
In memoriam: Tom Graham



Tom Graham, University Librarian at the University of York, 1984-1997, and at Newcastle University from 1997, died on 30 November 2008. In appearance always a fit and active person, a keen hill walker, he had successfully undergone major heart surgery in 2007, only to find in the spring of 2008 that he had cancer. He continued working until a fortnight before he died.

As well as his successful management of major university libraries, Tom Graham brought to the profession a rigorous belief in sharing good practice and in collaboration with others. Cooperation was something to be pursued not merely for its own sake, but as a means to achieve shared goals for the benefit of all. He found many channels to facilitate collaboration, notably in SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries), in the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the UK higher education funding councils, and in Research Libraries UK.

He was a member of SCONUL's Council from 1987 to 1995, and Vice-Chair (1991-92) and Chair (1992-94) at the moment when SCONUL and COPOL (the Council of Polytechnic Librarians) merged. Apart from these roles in the governance of the professional society he was also active in its grass-roots activities: a member of its Advisory Committee on Buildings, 1985-92, and again in 1996-99. He was a member of the joint Working Group on Scholarly Communications (established by SCONUL and Research Libraries UK) from 1995 to 2008, and its Chair from 2000 to 2004.

From his work in these groups two major interests can be seen – the successful design of university library buildings, and the importance of gaining optimal value for library users from the purchases made by libraries.

Tom Graham wanted the maximum number of people to benefit from published knowledge and scholarly results. By collaborating with other libraries and agencies (largely through JISC) he was one of the leaders in establishing cooperative purchases by libraries of electronic journals, so

that, from the late 1990s, more journals became available to more people. Through SCONUL and RLUK he worked hard to influence the process of scholarly publication in universities, and was rewarded when databases of scholarly publications began to be established in universities themselves, thus providing an alternative platform alongside commercially-published learned journals.



Tom Graham at Newcastle conference

Many of us will remember Tom armed with his pocket camera when visiting other libraries and enjoying meeting new faces at our annual SCONUL conferences. Tom was always sure to greet and welcome those attending SCONUL conferences and meetings for the first time. In his sympathetic and cheerful character he represented the inclusive culture we espouse in our profession.