MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviews with

Leslie T. Morton

Interviews conducted by T. MARK HODGES and SHANE GODBOLT 9 August 1999 and 27 February 2000

Transcript edited and prepared for publication by Tom Flemming December 2004

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Mark Hodges: This interview of Leslie T. Morton is taking place at his home in Pinner, England (just north of London) on the afternoon of Monday, the 9th of August, 1999. Mark Hodges, a Fellow of the Medical Library Association (MLA) and also a fellow countryman, interviews him. Firstly, Leslie, let me say it's a great honor to interview you for the MLA Oral History Project. As you must know, you've been selected because of your ties to MLA and because you are numbered among the 105 Most Memorable Members of its first hundred years. Moreover, if there were ever a list of the 100 most memorable medical librarians of all time, I think you would make that list. One distinction you have — among many — is that you are the only non-North American medical librarian to be chosen for interview in this series. Because you had a life long before MLA came into the picture, let's begin at the beginning. Please introduce yourself by stating your full name and the place and date of your birth.

Leslie Morton: My name is Leslie Thomas Morton; I was born in London on July the 20th, 1907.

MH: And perhaps, Leslie, you'd care to tell us of your parents and your siblings, if any, your spouse and children, and any grandchildren.

LM: My parents were ordinary working-class people. I had two sisters, both of whom have now died. I was married to Helen Shrosbree¹ in 1933. We celebrated our Diamond Wedding in 1993, and sadly, she died on the 7th of June, 1997. We have three grandchildren.

MH: Perhaps I should tell you that Leslie proudly showed me before this interview began that her Majesty the Queen — Queen Elizabeth II — sent him and his wife a congratulatory telegram, and it sits very close to his Marcia C. Noyes Award. Tell us, Leslie, now, something of your schooling, and forgive me if I interject translations or explanations for an American audience.

LM: I went to Haverstock High School and although I usually came in the first half dozen, I wasn't top of the grade until the last year, by a fluke. When a bad algebra paper was substituted, I did better on the second. So, just for that once, I came top of the grade. In those days, the University College London Library seemed to recruit somebody as a Junior almost every year. In 1923, I was asked by my headmaster how would I like to be a librarian and I replied: "I wouldn't mind, sir". He said: "Well, if you wouldn't mind, you don't mind if you do or if you don't; now I'll ask you again. Would you like to be a librarian?" And then I replied: "Yes, please, sir". So I was sent to University College for an interview and I got the job.

MH: So the influence really was the headmaster, or as they would say in American high school, the "principal" more or less decided it for you.

LM: He did, yes. When I went there I was put in the brand new medical sciences library. This was financed by the Rockefeller Foundation, so I had the opportunity of meeting a number of research people who later became distinguished Americans.

MH: So you didn't really opt for medical librarianship. You were put in the medical library ..., you were put in a medical library, one of the divisions of the University College Library. Is that correct?

LM: I was, in fact, typed so early, but later on, I had the chance to go part-time to the School of Librarianship at University College. This was the first school of its kind in the U.K.; I believe, in the world. It was the inspiration of MacAlister and Osler. It held examinations and granted certificates. It has its own diploma. The Library Association accepted its certificates, and five or more passes, plus two years practical experience, qualified for ALA. This [qualification] I obtained in 1932. The Fellowship of the Library Association was granted after presentation of a thesis or equivalent proof of senior status. Mine was awarded in 1964.

MH: You mentioned "Osler". I just confirmed this; this was, indeed, the Sir William Osler,

Regius Professor at Oxford and previous to that, a professor at McGill University in

Montréal, a co-founder of the Medical Library Association. Later, he was Professor of

Medicine at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. It was the very same man.

LM: Yes, he ended up as Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford where he died in 1919.

MH: So, armed with your Associateship of the Library Association - that is your certificate

of proficiency in librarianship - and now a chartered librarian, you were able to secure a

post at the Royal Society of Medicine Library, which I think you're going to refer to

henceforward as the RSM.

LM: RSM, yes.

MH: Arguably, the premier medical library in the United Kingdom. So, could you tell us a

little of your two years there?

LM: Well, it was not very well-organized. It had a very good deputy librarian who knew

where everything was, and it had no proper classification. So, you often went to him if you

wanted to know where a book was shelved. Eventually, they decided to have a proper

classification. In those days, there was only Dewey or the UDC. They opted for the UDC. It

was found that only two of us - Jeffrey Hipkins and myself, the two at the bottom of the staff

ladder - knew anything about UDC, so we were given the task of beginning classification

of the library. That's how the Royal Society of Medicine adopted the UDC classification. It

wasn't until recent years that they changed to [the] NLM [classification].

MH: ... or, the National Library of Medicine.

LM: Yes.

MH: And, just expanding on some of these abbreviations we have used ..., one was "ALA",

that stands for "Associate of the Library Association"; "UDC", "Universal Decimal Classification", which for those of you who don't know, is an expansion of Melville Dewey's decimal classification. Moving on, Leslie, to your first major appointment, which I have as 1935 (but I think it's, in fact, 1933), you became librarian at St. Thomas Hospital Medical

School?

LM: No, that was the Royal Society of Medicine. St. Thomas was in 1935.

MH: Oh, '35. Oh, so I did have it correctly.

LM: Yes.

MH: Can you tell us something about the hospital and the medical school, and its parentage?

Under whose umbrella did it fall?

LM: Well, St. Thomas Hospital was really founded in 1106, as St. Mary Overie. It was a kind of hospice on the south side of London Bridge — then the only bridge across the Thames in London — and it was meant to filter off people who'd come back from pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. Thomas Becket in Canterbury, and who might be suffering from some infectious disease. It was later renamed: "St. Thomas" after the martyr [i.e.: Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury]. It was closed by Henry VIII, reopened by Edward VI, and then it was renamed after St. Thomas the Apostle. The medical school opened in 1871. It was a poor library when I went there; it had only one staff, a secretary. Students were then expected to buy most of their books themselves; the library was a place to read them. Standard texts and also some literature for teaching staff were there. Senior staff generally used the Royal Society of Medicine and the royal colleges.

MH: Are there any other things that you'd like to say about your career choice and your professional education in those early years? Do you think we've covered all the bases?

