

BIALL Annual Study Conference and Exhibition, 2001

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During the eight years that I have been involved in the Australian Law Librarians' Group (ALLG) I have envied the lucky recipients of scholarships who attend a conference in the United Kingdom or the USA. These scholarships were initially awarded by Butterworths and then the ALLG stepped in when that sponsorship was withdrawn. It is an honour to have been selected by my professional colleagues to represent the ALLG at the 32nd BIALL Annual Study Conference in Cork last June.

From the first afternoon of my arrival the BIALL Committee members and conference team made me welcome. For the five days that I was there the social activities were interrupted from time to time by several interesting papers. A dinner had been organised for each night, at different venues and with a variety of entertainments. Yes, law librarians the world over know how to let their hair down. At the Conference Dinner the flavour was distinctly Irish with a superb display of Irish dancing from a very youthful troupe of young ladies, followed by music from a spirited Irish band, then the floor was given over to the delegates for a bit of rock and roll disco to work off the generous dinner. The following night was less formal but many enjoyed the rigours of a ceili after dinner.

On Sunday afternoon a large number of delegates took advantage of one of several excursions offered. My bus took me off to Blarney Castle where we thought we might gain some public speaking skills by kissing the Blarney Stone. However, Blarney was a procrastinator, and I don't think that is such a useful skill for a librarian. A touch o' the Irish never goes astray though.

During the time in between came the cerebral stuff. I came away from the Conference stimulated by several issues which I saw as being of direct relevance to our profession in Australia.

CONFERENCE VERSUS SYMPOSIUM

The first was the form of the Conference itself. The BIALL Conference began in a similar format to that of our Law Librarians' Symposium. It was held on University campuses and utilised university accommodation. Numbers grew and expectations grew - over 400 delegates attended the conference in Cork. In recent years BIALL has employed a conference organiser and utilised conference centres and hotel accommodation.

This year the registration fee was £274 (VAT incl.) or approximately \$A740. The two main days of the conference were Saturday and Sunday, with a half-day on Friday and Monday. Many delegates arrived after close of business on Friday and returned to their place of employment Monday morning thus attending the conference in their own time. In Australia, most conferences are held during the working week.

In 2002 the Queensland Division is presenting our 4th Law Librarians Symposium. They have had considerable difficulty locating appropriate venues to accommodate the expected number of delegates. This is a factor that is inevitable in the smaller Australian cities. Even in Sydney, the conference venue was stretched to its limit. The organising committee of the first two Symposiums in Melbourne achieved the desired aims of the Group by presenting a low cost, high interest event – but at what cost to the individuals who organised it?. It took considerable dedication and effort on their behalf (and they also held down their day job).

The issue I am raising here for ALLG members to consider is the future of the Law Librarians' Symposium. Do we continue to strive for a low budget meeting so that it is accessible to all ALLG members (and others), or do we let it ride on its success to the level of a professionally organised conference? If the latter, are members then divided between attendance at the ALLG conference and the Asia Pacific Health, Law and Specials Conference (yes, it is reverting to that name in 2003) because they cannot afford to pay \$600 plus travel/accommodation

expenses every year? If the former, a low cost meeting, how can it be accomplished?

LOBBYING

The second issue I noted was occasioned by the paper presented by Robert Oakley, President of the American Association of Law Librarians (AALL). Robert is also Director of the Law Library at Georgetown University, Washington, DC. He spoke about lobbying on information policy issues. Several years ago the AALL decided to become pro-active in this area and appointed Robert to lobby on behalf of the organisation in Washington. He and his support team represent not just law librarians and libraries, but also the libraries' clients. The latter can be a powerful support group – although Robert said that it needs a lot of work to gain their support. Robert also forms alliances with other lobbyists who share an interest in a particular issue.

The issues that the AALL Lobby Group has dealt with include:

- access to government information at the lowest cost possible,
- citation reform,
- access to legal information on the web,
- IP issues, e. g. NAPSTA,
- licensing issues,
- anti-trust and mergers of publishing houses,
- commercial laws and licensing, and
- fair business practices

BIALL intends to consider forming its own lobby group and I suggest that ALLG members consider the possibility of something similar in Australia. We should be more pro-active in lobbying our governments on matters that affect our services. We have lobbied in the past, but it has generally been a reactive process.

