TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEWS
Conducted by
W. Boyd Rayward
at
Letchworth Garden City, Hertsfordshire, U.K.
on
4 July 2000
(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)
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(Signature) Jean Aitchison

(Date) 6 February 2004

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THOMAS M. AITCHISON

1923 Born in Glasgow, Scotland on 31 July

Education

1944 B.Sc., math and physics, University of St. Andrews, Scotland
1955 Associate of the Library Association, U.K.

Professional Experience

Courtaulds, Ltd., Braintree, Essex, U.K.
1948-1955 Librarian

British Aircraft Corporation, Luton and Stevenage, U.K.
1955-1964 Divisional Librarian and Information Officer

1964-1966 Technical Officer and Director, SDI Project

Institution of Electrical Engineers, London, U.K.
INSPEC
1967-1988 Deputy Director, then Director

Peter Petergrinus, Ltd.
1980-1988 Director

J&TM Aitchison, Information Consultants, Letchworth, U.K.
1988-1990 Partner

Honors

1986 O.B.E. [Order of the British Empire]
1987 Hon. Fellow, Institute of Information Scientists
1988 Hon. Fellow, National Federation of Abstracting and Indexing Services
JEAN AITCHISON

1925 Born in Huddersfield, Great Britain on 6 October

Education

B.A. in honors history, London University

Professional Experience

Ministry of Town and Country Planning Library
1948-1949 Assistant Librarian

Derbyshire County Library, Matlock Branch
1949-1950 Deputy Librarian

Sheffield Public Libraries, Science, Commerce, and Technology Library
1950-1951 Sub-librarian

Kingston-Upon-Hull Public Libraries, Commercial and Technology Library
1952-1954 Librarian

English Electric Co. Ltd, Whetstone/Rugby Library, Leicester
1955-1964 Chief Librarian

1961-present Consultant
From 1988 to 1998 operated under the name J & TM Aitchison

Honors

1982 Ranganathan Award for work on Thesaurus Design
ABSTRACT

Thomas M. Aitchison begins his interview by detailing his educational background and then continues by discussing how he first became interested in the field of information science. With the start of his career at Courtaulds, Aitchison got his first taste of working in a library. However, it was with the completion of the Library Association correspondence course that Aitchison gained the confidence and knowledge necessary to become a successful librarian. After applying and being hired for a divisional librarian and information officer with the British Aircraft Corporation, Aitchison became a member of the Aslib aircraft information group. He also joined the National Electronics Research Council and helped the Council develop a journal and numerous other projects. In January 1967, Aitchison helped form the Information Service in Physics, Electrotechnology, and Control [INSPEC] and became the information research manager. He also worked to mechanize Science Abstracts and organize the Direct Evaluation of Indexing Languages [DEVIL] project. He concludes his interview by sharing recollections of those who had the most influence on his career.

Jean Aitchison begins her interview by discussing how she first became involved in thesaurus development. She continues by sharing her first meeting with Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan and her initial impressions of him. Aitchison worked to complete three editions of English Electric Faceted Subject Classification for Engineering, between 1958 and 1961. With the help of others, she developed and reclassified many projects. She worked with Cyril Cleverdon on several publications and in March 1967 she began work on Thesaurofacet. She also worked to develop and improve the Bliss Association Classification system.

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.
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1  Thomas M. Aitchison Interview
   Attended the University of St. Andrews, interested in math and physics. Joined
   the army but was discharged to work at the Admiralty Signal and Radar
   Establishment in Haslemere, England. Lost interest in a career as a physicist.
   Became librarian for Courtaulds Limited.

3  Organization Affiliations and New Projects
   Became a member of Aslib. Set-up manual SDI [Selective Dissemination of
   Information] system which was greeted with enthusiasm. Joined National
   Electronics Research Council. Transferred to the IEE [Institute of Electrical
   Engineers].

6  INSPEC Formed
   January 1967, INSPEC [Information Service in Physics, Electrotechnology and
   Control], a mechanized version of Science Abstracts, formed. The DEVIL
   [Direct Evaluation of Indexing Languages] project started. Thesaurus developed.

9  Director at INSPEC
   Tensions with AIP [American Institute of Physics] rose. Became an agent for
   IEE primary publications. Competition and collaboration with different
   information committees. INSPEC grew.

20 Jean Aitchison Interview
    Originally ran large library in the English Electric Company. Hoped to create
    classification system. Developed the English Electric Faceted Subject

23 Thesaurofacet
    Started work on Thesaurofacet in March 1967. General Electric Company took
    over the English Electric Company and closed down most of the libraries.
    Thesaurofacet died.

25 Work at UNESCO
    Helped develop UNESCO thesaurus. Made system for the Royal Institute of

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