

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

MICHAEL W. HILL

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

W. Boyd Rayward

at

Oxford and Cambridge Club
London, England

on

26 June 2000

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Oral History Program
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Chemical Heritage Foundation
Oral History Program
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106



MICHAEL W. HILL

1928 Born in Ross on Wye, Herefordshire, United Kingdom on 27 July

Education

1938-1941 King Henry VIII School, Coventry
1941-1947 Nottingham High School
1949-1953 M.A. and M.Sc., University of Oxford, Lincoln College

Professional Experience

1953-1956 Laporte Chemical Company
Research Chemist

Morgan Crucible Group
1956-1958 Laboratory Head, Chemistry, Physics and Physical Analysis
1958-1962 Assistant Process Control Manager, Carbon and Sintered Metals
1962-1963 Manager, Telephone Granules Production
1963-1964 Group Technical Editor

British Museum
1964-1965 Assistant Keeper, National Reference Library of Science and Invention
1968-1973 Keeper, National Reference Library of Science and Invention

Patent Office Library
1965-1968 Deputy Librarian

British Library
1973-1986 Director, Science Reference Library
1986-1988 Associate Director, Science, Technology and Industry

Other Professional Activities

1969-1973 Member, Organizing Committee for the British Library
1973-1980 UK Delegate, EEC, DGXIII, WP on Patent Information
1976-1980 UK Delegate, EEC, DGXIII, WP on Information for Industry

1980-1984	Vice President, Federation for Information and Documentation [FID]
1984-1990	President, FID
1990-present	Honorary Fellow, FID
1980	Joint Founder of Western European Round Table for Information and Documentation [WERTID]
1976-1981	Vice President, International Association of Technological Universities Libraries [IATUL]
1969-1974	Member, Advisory Council on Scientific and Technical Information [ACSTI]
1974-1978	Chairman, Online Information Services Committee, British Library
1974-1979	Honorary Secretary, Council of Association for Information Management [ASLIB]
1979-1981	Chairman, Council of ASLIB
1974-1976	Board Member, U.K. Chemical Information Service
1970-1986	ad hoc U.K. Delegate to World Intellectual Property Organization
1971-1974	Member, Executive Committee, National Central Library
1974-1993	Various official consultancies to foreign official and international bodies
1977-1979	Chairman, Circle of State Librarians
1983-1987	Member, Advisory Committee, Scottish Science Reference Library

ABSTRACT

Michael W. Hill begins his interview by discussing how he was first drawn to the information and documentation side of chemistry. While at Lincoln College, Hill planned to become a chemist. He received his B.A. and M.Sc. there, under the tutelage of Rex Richards, by researching applications of nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy. After graduating, Hill started his career at Laporte Chemical Company in Luton, then moved to London to become head of Morgan Crucible Group's chemistry laboratory. Eventually Hill left the secretive world of industry to work as assistant keeper in the National Reference Library of Science and Invention, a new national science library being setup by the British Museum. Hill soon advanced to the post of deputy librarian at the Patent Office Library. Next he became the head of the National Reference Library of Science and Invention, first as part of the British Museum, then from 1973 as part of the British Library's Reference Division, renamed the Science Reference Library. Hill also joined Aslib and became a fellow of the Institute of Information Scientists, chairman of its council, and, in the 1980s, president of the International Federation for Information and Documentation [FID]. He was also elected vice president of the International Association of Technological University Libraries. Hill concludes his interview by hypothesizing about the future impact of information science.

INTERVIEWER

W. Boyd Rayward is a research professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He turned to librarianship after graduating in English literature from the University of Sydney. He received his Ph.D. from the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago in 1973. He has held positions in the University of Chicago (where he became Dean of the Graduate Library School). He served as Professor and Head of the School of Information Library and Archive Studies and Dean of the University's Faculty of Professional Studies at the University of New South Wales in Sydney where he is now professor emeritus. He has published two books related to Paul Otlet, Belgian documentalist and internationalist, and a great many articles on history of national and international schemes for the organization and dissemination of information.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Education and Early Experiences in the Chemical Industry
Early work at Lincoln College under Rex Richards. The value of good research techniques. Receives M.Sc. for application of nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy. Enters industry at Laporte Chemical Company in Luton. Moves to London to be head of chemistry research laboratory at Morgan Crucible Group.
- 2 Entrance into the World of Information Science
Applies and receives position as Assistant Keeper in the National Reference Library of Science and Invention, the British Museum's national science library.
- 4 Career Growth and Advancement at the British Museum
Transfers to post of deputy at the Patent Office Library. Becomes a civil servant. Manages the daily operations of the library. Advances to head of National Reference Library of Science and Invention. Member of National Organizing committee for the British Library.
- 7 Personal Involvement in Information Committees and Conferences
Joins Aslib. Elected as a fellow of the Institute of Information Scientists. Attends Federation for Information and Documentation [FID] conference in Rome.
- 15 Further Professional Recollections
Elected President of FID. Works to establish proper FID mission and improve FID financial situation. Attends FID council in Moscow. Helps FID cut financial and political dependence on UNESCO.
- 25 Future of Information Science
Changes due to development of compact discs and the World Wide Web. Pitfalls of the World Wide Web. Growth of the information field and availability of information. Profit and cost involved in the information field.
- 30 Notes
- 31 Index

