

## OBITUARY

# Rikki Breem 1934–2015

Rikki was born Daphne Audrey Parnham in west London in 1934. Her working life was spent in libraries, beginning in public libraries and Harrods subscription library (where her ‘customers’ included the composer Sir William Walton and the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Goddard) before moving to the Inner Temple in 1961, where she remained until she retired in 1991. She was Sub-Librarian for most of that period. Her painstaking work on the catalogue and subject index (both still referred to on occasion to this day) was later to prove an invaluable reference resource when retrospective online cataloguing was in progress and much library material was in storage pending building work. In summer 1966 she married Wallace Breem, who had been appointed Librarian of the Inner Temple in the previous year, having worked there since 1950.

It is difficult to write about Rikki without writing about Wallace as, in their contribution to BIALL and law librarianship, they are inextricably linked. Wallace was a leading figure in the foundation of the Association: Rikki’s support in his roles of Secretary and Treasurer can only be glimpsed occasionally in the official records, but it was undoubtedly considerable: they were two sides of the same coin. Rikki’s individual contribution to BIALL was more low-key than Wallace’s but also substantial.

Amongst its early activities, BIALL set up a committee on co-operation, an activity which is taken for granted today but which was an underlying catalyst for the establishment of the Association in 1969. The committee’s report generated a programme of work for BIALL, including a Committee on Acquisitions and Storage. At that

time, the United Kingdom was about to enter the Common Market and there was a real need amongst law librarians (to say nothing of lawyers!) for information on sources of European law and the law of the member states. Rikki was co-opted to a sub-group of this committee, chaired by Charlotte Lutyens (Librarian of the Middle Temple), which was preparing a bibliography on *Community Law*. Its publication, timed to coincide with UK entry to the Common Market, was delayed from January to October 1973 and it sold out by Easter the following year.

Membership of this committee and her early notes to *The Law Librarian* on the supply of Parliamentary publications (volume 1, p. 38 and volume 3, p. 47), made her an appropriate choice as author of the chapter on acquisitions and storage in both editions of the *Manual of Law Librarianship* (published in 1976 and 1987). Although written BC (before computers), the principles it set out are still valuable foundations for good practice today. In the late 1970s Rikki was also a member of the Cataloguing and Classification Committee, during the period when it was making recommendations about cataloguing legislative materials in AACR2.

After Wallace died in March 1990, BIALL wished to set up a permanent memorial to recognise his contribution to the Association and profession. Rikki was, of course, a member of the committee which advised BIALL on how to commemorate him and on the subsequent Wallace Breem Memorial Award Committee which decided on the recipients of the biennial awards.

Rikki retired in 1991 and was able to follow her many interests, amongst them the Tolkien Society (of which she was treasurer for fifteen years from 1978 to 1993), Egyptian and Middle Eastern archaeology, and travel. She was also a volunteer at the British Museum and later at the Petrie Museum, University College London. Her knowledge of music, particularly romantic opera, was extensive, and she had (as in most other matters) firm opinions as to what constituted a good or bad performer or production. She had been in poor health for several years before the fall last autumn from which she never really recovered. She died in August 2015 at the age of 81.

To those of us who knew her, the abiding memories will be of those sparkling eyes, her vivacity, her firm likes and dislikes, the amusement with which she viewed everything, and her devotion to Wallace.

Barbara Tearle and Margaret Clay.

### Personal memories of Rikki

John Sinkins wrote of the time when as a schoolboy he delivered books to local customers for Wildys:

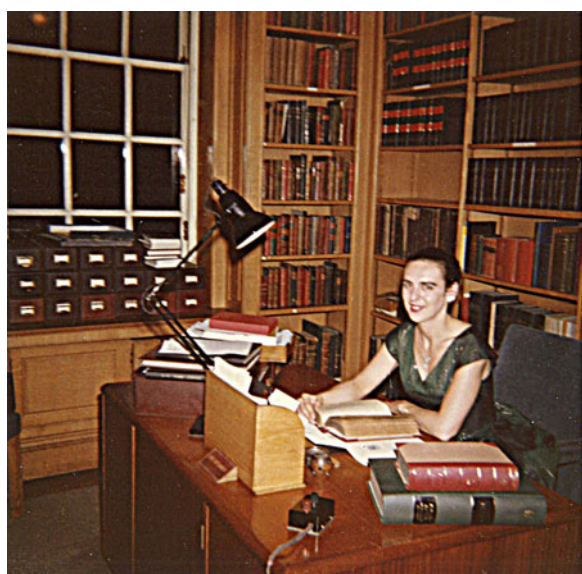


Figure 1: Rikki Breem 1934–2015.

