

GEORGE BOSTON (1942-2020)

George Boston, longtime IASA member, contributor to many IASA and UNESCO initiatives, and a staunch advocate for the preservation of sound and audiovisual materials, passed away on 9 December, 2020.

George joined IASA in 1985. At the time he was working as manager of the camera and sound technicians at the BBC Open University Production Centre in Milton Keynes, UK. He had worked his way up from a recording technician at the BBC music studios in London, through work as a sound and camera operator in Manchester to being assistant head of the Audio Unit in Manchester.

At Milton Keynes, one of his responsibilities was for the safekeeping of tapes and films in the libraries. He sought advice about this duty, which brought him into contact with Helen Harrison - then the General Secretary of IASA - and Dietrich Schüller. Through meeting these IASA members George became more aware of the importance and imperatives of sound and audiovisual archiving, especially in the light of what was then, the approach of digital technology.

In IASA George found many of the answers he was looking for, and also unpacked a whole new set of questions that he hadn't thought to ask before. Not being a person to take without giving, George plunged headlong into the business of IASA. In 1995, Albrecht Häfner was elected Secretary General of IASA and had to step down as Secretary of the Technical Committee. George agreed to take Albrecht's place and served until 2005.

Much of George's work was with UNESCO and not directly for IASA. In the late 1980s, Helen Harrison represented IASA at a number of meetings on subjects as diverse as training for AV archivists, intellectual property and legal deposit. George was asked to accompany Helen to these meetings whenever she felt that a technical voice might be helpful. One result of Helen's work was that the official status of IASA within UNESCO was raised.

As a raw recruit at his first IASA Conference in 1985 in East Berlin (and still, he said, in a state of severe culture shock), George was asked to join the team of people from FIAF, FIAT/IFTA and IASA responsible for organising the second Joint Technical Symposium in Berlin in 1987. At the end of the JTS, UNESCO had arranged two meetings; one about training for AV archivists and the other a meeting of archive technicians with manufacturers of equipment. George was asked to Chair this second meeting.

The meeting was a success and the manufacturers' representatives suggested that a more permanent liaison group of archive technicians be formed. UNESCO agreed and established the Technical Co-ordination Committee (TCC), made up of representatives of the technical committees of FIAF, FIAT/IFTA and IASA, with George as the Chair. The TCC went on to organise the 1990 and 1995 symposia with George as the relentless lead organiser. The TCC also published several texts which George edited and contributed to. George was asked to represent IASA to discuss the establishment of the Memory of the World Programme (MOTW) in June 1992. The original idea was that the Programme would only include text materials.

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George was asked to represent IASA again at the first meeting of UNESCO's International Advisory Committee (IAC) meeting in 1993, where he successfully argued the case for sound and audiovisual materials to be included in the Programme. Also discussed at this first meeting was the creation of the Sub-Committee on Technology (ScoT). George was appointed Rapporteur with Dietrich Schüller as the neutral Chair. George continued as Rapporteur until April 2011, all the while maintaining a strong commitment to sound and audiovisual materials and archives. In 2001, the IAC created the Registers Sub-Committee to allow nominations for the MOTW International Register to be better vetted. George was, again, appointed a member and Rapporteur of this new body, serving until 2005.

George also undertook a number of Missions for UNESCO to advise various organisations on ways to improve their library and archive operations. These included trips to Bhutan (twice in 1992), Yemen (1992), India (1995), Kenya (1998) and the Bahamas and Jamaica (1999). He was also asked to examine and report on the condition of the AV archives at UNESCO headquarters in 1995.

In 1995 George, on behalf of the IASA Technical Committee, undertook a Survey of Endangered Audio Carriers for UNESCO and again in 2002 with the addition of a number of moving image formats to the survey's scope.

Seemingly in possession of boundless energy, George maintained his involvement with IASA and UNESCO MOTW even as age slowed him down. He curtailed his involvement only when his wife Sue, who had previously accompanied him on some of his working trips, became ill and required more help and support at home. George passed away in December 2020 and Sue followed 28 January 2021.

George's consistent involvement over the years and his commitment to IASA's aims was commendable, his critical involvement with the organisation was legendary, as was his capacity and willingness to undertake work for the good of sound and audiovisual archiving in general and IASA in particular. He will be sorely missed.

Kevin Bradley
IASA President, 2008-2011

Tribute adapted from Kevin Bradley's remarks at the 2011 IASA Award of Recognition ceremony in Frankfurt, Germany.