

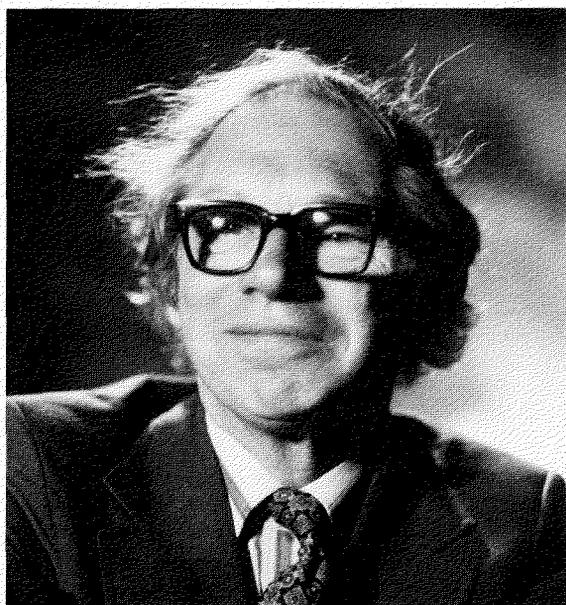
H.G.R. King and the Scott Polar Research Institute

The Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) is housed in a handsome building on Lensfield Road, Cambridge, England. Its library is the core and Harry King, former head librarian, was until his retirement its central force. From 1955 until he stepped down in 1983, Harry King's skill and humanitarian vision of what a library should be provided scholars of the Arctic and Antarctic enlightened access to what is now internationally known as the finest collection of polar material in the world. The discriminating growth of this renowned collection was due to the constructive relationship between Harry King and the director, the late Dr. Brian Roberts. Dr. Roberts, a polar explorer and scholar, combined the twin posts of research associate at SPRI and head of the Polar Regions Division of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. His appointment of Harry King was inspired. Though of very different training and backgrounds, they found their respective visions complementary. Among their achievements is their co-editing of the institute's 19-volume library catalogue published in 1976. Together with their respective talents and the assistance of Ann Savours, as former archivist, they are to be credited for SPRI's high international reputation.

During World War II Harry King served in the Royal Air Force as a radar mechanic and by 1949 he had completed a degree in history at University College, London. Following training with the Library Association he worked in the libraries of London University, the Institute of Historical Research and the Manchester Guardian before his appointment as librarian of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Harry King's peers have called him the elder statesman of polar libraries, for not only did he help build SPRI into the world's largest single collection of published and unpublished material dealing with the Arctic and Antarctic, but he had the vision to promote the development of various ancillary collections such as maps, photographs, films, slides, and art connected with polar exploration. He arranged the collection to serve the users rather than merely display an array of information. Of special interest to historians are the collections of explorers' diaries, logs, and journals and their visual records of sketches, drawings, and watercolours.

Harry King's sensitivity to the potential for the unforeseen connections bearing on polar knowledge is a monument to his career. This often came from understanding the reasons for collecting in areas not immediately visible. Among King's many important acquisitions for SPRI was the purchase of the large group of John Ross watercolours he found by chance while previewing other polar archival material at a Sotheby's auction. By the 1970s SPRI's art archives were comprehensive enough to warrant the compiling of a bibliography to facilitate serious study of the material. Prior to this the visual records of the arctic explorers had been dismissed as incidental; their scholarly significance was undetermined, because of the absence of any tangible category. The imagery appeared of only marginal use to the historian and outside the parameter of fine art. Collections like that of SPRI were instrumental in changing that perception. Today these visual records are not only seen as a means to better understanding the explorers' perceptions of an alien world, but their close recording of



H.G.R. King. Photo credit: John Edward Leigh.

natural phenomena are a contribution to the development of landscape art.

Harry King's own work editing *Edward Wilson's Diary of the Terra Nova Expedition to the Antarctic, 1910-1912*, published in 1972, has enhanced the appreciation of polar art. Wilson was an accomplished landscape watercolourist, and on Scott's ill-fated journey he painted a beautiful series of watercolour views. King included these expressive images in Wilson's published diary. Their remarkable survival is explained by the explorer-artist's 28 October 1911 diary entry stating that he had packed up 118 watercolours in two parcels to be sent home on the *Terra Nova* to his wife. A selection of these was later issued as commemorative prints by his widow to raise money for the Red Cross, and a set now enhances the Arctic Institute of North America's own art collection.

The Scott Polar Research Institute was founded in 1920. It is a memorial to Captain Robert Falcon Scott, RN, and his companions who lost their lives in March 1912 on their return journey from the South Pole. It came into being through a balance left in the account of the lost expedition's Memorial Fund put together by the City of London to support the dependents. At first the institute was housed in one room in Cambridge, as a place for polar travelers and explorers to meet and deposit collected material that might be of interest to future polar research. In 1963 Harry King wrote that the founding of the Scott Polar Research Institute was "largely the inspiration and brain child of Frank Debenham," a geologist and survivor of the Scott expedition. Debenham was also founder and first professor of the Department of Geography at Cambridge.

