

Tribute to Diana Leitch



Diana Leitch – who is due to retire from The University of Manchester in July 2008 – is well known to the majority of readers of *Serials* and is widely respected within the broader library/publishing community. Born in Liverpool and brought up in Runcorn – the heart of the UK chemical industry – she comes from a long line of chemists. Her father, having been taught at Widnes Technical College in the early 1930s by Harold Wilson's father, and later at UMIST, went on to head several ICI analytical laboratories in Runcorn.

Diana's early schooling began in Runcorn but she was quickly picked out as a bright child from a class of 46. She passed the exam to go to The Queen's School, Chester, which, she says, had a huge formative influence upon her. It was an all-girls' school and the girls were expected to do everything boys did. There was also a strong emphasis on science, charitable work and community service.

At the age of 16, Diana's love of the world of information started. She spent her summer vacation helping out in the Information Department at ICI's R & D Division and whilst there came under the influence of the work of Angela Haygarth Jackson, who became a lifelong inspiration to her. At 18, the magic of chemistry beckoned and Diana went to study chemistry at Edinburgh University. In her first year she also studied maths, physics and meteorology (in which she won the Class Medal) and, in her second year, geology (in which she

jointly won the Class Medal). But the highlight of her time in Edinburgh was undertaking her fourth-year project with Evelyn Ebsworth, Crum Brown Professor of Inorganic Chemistry and recently arrived from Cambridge, as her supervisor.

Like the majority of us, post university was a time of uncertainty for Diana. What to do? A PhD? A chemical information masters course? After much thought, she chose the PhD route and returned to work with the Ebsworth group which was a truly rewarding experience. She recalls the frustration during her PhD at not being able to find information easily. Of course there was the print version of *Chemical Abstracts* and Beilstein but the Chemistry Library had a fierce librarian and books were kept behind locked grills! Learning technical German was a necessity and mandatory to get a PhD.

In 1971, having completed her PhD research, Diana started looking for a job. However, at the time, jobs were thin on the ground as the chemical industry was in a downturn. Finally she found employment in Manchester at the Cotton Silk and Man-made Fibres Research Association (the Shirley Institute), working on *World Textile Abstracts* as an abstractor, indexer and translator. The title had just been computerized and one of her daily tasks was checking the ticker-tape. Her second job was at CPC International where she was appointed as Assistant Technical Information Officer. This was a dream job but after just 10 months they decided to

close the Information Centre and she was made redundant. This was not a good time to be made redundant. Diana had just got married and she and her husband had recently taken out their first mortgage. Luckily, she saw an advert for a job at The University of Manchester; a chemist was required to work in the University Library. She was interviewed by the University Librarian, Fred Ratcliffe (and what seemed like 20 men in grey suits) and offered the job, which she accepted – despite the fact that she had no idea what the job entailed. Recruitment was different in those days!

On 6 July 1973 she turned up for work in the Science Library. She was given a typewriter and told to catalogue and classify books. Not quite what she expected but a formative experience! However, she found herself in good company. Also working in the John Rylands University Library (JRUL) of Manchester were Bill Simpson, Chris Hunt, Reg Carr, John Hall, John Henshall, John Lancaster and Ian Lovecy who, as many readers will know, all went on to become University Librarians and senior ambassadors for the library profession. Diana spent the next four years as a cataloguer and then in 1977 she found that she was pregnant. She asked to take maternity leave but was told this would not be possible. (Our younger readers will probably be astonished to know that maternity leave legislation was not in place in 1977.) In fact it took a petition to the Vice-Chancellor to allow her to return to work part-time in late 1978 and she was the first woman to return to work in the Library post-maternity. Following the birth of her second child in 1981 all staff from the Christie Science Library were moved to a new extension of the Main Library building. This coincided with the appointment of a new University Librarian, Mike Pegg, and finally Diana was released from the cataloguing department. Her new job was working in a team of three people in the newly-created Science and Medical Information Office – finally she was working in an outward facing team as she had always wanted to do.

