

LOUIS B. FREWER 1906–2005

Louis Frewer, former Superintendent of Rhodes House Library, Oxford and Chairman of SCOLMA 1968–1971 died on 6 June 2005; he would have been 100 in January 2006. His son Glyn has written this obituary notice, which is followed by Patricia Larby's note about Louis Frewer's contributions to Africana librarianship and to SCOLMA.

Born in Oxford in 1906, Louis Frewer was a pupil at Bedford House School where he was Games Captain and later President of the Old Boys' Society. After leaving school and studying while he was working, firstly at the *Oxford Times* office, then as a junior assistant on the staff of the Bodleian Library, he matriculated at St. Catherine's Society in 1924, taking his MA in 1931. In 1929, he married Dorothy Poulter, whom he had known since childhood and with whom he was to enjoy the happiest of marriages for the next 73 years until her death at 96 in 2002.

In 1932 he transferred from the Bodleian to Rhodes House Library and became Superintendent in 1938, a post he held until he retired in 1968. Under him, the Library of Commonwealth and United States History grew rapidly in size and its resources of printed books and manuscripts were well publicised by his many bibliographies and overseas visits. He was joint compiler of *World List of Historical Periodicals and Bibliographies* (1939); British editor of *International Bibliography of Historical Sciences* from 1939 to 1990; author of *Bibliography of Historical Writings 1940–1945*; translator of Frédéric Masson's *Napoleon at St. Helena*; the author of *Pictorial and Historical Guide to Oxford*, as well as of hundreds of articles on historic Oxford and eminent Oxonians. He was recalled after retirement and continued to work for Rhodes House, finally retiring in 1971 after 50 years' service to the university.

His enthusiasm and interests were as wide as they were long-lived. Not least was his love of cricket. He played for South Oxford CC from 1920 to 1948. In 1942, after becoming a Post Warden in Civil Defence, he joined the RAF and was a Flying Control Officer in Coastal Command based in Northern Ireland during the height of the U-boat campaign. He played cricket for RAF Aldergrove and for RAF Northern Ireland. When he was posted to Tiree in the Outer Hebrides he teamed up with Stan Squires, the Surrey cricketer, and they founded a station XI. A hanger was converted to an indoor cricket school and the team flew to matches in a Halifax. After the war he played in several County Club trials, was elected to the Oxford County selection committee and was Honorary Secretary from 1948 to 1973. He was also Honorary Local Representative of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music and, because the theatre was a lifelong interest, became Honorary Secretary of the Oxford Playhouse Guild and a member of the Playhouse council.

Another interest which he developed from boyhood was the collecting of autographs. His collection of over 3,000, meticulously catalogued, included great names from stage and screen, the arts, politics and royalty as well as sport. Gardening, too, was a hobby and he became Secretary of the Oxford Horticultural Society. He was made a Freeman of Oxford and he edited not only their magazine, but also the magazine of his old college for a period of 25 years.

Louis Frewer was a devout Catholic. To those who knew him well, it was clear it was the cornerstone of his life. He regarded his faith as an intensely personal and private matter. His faith was unwavering and for all his life a source of strength. When he and Dorothy were presented on their seventieth wedding anniversary with the apostolic blessing imparted by Pope John Paul II it was, in a long lifetime of proud moments, one of the proudest.

A devoted family man, he is survived by his sons, Glyn and Ivor, five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Patricia Larby writes:

Older members of SCOLMA will remember Louis Frewer as the Superintendent of the Rhodes House Library, Oxford, where, apart from war service, he worked from 1932, first as Assistant and then as Superintendent, until his retirement in 1971. RHL's resources of African printed materials, many received under the Colonial Copyright Law, and manuscripts, publicised by Louis' journal articles and output of bibliographical guides, ensured its recognition as a major resource for the growing African studies programmes in Oxford. The Library was among the early SCOLMA members and Louis served as Chairman from 1968 to 1971. Even in retirement he continued to work, helping with the cataloguing of some of the manuscript materials collected by the Library under the Oxford Colonial Records Project – original materials deposited by former colonial servants and now a major archive.

For Rhodes House and for SCOLMA Louis attended various overseas library conferences: the 5th Leverhulme Inter-Universities Conference on the Needs and Problems of University Libraries in Tropical Africa in Salisbury, 1964; the International Conference on African Bibliography, Nairobi, 1967; and the Conference of Librarians from Commonwealth Universities in Africa, in Lusaka, 1969

In 1966 he toured several African Studies Centres in the United States to establish personal contacts following a previous visit in 1958 when African studies were offered at only two universities. He told the story of how, on one occasion, he was faced with a programme of visits to civil engineering projects and highway developments. He posed a tactful question. "Oh," came the reply, "We were told that you were Superintendent of Roads!"

I first met Louis at Nairobi Airport in 1971. As Chairman of SCOLMA he was travelling with Jim Pearson, SOAS Librarian, and Ken Humphries, Librarian, Birmingham University. Also joining the flight was Tony Loveday, University of Zambia, and Wilfred Plumbe, University of Malawi. Together we were all off to Addis Ababa to attend a meeting of the Standing Conference of African University Librarians from East Africa during which we addressed the many difficulties experienced both in Africa and the West in the acquisition and handling of materials on and from Africa.

On the return journey, via Nairobi, Louis stayed with my husband and me for a couple of nights. He was a charming guest – and a good dancing partner. We enjoyed his visit and later when we returned to England we were glad to renew our friendship on visits to Oxford when Rhodes House was hosting SCOLMA meetings.

It is many years since he was actively involved with SCOLMA but is fondly remembered by those who knew him then.