By the time Harry King joined the staff SPRI had built the elegant stone building with graceful arched windows now standing in the heart of Cambridge. Later in 1965 with the

help of the Ford Foundation, King had the opportunity to oversee the building of a new wing and to put his personal stamp on enlarged facilities. Today these include a museum, gallery, offices, research rooms, the library, a map room, and an archive room. Harry King believed his opportunity to supervise in detail the building of the new wing was a unique privilege for a librarian. Details such as comfortable, stable library tables, pleasant desks flooded by natural lights from nearby windows and handsome polished wood bookcases with adjustable shelves all reveal an understanding of the needs of both the collection and the researchers. These particulars combined with intelligent interest in each individual who found his or her way to the library made research under Harry King's eye a memorable experience. As one former scholar remarked: "His genial presence and knowledgeable helpfulness are what many visitors to the Institute will best recall."

Through the 1930s the Scott Polar was a base for planning a number of scientific expeditions to the Arctic. During World War II it became a center for government research into cold weather warfare, clothing and equipment. Previously funded directly by the British Treasury, the institute became part of Cambridge University's Department of Geography in 1957.

SPRI came to have three roles, teaching (or "reading" as it is known at Cambridge), research and information. Teaching takes the form of formal lectures given to university undergraduates in addition to the lectures, seminars and supervisions that are part of the one-year M. Phil. in polar studies. The degree covers all aspects of the polar world, Arctic and Antarctic. The institute's Ph.D. staff, who work in the fields of oceanography, glaciology, geophysics and historical and economic geography, is ample evidence of the variety of scholarship pertaining to polar studies. These areas are also pursued by visiting research students and established scholars who recognize SPRI to be the most comprehensive center of polar material in the world.

The institute's other function is to provide polar information to an international public. Part of this role is served by SPRI's journal *Polar Record*, which is published three times a year and is directed to a well-informed public rather than specialists. It incorporates *SCAR Bulletin*, the organ of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research. Like *Arctic*, it is an multidisciplinary publication with comprehensive articles in the sciences, social sciences and humanities. Many of the articles represent work based on primary research at the Institute. Of growing importance in the field of polar bibliography is the

institute library's computerized bibliography published under the title *Polar and Glaciological Abstracts*. Formerly titled *Recent Polar and Glaciological Literature*, its present status as a leading journal in its field owes much to Harry King's editorial expertise.

In 1959 Harry King's position as head of the library became a university post, with the dual responsibility for overseeing both the library and the information center.

King saw these dual roles as complicating the organization of the institute's library. He wrote of the preparation needed to answer a request from "an advanced ethnography student studying the customs of the Chukchi of northern Siberia or supply at short notice a rural police force with blue-prints for snowshoes." These two hats of the former librarian may well have inspired his book *The Antarctic*, published in 1969. Designed to introduce the layperson to the south polar regions, it did so with clarity.

King presented a good summary of the ways in which SPRI acquired its far-ranging material in a brief article for the *Geography and Map Division Bulletin* in 1972. It seems the original nucleus of the institute came from the published scientific papers of Scott's *Terra Nova* expedition, the complete stock having been handed over to the founders. This collection was followed by the bequests of private libraries of many important explorers. The Lefroy collection of Franklin papers is of particular importance to current Canadian arctic scholarship. Of like importance to the Antarctic was the library of Hugh Robert Mill (1861-1944), a noted polar historian who, King tells us, was the confidant of Shackleton, Scott, Amundsen, Nansen and Byrd. Mill was the former librarian of the Royal Geographical Society and his collection of 500 books and pamphlets became the base for the library's Antarctic section. An acquisition of major importance to the circumpolar nature of the arctic collection was the purchase of the library of Vaino Tanner (1881-1948), a former professor of geography at Helsinki University. His collection revealed his interest in the geology, geography and ethnology of the Fennoscandian region, Lapland, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Under King wherever possible SPRI preserved all large collections of papers intact, even when this often involved the acquisition of material of no direct polar interest. Among these groups are the diaries of Lady Jane Franklin covering 1810-71, many of them dealing with Lady Jane's travels in Tasmania, Hawaii and Europe. Studies of Jane Franklin and her husband's governorship of Tasmania are currently in progress, an indication of the wisdom of building the collection for the unforeseen needs of future researchers. Harry King's search for Russian material is another example of the interdisciplinary needs of circumpolar scholarship. The institute's strength in this area originated with the purchase in 1951 of the important Russian and German polar library of a former member of the old Imperial Russian Navy, Leonid Breitfus (1864-1950). King believed that the institute would never have been able to attract eminent scholars such as Terence Armstrong (a former deputy director of SPRI) had it not collected arctic material from the Soviet Union.

