

Fifty years of library and information history.

REID, P.

2017

This is an Accepted Manuscript version of the following article, accepted for publication in Library and information history. REID, P. 2017. Fifty years of library and information history. Library and Information History, 33(4), pages 233-235. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17583489.2017.1372972>. It is deposited under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Fifty Years of Library and Information History

Peter Reid

Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK

It has been fifty years since, in the spring of 1967, *Library and Information History* first appeared under the title of *Library History*. It was launched by the Library History Group of the then Library Association to replace a newsletter that had been distributed since 1963. Peter Hoare stated in the editorial of the first issue that the group hoped ‘to provide an appropriate medium for the publication and recording’ of recent research in the history of libraries and librarianship and that the journal hoped ‘to provide a focus for those working on or interested in the development of libraries and book-collecting, particularly in Britain but also abroad’. It is fair to say that in the fifty years which have followed, the journal has certainly lived up to those goals and ambitions. The vision which Peter Hoare and others had in 1967 has resulted in a journal which has published articles and reviews that have significantly contributed to the expansion of knowledge in many diverse aspects of cultural history.

In 2009, the title of the journal was extended to *Library and Information History*. By this time, the group had changed its name to the Library and Information History Group. This followed the merger of the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists in 2002 to form CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals). The title change also reflected an increasing interest in information history. As Toni Weller, the incoming editor in 2009, pointed out: ‘The previous few years of the journal have witnessed an increasing volume of articles dedicated to aspects of information history as well as to library history’.

The journal has included a wide range of topics over those fifty years. It has, however, also been at the forefront of the debate surround what library and information history is and how and where it sits. In particular, the seminal paper by Alistair Black in 1998 (14, no. 2) entitled ‘Information and modernity’ stimulates serious discussion around the nature of our field, how it is undertaken and reported, and the contribution it makes to wider historical endeavours. Subsequently, Donald Davis and Jon Arvid Aho posited further discussions around the same theme in their work ‘Whither library history?’ (17, no. 1 [2001]). For me as editor, these reinforce the worth and value of our journal because they provide a space to debate the philosophical and theoretical approaches to our discipline and how it interacts and engages with others as well as being a vehicle for reporting on scholarship in library and information history.

Some of the former editors of the journal have been asked to select papers which help to illustrate the variety and diversity of our content over these past fifty years. The selection is not necessarily an indicator of impact nor as pageant of those considered of highest quality; rather, those chosen represent a cross-section that highlights the range and diversity of our proceedings. Some of these will appear in an online collection to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary. It is, however, useful to outline some of them here, as they reinforce many of the points made above.

Peter Hoare, our founding editor from 1967, has perhaps an unrivalled overview of our discipline and his selection included Denis F. Keeling, 'British public library buildings 1850–1870' (1, no. 4 [1968]), from the very earliest days of the journal, and Peter S. Morrish and James William Clark, 'Revisited: aspects of early modern library design' (3, no. 3 [1974]). He also highlighted John R. Allred's 'The purpose of the public library: the historical view' (2, no. 5 [1972]), a paper which scored highly in Goedecken's citation analysis of library history in the February 2017 edition of the journal. Two other articles besides Allred's were cited by Ed Goedecken in his citation analysis: Sara Joynes' 'The Sheffield Library, 1771–1907' (2, no. 3 [1971]) and Joan Knott's 'Circulating libraries in Newcastle in the 18th and 19th centuries' (2, no. 6 [1972]).

Keith Manley, who was a long-serving editor, selected Pamela Spence Richards, 'The quest for enemy scientific information 1939–1945: information as part of library history' (9, no. 1–2 [1991]), P. S. Morrish, 'Domestic libraries: Victorian and Edwardian ideas and practice' (10 [1994]), and Paul Sturges, 'The public library and its readers 1850–1900,' (12 [1996]).

Alistair Black, who has done so much to promote library and information history and to stimulate debate around our field, served as editor in the early years of the twenty-first century and selected J. H. Bowman, 'Classification in British public libraries: a historical perspective' (21, no. 3 [2005]), Kathryn La Barre, 'The heritage of early FC in document reference retrieval systems, 1920–1969' (23, no. 2 [2007]), and Laura Skouvig, 'The construction of the working-class user: Danish free public libraries and the working classes, 1880–1920' (23, no. 3 [2007]). The latter paper emphasised the library scholarship undertaken in Nordic countries.

Toni Weller, who was in post during the time that the title of the journal changed to *Library and Information History*, selected three works which strongly reinforce the international focus of the journal, with Marek Sroka, "'Forsaken and abandoned": The nationalization and salvage of deserted, displaced, and private library collections in Poland, 1945–48' (28, no. 4 [2012]), Ellen Rubenstein, 'From social hygiene to consumer health: libraries, health information, and the American public from the late nineteenth century to the 1980s' (28, no. 3 [2012]), and Jason Vance, 'Librarians as authors, editors, and self-publishers: the information culture of the Kentucky Pack Horse Library Scrapbooks (1936–43)' (28, no. 4 [2013]).

For my own part, I look back at the scholarship around private libraries which has appeared in many editions (and in doing so perhaps going against the grain of moving in directions other than institutional histories). The special edition, the National Trust issue (18, no. 3 [2002]), offered a range of stimulating articles including Elizabeth Quarmby Lawrence's very well-observed study of the Parkers of Saltram and their books as well as Mark Purcell's essay 'The country house library reassess'd', which explored whether the country house library ever truly existed.

We have, therefore, a journal which has achieved much in its fifty years thanks to the range and breadth of the contributors, the rigour and diligence of the reviewers, and the guidance and vision of successive editors. May the next fifty years continue to be as productive.

Finally, I would like record my thanks and gratitude to Monica Blake for her work in coordinating the selection of articles over the last fifty years for the online collection and for her background text which has informed this editorial.