

need for such resources to promote themselves visibly, and for information professionals to continue to share knowledge about them. In addition, many of these findings suggest a healthy future for commercial publishers, particularly where their resources offer something which free resources cannot. Indeed, if both types of resource are clear about what they provide, and for whom, then one type does not have to transcend the other.

## Acknowledgements

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## Biography

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# The Present and Future for Lawlinks

**Abstract:** Diane Raper describes the ongoing project at the University of Kent to upgrade the free Lawlinks portal established nearly ten years ago by Sarah Carter. The emphasis is on ensuring linking is working, establishing new links, and generally making the site more user-friendly, both to Kent law students and the outside world.

**Keywords:** portals; internet; websites; links; academic law libraries; project management; legal databases

## Introduction

Lawlinks is one of those excellent brand names like *Current Law*. Whether or not the service delivers to expectation, it is memorable even if the expectations are not explicit.

When I joined the staff of the Templeman Library in July 2006, the most frequent question I was asked was “What are you going to do about Lawlinks?” In my experience, the question most frequently asked usually implies that a priority has been established and the answer, at least initially, has to be “I’m considering it.”

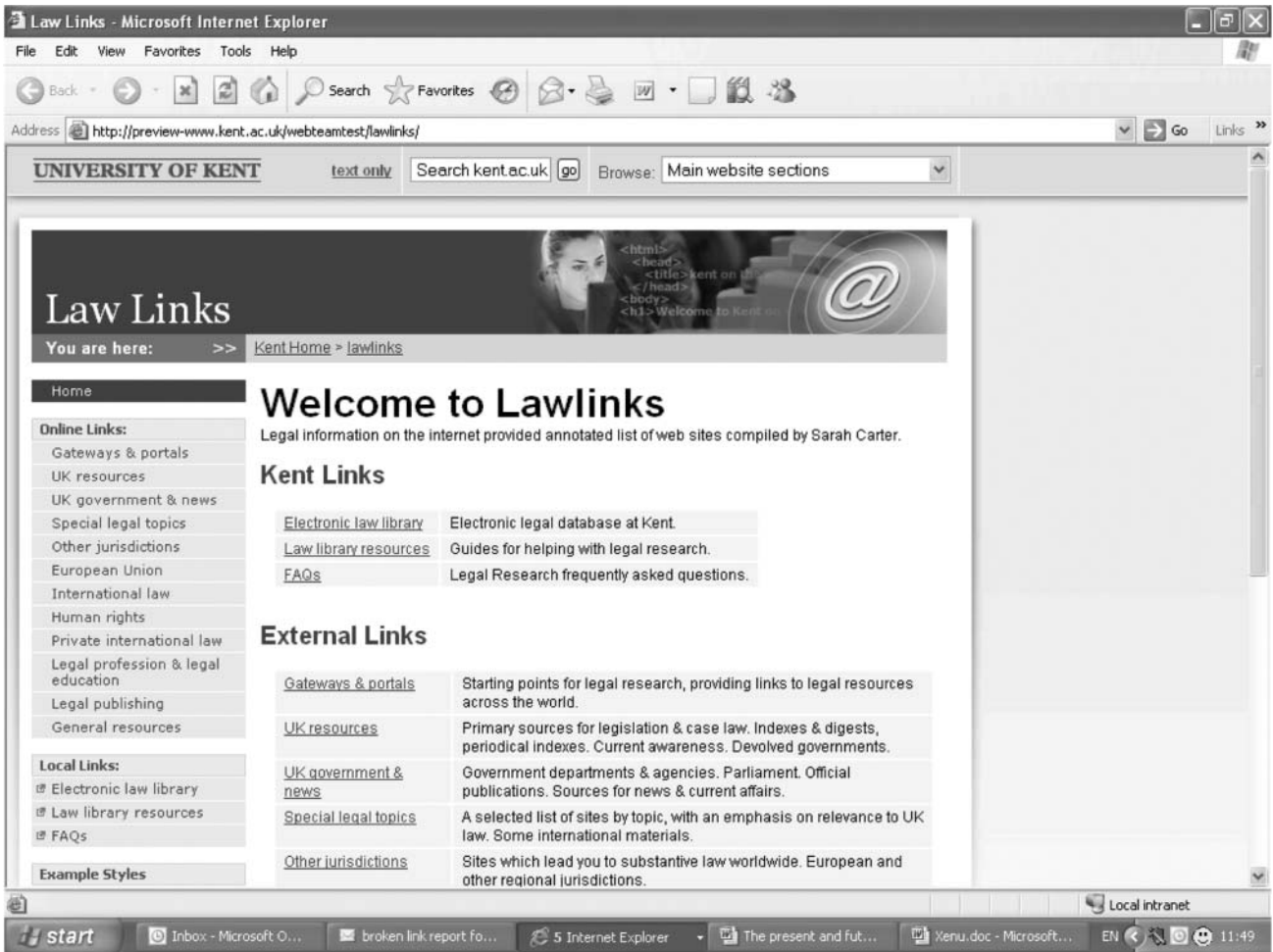


Fig. 1: Lawlinks Dec 2006

## History of Lawlinks

Lawlinks was established in the late 1990's by Sarah Carter, the Law Librarian at the Templeman Library at the University of Kent. It was a time, pre-establishment of search engines, when many were bemused by the development of what we all referred to as the world wide web. There was no pre-eminent search engine and the likelihood of finding reliable sites had not been established. It was before the current UK government's establishment of easy access to government policy and publications. The currency of the effective law librarian was depth of knowledge about, mainly, paper sources and how to locate them. At that time a rash of what we now know as portals were developed in a variety of subject areas. Many of those portals have now disappeared. The suspicion has to be that the complexity and time consuming nature of their continued maintenance is the reason that many of them have disappeared. Those that remain have been a source of inspiration and encouragement in the task of moving Lawlinks forward.

In the 1990s, web authoring tools were basic and it was the task of many librarians and information workers to assist their user populations in making sense of the myriad of sites that were beginning to develop.