LM: I think we've covered things ..., yes, yes.

MH: Well, let's move on to what I'm referring to as the bibliography. For those of you who don't know what I'm referring to (and if you don't know, you probably shouldn't be listening to this tape) [laughs] ..., but it is better known as *Garrison and Morton's Medical Bibliography*². Or would you like to give me the full title as you remember it?

LM: Yes, a detailed account of its history is in the 5th edition, edited by Jeremy Norman, page five (Roman figure five)3. I first became interested in the history of medicine at University College, where Professor Charles Singer's room was close to the library and it then contained many of the secondary medical classics. He was a charming, kindly man, often called me in to explain the importance of a book he was consulting. I remember him showing me Aselli's De lactibus⁴ and pointing out that it was the earliest medical book with colored plates. He would sometimes ask me to take a taxi and take a book back to the Royal College of Physicians [Library], because it was so valuable that he had promised them he would send it back by hand. At the Royal Society of Medicine, I used to read books and journals on medical history; there was a very wide collection there. And here it was I came across Garrison's "Revised Students' Check-list" in the Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine, 1933⁵. I never met Garrison or communicated with him. In 1938, I thought again about the "Check List" and I suggested to my friend, W. J. Bishop, that good author and subject indexes would improve it. We also considered that explanatory annotations would be valuable. After I had started on it, I realized that many more entries needed to be added to make it really useful. I also found that because Garrison was such a good German scholar, he was rather top heavy on the German material.

MH: At the expense of say, French, or Italian or British works in the field?

LM: Yes, yes.

MH: Did you feel that it was important then to rectify that imbalance?

LM: Well, I went ..., when I went into the detailed history of a particular subject, I found that one could add quite a lot more and make it more useful.

MH: I read in your article on the compilation of the bibliography⁶ about how much of it was done during the early years of World War II, so I'd be interested in hearing your experience of the war years: such things as air raids, evacuation and the like. You might be interested in knowing that just in the last few days, I visited Camp Eden up in Yorkshire, which is a theme museum that recalls the war years — 1939 to 1945 — as it affected the civilian and the man in the street. I was a mere child of six when it started and twelve when it ended, but you were a few years older than that and probably remembered it more vividly. Be an "Edward R. Murrow", and tell it like it was.

LM: At the beginning of the war, when the air raids started, we used to sleep down here. We had the doors closed, and my little boy used to have his cot at the bottom there, and you can see in the glass panel, there, how it's bowed in where a bomb — our only bomb — which fell out in the road, bent the windows, but we were all right. Soon after that, St. Thomas was evacuated to Guildford, and this was really a blessing in disguise because there was nothing else to do but the book, so I got on with it. There was nothing much to do in the evening; we lived in a very small flat, and so I got on with it. In 1943, at the beginning of the year, I had sent it all in to the publishers and then I was called up into the army. But they found that I had a heart defect so I was thrown out, which was a blessing in disguise, in a way.

MH: Unfortunately, they didn't throw me out; they put me in the Royal Army Educational Corps, and there (otherwise, known as the RAEC) ..., and that was where I got the call to

librarianship. So, I don't know whether I brought that out when a similar interview was conducted on me, but I just thought you might like to know that little bit of trivia.

LM: Well, as I mentioned in the introduction to the 5th edition, it became quite a problem because I had to copy out every entry and put it in a safe place. So, while I lived at Guildford, the hospital library was moved to Godalming [about five miles to the southwest]. I copied every entry as I made it and took it to the hospital library, [and] kept one at home. Everyone knows about the story of the shoeboxes in which we kept these 5 by 3 slips, I'm sure. When the bibliography actually came out, I never expected it would be so well received, otherwise I think I would have spent so much more time on it that it would never have been completed. MH: And that leads me to this. The bibliography has gone through several editions, and is known worldwide. Did you ever expect to become a household word? ... at least, a librarian's household word?

LM: No, it was quite a surprise to me. I think that the Americans took it much more seriously and [were] much kinder about it than people over in England.

MH: Talking of the Americans, how did you feel about giving it back to the USA? I say "giving it back", because its genesis was in the USA (thanks to the work of Fielding Garrison). As I think you've already mentioned, you gave it back – or relinquished it – to Jeremy Norman, the bookseller in San Francisco, I think, isn't he?

LM: Yes. Well, I was about 80 years old when he first approached me. At first, I wasn't very keen, but I reflected that I was getting too old; I didn't have a medical qualification, and the subject was getting much too widespread for me to understand it. So, in the end, I gave it up to Jeremy, and he produced a very nice 5th edition. I did keep in touch with him for a long time, and still occasionally send him date of somebody. You'll notice that he had very great

difficulty in getting the dates of people. I spent an awful lot of time in trying to discover the

dates of people. But as I say, I felt that my lack of medical training would not [allow me to]

cope with the widely expanding subject. Another point where ..., a point where we differ,

is that I, early on, decided not to have a team of collaborators. I would consult people, but

experts on a particular subject are very often very biased about their own subject. I might get

letters from somebody, the first page of which was a tremendous compliment about the book

and what a wonderful thing it was, and then over on the next page, they would go into

pointing out a mistake or an omission I'd made, which usually turned out to be a paper that

they'd written, or a drug that they were sponsoring. And also, I felt that ..., well, I felt that

specialists could be very biased, but Jeremy Norman decided on a team of specialists.

MH: He did?

LM: Otherwise he's done a marvelous job, and the only criticism I have of the 5th edition is

that the indexes are not so good. They were probably computer-made because things like

umlauts were ignored, and that's quite serious when you get a Muller and a Müller, which is

a long way apart [alphabetically].

MH: You mentioned the indexes. I did note that two indexes to the bibliography (when it was

under your compilation) were compiled; one of serial publications by the late Lee Ash. And

by the way. I checked on the date of his death the other day. I called Library Journal, and he

died in 1993.

LM: Yes.

MH: I did know him, first of all because he was a former editor of American Notes and

Oueries, and my first boss in the United States - Walter Pilkington - was his predecessor as

editor of that publication. And then, subsequently, I met him when Ralph Esterquest, director

of the library at the Countway Library engaged him to evaluate the rare books of the Boston Medical Library ...,

LM: "The pile"s.

MH: "The pile", yes.

