

## *Thirty Years of the ALLG: A Personal View*

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The Australian Law Librarians' Group has celebrated its thirtieth anniversary. The meeting that saw the Group come into being as a national body was held at the University of Sydney Law School on 2 December 1969. Twenty four people attended, including four from outside Sydney and a further eight sent letters of support.

I was one of the non-Sydney librarians at the meeting. The other three came from Canberra. It was at the end of my first year as Law Librarian at the University of Adelaide. My attendance at the meeting was part of a tour of law libraries in the eastern states, designed to give me some ideas for the future of the law library I had been appointed to run.

The purpose of the December meeting was to see whether the people involved in law libraries were ready to form a group, with the object of promoting cooperation and carrying out joint projects of interest in the field of law. The need for action was very clear, even in a centre like Sydney. In the 1960s, as now, people could find themselves employed to run a law library with no immediate guide, mentor or informed supervisor to teach them about the subject and the literature. As well, there was no AustLII, SCALEplus or even LEXIS. I leave it to others to decide whether their absence made the overall task more difficult or less!

If law librarians felt isolated in Sydney, their position in smaller cities like Adelaide, Perth and others was much worse. In Adelaide, for example, the only other law library that had staff to talk to was at the Supreme Court.

The December meeting that was to set up the Group, had been preceded by a smaller meeting in Sydney in late October. It consisted of Rob Brian (High Court), Stephen Budavari (University of Sydney Law Library), Leone Glynn (Supreme Court), Gwenda Fischer (Law Society of NSW) and Lynn Pollack (NSW Attorney General and Justice). They met at lunchtime in Cahill's Temple Court Restaurant in Elizabeth St and decided to call a general meeting of librarians and other people connected with law libraries, to discuss forming a group to promote cooperation and joint projects in the field of law.

A detailed history of the ALLG's foundation and its early years has already been published by Rob Brian.<sup>1</sup> The years following the Group's foundation and early establishment in Sydney have still to be recorded.

From the start the Group was fortunate to attract financial support. The help of the Law Foundation of NSW, in particular, was of great importance, while sponsorship of particular events by law publishers continues to be helpful.

<sup>1</sup> Brian, R.F. 'National Group report: Australia. The Australian Law Librarians' Group' (1973) 1 *International Journal of Law Libraries* pp. 9-15; Brian, R.F. 'The ALLG – twenty-five years old!' (1994) 2 *Australian Law Librarian* pp. 323 – 330.

In this paper I want to give a picture of the law library world as it was in 1969 and briefly compare it with the world of today. Many of the changes and improvements that have happened in the intervening thirty years are related to the resolutions of those early meetings. It is pointless, though, to speculate about what might have happened in the law library field if the ALLG had not been founded in the way it was and at the time it was. Many other forces, in particular the strength and sheer professionalism of so many of the law librarians of those days, would have forced change and development, and would have brought people together in one way or another.

One of the striking features of the law library world of the 1960s was that, in spite of its small size, it had a large number of outstanding individuals working in it. Of the five who met in Sydney: Leone Glynn became a Judge; Lynn Pollack ran the NSW Courts Library until her recent retirement and is still very active; Rob Brian spent many years as Law Librarian of the University of NSW and then became Parliamentary Librarian; and Gwenda Fischer, besides running the Library of the Law Society of NSW, single-handedly compiled and published the *Current Australian and New Zealand Legal Literature Index* (CANZLLI).<sup>2</sup>

Not that all the projects agreed at the Group's early meetings were realised, or realised quickly. The directory of law libraries, for example, begun by Leone Glynn in 1970 did not appear until 1976.<sup>3</sup> The union list of periodical holdings that Peter Biskup started at ANU (or perhaps at the Canberra CAE) was taken over and eventually published at Monash by Ted Glasson. Much of the work on cataloguing codes and subject-heading lists seems in retrospect to have been inconclusive, and in any event was soon made obsolete by the coming of ABN and other centralised and computerised services. The Australian subject headings list did not appear until 1987.<sup>4</sup> The Moys classification was good enough to achieve its near-universal use in Australia without the special support of the Group.

It was a strength of the Group that exactly who it was that started and who finished a project did not seem to matter. The important thing was that the product (union list, directory or whatever it was) did appear, and that there was certainly a need and use for it.

The same might be said of the *Standards for Law Libraries in the Universities*, although strictly speaking these standards were not a subject for the Group, but for the librarians in AULSA.<sup>5</sup> The first set of standards was produced by J.E. Richardson,<sup>6</sup> and the more recent set under the auspices of ALTA.<sup>7,8</sup> Even so, the standards were still discussed at law librarians' meetings and conferences and the responsibility for putting them together seemed to be

<sup>2</sup> *Current Australian and New Zealand Legal Literature Index*. Sydney : Law Book Co., 1973-1987.

