

Bernd Pflug (Library User)

Born 1944

Born in Germany (at the time West Germany)

Parent occupations: Father was a soldier, and later both his parents were physiotherapists

Bernd came to the UK in 2009

Bernd is a professor, author and academic who has lived and worked in India, Sri Lanka and Sudan. He would always gravitate to libraries in each new place he was, saying that 'libraries have been my life'. He uses Swiss Cottage library to do the reading, research and editing for his publications. The library isn't his local one, but he continues to come here because it is spacious, light and has lots of books. He also uses the computers at the library; there used to be quite rigid rules about accessing these, putting your name down on the system and then waiting for your number to be called indicating your turn on the computer. But now it is easier and he is able to use them for editing.

The people who work at Swiss Cottage library have been friendly and helpful from the beginning, although he jokes that they are maybe more well-versed in technology than they are in the books themselves. He has chatted to some of the other library users who work on their projects at the library. There are also students who use it to revise for their exams - in the past they have caused some disruption, but these days they are much more studious and there is a focussed atmosphere amongst people working in the library.

Swiss Cottage library is a research library that specialises in philosophy, so has brilliant resources. However a lot of it is stored in the basement, and it can be difficult to access that information as users aren't allowed to go to the basement alone. He says it is a shame that people can't so easily browse the collections, shows that 'our relationship with books is changing'. Bernd also despairs of the way the library is being filled with 'commercial additions', and that the space is diminishing as a result of this. Despite this, he still thinks it is a building with great light and space; the library 'encourages movement'. Occasionally the open-plan nature of the library can be distracting when there are classes or community activities happening in these spaces. Some of the changes in technology have been useful, but he fears that the reduction in contact with staff and the sense of anonymity might put off people who are new to libraries. Bernd used to use the children's library with his family, but nowadays he fears that use is decreasing as there is more of a focus on gadgets than on the children's books themselves.

Bernd spoke about his routine in the library, especially when he is working on a specific book or project. His book 'Footprints on Water: The autobiography of W.T. Stace colonial administrator in Ceylon 1920 to 1932' was edited almost solely at Swiss Cottage library.