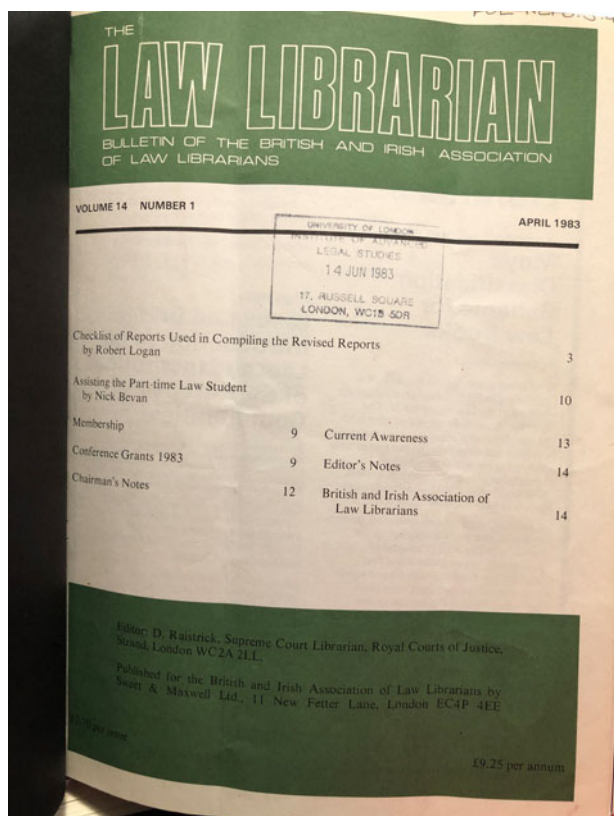


RETROSPECTIVE

Raiders of the lost archive

Abstract: In the second 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 travel back in time to 1983.

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 specific 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 40 years ago ...

STRIPED JEANS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE INTERNET

In 1983, for a little while at least, pinstriped jeans were the must-have fashion accessory – wonder whatever

happened to them? But perhaps of more interest to information professionals is that in January of that year the migration of ARPANET (the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) to TCP/IP (the internet protocol suite) was completed – seen by many people as the start of the internet. Another technological breakthrough in 1983 was the first commercial cellular mobile phone call, which was made in Chicago in October. Put those two things together and you could argue this was the start of the modern communication revolution. On top of this, Chuck Hall invented the 3D printer in 1983, too, which made it quite a year for scientific development.

Meanwhile, in Germany, *Stern* magazine published *The Hitler Diaries*, which were later proved to be fake, while Margaret Thatcher led the Conservatives to a landslide general election win, and Michael Jackson's *Thriller* was the best-selling album in the UK.

But perhaps the best good news story of the year – although no one in the wider world even knew much about it until 1988 at the very earliest – was Soviet military engineer Stanislav Petrov's decision to ignore nuclear missile attack alarms on the Russian early-warning system and not relay these to the man with the big red button. Petrov correctly suspected these were bogus, which quite possibly saved the world from all-out nuclear war. The lesson? You really do need to check your information is correct before passing it on.

PART-TIME LAW STUDENTS AND FULL-TIME LIBRARIANS

It wasn't so much about avoiding Armageddon in the first issue (April) of *The Law Librarian* in 1983, but rather sorting the problems part-time law students faced when using law libraries. "Unable to study during the day he (*sic*) is lucky if he can squeeze in a couple of hours in the library before the closing bells are ringing and the porters are urging everyone to leave," wrote Nick Bevan, then Law Librarian at Bristol Polytechnic, before going on to explain some possible solutions, including putting content onto microfiche and then giving users portable readers so they could access this at home – these came without screens, but could be projected on to a blank wall. But the solution

Bristol Poly ultimately chose was to set aside books which were only to be borrowed by part time students, which was then called a 'law part-time collection'.

Later in this edition, in the Chairman's Notes, John Jeffries quotes from another journal, *Inform*, on a writer's first experience with librarians. To requote: "What surprised me was the extent to which librarians seemed to owe a loyalty to a profession rather than an employer. They appeared to belong only incidentally to the job they were in at the time, and the job itself [was] regarded as an unfortunate impediment in the path of pure librarianship."

John Jeffries' response to this was that he was much happier with the first sentence than the second. These days, though, we think the opposite is probably nearer the truth, that people are more attached to their job, and it seems there is less engagement within the profession at large now, and perhaps even less pride in being a part of it. Indeed, how often will a job title, especially in the non-academic sector, now actually contain the word 'librarian'?

BYELAWS AND MICROFICHE

1983's second edition of *The Law Librarian* kicked off with a very detailed article on the creation and control of local authority byelaws, which made the point that people often did not know they were in place, and called for them to be more widely publicised. Is this still the case? Maybe someone reading this can let us know – it might be time to revisit this often neglected area of the law.

Another often neglected area of the law is Finland. But not in *The Law Librarian*, which featured an article on

'The Chancellor of Justice of Finland', which was submitted by the Finnish Embassy in London, and shows – as we found within the 1973 issues last time – that the scope of this journal used to be very international indeed.