NOTES

1. The recitation of “The Address to the Haggis,” a poem by Robert Burns is a central feature of “Burns Suppers.” When the line, “an’ cut ye up wi’ ready slight,” is reached the speaker cuts open the haggis with a sharp knife.
2. Nathalie Dusoulier, interview by W. Boyd Rayward in Nice, France, 19 June 2000 (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, Oral History Transcript #0201).
3. Michael W. Hill, *The Impact of Information on Society: an Examination of its Nature, Value and Usage*, (London: Bowker Saur, 1999).

INDEX

A

- ADBS. *See* *Association des Professionnels de l'Information et de la Documentation*
Aitchison, Tom, 24
Anderla, Georges, 11-12, 24
Annual Review of Information Science and Technology [ARIST], 15
ARIST. *See* Annual Review of Information Science and Technology
Arntz, Helmut, 16, 18
Aslib. *See* Association for Information Management
Association des Professionnels de l'Information et de la Documentation [ADBS], 15
Association for Information Management [Aslib], 7-9, 14
 Council, 8
Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureau, 7, 19, 23

B

- Barrett, Jack, 11-12
Battersea, London, 1
Berners-Lee, Tim, 22
BL. *See* British Library
BM. *See* British Museum
BNB. *See* British National Bibliography
British Library [BL], 4-8, 11-12, 14-15, 19-20, 22, 28
British Museum [BM], 2-7, 12, 14
British National Bibliography [BNB], 5-6
Brown, John, 5
Brown, Kenneth, 18
Brown, Peter, 7
Burns, Betty, 5

C

- Cambridge University, 5
Canisius, Peter, 16
CDST. *See* *Centrul Pentru Dialog Intre Stiinte si Teologie*
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique [CNRS], 15
Centrul Pentru Dialog Intre Stiinte si Teologie [CDST], 15
CERN. *See* European Organization for Nuclear Research
Chambeau, Serge, 15
Chemical Abstracts, 11-12
City University, London, 23-24
CNRS. *See* *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*
Coward, Richard, 6

D

- Delft University, 10

Department for Scientific and Industrial Research [DSIR], 6, 8
Department for Trade and Industry [DTI], 13
Derwent World Patents Index Service, 21
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Dokumentation [DGD], 15
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Informationswissenschaft und Informationspraxis [GDI], 16
DGD. *See Deutsche Gesellschaft für Dokumentation*
Document Supply Centre, 20
DSIR. *See* Department for Scientific and Industrial Research
DTI. *See* Department for Trade and Industry
Dusoulier, Nathalie, 15

E

Eccles, Lord, 5
ECIA. *See* European Council of Information Associations
Edinburgh, Scotland, 9
EPO. *See* European Patent Office
ESA. *See* European Space Agency
Euronet Diane Network for Information Retrieval, 11-12, 24
European Council of Information Associations [ECIA], 10, 15
European Organization for Nuclear Research [CERN], 22
European Patent Office [EPO], 15
European Space Agency [ESA], 11

F

Fachinformationzentrums [FIZ], 15-16
Farradane, Jason, 23
Federation for Information and Documentation [FID], 7, 9-10, 14, 16-20, 26
 1978 Congress, 9
 Council, 9, 16, 18
FID. *See* Federation for Information and Documentation
FIZ. *See Fachinformationzentrums*
Francis, Sir Frank, 4
Frascati, Italy, 11
Fujiwara, Yuzuru, 19

G

Galilei, Galileo, 23
GDI. *See Deutsche Gesellschaft für Informationswissenschaft und Informationspraxis*
Gietz, Ricardo A., 16
Goedegebuure, Ben, 19-20
Greaves, John, 13

H

Hailsham, Lord, 3
Havard-Williams, Peter, 19

Hill, Michael W.
 wife [Barbara Youngman], 4
Hookway, Harry, 5, 9, 11
Hulme, Edward Wyndham, 3
Humblet, Jean, 9-10

I

IATUL. *See* International Association of Technological University Libraries
IDT. *See* *Information, Documentation, Transfert des connaissances*
IEE. *See* Institution of Electrical Engineers
IFLA. *See* International Federation of Library Associations
Information Age, 23, 25
Information Service for the Physics and Engineering Communities [INSPEC], 11, 24
Information, Documentation, Transfert des connaissances [IDT], 15
INIST. *See* *l'Institut de l'Information Scientifique et Technique*
INPADOC. *See* International Patent Documentation Centre
INSPEC. *See* Information Service for the Physics and Engineering Communities
Institut du Petrole, 15
Institute of Information Scientists, 7, 22-23
Institution of Electrical Engineers [IEE], 11
Intergovernmental Programme for Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical
 Information [UNISIST], 26-27
International Association of Technological University Libraries [IATUL], 10
International Federation for Information and Documentation, 19
International Federation of Library Associations [IFLA], 19
International Patent Documentation Centre [INPADOC], 17, 21
Ironsides, Lord, 14

