

# MORE POWER TO THE CIA!

## PHILIP WARK outlines the 1997 Community Initiative Award (CIA), the thrust behind the competition and 1997's winners.

Sometimes it's difficult to find hope and inspiration amongst the constant cuts in budgets and the day to day problems of trying to operate a meaningful library and information service. We all get caught up in our own world of internal politics and the fight for survival in a constantly changing library landscape buffeted by the winds of external whim.

### REAL HOPE

There is a very real positive answer to all these feelings of powerlessness which many library and information workers experience, and that is to look at the entries received for the Library Association Holt Jackson Community Initiative Award (CIA) over the past five years. These entries show that up and down the country many library authorities and voluntary and statutory organisations provide services which are making a significant impact on the communities they are working in partnership with.

### THE AWARD

I know that every time I am involved with the award I come away excited and energised by the creativity, imagination and commitment of all those who have entered. Hope comes flooding back to my heart and I want to shout about all the great ideas which are being carried out and the real importance of library and information services in the lives of individuals. Year after year the award, which is administered by the Community Services Group (CSG), brings to light example after example of good practice in all areas of library and information provision.

### 1997 AWARD

I would like to take this opportunity to thank this year's judges who gave their time and enthusiasm so freely, kept me sane and who I am sure will never forget the high speed chase through the British countryside to enable Kevin to catch his train, which unfortunately he missed by about six minutes!

You will be aware by now who won the 1997 award and who was short-listed, what you may not know is why they were shortlisted, why they matter and what impact they are having on their individual communities, so this is what this article is all about.

### THE PRIZE WINNERS

Horley Local History Centre, one of the services provided through Horley Library, is this year's winner. Horley is a small busy town situated close to Gatwick Airport fairly isolated from major local history source material held in Surrey Record Office in Kingston-upon-Thames and Surrey Local Studies Library at Guildford, both more than twenty miles away.

### A STRATEGIC APPROACH

Over the years Surrey County Council recognising the need to meet the increasing demand for local history material, developed a corporate "Surrey Heritage Strategy" which produces annual action plans and review reports. This strategy stresses the importance of working in partnership with local organisations and communities.

The Chairperson of Horley Local History Society asked the library to house material collected by the very active researchers among its membership. This was the request which sparked the genesis of Horley Local History Centre. The library staff were very aware of the growing demand for local history information but were concerned that they lacked both the time and expertise to respond effectively to these enquiries.

This request fitted in with the Heritage Strategy and further consultation with other organisations such as Horley Town Council, local Parish Councils and neighbouring Local History Societies as well as interested individuals resulted in the setting up of The Horley Local History Centre (HLHC) in November 1995.

### THE SERVICE BEGINS

A corner of Horley Library is devoted

to the Centre where the library's local history stock is combined with material owned by Horley Local History Society (HLHS) together with copies of the most useful material obtained from Surrey Record Office and Surrey Local Studies Library. Some of this is held on closed access, but most of it is available for loan or reference use. There is an enquiry desk which is staffed at set times by HLHS volunteers who have the required subject knowledge and expertise and were also trained in library procedures and enquiry techniques by library staff. They have also received training in what services and facilities the Surrey Record Office and Surrey Local Studies Library have to offer.

### THE CRITERIA OF THE AWARD

The essential criteria for the award are that the project-

- is community based
- is library based
- has defined objectives
- has a measurable impact
- has agency co-operation
- is adaptable
- is ongoing

One of the key elements in allocating this award is the degree to which the project or service is, as the title of the award suggests, a community initiative.

In Horley there was and continues to be widespread consultation and the project is community led rather than library management led, with its own HLHC Management Committee consisting of Councillors representing the County, Borough, Town and Parish and representatives from the local schools, library service, local history societies and public.

The award was set up to encourage good practice which means that the winning projects must be able to be reproduced elsewhere without too much difficulty. HLHC is one of the services provided in Horley Library and has heavy involvement and co-operation from library staff. It is also very



easily adaptable and could be used as a model for the development of other services in the future.

As part of the award criteria the winning projects have to have identifiable objectives and a measurable impact on the communities served. This ensures that it is clearly defined and can be measured by objective criteria. We also ask for corroborative subjective evidence in the form of testimonials from users, messages of support, examples of media coverage etc. This brings to light the social impact of the service which is an important aspect of library and information provision.

