Trajectories

This Bird's Flight Path on the Good Ship 'Librarianship'

Thank you for allowing me the indulgence to look back on my career and to share with you the highs and lows, the lessons learnt, the changes I have seen, and the ideas, fads and developments along the way. All have resulted in some constant truths about libraries which I hope you will take on board.

1. **Early exposure to books and libraries**

The indications that I might have some involvement with books came early. My Italian grandfather had a library of which my mother was very proud, and he had records of his collection, plus his own accession system. And my mother did much the same with the books in our home, not only inserting ownership marks in each one (name and address) but also listing them by author in a notebook, and giving each one its own unique record number (eg, f7). When I started to get my own collection of books, I decided on having them organised as well, and chose to sort them by author…

All that was in my childhood, and I was also an active member of the Malvern Library, heading there most weeks in my teenage years, to borrow and devour what I could manage.

I was lucky to be at a school that had a good library and a nice librarian and I read the whole series of Biggles books – nice to have no sexist divisions of what could be held in a girls' school library! And I also became a library monitor. Maybe the seed was sown and I just wasn't aware of it..

At Uni I used the Baillieu Library constantly – in those days it had a smoking room where we would retreat at the end of the day to do the Herald crossword. And I would have a short sleep at 'my desk' some days after lunch… On Saturday evenings the Baillieu would close at 5pm so off to the State Library down the road for me. What a swot! But it was a great place to study in the Reading Room with radial tables and the green lamp shades.. and Barry Jones was sometimes there as added inspiration to a budding historian.

Lesson learnt

A library is more than a collection of books.

Organising your books helps you find them more easily

2. **But – teaching came first…**

So I took a scholarship which meant I had to teach for 3 years at the end of my degree, seemed like a bit of a drag at the time – but I really enjoyed it, to my surprise. I loved the teaching and the lesson preparation, but when it came to marking – after a few years I thought I had better things to do with my Sundays. I also started to realise that students

learnt much better when they wanted to, rather than when the school curriculum told them to.

I was very lucky to land at a high school where the remarkable Barbara Hollow was the librarian. It was a school on a Commission estate, and later on I found what this meant. She made going to the library fun for these kids, and worked with me to help with my remedial year 9 English class.

This was the time that the Education Department supported the idea of teacher librarians having a valuable role in schools. I applied for study leave and had a year at the Secondary Teachers' College where I took the Graduate Diploma of Librarianship. 1978 - what a year! To be a full time student again after 5 years out in the work force was such a luxury. I was one of a group of 15 teachers who were retraining, and I loved every minute of the course. Our lecturers included Faye Nicholson, Doug Down, Stella Lees, Nev Johnson and Wes Bate – names to be reckoned with in those days! We learnt cataloguing, research, reference sources – gazetteers, dictionaries, biographies, encyclopaedias, - classification – Dewey , UDC, LC, – Subject heading s – Sears, Dictionary catalogues, over the rod filing, but most exciting of all… punch card programming!

You cannot imagine how exciting it was to have a sharp pencil and a punch card and be told to write a little programme… It was this introduction to the concepts of computing that added to the excitement of the course.

Lesson learnt

I did not know how to use a library properly when I was an undergraduate because they did not have any library inductions at that stage, nor any user guides. So a user needs help to get the best out of a library!

Librarians could teach but rarely had to do any marking

3. On to the life of a teacher-librarian

When I finished the Grad Dip, I went back to my school, and took over the library. I employed my first library assistant, and Lyn Piggott is still my friend after 35 years. Together we reorganised that library.

New technology included the wet paper photocopier, a Gestetner duplicating machine, a spirit duplicator (Fordigraph) – we had it all. And we had a 'paperback party' every term… I would buy maybe 200 popular children fiction titles from Robinson's Booksellers in Frankston, and put them out. Kids would come in and 'select' their book and we would insert their name on a bookplate – 'This book was chosen by Freddie Turner' – a permanent record in that collection. It was a really popular event that dragged in the most unlikely surly teenagers. And when I did the matric book retrieval I found out why. I went round to the houses of the years 12s after their exams were over to collect the library books

they still had out, and in 8 out of 10 houses, there was not a book to be seen in the house. Such a contrast to my cosy upbringing.

