

Editorial and Introduction

BIALL: 50 YEARS

Welcome to the summer issue of Legal Information Management (LIM) which celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians (BIALL). Back in 1999, on Friday 16th April 1999 to be precise, a BIALl Council meeting took place that was held at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in London. The minutes of that meeting record that,

Before the meeting opened, Mary Blake [then President of BIALl] informed those present that the date was a special one in BIALl history, as it was 30 years to the day that BIALl was established. She had marked the occasion by bringing a birthday cake and Michael Maher [then Chair of the Association] provided bottles of Champagne for a toast after lunch.¹

This was indeed a landmark moment for BIALl and it demonstrated the significance, relevance and longevity of the Association to that point. It was also a reflection of the strength of the membership and healthiness of BIALl as a professional organisation. To further mark 30 years, Mary Blake, in her other capacity as BIALl's Hon. Archivist and historian, wrote an excellent and thorough account of the history of the Association from 1969 to 1999. Derek Way, Vice-President at the time and founding member, acted as a consultant for the publication. The book was published in 2000.²

Now, a further twenty years on, BIALl has reached a half century, an even more significant anniversary. Therefore it is appropriate to mark the occasion by devoting this issue of Legal Information Management (LIM) to some of the achievements of the Association while also noting the many developments in law librarianship over the past 50 years. For those BIALl members who were able to attend, there was also an opportunity to mark and celebrate the fiftieth anniversary at the BIALl Annual Conference which took place on the south coast in Bournemouth from 13th to 15th June. A fiftieth birthday party (again, with a birthday cake!), sponsored by Justis, took place at the Aruba Restaurant and Bar at the entrance to Bournemouth Pier. On the second evening of the conference the President's Reception, sponsored by Bloomsbury Professional, and the BIALl Annual Dinner, sponsored by LexisNexis, also added to the celebrations.

At the conference The Right Honourable Baroness Hale of Richmond, DBE, the President of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, gave the keynote address which was also the 7th Willi Steiner Memorial Lecture. This lecture, together with the other presentations given at the conference, will be published in LIM later during this year. With such a high profile public figure headlining the programme, it was a timely reminder of the significance both of BIALl as a professional organisation and of law librarians and legal information professionals who play such an important role in underpinning our legal system.

THE BIALl VISION

BIALL is a flourishing and highly respected professional association. The original aims of the Association were detailed in Mary Blake's *History*. Today those aims, which have been revised appropriately to reflect the current nature of the Association and the changing legal information world it supports and interacts with, state that: 'The Association exists to support and further the management and promotion of law libraries and legal information units, principally in Britain and Ireland. The Association represents all jurisdictions in Britain and Ireland'. The 'BIALL Vision' is as follows:

- BIALl leads the way in legal information;
- It provides opportunities for members to exchange information and share best practice, enhance their knowledge of legal information management, and promote the value of law libraries and the legal information profession;
- It actively engages with other organisations serving librarianship and legal information and supports members to attend the meetings and conferences of those organisations;
- It acts as a forum for legal information professionals and suppliers of legal information;
- It encourages bibliographic study and research into law librarianship through publication in the Association's journal, *Legal Information Management*.

CELEBRATING LAW LIBRARIANSHIP

This year represents a celebration of the Association. It is also a celebration of law librarians and legal information professionals, both as individuals and as teams, committed to the pursuit of excellence in the library, information and knowledge management world. It is a celebration, too, of our libraries as institutions. It is also about celebrating our significant place within the legal world and the vital part we, as a profession, play in upholding the rule of law. In this regard I wish to make particular reference to three quotations that I believe help to highlight the importance of our legal information industry. The Right Honourable Lord Woolf, the former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, whilst also acknowledging the importance of legal technology in an address in Cambridge in 2004, commented with reference to an academic law library, that:

Any worthwhile society requires an efficient and effective legal system. A healthy system requires great law libraries. This is particularly true of common law legal systems. It is as true today as it has been in the past. Great law libraries are the treasuries of a legal system. They are warehouses where we find the law. They are

also where we collate, catalogue, index and digest the sources of our and other systems of law.³

In 2012 John Larkin QC, Attorney General for Northern Ireland, in his keynote lecture at the BIALL Conference that year observed:

