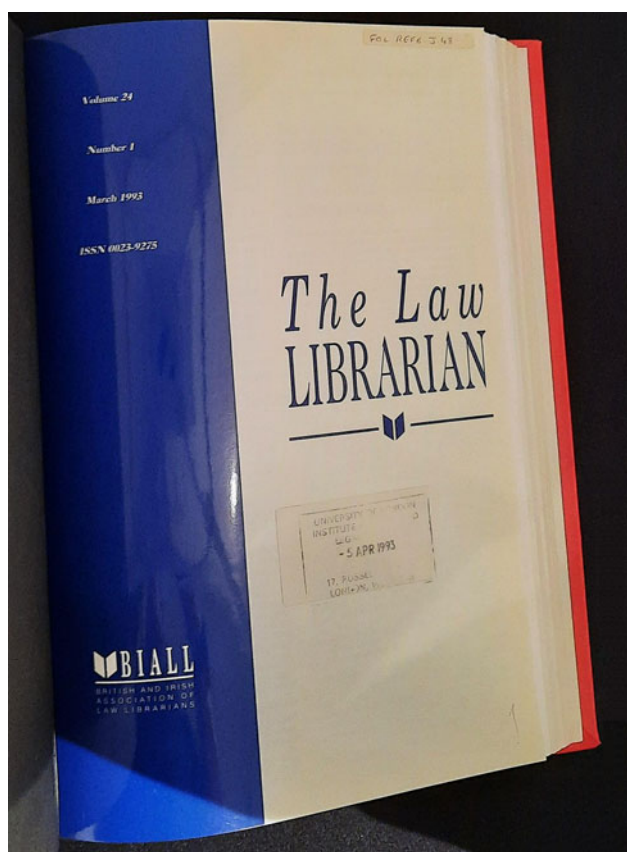


## RETROSPECTIVE

# Raiders of the Lost Archive

**Abstract:** In the third in our series of regular 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 1993.

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



*The bound volume of 1993 issues in the IALS library*

*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 four editions published 30 years ago ...

## LOST DAYS AND TRICKY SUMS

If you happened to live on the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, one thing you might have noticed about

1993 was that you lost an entire day. This was because its calendar was put forward 24 hours so that it could be on the Eastern Hemisphere side of the International Date Line, which meant skipping the 21st of August.

Luckily, not much happened on the 21st of August in 1993, anyway. But this was certainly not the case for the rest of the year, which began with Czechoslovakia ceasing to be in January, splitting up into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, while on the very same day as these new borders were established, the European Economic Community was getting rid of the trade barriers between member states by creating the single market. Later in the year, in November, the Maastricht Treaty started to take effect, formally establishing the European Union.

Bill Clinton was sworn in for his first term as US President at the start of the year, and in March Janet Reno became the first female Attorney General of the United States. Meanwhile, in South Africa the 32-member Transitional Executive Committee held its first meeting in Cape Town; notable because this was the first meeting of an official government body with Black members in the country. Staying in South Africa, Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk shared the Nobel Peace Prize, “for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa”.

Elsewhere, Niamh Kavanagh won the Eurovision Song Contest for Ireland, Manchester United were crowned as the first ever UK Premier League champions – for the 1992/93 season – while British maths genius Andrew Wiles presented his proof of Fermat’s Last Theorem for the first time, a thorny little puzzler that had been troubling mathematicians for over three centuries. We’ll leave you to decide which of those three achievements is the most impressive.

## IT WAS WHAT IT WAS

Talking of numbers, by 1993 *The Law Librarian*, as LIM was then known, was up to four issues per annum, this having been approved by Council the previous year. The first of these, March, was devoted to the use of information technology in law libraries, with a variety of suppliers

writing about their products and services, pieces that were then followed by a case study written by a law librarian who used that very same product.

This was a useful theme, for as Diane Raper, then Head of Library and Information Services at DJ Freeman, pointed out in her appraisal of the UNICORN Collection Management System, from Sirsi, “As the costs of automating library housekeeping and adding computerised information retrieval systems have fallen in relative terms, effective systems have come within the realms of affordability for all but the smallest of libraries.” There was plenty to choose from, too, and the issue also contained pieces on BRS-Search; the Soutron Library System; CAIRS-LMS; Personal Librarian; Headfast and others.

The results of a survey on ‘University Expenditure on Law Materials 1991/92’ were also published in the March issue, the headline numbers being £7000 (the lowest) up to £109,300.

Elsewhere in the issue David Byrne, then the Information Services Manager at BT Group Legal Services, provided an interesting piece on ‘Delivering Quality Services Through Technology’, which makes the point that technology really is an ally. “Electronic mail can cut through hierarchical layers bringing senior management close to every employee without the ‘fog’ of cascading information. E-mail and in-house networks are a powerful tool for the information professional if used correctly.” Just remember that the next time you’re working through the 23,012 emails that have accumulated while you were on your hols ...

## KIPPERS AND KILTS

The June issue of *The Law Librarian* was originally supposed to be devoted to quality management and BS5750, explained editor Christine Miskin, but at the time there had been little sign that libraries were obtaining the standard, which is to do with quality systems.

There is still plenty of quality in the issue, though, in both respects, which fitted the zeitgeist of the time with many organisations and businesses across all sectors then looking at quality control and quality assurance as a way to gain a competitive edge. In ‘Improving the Quality of Legal Services’ Caroline P Hedges addressed just what ‘quality’ is, making the point that in the provision of legal services it is really all about three things: professional competence; client care and business skills.