I remember meeting Rikki Parnham (Deputy Librarian). She would always speak to me kindly and would often give me a mint imperial as we quietly chatted together. I remember asking her one day who the gentleman was who seemed to be permanently engrossed with old manuscripts and documents and she informed me that it was Wallace Breem, the then Librarian and Keeper of Manuscripts. I had no idea of their connection (husband and wife) until many years later. (Inner Temple's *Library Newsletter* anniversary issue, April 2008, reprinted with permission.)

*Christine Miskin remembers:*

My first memory of meeting Wallace and Rikki was startling in the least and took place at the BIALL Conference at Liverpool in 1970. It was held in a part of the university which was laid out round a central grassed quadrangle and, on arriving at a session a little early, I was taken aback to see an early middle-aged couple, one of whom was wearing a very arresting long black velvet cloak lined in red, exercising a cat on a lead on the grass! I later discovered that this was one of the Breems' succession of Burmese cats, which apparently accompanied them on all excursions.

They seemed mysterious and rather exotic and this unusual behaviour was further enhanced that evening when, as a very new law librarian, I was invited to a soiree in their room. When I arrived I found Wallace and Rikki decked out in long striped Middle Eastern robes with a fetching cap/fedora perched on Wallace's head and both of them smoking cigarettes via long cigarette holders. Never in my wildest dreams had I thought I might come across such a sight at a staid law librarians' conference.

Over the years that followed I got to know both Wallace and Rikki extremely well and they were a delightful couple. He was the Inner Temple Librarian and she was the Sub-Librarian. She was always known to us all, including Wallace, as 'Miss Parnham' which was her maiden name and she was the steadfast rock of support to Wallace throughout his career. She worked for many years at Inner Temple keeping all the systems going although she was occasionally known to become slightly tetchy about the activities of the members of Inner Temple and particularly those charged with overseeing the library, and was not averse to uttering some very pithy remarks on occasion.

In the early 1970's I was the first European Communities Librarian at Middle Temple and my work involved me liaising closely with the other Inns of Court,

but particularly Inner Temple as Wallace took a keen interest in the developing collection. I would normally try and time my meetings for 4pm and would arrive just in time for tea and biscuits which were served up by Miss Parnham at 4pm precisely in the staffroom and always lasted longer than its allotted 15 minutes. She was immeasurably kind to me as I was really feeling my way whilst trying to navigate the politics of setting up a collection which was financed not only by the four Inns of Court, but also by the Law Society. Both she and Wallace encouraged and helped me throughout my time at Middle Temple.

In later years Rikki always kept in touch as she indulged her passion for Egyptology and all things ancient, and her Christmas letter was always a fascinating read. She was heavily involved with the British Museum's Egyptology Department and also went on several cruises to ancient sites each year. She certainly had a particularly active and rewarding retirement.

*Barbara Tearle remembers:*

My first memory of Rikki is the same incident that Christine Miskin recounts. The cloak, the cats and Wallace and Rikki's soirees made a similarly deep impression on me and on other BIALL members. These soirees were held annually and for me were the highlight of BIALL's conferences. One never knew how Rikki and Wallace would be attired; it depended on where they had been for their August holiday. Wallace took centre stage and Rikki clearly derived a great deal of amusement from others' reaction to his flamboyance, not that she took second place in finery as anyone who saw her in Tolkien-mode will know.

In preparing for her chapter on 'Acquisitions and Storage' for the *Manual of Law Librarianship*, Rikki had a detailed questionnaire covering the methods of ordering material, which she used when interviewing several people, including me, to find out the range of practices followed in different libraries. During the interview I gradually realised that my answers were not adequate but I was too young and green to tell her that, because I worked in a large library system, I did not actually place the orders. Consequently my answers may not have been much help. I think she realised, but carried on with the interview nevertheless. This kindness towards me, this young, earnest, inexperienced, would-be law librarian was, I realise now, characteristic of her. Although she had decided views and firm likes and dislikes, she was also tolerant of those whom she accepted.