

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

# The Path to 2020: A Vision for Change. Personal Reflections on the PLL (Private Law Libraries) Summit Held at the 105<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Conference of the American Association of Law Libraries

**Abstract:** Kathryn Hayes reflects on the PLL (Private Law Libraries) Summit at the 2012 AALL Annual Meeting and Conference in Boston, which focussed on what law libraries and information services will look like in 2020 and what we should be doing now to advance that vision.

**Keywords:** law librarians; American Association of Law Libraries; private law libraries

## INTRODUCTION

On Friday 20 July 2012, just one week before the opening of the London Olympic Games, I headed to Boston, Massachusetts, to attend the 105<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Conference of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL). I had visited Boston a year earlier on holiday and commented that if I ever saw a conference on offer in the city I would definitely try to attend. I was, therefore, delighted to find out that AALL would be hosting their 2012 meeting in “Beantown” and was fortunate to be the recipient of the BIALL bursary which enabled me to return to this great city. It is with pleasure that I share my experiences here and hope they will encourage other BIALL members to apply for bursaries to attend overseas conferences in the future.

The main programme of conference events kicked off on Sunday 22 July, but similar to the BIALL Conference there were pre-Conference events scheduled for the Saturday. I signed up to attend the Private Law Libraries (PLL) Summit, *The Path to 2020: A Vision for Change*. My report will focus on the Summit and also give a brief overview of my conference highlights

## ORIENTATION

My first impression – they sure like an early start in the US! Registration for the PLL Summit opened at 7am with a buffet breakfast being served before the keynote address started at 8:10am. Thankfully there were plentiful

urns of Starbucks coffee available! The PLL Summit<sup>1</sup> was held in various salons and meeting rooms at the Marriott Copley Place which rather fortuitously was the hotel I was staying in, so I didn’t get lost at the crack of dawn. My second impression – wow there are so many people here. The PLL Summit alone was catering for 350 delegates and I soon realised it had taken librarians from the west coast of the US just as long to get to Boston as it had me from London. This is conferencing on a huge scale. I quickly found a familiar face amongst the vast swathes of librarians in the shape of Ann Coleman, Senior Researcher at Hogan Lovells in London. Ann and I have been friends for many years and we were both excited when we discovered we would be sharing our Boston adventure together. I found it beneficial to have Ann there both for company and to discuss the sessions from the “Brit” perspective. We became known as “the Brits” by people we kept bumping into over the course of the Conference which I have decided to take as a term of endearment!

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Summit keynote speech “*Climbing the Value Ladder: Rethinking the Law Library on the Road to 2020*” was given by Jordan Furlong<sup>2</sup>. Jordan is a strategic consultant and commentator on the impact of the changing legal market on lawyers, law firms and legal organisations. Based in Ottawa, Canada, he is a partner with the global

consulting firm Edge International and a senior consultant with legal web development company Stem Legal Web Enterprises. Jordan's award winning blog Law21 is subtitled "Dispatches from a legal profession on the brink"!

Jordan's presentation focussed on how librarians can respond to, and leverage, the extraordinary changes in the legal marketplace such as the Legal Services Act 2007 in the UK, Dewey & LeBoeuf filing for bankruptcy in the US, and the emergence of Legal Process Outsourcing (LPOs) globally. He predicts the legal market and law firms in the next 10-15 years will be unrecognisable from what we see today. However, this future is not to be feared, instead we must look for opportunities and be dynamic. He referred to the crisis in large law firms whereby crisis represents a turning point when important management decisions need to be made. Law firms need to do a better job of managing their business including people and projects. Revenue growth is stagnant which means costs need to be reduced in order to retain partner profit.

Jordan argued lawyers tend to cut anything whose function they don't understand or particularly value. If they think the library is merely a cost centre then this is a cause for concern. As law firm librarians we need to change the narrative by finding ways to move at least some of our efforts from the cost to the revenue side of the business's ledger. A phrase Furlong used which I think captures this concept quite nicely is "fee-earners versus fee-burners"! We need to prove to the law firm management that our department is an indispensable provider of high value service and a critical part of the business. Everyone in the legal market is being forced to climb one or two rungs higher on the value ladder so how can law librarians achieve this?

