

John Edwin Holmstrom

Dr John Edwin Holmstrom, an engineer and information scientist, was a Lancashireman. Born at Birkdale, he attended St Paul's School, and subsequently studied at both the Imperial College of Science and the London School of Economics. As an engineer he spent much of his life abroad, in various parts of Europe, Malaysia and China. He died on 2 July 1982.

At the end of World War II the public demand for scientific and technological information to be more thoroughly organized for the needs of an advanced technological age was apparent. The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research then came into being and put its efforts firmly behind the reorganization of Aslib, while the practical efforts of librarians and information officers in the great international organizations of the United Nations—the OEECD, ILO, FAO, etc.—laid the foundation for the new profession of information scientist.

This was what many of us regard as the golden age of Unesco. The decade of the 'fifties saw the assembly of a brilliant group of men and women at the Avenue Kléber, among whom we particularly number Luther Evans, Francis L. Kent, Madame Ravage, E. J. Carter, Sandor Maller—and, of course Dr Holmstrom, with the magnificent title of programme specialist for scientific documentation and terminology. Whatever the title, the man remained the same, a visionary with a practical turn of mind, gifted, fluent, literate, enthusiastic, and an original thinker. Everyone recognized that he was an influence, an encourager who brought fresh air to the complicated sessions on a new and difficult topic.

Holmstrom's energy is confirmed by his published output which may be regarded as the pioneer publications of information science. His *Records and research in engineering and industrial science*, first published in 1940, deservedly justified a second edition in 1947 and a third in 1956. His vast *Trilingual dictionary for materials and structures* (1971) was published under the auspices of the International Union of Testing and Research Laboratories for Materials and Structures, and with the assistance of Unesco. And it was the Provisional International Computation Centre that commissioned in 1959 his *Multilingual terminology of information processing*. But perhaps the most effective and widely read of all his writings was his delightful *How to take, keep and use notes*, a pamphlet issued by Aslib (now regrettably long out of print) as charmingly written and popular as was Carey's pamphlet on *Indexing* in a related field. Today it is difficult to find a copy of this, one of his earliest writings.

This was not the only contact of Holmstrom's with Aslib—at some time in the 'sixties he was working with Aslib in Belgrave Square, much to the pleasure of his numerous admirers, for he was too often absent from Britain. Indeed, one of his last assignments abroad was that of a literary project in Austria.

Holmstrom has a special importance for The Society of Indexers. His remarkable comprehension of technical subjects, his instinctive ability to produce possible solutions, and his lifelong interest in the improvement of indexing standards and practice, all made him a very welcome member. Active to the end, he completed his latest index this year and, to his very great pleasure, it was awarded the Wheatley Medal. It was an award that had The Society's enthusiastic approval.

Robert Collison,
President, The Society of Indexers

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