LM: I saw the pile on [the] pile ...

MH: Oh, you saw "the pile" down on the Fenway.

LM: Yes, yes.

MH: And then ... , O.K. ...

LM: He had to erect a scaffold around it, didn't he, because it was so dangerous?

MH: Yes, that's right? [laughs]

LM: I did meet Ballard of course.

MH: That was earlier on.

LM: Yes. And then, I was introduced to "the pile" by Charles Colby III9.

MH: Yes, Charles C. Colby III, yes. And the "Ballard", of course, you mentioned earlier, was

Colby's predecessor as the Director of the Boston Medical Library. "James Francis Ballard",

I think he was; "J. F. Ballard", does that sound right?

LM: Yes. He was a character, wasn't he?

MH: Oh, I never met him, I know him only by repute.

LM: He spent his time buying books, and everybody ...; he was ...

MH: And buying beer I think, too. [laughs]

LM: Yes. Anyway, I met Lee Ash. Gertrude Annan had asked me if I could possibly lend her the slips. Now, when it was all typed up, these were long slips, 8 x 3, or something. They were all typed in duplicate, and I gave her this set and it seems that it was for Lee Ash to look

at in order to think about the serials. I gave the lecture at Yale 10 ... Now what was it called,

the ... ?

MH: It was a memorial lecture, was it?

LM: Yes.

MH: Yes. Somewhere in the ...,

LM: And it was a very bad effort; I wasn't used to this sort of thing. As we came out, Lee Ash said: "Leslie, I want to publish this list of all your things ...; I want to put your lecture ..." So I said: "Yes, of course." And then, I think it was Ralph Esterquest who said: "Lee, if you use it, you've got to pay him." And I said: "No, no; you've already given me a fee for this inadequate lecture ...," but he insisted. So I was paid twice for a lecture. [laughs] Anyway,

I don't have any recollection of Frances Groen.

MH: Frances ..., Oh, it's been suggested that I identify Ralph Esterquest because ...; it's hard to believe this, but Ralph has now been dead for 31 years.

LM: Yes, I remember when he died. He died very young, didn't he?

MH: Yes, he was only 56. I have kept in contact with his widow over the years, Dorothy. In fact, just as recently as last September, I went over to visit with her and I told her I was going to the Countway Library, and she said, wistfully: "You know, I haven't been over there in a long time. Can I come with you?" So I said: "Yes." And the current librarian there — a lady by the name of Judy Messerle — was very gracious and showed us both around. I just thought you'd like to know that. Frances Groen¹¹ — I know her very well — she is now the university librarian at McGill [University, in Montréal], having inherited that position. I forget who her predecessor was, but prior to that, she was the Medical Librarian at McGill. Before that, she was at the University of Pittsburgh. I think she was at Pittsburgh under a

fellow called Carroll Reynolds12.

LM: Yes, I've heard his name, yes.

MH: I think that's where she was at the time. So..., but you didn't ...; although you had dealings then, with Ash, you didn't have any with Fran Groen?

LM: No.

MH: Fran, by the way, did become president of the Medical Library Association; [she] held that appointment [from]1989 to '90.

LM: She may have contacted me, but I have no recollection at all of that.

MH: O.K., there must be some other interesting anecdotes you can relate pertaining to the bibliography. Any embarrassing moments? amusing incidents? close calls? [laughs] awkward situations that you care to tell us [about]?

LM: I recall that at a Kansas City meeting in 1960, Brad Rogers introduced me to a British medical man who was then teaching in the USA and writing medical history papers; I've forgotten his name. Brad said: "May I introduce you to Leslie Morton; you know, author of Garrison and Morton". And this man — an Englishman — said: "How do you do? Is your colleague, Garrison, here?" I was a bit embarrassed, but I said: "No, he is either upstairs or down below." But when Brad recounted it later that day, he said: "Leslie replied: 'No, he's either upstairs or down in a bar." In that hotel, the bar was down in the basement.

MH: It was at the Muehlebach, as I recall.

LM: Yes, yes, a German name.

MH: Yes; there have been two subsequent annual meetings in Kansas City, one in 1973, at the Muehlebach, and then more recently in ... [the Kansas City Convention Center]; it was the year after I retired, 1996. Although, by this time, we'd grown so large the hotel wasn't big

enough, so we were in a convention center and we were shuttled back and forth in buses to the meeting.

LM: I'm told the Muehlebach is gone now.

MH: Yes. Any other things about the bibliography before we move on, as you have lots of other ... ?

LM: I can't think; there's so many things ... I once had an American come all the way across
...; he wrote some little general bibliographical newspaper — I've got a cutting somewhere
— but he came (he had a Jewish name) ..., he came all the way up here from London just
to speak to me a few minutes, and then I got half a page from General Literary Review or
something like that ..., but I don't remember too much about things really.

MH: Leslie, you have many titles to your credit, one of which has gone through many editions, your *How to Use a Medical Library*. ¹⁴ Tell us about its genesis and your measure of its success and usefulness. How does it compare, for example, in your view with MLA's *Handbook of Medical Library Practice* ¹⁵ and other manuals of this genre?

LM: Well, I can be quite frank about it. How to Use a Medical Library was a poor little effort, and [it was] impertinent of me to publish it, but at that time — 1934, I think — there was nothing else about it. Not long afterwards, of course, came the Handbook, and it cannot possibly stand in comparison with the Handbook. Much more useful are the series: Use of Medical Literature 16, later named Information Sources in the Medical Sciences 17, because it contained contributions by specialists in the field.

MH: Do you wish to say, or go on to say anything on other works that you have compiled?
Again, you've got a long list of publications to your credit.

LM: Two that I've done with Robert Moore, my successor at Mill Hill: one is the Bibliography of Medical Related Biography¹⁸ [sic]. That's quite useful I think. And perhaps better still is the Chronology of Medicine and Related Sciences¹⁹, which took us two or three years to compile. That's the most recent thing that I have done.

MH: You mentioned Mill Hill. For the benefit of listeners, Mill Hill is a district in north London, and it is where the library you were working at is located.

LM: The National Institute for Medical Research, which was the principal library, a principal research institute of the Medical Research Council.