Firstly, we need to expand and perhaps even more importantly, *be seen to be expanding*, beyond our traditional research and knowledge support functions. Invest time figuring out which basic tasks you can delegate, unbundle, outsource or automate. Don't punch below your weight by doing tasks below your skill level. Shift your default setting from receptive to active: be proactive and visible, market yourself and the library function to stakeholders. Shift out of neutral – make recommendations, opine and offer analysis; librarians have an eclectic mix of skills which can be utilised in many aspects of a law firm's business (e.g. project management) but we need to make sure decision makers are fully aware of these skills.

Furlong suggested we create new roles for ourselves that capture and express higher value, something he called "Law Librarian +". He proposed roles we could undertake internally and also externally to the law firm's clients. Like lawyers, law librarians can provide niche expert advice. The current trend of embedded librarians was suggested as a way to add value in this area. By sitting within a legal group you can become an indispensable member of the department. Personally, I prefer to

work collaboratively side by side with my fellow research librarians in a central team gaining exposure to all aspects of the business, but I can see the advantages in perhaps smaller firms where embedding may help with visibility. I don't think embedding should be seen as the only option to raising the profile of a library and the skills the librarians can offer to the various groups in a law firm and believe a central team with strong leadership can achieve this too.

Other roles Jordan suggested to secure the function of the law librarian in the future legal marketplace were to get involved with more training, perhaps offering coaching to individuals on particular research topics or design bespoke programmes for the lawyers or support staff to follow. Utilise project management skills and put yourself forward as a specialist in this field to coordinate specific projects the firm undertakes. Process management is a growing area in law firms and getting involved at an early stage will make you the "go to" people when other projects arise. Use analytical skills to do business and competitor intelligence research. This adds value by helping the lawyers understand more about both their clients and their competitors in the legal marketplace. Externally law firm librarians could get involved with legal knowledge liaison – become an integral part of the business by offering services directly to clients (no mention was made here about how this works with contracts with publishers and database providers!).

I think many of us would already see ourselves undertaking a number of these roles on a regular, if not daily basis, but perhaps this isn't so much the case in US firms? From discussions with other delegates I got the impression that "competitive intelligence" research (or business research as I think most of us in the UK refer to it) is seen as something quite new and perhaps even to be feared. In my role as Research Librarian at A&O well over 60% of the enquiries I work on are now non-legal and I think this will only increase as our lawyers are able to do more legal research themselves but instead will rely on us to assist with complex financial and analytical research. Seeking opportunities to be involved with clients more closely is an interesting idea and I am aware of library services being referred to in pitches to prospective clients. Perhaps we should investigate how to offer services directly to clients which adds value to the services the client receives from the law firm, whilst adding value to the library's services internally by making us fee-earners *not* fee-burners!

Jordan was easy to listen to and I found his address quite reassuring in terms of what the library team at A&O currently offers and how we market ourselves. Thinking of yourself as an overhead on a balance sheet is a useful analogy to make you consider how and where you can add value in your daily work. I look forward to climbing the rungs of the value ladder in the next seven years – I hope we will be fairly near the top come 2020!

## PANEL SESSION 1 – THE LIBRARIAN’S PERSPECTIVE

After the keynote, the first panel session sought to answer ‘what will library services be like in 2020 and what can we do now to plan for these services’. Sandra Campbell, Library Director for the North American region of Baker & McKenzie LLP, was first to respond. She sees it as essential that library managers be part of the wider executive team and an integral part of the firm’s strategy. We will need to leverage new technologies and provide innovative services to both our lawyers and clients. One of Sandra’s recommendations which I thought to be a very interesting idea was for the library to publish an annual report in which you really show off what the department and staff have done over the year and illustrate how and where you have added value.

Steve Wingert, Executive Director at Marshall, Gerstein & Borum was next to speak in his capacity as President-Elect of the Association of Legal Administrators. He encouraged law librarians to be visible to the management team, to show initiative and get involved with firm-wide projects. Steve suggested the library team be more closely allied to the business development and business acceptance units to share skills and develop better understanding of the business as a whole. I’m sure I can’t have been the only librarian in the room thinking “we already do this” but it was interesting to hear his views.

The final speaker, Stephen Abram<sup>3</sup> from Cengage Learning, predicted a future whereby we practise “device agnosticism” – people will be able to choose the device they work on and we will need to be prepared to offer services across all platforms. We are already experiencing this at Allen & Overy with an increasing number of partners and staff who “BYOD” (bring your own device). We receive calls to the enquiry desk asking about apps and have been giving advice on iPad use for a while now. This enabled us to put forward a business case to get an iPad for the library team to use for testing new products such as eBooks and means we can speak with more authority when people come to us with questions. The library, just as much as the IT department, needs to keep abreast of new platforms and what our lawyers are using to access information. Stephen’s parting comment summed it up nicely: “the future will be complex!”.