HLHC's objectives are explicit, attainable and fit into an overall Council strategy which enables and encourages projects like this to happen. While some of the impact may be subjective a lot of it can be measured in terms of meeting its objectives e.g. the growth in the number of enquiries dealt with, the number of publications produced, donations received, exhibitions and displays held, number of people attending events and talks, the expansion of local knowledge through community interest and assistance.

One of CSG's aims is to encourage and foster partnerships and links with organisations and agencies outwith traditional library and information providers. This aim is mirrored in the award in that the project has to have interagency co-operation.

The setting up and running of HLHC involved a great deal of co-operation and partnership with all sectors of the community who recognise the importance of local history.

The final criterion is that the project is ongoing, i.e. it wasn't set up for a set period and then abandoned. The underlying philosophy in setting up the award was one of sustainability and replicability. Not only is HLHC ongoing, but it is growing from strength to strength with the introduction of the INTERNET and an ambitious publications programme.

#### **DOES IT MATTER?**

Why should we get excited about this particular local history service? The Comedia report identified five main areas where libraries make an impact : Education, Information, Cultural Enrichment, Economic Development and Social Policy. It can be argued that HLHC fits into all five categories.

#### **EDUCATION**

The changes in the education system in the past few years has had a great impact on libraries in general and the provision of local history or local studies material in particular. School children and students are now expected to conduct investigations using original source material as far as possible. This has put tremendous pressure on valuable, in all senses of the word, sometimes fragile items which can be irreplaceable if damaged. Much of the stock in HLHC is a copy of material in local history collections too far to travel to, but there is also original source material which children can look at, touch and be imbued with a sense of wonder. Local history also has relevance from a Lifelong Learning perspective; most people are interested in the area in which they live, their family tree, major events which have happened in the area etc.. These interests can be catalysts to pursue informal learning and further education in the broadest sense of the term.

#### **INFORMATION**

An aspect of the service provided by the volunteers in HLHC is that they help people understand how to find information for themselves. This has valuable implications for the rest of the library service where staff may be under extreme pressure just issuing and discharging books and not have time to show users how to use OPACS, microfiche readers, information sources etc. Once the volunteers have shown users how to find information for themselves these skills are transferable to other parts of the library service. These users will feel more confident in being able to use other sources of information, use the library as an "information gateway" and in effect have a sense of ownership of the library.

#### **CULTURAL ENRICHMENT**

An essential ingredient of Cultural Enrichment is individuals having a strong sense of community identity and what better way of libraries enabling this to happen than through local history collections. In HLHC the involvement of so many community organisations in providing and managing the service ensures that there is a wide base spreading the knowledge and influence of the collection engendering a greater sense of social and community involvement.

#### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

In terms of Economic Development no one is going to pretend that a local history collection is going to have a vast impact on the local economy, but it can have considerable impact for individuals or organisations. Many Library Authorities have introduced shops selling all manner of things including publications from local writer's groups, calendars produced from material held in the local studies collection and local history publications. All these are contributing to the income of the library and local history authors.

#### **SOCIAL POLICY**

An area in which one may think local history doesn't have much influence is Social Policy, but think again! "Capacity building is the systematic approach to assisting community organisations to play a major part in the regeneration of their neighbourhoods. Increasingly community organisations are becoming involved in local partnerships, in the management of projects and services and in the creation of community enterprise." (1) Community development and capacity building should be major platforms for library community involvement in the future, if they aren't already. A strong sense of community identity, co-operation and pride is more likely to engender community involvement in the planning and decision making process. The library's local history collection has a fundamental role to play in this process.

#### **IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY**

Authors, local historians, teachers, school children, students, business people, genealogists, archaeologists and people from all walks of life make use of this valuable community resource. This is a project which has united the many voluntary and statutory organisations, forging new friendships, alliances and relationships. There are now new networking pathways which can be used for purposes beyond local history, have a beneficial effect for all and affect the Social Policy for the area.

The service stimulates the search for knowledge in it broadest sense and uses local history as the jumping off point. HLHC is not only interested in the past but also looks at the contemporary relevance of local history. One of its members regularly photographs



shop fronts as a record for generations to come. While the judges were there, either by design or good fortune!, the centre received two donations of material – a photograph taken in 1904 with delightful personal annotations and a video of a pilot programme about Gatwick Airport made by Carlton Television.