*Lawyers can (just about) be lawyers without law librarians but it is only in partnership with librarians that excellence in lawyering is ever possible. For my part I am grateful for the wonderful possibilities law librarians bring into being and nurture every day.*⁴

Jules Winterton, the recently retired Director and Librarian of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, wrote of the profession in his excellent introduction to the *BIALL Handbook of Legal Information Management*:

*Law librarians have responsibility for the selection, acquisition, maintenance, management and delivery of information of legal relevance in convenient and speedy ways suited to the nature of the legal research of their users. In doing this they play a vital part in the administration of justice, in the support of scholarship and legal information, and in the functioning of a social system which adheres to the rule of law.*⁵

The profession, and BIALL as an association, faces many challenges for the future but the value of law librarians and legal information professionals remains constant and is notably appreciated across all sectors of our business. Developing and changing technologies, the greater accessibility of legal information, the growing open access movement, shifts in the approach to ways of working, studying and researching, and the financial pressures to which the industry is exposed are all impacting on the way our business is conducted. It is with some of these aspects in mind that this issue of LIM aims to address the relevance of our profession, and BIALL, in today's world.

LIM: A CELEBRATION OF BIALL AT 50

This issue of LIM opens with an article written by Dunstan Speight, BIALL President in 2018-2019. He asks *Are we still needed?* He reflects on the state of the profession today. Guy Holborn writes about professional law librarianship and the professional law librarian. He focuses on a period from 1850 to 2000 and looks at legal education and law libraries, the development of law firms and their information services, the content of law

libraries and the information needs of the profession, and the emergence of the professional law librarian.

Then, we have two articles specifically about the importance of law librarians. Daniel Greenberg contributes an entertaining and thought provoking piece entitled *Lions and Librarians: a Plea for the Intelligent Conservation of an Unnecessarily Endangered Species* while David Ibbetson asks *Why Ever Should Anyone Need a Law Librarian?* and takes a view from academia.

Samuel Wiggins' article approaches from the commercial sector and is entitled *Reflections on Current Trends and Predictions for Commercial Law Libraries* and considers how those trends might continue over the next five to ten years. The areas that he considers include legal technology, the future of the library space, the role of the professional body, training, and the relationship between traditional librarianship and knowledge management. Holger Aman explores the *Legal Information Landscape* and how *Change is the New Normal*.

In a combined article, five authors with a wealth of experience provide a summary of the activities of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians and the developments in law librarianship over the past 50 years, each writing about a different decade. Barbara Tearle (writing about the 1970s), Christine Miskin (the 1980s), Michael Maher (the 1990s), Fiona Fogden (the 2000s) and Narinder Toor (the 2010s) each bring their own experiences and memories to their writing and complete a half century of reflections to coincide with BIALL's fiftieth anniversary.

The celebration of 50 years of BIALL is completed with three other pieces about the Association. Catherine Bowl, John Furlong and Caroline Mosley contribute a joint piece about BIALL Conferences from 1970 until 2019. Jennefer Aston, former Chair of the Association, writes about the BIALL Irish Group while Loyita Worley, also a former Chair, discusses BIALL and its wider profile internationally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As ever, I wish to record my gratitude to each of the contributors to this issue of the journal and to the LIM Editorial Board and our publishers, Cambridge University Press. I also wish to thank Loyita Worley for all her help and support as Chair of the LIM Editorial Board. I look forward to working with her successor as Chair, Sinéad Curtin while Loyita will continue to be a member of the Board for a further year. I also thank Paul Banks, who has recently stepped down, for his contribution as a board member especially with reference to his excellent proof-reading work.

Happy 50th Birthday, BIALL!

David Wills
Editor

Footnotes

¹ BIALL Council minutes of the meeting held on Friday 16 April 1999.

² Mary Blake, *A History of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians 1969–1999* [Warwick]: BIALL, 2000.

³ Lord Woolf, 'The Rule of Law and a Change in the Constitution', *Cambridge Law Journal* (2004) 63(2), 317.

⁴ John Larkin, 'Lines on Maps and the Frontiers of Legal Research', *Legal Information Management* (2012) 12(4), 246.

⁵ Jules Winterton, *Law Libraries and their Users* in Loyita Worley and Sarah Spells (eds) *BIALL Handbook of Legal Information Management* (2nd ed). Ashgate, 2014, 1.