

Tribute to Ana Healey (11 September 2014)
(By Colin Annis, Librarian, Institute of Classical Studies)

My first encounter with Ana was as an interviewee for the Senior Library Assistant post in 1979: with both of us perched on a chair, surrounded by books and papers, it turned out to be not so much an interview, more of a pleasant chat! Heaven knows what HR Departments would make of that these days, but that was Ana all over, as I was soon to learn: never one to stand on ceremony, she was highly approachable by all, and treated everyone the same, from the most eminent academics to first-year undergraduates. Not long after I started, I remember being introduced to one such eminent academic, who I'm happy to say is here today, and I well remember his words, still resonant to this day some 35 years later: "You've come to the right place: this is the best Library in the world, with the best Librarian in the world!" Even allowing for a slight exaggeration, it's not hard to see what he meant. Ana had a remarkable memory for the names of all the readers who passed through the Library's doors, as indeed she did for the authors and titles of books: marry these two virtues together, and you get a combination highly conducive to the fostering of the kind of "club" atmosphere very seldom found in libraries, and one which I like to think persists even now, despite the fact that it's grown to about twice the size that it was then; and this is largely down to Ana's influence.

Ana's kindness and goodness of heart shone through; yet she was not afraid to give a ticking off to anyone who had committed some library misdemeanour, whilst at the same time remaining on good terms with the offender – an enviable skill! She was also very much a Librarian of the old school, and all the better for that. It must be remembered that most of Ana's working life was spent in a pre-computerised, pre-electronic age, but she didn't quite escape its clutches completely. In the late 1980s, just before her retirement, the Library was suddenly presented with – horror of horrors - a computer (known as Ibycus after the Greek poet) which claimed to be able to search virtually the whole of ancient Greek literature. Ana duly treated it with a natural scepticism, not so much perhaps with the substance of the claim, but with its value: research was never meant to be too easy! I myself speak as a sympathetic successor, struggling to keep up with the latest technological complexities of librarianship.

Although not noted for the tidiness of her office (!), Ana none the less showed that she had the kind of organisational mind which made her very adept at marshalling facts and information from her phenomenal memory, and clearly knew where important items were to be found: testament to this was the wonderful exhibition which she mounted for the Hellenic Society's centenary in 1979, displaying snippets about eminent scholars throughout its history, and all kinds of other interesting memorabilia.

When Ana finally decided to retire in 1989, characteristically she wanted to leave with the minimum of fuss, despite having given over 30 years' invaluable service. Fortunately, however, she was given a send-off that she entirely merited: to a packed lecture hall in the Institute of Archaeology's building in Gordon Square (where the Library was then located) a special lecture was given in her honour by Peter Parsons, and others sang her praises, to which Ana responded with her customary humility and grace. But above all it is her kindness to colleagues which will be remembered most, and I'd like to end, if I may, by quoting from just one of the numerous tributes which the Library received following the announcement of her passing:- *"Thank you so much for sending this very sad news. Ana was special in every way, respected and loved by all who worked with her. Her knowledge of every book in the Library was astonishing as was her generosity in sharing this knowledge with every user, whether illustrious professor or first time user. She was the "boss" that I admired more than any other before or since and her kindness to me ... showed her deep humanity and warmth. This is very sad news that will bring tears to many eyes."* That, I think, says it all. Thank you.