

Obituary: Michael Head



Michael (Mike) Head who died aged 85 on Christmas Day 2021 was, for quarter of a century, Senior Lecturer at the School of Librarianship at Robert Gordon University (formerly RGIT) and was President of the Scottish Library Association 1982-83.

Michael Cashen Head was born in Essex in 1936 where he was also educated. In 1958, he married Eileen Rice at Epping, and their union lasted nearly fifty years until Eileen's death in 2007. In 1964, they moved to Leeds where he worked in the Reference Department at the Central Library. Their son, Iain, was born during their time in Leeds. Mike studied at the Open University and, later, with his move north, his Masters dissertation examined nineteenth century libraries in Aberdeen with Mechanics' Institutes being a particular interest.

After six years at Leeds, they moved to Aberdeen, Mike having been appointed as a lecturer at the recently established School of Librarianship at Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology. He quickly advanced to senior lecturer and remained there until his retirement. In teaching, Mike found his metier. His area was bibliographic services but his interests were broad. He was equally at home teaching early printing, contemporary reference sources or hands-on tutorials formulating fiendishly long and complex search strings for Dialog or Datastar. His lectures on Wynkyn de Worde, or the Copyright Act of Queen Anne will be long-remembered but so too will be the shock in class when he destroyed an old book to demonstrate conservation techniques. In tutorials, he would ask questions and then just sit patiently, with his beaming smile, waiting for the answers to come.

Mike soon became involved in the work of the Scottish Library Association and in 1976 was appointed its Secretary, holding the post for four years. In 1982 he became the (first English) President of SLA. His colleague and great friend Jimmy Orr, Head of the RGIT School, would also hold the SLA Presidency in 1986, and a number of his former students would later become Presidents of CILIPS.

Mike, together with Douglas Anderson and David Andrews, formed the pivotal cornerstone of the Library School at RGIT with Douglas and Mike being joint Acting Heads of School for a time. They were a formidable, humorous and generous double-act, much loved by their students and their colleagues. Mike took early retirement in the summer of 1995 but continued to supervise doctoral students for a further few years. Mike and Douglas met regularly with lunches at the Prince of Wales pub featuring strongly.

On the news of his death, his former students recalled his supportive generosity, his wisdom and kindness, and his strong sense of professionalism. Many recalled his genuine interest in his former students, often being astounded that he remembered them decades after they had completed their studies. Through his teaching, his professional work, and his generosity, Michael Head made an incalculable contribution to the library world in Scotland and beyond.

He is survived by his son Iain, daughter-in-law Annabelle, and granddaughter Aimee.