

# Douglas John Foskett

## 1918–2004

On May 6, 2004 the library and information science world, and in particular the world of classification, was saddened and became considerably poorer with the death of Douglas Foskett, librarian, educator, classification theorist and friend to many of us. Educated at Bancroft's School and the University of London, he received a BA with honours in English from Queen Mary College in 1939 and an MA from Birkbeck College in 1954. During summer vacations, while studying at Queen Mary College, he worked in the Ilford Public Library. In 1940 he began a long and distinguished service as a member of the Library Association. Inevitably, his professional career was interrupted by World War II, but following military service in the Royal Army Medical Corps and the Intelligence Corps in 1946, he returned to the Ilford library as an assistant librarian. He also continued his professional training and became a Fellow of the Library Association (F.L.A.) in 1949. In 1975 he was made an honorary fellow and became President of the Library Association in 1976.

1948 was a momentous year that did much to shape the rest of Douglas Foskett's life. He moved from the Ilford library to the Research Division Library of the Metal Box Company where, as stated in his own words, he "soon realized how the skills required for a scientific and industrial research 'information officer' depends on the basic techniques of librarianship, notably classification and cataloguing. The enhancement of these led to the development of higher levels, in literature searching and, more particularly, in current awareness service and selective dissemination of information." (Foskett, n.d.) It was fortuitous that in that same year he met S.R. Ranganathan. This contact gave him a new view of the possible use of the concept of facets together with traditional generic analysis. With this understanding, he began to apply facet analysis in schemes for Packaging, Occupational Safety, Health and Education. The result of this work suggested to him that facet analysis could be applied to any subject and could be the basis for possible future research. Thus he was afforded the opportunity to become one of the pioneers of the emerging discipline that came to be called "information science." 1948 was also the year of the Royal Society's Infor-

mation Conference and from this conference emerged the Classification Research Group (CRG), a Group in which he remained fully involved for the rest of his life.

Douglas was a man of many parts and his career encompassed many activities. His many contributions to librarianship, and in particular to the theory and practice of classification, have been clearly recognized through numerous tributes and awards both at home and abroad. Evidence of this can be seen in his participation on numerous commissions and advisory boards throughout the world. Among these were Unesco's International Advisory Committee on Documentation, Libraries and Archives, the United Kingdom Unesco National Commission and the Thesaurus Working Group of the Council of Europe's EUDISED Project. Moreover, he was committed to the importance of the careful and thorough training of librarians to a high standard. To this end, for many years he was teacher and examiner *par excellence* at the School of Library, Archive and Information Studies, University College London, and served as visiting lecturer in many universities and library and information science training programmes across the world.

Of particular significance were his contributions to the theory and practice of classification and indexing. A founding member of the Classification Research Group (CRG), he served as its secretary and later as its Chairman and was a moving force in all of its activities. Indeed, he was an active contributor to the CRG's work until very shortly before his death. In 1955 the CRG had endorsed "the need for a faceted classification as the basis for all methods of information retrieval" (Classification Research Group, 1955). This principle was later endorsed at the Dorking Conference in 1957. It was in this context that Douglas Foskett's scholarship and research made its mark through his work in the study and dissemination of the theoretical concepts of Ranganathan. Putting facet analysis into practice, he developed a number of classification schemes, the best known of which are the *London Education Classification* and Class J, Education, for the second edition of the *Bliss Bibliographic Classification*. Less well known, perhaps, is the

scheme he prepared for Lord's through his legendary dedication to the game of cricket. Among other important works are his *Classification and Indexing in the Social Sciences*, *The Sayers Memorial Volume* edited with Bernard Palmer and his work on "Classification and integrative levels" (Foskett, 1961).

Testimony to the significance of his contributions to scholarship and the advancement of library and information science are the numerous prestigious honours that he has received. Among these are the awarding of the OBE in 1978 for his record of public service to his country and his installation as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 1985. In 1993, Douglas was further honoured by a number of his distinguished colleagues in a Festschrift (Humby, 1993) on the occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. Its content details very completely the activities and interests that filled the many facets of his life and includes a 31-page bibliography of his many contributions to scholarship and practice.

Douglas John Foskett contributed much to the advancement of librarianship and information science. At the same time he charmed the world with his sunny personality, his friendliness, his marvelous sense of humour and his love of cricket. His intellectual legacy will live on and continue its impact and he will be greatly missed by his wife, Joy, colleagues and friends.

Nancy Williamson

## References

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