Those of us working in public libraries are all too well aware of the constraints of resources on the development of services we would like to see delivered. In my experience there is no shortage of ideas or enthusiasm from staff and public, the problem is usually shortage of staff, time and money. HLHC is something new and exciting and has made a huge measurable impact in a short time.

Is harnessing the expertise, knowledge and enthusiasm of the “amateur” the way forward for public services in general and libraries in particular to provide what the public purse can’t or won’t? The future will tell, but in the present we have HLHC as a prime example of a firmly rooted community based partnership of two organisations working together to produce a service greater than the sum of the two parts.

### **THE TWO SHORTLISTED WINNERS**

Honiton Advice and Information Centre  
For those of us living in the city we don’t often think of rural areas as being particularly deprived. We frequently have an idealised vision of peace and quiet where life carries on at a leisurely pace.

The reality is very different. Rural services have been systematically cut over a considerable period of time creating a vacuum of need waiting to be filled. Honiton is a small market town in Devon relying heavily on the tourist trade for the majority of its income. Honiton Advice and Information Centre (HAIC) is a multi agency centre, involving both statutory and voluntary organisations, situated in Honiton Library. It is an outstanding example of the community management of services meeting a demonstrable need.

The centre works on a time share basis making use of premises, equipment and resources to provide a focal point for a one stop information and advice shop. Making use of the latest technology it collects, stores and disseminates community information on

behalf of a wide range of organisations for the benefit of the local community in a safe and comfortable environment.

This has evolved out of an originally British Library funded PIRATE (Public Information in Rural Areas Technology Experiment) project which was set up in the 1980’s to examine the application of IT to meet the needs of rural areas for community information.

HAIC is run by a management committee consisting of representatives from all the agencies involved and is the sole base for a wide range of organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Age Concern and WRVS. It is has the enthusiastic moral and financial support of the local Parish, Town and District Councillors which is particularly important in times of cutbacks. Regular use is made of the centre by a range of organisations including the local MP’s surgery, Chamber of Commerce, local businesses etc. and it is supported by the local press.

A project worker co-ordinates the information, produces numerous publications such as the Town Directory, Village Directory, Speakers and Demonstrators, Dance Exercise and Keep-Fit, Information for Carers, Halls for Hire, etc. etc. she even has time to help prepare posters for local organisations on her word processor!

The judges were impressed by the intensive use of the physical space and the creative adaptations to make a little go a long way, they even changed the mobile library garage into an information and advice centre!

We were also impressed by the degree of enthusiastic support which was highly visible from all those who turned up to welcome us, including the Mayor!

### **EVEREST HALL**

This project just tugs at your heart-strings, a cry in the wilderness of rural cuts and alienation. Everest Hall is in Llangair Waterdine, near Knighton Powys and we still don’t know if it is in Shropshire or in Wales!

Here we have a community which lost its school many years ago, its only village shop in the last two years and the post office in the last year. It only started getting terrestrial television a year ago and before that residents had to subscribe to Sky if they wanted to receive any programmes and there is no public transport. The mobile library visits once a fortnight and is a lifeline for many of the community.

Everest Hall belongs to the village. It is a centre for use by a widely dispersed community who come together to share experiences, learn new skills and overcome the sense of loneliness and isolation which many of the residents would feel if the hall was not there.

They have a local community information service, a reminiscence project, a crafts group, computer classes provided through laptops, yoga classes and line dancing. A book club has been formed based on the late Parish Clerk’s book collection donated by his wife. At first they met in the village car park furtively exchanging books kept in the boots of their cars. Now the hall acts as a library and information centre working in conjunction with and supplementing the mobile library service.

This is an example of the community taking the initiative to replace services which the statutory organisations have decided weren’t viable. This is a small but extremely valuable and in a real sense life saving project which won over the hearts and minds of the judges when they visited.

### **THE REAL WORLD**

Do these awards actually influence anything in the real world or are they just so much hot air? All I can do is answer that question from the experience of my own Authority.

Craigmillar in Edinburgh is a Priority Action Area where there is a high level of economic, educational and social need. An early literacy project was set up in the area involving local schools, nurseries, community organisations and the local library. Sunderland received a great deal of publicity when it won the Community Initiative Award in 1995 with “Bookstart” which takes books, poetry and the library into the lives of families with new babies (2). A member of the Craigmillar early literacy project read the publicity, thought it was a great idea and action was taken to set up the Craigmillar Books for Babies scheme which is due to start in January 1998.