Complementing the above are the SPRI special archival holdings, including the letters and diaries of Sir William Edward Parry, Sir George Back, Sir John Franklin, W.S. Bruce, Sir Raymond Priestley and Sir Vivian Fuchs. These and the special collections already mentioned even include the organ used on Parry's unmatched expedition into Lancaster Sound in 1819.



Scott Polar Research Institute.



W.E. Parry's barrel organ, from the expedition 1819-20, and an illustrated dome in the old wing of Scott Polar Research Institute.

The vast areas covered by the Arctic and the Antarctic, with the great variety of natural features and peoples, makes the possibility of any library being totally comprehensive beyond reach. Instead the SPRI attempts to balance its own collection by encouraging cooperation with polar institutes and libraries around the world. This included Harry King's involvement in the founding of the Northern Libraries Colloquy, now called Polar Libraries Colloquy. Its first gathering was held in Edmonton in 1970 and the third was organized and hosted by the Scott Polar in 1973. The meetings, which are every two years and are in Columbus, Ohio, in 1992, are not primarily for the purpose of giving papers, but rather to talk about ways of achieving international cooperation among polar libraries.

Over the years of his involvement King visited most of the polar centers in the Western world, enabling other institutes to share his experience. Important among these travels was King's four-month visit in 1976 to New Zealand to assist the Canterbury Museum at Christchurch with the setting up of their newly built Antarctic Library and museum wing. Funded by the Commonwealth Foundation in London, this visit provided King with the opportunity to visit the principal polar collections in New Zealand and Australia.

King's career and his relationship with the library of the Scott Polar Research Institute and with the hundreds of polar scholars, scientists and enthusiasts from all over the world are probably best summed up by the late Alan Cooke, who in a letter shortly before his death in 1989, wrote: "I know virtually nothing of his [Harry King's] biographical details, although I was his assistant librarian from 1967-1975 and, of course, I already knew him well when I was a graduate student in the SPRI, 1963-1965. I think of him as knowledgeable, patient, humorous, full of good will. He is the best kind of specialist librarian, thoroughly familiar with the literature in his care. His long experience of aiding scholars in every field of polar study gave him an unrivalled familiarity with the whole range of polar literature, and his book on Antarctica is abundant evidence of his special interest in that region."

In 1983 Harry King tried to retire. The transition to new leadership was not easy and twice he was recalled to smooth the way. For even though Harry King's career was that of a pre-computer librarian, his experience was invaluable in laying the groundwork for the SPRI transfer to the world of high-tech. During the past decade Harry King has edited and compiled several publications, including *South Pole Odyssey*, *Atlantic Ocean*, *The Arctic*, *The Antarctic Diary of Victor Campbell* and a catalogue of the Henry Robertson Bowers papers.

Because today we know our globe to be fragile, reasons for preserving the polar regions from exploitation multiply. If we are successful in protecting these vast natural laboratories it will ultimately be measured by the contribution of skilled librarians such as H.G.R. King and his work with the Scott Polar Research Institute from 1955 to 1983.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ARMSTRONG, T., BERTRAM, C., and ROBIN, G. 1983. Harry King, Foreword. *Polar Record* 135:547-548.
- COOKE, G.A. 1990. A Brief History of the Polar Libraries Colloquy. In: *Man's Future in Arctic Areas. Proceedings of the 13th Polar Libraries Colloquy, 10-14 June. 10-11.*
- KING, H.G.R. 1969. *The Antarctic*. London: Blandford Press.
- _____. 1965. The Library of the Scott Polar Research Institute. *Geography and Map Division Bulletin* 61:7-12.
- _____, ed. 1982. *South Pole Odyssey; selections from the Antarctic diaries of Edward Wilson*. London: Poole, Dorset, Blandford Publication. 176 p.
- _____, compiler. 1985. *Atlantic Ocean*. Oxford: Clio Press. 250 p.
- _____, compiler. 1985. *The Arctic*. Oxford: Clio Press. 272 p.
- _____. 1986. Brrr, It's Antarctica: Down there artists can capture atmosphere better than photographers can. *Connoisseur*, August:70-73.
- _____, ed. 1988. *The wicked mate; the Antarctic diary of Victor Campbell*. Alburgh, Norfolk: Bluntisham Books and the Erskine Press. 192 p.
- _____, ed. 1990. *A catalogue of the Henry Robertson Bowers papers in the archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge*. Cambridge: SPRI. 206 p.
- SPRI. n.d. *The Scott Polar Research Institute, Information Booklet*. Cambridge, England.
- WILSON, E. 1972. *Diary of the Terra Nova Expedition to the Antarctic, 1910-1912*. Edited by H.G.R. King. London: Blandford Press.

Constance Martin
Research Associate
The Arctic Institute of North America
The University of Calgary
2500 University Drive N.W.
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
T2N 1N4