MH: We'll come back to that in a moment. One of the things, as I looked at your bibliography, i.e., the bibliography of Mortonianna, [laughs] if that's the word, "Bibliographia Mortonianna"...; I wonder how with all these publications, you ever had time to administer the departments under your care! How did you accomplish this? Did you have very good staff or did you just neglect your primary duties? [laughs]

LM: Much of it was necessarily done outside of working hours. For example, during the bibliography, I had to go to St. Albans from Guildford (which was a long way) because the Royal Society of Medicine had many of its periodicals away north in St. Albans. I used to start out very early on a Saturday and work and come back very late at night. This was just one of the small stacks. But much of the other was necessarily done outside working hours. You weren't allowed to do these things, and we didn't have the staff to do it. Little was done inside. And I went back from the BMA to ..., I went away from [the] *British Medical Journal* to the National Institute partly because I wanted to get back to a library. But as to working hours, I can quote William LeFanu, who, during a visit to the USA, was asked: "Mr. LeFanu, who does your work while you're away?" And he said: "The same people as do it while I'm there." [laughs]

is a section of the overall British Library Association. I'm going to come now, Leslie, to some

questions regarding people and personalities. Most of the great names in British medical

librarianship are just names to me, so, can you say something of your acquaintanceship with

the likes of Cyril Barnard, William J. Bishop, William LeFanu, F. L. Poynter, and Philip

Wade?

LM: Yes, I knew them all and the other people you mentioned: Tony McSean, Judith Palmer,

Fiona Picken, David Stewart — both David Stewarts — and Roy Tabor. I should also like

to add Peter Morgan, who is now at Cambridge, and Pat Russell, who was at Birmingham

(she has died).

MH: Peter Morgan, of ...

LM: Cambridge. Yes, it's in your list.

MH: ... and Pat Russell.

LM: ... of Birmingham, yes.

MH: They were what the British sometimes refer to, disparagingly, as "in the provinces".

LM: Yes.

MH: All the others, I think, are ..., practiced in ...

LM: Some of the people you mentioned of considerable experience. You could call Bill Lee

of Liverpool - he was [at] Liverpool Medical Institution, one of the few private medical

institutions that still exists, and George Wilson. He was at Manchester; I think Manchester

Medical Society is now incorporated in the university.

MH: In the Victoria University of Manchester. Any special remarks you want to make about

any of them, any tall tales, or tell tales, if you want? [laughs]

LM: No. Both of the last two were on the Queen Mary when we went across to the Congress22

in 1963 in the United States. It was the Second Congress, wasn't it? Yes.

MH: Yes, in Washington, DC

LM: It was ..., yes.

MH: American medical librarianship — certainly since World War II — seems to have been

dominated by women, whereas in Britain, it seems to be the opposite. And if this is indeed

the case, do you have any thoughts about this?

LM: Well, it's true that in the USA women seem to be dominant in medical librarianship, but

over here, they're coming more and more to the front as well. We have actually had two

women in the Chair of the Library Association. When I went to [the] National Institute23 in

1959, I was the first male on the medical staff. My two predecessors had been — a Canadian

and an American - women. When I got to my office, there was a little cartoon on the front

door. It was a picture of a librarian - an elderly lady with a bun - [and] a man sitting in the

library. He had pistol to his head and above him was a great big notice - Silence - and this

horrified librarian was dashing around with a noose instead ... , instead of a shush. She didn't

want him to make a noise. Now you asked about "The Group".

MH: Yes, "The Group", of course, referring to the "Health Libraries Group" (which is a

section of the British Library Association) has honored you not just once, but twice. Firstly,

when it gave you the Cyril Barnard - by the way, do you pronounce it Barnard, or Bernard?

LM: Bar-nard [accent on the first syllable].

MH: Bar-nard.

LM: Barnard, yes.

MH: ... Cyril Barnard Memorial Prize, which is its highest honor. And secondly, when the

Group's official journal, Health Libraries Review, dedicated a whole issue to you in 1987.

How did you feel about these accolades?

LM: Well, I think the Barnard Award was probably made because I had taken a good part in the formation of the section, and also worked on the first Congress, but no doubt, it was mainly because of the bibliography. The 80th birthday festschrift was a kindly thought, mainly from Shane Godbolt, who had been a long-term friend, and was a student of my lectures many years earlier. Perhaps the Centenary Medal was a reward for surviving so long. [laughs] The Princess Royal asked me for how long I had done the job of library advisor to the BPMF²⁴, and I could only reply: "About seven years". You see, I had already retired, and I had been retired for about 18 years then. And this was the last job I had, so it wasn't a long-term thing, you see.

MH: Perhaps those of you who are listening should know a little more about this. The British Library Association — although it was founded in 1877, the year following the formation of the American Library Association — it didn't really become an association of substance and credibility, I think, until it received a Royal Charter from Her (late) Majesty Queen Victoria. So, to commemorate the centenary of [the] granting of that royal charter, the Library Association invited members to nominate people to receive a Centenary Medal, the number being limited to 100. It was for all walks of librarianship: public libraries, university libraries, special libraries, medical libraries. And I'm happy to tell you, Leslie (I don't know if you know this) but I put my signature to one of the petitions to the Library Association that you be granted ..., be the recipient of one of these medals. I wish I could say the same for the only other medical librarian who received this award, Shane Godbolt, your protégée. I wish I could say that I'd put my signature to that [petition]; I didn't, but I was no less pleased to hear that she received one of those medals.

LM: Yes. Well, she founded our professional journal and kept it going for many years.

MH: And also, you should know that, as we sit at the table conducting this interview, I'm at

this moment, holding in my hand the medal that Leslie received from the Princess Royal. The

Princess Royal is the only daughter of Queen Elizabeth II - better known as Princess Anne

- and she was the person who presented these medals. It reads: "The Library Association

Royal Charter Centenary, 1898 - 1998." I'm sure it's one of your proudest possessions,

Leslie?

LM: Yes, yes.

MH: Moving on from British professional associations, let's cross the Atlantic to the USA,

and of course, we're talking about professional library associations. My first question to you,

Leslie, is: "Can you recall your first awareness of MLA — the Medical Library Association

- and your early dealings with it? And please, could you name some of the U.S. medical

librarians you encountered around that time, either directly or through correspondence, and

which ones impressed you or made their mark when you dealt with them?"