A piece on the ‘BIALL Survey of Law Firm Library and Information Services’ is also in the June issue, one of the first surveys of this kind ever to be conducted by the organisation. One hundred postal questionnaires were sent, resulting in a 78% return rate – can you imagine dealing with that amount of raw data on paper and performing the analysis without SurveyMonkey or Excel? Of note, in 1993 only six library or information services had been established longer than 16 years. Education and training were high on the list of responsibilities for service providers and, perhaps because many services

were fairly immature, there was an increasing number of subscriptions being set up to access external databases and CD ROM services.

Libraries were also “waiting to see the effect the new skills based Law Society’s Legal Practice Course will have on future trainee solicitors”. In 2023, we are now waiting to see the impact of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination on our services and future trainees’ skill sets.

There are also articles on law on the Isle of Man, “famous for its tailless cats, its kippers and its motorcycle races”, and also a piece on what to do with unwanted legal materials sub-headed “Destroy, Donate or Sell”. This is something that we will be returning to in an upcoming issue of LIM, so hang on a while before you bin those copies of the Yellow and Orange tax handbooks.

There was a report on the 1992 BIALL Conference in Edinburgh, too, which was written by Jacqui Elliott, then the Court Librarian at the High Court of Australia who attended as the BIALL Exchange Award Delegate. Jacqui loved the experience, but she did write: “It should be recorded for posterity, however, that the conference organiser from Dundee actually *hired* his kilt!” There you go, posterity in action.

## POLISH SWEETS AND BULGARIAN BEER

Special information services was the theme of the September issue and John Harrow, then of IfB, a research agency based at the Westminster Reference Library, set the tone with, “I never cease to be amazed at the endless variety of abstruse, bizarre and downright perverse queries our legal practice throws at us, queries that have no immediate relevance to any point of law that an innocent mind can conceive.” Though he does go on to conclude: “I have enjoyed working with our legal clients, they are invariably a cheerful and unflappable bunch – I guess they have to be.”

With the then recent crumbling of the Iron Curtain an urgent need for business information on Eastern European countries had arisen, and Tania Konn, then the senior assistant librarian at Glasgow University Library, explained how, during the early years of glasnost and perestroika (where are those two when you need them, eh?), the university had been getting many requests from businesses that had “somehow got to know of the collection of Soviet and East European materials housed in the libraries”. The service had built up from there, and at the time of writing in 1993 it was dealing with requests for information on anything from the confectionery distribution system in Poland to the location of the main breweries in Bulgaria.

Perhaps the biggest talking point in the legal sector, though, was *Pepper v Hart*, which had been fully reported in at least five series of reports in 1993, and Guy Holborn’s article on the relevance of this is as significant now as it was when it was first published. It was held in *Pepper v Hart* that reference to parliamentary materials would be permitted to be relied upon in court where legislation is ambiguous or obscure. Guy’s article

highlighted the lack of access to the Parliamentary debates and the cost that this sort of research could potentially add to a solicitor's bill. Thirty years on, the *Pepper v Hart* training course run by BIALL remains a rite of initiation for new professionals in our sector.

Meanwhile, Margaret Brittin, then the library and information consultant at Information Unlimited, said of her role: "I tend to describe myself as a 'freelance librarian', but this usually leaves [people] mystified. 'You mean you rush into a library, stamp a few books and rush out again?' said one person jokingly."

Later, in an article intriguingly entitled 'In Praise of Law Librarians: Lexis in the United Kingdom – 1975–1993', Kyle Bosworth mentions BIALL. "The above initials spell out an unfortunate word that is not particularly pleasant to the ear, but this is not the case with the vibrant voices of the members of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians. They represent a power that should never be ignored by those who wish to sell legal materials to lawyers – in any form." As true today as it was in 1993.

## DINOSAUR SNACKS AND FIGHTING BACK

Papers presented at the 24th BIALL Annual Study Conference held at Elliot College, University of Kent, accounted for most of the content in the final edition of 1993, two of which offered a very different assessment of the state of the legal profession in England. Entitled 'Business in the '90s', the first focussed on the large law

firm, and was written by the then managing partner of Allen & Overy, W Tudor John and was largely positive. The second was by Peter Gottschalk of Beadle Pitt & Gottschalk in Canterbury, and it painted a bleak picture of the future of the high street practice, concluding: "And what of the rest of the '90s? For most firms it will be a matter of survival." Both also make the point that lawyers were not viewed favourably at that time, W Tudor John referring to the must-see cinema release of that year when he wrote: "They say that the scene in *Jurassic Park* which creates the greatest applause is the one where the dinosaur swallows the lawyer. Wouldn't it be great to have the audience in tears when this happened?"

Elsewhere, Ulla de Stricker outlined the constraints legal database designers face, while David Shaw expanded on his paper on the cataloguing of rare books online, noting that, "In many ways the rare books cataloguer has to be more innovative than his counterpart dealing with the more bread-and-butter modern monographs."

But the highlight of the conference for editor Christine Miskin was Professor Bob Berring's 'masterpiece' on the electronic future of law libraries, in which he considers what he saw as the precarious position of librarians in the electronic information revolution. In the article that arose from his presentation Professor Berring concluded with the following call to arms: "Librarians must seek and seize power. It is the only way to preserve the ideals that have motivated us for so long. We must not withdraw at this crucial point, we must fight for what we care about." Reading that now, you might say the very same thing about generative AI.