

# 1

## Introduction

ALAN F. MacDOUGALL

This Festschrift celebrates and commemorates the work and career of Professor Peter Brophy, who retired in 2008 as the Director, Centre for Research in Library and Information Management (CERLIM), Department of Information and Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University. It both identifies and honours his contribution and acknowledges his distinguished career over more than 30 years in the field of libraries, information management and information science. The collection of writings in this work is written among others by: close academic colleagues, those who worked for and with him, people whom he inspired and peer colleagues of high international repute. It weaves an impressive account of achievement and respect for his abilities. It also gives an insight into his character.

In an introduction of this kind the requirement to reflect on Peter's career and achievements might unwittingly seem more like an obituary, or Gedenkschrift, rather than a Festschrift. On the contrary, Peter retires from his post at the zenith of his career, indeed, he constantly likes to remind me, and anyone who will listen, that he is actually younger than me (only four days though!).

I begin this introductory chapter on a personal note but with some reason. To be asked to write this introduction is a privilege and an honour. I am equally aware that contributors to this book were eager to honour Peter and his importance in the profession, and to record his achievement, which will stimulate the next generation, their research and their practice.

The second chapter in this work refers to the time before I knew him. It provides an insight to Peter's contribution during the early days of his career from 1971 to 1973. Written by Michael Buckland, the eminent professor, it is worthy of note that he should describe Peter as having a 'distinguished career'. The chapter introduces us to the innovative work of the Library Research Unit at Lancaster University, which Buckland headed and where Peter was a research

associate. It is a timely commentary both as a review of the work of that Unit and Peter's role in its success, and as an introduction to his professional career. It was to be the formative period for the way he was to think, challenge, analyse and deliver quality throughout his career. At this stage he was encouraged to go beyond the status quo to enquire why things are done, how they are achieved, why they are achieved and, significantly, to carry out the research to discover how any activity could be informed and improved. In essence, this process involved re-examining traditionally held thoughts and proposing new ideas within a context of continuous improvement.

Buckland then makes reference to Peter's leaving Lancaster in 1973 to become the Library Systems Officer at Strathclyde University, where he worked until 1975. A measure of the man can be deduced when one realizes that it was only a further eight years until he was appointed, aged 33, to the post of Librarian of Bristol Polytechnic (subsequently renamed University of the West of England). In those intervening eight years he was successively a subject librarian and Deputy at Teesside Polytechnic.

After six years, in 1989, Peter left Bristol to return back North, not to 'God's Own County' and the county of his birth (Yorkshire) but to Lancashire. He became the Head of Learning Resources at University of Central Lancashire. I can still remember meeting him (with a sinking heart) at breakfast on the morning of the interview; I was one of the candidates!

Unfortunately because of space limitations this volume could not accommodate additional chapters on his outstanding success in the two practically based professional posts of University Librarian; strictly this Festschrift has concentrated on his academic record.

If Lancaster University was to be the place where he served his research apprenticeship then it was at the University of Central Lancashire that he began to practise his research craft as a master. In 1993, while still the Director of Learning Resources and achieving outstanding results, he set up the Centre for Research in Library and Information Management (CERLIM), which until the present day has continued to be so influential in the profession. He was recognized as one of the leading and most influential university librarians and also as an acknowledged leader, carrying out research in information management, which could be fed directly back in to the library world and to the benefit of his community.

The research output was impressive but during the following few years it became clear that something had to give. While Peter pondered the possibility of a full time career in research, Professor Dick Hartley, the Head of Department of

Information and Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University, who has contributed a chapter to this volume, approached Peter with an offer for the team to come to Manchester. It was an inspired thought. After some discussion he managed to encourage Peter to come to Manchester with the CERLIM team in 1998. It turned out to be to the benefit of Manchester Metropolitan University and to the Department (enhanced research assessment exercise rating followed) by enriching the research environment. It clearly also suited Peter and the CERLIM staff, who went from strength to strength, providing high level and much needed research in the profession. Subsequent findings emanating from CERLIM continued to play a part in influencing the way that libraries and their services were being developed. Peter, as Professor of Information Management, devoted himself primarily to the pursuit of research, albeit with teaching commitments.

The above paragraphs outline the progression of Peter's career but do not convey the influence, range and extent of the research and original contribution to knowledge. The remaining chapters in this book illustrate the main themes of his research interest over the past 30 years or more. A more comprehensive treatment of the themes would merit a multi-volume work.

The first area of these research interests is associated with libraries and learning, including distance learning – an area with which I became associated through European projects, particularly the project entitled BIBDEL (Libraries Without Walls: the delivery of library services to distant users). Gill Needham and Nicky Whitsed chart the progression and contribution of the Library at the Open University to the needs of the distant learner and acknowledge Peter who 'has been such an inspiration to us working in this field'. The chapter neatly illustrates how the challenge ten years ago was to overcome the physical distance to give the best support to distance learners; now the challenge is to overcome the virtual distance and understand different virtual spaces so as to position and provide services for the future. The chapter by Professor David Baker, who had a similarly fast track career, reflects on the history, development, application and future of information and communication technology in the field of learning and teaching, with special reference to UK higher education. One of the most influential library bodies in the UK has been the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), which has contributed to the shape and direction of the future of information provision. It is no surprise that Peter has been closely associated with carrying out major consultancy work on behalf of JISC.