LM: I exchanged duplicate material with some of them. I'm not quite sure how it started, but

one of the first of those was Gertrude Annan. She was one of my most valued American

friends. There was one Canadian librarian — whose name, sadly, escapes me now — but she

wrote for information about an ancestor who, she believed, had attended the inquest on

Napoleon. This man had been passing St. Helena in his boat at the time. I went into the Public

Record Office and looked up the inquest, but his name wasn't among the signatures on it. This

lady was very kind because just after the war, she sent baby items for our new daughter at a

time when they were unavailable here: like real toweling nappies and a real rubber hot water

bottle, which was absolutely wonderful.

MH: "Nappies" (for our American audience) are "diapers".

LM: "Diapers", that's right, yes.

MH: If you could remember the institution that this woman was associated with, perhaps we

could fill in the name. I don't guarantee it ...

LM: It was in Canada. If I look up the older records, I might find ... Once it's mentioned I would know it, you know. She was getting on in years.

MH: Probably before my time then ...

LM: Yes. We're talking about 1946-7.

MH: ... well, definitely, then before my time.

LM: She was really wonderful.

MH: Any others sort of impressed you from your early acquaintanceship with the MLA, other than Gertrude Annan?

LM: Well, I first visited the USA in 1960 to receive the Marcia Noyes Award, and that's how I first really came into contact with the MLA, properly. I knew the *Handbook*, of course, but I hadn't been to the States before; that was my very first visit.

MH: Really? Oh, because I somehow ...; I thought you had been — you know — a few times and people must have ..., you must have made your mark on American medical librarians, and that's why you were nominated. So your nomination for the Noyes Award was based on your reputation.

LM: I think on the second edition²⁵. I've searched everywhere for the letter that Mary Louise Marshall²⁶ sent me, but I can't find it. I may have given it to my daughter who is the (sort of) archivist of the family now. When I visited again in '63 to [the] Washington Congress²⁷, I was able to make a number of new friends, and, this was rather ..., and to meet some old friends from the 1953 Congress. I think the first time I really met Americans "in a lump" was in 1953 when they came over and well-supported the Congress²⁸; they were very good.

MH: So, you did know American medical librarians before you first set foot in the USA? Seven years before ... ?

LM: Yes. You were asking about American meetings; I think they were better-funded.

organized on a larger scale, and offered a much more varied program than the British. We

would have a meeting for about three days and your meeting lasted a week. We still, I think,

have ours as part of the annual meeting of the L.A.

MH: Of the "Library Association". So you have to ..., you still have to "tag along", as it were

•••

LM: Yes, yes.

MH: ... with the national parent organization.

LM: Yes.

MH: Moving on to an older generation of American medical librarians ... , you are also known

for your Notes from London, and other pieces that appeared in the pages of our Bulletin (that

is, of course, the Bulletin of the Medical Library Association). Can you tell us how the Notes

from London got started and also any of the other things, and tell us what you think of our

Bulletin?

LM: I took over the Notes from London, I think, from W. J. Bishop. He was then at the

Wellcome²⁹ and worked very closely with [F.N.L.] Poynter, his second in command. I believe

it was their persuasion that made me take it up. You would be able to trace the origin of these

Notes from earlier volumes of the Bulletin, which I don't have. Maybe you will find that

that's when they started ..., when they first got them going. It's the sort of idea that Bishop

would have had. He was full of ideas, as well as full of knowledge and references about

medical history and librarianship.

MH: I've listed a number of "greats" from the roster of MLA presidents and some other MLA

members from the end of World War II until your second retirement, which was in 1981. If

you knew any of these people and they, or others, in American medical librarianship

impressed you, could you tell us why? I'm not going to read off all the names; you have that list. Do you want to say those that you knew, and say anything about them?

LM: Yes. Among those I remember as great friends were Gertrude Annan, Estelle Brodman, Mildred Langner — who I still communicate with — and Brad Rogers, of course. I also remember meeting, with pleasure, Alfred Brandon, Helen Crawford, Eileen Cunningham, Ralph Esterquest, Tom Keys, Fred Kilgour, Irwin Pizer, William Postell, and David Kronick. MH: Oh, I see that I omitted David's name. I had some correspondence with him recently because he was a former Janet Doe Lecturer, and I invited him to join a lunch that we had for former Doe lecturers in Chicago recently. Unfortunately, he couldn't come, but he did send his regards.

LM: He was very kind. When my wife couldn't travel anymore, he came ... He was visiting London and he came all the way up here just to have lunch with us. A year before that we had met him in town, but it was getting a bit difficult for her to travel. But he came all the way up here to see her. I've got a photo of him somewhere.

MH: And you mentioned knowing Mildred Languer very well. I think I told you that my wife and I — Judith and I — went down to see Mildred very recently. She's now living in a retirement home just outside Chattanooga, Tennessee, where, by the way, she was born and raised.

LM: Yes. Her brother was there, wasn't he?

MH: I think he was. I don't know whether he's still living. The person who seems to be sort of really keeping an eye on her these days is her niece — whose name is Alice Crowe — so that must be her brother's daughter. She did particularly ...

LM: Oh yes, Mildred "Crowe" Langner, yes. Yes, I had a Christmas card, as usual, but it was written by somebody else on her behalf, so I sent my sympathies.

MH: I think somewhere someone remarked that Mildred actually came and visited you in this house and you took her on a tour of your rose garden.

LM: Well, she remarked on how nice it was. It's very miserable at the moment; it's the wrong time of the ...; well, the roses have gone off; come back in a month. But she was pleased with it. Yes, she stayed with us for a few days.

MH: Oh, how nice! O.K., among the names that I listed, Ralph Esterquest was my first boss in medical librarianship at Harvard. Eileen Cunningham — I never knew her personally — she was my predecessor (not my immediate predecessor) at Vanderbilt, where she served from 1926 to 1956. And then I know the other people in the list very well, in fact that's probably why I listed them.

MH: Perhaps I should remark, Leslie, that there are, you know, two Bill Postells — Postell Senior, [and] Postell Junior — and the one you're talking about is Bill Postell, Sr.

LM: Yes.

