

OBITUARIES

BARRY BLOOMFIELD 1931–2002

BARRY CAMBRAY BLOOMFIELD, who died suddenly on 26 February 2002, achieved equal distinction as both librarian and bibliographer, and remarkably in totally unrelated fields: in Asian studies as the director of the United Kingdom's most important library collections, and in modern English literary studies as the bibliographer of Auden and Larkin.

Barry retired from the British Library in December 1990 as Director of Collection Development. His responsibilities had ranged over a vast East-West empire of printed and manuscript materials, taking in English and European language collections as well as Oriental Collections and the India Office Library and Records. Barry was at the forefront of oriental librarianship in this country for twenty-five years. He held the distinction (never to be repeated) of heading the three major Asian studies libraries in London: the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London, the India Office Library and Records, and Oriental Collections at the British Library. The secret of Barry's success in this field was that he was an orientalist through experience rather than by training. He consistently applied the standards and practices of mainstream librarianship to Asian studies in a common-sense manner, unencumbered by the narrower concerns that sometimes loom over-large in the minds of specialists themselves. Barry in fact never left the mainstream of librarianship, being a regular and respected participant in many professional bodies, not least the Library Association of Great Britain. From 1991 to 1995 he chaired the Rare Books Group, and he co-edited with Karen Potts the second edition of *A Directory of Rare Book and Special Collections in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland*, which the Association published in 1997.

Barry's first professional appointment in 1956 was as Librarian of the College of St Mark and St John in Chelsea, where he published his first foray into modern English literary bibliography, *English Poetry in the '30s: A Short Title List* (1958), an indication of greater things to come. In 1961 he moved into university librarianship as an Assistant Librarian at the London School of Economics, where he remained until 1963 when he began his long successful association with the School of Oriental and African Studies as Deputy Librarian. It was during his subsequent period as Librarian of the School that the new SOAS library building opened in 1973, much needed to modernize the library's facilities and services that had previously been scattered in odd corners of the old building. Barry was intimately involved in the design and construction of the new building, of which he felt justly

proud. On his own initiative, he had a special keepsake printed as a souvenir of the opening with contributions from many poets, including of course Auden and Larkin.

In 1978 Barry became the last 'independent' Director of the India Office Library and Records, then still part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and in 1982 successfully negotiated its incorporation into the British Library. Barry deserves great credit for ensuring, in very difficult circumstances, that the India Office Library and Records was not broken up and its collections split between various institutions — that would have been an act of cultural vandalism — and for steering it towards its rightful place as an integral part of the national library. In 1983 Barry added to the India Office Library and Records responsibility for the British Library's other Asian Department, then the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books, paving the way for their amalgamation in 1990 as Oriental and India Office Collections, creating the finest single resource for Asian studies in any library in the world. Barry therefore played a key role in the two decisions that consolidated the future of library resources for Asian studies in this country. All those in the field owe him a great debt.

Very many colleagues throughout the British Library, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and beyond can testify to Barry's willingness to offer advice, his concern for their career development, and his 'human' approach to paperwork and administration: something to be lived with but not made a meal of. Barry was a natural facilitator, prompting and cajoling good-naturedly, an enthusiastic promoter of research into the collections in his charge and always aware of the importance of prompt publication. For many years he re-energized the British Academy's Oriental Documents Committee and had several important catalogues of the India Office Library and Records's collections published through that channel.

Inevitably Barry held many offices in the course of his career, indicative of his enthusiasm not only for libraries but for professional associations and learned societies. He was Chair of the Group of Orientalist Libraries of the Standing Conference of National and University Libraries, 1975–80, and Council Member of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1980–84 and 1996–2000; he served on the Executive of the Friends of the National Libraries, 1981–96, and became President of both the Private Libraries Association and the Association of Independent Libraries. Fittingly he was President of the Bibliographical Society during its centenary year in 1992, and with typical energy raised an enormous amount of money for the Society to start an endowment fund that now subsidizes research into a whole range of bibliographical subjects.

Barry will be much missed internationally as well as nationally, by his many friends and acquaintances in the diplomatic field as well as by overseas archivists and librarians. It was, for instance, on Barry's initiative that the

Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Record Managers was set up in 1983. He laid great emphasis upon the importance of libraries in what might best be called 'cultural diplomacy', and among a string of overseas assignments that he personally undertook were specialist tours in India, Pakistan, and Malaysia for the British Council; he also acted as Adviser to the National Archives of Burma for the United Nations Development Programme and UNESCO.

Barry wrote numerous articles and edited several very useful contributions to oriental librarianship, including *Theses on Asia Accepted by Universities in the United Kingdom and Ireland, 1877–1964* (1967), and, with the late Brian Hickman, *A Preliminary Directory of Library Resources for Korean Studies in Europe* (1978). But he will rightly be best remembered for his masterly bibliographies of the works of two of the last century's greatest poets, W. H. Auden and Philip Larkin, both widely regarded as models of meticulous scholarship. The first edition of his Auden bibliography appeared in 1964, covering the early years through to 1955, and the second edition of 1972, documenting the poet's output up to 1969, was co-compiled with his American friend Edward Mendelson, Auden's literary executor. If Auden had seen Barry benignly as his 'recording angel', Larkin was much more wary, particularly when Barry insisted that there must be 'complete honesty' between the bibliographer and his subject. No doubt Larkin's respect for Barry as a fellow professional librarian eased the way to what obviously became a close friendship, as portrayed by Barry himself in his very perceptive and sympathetic reminiscences of Larkin, *Brought to Book* (1995), a rare examination of the author-bibliographer relationship. *Philip Larkin, a Bibliography, 1933–1976* was published in 1979, and Barry immediately embarked upon revising it to cover publications up to 1994. It was tragic that he died just before the British Library brought out the second edition in 2002. There is one other valuable bibliographical contribution that emphasized Barry's predilection for the literature of the decade of his birth, *An Author Index to Selected British 'Little Magazines', 1930–1939* (1976).

Barry was much more than the consummate library professional and master-bibliographer. He was truly a bookman in every sense. He lived a life of books and in books; he loved reading and collecting them, particularly poetry and detective novels; he enjoyed scouring second-hand bookshops, with the uncanny knack of turning up a frequent bargain or a totally unexpected find. All this was done with those quintessentially 'Bloomfieldian' qualities — seriousness laced with fun, an irrepressible and generous spirit, ever-present enthusiasm and good humour — that inspired so much affection for Barry in his lifetime, and hopefully will live on in the many colleagues whom he influenced during his long and distinguished career.

GRAHAM SHAW