

In Memoriam: Sarah Spells

It was with deep sadness that BIALL was informed of the death of Sarah Spells, Law Librarian and Deputy Head of Teaching and Research Support at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library, on the 11th September. Sarah died suddenly and tragically following a pulmonary embolism and a brief illness. Sarah achieved much during the time that she was with us; this *In Memoriam* piece reflects on her career, her professional achievements, her warm personality and humour.



(at the time), her work as Law Librarian and Deputy Head of Teaching and Research Support at SOAS and her out-of-work commitment to the Harpenden Light Operatic Society; as well as finding time to spend with her fiancé Keith and her many friends. Manage it she did though and I often wished I'd had half her energy!"

The Harpenden Light Operatic Society was something Sarah was passionate about though she preferred to be behind the scenes rather than upfront, despite her excellent singing voice. Jennifer recalled, "She was also

very enthusiastic about film and music, two of her passions I was able to share with her when we lived in the same flat for a while. Sarah possessed the best DVD collection I think I've ever had the privilege to be able to use and we would have occasional film nights, fuelled by wine, pizza and galaxy minstrels! With Sarah around, our house was always well stocked with galaxy chocolate!"

MEMORIES OF SARAH; SOME PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

Dean Mason, of Salans LLP and a BIALL colleague, recalled how he and Sarah began their professional lives in similar ways. "I first met her on the MSc Information Science course at London's City University in 2002. Sarah was approachable, friendly and fun and therefore a popular person on the course. We were both studying part-time while working as librarians and thus shared a commonality where we could discuss, amongst other things, how we were going to fit in all the studying while working full-time. This was never a problem for Sarah as she was extremely well-organised and always prepared for our lectures and tutorials. It came as no surprise that Sarah went on to achieve a distinction for her Masters."

Jennifer Darroch, Research Librarian at Berwin Leighton Paisner LLP, and a close friend recalled how she met Sarah for the first time. "Sarah and I first met around 8 years ago, as fresh faced new graduate law librarians finding our way around our first ever BIALL conference in Edinburgh. Feeling a little nervous about what to expect, Sarah's warm smile and enthusiastic nature made me feel instantly at ease. Since then I've had the privilege of being able to count Sarah not only as a fellow law librarian but as one of my closest friends".

Jennifer further recalled, "Sarah's enthusiasm for her work was obvious to those who knew her. She was always looking for opportunities to spread the word about SOAS and gain more of an understanding of the various areas of law covered there. From her attendance at various conferences to the Masters course she began last year, she was always keen to learn more. The Masters course was something she'd talked about doing for years and her passion and dedication were paying off, receiving a distinction in her first year of the course. I often wondered how Sarah managed to fit it all in, adding studying for an LL.M to her already full commitments for BIALL as Publications Chair

SARAH; HER PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Within BIALL Sarah will be best remembered as the Chair of the Publications Committee. Daniella King, of Winckworth Sherwood and the former chair of that committee when Sarah first joined in late 2005, described her as a "shining light" and a "safe pair of hands" on the committee. Dean Mason, who joined the publications committee in July 2009 when Sarah was Chair, recalled how it had been, "inevitable that Sarah would be a great candidate to take on the responsibility for the committee and inject her brand of high organisation and personality into proceedings". "Sarah invited me along to a committee meeting on the basis that I was under no obligation to join, but knowing I would be hooked (which she admitted at a later stage)."

Under Sarah's leadership, the Committee delivered an extra level of quality and depth to its portfolio. Key achievements included, updating, expanding and republishing the Legal Research Packs in 2010. There followed a redesign of BIALL Newsletter with an improved image and which included a greater range of content for members. Another project involved the updating of the BIALL Careers Information Leaflet which promotes law librarianship as a profession. Sarah also took on a substantial role as editor of a new edition of the BIALL Legal Information Handbook. This involved a huge amount of work coordinating the various submissions from a range of authors and editing the

text throughout to produce the final manuscript for the publishers; this was submitted in September of this year.

