

David Hart, the Well-Known Scottish Law Librarian: Notes of a Meeting

Abstract: This issue of LIM has a theme of Scottish legal information and David Hart the highly respected and long-standing (ex) Scottish law librarian, kindly agreed to talk to the Editor about his long career on law librarianship and his involvement with BIALL

Keywords: academic law librarians; Scotland

Introduction

Because this issue has a Scottish theme, the Editorial Board decided that we should talk to a prominent Scottish law librarian about their views on, and experiences of, the Scottish legal information scene. Who better to fit the bill than David Hart, until recently the very popular BIALL Conference master of ceremonies and winner, to great acclaim, of the BIALL Wildy's Law Librarian of the Year Award at the 2008 BIALL Conference.

What better excuse to visit the glorious City of Edinburgh than to talk to David on a cold but sunny day in November. Very shortly after he received the award in Dublin, David was appointed Reader Services Librarian at Dundee University, meaning that he didn't quite make his 29th anniversary at their Law Library. He is relishing the challenge of his new post, which includes responsibility for liaison with the College of Life Sciences and the School of Dentistry, and finds himself on a steep learning curve.

Family background

David emerged into the world in Edinburgh at the grandly named Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion, which is apparently where all self-respecting young Scots were born in the mid-1950s. He spent his early years in Joppa, a suburb of Edinburgh, and his father worked for the Electrical Contractors Association of Scotland. His mother had given up her job as secretary to Sir Sydney Smith, the famous forensic scientist, to raise David and his younger sister. He used to make the



David Hart

journey to primary school across the City, by himself, by bus and steam train!

Education

The family later moved to Paisley where David attended secondary school and it was during these years that he decided he wanted to become a history teacher, having developed a crush on Miss Harper, his excellent history teacher.

David attended Glasgow University where he read History and English with Honours in History, but he did not study Scottish history, which was not a fashionable topic at the time, concentrating instead on US history. He went to Jordanhill College to train as a teacher and obtained his teaching diploma in 1977. At that time it was extremely difficult to find jobs teaching history and whilst job hunting, by a happy chance, he happened to drift into the History class library at the University where one of the librarians encouraged him to think of working in a library. Until this time, it had not occurred to David to consider it. It just so happened that one of the eight SCONUL trainees due to start at Glasgow University Library that Autumn had dropped out and David applied for, and was accepted for, this place. He loved the work and his first placement was in the history/law and archaeology division. At that time Inez Hamilton (later McIntyre) was the head of the division and David was very impressed with her management style. She did not expect her staff to do any task which she was not prepared to do herself; she led from the front and embraced continuous learning – an



Figure 1: Scrymgeour Building

ethos which David has strived to emulate throughout his professional life.

At the end of his trainee year, David got a grant to go to Sheffield University to take the post-graduate MA in librarianship and information studies. He was taught faceted classification by the redoubtable Gillian Bull. Whilst there, he wrote a report on cataloguing of maps, and produced a bibliography on immigration into the US in the early twentieth century, both of which he thoroughly enjoyed.

During a field trip to Edinburgh, David dropped in on the Akela from his old cub pack who was secretary

to the University's Centre of European Governmental Studies (now the Europa Institute). She introduced him to Lesley Kelly, then EDC librarian, and David spent a profitable morning gaining insight into the practical challenges of handling the official publications emanating from Brussels and Luxembourg. This insight was to prove useful in his course and also when he travelled north to Dundee for a job interview in November 1979.

Dundee University Law Library

David's first professional post was as EDC Librarian at Dundee University, where he worked with Hilary Charlton, who was a qualified lawyer and the Law Librarian. The Law Library is situated alongside the School of Law, in a building which was the former College of Education, a handsome traditional building but poorly equipped for the demands of the twenty-first century.

One of David's earliest achievements was designing EDCKEY, a computer program which contained a system of keywords which could be used for indexing European Communities documents. He was also responsible for cataloguing and classifying the law collection. Hilary Charlton retired in 1986 and David took over as Law Librarian. He was the sole professional for the next twenty years, responsible for all aspects of running a large site library, but was fortunate in having a great team of assistants to support him.



Figure 2: Lower Reading Room



Figure 3: Senior Reading Room

School of Law

Dundee became an independent University in 1967, after a seventy-year relationship with the University of St Andrews, where law teaching started nearly six centuries ago. Dundee is unique in the UK in offering the LL.B in both English and Scots law at ordinary (3 years) and honours (4 years) levels. A number of subjects are studied jointly but for students wishing to go on to obtain professional qualifications in either English or Scots law, separate subjects will then be included.

The School also offers a wide range of taught post-graduate courses and has close links with the Centre for Energy, Petroleum and Mineral Law and Policy and the UNESCO Centre for Water Law, Policy and Science, making for a good mix of enquiry and liaison work.

The School consists of about 25 staff, 500 undergraduates and 100 postgraduates, a fair proportion of which are non-Scots. The LL.B in English law is particularly popular with students from Northern Ireland and is structured to satisfy the professional requirements of students wishing to practise there. Because it is a relatively small department, David has enjoyed close working relationships with the academic and support staff and thoroughly enjoyed this part of his job.