## PANEL SESSION 2 – THE PARTNER’S PERSPECTIVE

Three law firm partners took to the podium for the second panel discussion, presenting their views on the evolving role of the law librarian. I listened with interest to their views because in a large law firm you seldom hear a partner’s perspective on the library function. Greg Castanias of Jones Day, Eric Charlton from Hiscock & Barclay and Brian M Gaff of Edwards Wildman Palmer made up the panel.

These partners were obviously all library fans otherwise they wouldn’t have agreed to speak to over 300 law

librarians, but they did have interesting opinions on how they see our roles transforming as the business of law changes. They lamented how the “new normal” is “we are all screwed!” – there is a glut of lawyers and firms are under mounting pressure to reduce costs. They went on to discuss how to “unscrew” ourselves in a very lively debate. As firms face ever increasing competition for legal work, lawyers will need to be more responsive than their competitors. They mused about the 24 hour lawyer and with that comes the 24 hour librarian (there were some muffled noises in the audience at this point!). I can see their point, support staff at law firms traditionally only work 9-5 hours but lawyers do not. The partners talked about how it is important to have support from their librarians as and when they need it. Perhaps library teams should review their operating hours to offer more flexibility.

Another comment from the panellists that struck a chord with the audience was that lawyers are arrogant about other professionals in their firms with non-legal backgrounds. Librarians are professionals and need to reinforce this to the management of our firms. They mentioned how fee recovery is always a good way to impress partners so maybe think about what you can charge back to clients in your daily work, including your research time.

All three partners were keen that the librarians in their firms maintain an “aura of mysticism” about their trade secrets. But I think this only strengthens negative stereotypes and it is more important, as Jordan Furlong suggested, to show our value. Demonstrating how it is more cost efficient for you to spend an hour researching a topic than a £400 an hour associate is another quick win with partners. They stressed how important it is for their support staff to really understand the firm they work for; know what the strategy is and who the key clients are. I think law firm librarians are probably some of the most informed people I know on companies and various legal markets because of the variety of research we undertake. Maybe we need to do more to ensure the decision makers in our firms are aware of our expert knowledge.

## ACTION PACKED AFTERNOON

During the afternoon, concurrent programmes covered four different themes or “tracks”. In the first session I attended, *Tracking Through Technology*, Patrick Fuller of LawVision Group spoke about listening platforms (e.g. Radian6) and current awareness tools. An interesting question posed by Patrick “are your lawyers following their clients on Twitter?”. I’m not sure how many lawyers are doing this but it would certainly be interesting to find out. I was asked to undertake some research recently looking at people in specific sectors to see if they had Twitter accounts so I can only guess this will be something we are asked to do more frequently in the future. Another interesting point was how to set up alerts to track negative news on clients, industries and sectors. Negative news is often good news for lawyers, it means their services might

be needed. Perhaps we need to think more about how we set up alerts to focus on negative trends.

I then moved to a session on *Embracing the Changing Business of Law*. Professor Bill Henderson from Indiana University spoke passionately about teaching the business of law and the value of project management to today's law students. He sees it as imperative that law schools start preparing law graduates for the legal market of the future. The new Legal Process Outsourcing (LPO) businesses emerging are capitalising on their strength in project and process management which is core to their strategy. Students looking to pursue a career in law need to look at these LPOs and how they operate and think about the skills required to work in this sector. Equally law schools need to better equip students with these skills. Henderson believes there are many opportunities for law librarians in the new legal marketplace and new roles which will emerge that suit our skill set as the LPO market develops.

My final session of the afternoon was on *Leveraging Technology for Better Services, Collaboration and Organisation*. Sarah Stephens from Sutherland Asbill & Brennan and Cindy Chick of Latham & Watkins gave a lively presentation on how libraries can use new technologies to deliver training to lawyers regardless of location. Sarah said we need to "blow up the idea of training". We need to provide "infotainment" to people who are constantly multitasking if we are to keep their attention. The trainees of the future are not going to change their learning style just because it doesn't fit with our teaching style. Lawyers will more frequently demand training anytime and anywhere and we need to prepare for this and work with our IT departments to provide this service.