MH: Tell me about your reaction when you learned that you were to receive the Marcia C. Noyes Award, and to be not only the recipient, but the first non-American to be so honored. LM: Well, I felt greatly honored to be given the Marcia C. Noyes Award. At the time, I considered that American medical librarians had a much greater appreciation of the history of medicine than people over here. They certainly expressed their appreciation of one's efforts more openly than is the case in Britain. Brad Rogers helped finance the trip in 1960 by giving me a five-day consultancy at NLM, and hospitality at his house during that time. Hospitality and helpful Americans at that time was overwhelming. It was also a great honor to become an honorary member of MLA, more recently 10. I feel I hardly deserved it. While at San Antonio I felt sorry that I'd not been able to attend many previous annual meetings of the MLA.

MH: I understand that you were part of the British librarian representatives when MEDLARS (that's: Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System) first went international. Can you tell us about your involvement in that, Leslie?

LM: Well, when MEDLARS first went international, the NLM kindly offered it for operation by the Medical Research Council in England. It was eventually (and perhaps more appropriately) passed on to the British Library, and I was asked to become a member of a small committee elected to exploit it.

MH: Are there any other things you want to say about MLA (the Medical Library Association) and American medical librarianship?

LM: [pause] I don't think I have any more to say on that.

MH: O.K. All right, I think this brings us sort of to the conclusion of this interview, and I'm going to ask you for some of your reflections on these topics. Firstly, who are the people who most influenced your life and career?

LM: Well, as regards librarianship, W. J. Bishop was a fine guiding hand and a valued friend for many years. His store of knowledge on medical librarianship and history of medicine was remarkable. While I was working at the *BMJ*, for example, I said: "Wouldn't it be a good idea if we had a book on the history of the medical institutions of London? You know, short histories of all the colleges and all the hospitals and that." And he said: "It's already been done, in your own journal, about 1895 or something." And I looked, and sure enough there was a series of articles on some of the great hospitals and colleges at that time³¹.

MH: What about people you think you have influenced? Who do you regard as your protégés?

LM: Well, I think John Thornton, who was my assistant at University College for some years;

[he] became interested in medical and scientific librarianship, history of medicine and so on because he worked with me and we both were interested in that. Bob Moore, of course, was

a good Junior Assistant; he joined me about 1961 at the National Institute for Medical

Research. I was the first male on the staff there. There were two other ladies who had been

there for many years, and may have expected to be posted to the top, but they preferred me.

And it was nice for me to be able to have a male assistant rather than a female. I had a staff

of eight or ten at the time and Bob stuck on with me ever since, and he retired only last

month. So, he became librarian in 1972 and he's just retired. He's been a great friend, and we

worked together on one or two projects, and we still work together. So those are the two

people I think I may have influenced, but perhaps fortunately I haven't been able to influence

anybody else. [laughs]

MH: And overall, how do you like to be remembered by the library community, as an

administrator, a bibliographer, an educator, editor, compiler, historian, journeyman?

LM: Just as someone who has made modest contributions to medical librarianship and

medical historiography, I suppose. I haven't done much else.

MH: But it's still substantial ... and you consider that your most important contribution?

LM: Yes, Yes, I think the bibliography is quite useful and I'm sorry that it won't continue.

I know that Jeremy Norman was talking about a CD-ROM but . . . , I think he realizes what

a job it is. To me, it started off as a bright idea, and then it was a millstone for 40 years.

MH: A millstone?

LM: Well, a pleasant one ...

MH: It was made of the finest granite ... [laughs]

LM: You know, I would pick up ..., I still do look up the paper every day and see any

obituaries of people that were in my book and make a note. I used regularly to send to

Jeremy Norman the deaths of people who were still in it and were still alive.

MH: So that he could put a closing date on the ...

LM: Yes, yes.

MH: Where do you see librarianship and medical librarianship headed in the future? What are the issues we have to address and how can we learn from the past?

LM: Well, first of all, I think since I first worked in the medical library in 1923, the standing of the profession has changed enormously. We were custodians and distributors of books and information, but now medical librarians enjoy much higher status due to their ability to exploit information technology. This in turn owes a great deal, of course, to the introduction of MEDLARS.

MH: Which was Brad Rogers' creation.

LM: Yes. There is now much greater specialization within medical librarianship because of the increasing technical sophistication that has followed MEDLARS. Librarians are now information specialists, but they must keep in mind that however specialized they become, they're still providers — still facilitators — who guide their readers to ever-increasing sources of information. Readers do not always come to the library. Soon, they may be able to read all their current journals, electronically, at home. Users have a much larger number of disciplines to follow, more specialisms. When I started, medicine was medicine; now it embraces molecular biology, biochemistry, genetics, etc. A paper by a librarian in a recent issue of *Health Libraries Review* listed all Web sources of information on the genome project. I think there's a marvelous present and future in medical librarianship, and I wish I was still there [laughs]. I don't think they realize what a great contribution Brad Rogers made, really. When the Second Congress came up in '63, LeFanu and I wrote to him a joint letter saying we were rather sorry that there weren't more medicine history papers in it. And he wrote saying: "Your letter makes me very sad; we're going to discuss a project called MEDLARS." Really, we were ...,

MH: You weren't really trying to ...,

LM: ... not being impertinent, really. We didn't realize what a great thing this was.

MH: Yes, at the time ... It's funny, 1963 — well, actually the beginning of '64 was — no, '64 was when I entered medical librarianship (January of '64) and I remember I had to ask the then deputy librarian at Harvard — a fellow called Harold Bloomquist — what MEDLARS stood for [laughs]. It hadn't really hit the headlines. There were a select few [who] knew about it. And you're right about people not appreciating what Brad Rogers does. It's amazing that at this very moment, as we talk, there are some medical librarians and medical informaticians — who shall be nameless — who think that it began yesterday, or possibly just with them ..., that all that went before counts for naught ... LM: Yes.

MH: ... which is regrettable.

MH: Now that this interview is coming to a close and you're recorded for posterity, Leslie, what will you do next?

LM: Well, I'm afraid there isn't much time left now [laughs]. I've only eight years now before my telegram from the queen on my hundredth birthday. But in-between, I hope that we shall have another edition of the biographies — the *Bibliography of Medical Biographies*³² [sic] — and also another volume of the chronology³³, a smaller one. One of the big things we missed out in that, I think, was a calendar, a day-by-day listing of everything. It will be just an enormous job, but it would be well worth it, so that you could look up any date and you could find out that in 1549, somebody did something ...,

MH: On August the 9th ...

