

RETROSPECTIVE

Raiders of the Lost Archive

Abstract: In the latest in our series of articles reviewing archived issues of *Legal Information Management* and *The Law Librarian* – as the journal was once known – the LIM editors leaf through the issues of 2003.

Keywords: legal publishing; legal journals; law librarianship; legal information management; BIALL

Legal Information Management (LIM) has been around since 1970, which means pretty much every aspect of legal information technology and practice has been covered at some time or other. With that in mind, in this regular feature the editors trawl through the archives for a given year to give a snapshot of the trends, tech developments, points of discussion, controversies, and also those predictions that have come true and those that have not, of LIMs gone by. In this issue we will look at the three editions published 20 years ago ...



BULL AND BUSH

Before we get started on all things 2003, a little health warning. If you think “that can’t possibly be 20 years ago”

while reading anything below, then you are getting old. On the other hand, some things from 2003 did seem to go on for an awful long time, so maybe it’s understandable.

Take the invasion of Iraq, for example. Hostilities began on March 20, by April 9 US forces had taken Baghdad, and on May 1 President George W Bush famously declared that it was “Mission accomplished”. He might have been a tad premature, there, though.

Also in 2003, the World Health Organisation issued a global alert concerning severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which had travelled from China – where it had originated – to Hong Kong and Vietnam. SARS, which was declared as contained by July 2003, was not especially deadly, in comparison with Covid at least, with around 780 fatalities recorded globally.

Meanwhile, in Europe it was the hottest summer in over 500 years, and indeed 2002 and 2003 were the second hottest years ever worldwide, only beaten by 1998. Many were asking the question, when will all this end? The answer: the eight years before January 2023 were confirmed to be the hottest on record (World Meteorological Organization) and as we went to press 2023 looked like being confirmed the hottest yet, so no time soon.

On a cooler note, in July the island of 83-42 was discovered, which may be the northernmost piece of actual land on Earth, though this is still the subject of much discussion. It’s sometimes called Eclipse 0 or Schmitt’s Island, which makes it sound a little more attractive. But be warned, it’s only around 600km from the North Pole, so maybe not the place for a holiday.

If you like your travel a little more supersonic, then 2003 was your last chance to do this, as of writing at least, as in November Concorde made its final flight – it’s weird that something so wonderfully futuristic is now in the past.

Another thing you have not been able to do since 2003 is have a conversation in Akkala Sámi – a language from a part of Russia close to Finland – because on 29 December Maria Sergina, who was the last fluent native speaker, died. Although in the 2020 Russian census one person claimed to have some knowledge of the language, it is now pretty much extinct.

Meanwhile, some of the new English terms that are listed from this year include 'binge-watch', 'muffin-top' and 'unfriend', which makes you think this really might have been the start of the enlightened age in which we now live.

THE ONLY WAY IS ETHICS

LIM's first issue of 2003 kicked off with a look at the threat to the future of law librarians in a world where lawyers were able to access information from the computers that were on their desks. Spoiler alert, law librarians are still here, but it's interesting how often this theme comes up over the decades which we've examined in this slot. The conclusion Susan Doe, who wrote the piece, came to was: "You are part of the firm, you are not just taking up floor space. Ultimately there is no change – lawyers are still giving legal advice after receiving legal information." Which is still the case now.

Next up was a piece on Negotiating an Online Contract by Fiona Durrant (now Fogden), the writer of what is still the best book available – we believe – on the process of digital resources contract negotiation, in which she asks the scary question: "How many contracts have you signed without looking at the wording?"

There is also a huge chunk of articles on copyright, mainly to do with the then upcoming implementation of the EU Directive on Copyright, but also other things, such as a very practical piece on completing the Copyright Audit form and a thorough list of copyright resources.

Later on there's an interesting article about whether BIALL should have a code of ethics. In the wider library world there is such a thing – see the interview with CILIP President John Trevor-Allen on page 207 – yet in 2003 the only law library association with a code in place was AALL (American Association of Law Libraries). This piece recommended that a working party was set up to look into this, but we are not sure what the outcome was. Perhaps, with everything that is happening in the information world right now, this should be looked at once more?