In 1996 plans were well under way for the biggest new community library to be built in Edinburgh in decades. Consultations with the Wester Hailes community were ongoing and as part of that process a member of a community group brought up Sunderland’s Bookstart which they had read about in



the Times Educational Supplement. Wester Hailes Library opened on 17th October 1997 and a Books for Babies scheme similar to that in Craigmillar is planned to start in the near future. It also opened with Edinburgh's first teenage library where a lot of consultation had been done with local teenagers. To gain ideas and inspiration Edinburgh staff also visited Petersburn Drop In Centre which won the award in 1994.

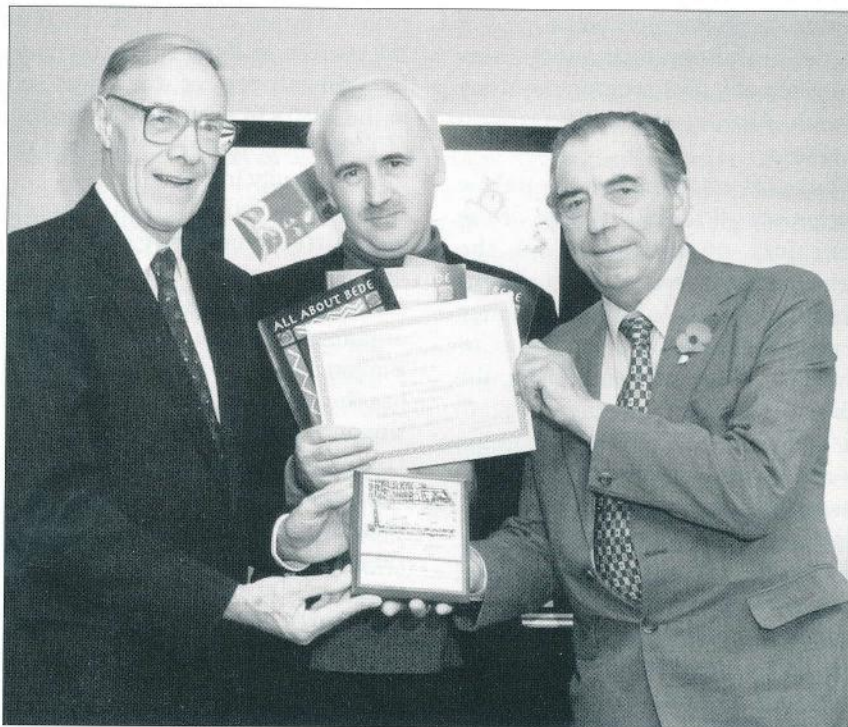
This is just Edinburgh's experience where the award has positively affected the services we provide and no doubt there are numerous other examples up and down the country.

This award attracts coverage from all sectors of the media, there have been articles in the Guardian, Times, Independent, Times Educational Supplement and items on national and local radio and television. This brings library and information services to the attention of a wide and disparate audience who might not think of them as being relevant to their lives, but on learning about these initiatives realise that they are and want them in their community.

*Philip Wark, Chair of CIA Judging Panel 1997, Vice-Chair Community Services Group, Acting Divisional Librarian, Edinburgh City Libraries*

- (1) Steve Skinner, Building Community Strengths. CDF, 1997. £16.95. 0 902406 78 7
- (2) Anne Scott. Bookstart... in Sunderland, PLJ Vol. 10, no 6, 1995 p149 - 150.

## Local Saint Scores Again



The Alan Ball Local History Awards are presented by the Library Service Trust each year to local authorities who produce local history publications of a high standard. Wear Books, the publishing imprint of the Community Services group of the Education and Community Services Department, entered 'All About Bede' for the award earlier this year. This book, which aims to make the life of the Venerable Bede accessible to children, was the result of a project involving Terry Deary and two other artists working with local school children to produce ideas for text and illustrations.

Michael Saich, of the Library Services Trust, was at the City Library and Arts Centre on Tuesday 4 November 1997 to present the award, an engraved trophy, to Councillor Ralph Baxter, Chairman of the Libraries, Museums and Arts Sub Committee. He also presented Terry Deary with a commemorative certificate.

The award ceremony was part of the celebrations for National Libraries Week.

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