

## CRISPIN JEWITT (1949–2025)

*Christopher Clark, Retired, United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>*

**DOI:** 10.35320/ij.183

Crispin was Head of the Sound Archive at the British Library from 1991–2007 and IASA President from 1999–2002. His proudest career moment, I believe, was hosting the IASA Conference at the British Library in London in 2001, especially the farewell dinner at the Institute of Directors. But before considering his contribution to IASA, let's go back a decade.

The summer of 1991 was a milestone for Crispin, as it was for me. Big changes were made at the Sound Archive while I was away on a Fulbright Fellowship: I returned to find that Crispin Jewitt had replaced Christopher Roads as director and a team of management consultants was busy preparing the ground for a computerised catalogue and data conversion project. We both played a major part in bringing that project to a successful conclusion. Both of us had to set aside pet interests (for Crispin it was maps and for me, jazz recordings) in favour of project and data management respectively. Crispin drank deeply from the PRINCE and PRINCE2<sup>2</sup> manuals, became adept at winning European Commission-funded partnership projects and gained a reputation for timely delivery with minimal overspend. He became a master of the Work Package, but he also grasped the bigger picture, engaging comfortably with strategy and the inevitable structural adjustments that followed.

His election to the IASA presidency came later than expected. I travelled with him to the conference in Bogensee in 1994 to report on accomplishments back home. Shortly after his return from Bogensee he was diagnosed with leukaemia. Miraculously, he survived and although he missed the heat and hype of the conferences in Washington and Oman he was back as Chair of the National Archives Committee in time for Paris in 1998 and was elected President in Vienna the following year.

Crispin liked to feel in control of any work-related process, the “inputs and outputs”, as he would say. For some people that made him appear overly bureaucratic. I think of it rather as adopting a business-like approach coupled with a wariness about any sense of privilege or entitlement. A renowned subject specialist himself (Who's Who lists him as a historian of cartography and specialist adviser to the British Library on military cartography), Crispin was acutely aware of the dangers of allowing singular interests to dictate policy—tails wagging dogs. He was less interested in collection building per se, more interested in accountability, quality of service and delivery. By paying so much attention to internal processes, he believed that the taxpaying user was getting a poor return and that they were right to ask, seeing the slogan “preserving for future generations”, if that future was ever likely to begin soon.

- 
- 1 Christopher Clark worked at the British Library in various capacities, including Head of Cataloguing and Head of Digital Research from 1978–2013. Now retired, he was a long-time IASA member, serving as IASA Editor from 1996–2002. He chaired the IASA Cataloguing Committee from 2002–2009 and contributed the chapter on metadata in TC-04. He received the IASA Award in 2006 for cataloguing and documentation standards.
  - 2 <https://www.prince2.com/uk/what-is-prince2>

He made the Sound Archive and IASA more rounded and interoperable with the larger knowledge community. In this respect he was helped by the rapid adoption of international standards for delivering sound files across networks. He made sure that his staff and IASA members gained competence in those new technologies. The standard of IASA conference papers broadened and their quality improved, I think, during Crispin's era.

As Director and President, he also understood the importance of external relationships. He cultivated good relations with IFPI and the BPI, the representative bodies for the international and national recording industries, in a bid to reduce the severity of copy-right barriers to collection digitisation and online access at scale. Recognising that digitisation brought recording media closer together and made the world an even smaller place, the Singapore conference in 2000 was shared with SEAPAVAA and London with ARSC, while in 2001 he led the IASA presence at the first Latin American audiovisual conference in Mexico City, where FIAF and FIAT were also major participants. Crispin received the IASA Award in 2007 "for significant contributions in promoting a broader vision for IASA and as ambassador to external associations culminating in his success as Convenor of the CCAAA since 2002". IASA Awards were established by the IASA Board under Crispin's presidency at the London conference in 2001.

Crispin retired from the Sound Archive and from IASA in the same year, 2007. One of his leaving gifts from the British Library was a 35-year-old bottle of whiskey that had been working for as long as he did. I do hope he had time to enjoy it.