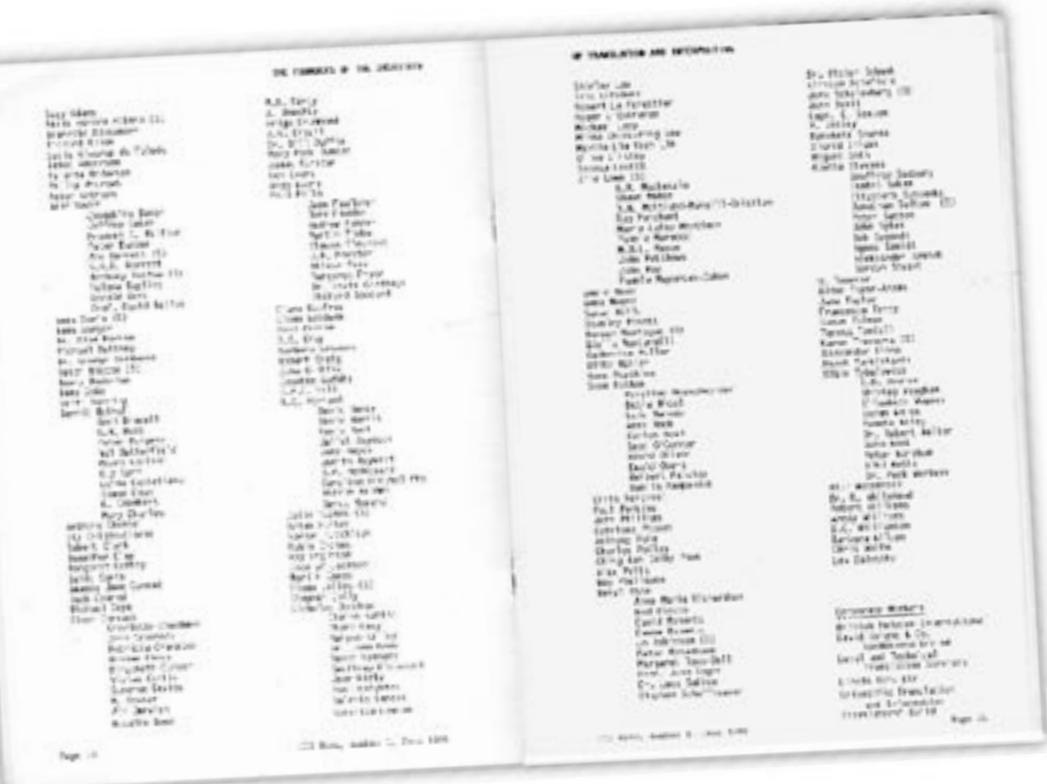
sealing and franking them, and then hauling sackfuls of post down the stairs — to spare the legs of weak-kneed postmen. In time, a paid editor was brought in, after which it evolved into the professional journal it is today. *ITI Bulletin*, which won the FIT Best Periodical prize in 2005, now has a readership of approximately 7000 people in the UK and overseas and has come a long way from the first black-and-white, typed and stapled-together news-sheet. Membership of the Institute also saw an impressive growth, from the initial 400 to approximately 3000 today. The disagreements within the IoL have long been forgotten and were never between ITI and the IoL. Relations between ITI and what is now the Chartered Institute of Linguists are positive and amicable, with the two institutes successfully collaborating on the Chartered Linguist scheme.

Milestones in ITI's history include

buying its own property in City Road in 1992, hosting the FIT conference in Brighton in 1993 organised by an ITI team led by Eyvor Fogarty, and then moving the office to Milton Keynes in autumn 2001, which made it possible to take on a larger paid staff.

The future

So what lies in store for the next twenty-five years? Lanna Castellano has the final word: 'I think translation will become even more specialised, where we will have to state that we specialise in criminal law, rather than law, and so on. I hope that the continuing spirit of voluntary effort will continue, with even more changes and developments coming about as a result of individual initiatives. Growing emphasis on improving not just the standard of translation but the acquisition of translation-related skills. And greater rewards for the work we do!'



A list of founder members of the newly formed ITI, printed in the centre pages of ITI News

Sources

- Interview with Pamela Mayorcas:** London, 25 September 2010.
- Interview with Lanna Castellano:** London, 24 November 2010.
- Professionally Speaking: The Chartered Institute of Linguists Centenary 1910-2010**, pp 42-43 and pp 50-52.
- ITI: an unofficial history by Pamela Mayorcas** (ITI 10th Anniversary series: 1986-1996).
- Winners of the John Sykes Prize by Catherine Greensmith**, *ITI Bulletin* July-August 2007, pp 5-6.
- John Sykes 1929-1993 by Kerstin Schofield**, *ITI Bulletin* May-June 2007, pp 12-13.
- Patricia Crampton: Freedom fighter for rights and remuneration by Eyvor Fogarty**, *ITI Bulletin* May-June 2007, pp 14-16.
- ITI News: The Newsletter of the Institute of Translation & Interpreting:** June and November 1986, July and November 1987.
- TGNL: The Newsletter of the Translators' Guild:** April, July and October 1986.