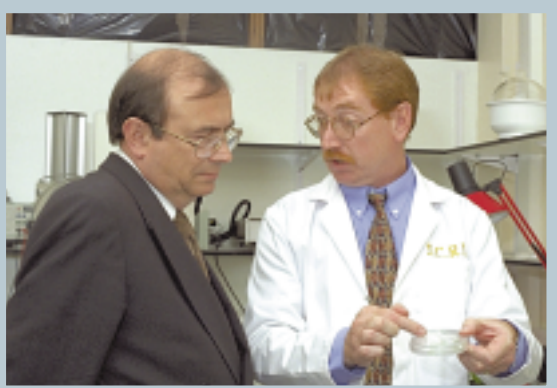


## Scientific Liaison & Information Services

W.H. Macfarlane Smith

The Scientific Liaison and Information Services (SLIS) remit includes the promotion of SCRI and its science wherever appropriate opportunities present themselves. These range from events such as SCOTCROP and POTATO HARVEST '97, through articles in the popular press, magazines and scientific journals to radio and television appearances. As a result, public knowledge of the Institute's work has widened, with consequent benefits for SCRI's reputation. However, the costs of participation in some of these activities has increased to such an extent that SLIS constantly seeks new and cost-effective means of publicising the Institute's many successes.

The number of scientists (both public and private sector), students, journalists, etc. visiting the Institute continues to grow. SCRI was delighted to welcome the new Minister of State for Agriculture, the Environment and Fisheries in Scotland, Lord Sewell, who visited shortly after his appointment to familiarise himself with the Institute's research.



Dr. Karl Oparka explaining to Lord Sewell the rôle of plasmodesmata in plant virus transport

The appointment of Dr David Marshall to lead the Unit of Bioinformatics and Information Technology (formerly Information Technology Services) has brought new strengths to the Institute. A major programme of upgrading both hardware and software has now commenced. Over a period, the Local Area Network (LAN) cabling will be upgraded to C5 standard and extended. New servers have been purchased and installed.

Communication, both within the Institute and between SCRI, the Scottish Office and other Institutes, will be improved by standardisation on the software packages, Windows NT and Office 97. This necessitates a substantial investment in upgrading and purchasing of new computers. The number of computer users continues to rise in both the scientific and service areas. Much of the Institute's science is now heavily dependent on the use of such equipment. As a further aid to publicising SCRI, a start has been made on expanding and improving our Web pages (<http://www.scri.sari.ac.uk>). This will be followed by the creation of Intranet pages to deal with many standard internal procedures and information (e.g. chemical safety data). A review of possible problems with computers and other equipment in the year 2000 has been carried out and a programme initiated to ensure that all such equipment is, or will be, '2000-compliant'.



Ian Black installing software on new Compaq Proliant servers.

The activities and future needs of the Library have been reviewed. Library costs continue to increase in excess of inflation, with inevitable pressure on the number of journals taken and books purchased. Measures taken to minimise any reduction in journals subscribed to, include membership of the Research Institutes Serials Consortium (BRISC) and the Research Councils Library and Information Consortium (RESCOLINC). These consortia have been able to negotiate advantageous prices from the suppliers of both printed and electronic journals. As a result of membership of RESCOLINC, Institute staff



Librarians Sarah Stephens and Ursula McKean accessing an electronic journal.

now have electronic access to the complete stable of Academic Press titles. The demands on the Library continue to increase, with additional access required to the databases, BIDS ISI, EDINA BIOSIS and CAB Abstracts. The number of inter-library loans has increased by 20% and there was a 5% increase in the number of new books obtained. We are grateful to all those who made donations, so allowing us to maintain a comprehensive and modern stock of reference material. Inadequate space in the Library is a growing cause of concern and necessitated the creation of an annex to archive old or less used journals and books. While this has resolved the problem in the short term, further measures will be required at a later date.

The services of the Visual Aids Unit continue to be in heavy demand for a wide range of activities from the

provision of routine photographs of gels, through photographs and graphics for publications, brochures, and the Annual Report, to the creation of large-scale displays of the Institute's research and commercial products for conferences, agricultural shows and so on. It is pleasing that the standard of presentation from the Unit receives very favourable comments in comparison with displays produced by private sector organisations. While the rate of increase in the number of such jobs is not as great as in previous years, the complexity of each job is now greater than ever before.

Health and Safety at Work issues continue to have a high profile with the advent of both new and modified legislation and the necessity to demonstrate competence by means of certificated training. Inevitably, this has substantial cost implications. Overall responsibility for Fire Safety has been transferred from the Scottish Office to the local Fire Authority.

The major Dundee contribution to the new Millenium will be the creation of a Science Centre, one of a network of such centres in Scotland. SCRI is a partner in this activity, along with Dundee Council, Scottish Enterprise and the Universities of Dundee, St.Andrews and Abertay. Aimed at creating a greater public awareness and understanding of science, the Centre will have a substantial input from SCRI, demonstrating the latest scientific advances in plant, soil and environmental research. The Deputy Director, Professor Wilson, has been involved in bringing the scheme to fruition and, together with SLIS staff, will have an ongoing committment to its succesful implementation.