
The Brian Perry commemorative workshop, 27th November 2006

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Author

Lynne Brindley has been the Chief Executive of The British Library since 2000. Since her appointment, Lynne has led a major strategic repositioning and modernisation programme to ensure that the BL continues to provide relevant services to users in the 21st century, and that the library is recognised for its contribution to research, innovation and culture.

Lynne spent the early part of her career at the British Library and has held senior library positions at the London School of Economics, KPMG, and Aston University. Lynne was previously Pro-Vice-Chancellor and University Librarian of the University of Leeds. Lynne is active in national and international bodies concerned with cultural, library and digital information strategy. She is a Visiting Professor at City and Leeds universities. Her research and professional interests are in knowledge management, digital library developments, strategy and leadership.

Welcome

Welcome all of you to the British Library today for this important commemorative workshop in honour of Brian Perry. May I extend a particular welcome to Terry Cannon – Terry I am very glad that you have been able to join us today.

As I look around today, many of you, like me, owe Brian an immeasurable debt of personal and professional gratitude; some of you, unknowingly, have had your careers and thinking shaped by Brian's vision and actions; and some of you, who represent the future of libraries and information science research and practice, I hope will be energised by the proceedings today to play a significant role in shaping and delivering the future research and professional agenda – for there have never been more strategic and intellectual challenges to face and to enjoy.

The idea for this workshop came early in January this year as Nigel McCartney and I met at Brian's funeral in Devon. It was there that we decided that a workshop that, yes looked back at research achievements, but more importantly looked to the future, would be our celebration of a man we both admired and who had shaped our thinking. Of course it had to be held here at the British Library for that was Brian's organisational and research locus.

My very sincere thanks go to Nigel for taking up the invitation to organise the workshop and for bringing together such an excellent organising committee – Mel Collier, Bidy Fisher and Stephanie Kenna – and for such a great programme of speakers and participants – just look at the list for yourselves! Thank you all.

But much is expected of you all today. It is only proper to give Brian the send-off that he so richly deserves, that we think hard about the future, its agenda for us all, its research challenges, the importance of translating research into practice, professional and organisational leadership of research (in what is a rather fragmented setting, nationally at least), and so on. Let today not be a 'one-off' but rather a seminal guide to our future planning.

You may wonder why I am so delighted to be hosting today. You will hear much from others about Brian and the contribution of BLRDD to research and practice, but you may not know how much I owe personally to Brian, to his mentoring, his early confidence in me, when I had little in myself, and his backing of key activities that I was involved in or wished to lead. Let me share just a few examples:

In October 1988 a conference was held in Banbury entitled '*the electronic campus: an information strategy*'. Brian had supported the idea of the conference and I played a major role in orchestrating it and editing its proceedings. The title sounds rather quaint now but in truth it heralded more than a decade of thinking and developments of the electronic/digital library, supported by JISC and others, which held its own, and often led across the world. Many of our digital library efforts today would not have been possible without Brian's foresight at that time.

With support from Brian I visited Japan several times, running workshops and seminars on leadership and management in the profession, again experiences that influenced my development over a long period – and by the way, under Brian's tutelage, I developed an increasingly sophisticated (and expensive taste in Japanese ceramics).

And finally I gained a grant from BLRDD to work on patterns of information services needed by small companies, particularly in science and innovation parks. Much of that thinking is still relevant, and has certainly helped me as we have developed our Business and IP Centre and associated services, events and networks, here at the BL.

But more than this Brian was a genial colleague and mentor. Most of our thinking was done over food and wine, whatever the time of day! I lose count of the number of pizzas I ate in the cause of research policy! I will never forget the wild cherry soup at the Gay Hussar, with associated high quality group debate, and I do believe that single handedly Brian kept afloat the Verde Valle restaurant in Soho. We have,

colleagues, perhaps become a bit too serious. Good ideas often stem from good company, enjoyment and some conviviality – and with Brian, with his maverick yet visionary ideas – we were guaranteed all of these.

To finish, and to start our workshop proper, let me remind you of Brian's roots in nursery gardening. Brian nurtured and cared for people as he did plants. Even along the bumpy road as others pruned, damaged or even tried to pull up the roots of our LIS research and policy developments, they have survived and to some extent prospered. I would like today to be an occasion for the nurturing of new plants, new roots and new ideas for the future.

It is your day, each one of you has a contribution to make and it is Brian's day.

Thank you very much.