Despite her commitments at SOAS, and within BIALL, Sarah's enthusiasm for contributing to the profession was not curbed. In the Newsletter for August 2006 issue included a "Day in the Life" piece from Sarah detailing a typical day at SOAS and featured an excellent photo of her taken during the Oxegen Festival in Dublin, where "she had a great time getting wet!" Sarah would continue to contribute to the Newsletter, including articles on a guide to festivals in "Things to do during the summer" (May 2007), "Adventures in Mumbai" (March 2008) and "On the Spot" (January 2010).

Sarah always gave one hundred percent whilst on the Publications Committee and the fact that she managed to achieve all this while working full-time at SOAS, and studying for an LLM (for which she gained a distinction in her first year), is testament to the hard work and dedication to these areas of her professional life and her ability to juggle a heavy workload.

In June 2012 after three years as Chair of the Publications committee, Sarah stepped down. In typical fashion, during her final committee meeting, she surprised the members with a box of doughnuts and a joke that these were "reason enough for departing." Jon Beaumont, new Chair of the Publications Committee, recalls that Sarah asked him to arrive early at the meeting to discuss taking on the role of Chair. "I was unsure about whether I could commit the time that the role required, but Sarah's pep talk convinced me that it was possible to juggle all the tasks and come out smiling". This was typical of Sarah's style of leadership. After leaving the Publications Committee, Sarah became a BIALL Council Member. With her BIALL work, Sarah was always enthusiastic and generous with both her time and with her ideas on how things could be improved. There are far too many projects that Sarah worked on for them to be listed here, but of particular note is the work she did with Jon Beaumont on moving the Directory of Law Libraries from a hardcopy publication to an online database. Whilst the work on this project is ongoing the foundations are in place for what will prove an excellent resource.

Outside of BIALL Sarah was very active within the FLARE group (Foreign LAW REsearch) and was a regular attendee at the International Association of Law Libraries (IALL) conferences. Jules Winterton of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (IALS) detailed Sarah's significant contribution when he wrote, "Sarah was the representative of SOAS together with representatives from IALS, the Bodleian Law Library in Oxford, the Squire Law

Library in Cambridge and the British Library. All the members of this tight-knit group valued Sarah's active participation and have asked me to express their condolences and their sense of loss."

Sarah contributed significantly to the close relationship between SOAS and the IALS. Jules recalled Sarah's efforts in that respect, "There is a considerable amount of professional collaboration at various levels with SOAS and this was conducted with Sarah in particular. Several of the Library staff at IALS knew Sarah well through this work and she became close friends with some of the Library staff of a similar age at IALS."

Apart from her wonderful personal qualities as a bright, positive, enthusiastic and thoroughly engaging colleague, Jules was also impressed by Sarah's contributions to the profession of law librarianship. He said, "Sarah was without doubt one of the most promising law librarians of her generation and displayed the courage, initiative, determination and dedication to her chosen profession which few can match. Sarah had already achieved a great deal and I, and others, had expected her to play a leadership role in the future. It is a great loss to the profession as well as a tragic personal loss to her loved ones that she did not have the opportunity to fulfil these expectations."

As a friend and a colleague many of us will miss Sarah's advice, enthusiasm, generosity of spirit and all round lust for life. Many of us will also remember her smile and her way of making you feel like you were the most important person at the time. Jennifer Darroch recalls how she and Sarah had a standing joke at the BIALL Conference; "Sarah would pretend to be hoping she'd be read out as Wildy BIALL Law Librarian of the Year. She'd sit fingers crossed and then mock disappointment when it wasn't her as the rest of us stifled our giggles. One day, she'd say, one day." I have no doubt that in due course, had she been given more time with us, she'd have achieved just that reward and recognition."

Not only has Sarah contributed so much in such a short space of time, she has left a wider legacy as a person, as someone that was able to fearlessly pursue her careers goals and passions and be an inspiration to colleagues. It is with this in mind that BIALL intends to dedicate the new edition of the BIALL Handbook of Legal Information Management to Sarah's memory.

BIALL Council would like to thank all those who have contributed to this *in memoriam* piece. These individuals include; Dean Mason, Daniella King, Jon Beaumont, Jennifer Darroch and Jules Winterton.

James Mullan
BIALL President