The second theme is that of widening access to information. It illustrates Peter's ability to influence matters beyond the boundaries of academic libraries

and especially to public libraries. The chapter by Jenny Craven, a fellow colleague in CERLIM, illustrates the thinking and research carried out in the area of widening access to library services for people with print impairments. It emphasizes the requirement of ensuring equality of delivery for all. Chapters by John Dolan, one of the most respected leaders in this area, on widening access and public libraries, and Juliet Eve (a former fellow academic at Manchester) on Web 2.0, both emphasize this perspective.

The third theme is the changing direction of information delivery. Under this heading, contributions include a chapter by Rowena Cullen and Brenda Chawner at the School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington, which provides a comprehensive view of institutional repositories and illustrates the rapidly evolving thinking about storage and dissemination. Professor Richard J. Hartley, in his chapter, also refers to Peter as having a distinguished career, reminding us of Peter's commitment to networking and dissemination, especially the conference series entitled 'Libraries Without Walls', of which Peter was the creator. It came out of the European research and dissemination process for the BIBDEL project. This conference has been repeated every two years since the 1990s and I can testify that its continued success is primarily due to Peter. Time and time again I have been informed by attendees that the reason for their attendance is to have the opportunity to talk to him about developments and seek advice.

The final theme is performance and quality, areas with which I became associated through becoming a partner in various European projects directed by Peter. Two examples are Eclipse (Evaluation and Quality in Library Performance: Systems for Europe) and its follow-on project entitled Equinox. In the 1970s and 1980s the library profession was only beginning to gather and articulate its thoughts about matters related to quality. Peter acted as a catalyst and, along with the professional bodies, helped to stimulate timely research. As the years passed and the influence of digitization began to be noted he, and his team, began to focus on electronic provision and how it might be evaluated. Professor Charles R. McClure, a highly regarded US scholar, and his colleague John T. Snead discuss web-based evaluation decision-making systems. Chuck McClure's input symbolizes Peter's commitment and involvement in pursuing international solutions. Jill Griffiths, a colleague of Peter's in CERLIM, reflects on some of the work on quality attributes thinking in her chapter. Also under this theme Professor Jennifer Rowley (fellow academic at Manchester Metropolitan University) and Sue Roberts (Victoria University of Wellington) write on influential leadership. The authors mark Peter's contribution as an information

leader 'who has over many years, in differing contexts, and playing different roles, been a leader not only in the specific job roles that he has held, but also to the profession as a whole. He has been an exemplar of the influential leader . . . on some occasions unwittingly as a consequence of a seemingly unrelated action'. A sentiment widely held and endorsed by the library and information community.

## **Conclusion**

This Festschrift clearly illustrates Peter's contribution to the profession in terms of original thinking; original research; contribution to knowledge; the acknowledgement of his peers by having been made a Fellow of several bodies; the numerous requests for him to carry out consultancies particularly for the British Council; the recognized influence he has had on those who have worked with him; and, significantly, the wider international audience that Peter would have no idea of and may never have met.

One only need look at Peter's voluminous publishing output as further evidence of his contribution (see the Bibliography at the end of the volume). A glimpse at three of his major works: *The Library in the 21st Century* (2nd edn, 2007), *Measuring Library Performance* (2006) and *The Academic Library* (2nd edn, 2005) offers some indication of his academic rigour, structured thinking, intellectual grasp and incisiveness.

Peter's work exhibits a continuing desire for improvement and equity; this also extends to the way he conducts not only his professional but also his private life. Many people have remarked on Peter's ability to inspire and enthuse them and comment on the manner in which he has helped to provide marvellous opportunities for their career development; these sentiments have been particularly emphasized by the present and former staff in CERLIM.

What many people will not know is that he has an equally successful parallel life. He has been a magistrate (and was very helpful in introducing me to the magistracy), and has deep spiritual convictions. It is often the case that behind a successful person is another very important individual; Peter's position is no different. There is no doubt that his highly successful career is influenced in no small part by his family: his daughter Jenny, and Alison. It has been my pleasure to know his librarian wife, Alison, and it is abundantly obvious that she is a wonderful support. It will be no surprise to learn that she is an accomplished counsellor.

It only remains to thank the contributors for their timely and thoughtful chapters and for their perceptive words about Peter, which so accurately reflect

his abilities. I am convinced that when he learns of, and reads the content of, this book he will be genuinely surprised that his colleagues have wanted to bring these chapters together in his honour. He will also find it difficult to accept the words of praise, but this is a measure of the man and his genuine modesty. He deserves the praise and the recognition; the information profession is much the stronger and richer for the contribution of Professor Peter Brophy.