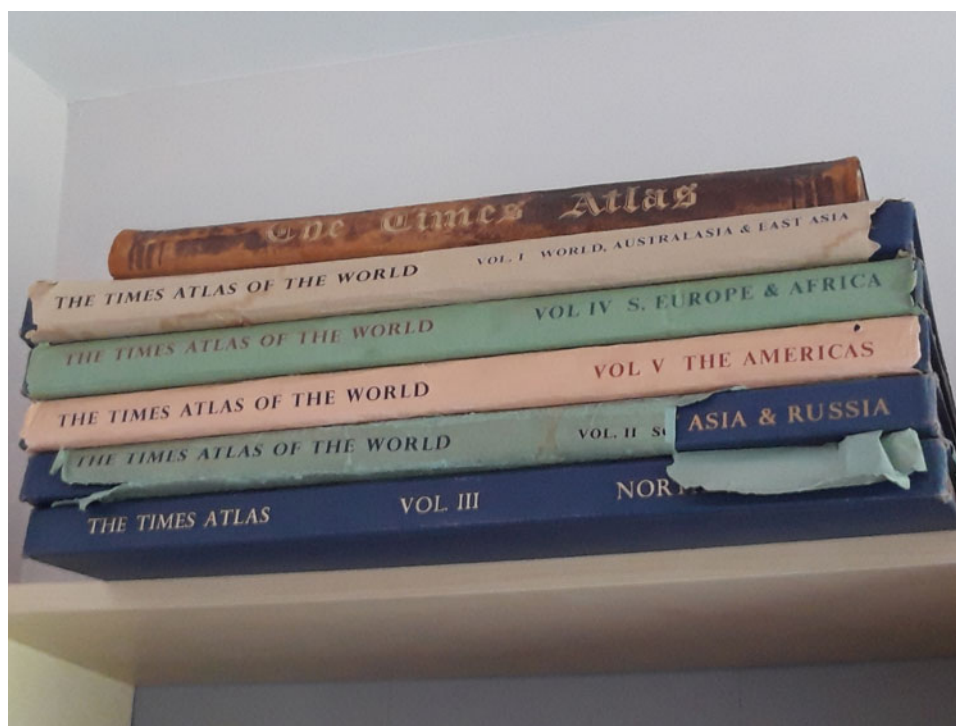
The journal also had more of a magazine feel to it in 1983, with news stories as well as long, detailed articles. One story which caught our eye was a small piece on the Bar Library and the Probate Library, which were set to become part of the Supreme Court Library later that year.

Adverts featured quite heavily, too, including one which extols the virtues of microfiche technology, stating: "Each of the microfiche sets has a standard 98-page format and requires magnification of between 21 and 24X. The film is archivally permanent silver halide and comes in the positive reading mode. Negative copies can be made to order." It also says: "Over 46,000 pages of text have been reduced to 473 fiches, which are themselves contained in nine compact library binders."

There was also a somewhat random small ad' at the foot of one page which offered: "Times Law Reports, vol. viii to end, £850." There's a phone number, if you're interested, but even at that price – quite a sum in 1983 – we're guessing they've been snapped up by now.

LIBRARY TECH AND RUGBY TACKLES

The lead article in the final edition of 1983 outlines how the Denning Law Library at the University of Buckingham was embracing new technology by developing a



Keeping old books in good condition was a matter of great concern in *The Law Librarian* in 1983

computerised version of their card catalogue, aptly called 'Librarian', which, we were told, due to the unique search mechanisms embodied in it, "takes the system between one and two seconds to locate all the records matching a given request ... Should the catalogue double in size the response time would only be extended by a further one to two seconds." It's hard to overstate just how impressive a system like this would have been back in 1983.

But this issue wasn't just about hi-tech and there were also two articles on conservation; not so much to do with saving the planet, but rather its books. The book burners, it says, "are a small troop compared with the giant forces of neglect." Adding: "In recent years, the fragile durability of books has been threatened by a host of new dangers", among these were the overheating of libraries, we were told. One of the pieces looked at the work the British Library was doing to save its books for future readers.

Also looking to the future, there was a small piece on a questionnaire that was sent out to members regarding the annual conference (incidentally, in 1983 membership was up 15 to 243). Part of this questionnaire was on possible host cities, with members proposing Exeter, Edinburgh, York and Dublin. Some were a little bit more adventurous, though, and Paris and Cannes were also suggested. Which, come to think of it, doesn't sound like such a bad idea at all ...

For 1983, though, conference attendees had to be content with a "wet and windy" Cardiff, not that the 14th annual conference wasn't a great success, both professionally and socially, with both cheese and wine parties and sherry receptions. There was also a bit of sport: "The devotion of the local population to rugby football was illustrated by one passer-by, who, probably hoping to catch the eye of any passing selector, attempted a flying tackle on a member of this association. His efforts were less than successful." We're not entirely sure if this was after the cheese and wine or the sherry ...