
In memoriam: Tony Bowyer, 1924-2008



Tony Harold Bowyer, former Librarian of Queen Mary College, University of London, was born on 18 April 1924 and died on 12 December 2008.

Tony Bowyer enjoyed a successful career as an academic librarian in his native London and in Birmingham and he went on, in his retirement, to further achievements as a historian. His kindness and modesty will be missed by many friends and colleagues.

The start of his career was delayed by service in the Navy at the end of World War II, after which he studied Economic History at the London School of Economics and was married in 1952 to Nora, whom he had met as a fellow-student five years earlier and who predeceased Tony by only a few months.

Early professional roles were at the British Library of Political and Economic Science and then as head of acquisitions at the University of London Library. In 1962 he moved to the University of Birmingham Library as deputy librarian, at the height of the 'Robbins' expansion of universities, and played a major part in developing a cooperative framework of major libraries in the city, including the setting up of BLCMP (the Birmingham Libraries Cooperative Mechanism Project).

Returning to London in 1971 as Librarian of Queen Mary College, he set out to energise a library that had yet to embark on serious growth. He developed the staff by creative evolution, one of his first steps being to appoint QMC's first subject librarians and creating a highly effective structure of professionals combining subject and management portfolios. He was ambitious but realistic about what was possible for the library in a college that still considered itself small; however, with a youthful and service-minded team devel-

oping around him, the library's impact became progressively greater.

As at Birmingham, he took an active part in developing library cooperation within the University of London and nationally, as evidenced by his articles 'Cooperative schemes and resource sharing: case-study of the University of London' (1981)¹ and 'National library coordination and the art of the possible' (1981).²

His interest in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe led him to participate in the activities of the SCONUL Slavonic and East European Group (later the Advisory Committee on Slavonic and East European Materials) and he assisted in the compilation of the group's *Directory of libraries and special collections on Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R.* (1971).³ However, it was in SCONUL as a whole that he made his most significant contribution to library cooperation at the national level. He served as Honorary Treasurer from 1973 to 1979, as Vice-Chair in 1979-81 and finally as Chair in 1981-83, then in 1984 as past Chair. He played an important part in the constitutional and financial changes as the result of which SCONUL became a more formal and effective organization. He represented SCONUL on the British Library Advisory Council and on the Joint Consultative Committee, which brought together various library professional bodies. He displayed a keen interest in matters of copyright.

He also researched the early history of SCONUL for his 'The founding of the Standing Conference of National and University Libraries' (1980).⁴

Tony retired in 1984, his final contribution at QMC being to set in motion the much-needed new college library project.

Retirement gave him the opportunity to turn himself back into an historian. His initial aim was to write a biography of the controversial eighteenth-century politician Sir Philip Francis, the probable author of the 'letters of Junius', about the earliest editions of which Tony had published a study in 1957. The biography remained unfinished, sadly, but Tony's impeccable research led to the publication of a number of significant articles. 'India and the personal finances of Philip Francis' appeared in the *English historical review*⁵ and 'The appointment of Philip Francis to the Bengal Supreme Council' in the *Historical journal*,⁶ both in 1995. Other articles were published in *Parliamentary history* (1999 and 2006),⁷ *Albion* (1995)⁸ and *The mariner's mirror* (2001).⁹ His reputation as a histo-

rian led to his involvement as a contributor to the *Oxford dictionary of national biography* for which he wrote eighteen entries, focused on Britons who had served in India during the eighteenth century. Tony combined the qualities of a kindly, supportive and charming family man and colleague with those of an efficient and modernizing librarian. His passions for cricket and for chocolate were well known. He also had an enthusiasm for travel, particularly in his life-long love of Italy, but also in the more intrepid travels in central Asia which followed his retirement.

As a companionable man he found in retirement a natural niche in the Institute of Historical Research, but the circle of friends and colleagues who will greatly miss him extends far more widely. He is survived by his daughter, Katharine, and son, David.

(A similar obituary is appearing in *CILIP library and information update*.)

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