
Obituary

Brenda Elizabeth Moon MA MPhil PhD FRSE

an appreciation

I well remember Brenda's arrival in Edinburgh University Library on the first day in her new post. A note in my diary for Monday 7 January 1980 reads, portentously, "Miss Moon comes". I remember having been able to keep that first day clear for her to meet and talk to senior staff, particularly to the Secretary to the Library, Nancy Watt. Brenda arrived having driven from Hull with a one-night stopover in a hotel at Berwick-on-Tweed. Here she had spent the evening finishing off a biographical note on Marianne North for a new edition of North's *A Vision of Eden*, which was already at press and which the printer and publisher were awaiting to complete the print run. She posted it the following day, and met her deadline. I later discovered that this was typical of Brenda: she always had unexpected extras on hand – and she met her deadlines.

Brenda's honeymoon period at Edinburgh was short if, indeed, it existed at all. A note in my diary for her second day reads "Dr Ottaway to see Librarian". Jim Ottaway was the vigorous Convener of the Library Committee's On-Line Sub-Committee, and a meeting of the On-Line Sub-Committee was scheduled for that Friday afternoon. The Library Committee had already decided that the future lay in automated systems. Brenda had triumphantly managed the installation of the country's first Geac installation at the Brynmor Jones Library of the University of Hull. Five years later, against many odds, including the first Thatcherite recession and the celebrations of the library's and, three years later, the university's 400th anniversaries, Brenda achieved the second Geac installation in the UK, at the University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh may have been a late entrant to the library automation race but, thanks to Brenda's vision and the active support of ERCC, the University's computing service, it was one of the first to network a version of its new online catalogue.

Brenda was a ground-breaker at Edinburgh, and she had it tough. She was the first woman to

hold the post of University Librarian – she may have been the first woman to hold such a post in Scotland – and was immensely proud when, many years later, the University revived for her the old title “Librarian to the University of Edinburgh”. Supported by successive Conveners and members of the Library Committee and enthusiastic members of her library staff, she healed a rift with ERCC, the University’s fast-developing computing service and persuaded the University to step up the embryonic programme to automate library information, cataloguing and lending services. She always briefed her Library Committee Conveners most thoroughly. I once startled her by suggesting that her extensive briefing notes for the Convener could be used as the basis for the minutes of the meeting; but she insisted, probably rightly, that that was a step too far!

Brenda did so much for the university during her time as its librarian, having already done as much at Hull as Philip Larkin’s deputy. Her legacy and lasting memorial here at Edinburgh is the library that she dragged into the late 20th century, with its excellent automated systems and the strong base that she laid for its current reorganisation. Under her leadership the library reached out into faculties and departments as it seldom did before. Her successors Ian Mowat and Sheila Cannell have achieved what they have in so short a time because of what Brenda did when she did. All of us on her staff feel privileged to have worked with her at Edinburgh, and to have been part of her constant concern for the university, the library, and its staff.

Beyond the University, Brenda insisted that EUL play its part in co-operative networks, especially SCOLCAP, SCONUL, SCURL, CURL and LIBER, and enabling members of her staff to meet specialist opposite numbers in other libraries. To do so would enhance and enrich the services that EUL provided to its own users. These organisations met at Edinburgh from time to time, bringing chief and other senior librarians to Scotland to see what we were up to. She also arranged for exchanges between EUL staff and their opposites from other libraries, and for librarians from elsewhere to be seconded to EUL within their specialist spheres. These often resulted in lasting friendships between EUL staff and their opposites, and spread the name and reputation of EUL across the world.

As well as her concern for providing the best possible services to the widest user community, and for constantly seeking additional resources for the development of those services, Brenda had a scholar’s interest in the Library’s collections

and its history, arriving in the University during the library’s own 400th anniversary celebrations. Major collections that came to the library during her tenure include the BBC Press Cuttings, papers of the poets George Mackay Brown, Norman MacCaig and Hugh MacDiarmid, the papers of John Middleton Murry, the Barry Bloomfield and A H Campbell Collections of editions of W H Auden, the Arthur Koestler Collection, and Corson Sir Walter Scott Collection. Brenda revived the Friends of the University Library and encouraged them to contribute more and more to the purchase of books and manuscripts, and occasionally of additional equipment for the use of students in the Library.

We were delighted when she gained her MPhil in 1987 from Leeds University with a thesis on Marianne North and later, after retiring, her PhD from the University of Hull with a thesis on her special heroine Amelia Edwards. This became the basis for her book *More usefully employed: Amelia B. Edwards, writer, traveller and campaigner for ancient Egypt*, which was published by the Egypt Exploration Society in 2006. Brenda was delighted to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, especially as her friend and colleague Henry Heaney, Glasgow University Librarian, was elected at the same time. Her last piece of research before her retirement was into the history of the library committee, which the library published as a fascinating booklet *Minutes and Days of Edinburgh University Library Committee* (1996).

We all remember her as an enthusiastic hill-walker and traveller, often with her sister Mary as well as with friends, and an expert photographer, especially of wild flowers; and we remember also her delight in sharing her travel experiences with friends and colleagues. Often this took the form of an evening in her own house that began with drinks, while she put the finishing touches to delicious suppers that she prepared and cooked herself, followed by a show of magnificent slides of her latest travels to yet another part of the world. It was tragic that, in her retirement, serious illness struck first her mobility and then her sight, but even then her dogged determination, and Mary’s devoted support, kept her going until the end. We shall all miss her, as a friend, as well as a colleague and as a great boss to work for. I am very pleased that the newly-refurbished Library will continue to have a Brenda Moon Room to commemorate her Librarianship at Edinburgh.

Peter Freshwater
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