K

Keenan, Stella, 19
Kent, Anthony K., 11-12
King, David, 14
Klintoe, Kjeld, 11
Krumholz, Walter, 10

L

l'Institut de l'Information Scientifique et Technique [INIST], 14
Laporte Chemical Company, 1
le Coadic, Yves, 15
Lewis, Den, 8
Library Association, The, 22-23
Liebesny, Felix, 9
Line, Maurice B., 6, 21
London, England, 1, 3, 6-7, 21, 23, 26

Loughborough University, 19, 23-24
Luton, England, 1

M

Martin, Leslie, 7
Marx, Bernard, 15
Mathys, Reg., 5
McIlwaine, Ia, 23
Medical Literature Analysis Retrieval System [MEDLARS], 11, 21
MEDLARS. *See* Medical Literature Analysis Retrieval System
Menou, Michel, 15
Meyriat, Jean, 10, 15
Michel, Jacques, 15
Mikhailov, --, 9
Monsanto U.K., 11
Morgan Crucible Group, 1-2
Moscow, Russia, 16
Moureau, Madeleine, 15

N

National Central Library [NCL], 3, 5-6
National Federation of Abstracting and Information Services [NFAIS], 19
National Information Systems [NATIS], 26
National Lending Library for Science and Technology [NLLST], 4-7, 10, 21
National Libraries Committee
 Dainton Committee, 5
National Library of Medicine, 11
National Reference Library of Science and Invention [NRLSI], 2, 4-8, 10, 13, 16, 21
National Science Foundation [NSF], 17
National Sound Archive, 7
NATIS. *See* National Information Systems
Natural History Museum, 4
NCL. *See* National Central Library
NFAIS. *See* National Federation of Abstracting and Information Services
Nerlich, Hans, 16
Newton, Sir Isaac, 23
NLLST. *See* National Lending Library for Science and Technology
Northampton Polytechnic Institute, 23
Nottingham University, 11-12
NRLSI. *See* National Reference Library of Science and Invention
NSF. *See* National Science Foundation
Nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, 1

O

Office for Scientific and Technical Information [OSTI], 6, 8

OSTI. *See* Office for Scientific and Technical Information
OUP. *See* Oxford University Press
Oxford University Press [OUP], 5
Oxford, University of, 5
 Lincoln College, 1

P

Patent Office Library [POL], 3, 5-7, 12, 14
Pelletier, Gerard, 24-25
Perry, Brian, 8
POL. *See* Patent Office Library
Programme Generale d'Information [PGI], 27

R

Richards, Rex, 1
Richnell, Don, 8
Rome, Italy, 7
Rowlands, Mel, 4
Royal Society of Chemistry [RSC], 11-12
RSC. *See* Royal Society of Chemistry

S

Sassoon, G. Jacques, 13
Saunders, Wilf, 24
Science Museum Library [SML], 3-5
Science Reference and Information Service, 5
Science Reference Library [SRL], 5, 7-8, 12-13, 16, 22, 28
Scientific Age, 23
Sheffield, University of, 23-24
SML. *See* Science Museum Library
Southampton University, 5
SRL. *See* Science Reference Library
Strathclyde University, 24
Sviridov, Felix, 18

T

Thatcher, Prime Minister Margaret H., 22
The Impact of Information on Society: an Examination of its Nature, Value and Usage, 23
Thompson, Elizabeth, 13
Tocatlian, Jacques, 17, 19, 26
Turner, W. A., 15

U

UCL. *See* University College London

UDC. *See* Universal Decimal Classification

UKCIS. *See* U.K. Chemical Information Service

U.K. Chemical Information Service [UKCIS], 11, 12

UK LIS. *See* United Kingdom Library of Information Services

U.K. Patent Act, 6

UNESCO. *See* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNISIST. *See* Intergovernmental Programme for Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Information

United Kingdom Library of Information Services [UK LIS], 3

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 16-18, 26-27

United States Patent and Trademark Office, 3

Universal Decimal Classification [UDC], 3, 19-20

University College London [UCL], 24

Urquhart, Donald, 3, 5, 21, 28

V

van der Brugghen, --, 18

van der Wolk, --, 10

W

Webb, Maysie, 2, 4-5

Wells, Jack, 5

Werdel, Judy, 17

WERTID. *See* Western European Round Table on Information and Documentation

Western European Round Table on Information and Documentation [WERTID], 10, 15

White, Herbert S., 17

Wilson, Colin St. John, 7

Wilson, Leslie, 8-9

WIPO. *See* World Intellectual Property Organization

Wolfenden, Jack, 5

Woodcroft, Bennett, 3

World Intellectual Property Organization [WIPO], 17-18

Wysocki, Adam, 18-19

Y

Yorkshire, England, 4, 6-7, 21

Youngman, Barbara, 4

Z

Zaher, Celia R., 26