<sup>3</sup> *Directory of Law Libraries in Australia and Papua New Guinea*. Sydney : Butterworths, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> *Australian Legal Subject Headings*. Sydney : ALLG, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Australasian Universities' Law School Association, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Universities Law Schools Association. Committee on Australian Legal Education *Law Libraries in Australian Universities*. Sydney : Butterworths, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Australasian Law Teachers' Association, 1990 -

<sup>8</sup> *Australian Law School Libraries: A Position Statement and Standards. June 1995 (Revised September 1995)*. Sydney. Published on behalf of the Committee of Law Deans by the Centre for Legal Education.

handed on from one person to another in much the same informal way the Group managed its projects.

Other products of the Group came out exactly as planned, with all the research and writing done by the people originally commissioned to do it. A good example is the publication always referred to as the Wilson/Glasson survey<sup>9</sup>

The world of law librarians was different in 1969. There were very few universities or other tertiary institutions where law was taught. Some states had significant collections in their Supreme Court libraries, and some of these libraries were very well staffed. In South Australia the University of Adelaide and the Supreme Court were the only two institutions that I knew of that had law libraries staffed by professional people, some of them lawyers and some librarians.

The collections were much smaller. This is not just because law libraries are mainly collections of serials, which will continue to grow, at least until the subscription is cancelled, the donor stops the presentation or the library decides to rely on the material on the Internet. But besides this automatic growth, many libraries increased their scope a great deal, particularly in the 1970s. Libraries changed from the very Anglo-Australian collections of the 1960s to cover a much wider collection of common law countries. US and Canadian sources, in particular, became significant parts of many law libraries.

The number of Australian publications in all fields, books, journals and law reprints, has also grown enormously in the last thirty years, so that a much larger proportion of the budget has to go on titles which seemed from the first to be essential. And, of course, there simply is more law! Compare the size of a volume of statutes from the 1990s with one from the 1960s.

It is a sad irony that at a time when the courts are making more and more references to North American, particularly to US judgments, libraries are having to cancel their subscriptions because their funding cannot keep up with the prices.

In 1969, Sydney had a big enough population to provide a boardroom table of people interested or involved in law collections. Melbourne soon produced a smaller group under George Alcorn, the Supreme Court Librarian.

Sydney's relatively large population, rather than the fact the Group started there, is probably the reason that for some years the ALLG always seemed to be a Sydney organisation, with a leader in Sydney, a newsletter (from December 1973) produced in Sydney, first by Rob Watt, later by John Rodwell and then Colin Fong, and a continuing professional and social existence in Sydney.

Eventually Victoria, as might have been expected, was the state that took over the running of the Group and the Newsletter (1989), and since then the responsibility has been shared between the different states and territories. Responsibilities have included running seminars and conferences, editing and publishing the *Australian Law Librarian* and forming a national executive.

<sup>9</sup> *National Survey of Law Libraries in Australia* by Beth Wilson, supervised by E J Glasson, Sydney, ALLG, 1984.

Queensland was the third to form a recognisable state group, and there is now a group in each of the states, the ACT and the Northern Territory. This has been a great help in the organisation of conferences, particularly the joint Specials Health and Law Conferences which have become the major place for regular law librarians' meetings.

The isolated position of the law librarian, even in the smaller states, is a thing of the past. There are librarians in most of the larger law firms, as well as government offices like departments of Justice and Attorneys-General, and the courts. Convenors and members of committees come from all these areas, with no particular type of law library playing a greater part than any other.

Not all the outstanding people that I met in 1969 were working in the universities but, as I went on to Canberra and Melbourne after the ALLG meeting, by the time that I returned to Adelaide I had met the law librarians of Sydney (Stephen Budavari), the ANU (Peter Biskup), and Monash and Melbourne (Ted Glasson and Peggy Macmillan). At the time I think Bill Ford was at W.A. and Rhonda O'Shea at Tasmania; I met Robert Bodey of Queensland when I went to the AULSA conference there in 1970.

None of the people named above is still in the same Law Library. Rob Brian is NSW Parliamentary Librarian, Ted Glasson retired from Monash a few years ago, Bill Ford is a law academic, Peter Biskup became a teacher in the Canberra CAE (and had an excellent letter in the Australian Review of Books a few weeks ago) Stephen Budavari retired, to be succeeded by Margaret McAleese, who is still Law Librarian at Sydney. Some of the other universities have had a number of law librarians since 1969, like W.A. with Andrew Domahidy, Alison Southern, Paul Genoni and now Helen Wallace, or Melbourne (Bill Ford, Nigel Smith, Mark Linnemann, Stephen Connolly and now Ruth Bird)

In its first meeting the ALLG resolved that it would be no more formal than it had to be. At its second, on 3 February 1970, it decided that the group should not seek formal affiliation with any other body. Even after thirty years, and the formation of groups in the states, the ALLG still sometimes seems to me to lack the formality of the BIALL,<sup>10</sup> which formed itself in Britain at much the same time as the ALLG, to say nothing of earlier law librarian groups in the US or Canada.

