

Profile: Eilish Doran

I have just had the pleasure of interviewing a true representative of that group of librarians totally devoted to service and the needs of users. Eilish described a career from which she has gained the deepest satisfaction; one which is still illuminated by dedication and enthusiasm. She insists this is in no small part due to the example set by those she has worked with, not least James Vitty and Jessie B Webster, both of whom provided excellent training, example and leadership in the Belfast setting.

The youngest of eight children, Eilish had the fortune to find her first job at the Linenhall Library, Belfast. The Linenhall has a wonderful collection of material on Irish literature and history and by supplying an enquiry service in the Reference area, Eilish came to know hundreds of scholars, artists, writers and broadcasters and, at the same time, developed her own knowledge of things Irish. She so loved the work that she actually "hated her afternoons off duty". Her enthusiasm was encouraged by James Vitty, who died only last year. Late in life he was awarded an honorary degree from Queen's University.

Eilish's love of her work did not prevent another love entering her life and in 1960 she married Sean, a teacher, and set up home in County Down, where for six years she concentrated on family and domestic pursuits. Her three children demanded much of her energies but she continued to feel attracted to library work. A move to Belfast in 1966 was the prelude to a return to work on a part-time basis as Library Assistant in Queen's University Agriculture Library. By 1970 she was able to obtain



a full-time post in her present establishment, Queen's Medical Library. Originally her work was concentrated at the Circulation Desk where she was able to renew her contact with readers and polish up her enquiry skills. Her new boss Jessie B Webster encouraged her to study for the City and Guilds Library and Information Certificate.

In 1976 Eilish entered a new career phase working with Periodicals and Binding in the Medical Library. This move fed her interest in archives and the scholarly exploitation of journal literature. Academic staff and researchers use her constantly as an information guide and broaden her work into the reference mode which acts as a major supplement to her periodical management duties. She is constantly involved in historical research and "learns something new every day". Her contact with periodicals also feeds her other major interest, the Third World. She has made many contacts overseas and has been able to send material to

individuals and libraries seriously short of reading matter. Her one regret is that funds do not exist to maximise her efforts in this field.

Her dedication to work and good causes in the end did not provide sufficient outlet for a lively mind and keen intelligence. When Queen's started up its part-time degree course in 1983, Eilish seized the opportunity to embark on serious study involving two nights a week for six long years. Not surprisingly she chose to major in literature and history and gained particular pleasure from the study of European material. She was awarded her BA General Studies degree in 1989.

At this point most of us would have rested on our laurels; not so Eilish. She is about to embark on Library Association qualification by the mature student route, involving the submission of a report. This is an alternative route which has been eagerly seized upon by scores of experienced but previously unqualified library staff. Any remaining time available to stand and stare will vanish shortly if Eilish's application to register for an MA by thesis is accepted by her university. She has chosen as her subject: "Postgraduate and Continuing Education: the role of the Medical Library".

When asked about the place of UKSG in her career, Eilish spoke enthusiastically of its importance as a means of exchange of experience and ideas and as a source of knowledge and information. She attended her first conference in Durham and has not missed one since and was thrilled to attend the recent European session in the Netherlands. She hopes that national and regional groups will be set up throughout Europe and supports the idea of further joint conferences perhaps at two or three year intervals. She would dearly like to have UKSG committee involvement but feels that the Belfast location provides too many complications.

Eilish's long experience of periodical management has now been extended to the role of

sub-editor of the "Ulster Medical Journal". When the Sub-Librarian who had been doing the work fell ill, Eilish typically stepped in to help. She was subsequently appointed to the vacancy and now includes proof-reading, contact with printers and responding to enquiries in her range of editorial activities.

It was with some temerity that I asked her what she did in her spare time. It was no surprise to hear of her intense interest in her family. Husband, Sean, left classroom teaching to become an Education Advisor in Belfast and they share a common interest in education and learning. The three children, now grown up, have mum's pride, affection and support. Kathleen is a primary school teacher, Grainne a G.P. in Belfast and Sean jnr. is in his final Masters year at Imperial College, London, reading chemical engineering. The family shares a deep love of music - although husband's attempts at singing attracted humorous comment - and it was only pressure of studies that forced Eilish to give up membership of the St. Agnes Choral Society after an association of 21 years. Eilish is active in church work and you sensed that her Catholic religion was very important to her. The interview ended on a lighter note when she admitted writing to "Jim'll Fix It" requesting that he arrange for her to sing live with Frank Sinatra! She also agrees with your interviewer that Placido Domingo is currently the best tenor in the world (apologies to my many Italian friends and Mr Pavarotti).

I came away from our interview session with a very warm feeling. It wasn't only the bottle of Brouilly we shared but a real enjoyment of a fellow librarian who has retained all her early Linenhall enthusiasms but, at the same time, comes through as a fascinating, fulfilled person, who, as she put it, enjoys "listening to and helping people". □

J. Cowley