

BIALL Annual Study Conference & Exhibition: Diary of an Australian Delegate

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INTRODUCTION

In early June I attended the annual conference of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians (BIALL) as the ALLG's sponsored representative.¹ As I was very honoured to be selected, I endeavoured to experience as much of the Conference atmosphere as possible. I attended all of the sessions, including the pre-conference seminar. I had the opportunity to socialise with many international colleagues at the dinners and organised excursions, and also had a good browse around the excellent trade exhibition.

Pre-conference Seminar

The pre-conference seminar was held on the afternoon prior to the official opening. The theme was 'Motivating your team'. Mary Birch of MEB Training ran the fast moving ninety-minute session with lots of enthusiasm and practical tips. She concentrated on assertiveness skills, in particular how to deal with destructive behaviour in the workplace. Many assertive models were looked at with examples of passive phrases to be used when dealing with combative opponents. My favourite one was 'negative assertion'. By agreeing with the complainant that there is a problem straight away somehow manages to take the argumentative stance out of the complainant. Although you do not have to agree that the complainant is actually right, it just gives you time to calm the person down enough to get your point across.

The second phase of the seminar was about motivational theories. In particular, ways of communicating with your staff so that they feel involved and informed.

¹ BIALl 31st Annual Study Conference & Exhibition 2000, 'Managing or just managing', Bristol, England, 9-12 June.

and develop a sense of ownership towards their job. Reviews and visible targets were seen as encouragement measures for long-term projects. We were also shown how to use assertiveness skills in this area to motivate colleagues. Overall I found the session very useful and informative, and unlike many other training sessions, I found that when time was up I wanted to stay and learn more.

CONFERENCE PAPERS

Friday 9 June 2000

Elizabeth Orna (One Stevens Associates) *People and technology: battlefield or creative interaction?*

Elizabeth discussed how to manage the people and technology relationship, especially how to deal with the IT phobia and the IT euphoria players. Knowledge management issues were covered along with the need to judge information quality on the Internet

Ian McAleer (Freelance Consultant) *EURO: an Australian perspective from Britain*

I am not quite sure what the Australian perspective was, but this was a very informative paper about how the EURO currency is going to affect the British economy. Ian covered the timetabling of the Economic and Monetary Union and how this will bring about large macro economic changes in Britain, from e-commerce dealings to changes to vending machines and cash registers. This theme was also used as good example of how librarians will have to deal not only with the EURO, but how to deal with change in general.

Saturday 10 June 2000

Alistair Pauline (Hoppenstedt Bonnier plc) *Companies House information provision: today/tomorrow*

Companies House is the repository of information on British companies. Alistair discussed how there is a driving force from Europe for standardization; how electronic signatures will affect electronic filing; and how to obtain basic information on companies. The future outlook is for all company information to be available on the Internet.

Shone McTavish (School of Information Studies, University of Northumbria) *Sweet & Maxwell Bicentenary project report: 'Law and order: legal information provision into the next century' final conclusions*

Sweet & Maxwell sponsored a bicentenary research project on trends in legal information provision. The report was published in the December 1999 issue of the *Law Librarian*. Questionnaires were sent to 750 legal information providers. Interviews were conducted along focus themes of training, knowledge management, information technology, skills and services. One of the most interesting findings was about use of electronic media. It showed that there is a variation in what resources are being accessed. There were also mixed responses to the advantages and disadvantages of electronic and hardcopy materials. Not surprisingly there was general dissatisfaction with the publishers over their pricing structure of electronic resources. Overall, respondents were satisfied with their professional status within their organizations and were evolving their skills with the development of electronic demands.

Members' forum

This thirty-minute session gave members the opportunity to ask the BIALL Council questions. It was a very interesting and instructive session. As an overseas delegate, thankfully all I had to do was stand up and give a little wave. Representatives of the BIALL Standing Committees gave their individual reports at a session later in the afternoon.

Peter Guildford (Universities & Colleges Staff Development) *Good practice in recruitment and selection*

Peter gave a very informative paper on issues involved in employing staff. Topics ranged from advertising and designing selection criteria to interviewing techniques and final decision-making skills.

Jane Coker (Coker Vis Partnership) *Good recruitment practices for UK judges: a recent case*

Jane Coker analysed the exemptions from normal civil service procedures when private appointments are made in the Lord Chancellor's Office. She challenged a recent special adviser appointment to the Lord Chancellor's Department on the

grounds of sex discrimination. Special advisers are political appointments that are made with little consultation with the legal profession and are very rarely advertised. The Lord Chancellor's Department is expected to appeal against the decision in October or November 2000.

Laurie West-Knights (Barrister and Vice-Chair, Society for Computers & Law)

The BAILII Project

The BAILII project is a joint project set up with the assistance of the AustLII team. It was very interesting to discover that its original name was UKILELI. He generally spoke about the history of the formation of BAILII and the databases that it contains.

Wendy Beecham (Sweet & Maxwell) *The road less traveled: partners in product development and marketing*

Sweet & Maxwell recently went through a stage of creating product development strategies. One that is relevant to information professionals is a customer-focused service. The focus was mainly directed at law firm librarians but there were general themes which were relevant to all librarians.