I loved – still do - the teaching aspect of librarianship. The users came when they wanted to know something. It was great to demystify the index of an encyclopaedia, or the longitude and latitude lines on a map as we located answers. I went on to be curriculum coordinator in my next two schools, and integrated research methods and library classes into the assignments being taught in English, history, geography, biology, etc.

We used Pathfinders as a way of exploring a range of resources on a topic – as much for the teachers as the students – because although we had class sets of text books, we had so much more.

I was also cataloguing and classifying books. This sounds weird, but I took the roneo home to sort out the journal entry cards when I first started at my second school. All ordering was manual – purchase order forms written out, invoices issued manually. Batch purchases at bookshops done with one blanket order. No EDI! Cataloguing was original or else the National Library entry. And we were typing catalogue cards – Main entry, Title entry, Author entry and at least one subject entry card.

There was technology which allowed you to type the main entry card and the typewriter would make 5 copies, and all you had to do was type in the subject or author on the top. Oooh, so modern! And then the catalogue cards had to be filed … so we had 'over the rod' filing done by the library assistant, and then I would go and check the filing and when satisfied, the rod was removed and the cards patted down before the rod was re-inserted. Catalogue cards had a hole pre-punched in them to accommodate this. We used to cover the paperbacks with self adhesive clear plastic film. We inserted borrowing pockets into the back of books. The cards would be filed in a box at the checkout desk, in date due order.

Arguments existed over whether you used this system – Browne – or Reverse Browne – organising borrowing cards by book title.

The lessons I learned from this:

Treat your staff as you wish to be treated.

Don't ask anyone to do something you would not do yourself

612.6 is the Dewey number for the biology books dealing with sex

We also looked after the audio visual side of collections. One subject we had studied in the Grad Dip was educational technology, which dealt with collecting and cataloguing slides, games, films, and TV programmes. We had a school TV and Beta recorder (this was in the days of VHS versus Beta competition) and a licence to tape 'educational' programmes. It was not sophisticated – teachers had to book the TV and the recorder, and I would wheel

these in on a trolley to their classrooms, to show the kids. You soon got to know which teachers used the TV as their main teaching aide !!

I was able to achieve one dream – In 1985 I went to a brand new high school as one of the first cohort of teachers and was able to build a library from scratch. What a privilege. It is still there, 30 years on. That was where I was able to work with a whizz-bang computer teacher and we wrote a primitive catalogue and borrowing programme on FoxPro, a text based DBMS.

In that school we had Apple IIe computers for the students, and 20 Wyse dumb terminals for the staff. This allowed us to word process student reports, such an innovation!

The lessons I learned from this:

I understood the concept of databases, and was able to talk easily with a programmer about what was needed in an online version of a catalogue

I learned that computers are tools and not masters

4. Moving to the corporate world

For various reasons, in 1988 I was after a new challenge and decided to escape the public bureaucracy for something in the city. I was lucky to be taken on by a law firm because of my computer knowledge … they wanted someone who would 'computerise their library'. This was a whole new world to me.

After working for 15 years in schools, the tranquillity of the corporate work environment took me aback. And the library had such a small group of users. The size of the collection – who knew there were so many law books in the world? Who knew a solicitors' office could have 33 partners and 180 staff? Who knew law collections required such large budgets? My annual budget went from $3,000 for materials to $40,000! And who knew about law reports, legislation, looseleafs, annual reports, business and banking and clients and current awareness and precedents and legal research? In retrospect I was quite clueless, but Arthur Rob's gave me a chance and I loved it from the get go.

Within 3 months of starting I was sent to Auckland to investigate some software that might suit the plans I had for a library information system. It was called BRS Search, and allowed database creation using UNIX.