LAW LIBRARIAN AS A TITLE

The third matter that aroused my interest, not surprisingly, was the change of name of the BIALl journal, the *Law Librarian*, to *Legal Information*

Management. One of the reasons given for the change of name is that librarians had become disenchanted with 'Law Librarian' as a job title and many had changed their titles to become legal information managers or similar. They felt that others within the legal profession failed to give the skills and expertise of law librarians due recognition. The change in title gave them recognition on a par with IT managers and finance managers. The Editorial Board conducted a detailed survey of law librarians and found a majority in favour of the change of name for the journal. The final decision to change was also influenced by market opportunities. Many people operate in the field of legal information provision who are unlikely to give much consideration to a journal with the name *The Law Librarian*.

A major difference between the *Australian Law Librarian* and *Legal Information Management* (formerly *Law Librarian*) is that the former is published and edited by members of the ALLG. *Legal Information Management* is published by Sweet and Maxwell for BIALL and the Editor is paid on a part-time basis. He is supported, as is the Editor of *Australian Law Librarian*, by an honorary editorial board of law librarians and other interested persons.

I suggest that ALLG members, in their various forums, discuss the issues of professional titles and the name of our journal. Many qualified law librarians in Australia now work under a title other than 'Law Librarian'.¹ We also know that there are many people working in the legal information industry that have no law library experience or skills but who are interested in the management of law information. However, is the tide turning? Are the skills of law librarians now being recognised to the extent that they can carry the title with them into new areas of operation and responsibility?

Before jumping on the bandwagon and changing the name of our journal we also need to consider its purpose. The *Australian Law Librarian* is currently a journal published by the ALLG for its members. Its title therefore seems appropriate. I

¹ 'Librarianship skills in demand in the Age of Information', *Australian Law Librarian*, vol 8, no 2, 2000, pp 120-132

would like to see members engage in thoughtful debate on the future of the journal and its targeted audience before any change of title.

PAPERS OF INTEREST

There were many papers of interest, some of which are available on the web site: <http://www.biall.org.uk/CONF2001.htm#Programme>. Michael McDowell, the relatively new Attorney General of Ireland spoke of changes he has implemented in his office, particularly his aim to have all records and documents available in electronic form including legal decisions, discussion papers, forms, and so on. A delegate raised the question about HMSO's position that electronic documents are not authoritative, to which Mr McDowell replied that documents emerge at some point in their generation as a printed document. At this point care is taken that the document is correct/authoritative, it is then stored electronically by scanning, for instance, and 'frozen' in time. Therefore it must be authoritative. McDowell claimed that the problem was attitudinal, not technical.

Another presentation of interest, particularly to me as a university law librarian, was that of David Hart, Law Librarian at the University of Dundee. David gave a grim report that more than half the universities in Scotland have a budget deficit. The teaching of law at some universities has a very uncertain future. Library budgets have been reduced to such an extent that they can now only provide essential reading, mainly for undergraduates, and are dependent on other libraries for research materials.

Later in the conference, speaking from the floor during a discussion, a law librarian from an English university said that support from other sectors of BIALL is needed for the future of law librarians and libraries in academic institutions. The trend is to replace subject librarians with generalists with larger portfolios

LIBRARY VISITS

A chance to attend an overseas conference also gives one the opportunity to visit law libraries in other countries. It was of great value to me to be able to accept the invitation of Barbara Tearle, Law Librarian at the Bodleian Law Library, Oxford

to visit the library, and she was most generous with her time in showing me around.

My time overseas was limited, but I travelled on a round-the-world air ticket which enabled me to return to Australia via the United States. As I was visiting Duke University on another mission I was able to take a look at that highly reputed law library as well.

AUSTRALIAN LAW LIBRARIANS ABROAD

The Conference also gave an opportunity to make contact with ex-patriot Australians who are working in UK law libraries. Prue Presser, formerly of the Law Library at the University of Melbourne, is now Joint IT Training and Development Officer at the Bodleian Law Library. Catherine Bowl who hails from Western Australia, is currently working at Travers Smith Braithwaite in London. Both played a prominent role at the Conference by each chairing one of the parallel sessions.

I was the official ALLG delegate at the Conference, but there were other Australians who had made their own arrangements to attend. Vanessa O'Meara of the Law Courts Library in Sydney has established many links with UK law librarians. She had a Visiting Fellowship in Law Librarianship at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, University of London (IALL) for five months in 1999. In fact she introduced Graham Greenleaf of AustLII to Jules Winterton, Librarian at the IALL, who went on to initiate the meetings that eventually led to BIALL. The other Australian to make her way to Cork was Alison O'Connor of Blake Dawson Waldron in Melbourne. Alison combined an overseas holiday in Europe with attendance at the conference. So there is more than one way to get to the BIALL Conference.

Australians at BIALL, Cork, June 2001



Alison O'Connor, Vanessa O'Meara and Helen Wallace



Catherine Bowl



Kathryn Waugh