

In Memoriam: Dr Bríd McGrath BA (Mod), MLitt, PhD, DLIS

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It was with great sadness that the Irish library community learned of the passing of Dr Bríd McGrath on the 13th of August 2025. A woman of prodigious talents, she was highly regarded for her historical research work on 17th century Irish towns and parliaments, her lectureship in palaeography and in applied social research and her valuable work in social research and policy. As someone who stood for her convictions, she advocated for the protection of Dublin's historical ecosystem and was a participant in the occupation of Woodquay in the 1970s (RTE Archives, [no date]). She was especially known to us in the library world for her excellent advocacy and consultancy work on librarianship and information literacy.

LIBRARIAN

Bríd had a long history with libraries, as librarian, library consultant and library educator. In the 1980s, while studying for her M. Litt., she worked full-time as a librarian at the National Rehabilitation Board (now the National Disability Authority), where she set up two libraries. After this, she moved to the National Institute of Higher Education, Limerick (now the University of Limerick) as Humanities Librarian. She subsequently worked as a librarian at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), the Stadtbuecherei at Bonn and Irish Cement, and was also an information consultant at the Department of Health and Children.

LIBRARY CONSULTANCY

In order to keep working with libraries, as she began her PhD with TCD in 1987, she developed her library and information consultancy business (McGrath, 2015). The McGrath Barratt & Associates training consultancy, subsequently created in 1994 with her colleague Julia Barratt, was highly regarded in the Irish library world and the courses provided reflected their wide understanding of the theory and practice of librarianship and the changing information needs of librarians and information workers. Many of us were lucky to have participated in these library and research courses, where the infectious enthusiasm for the course topics was just as useful and motivational as the knowledge imparted. The consultancy was one of the very few training resources for continuing professional development at that time and was invaluable in allowing us to build our technical and managerial skills and advance the profession.

LIBRARY CREATION

A trailblazer always, she was the first health board librarian in Ireland, and she established libraries for several social organisations. One of these was the innovative Combat Poverty Agency library, created in the late 1980s, which provided a comprehensive collection of relevant information resources, as well as a librarian providing information services, in-house and by phone, to community groups and researchers across the country. This pioneering library was networked with the Community Projects Foundation and the Volunteer Centre in Britain, via VOLNET, their computerised database of research and documents on community development and social services. Bríd was later instrumental in the establishment of the National Documentation Centre on Drug Use at the Health Research Board (HRB), now the HRB National Drugs Library, as a consultant librarian in 2002, and she also consulted on libraries for ENFO (the

Department of the Environment's Environmental Information Service) and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), among others.

LECTURING AND LITERATURE

Throughout her professional career, Bríd was a strong advocate for libraries and librarians, promoting lifelong learning and access to information for all. As well as her lectureships on history and archives, Bríd lectured on librarianship in the Department of Library and Information Studies, University College Dublin (UCD) and on the Diploma in Information Studies, TCD. She taught information literacy and research dissemination as Adjunct Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work and Social Policy, TCD. Her strong belief in the value of evidence through research meant that she made several valuable contributions to the literature including, for example, a report co-written by TCD's Children's Research Centre for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs on young people's library use and requirements: 'Young People and Public Libraries in Ireland: Issues and Opportunities (McGrath et al., 2010).'

LIBRARY AND RESEARCH

Bríd's authoritative historical research and valuable library advocacy complemented each other. She encouraged librarians to develop their research and publishing skills, while bringing librarian rigour and thoroughness to her research outputs. Bríd created the Dr Bríd McGrath Fellowship for Independent Scholars, a visiting research fellowship enabling independent scholars and early-career scholars and adjunct or part-time teachers to carry out research in Marsh's Library (est. 1707) and the Edward Worth Library (est. 1733). In 2018, in recognition of her significant work, she became a David Walker Memorial Research Fellow at the Bodleian Law Library, developing work on the Operations of the Irish House of Commons, 1613–1648. Her many achievements in the professional areas in which she practiced and excelled are far too numerous to outline here, suffice it to say that she brought great intelligence, curiosity and passion to all her professional endeavours.

Our deepest condolences go to Bríd's family and friends on this tremendous loss. The impact Bríd has had on the Irish library world has been incalculable. We are lucky to have had the benefit of her professional knowledge, fearless advocacy and generosity of spirit.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam dílis.

REFERENCES

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