

# Profile: Ronald Milne



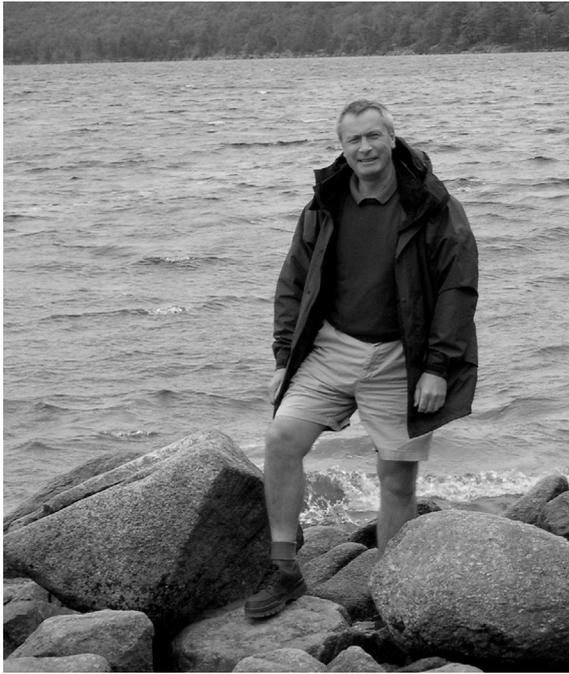
Ronald Milne's face may seem familiar to some readers of this journal. If so, you probably saw him being interviewed recently on television talking about Oxford University's agreement with Google to digitize out-of-copyright 19th-century materials held in the Bodleian Library. Other libraries contributing to the project include Harvard, Stanford and Michigan University Libraries and the New York Public Library. The story received a high profile in the media and for about a week Ronald did many interviews for television, newspapers and radio. His favourite one was with Eddie Mair on BBC Radio 4's PM Programme.

The reason that Ronald was the spokesperson for Oxford is that he has recently been appointed Acting Director of University Library Services and Bodley's Librarian. Reg Carr, the current Director, has moved to full-time fund-raising activities, seeking to raise £40 million for various infrastructure and development projects including refurbishment and development of the New Bodleian Library and the Clarendon Building, and a 'new build' medical library. Ronald's empire is impressive. Sited among the 'dreaming spires' of Oxford University there are 119 libraries. However, not all of these come under the umbrella of the central library services. (Some, for example, belong to the Colleges.) The University Library Service comprises some 40 libraries, including the Bodleian, with 660 staff, 11 million books and a budget of £25 million. The Bodleian itself has 400 staff, 8 million books and a budget of £14 million.

Ronald came to this job via an oil rig in the North Sea and various UK university research libraries. He was born in Duns, in the Scottish Borders, spent his childhood in Perth and his undergraduate years at Edinburgh studying

German. He worked as an English language assistant for a year in Lübeck in Germany and spent some time in France after graduating. Having decided that he would like to be an academic librarian he applied for a SCONUL trainee post and obtained one at Cambridge University Library. But before starting he needed to earn some money. At that time, working on oil rigs in the North Sea was a highly lucrative occupation, so off he went. After six months on the rig he moved straight into the rare books department at Cambridge. An amazing contrast!

He obtained his professional library qualifications at University College London and moved to work at the University of London Library Resources Co-ordinating Committee (a body now disbanded). This job was followed by five years at Glasgow University as an Assistant Librarian specializing initially in modern languages, spells at Trinity College Cambridge and King's College London (as Assistant Director of Library Services) and then a move to the high profile post of Director of the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP). It is probably true that it is in this job that Ronald became a familiar figure on the national and international scene. RSLP was a national initiative funded by the four UK higher education funding bodies. It ran from 1999–2002 with funding totalling almost £30 million awarded during the lifetime of the Programme. Its overarching vision was to facilitate the best possible arrangements for, and access to, research collections in UK libraries. A major success of RSLP was that it encouraged higher education institutions to work collaboratively and consortially with national libraries, other research libraries and public libraries. Following the successful conclusion of the



Programme in November 2002, Ronald moved to Oxford as Deputy to the Director and in August 2004 he became Acting Director.

Ronald is hugely enthusiastic about developments at Oxford. He is currently overseeing a number of important projects, one of which is a major programme of library integration. As mentioned above, the University Library Service comprises some 40 libraries, including departmental and faculty libraries, the Radcliffe Science Library and the Bodleian. There are, however, still 40 departmental libraries, funded by the central University which are outside the University Library Services management structure. Ronald and his colleagues are planning for a rationalization and physical consolidation of a high percentage of all of the centrally-funded libraries. Key to this development is the construction of a high-tech depository at Osney Mead, which will hold up to 9 million volumes. (The University Library Service already has premises at Osney Mead and, indeed, this is where Google will be setting up their digitization centre.) High use stock will be housed in central Oxford, for example at the Radcliffe Science Library or in a new Humanities Library to be built on the Radcliffe Infirmary site on the Woodstock Road, while low use stock will go to the new depository. These developments will take place in tandem with very significant increase in the provision of electronic resources.

Indeed, EPS consultants are currently undertaking a study of existing resources, development

potential and the costs of moving to electronic provision – including an analysis of current staff, stock and space for library and information provision for STM departments within the University. As can be imagined, duplication of stock is a major issue – and is certainly one which has hindered the development of electronic resources in Oxford.

All this activity means that Ronald is a very busy man. Combined with the fact that Oxford University is a very democratic organization – which means he has to attend a lot of meetings! – he finds that he has become even more work focused than previously. Nevertheless, he really enjoys managing the University Library Service, he feels welcomed and accepted by the University and he likes Oxford as a place to live (despite the fact that he retains a very strong affinity with his homeland Scotland). He is a Fellow of Wolfson College and in his spare time enjoys the outdoor life, describing himself as a ‘reasonably serious all-season hill walker’. He has climbed over 200 of Scotland’s Munros. (The 284 Munros are the highest of Scotland’s mountains – over 3,000 feet – named after the man who first catalogued them, Sir Hugh Munro.) Ronald also enjoys travelling and is a great fan of classical music, enthusing about Oxford being a wonderful cultural centre for music and the arts.

Finally we asked Ronald if he had a message for publishers. He focused in on the recent House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, saying that he felt the Government’s response to the report was ‘ill considered’. He feels that despite this response, the economic and business models of e-publishing *will* change, with open access becoming one of a number of alternative models. It is just a matter of time.

