April 2010

Notes on the life of James Galbraith

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by **Scott A. Smith** (Alibris) <scott.alan.smith@comcast.net>

In April of this year it was my sad duty to report the death of a dear and longtime friend and colleague, **James Galbraith**. At the time I agreed to post news of this in several places, but given time constraints did so with some brevity. I also agreed to write a more substantive account of his life for subsequent publication; it is with a profound mixture of sadness at his passing and thankfulness to have been counted among his many, many friends that I offer the following.

Jamie was born in the village of Brevig on the Isle of Barra, in the Western Isles of Scotland, on 12. May 1942. His family later moved to the town of Castlebay on Barra. He graduated from **Strathclyde University**, and began his library career at the **Dunfermline Public Library**. While there he also taught Gaelic at **Lauder College**. He served at **Newcastle-under-Lyme** as well, and taught in the library program at **Stoke**.

He moved to Canada in 1968, and served as Chief Librarian in St. John's, Newfoundland, and Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. In later life he recalled his time in Newfoundland and on the prairie with great fondness.

In 1972 **Jamie** joined the staff of **Blackwell's** and worked for the firm in a variety of capacities for the next thirty years, both in the UK and in North America.

Jamie retired initially to Barra in the 1990s, but returned to Canada and spent his last years in Nova Scotia. He died on the 31. March, 2010 in Liverpool.

Jamie was deservedly known as a bookman extraordinaire; he well knew the location of every independent and secondhand bookshop worth noting in the UK, Canada, and the USA. (He was one of very few to be excused Otto Penzler's ban on drink in the shop.) His collection of crime novels and sea stories was likely unsurpassed in Canada.

There's the danger of being regarded as trite to say that Jamie was an icon in the library world, but he was indeed just that. Generations of librarians regarded him with affection, and Jamie stories abound. The late R. Miles Blackwell often remarked that Jamie was one of the best librarians and booksellers he ever knew, and that James was happiest "when he surveyed (or caused) utter disaster".

In November 1995 I embarked on an oral history project of **Blackwell** staff, both from the UK side of the house and from **Blackwell North America**. **Jamie** was the first to be interviewed for the **Blackwell Oral History Project**; we have four hours of his marvelous voice recalling his remarkable life.

He leaves to mourn friends without number; his children **Ewen** and **Stephanie** (both librarians); his daughter-in-law **Thomasina**; a wee granddaughter **Quinn**; and his companion of many years, **Eileen Heaslip**. He will not be soon forgotten.

Under the Hood — Buy, Build, or Borrow

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Are we still talking about ERMS? I was surprised when attending the recent **Electronic Resources & Libraries Conference** how much talk there still was about Electronic Resource Management Systems (ERMS). It's not the same discussion, though. After years of presentations on the frustrations of data entry into ERMS and the lack of interoperability with other software programs, the discussion has started to change from "how do we get all our data into our ERMS?" to "how can we gain the same kind of functionality from other tools?" What if, instead of buying an ERMS product, we build just the functions we need? Or borrow the work of others?
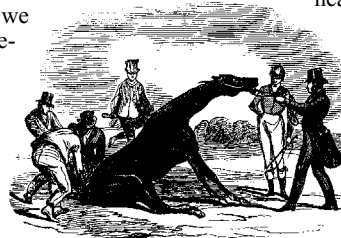
There are certain e-resource tasks that need to be accomplished and not all of them can be effectively done through an ERMS. Sometimes the answer might be another commercial product that can pick up one of the tasks needed for e-resource management. My department desperately needed e-resource purchase tracking; we had trouble knowing where a new resource was in the purchase process and making sure that it progressed smoothly through the acquisition cycle from selection to access. Our ILS could not help; we did not see an ERMS available that could function as a tracking system for purchases. So we borrowed a solution, adapting helpdesk software licensed by another department to manage our new electronic purchases.

Another path is building your own solution. One of the best examples I've seen recently was at the **Electronic Resources & Libraries Conference** when **Ben Heet** and **Robin Malott** from the **University of Notre Dame** presented **CORAL (Centralized Online Resources Acquisitions and Licensing)**. Their team, including **Andy Langhurst**, has built an e-resource management product from scratch, module-by-module as the need arose in their department. They started with fund reporting and usage statistics modules and moved to licensing, as they could not find a commercial solution that fit their requirements. For institutions like **Notre Dame**, the discussion is first what do we need and then how can we build it? Part of building something from scratch is taking a hard look at what functions your library needs, rather than taking a commercial system and adapting your processes to it.

We don't have to build a product that imitates the commercial offerings, we can create the features and functions we need in ways that suit our workflow. For example, one of the major issues with implementing a commercial ERMS is how it will integrate with your ILS. Does it integrate seamlessly or do you need to port data back and forth? For a homegrown product, this may not be an issue. It won't integrate with your ILS and you don't expect it to. Yes, your staff may need to learn multiple interfaces, but it is not just e-resource management that is making this necessary. As purchasing is increasingly done in vendor-provided systems and even print acquisitions require significant Internet searching, library staff are being pushed to move through different interfaces and software products to accomplish their tasks.

Manual data entry has also been a major concern with commercial ERMS products. Conference presentations in the last few years have often discussed how to streamline the heavy load of data entry and what staffing is needed to populate an ERMS. Much of the need for data entry in an ERMS product is centered on the software being a storage place for information. This is always problematic because we have long considered the ILS to be the database of record for purchasing, and, unless these two products really do integrate seamlessly, we find ourselves with two competing sources of information. What if our ERMS are instead a point of need solution for information that is archived elsewhere? Most libraries require that their license agreements be