

Insights – 34, 2021

Tribute: Albert Prior 1944–2021 | Brian Cox, et al.



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Albert Prior, who was born on the 19th of November 1944 in Cambridge, was a high-profile figure in the scholarly communications industry from the late 1970s until 2010. He was also, along with John Merriman and Brian Cox, one of the earliest members of the UKSG committee. There was a brief period in Cambridge before all of this, when it all could have been so very different. A keen guitarist, Albert was part of the music scene in the city in the early 1960s that included Syd Barrett, Roger Waters and David Gilmore. The latter has been quoted as saying, 'I always thought that he was quite a bit better than me on guitar'.



Albert began his career training to be a librarian, but he moved into the book and journal trade at an early stage. Whilst working at Blackwell's he met up with John Merriman who worked for Blackwell's Subscription Agency. Together they planned a conference to bring together their library customers and people from the journal trade to facilitate better communication across the sectors. This had never happened before! This Oxford conference was the forerunner of UKSG.

Once established, UKSG went from strength to strength. Albert was, for several years, the editor of *Serials* (the former title of *Insights*) and later he became the Chair of the group, leading it forward professionally and with some fun along the way. As former UKSG Business Manager, Jill Tolson noted, 'Hazel Woodward had introduced the neutral title "Chair" which Albert continued rather than reverting to the then more common "Chairman", signing his faxes (the method of swift communication in those days!) with a drawing of a chair. This was indicative of his humour and the fun we had while working hard'.

After working for Blackwell's, Albert moved to Swets & Zeitlinger, becoming their first UK representative and building Swets UK into a major competitor to other, more established subscription agents, eventually becoming the leading agent for academic libraries in the country.

2 Albert always remained a strong supporter of UKSG, providing helpful knowledge as a committee member as well as seeking out conference venues and assisting with the preparation and organization of the Annual Conference. His friendly, helpful manner and organizational skills were very much appreciated. For a few years, UKSG also organized European Serials Conferences and, once again, Albert contributed his skills and knowledge to their organization.

Albert's success with Swets in the UK, persuaded the parent company to appoint him to the Board of Swets & Zeitlinger and he spent some time in the Netherlands developing the global business before heading up a new publisher services division he had masterminded called Extenza. Always something of an entrepreneur, Albert established the industry newsletter *Scholarly Communications Report*, with David Brown, and built up a significant subscriber base among the publisher and intermediary communities.

With the advent of online journals and 'big deals' came agreements negotiated between publishers and libraries and library consortia. In 2003, Albert teamed up with his former Swets colleague, Paul Harwood, to establish Content Complete Limited (CCL) which worked on behalf of libraries to secure agreements with publishers. CCL became Jisc's negotiation agent for NESLi2, the UK's national electronic site licence initiative and went on to do work for IReL, the universities in Italy and the pharma companies, GSK and AstraZeneca. Albert retired in 2009 when CCL was acquired by Jisc Collections. Albert undertook several consultancy projects for Jisc Collections in the years immediately after his retirement. Those who worked with him, either briefly or for many years, will no doubt endorse this further quote from David Gilmore, who said, 'He was, in my memory, a class act and a gentleman'.

Albert is survived by his wife, Ann, and by their three children: Suzy, Alex and James.

Brian Cox

Paul Harwood

Jill Tolson

Hazel Woodward

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