
Obituary



EMERITUS PROFESSOR COLIN HARRIS

Professor Emeritus Colin Harris, a distinguished academic librarian and consultant, died on 15 July 2014, aged 70. Colin's childhood was spent in Gravesend. Born into a large family, often living in poor circumstances, Colin's teenage years were particularly difficult. Despite these handicaps, he proceeded to the University of Hull and graduated in 1966 with a BA Social Studies degree. It was here that he met his wife Colleen. He moved to Canada, where he obtained an MA in sociology from McMaster University and an MLS from the University of Western Ontario. Prior to returning to Britain in 1972, Colin was Librarian of Seneca College, Toronto. From 1973, he spent five years at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, first as research assistant on a British Library project under the late Keith Harris and subsequently as Senior Lecturer in the School of Librarianship. In 1979 he became Director of the Centre for User Studies at the School of Librarianship, University of Sheffield.

Colin's ambition was to make his mark in university librarianship, and he was appointed University Librarian at the University of Salford in

1985. His drive and administrative skills led to his promotion as Director of Academic Information Services when services were combined in 1988. In 1986, Colin took Salford into BLCMP, subsequently TALIS, and became a director in 1986. His passionate belief in cooperation led him to persuade a casually cooperating group of university librarians in Manchester, meeting with the City Librarian and known as the 'Precinct Working Party', to become a formally administered Consortium of Academic Libraries in Manchester (CALIM) with a salaried administrator. The newly invigorated organisation was capable of bringing about positive change.

Colin was appointed University Librarian at the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) in the summer of 1993, taking up the job after the retirement of Professor Ian Rogerson in the December of that year. He was immediately awarded a personal Chair. Initially, he was faced with the task of planning an expanded main library within the All Saints building. An outstanding feature of his design was the area devoted to special collections, with conservation workshop, open access shelving for a large book collection, and a paper store for archives. This accommodation was subsequently extended and improved to include an object store and gallery when the Manchester School of art collection was brought into the library. Colin's efforts, supported by a small team of enthusiastic, specialist staff, resulted in the extended special collections being awarded MLA accreditation in 2005, and becoming a facility respected by researchers internationally.

In addition to the extension of the Sir Kenneth Green (main) Library, Colin negotiated a move to much improved accommodation for the North West Film Archive, also part of the library service, and oversaw refurbishments (some of them major) in all other site libraries bar one. His interests, however, were far wider than buildings, and he steered the library through such initiatives as the establishment of an ambitious information skills programme and of e-Space, MMU's institutional repository. At the same time he continued to work tirelessly on behalf of CALIM and later NoWAL (North West Academic Libraries), being instrumental in CALIM's involvement in the Resource Discovery network, which later became Intute, and in particular in the successful bid for the Creative Arts and Industries Hub, led from and subsequently based at MMU.

For many years he chaired CALIM's Staff Training and Development Group, and under his leadership CLIP (Certificate in Library and Information Practice) was developed. This was accredited by the Greater Manchester Open College Network and was later awarded the CILIP Seal of Recognition. A further achievement, having pushed consortial purchasing for many years while also being active in the movement to encourage publishers to provide electronic content, was to set up the contract between NoWAL and NetLibrary, which, as probably the first large-scale e-books contract in the UK, allowed the potential of e-books to be explored in the UK higher education environment.

While at Salford, Colin had become seriously involved in a number of international initiatives in the development of information systems and services. With Peter Taylor, a courageous and innovative publisher, he planned and launched the *British Journal of Academic Librarianship* and revealed himself as a skilled editor, capable of attracting many of the most original thinkers in the profession to write for the publication. His extra-mural professional activities were multifarious but he never accepted any position unless he felt capable of making a positive contribution. In 1989 the University of Hull awarded him a PhD by published work. He was made both Fellow of the Library Association and Fellow of the Institution of Information Scientists. He participated in many Higher Education Funding Council, JISC and other national programmes and continued to be active in research projects even after his retirement from MMU.

Colin's last months at MMU were clouded by ill health and he retired in June 2007. After diagnosis of a rare condition, his condition improved but in recent months his ill-health returned. He will be warmly remembered by many for his incisive and positive contributions to the profession. Our sympathies go out Colleen and his two sons.

Ian Rogerson and Gill Barry
*Former University Librarians,
Manchester Metropolitan University*