We need to utilise technologies such as Captivate, use remote access technology to hook onto user's PCs and use Telepresence rooms if available. We need to ask what device they are using with the growing use of BYOD and be prepared to train people using non-standard PCs and screen resolutions. It is perhaps time to admit that nobody reads user manuals! Rather than spending hours preparing guides people won't look at try to put snippets of information where people will stumble across it. For many of the ideas put forward I can foresee battles with the IT department. I think as law librarians we need to be prepared to fight these battles as long as we can provide the evidence to show how having access to certain technologies will improve the business.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

Reflecting on the PLL Summit, it seems the US law firm librarian is experiencing much the same as the UK law firm librarian. We need to add value at every opportunity, be fearless, exploit our skills and tool up by developing skills in project and process management. I think the BYOD trend will be one of the biggest challenges in adapting how we train new (and older) lawyers, and how to offer online services in the future. In Richard Susskind's keynote address at the opening of the main

Conference he quoted Alan Kay, "the best way to predict the future is to invent it". This seemed to really connect with what had been examined during the PLL Summit.

## THE BEST OF THE REST

Despite our best efforts to get hopelessly lost in the hallowed halls of Harvard, Ann and I eventually found Langdell Hall which houses Harvard Law School Library<sup>4</sup>. Having missed our time slot for the tour we were grateful to Lisa Junghahn, the Business and Corporate Law research specialist in the library, who gave up her time to talk to us and explain the work of the reference desk and let us wander freely around the magnificent stacks. The Harvard Law School Library is the largest academic law library in the United States. Established in 1817, the library has continued to reinvent itself and now serves the iPad generation of scholars. If you ever visit Boston I would recommend a visit to the HLS Library.

A balmy Saturday evening was spent at Fenway Park for the baseball, watching the Boston Red Sox lose to the Toronto Blue Jays. Liverpool FC, now linked with the Red Sox by their owner, were in town that week too and trained at Fenway Park. One evening walking over Boston Common I even saw a few of the Liverpool squad casually wandering around the lake, quite a surreal experience!

Given the size of the delegation, it isn't really possible to have a conference dinner that everyone attends like we have at the BIALL Conference. I discovered most of the events I attended in the evening by word of mouth. The Gen X / Gen Y Caucus<sup>5</sup> networking drinks were great fun and I chatted to librarians from all over the US and also met Marisa Bendeich, President of the Australian Law Librarians' Association with whom I now have the occasional Twitter conversation. It was after these drinks we discovered the Fastcase hospitality suite which seemed to be *the* place to be and I must say the fridge was well stocked with my favourite Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc!

My theory on city breaks is, if you don't have much time to see the sites - do an open top bus tour. Or, if you're in Boston do a Duck Tour! Our guide, Muddy Waters, carefully navigated us around the main attractions in Boston (Bunker Hill, Beacon Hill, Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market etc) and we cruised gently up the Charles River. While on the Duck we learned the history of Boston and other interesting facts, my favourite being that there are more Dunkin' Donut outlets in the greater metropolitan area of Boston than anywhere else in the USA! Having heard this, the first thing I did after disembarking the Duck was to head to the nearest DD and indulge in a tasty Boston Crème donut – the perfect way to end a thoroughly enjoyable Conference!

The 2013 AALL Annual Meeting and Conference will be held in Seattle. I urge any BIALL member curious about attending an overseas conference to apply for a bursary. The scale of AALL is daunting at first but everyone I met was incredibly friendly and it is an experience I will keep with me and hope to repeat one day too.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The PLL Summit 2012 agenda and links to various hand outs and audio files available here: <http://pllsummit.wordpress.com/2012-summit/agenda/>

<sup>2</sup> Jordan Furlong's website: <http://www.law21.ca/>

<sup>3</sup> Read Stephen's blog: <http://stephenslighthouse.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Find out more about the history of Harvard Law School Library: <http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/about/history/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> Find out more about the Gen X / Gen Y Caucus: <http://www.aallnet.org/caucus/genxy/about.htm>

## Biography

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# Current Awareness

Compiled by Katherine Read and Laura Griffiths at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies

This *Current Awareness* column, and previous *Current Awareness* columns, are fully searchable in the *caLIM* database (Current Awareness for Legal Information Managers). The *caLIM* database is available on the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies website at: <http://als.sas.ac.uk/library/caware/caware.htm>

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