Obituaries

Frank Merrett

It is with much sadness that we record the death on 11 March 2005 of Dr Frank Merrett (1924–2005), distinguished educationalist, psychologist and indexer.

Frank was born in 1924 in Forest Gate, London, his family soon moving to Romford in Essex. On leaving the Royal Liberty School there, he went to work as a messenger boy for Unilever in the City. In 1941 he began teacher training at St Paul’s College in Cheltenham. He had an eventful war, first as a member of the Cheltenham Home Guard attached to the town gas works, then (teacher training completed) in the Royal Navy (‘Like Nelson, I was a bad sailor’). It was a matter of pride to him that on 6 June 1944 he found himself in the first wave of the Normandy landings. A year later, after a rapid course in ocean navigation, he enjoyed the challenge of sailing with the Fourteenth Motor Launch Flotilla on one of the longest journeys undertaken by such small craft in modern times. The objective at the end of the journey was to prevent the Japanese escaping across the Sittang River into Eastern Burma and Thailand. Unfortunately a combination of shallow waters, huge waves and light craft meant that Frank and his colleagues found themselves overboard and close to drowning. Rescue came only after three days in enemy territory.

Frank began his teaching career in Essex in 1946, at the same time studying for a degree in geography and economics. In 1957 he was a lecturer in geography at St Paul’s College, Cheltenham until, in 1962, he went to Nassau as vice-principal and then principal of the Bahamas Teachers’ College.

Frank’s colleague and friend, Professor Kevin Wheldall, takes up the story:

On his return to the UK in 1969, Frank worked as a teacher of primary and secondary school children, and then for a year in a residential school for maladjusted adolescent girls. His feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness in his dealings with these girls had a profound effect on him and undoubtedly led to his determination to try to find better ways of managing student behaviour in the classroom. It was while studying for an MA at the University of London Institute of Education in the early 1970s that he became acquainted with ‘behaviour modification’ and (while senior lecturer in education at the Wolverhampton Teachers’ College) applied to read for a doctorate in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Birmingham on the topic of behavioural interventions in primary schools. It was my good fortune to become Frank’s supervisor, even though he was about 50 at this point and I was about 25! In spite of this age difference, we became close friends and worked together for 15 years at the university.

Frank’s contribution to the development and acceptance of behavioural teaching methods in the UK was considerable, not only through his research work but also through his proselytizing among teachers. In 1980, he was the first person in Britain to gain a doctorate for research on behaviour analysis in mainstream education. Together we produced a number of books and articles on Positive Teaching and a series of training packages for teachers in classroom behaviour management. We travelled the length and breadth of the UK, running training courses on Positive Teaching methods. Frank also ran an annual course, ‘Encouragement works better than punishment’, leading to a small but important book of the same title, intended for practising classroom teachers, for whom Frank was an advocate and a champion.

Frank was, without doubt, one of the finest men I have ever known, both a true and loyal friend and an incredibly hard-working and gifted research colleague.

From 1990 to 2003, Frank lectured at Birmingham University. He was also editor of the Educational Review and a member of the editorial board of Educational Psychology. In 1997 he was awarded a D.Litt., a fitting tribute to his contribution to education. His involvement in indexing began when he made the index to one of his own books. In 1982 he joined the Society of Indexers, trained with the Rapid Results College, and began working as a professional indexer. He became a Registered Indexer in 1985.

Frank was generous in his service to the Society. There was a time when it seemed that no committee was complete without him. He was a member of Council (1998–2004), treasurer (1999–2004), and from time to time a member of the constitution, continuing professional development, research and workshops committees, and a workshop leader. He also took a major role in organizing the 2002 Cheltenham conference. He served on the editorial board of The Indexer from 1999 until his death, for much of the time chairing its annual meetings, and acting as a very effective subscriptions manager.

Frank’s marriage, his three children and his grandchildren were a strength and a delight to him. He and Grace celebrated their golden wedding in 1997. He was a man of strong personal principles and beliefs, and tireless in working for them: a devoted Anglican and a lay reader; a local speaker for the Children’s Society; a supporter of UNESCO, for which he made a number of visits to Nigeria, and of Amnesty International. In his latter years he suffered badly from arthritis, so the Gloucestershire Arthritis Trust was added to the list. He played hockey and tennis, and was an indefatigable cyclist. Music was likewise important to him: he played the flute and sang in a number of music groups. He died in the happiest and most appropriate of ways, still enjoying his cycling and preparing for a performance of Haydn’s Nelson Mass, due later in the year.

With all his many gifts Frank was a man of great modesty and kindness; a born teacher and mentor; always positive and constructive, setting high standards but forgiving of others (though not easily himself) for failing to come up to them. We are grateful to have known him as a colleague and friend.

Barbara Hird, Maureen MacGlashan and Kevin Wheldall

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A. R. Hewitt 1907–2005

We are sorry to announce the death on 3 May 2005 of the Society of Indexers’ oldest and longest-standing member, Reg Hewitt. Reg was in his 98th year at the time of his death and looking forward to celebrating his 100th birthday simultaneously with the Society’s own 50th. He was puncilious to the last, writing on 4 July 2004 to apologize for not being able to attend that year’s AGM ‘due to increasing immobility’.

