



Brian Shackel (1927–2007)

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Brian Shackel, who died on May 9th 2007 at the age of 80, was a trail blazer who saw very early how important ergonomics was to the development of the computer industry. I remember in 1968, when I was a new recruit to the Ergonomics Laboratory he ran in EMI Electronics, his excitement when he showed me an early teletype, a 'dumb' remote terminal, that could interact on-line (albeit very slowly) with a mainframe computer. He was convinced these terminals would become the working tools of the future but that a lot of ergonomic work would be necessary to turn them into usable devices. Earlier, in 1962, he had completed his first study of human-computer interaction by re-designing the console of the EMIDEC 2400. That was to be the first of numerous studies of people using computers he was to lead over the next 40 years.

Born in Kidbrook, London in 1927, Brian took a BA degree in classics at Cambridge and, after service in the Royal Navy as an Instruction Lieutenant, he returned to Cambridge to take a MA degree in Psychology. His classics education was very important to him and to those of us that worked with him. I can feel his red pen hovering over these words as I write them! He began his long career in ergonomics by joining the Medical Research Council's Applied Psychology Unit in Cambridge where he worked on eye tracking research. In 1954 he started the Ergonomics Laboratory at EMI Electronics, a laboratory that still exists today as part of Quintec which celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding in 2004. Unfortunately, because of illness, Brian was unable to be present for the celebrations.

In 1970 Brian moved to Loughborough University as Professor of Industrial Ergonomics and set up the HUSAT (Human Sciences and Advanced Technology) Research Institute. I joined him in Loughborough and, together with Tom Stewart, Leela Damodaran and eight other young enthusiasts; we set about turning Brian's vision of ergonomics at the centre of the computer age into a reality. For the next 22 years until his retirement in 1992, Brian not only ensured HUSAT was a focus for research on human-computer interaction but also worked to develop an international community dedicated to the subject. He was the focus for the 'human' part of HCI and worked tirelessly to promote forms of interaction that were useful, usable and safe. In the process Brian became a father figure in the emergence of usability and user-centred design. Amongst many pioneering ventures, he led BLEND one of the first major projects to evaluate the promise of electronic journals.

Within a few years of arriving in Loughborough Brian was Head of what is now the Department of Human Sciences and, in a 10-year tenure, oversaw its growth to include major undergraduate programmes in Ergonomics, Human Biology and Psychology

in addition to the well-established MSc in Ergonomics. During this time he also became the Dean of the School of Human and Environmental Studies. He was always an advocate of the application of ergonomics in product and systems design and led a campaign to teach ergonomics to engineering all over the campus. Generations of students will remember his enthusiastic case study descriptions of the application of ergonomics in the Port of London Meat Handling Authority and in the ESSO Refuelling Control Centre at Heathrow.

Brian was a true English gentleman with a great love of cricket and a defender of the courteous and proper ways in which we should conduct ourselves. Nevertheless he went about his mission with steely determination. He possessed enormous energy and great tenacity. His capacity for attention to detail was bottomless. He was wonderful to have on your side because he could outlast any opponent – many gave up from exhaustion.

One of Brian's great gifts was to foresee the institutions that had to be developed in ergonomics in general and human-computer interaction in particular. And he had the endurance to fight the battles to create these institutions. In addition to his work in developing HUSAT (now part of the Ergonomic and Safety Research Institute) and the Department of Human Sciences at Loughborough and the EMIE Ergonomics Laboratory, he was instrumental in many other developments. His devotion to the application of ergonomics led to the launch of Applied Ergonomics and he was its first editor. He was the Chairman of the Council of the Ergonomics Society and Treasurer of the International Ergonomics Association. In the development of human-computer interaction he helped create the IFIP (International Federation of Information Processing) Technical Committee 13 in human-computer interaction and he chaired the committee for many years. Under the auspices of IFIP, in 1984, he launched the INTERACT series of conferences on human-computer interaction which is now a major, biannual, international conference.

Brian's achievements have been recognised in many ways around the world. The presenter of the best paper in the INTERACT conference is now given the Brian Shackel Award. He was an Honorary Fellow of the Ergonomics Society and a recipient of the Sir Frederic Bartlett Medal. He was given an honorary doctorate by Loughborough University on his retirement in 1992. The Human Factors Society made him Distinguished International Colleague, and SIGCHI (special interest group in computer-human interaction) elected him to the CHI Academy in 2004.

After his retirement Brian kept up a voluminous correspondence with his many friends around the world. He delighted in the achievements of everybody and went out of his way to provide all the support he could. Into his seventies he was still sending me details of papers he had read that he knew would be of interest to

me. In his retirement he was a founder Trustee of the Bayswater Institute and this enabled him to continue to promote the application of knowledge about people to design processes of all kinds.

Brian's vision and energy has left an indelible mark on the many of us he helped along the way, in particular the students of Loughborough and the many staff who spent a significant part of their career in HUSAT. He was fascinated by the way the internet developed and I am sure he would be intrigued and pleased to note the way in which it is now being used by the human factors community around the world to share their memories of him.

He is survived by his wife Penni, their three children Nicholas, Julian and Francesca and granddaughter, Eleanor.

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