Pat Metcalfe (1988-2006)

Having had a career break, preceded by an earlier career in Birmingham University's Main Library, I started working in HSMC's Library in 1988 where I stayed for 18 years. Eighteen years in one place leaves one with many, mainly happy memories which are hard to distil into a few words.

In my early years working alone in a library housed in two quite separate upstairs rooms, it was a considerable challenge to support the needs of postgraduate students, researchers, consultants and academic teaching staff. This was the pre-Internet age when manual paper searching of book indices and the use of Health Service Abstracts were the main research tools. Medline was a cumbersome resource to use as it was only available to us via a dial-up modem! In addition, Medline was not particularly relevant to the needs of health management study and research! In 1996, HSMC was at last connected to the 'high speed campus network' and the world wide web. This, together with the previus move in 1993 to more suitable accommodation on the ground floor, and the introduction of a more efficient computerised library management system, enabled HSMC's library staff to have access to electronically available materials and to support the needs of its growing variety of client groups in ways previously unknown.

Others might write of the academic and research impact of HSMC; the challenges and opportunities of the various waves of NHS reforms; the impact of the Thatcher years; and the difficulties of securing multiple funding streams in uncertain circumstances. In addition, I have vivid memories of Park House in the late 80s when the fabric of the house was desperately in need of repair and refurbishment (university funding was secured for this in 1993). Memories of a time when the students studying on the Overseas Development Programme were lodged in Garth House and came to the dining room at Park House for a full English breakfast and hot lunch (choice of menu) cooked in-house by a professional cook and 3 staff. Goodness knows what students from around the world (from Iraq, UAE, Saudi Arabia and even Timbuctoo) made of these arrangements! This was a time when some of the upstairs offices were still referred to as 'bedrooms', a hangover from the days when the house had been a residential preliminary nurse training centre.

Until 1993 there was a small bar, a TV in the staff lounge (now the Garden Room) where cricket was watched on summer lunchtimes, and the Courtyard Room was a University vehicle maintenance facility which doubled up as an overnight 'kennel' for the university security department's guard dogs! Refurbishment however, brought a more comfortable and attractive environment to work and study in. This, combined with the lovely grounds and outlook, made HSMC a wonderful place with which to be associated.

In retirement, I find I cannot completely distance myself from libraries, and now coordinate a local reading group based at a nearby public library, and plan to actively campaign for this library should it come under threat in any way. Fortunately, I live near enough to Birmingham to enjoy the theatre and the rich art scene. I read (of course), walk (but not enough), adn care for my very aged mother and extended family.

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