Reg was born in Ealing on 14 July 1907. He was educated at Ealing County Secondary School and then at the Collège de Genève (his father at the time being the Librarian and Registrar of the League of Red Cross Societies in Geneva). Reg’s own library career saw him as assistant librarian at the Middle Temple (1925–49), secretary and librarian at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London (1950–59) and librarian and curator of museum, United Grand Lodge of England (1960–72). He served in the Royal Air Force from 1940–45.

Reg was particularly interested in public library legislation, writing two books on the subject one of which (Public library law), first published in 1932, ran to several editions, the last appearing in 1974. His interest in how things in the library world might be better done found its roots in his youthful experiences in the Ealing Public Library. He describes vividly in an autobiographical note (to be found at http://www.cilip.org.uk/groups/ithg/e-memhewitt.pdf) the system for borrowing books in the days before open access, and a reading room where newspaper columns devoted to betting were blacked out. He was an enthusiastic and hard-working member of the Association of Assistant Librarians (AAL) and the Library Association (LA), which he joined in 1929.

Reg turned to part-time indexing in 1924 (with the sorting and alphabetizing of his medical librarian father’s manuscript slips), and continued for some 70 years until, as he says, the use of computers put a stop to it. His own account of his indexing career was written for the Society of Indexers’ Anthology for the Millennium (1999) (and is reprinted on page 205). In typically modest fashion he fails to mention that he was the winner of the Wheatley Medal in 1983 for his index to The Laws of Trinidad and Tobago (1981). He had been runner-up in 1968 for his index to Grand Lodge, 1717–1967. His index to The laws of the Lagos State of Nigeria was declared ineligible for the 1975 award on the grounds that the book had been first published abroad. He also won plaudits for his work on the indexes to Halsbury’s Laws of England and Statutes of England.

His admission of defeat at the hands of the computer had his antecedents. Writing to the editor of The Indexer in April 1980 (12:1) he pronounced fiercely against typing up manuscript slips before despatch to the printer:

Some of the hundreds of works I have indexed over the years . . . have included encyclopaedias – in one instance the slips numbered more than a quarter of a million. In more than 50 years of indexing I have never typed an index, and none of the publishers/printers with whom I have dealt has ever asked or expected me to do so.

He had said much the same thing 12 years previously (6:1, Spring 1968), when commenting on Mr Stallybrass’s Unusual method of indexing. But he admitted then to a secret weapon – his wife, ‘an expert assistant sorter’ who shared with him ‘a kind of second sight in rapid alphabetizing’.

Reg’s 1980 letter generated a good deal of Indexer correspondence, which brought out one of Reg’s most noticeable attributes – a devotion to the understanding, development and inculcation of good indexing practice. He wrote frequently in or to The Indexer about aspects of indexing which particularly interested him (for example, ‘Legal indexing’ (3:4, Autumn 1963) and ‘Citation indexing of English law’ (5:2, Autumn 1966)).

As he says in his Millennium anthology contribution, Reg was a founder member of the SI, one of the ‘more distinguished correspondents’ whom Gordon Knight sounded out at a ‘discreet luncheon’ about the possibility of accepting office in the projected society. This Reg did, serving as the Society’s first chairman from 1958–59, then as vice-president from 1959–81. He was also the first chairman of The Indexer editorial board, and first chairman of the board of assessors for the Register of Indexers. He also played a key role in establishing the Society’s training courses in the early 1960s. And, crucially important, he was responsible for the Society’s first Constitution and Rules, which survived many years with only minor amendment. This interest in constitutional matters no doubt explains his concern about what he saw as ‘drastic’ changes last year to the SI Constitution, fearing – a thought in nobody’s mind – that the Society might seek to merge with a non-indexing body and so lose its identity. He clearly didn’t take kindly to the Library Association metamorphosing into CILIP!

Although he has written at some length about himself, for example in the autobiographical note for CILIP referred to above, he says surprisingly little about his personal wartime experience (concentrating on the effects of the war on the Middle Temple library), or about his work with the Freemasons, and nothing about his life outside work apart from that mention of his wife’s alphabetizing skills and an acknowledgment of her forbearance and encouragement which made it possible for him to make two long trips abroad, in 1953 to the West Indies, the USA and Canada (to look into research projects relating to Commonwealth affairs), and in 1962 to India, to explore the state of public libraries there and offer encouragement. This semi-official travel was obviously something he much enjoyed.

From his great nephew, David Hewitt, we know that to the end he enjoyed other pleasures of life: Sunday lunch (dressed ‘properly’ for the occasion), the accompanying Martini and (until the doctor told him to stop) cigarettes. Above all he treasured his independence, living on his own until a gardening accident forced him into hospital a few days before his death and cheated him of his hundredth birthday.

Maureen MacGlashan

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