Colloquium Capensis 2002

The 2002 colloquium of the International Association of Bibliophiles was held in Cape Town and was hosted by the Society of Bibliophiles in Cape Town. The catalogues of the various exhibitions, as well as the papers of the conference, were published in a very handsome publication, *Colloquium Capensis 2002*. What makes this publication special is the catalogues on early Africana, the collections of the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town campus, the University of Stellenbosch and the private botanical collection of Mr Walter Middellmann. In a sense these catalogues provide an index to and oversight of some of the most valuable books, in historical terms, available in South Africa’s libraries and private collections. Sadly, an index to this prestige publication was omitted. Bibliophiles should perhaps keep in mind the value of indexes to books and even to conference proceedings.

Index to Philobiblon

The Society of Bibliophiles can perhaps be forgiven for the omission of the index to *Colloquium Capensis 2002* in view of its useful index to the first 11 years of its journal, *Philobiblon*. It was prepared by Frikkie Botha, with the assistance of Walter Middellmann, Peter Spargo and Malcolm Murphy. It consists of author and subject indexes and is easy to use and published in a very attractive format.

Contributors to this column

Thank you to contributors Hazel Bell, Noeline Bridge, Jill Halliday, Frances Paterson, Helen Litton, Nancy Mulvany and Madely du Preez.

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Obituary

Mary Piggott 1912–2003

I found it hard to accept that Mary Piggott had died on 17 February 2003 at the age of 90, and so a doyenne of British indexers had left us. Only two months earlier I had received my usual cheery Christmas card from her.

At least four members of the Society of Indexers were present at Mary’s funeral on 25 February – Jill Halliday (Vice-President), Doreen Blake (former President), Janet McKerron and Ia McIlwaine, a former student of Mary’s. Jill reports that the ceremony, held at Ipswich Crematorium on a lovely spring morning, began and ended with music by Brahms, chosen by Mary. Mary’s nephew, Andrew Piggott, spoke about his aunt and this obituary owes much to the copy of his affectionate tribute, which he kindly sent to me. Mary’s sister Stella, who had been caring for Mary recently, also spoke of her loss and of her fond memories of a sister.

Mary was born at Sudbury, near Harrow. After attending a local private school, she moved to the local council school where she progressed through Infants to Primary School. At the age of 11, she sat for and attained a scholarship to Alperton County School, joining in the autumn term of 1923. She progressed through to matriculation in 1928 and was accepted by University College London (UCL) in 1931, graduating with an honours degree in French.

At the funeral, Andrew Piggott stated that she was always interested in books. Andrew’s father remembers her on family holidays at Herne Bay sitting on the beach reading and reading. It was perhaps not surprising, therefore, that she should choose to become a librarian. After qualifying at UCL, she worked for ten years in Lancashire County Library before returning to UCL as a lecturer in cataloguing, classification and bibliography. She was very active in the Old Students’ Association. She retired as Reader in Librarianship and Archive Studies after nearly 30 years at UCL.

She remained a teacher all her life. In her excellent appreciation of Mary as an ‘index maker of today’, Hazel Bell (1993) commented that Society of Indexers members were still learning from her and Doreen Blake wrote to the writer of this obituary ‘always the teacher, I learned so much from her’. Doreen was not alone!

Mary spent the last few years of her life at Woodbridge in Suffolk, where she made copious notes on the region’s geology, soil, climate and history.
Andrew stated at Mary’s funeral that she was interested in people as well as books, a desirable quality of all librarians, and gave some examples of her caring and compassionate attitude. She would supervise her two young sisters shopping at Sainsbury’s in the busy high street at Wembley on Saturday afternoons and on Sundays shepherd them along a country lane and name for them the wild flowers growing by the wayside. On meeting a French girl at the local swimming baths who was being made unhappy by the family she was with, Mary persuaded her mother that the girl should move to their house, thus starting a friendship with the girl, and later with the girl’s daughter, which continued until Mary’s death. She regularly sent birthday and Christmas presents to her godson from 1944 until Christmas 2002 and arranged for him to visit her after the tragic death of his mother. From January 1988 until December 1997 she arranged for her supplementary pension to be paid to the Department of Librarianship at UCL. Many who knew her could give other examples of her compassion. As Jill Halliday says, she gave so much with such generosity of spirit.

I first came across Mary’s name when, as a student for the Library Association examinations in Advanced Cataloguing and Classification, I read the excellent symposium that she edited entitled Cataloguing principles and practice, published by the Library Association in 1954. I had no idea then that I would come to know her well and be able to call her a friend. Her later publications included two scholarly and readable works on cataloguing published by the Library Association: A topology of cataloguing: showing the most important landmarks, communications and perilous places (1988) and The cataloguer’s way through AACR2: from document receipt to document retrieval (1990). She was a member of the committee that prepared the ground-breaking 1967 revision of the Anglo-American cataloguing rules (AACR2).

Mary was a founder member of the Society of Indexers and spoke at its first training course, in 1958, on form and style of name entries. She became the Society’s Librarian, Assistant Editor of The Indexer, member of Council and, in 1995, an excellent President. Reviewing her two-year presidential term (Piggott, 1997), she stated that she could look back on a period of useful activity in the Society, for none of which, she said with characteristic modesty, she could claim any credit. She apologized for not being able to attend many Council meetings because her mobility was ‘much impaired by the existing prosthesis in my hip taking issue with the bone and the subsequent operation to have the offending piece of metal replaced by another piece of metal’. In 2000 she was a worthy recipient of the Society’s Carey Award for outstanding services to indexing.

Mary’s reason for not attending many Council meetings during her presidential term provided an example of her wit which, as Hazel Bell (1993) wrote in her appreciation, was often veiled by her quiet, demure manner but could be quite devastating. Hazel quotes from Mary’s review of J. M. Dickie’s author-index to his How to catch trout: ‘Our fly-fisher’s index reflects unhurried hours of quiet contemplation beside still waters, and so much enthusiasm for his hobby that he rewrites most of his book in the index, quite forgetting that brevity was one of his stated objects’.

Andrew Piggott provided an example of Mary’s wit, combined with her meticulousness, in his address at her funeral. She left him, as her executor, a list of people to be contacted on her death, the whereabouts of important documents and so on – all carefully indexed.

At her funeral, Andrew said that Mary would have wanted us to remember her, but not to be sad. Pat Booth remembers her encounters with Mary at conferences because there was a guarantee of lively conversation and a worthwhile exchange of views. She remembers, and is grateful for, Mary’s generous comments in the foreword to Pat’s book, Indexing: the manual of good practice. Doreen Blake remembers her gentleness and scholarship and her excellence on the Wheatley Medal panels. I remember particularly her contributions to British Standards Institution committees. She represented the Society of Indexers on the committees concerned with indexing and alphabetical arrangement, and I was certainly not the only person to be impressed by her carefully considered and well expressed comments, and by her stimulating and often witty conversation over lunch between or at the end of meetings. I remember the day in 1993 when she and I received BSI Distinguished Service Certificates together. I was so proud to receive my certificate in company with Mary and I treasure the photograph of us with our certificates. Andrew referred at the funeral to her scholarship, her sense of fun, her fondness for Jane Austen and her erudition lightly worn. All of us who were privileged to know her will remember these things.

Doreen Blake says that she will miss Mary for her wisdom, kindness and knowledge. As Doreen says, there is no replacement. As Pat Booth says, her books are not only good reads but are full of information and interest and will ensure that her name will continue to be a familiar one.

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References


Ken Bakewell, Liverpool