Sunday 11 June 2000

Maurice Frankel (Campaign for Freedom of Information [UK]) *The UK Freedom of Information Act – how well will it work?*

The UK *Freedom of Information Bill 2000* is currently going through the House of Lords. The focus of the Bill affects a wide range of authorities including private bodies with public functions. Maurice covered some major concerns, in particular the application of the 'public interest test', the 'harm test' exemption, and the general class exemptions for disclosure.

Gerry Smyth (Office of the Information Commissioner [Ireland]) *Freedom of information: changing the culture of official secrecy in Ireland*

Gerry discussed the position prior to the *Freedom of Information Act*, the scope of the new Act and the implementation processes.

Members' forum

This forum gave members an opportunity to comment on how BIALL Conferences are organised. Conference organisers were used for the first time for this conference and the majority of members gave their approval. They discussed the increasing costs and the move from academic to hotel-type venues. It was interesting to note that 50% of members are now from law firm libraries.

Caron Rollins (University of Victoria, Canada) *Law and the North American Collections Inventory Project in Canada: a review*

Caron looked at collection development issues in academic libraries. Twenty academic libraries were involved in this assessment of Canadian legal materials in academic law libraries.

Dr Peter Clinch (RSLP Project in Collaborative Management of Foreign Legal Materials) *A Web guide to overseas law in UK libraries: a project for the 21st century*

This project looked at primary legal resources held by UK libraries. They are planning to develop an inventory by July 2000 that can be searched on the Internet. Not just a new form of an automated union list it also describes the strengths of collections. Dr Clinch also discussed the need to keep it regularly updated. The site is at <http://ials.sas.ac.uk/rslp/forlegal.htm>

Monday 12 June 2000

Panel Session Outside in: integrating external databases with internal knowledge management systems

Robert Dow (PLC Publications)

Robert looked at intranets in law firms. He discussed the issue of precedents and how to re-mould information to the specific needs of the firm. In particular, he described how to take information from the Internet and repackage it to the needs of the law firm's information requirements.

Derek Sturdy (Granite & Comfrey)

Derek discussed the content management of internal/external integration. The importance of not just creating a database but making sure that it is kept up to

date. He also covered some very technical aspects of how to centralise internal/external links and some other valuable searching tools.

Daniel Pollick (DLA)

Daniel is the IT Director of the DLA law firm. It was very interesting to hear about the IT point of view. He discussed the cultural issues of bringing external knowledge into a law library and, most importantly, the role of knowledge management. He covered briefly the needs of DLA and, more generally, the impact of the Internet on law libraries. He gave some very practical advice about KM and intranets, for example, how to use existing Microsoft products to create intranets. The technical aspects of how to ensure that the information is accessible, relevant and current were also very interesting. Daniel queried whether librarians should compete with publishers and why more utilisation should be made of products like legal news which are delivered by daily e-mails. As a final point, he looked at how the future of law librarians will be affected. Basically, as long as librarians keep adding value to the information, not just duplicating it, librarians will still be very much needed. He used travel agents as an excellent example. Daniel's paper generated a lot of questions from the audience and I found this paper to be the most outstanding, positive and interactive of the Conference.

Dr Eric Davies (Library and Information Statistical Unit, Loughborough University) *What's the use of a library? Assessing performance and outcomes*

LISU provides a consultancy service for valuing libraries and evaluating performance. The aim of the service is to help people better manage their libraries. Dr Davies looked at strategies for change and adapting to the future as well as the importance of statistics and performance indicators. A very comprehensive look at a very technical way of monitoring, benchmarking and evaluating the performance of a library.

Graham Coult (Editor of *Managing Information*, ASLIB) *Promotional techniques for information services*

Graham covered some very general and basic promotional strategies for libraries.

SOCIAL SCENE AND TRADE EXHIBITION

There were three dinners and one excursion providing a great opportunity to meet and liaise with international colleagues. The excellent trade exhibition was the usual fare of publishers and interactive electronic resources demonstrations. It was a good chance to track down and chat to some of those elusive international publishers and to see what's new on the overseas market.

CONCLUSION

I would estimate the BIALL Conference to be equivalent in size and structure to the Australian Law Librarians' Symposium. I fully enjoyed the conference and as the ALLG representative I was made to feel welcome by all of the BIALL members. On a more personal level I found the delegates a very warm and sociable crowd. They were very interactive during question time at the sessions. At some stages delegates were questioning each other or expanding on issues by recounting their own experiences. During the dinners and breaks I found myself very busy meeting and chatting with other delegates about issues which we discovered were common to all librarians right around the world. I also hope that they benefited as well by having an Australian representative there to meet and discuss issues with.

I fully encourage the ALLG to sponsor another member to go to the next BIALL Conference in Cork 8-11 June 2001 as I found it a most worthwhile and rewarding experience. Anyone interested in attending the next BIALL Conference can find further details on their excellent Website <http://biall.org.uk/cork2001.htm>

POSTSCRIPT

For a reasonable price of £5 I purchased the recently published book written by Mary Blake, *A history of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians 1969-1999*. It gives a very comprehensive historical account of the evolution of BIALL and makes very interesting reading.