LM: Yes, exactly.

MH: Oh, that would be wonderful.

LM: And we would put in a few corrections that we've found since. For example, I found only yesterday that we'd missed out Down of Down's Syndrome. We put in the syndrome, or the trisomy 21, but we hadn't put a note of his birth in. So there ...

MH: Well, thank you Leslie, very, very much, for your time and for your cooperation in this Oral History Project of the Medical Library Association. This concludes the interview of Leslie Morton, conducted by Mark Hodges on Monday, the 9th of August, 1999. The interview took place in Leslie Morton's home in Pinner, North London, on that date.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Sides A & B, has no audible content.]

[Tape 3, Side A]

SG: [the Interviewer is now Shane Godbolt] Due to a technical difficulty, the next part of the dialogue did not get recorded. It was therefore recorded by Shane Godbolt and Leslie Morton on Sunday, the 27th of February, 2000. Leslie, do you wish to say anything on the other works you have compiled?

LM: I should have mentioned that *Use of Medical Literature* — which was later renamed *Information Sources in the Medical Sciences* — was important because it contained contributions by specialists in the field, and that the last two editions were compiled with the collaboration of Shane Godbolt³⁴.

SG: After St. Thomas, you held these posts before you retired for the first time in 1972: Librarian at the British Council Medical Department, 1943-46; Information Officer at the British Medical Journal, 1946-1959, and librarian of the Medical Research Council's National Institute for Medical Research, 1959-72. Please, will you tell us about the role of the British Council and about the National Institute for Medical Research? Is the latter

comparable, for example, to the United States National Institutes of Health, and what exactly did you do at the BMJ?

LM: At the British Council, I was responsible for the dissemination of British medical information to overseas inquirers — often South America — and for editorial work on the British Medical Bulletin. Here I learned a good deal about sub-editing. The British Council's future, however, became doubtful about that time, and as I had a small family to think of, I moved to the BMJ, although I met one of my most helpful and valued friends at the British Council: the late Dr. Norman Howard-Jones. I was recruited to the British Medical Journal to monitor medical journals from all over the world in connection with the publication of the new Abstracts of World Medicine. I also made contributions to the BMJ, and acted as its Information Officer. I moved to the National Institute for Medical Research in order to get back into a library. The U.S. National Institutes [of Health] are at Bethesda. The much smaller Medical Research Council [of the U.K.] has research institutes and units spread around the country, with the parent institute of the National Institute for Medical Research, Mill Hill.

SG: As if this were not enough, you took on additional work following your retirement, and accepted an assignment with the British Postgraduate Medical Federation, which kept you busy until 1980. Would you care to tell us about the regional medical libraries and the librarians who have administered and developed them?

LM: Within a year of retirement I took up the post of regional library advisor to the British Postgraduate Medical Federation. This is now Thames Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education, University of London, and Shane Godbolt is director of this department. The position arose from the need for continuing education of general practitioners. Lectures, etc., were arranged for GPs in non-teaching hospitals; this was

because of the availability there of clinical material not being monopolized by medical students. It was soon found that library facilities in these hospitals were often inadequate or absent, and usually staffed by untrained personnel. My job was to raise standards, train staff, and introduce all facilities of a medical library, etc. I dealt with the Northeast and Northwest Thames Regions, and a colleague dealt with the Southeast and Southwest Thames. Nowadays, almost all staff are qualified librarians. Shane Godbolt deals with North Thames Regions and Michael Carmel with South Thames. At the time, the only other regional librarian was Roy Tabor, Wessex. Now there exists also the Regional Librarians Group which has been instrumental in considerably improving the status of the relevant libraries.

SG: Yes, it has indeed. When did you first join the Library Association, and how did you become one of its Fellows?

LM: I joined the Library Association in 1932, became ALA³⁵. I became a Fellow in 1964 by submitting a thesis, in my case, the medical bibliography.

SG: Yes, that's a tremendous work, very much more than a thesis. I understand that you

— together with a few others — were instrumental in forming the Medical Section (now
the Health Libraries Group) of the Library Association, in the late '40s. This is roughly the
equivalent of the American Medical Library Association. Can you tell us about this
development and what offices you held in the Section?

LM: For a long time, W. J. Bishop had wanted to see an association of medical librarians in Britain. The failure of an earlier association had been because it was an association of libraries and not librarians. He and I used to meet for dinner once a week at a restaurant on Welbeck St., near the Royal Society of Medicine. Each week, we would invite a different medical librarian to talk about the possibility of founding an association. Cyril

Barnard — then our doyen — was cautious. He felt that we were too few in number to be a section of the Library Association. We compromised and became a sub-section of the University and Research Section of the Library Association. A few years later, we were strong enough to become a separate section. Twenty or so years later, to increase potential, the Medical Section agreed to combine with the Hospital Library Section and we became the Medical Group. In the Medical Section I served on the committee, took my turn as chairman, and was also responsible for the publication of two or three editions of a select list of books — a modest precursor of Brandon — which was later followed by the current *Core Collection* 36.

SG: Before the formation of the section, how were medical libraries in Britain served and medical libraries kept in touch with one another?

LM: Before the formation of the section there was no formal contact between medical librarians. There were occasional interlibrary loans, exchange of duplicate material, etc. The U.K. probably has an insufficient number of medical libraries and inadequate funds to support a separate association of medical librarians. In the USA, larger numbers and greater financial resources make possible the much preferred independent association.

SG: Most of the great names in British medical librarianship are just names to our American colleagues. Can you say something of your relationship with Cyril Barnard, William J. Bishop, William LeFanu, F. L. Poynter, and Philip Wade? And what of the current crop, Michael Carmel, Bruce Madge, Tony McSean, Judy Palmer, Fiona Picken, the David Stewarts, and Roy Tabor (to name some of those whose names may be familiar to American colleagues)? Who are some of the other "greats" of British medical librarianship in this century, in your view?

LM: I knew, and know them all. I would like to add to the list, the late Pat Russell of

Birmingham, and George Wilson of Manchester, and the present Peter Morgan of Cambridge. Also, besides playing an important part as librarian, Shane Godbolt also has the additional distinction of having founded our professional journal, *Health Libraries Review*, and edited it for 15 years.