## With Google, are portals necessary?

In 2006 some would say, and it was suggested to me, that, with the pre-eminence of Google, portals are no longer necessary. Observation would suggest that portals can be an answer to a lack of imagination or a lack of knowledge by those interrogating the internet. Certainly when I returned to law librarianship after a break of four years, I was pleased to have an aide memoire on screen while I refreshed my legal information skills.

If only to provide an answer to the questions "What...?", a decision needed to be made. Lawlinks was tired. It looked old-fashioned. Links were broken. Material was outdated. Those who know my working style will realise that I was unable to continue working with Lawlinks in the condition in which I found it. For my professional sanity there were only two choices: to kill it off, or to submit it to a thorough redesign and re-launch.

The notes that I made at that time indicated that I was keen not to lose the impressions that I had gathered while initially negotiating my way through the site, and would wish to use them to improve navigability.

The design of Lawlinks reflected the teaching needs of the then law librarian, but the design is not implicitly

understood by new users, particularly the user who expects instant gratification. This seemed to me, and was confirmed by others, that it was because so much was crammed into the pages. The aim of the redesign was therefore to reflect the expectations of current users. I was looking for more space around the text, and a reflection of current internet design standards.

### Project options

One of the options suggested to me was to seek funding and support for the work that needed doing. I pulled back from doing this because I felt that it would probably delay the work getting under way. I could see that Lawlinks would continue to be an essential teaching tool and, if that was to continue to be the case, work needed to commence reasonably quickly. The process of upgrading was also part of the revision and updating of my skills, and took me systematically to the subject areas that I needed to visit.

The other element that became clear in my deliberations was that Lawlinks could no longer be the

responsibility of one person. My contract with the Templeman Library is for 80% of full-time in complete days. I have a reasonably heavy teaching load. There are, and will continue to be, many other demands on my time. My preferred working style is to work with others as part of a team, where the collective output is greater than the sum of individual efforts. My senior library assistant, Lesley Lawrence, was looking for a new challenge and had untried Dreamweaver skills ripe for development and she was willing to work with me on the pages. Without the support of Lesley the redesign and re-launch of the project would not have been possible.

### University of Kent web team

The University of Kent was just appointing a web team and I was keen to use their professional skills to ensure that the site was developed and maintained to current standards. As it turned out, Kent was about to adopt new standards and design templates for its web pages and this fitted in well with my embryo plans.

