

Francis Aubie (Ali) Sharr OBE

BA FLA FLAA ARPS Hon D Litt (Curtin) CF, 5 October 1914 – 16 November 2002

It is with much sadness that members of the library community in Western Australia note the passing of Francis Aubie (Ali) Sharr who left us, peacefully, on 16 November 2002 after a short illness. Ali was predeceased by his wife Flo (McKeand) who died on 9 November 2002.

By all accounts Ali Sharr, esteemed library colleague of so many UK and Australian librarians, had a good innings. His love of cricket is one of the many memories he shares with us in his book *Recollections* where he mentions split loyalties during his childhood of cricket matches between Lancashire and Yorkshire. He was born in Manchester though spent much of his childhood in Leeds, Yorkshire. He writes that his parents never pressured him to choose a career, though his father sought the advice of the headmaster at his school 'who suggested librarianship because I was good at English ... the suggestion appealed to me because I thought that a librarian could be useful to other people without there having to be a loser in the transaction' (Sharr, 1990, *Recollections*. Personal ms copy p7). Ali Sharr took his undergraduate degree where he read English, French and Economics at University College London, graduating in 1935. His postgraduate qualification in librarianship followed, this being at the University of London School of Librarianship.

His first professional job was as an assistant in the Information Department of the National Central Library, adjacent to the University College, where he worked on interlibrary co-operation and lending.

His move to public librarianship was in 1937 when he joined the staff at the Kent County Library where he became a branch librarian. It was also when he first became involved in professional matters, joining the Kent Division of the Association of Assistant Librarians. He returned to the Kent County Library for a while after his war service and moved onto the deputy librarian's position in Derbyshire in 1946. It was here where his interest in public administration was first demonstrated when he joined the Royal Institute of Public Administration, of which he remained a member for some forty years, holding portfolios including president of the Western Australian Regional Group from 1960 to 1962.

He took the 'plum job' of deputy city librarian of Manchester in 1949. His interest in professional matters increased and he became involved in the Library Association (of the UK), and other professional bodies. He was elected president of the Association of Assistant Librarians in 1952. He was presi-

dent of the Library Association of Australia (LAA) from 1969–70, received a Fellowship from the LAA in 1964 and was awarded the Association's highest honour for a professional member, the HCL Anderson Award, in 1980. He was chairman of the State Librarians Council in Australia from 1973 to 1976.

When Ali Sharr arrived in Perth, WA in 1953 he was accompanied by his mother, then aged 64. They left England with five inches of snow on the ground and landed by ship with a cyclone hovering, humidity at ninety per cent and the temperature 98 degrees F (36.6 degrees C). He set about to equipping WA — a state where eighty-two per cent of the local authorities at the time had less than 6000 population, and sixty per cent had less than 2500 — with a viable public library service, providing shelf ready bookstock which was exchanged between all of the libraries in the State and made available to all residents through a free interlibrary lending system. His goal was to have a public library in every local authority. This dream came to fruition in 1982, and the public library service of Western Australia stands as his memorial.

The number of library services was to grow because of population increases which made the general philosophy which still stands today, of all citizens of the vast state being of equal importance, an added challenge.

The early beginnings — with a Treasury allocation of £5000 (when he requested £15 000) an initial staff of five, and an office in West Perth — are remembered with some fondness by those who joined him then or soon after. The early appointments included familiar names in Western Australian librarianship: Joyce Jackson (later Pugh), Val Creasey, James Hammond, Ali's late wife Flo (McKeand), Arthur Pugh. Others included Bill Chape, Lennie McCall, Jenni Woodroffe and Cec Florey.

The first new public library was established in York in 1954. The first three metropolitan libraries were established by 1956, these being Claremont, Fremantle and Kwinana. The amalgamation of the library services provided by the Library Board and those provided by the Trustees of the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery of Western Australia took place at the end of 1955 and the State Reference Library of WA, including a local history library, to be known as the J S Battye Library of West Australian History, was a result.

Sharr's interest in library education began with his professional involvement at

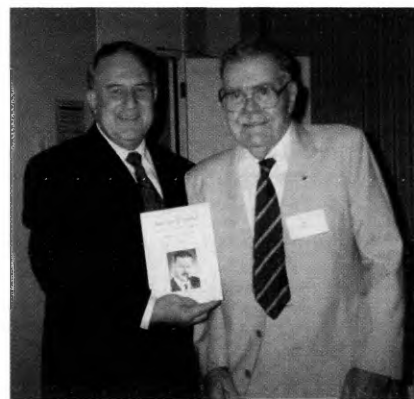


Photo courtesy of Bibbia

Alan Bundy and Ali Sharr with a copy of Dr Sharr's book *Recollections*.

Kent County Library and continued when he was at Derbyshire. Here the librarians ran a UNESCO course in rural libraries for overseas librarians. In 1950, Manchester was asked by the British Council to run a similar course. This was where he first met Flo McKeand, who after spending time in Toronto Canada, and joining the initial library staff in Western Australia in 1954, became his wife in 1962.

Ali Sharr became a senior examiner in Library Administration for the Library Association. Formal qualification for librarians in WA was attained through the registration examinations of the LAA held at part-time evening classes at Perth Technical College. In 1971 the library school was established at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) now Curtin University and Ali Sharr played a significant role in this.

His contribution to the library community continued well past his retirement as state librarian in 1976. In 1976 the WA Branch of the LAA awarded the first FA Sharr medal for the most promising new graduate, to Jean Ryding and the award has continued since. Ali is well remembered for his attendance at Curtin University of Technology student presentations and graduation ceremonies. He joined the stage party at Curtin graduations after receiving an Honorary DLitt from the University in 1990. He attended many local functions of the LAA (which later became ALIA) and until very recently would drive himself to them in his trusty Volvo.

There were other things that were important in Ali Sharr's life apart from libraries. He had an early interest in drama whilst at university, moving from acting to stage management. He maintained an interest in the early history of England and was a keen photographer, bird watcher and gardener. And there was Flo.

Kerry Smith, FALIA, and past president, ALIA, with the help of colleagues, Curtin University of Technology