

OBITUARY

Elaine Wintle 1953–2016

Our much loved colleague Elaine Wintle, who passed away peacefully on 17th June 2016, contributed to the profession in a uniquely personal way by imparting a shrewd knowledge on seemingly any topic under discussion with enthusiasm, generosity of spirit and a trademark wit. The informal title “font of all knowledge” conferred on her by other librarians was richly deserved.

Elaine (née Wardall) was born in London in February 1953. She first encountered a love for books and libraries as a schoolgirl when she took a Saturday job at Thames Ditton Library. She read law at Exeter University but faithful to her schoolgirl interest then secured a SCONUL Traineeship at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies. In 1977 she sealed her commitment to law and librarianship combined by pursuing a Diploma in Information Studies at Loughborough University where she also met John, her future husband. On leaving Loughborough she embraced her career wholeheartedly, first at the Department of Trade and Industry then subsequently at Nottingham University, London Metropolitan University and the British Institute of International and Comparative Law whose Bulletin she also indexed.

Elaine's grip on law librarianship was steadfast. Such were her research skills that members of Blackstone Chambers, where she was Information Officer from 2005 until she died in service, believed that if Elaine couldn't find information it probably didn't exist.



Figure 1: Elaine Wintle 1953–2016.

She was a loyal and regular presence at professional events. Jackie Fishleigh recalls: “You definitely knew if Elaine was at an event, whether it was a BIALL conference, a Lexis Product Advisory Board or a Solo Group drink up. She was always on the ball and had a brilliant, wry sense of humour.” She was a member of BIALL, CILIP, CLIG, Bar Librarians and BIALL Freelancers and Solos. A prolific contributor to LIS-LAW, BIALL E-mail Forum and INT-LAW, Elaine's postings were informative and thorough; from exposing the cost of sparse loose-leaf releases (“I thought I would flag this up as outrageous!”) to researching answers on Judges hearing appeals against their own decisions. She had a knack for unearthing the quirky yet edifying, sharing everything with characteristic humour. “I am now cutting a hole in a skeleton argument for one of our members of chambers!” she jested in July 2014 on circulating a link to a news item on the consequences of overly long bundles and skeletons. In a tribute to Elaine Julie Keys describes LIS-LAW and INT-LAW as “disturbingly sober” without her.

Suppliers respected Elaine and she fought her corner tenaciously but fairly with them. Inn Librarians recall that: “Elaine did enjoy the publishers' hospitality but never took her eye off the ball when it came to some of their more dubious practices.” She was greatly sociable and helpful to colleagues and besides a spell at organising BIALL Freelancers, was expert in rallying Chambers Librarians together for coffee meetings, with a venue usually carefully selected depending on her assessment of likely crowds and the weather!

Elaine was a keen singer and had extensive choral experience including the celebrated Hallé Choir when John worked in Manchester in the 1990s and Elaine was then devoting her time to the upbringing of their sons Nick and Tim. She was a prolific reader particularly of novels, history and travel books and latterly was an enthusiastic member of two book clubs.

Elaine loved Europe and visited Seville with Nick just one month before she died. Her sudden parting shocked us all, for the one thing she chose not to share was the gravity of the final months of her illness, remaining in post until the end in the work which had been a lifelong calling. In this her bravery, stoicism and dedication to law librarianship can but be added to the list of her other much loved attributes.

Tributes from the Freelancer & Solo and Bar Librarians Groups were unanimous in acknowledging Elaine's friendship, cheerfulness, helpfulness and wit.

Elaine is survived by her husband John, sons Nick and Tim and her brother Peter. She will be greatly missed.

Alison Million

With thanks to John Wintle for information and the photograph, and to other contributors including Tracey Dennis and Catherine McArdle.