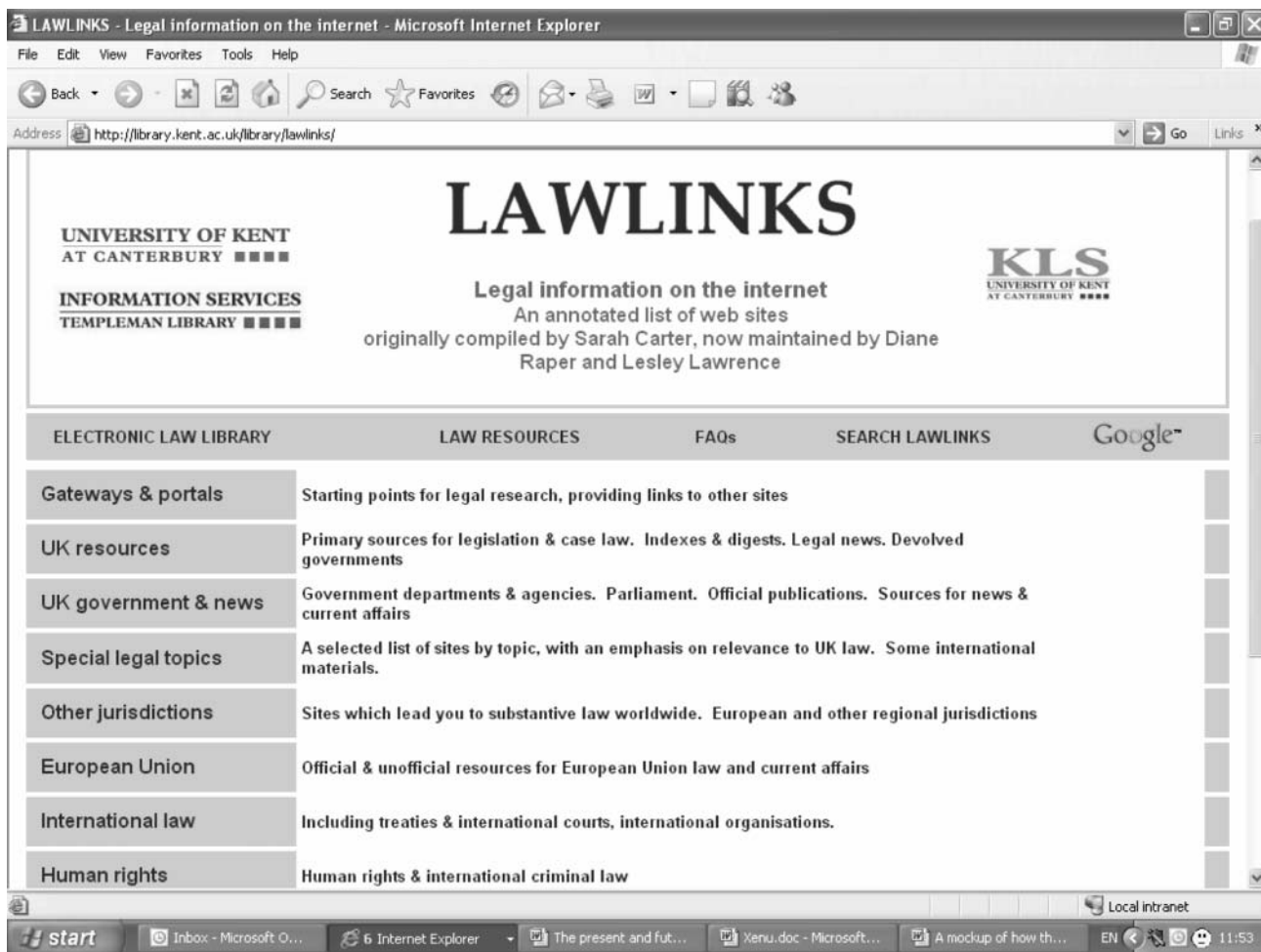


Fig. 2: Mock up of how it might look

### Project strategy

With the assistance of the Web Development and Support Manager, a stage-by-stage strategy for the future of Lawlinks was put together. Stage 1 was to be the mending of broken links; Stage 2 would be conversion to the new template; and Stage 3 and beyond would look at the site moving to a database format to make maintenance easier plus the possible use of web technologies for students to personalise the site, "My Lawlinks." Our optimistic estimate of the time this would take was that by Easter 2007 most of the work would be completed. It was on this basis that I prepared a concise paper for my manager. This was then submitted to the Library Planning Group (LPG), which resulted in an invitation to talk to the LPG about outcomes at its March 2007 meeting. I was allowing myself to be tied into a timetable which would ensure that I aimed to keep to my project plans.

### Stage 1 - Sorting out the links

With the assistance of the Web Development and Support Manager and using the freeware, Xenu, we established that 6.35% of the existing links were broken. We were offered the services of one of the web team to fix the broken links, but further investigation showed Lesley and I that just as many links again, although not broken, led to sites other than those listed on Lawlinks. The Stage 1 task was growing, but by this time I had mentally taken the decision to move forward and had confirmed to LPG that Lawlinks would continue, so there was no going back.

