

OBITUARY

Obituary: Ilse Sternberg (1931–2024)¹

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Ilse Sternberg who died in May 2024 was a leading figure in the early days of SCOLMA and helped to shape African Studies librarianship and collecting in the UK through her work at the British Library, her key role in organizing a seminal conference, her research, her mentoring of younger professionals and her service on the SCOLMA committee (as Business Manager, 1983–86).

Ilse was born in 1931 in New York City. She moved with her parents to Arizona at the age of eight. Their home was in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains from where Ilse would ride out into the desert on her horse. In 1949 she left for California to study International Relations at Stanford University. After graduating, in 1953 she travelled to London on a health workers visa, subsequently training at the Royal Free Hospital and qualifying as a State Registered Nurse. During her training she met her life partner, Marilyn, with whom she later adopted two children, Will and Mimi, who both survive her. Marilyn passed away in 2010.

After nursing, she came to librarianship by way of the National Central Library which later was one of the institutions forming the British Library. She was instrumental in persuading the British Library to hold its consultative colloquium on African Studies, one of a series of policy reviews in the 1970s on a range of subject areas intended to help the Library develop its acquisition policies. This led to a book, *African Studies: papers presented at a colloquium at the British Library, 7–19 January 1985*, edited by Ilse Sternberg and Patricia M. Larby (London: British Library in association with SCOLMA, 1986).

Her PhD, 'Policies for the Acquisition of Printed Books at the British Museum Library, 1837–1960: with attention to the procurement of works from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America', was awarded in 1989. Her supervisor at University College London (UCL) was John McIlwaine who describes her as an 'ideal research student'. Careful research into material at hand in the British Library also bore fruit in a valuable checklist, *Market Literature from Nigeria: a checklist*, edited by Peter Hogg and Ilse Sternberg, computer programmes by Robin Alston (London: British Library, 1990).

¹ Thanks are due to John McIlwaine, Patricia Larby and Will Sternberg for providing the author with additional information for this obituary.

After retiring, Ilse travelled widely including pony trekking across Mongolia in her seventies. She volunteered with HIV and homeless charities on a regular basis and ran a charitable trust which provided grants for young musicians and artists. She loved entertaining and held regular dinner parties which were always well attended. She had a wide circle of friends of many nationalities and ages and was an agreeable companion to concerts and exhibitions.

Ilse suffered a stroke in 2016 and vascular dementia was, sadly, the enduring result. In 2019 she left her home in London and moved to West Sussex where she could be better supported by her son and his partner until her death in May 2024.