How has the work of the law librarian changed over the years?

David has been responsible over time for all the professional tasks of the law librarian, including acquisitions, cataloguing and classification and budgeting. The major changes that he has seen are that much of the work previously undertaken by the professional law librarian has been de-professionalised. Many of the acquisitions and

bibliographic tasks are now undertaken by senior library assistants who are not usually professionally qualified. Bibliographic records may be bought in rather than on-site cataloguing being undertaken and, of course, the impact of technology has been huge.

Are you involved in teaching and training the students?

Possibly unusually for an academic law librarian, David has not been heavily involved in teaching over the years. He has been involved in basic legal research training, developed highly tailored worksheets for Lexis and Westlaw training sessions, and thoroughly enjoyed his annual double acts with the Lexis and Westlaw trainers. David is looking forward to being more involved with teaching and training on online sources in his new role in life sciences and dentistry.

Has the volume of enquiry work changed over the years?

There has been a definite decline in this and the Law Library is much quieter than it was in the eighties and nineties, when it was frequently full to capacity. Now it is often only a quarter full. Students use the far more modern Main Library and, with the proliferation of online sources and the advent of virtual learning environments, many of them work from home. Also a large proportion of students have part-time jobs to help finance their studies, so are not seen so frequently in the library.

Is there a future for the traditional law library and law librarian?

David's experience is that the law librarian over time has become much more involved in management issues, particularly staff management. He is uncertain as to whether there is a future for a physically separate law library, because of the costs involved in maintaining the fabric and services in these days of expensive energy and staff costs. It is interesting to see that many academic institutions are now combining the law subject specialism with other subjects.

Who were the key influencers in your career?

David's career history features an interesting selection of strong women whom he regards as very important,



Figure 4: Upper Reading Room from Balcony

including his history teacher, Inez Hamilton at Glasgow and Hilary Charlton at Dundee.

friends in Dundee and to get to Glasgow or Edinburgh for shops and culture is relatively easy.

Why Dundee?

The pleasures of working in a small provincial city far outweigh the disadvantages for David. He lives a 15 minute drive from his workplace with glorious countryside and coasts nearby and enjoys a relatively stress-free lifestyle. He has very occasionally been tempted to move on but is very happy with his lot. He has many

Involvement with professional organisations

David has been heavily involved with BIALL over the years, initially because Hilary suggested that it would be very beneficial. He has loved every minute of it. He regards his network of professional contacts and friends as one of the most important parts of his working life. He has met lots of inspiring people over the years.

BIALL

It was Mary Blake who first seized on David's potential and he became the Scottish representative on Council between 1987 and 1994. In 1995 he became Vice-Chair and in 1996, Chair.

BIALL Conferences

To many of us, David is best remembered as "the man who made the announcements" at many BIALl conferences, a role he has relished. David attended his first Annual Conference in 1986 – *Law Library Management and Training* – at Newnham College, Cambridge and since then has attended twenty-two consecutive conferences – is this a record?

The first conference he organised was in 1992 – *Wider Horizons* – at Edinburgh University. He also organised the first AALL/BIALL/CALL/ABCD Joint Study Institute in 1998 at Cambridge University. In those days, the amount of administrative work involved in conference organisation was huge and David was glad to see the introduction of professional conference organisers, though this has brought its own challenges and he has fought hard over the years to ensure that the Conference remains **our** Conference.

From 2002 to 2007, David was Vice-Chair of the Conference Committee, which is an onerous task, mainly concerned with organising the content of the programme. He admitted that despite his characteristic strong sense of duty, when he attended the Dublin Conference, which was the first one that he was not professionally involved with, he even bunked off one session, something he had never done before!

Scottish Law Librarians Group

David was one of the founder members, together with Carol John of the Scottish Law Commission and Dawn Mackey of Maclay Murray & Spens, of the Scottish Law Librarians Group in 1988. He was the Secretary from 1988–1989 and the Convenor from 1990–1992. He was also Chairman of the Scottish Working Group on Official Publications from 2000–2003.

Life outside work

I discovered over lunch that David has a boundless enthusiasm for all things Orcadian and visits the Islands at least

once a year. He is a fount of knowledge on the subject and is happy to share it with others. He is also very interested in music, particularly opera, and was famous for trying to ensure that BIALl Council meetings in London might coincide with a trip to Covent Garden. He lives at Broughty Ferry, a former fishing village four miles outside Dundee, where he can be found tending his garden and listening to music, if not out walking, and there is always a warm welcome for any visiting fellow law librarian!

Throughout our conversation, David's enthusiasm for the practice of law librarianship, as distinct from the practice of the law itself, his interest in the bibliographic structure of the materials, and the challenges involved in exploiting them, shone through.

David is a much loved colleague and friend to many of us and the measure of how much affection he is held in was shown by the rousing cheer he received at the Dublin Conference when he received his richly deserved award. We all wish him a happy future in his new role at Dundee University Library.

Publications

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