Stage 1 was to ensure that links were mended and led to authoritative sites. Between August and November, in between teaching and other commitments, Lesley and I worked on checking out, correcting and editing links. Priority was given to the pages I required for my teaching commitments. This gave me the incentive I needed when we were at the bottom of the steep incline of maintenance that needed to be carried out. Priority initially was given to removing material that was outdated or no longer relevant. We were then ready to start looking for better, newer links, since many of the favoured, older sites were no longer being updated. We plan now to ensure that all pages have a thorough review at least annually and are looking forward to being joined in this work by our colleague, Ben Watson, from the Drill Hall Library at the University of Kent at Medway.

The web has moved on and we plan to move Lawlinks content on. There are now links with sites that have video content, and with others that work from a clear understanding that imparting knowledge is not just about text. We are beginning to add links to law blogs. This is an important source to us at Kent, as our law students are taught to question and challenge established ways of thinking. Our student base is varied and we have many

overseas and part-time students, and we need to cater for them all. Some move with ease around the web, others need more help and support. Lawlinks can continue the aims of its creator in making material accessible to those who have no previous experience of legal materials. The hope is that the external visitors to Lawlinks, who make it such a highly rated site, will continue and find it of assistance in accessing the material they need. Our aim is to use the statistical information that will be available to us to develop well-used parts of the site and look more carefully at areas not being utilised.

Links with our web development team have been established, and it is our intention to be guided by them in ideas for the site's development. We are encouraging them to be frank in what they think of the site. They are keen to help us continue its high hit rating. This project is quite different to the departmental websites that are their standard fare.

One of the most difficult aspects of working with the team has been that their priorities are not ours. My priorities have been driven by a commitment to the LPG to complete this work by February/March 2007, based on the estimate originally agreed with the Web Development and Support Manager, and a need to write this article with an editorial deadline of December 2006. The web team's priorities have been to establish their team. The practical result for us has been that we have been working with different people as responsibilities and people have moved on to other projects. Another priority for them has been to ensure that the templates are flexible enough to cope with all demands. It is a challenge working with a team of people who are so involved with their work that they are apt to make assumptions about our understanding of their aims which may not be correct. The demands of my work schedule must also make it difficult for them to predict when I will have my next period of concentration on further development.

### Stage 2 – The move to new templates

Stage 2 of the work is to move Lawlinks to the new templates that are available. It is a relief to have the constraints of pre-agreed templates and to be able to move away from pages that were developed before currently available tools for editing and amending were available. Lawlinks was in the head of one individual and was inherited without documentation.

The move to Stage 2 will include the review of many more of the website features which relate to Law Resources and making the Electronic Law Library pages easier for Kent students to use. The work that is being done here is in response to the comments I have received from users, and the observations that I have made while carrying out one-to-one teaching and group workshops for our undergraduate and postgraduate

students. There will be fewer “Kent” written tutorials and more reliance on, and direction to, the help and support pages made available by the database providers and colleagues in other institutions. Those with time totally devoted to writing tutorials are going to be able to do a better job than we can with our limited resources.

## Conclusions

This has been, and continues to be, a challenging project. I am grateful for the support and encouragement of my new colleagues.

## Biography

Diane Raper is Academic Liaison Librarian for Law, Templeman Library, University of Kent at Canterbury. She has recently returned to law librarianship after a period working for the NHS. Prior to this she was Head of Information at DJ Freeman and has held a variety of senior positions in the legal information field.

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# The Development of Social Care Online

**Abstract:** Diane Gwynne-Smith writes about the project, which she managed, to create the most comprehensive and freely available online database of materials on social care. It can be found at: [www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk](http://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk)

**Keywords:** social care; online services; project management; library management systems

## Introduction

The Social Care Institute for Excellence identifies and provides knowledge, information, guidance and best practice materials to the complete range of people involved in providing or using social care services. The audience for our work product is variously academics, health professionals, social care workers, charity workers, the families and carers who look after those in need of social care, and those cared for. The range of material that we provide is correspondingly wide, with key areas being the provision of an index to journal articles, book reviews, guidance and best practice manuals, and reviews of research into trends and techniques in the social care arena.

Our core function, at our inception six years ago, was to provide an online gateway to information by means of abstracting and indexing the huge number of materials published each year that are relevant to the sector. No carer, care professional or even academic could hope to

keep up with the flood of literature, let alone events and conferences and their outcomes, without some form of summarising service, and that is what SCIE provides.

## Development up to 2003

From this starting point the simple fact of providing the gateway to information generated both additional needs and opportunities. Online indexes are available to everyone and the initial academic basis of the users rapidly expanded to social care professionals, carers and the cared for - a trend which was welcomed and encouraged from the very start. The expansion of the user base, both in terms of the type of audience and the numbers, in turn established the need to provide additional services. These user-driven requirements were met by establishing small, to-the-purpose services, to ensure that the requirements were met and the results were used for each development. This