[End of Tape 3, Side A]

Notes

- Mrs. Morton's maiden name was: "Bertha Helena Shrosbree" and although, according to family members, she preferred the name: "Helen", she was generally known as "Bertha".
- Garrison, Fielding H. A medical bibliography; a check-list of texts illustrating the history
 of the medical sciences. Rev., with additions and annotations, by Leslie T. Morton. London,
 Grafton, 1943. [This was the "first edition" of what later became known as Garrison and Morton's
 Medical Bibliography, a standard reference source with varying titles over the years. Most recent
 edition is the 5th, 1991.]
- Morton's medical bibliography: an annotated check-list of texts illustrating the history of medicine (Garrison and Morton), edited by Jeremy M. Norman. 5th edition. Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, Gower, 1991.
- Gasparo Aselli (1521-1626) was a Italian physician who, in 1622, discovered the lymphatic vessels during vivisection of a dog and described this discovery in his: De lactibus sive lacteis venis, which was published, posthumously, in 1627.
- Garrison, Fielding H. "Revised students' check-list of texts illustrating the history of medicine, with references for collateral reading". Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins University Institute of the History of Medicine, 1933; v. 1, no. 9, supplement, p. 333-434.
- Morton's introduction to the 5th edition, previously cited in note 3, above.
- American radio journalist (born "Egbert R. Murrow") who became famous for his wartime broadcasts from London reporting the devastation of the air raids.
- 8. The reference here is to the old Boston Medical Library, located on the Fenway. Although it is described as a Victorian edifice with a shabby exterior by those who knew it at this time, it was not in need of scaffolding. Both the interviewer and the widow of the late Charles C. Colby III (consulted on this point by Hodges) speculate that the subsequent reference to scaffolding may be a pleasantry referring to the fact that space was tight and many books were stacked on the floor, creating a veritable bibliographic pile.
- Charles C. Colby III had a long-term association with the Boston Medical Library and the Countway Library. His obituary can be found in: *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 2002 July; 90(3):361-362.
- Leslie Morton gave the Woodward Lecture at Yale University Medical Library in May 1960. It was subsequently published in: Ash, L. Serial publications containing medical classics. An index to citations in Garrison-Morton, compiled by Lee Ash. New Haven: The Antiquarian, 1961.
- Frances Groen indexed the third edition of Garrison and Morton (1970) when she was still Curator of the History of Medicine Department in the Falk Library of the Health Professions at the University of Pittsburgh.

12. The obituary of Carroll F. Reynolds, 1910-1975, Director of the Falk Library from 1957 to 1975, can be found in the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, 1976 April; 64(2):253.

- Fielding H. Garrison died in 1935.
- Morton, Leslie T. How to use a medical library, a guide to research for practitioners, research workers and students. London, Bale & Danielsson, 1934.
- 15. Handbook of medical library practice, including annotated bibliographical guides to the literature and history of the medical and allied sciences; based on a preliminary manuscript by M. Irene Jones, compiled by a committee of the Medical Library Association, Janet Doe, editor. Chicago, American Library Association, 1943. [Subsequent editions have slightly varying titles.]
- 16. Morton, Leslie T., editor. Use of medical literature. London, Butterworth, [1974].
- Morton, L.T. and S. Godbolt, editors. Information sources in the medical sciences. 3rd edition. London, Boston, Butterworths, 1984.
- Morton, Leslie T. and Robert J. Moore. Bibliography of medical and biomedical biography.
 Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1989.
- Morton, Leslie T. and Robert J. Moore. Chronology of medicine and related sciences.
 Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1997.
- 20. [Morton, Leslie T.] "Centenary of the Victoria Cross; the awards to medical men". *British Medical Journal* 1956: 1, 226-228, 302.
- 21. Problems in the recording process render the tape inaudible at this point. Morton therefore agreed to a second interview which was conducted by Shane Godbolt on Sunday, 27 February 2000; Hodges' original questions were again posed and Morton did his best to reconstruct his answers for Godbolt. The Godbolt-Morton interview (Tape 3, Side A) begins on page 28 of this transcript and contains material which should be read before continuing to read the transcript of Tape 1, Side B.
- The International Congress of Medical Librarianship first met in London in 1953.
- The National Institute for Medical Research (at Mill Hill, in north London) of the Medical Research Council.
- BPMF: British Postgraduate Medical Federation
- 25. Garrison, Fielding H. and Leslie T. Morton. Garrison and Morton's medical bibliography; an annotated check-list of texts illustrating the history of medicine, 2nd edition. New York: Argosy Bookstore, [1954].
- Mary Louise Marshall was President of MLA from 1941 to 1946.
- The second International Congress of Medical Librarianship was held in Washington, DC, in 1963.

28. The first International Congress of Medical Librarianship was held in London, England, in 1953.

- The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine is located in London.
- 30. Leslie T. Morton was made an Honorary Member of the Medical Library Association at the annual meeting held in San Antonio, TX, in 1994.
- 31. "The medical institutions of London", a series of eight articles, was published at the time of the 63rd annual meeting of the British Medical Association, held in London, in 1895. See: *British medical journal* 1895; v1: 1213-1216, 1289-1291, 1349-1350, 1388-1391, 1451-1453, and 1895 v 2: 24-26, 101-103, 141-146.
- 32. The 3rd edition of this work appeared in 2004. Morton, Leslie T. and Robert J. Moore. *A bibliography of medical and bio-medical biography*. 3rd edition. Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.
- 33. It does not appear that this wish came to fruition. The most recent edition of the "chronology" appears to be the first. Morton, Leslie T. and Robert J. Moore. A chronology of medicine and related sciences. Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar Press; Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co., 1997.
- 34. Morton, Leslie T. and Shane Godbolt, editors. *Information sources in the medical sciences*. 4th edition. London, New York: Bowker-Saur, 1992. The 3rd edition appeared in 1983 in London and in 1984 in Boston, with Shane Godbolt as co-editor.
- 35. "ALA" is "Associate of the Library Association".
- Core collection of medical books and journals 1997, compiled by Howard Hague.
 London: Medical Information Working Party, 1997.