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Editorial

Brian Vickery and the uneasy information scientists

At the start of the 2010, we heard the sad news of the death of Brian Vickery late the previous year. He was one of the leading lights of British information science over many years, and a prominent contributor to this journal in many ways. We will be publishing a full appreciation of his work, written by someone more qualified for the task than I, at a later date, but it seems appropriate to make some immediate remarks.

Born in Australia in 1918, Vickery – like so many information scientists of his generation and the one which followed – graduated in chemistry. Having worked for a period as a scientist in an explosives factory, perhaps more due to the necessities of wartime than by choice, he then made the move into librarianship, within a research institute in the chemical industry. He then moved, through a series of posts in national and academic libraries, to direct the research department at Aslib, then a major player in information research of the more applied kind. Finally he became head of the then School of Library, Archive and Information Studies at University College London, from which post he retired in 1983.

Although he was perhaps best known for his studies in information organisation and information retrieval – his seminal paper 'Structure and function in retrieval languages' (Vickery 1971) was selected as one the most influential *Journal of Documentation* articles from the journal's first six decades – his interests spanned the whole of what he and his contemporaries regarded as "information science". An issue of this journal (1988, volume 44 issue 3) was devoted to a series of essays presented to him; including a list of his publications up to that date, this shows clearly the breadth of his contributions. This breath is also shown by his scientific autobiography "A long search for information" (Vickery 2004A), by his magisterial textbook which went into a third edition (Vickery 2004B), and by the fact that he was regarded as the natural choice to be editor of a monograph of reviews celebrating 50 years of *Journal of Documentation* (Vickery 1994), and guest editor of a similar monograph marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Institute of Information Scientists (Gilchrist 2009).

In this last guest editorial - his last professional article - Vickery noted that a number of contributors to the volume – including myself – seemed rather uneasy or uncertain about the future of information science. In as much as we were, I think we should all be encouraged by his convictions, expressed consistently over many years, that 'traditional' information science insights are still very relevant, and not yet fully appreciated in a wider academic and professional world. Regardless of advances in technology, Vickery insisted, there are some fundamentals of human information-related behaviour and of the organisation of information, which do not change. It is the business of the information scientist to investigate them, and to show their relevance in whatever information environment they may be instantiated. I think that is a message we would do well to hold on to, and I hope that it will be reflected in *Journal of Documentation* in the future.

David Bawden

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