The Group's relationship with ALIA,<sup>11</sup> or before that with the LAA,<sup>12</sup> took some time to resolve. It seems now to be as straightforward and as satisfactory as it has ever been, with an informal tie to the ALIA's Special Libraries Section which expresses itself regularly through joint conferences. Beyond that there is still no formal affiliation.

Until the Melbourne Symposium of 1996, the Group's or the law librarians' conferences seem always to have been part of, or associated with, some other body. These bodies include ALIA and its predecessor the LAA, the International Association of Law Librarians (1981 Sydney, 1999 Melbourne), and ALTA every two years for the University law librarians, who have for many years been eligible for ALTA membership. The conferences never seem to be exclusive. For some years Bill Thorn of the National Library regularly

<sup>10</sup> British and Irish Association of Law Librarians 1970 -

<sup>11</sup> Australian Library and Information Association 1989 -

<sup>12</sup> Library Association of Australia, 1937-1988; previously Australian Institute of Librarians 1937-1949

attended AULSA, and the library sessions at any ALTA conference are likely to attract numerous non-university law librarians from the area in which the conference is held. Other important conferences, like the AustLII conference since 1997, are held without any apparent ALLG input.

The names of the people who have represented the ALLG or Australian law librarians on these groups are too numerous to list, although some mention should be made of the relatively few to work for the International Association of Law Librarians. These include Ted Glasson, Rob Brian, Lynn Pollack, John Rodwell and Jacqui Elliott on the Board and Rob Brian, Lynn Pollack and Jacqui Elliott as conference organisers.

Though there are many more law libraries now than in 1969, and more librarians and a much larger ALLG, it cannot be said that the position of law libraries in Australia has improved at the same rate. It is chastening to look back at the tone of some of the past correspondence and at some of the views expressed about the possible future. The ALLG was conceived in a spirit of hope and optimism. Like other librarians and workers in the fields of the law, information and education, law librarians have had to moderate their plans and wishes. The university law libraries, which have been such an important part of the overall resources in most cities, have been hit particularly hard and failed to keep up the expansion of the 1970s (although the Pearce report on Australian law schools<sup>13</sup> in 1987 was able to inspire improvement in one or two places.) Other libraries from the National Library down, have had to modify their collection policies, and the reliance on the availability of important materials on the Internet has probably gone too far already. Which is not to say that it will not go further; nor is it to deny the incalculable value of the free web sites available in Australia, AustLII and SCALEplus, which are, very properly, the envy of the common law world.

Looking back at copies of letters about the ALLG, AULSA/ALTA, the LAA/ALIA, and the conferences and meetings that have been held, it looks as though the ALLG has often acted as an enabling or supporting body rather than an executive one.

The main drawback over the thirty years has been the wide geographical distribution of members, particularly members of any national board or committee, and the resulting difficulty of communication and of reaching resolutions. In the past, this often led to a feeling that the ALLG, or that law librarians generally, were failing to make the best use of opportunities to exert influence where it was needed; examples are the meeting between law librarians and the National Library in 1989, and the National Library's revised collection policy in 1988. With better communication and consequently better preparation, more might have been achieved.

The university law librarians, in particular, have sometimes seemed to spread themselves too thinly, by regarding the AULSA/ALTA conferences as just as 'official' as the LAA/ALIA or later joint special conferences. For these to work well a good attendance was needed, and because the law schools or teachers' body is Australasian rather than Australian, and conferences are often held in New Zealand, this attendance cannot be guaranteed.

<sup>13</sup> *Australian Law Schools: A Discipline Assessment for the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission* (4 vols) Canberra, AGPS, 1987. Especially ch 19 'The Law Libraries serving the law schools', vol. 3, pp 736 – 856

In the past, it sometimes seemed that decisions could be taken at conferences by meetings of university law librarians that were not very widely representative. For the last few years the ability to communicate by email has solved this problem, so that opinions can be widely canvassed before a meeting, or even without having a meeting at all. The communication problems of university law librarians are now a thing of the past

The present arrangement of the ALLG with a national committee formed from the state convenors and with regular meetings, must be the best that has been managed so far, and offers more hope that we will be able to respond better, as a group, to challenges in the future.

A disclaimer:

This article was written in some haste. If I have left names out of any of the lists, or got any names wrong, I apologise.

I also apologise to the very many people who have worked long and tirelessly for law libraries, and often for the ALLG, who have not been mentioned at all. Again, I must plead lack of time. And the article is probably too long already!