HANGOVERS AND THE FBI

In the editorial for the Summer issue the then editor, Christine Miskin, comments on the great time that was had by all at that year's Conference, which was held in Cardiff, remarking on the "alcoholic haze which is one of the hallmarks of a true Conference attendee". Although this was then put in a global perspective. "Someone was heard to say that while it takes a week to get over a BIALL Conference it takes two weeks to get over an Australian conference!" Perhaps some further research is needed on this, just to see if this is still the case, you understand ...

Talking of hangovers, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks of 2001 there was a timely piece called the 'FBI in your Library', which examined the implications for libraries

of the USA PATRIOT Act, a then-new piece of anti-terrorism legislation, and in particular the threat to privacy it might represent. This was then followed by an article on the situation in the UK, which concludes with: "The question now is how far we are prepared to permit government agencies to intrude into aspects of private life hitherto restricted, or out of bounds, to them based on the justification of prevention of crime or terrorism." Anyone who read our interview with Stephanie Hare in the Summer 2023 edition of LIM will be aware that this is still a valid question, and it's interesting to note that it was at about this time that she started to become aware of these sorts of issues.

Elsewhere, Emily Allbon and Andy Bromley describe the recently initiated Lawbore website, which then and now was and is a "subject-orientated gateway to legal resources developed by City University," though in no way boring.

An overview of the SLS / BIALL (SLS is the Society of Legal Scholars) Academic Law Library Survey 2001 / 2002 was also featured. Among the interesting findings was that Sunday opening continued to be adopted widely in 2002 with 75 per cent of institutions now open. Meanwhile, usage of the top 10 legal databases was on the up and £126 was spent on law materials for each student in a typical university.

Also of interest from the survey, of the 87 responding law libraries 87 per cent had a "designated professional who could dedicate a significant proportion of their time to the needs of the law service". We're guessing that number might be a tad lower now.

WILLI STEINER

The Summer edition also included some sad news, the passing of Willi Steiner, but because this came in late in the publication cycle it was left until the next issue – which was actually a joint Autumn and Winter bumper edition – to celebrate the life of this remarkable man. In her Editorial, Christine Miskin wrote: "He was an outstanding law librarian and legal scholar, as well as a warm and humorous person. He was a member of a generation of international law librarians in every sense of the word, as not only was he fluent in several languages, but he also worked in law libraries both in this country and in Europe."

There are a number of personal appreciations of the great man in the issue, charting his time in Vienna before WWII, and his flight to England as a refugee, and then his remarkable career in detail – indeed, there are 12 full pages devoted to him. If you want to know more about this remarkable librarian, then take a look at this issue on the Cambridge Core platform (which is available to all BIALL members).

This issue's Editorial also brought the news that CUP was to take over as the publisher of LIM from the very next issue, and that it was to be made available in both electronic and print formats – which surely calls for a LIM / CUP 20th anniversary party in March?



Willi Steiner, described in LIM as “an outstanding law librarian and legal scholar, as well as a warm and humorous person,” died in 2003

Elsewhere in this issue are two fascinating articles on ‘Law Making and Devolution’, one looking at ‘The Welsh Experience’ and the other ‘The Northern Ireland Experience’, both of which were based on papers that were presented at the Conference in June. The first of these, by Winston Roddick QC, then the Counsel General for the National Assembly of Wales, makes an interesting point about the bilingual aspect of Welsh law-making. “Our experience of bilingual legislative drafting is already teaching us the benefits it typically brings in terms of clarity. When you have to express the same thing in two languages you really have to know what that thing is.”

There was also a report by South African law librarian Daniele Heij on her experiences at that summer’s BIALL Conference in Cardiff, which did not get off to the best of starts as she waited for her train at Paddington Station: “Sometimes you’re the pigeon, sometimes you’re the statue, as they say, and it was my turn to be the statue.” Happily, her experiences from then on in were much more positive.

Another person not to get off to the best of starts at a conference was Karen Gordon, who attended the AALL bash in Seattle. “I got some idea of the scale of this meeting when trying to book accommodation. I was told by a local accommodation agency: ‘Sure we can get you a B&B, as long as you’re not a librarian – they’ve booked up the entire city for the third week of July!’” Isn’t it interesting that librarians are so efficient when it comes to ‘booking’?