

Sidney Albert Tasker—An appreciation

Assistant Secretary BCS, 1958–65

Sidney Tasker became an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries in 1931, after passing the two examinations, with papers in company law, mercantile law, accountancy, banking and exchange, economics, company secretarial practice and procedure at meetings. The Companies Act of 1929 had recently become law: manual accounting systems were beginning to give place to mechanised procedures. In the medium-sized company the duties of the Secretary and the Accountant were being divided; accountants wrote up the main books of account, registers and minutes, themselves. Those who were advocating an increased use of machinery in offices saw at about this time a mechanisation chaos in a Northern city, which was only resolved by partially reverting to manual methods. It was a time of growing unemployment; the professionally qualified man could not get a job easily; those in work had to give much overtime at monthend and other periods of pressure. The training literature made little reference to mechanisation, concentrating on principles, proper certification and authorisation of expenditure and records, to give an audit trail.

It was fortunate for the British Computer Society that a man of his experience, prepared to write up records himself, with training in the legal framework of business, was available to work for the new and growing Society, at a modest salary. Membership had risen from around 400 to 1,300 at 30 April 1958, and it had become necessary to have a full-time man with accounting experience in the office. He joined in the enthusiasm of the honorary officers, and was appointed Office Manager in October 1958. About that time, the earlier staff who had worked hard for the London Computer Group and the newly merged Society decided to leave.

Tasker found himself alone in the middle of a membership expansion of 603 new members on to the register by 30 April 1959. Circulation of *The Computer Journal* was growing rapidly, helped by the exchange-publication arrangement, which had been negotiated with the ACM. Preparations for the December 1958 Exhibition at Olympia, where the BCS had a stand, had been dealt with by honorary officers; certain details were left to the office. There were a number of committees where he had to take the minutes, which had the advantage of bringing him rapidly into contact with matters.

For nearly seven years, he gave unstintingly of his time and energy to the Society. In 1958–59, income including sales of journals and advertisements was £11,220; a small net surplus was achieved and the accumulated fund at 30th April stood at £291. He was himself listing and banking all receipts as soon as possible after they arrived; his other basic records were written up usually after office hours, because of the many interruptions and meetings during the day.

By 1961–62 the honorary treasurer received from him a quarterly trial balance, from which we were able to give Council accurate statements of income, expenditure and the forecast position, at a critical time in the Society's growth. The publications committee received analyses of receipts, between current revenue released and the upheld prepayments, plus a territorial analysis of overseas journal sales; this permitted them to forecast the size and print order for future issues.

By 30 April 1962, without material increase in total office salaries, income had risen to £16,256 and the surplus of £905 of 1961–62 raised the accumulated fund



to £5,690. The honorary officers had received help of a secretarial nature from their organisations, in running many visible activities of meetings, etc. The office work behind the scenes for the Assistant Secretary had involved much overtime. Mr. Tasker continued to be mainly responsible for the accounting records for a further three years of continuing growth.

On several occasions in the office, and at annual conferences, Mr. Tasker was assisted by his wife, for example to form the registration and enquiry counter, in the days before a conference department was formed.

His close involvement with the detail, and continued battle to keep the records up-to-date, meant that he had no time for considering alternative systems. Mechanisation, other than the addressing machine and a simple add-lister, had not been possible on the earlier budgets, and all the honorary officers had current work for the Society, plus their daily job. The accelerated growth of the Society made the decision to reorganise even more difficult for the new honorary officers, when it was eventually taken. The Assistant Secretary's application to his task had, however, enabled the Society to keep a close control on detail through its formative years, and the accumulated fund at 30 April 1966 partly reflected the economies in the office of the earlier period.

After leaving the Society's service to take up another post in September 1965, he assisted other organisations in a professional office, where he seemed again to be involved to bring records up-to-date.

His experience of dealing with people over the years taught him much about human nature; few knew his real reactions, because he tended to keep his opinions to himself. He was a man, who, given a job to do, got down to it himself. At Council meetings and conferences he kept in the background, ready to help when asked; appreciating what he was doing for the Society at modest cost, members of Council respected and appreciated his efforts. In my judgement, having worked with him, he was at all times motivated by a sense of vocation to maintain the principles of his profession, without thought of personal enhancement; he applied this attitude in serving a number of organisations for over forty years.

Our deepest sympathy goes out to his widow, Mrs. Phyllis Tasker, in her unexpected and sad bereavement and loss.

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