These were the early days of online information and the team used dumb terminals initially to search Medline and other online databases through ESA, Questel, DataStar and STN International. But technology moved on quickly. By the mid 1980s CD-ROMs were beginning to proliferate; indeed Dr Alan Neville in Diana's team was the first person in the UK to network CD-ROMs in a LAN. Working with colleagues from UMIST he then worked out

how to make a wide area network (WAN) of CD-ROMs. The late 1980s and early 1990s proved highly significant as far as Diana's career was concerned. She began her long-standing involvement with the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) in June 1995 by becoming a member of the JISC ISSC (Information Services Sub Committee). Also, work was beginning in Germany on computerizing Beilstein and Gmelin, and there was discussion of a new service called Crossfire. Diana still had involvement with the Beilstein Institut as Manchester was the only UK library to buy the printed copy. She got involved in the early trials of Crossfire at the Daresbury Laboratory which proved that it was a service that chemists really wanted. Nobel Prizewinner, Sir John Cornforth, still researching in his late 70s, wrote to express his delight at this new service. Furthermore, her involvement with the Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS) led to her being involved in brokering a deal with CHEST for the UK scholarly community for SciFinder Scholar.

In 1991 Chris Hunt was appointed University Librarian at Manchester and one of his early actions was to appoint Diana and John Tuck as his deputies. Diana's focus was the e-environment and she threw herself wholeheartedly into the development of e-resource services. Her huge enthusiasm and knowledge of the e-environment has been valued both in the library and the publishing world. Always a great supporter of UKSG activities, Diana has also served on the library advisory boards of Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, the Royal Society of Chemistry, the American Chemical Society, CAS and OUP. Managing the transition from print to electronic proved a tremendous challenge at Manchester (as in many libraries) and one of Diana's more recent tasks since 2002 has been sorting out the space problems in the library. The purchase of digital back-files of journals meant that many runs of printed journals were hardly, if ever, consulted, and it was agreed by the University that these could be moved to storage in a cotton mill. Diana oversaw the whole operation. Over 50 miles of materials have been moved around the whole JRUL system in the last two-and-a-half years to provide space to maintain services to users.

Diana's contribution to the information profession at large and to The University of Manchester specifically has been prolific. It has been recognized by library colleagues and publishers as well as professional organizations such as UKSG and JISC. In the late 1990s Diana became the first woman at

The University of Manchester to become a University Presenter – introducing Honorary Graduands at Graduation Ceremony. But perhaps the greatest highlight of her career came in 2005 when Professor Sir Harry Kroto, with whom she had worked on the Dalton Bicentenary celebrations, invited her to seek election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry – the first ever academic librarian to become a Fellow of the Society, following, once again, in the footsteps of Angela Haygarth Jackson.

In her personal life Diana is as active as in her professional life. She has two children – a daughter, Fiona, who went to Glasgow University and is now a Surgical Registrar in the West of Scotland and a son, Andrew, who also went to Glasgow to study Systems Engineering and is now the Technical Director of a dot.com company in Manchester. As one might suspect, her husband, David, was also a chemist who, having worked at both ICI, until made redundant, and The University of Manchester, in later life became a mature student, took a Pharmacy degree and became a

Regional Drug Information Officer and Medicines Information Manager for Central Manchester Healthcare Trust. Her interests are also wide-ranging. They include director of a charitable trust promoting environmental education, school governor, local history, her family including the four-legged ones, gardening, the Edinburgh University Club of Manchester, promotion of science education for women and hindering her husband on his allotment (although she says she is banned from the allotment once she has retired).

Diana has had a wonderful career and has contributed massively to the profession – she will be truly missed by many of us in the information industry. She concluded our interview with the following:

“With one or two exceptions I have thoroughly enjoyed my career in the information world, particularly the people I have met and worked with, and I hope I can continue to keep in touch in the future in my work in a freelance capacity”.