I had found my little bit of heaven. I started to write databases like crazy, and learnt all about concatenation – linked databases which could be searched individually or all at one time. Cross database searching seemed like such an exciting innovation! And before implementing the system we reclassified the collection to Moys, so nothing like having multiple projects on the go to test your skills!

I also inherited 3 very good library staff who helped ease me into my role; I had several months to learn the tools before I took my first cohort of articled clerks through the mysteries of The Australian Digest and legislative updating.

The lessons I learned from this:

The corporate world is more pragmatic and results focussed than the public sector

Computers are the tools by which we can achieve some innovative services, but end users don't care about the mechanics of how things work.

5. Getting involved with our Professional Associations

I had been involved a little with SLAV – the School Libraries Association of Victoria – while teaching, and had attended one of the conferences in Adelaide. I had been impressed with the level of sharing and collaboration between librarians, and so one of the first things I did on joining AR & H was to join the Victorian Division of the Australian Law Librarians' Group. Within a year or two I was the Treasurer, and by 1993 I had become the National Convenor. I value the friendships I made with colleagues, the courses and conferences I have attended, and the sharing of knowledge we provide so willingly.

Whilst the law librarians' conference used to be part of the ALIA meetings held every two years, a group of us gathered in Melbourne and decided to hold a separate Law Librarians Symposium in 1996, one of the 'off' years for the ALIA meeting. A group of 5 of us, nicknamed the VILLANS, set about organising a 2 day conference which attracted 150 delegates to Trinity College at Melbourne Uni, plus sponsorship, had some great speakers, and turned a surplus income. We repeated the success in 1997. This led to annual law library conferences which have been hosted all around the country. We did it because we believed in the value of our own segment of the profession sharing what we knew, and because collaboration is a cornerstone of our profession.

Since then I became involved in the UK with BIALL, being on Council for 2 years, chairing a working group on legal information literacy, helping to organise the 2006 Joint Study Institute in Oxford, and being made a Life Member, a wonderful honour. I have been a member of AALL, the American association, nearly 20 years, earning me a badge! I also became involved in the international association, IALL, and am currently the Vice President. Each group has brought me contacts, friendships, and an opportunity to give something back to the profession. Next year I am organising another conference, this time for IALL, in Oxford, a final chance to be fully involved.

The lessons I take from this involvement:

Volunteering for professional Associations is rewarding and relevant to your career. It is a way to get to know colleagues in a profession that can be isolated if you are in a small library. New ideas, new challenges, and supportive structures enrich your career.

6. Moving around the world

Depending on the sector in which you find yourself, you may be lucky enough to travel with your library work. I was fortunate to have employers who valued the learning I gained from attendance at overseas conferences, and would allow me to attend one a year; my first such conference was in 1993 in SF, for AALL. This conference, which regularly had 1500 delegates, was quite an eye opener, and was the first of many.

Learning how others do things, talking to people with different backgrounds and experiences and expectations, sharing ideas, learning from what they did – the value of participating in such events cannot be underestimated. If you are lucky, you see every difference as a learning experience, and you absorb ideas subconsciously. Each conference also provided me the chance to visit libraries and I ensured I always had a packed programme.

A colleague in Germany always said to his younger staff: 'Become a law librarian and see the world!'

The other experience I had was actually working with foreign libraries on a short term basis. In 1991 I was asked to go to a law firm in Jakarta to organise their book collection. Armed with an Indonesian-English law dictionary I set about this challenge with some trepidation, but my concerns were groundless. It was a great 2 weeks, and as part of it I witnessed the initial digitisation of Indonesian legislation while I was there. Later on I worked on the setting up of a library at our firm offices in Port Moresby, but that was done from a distance. And most recently I have been working with the University of Yangon to try to re-establish a working law library there.

The lessons I take from this;

I encourage my staff to participate in conferences, to visit other libraries, and to ensure they have a broad view of the world of librarianship. You can only learn so much from books and theory.

7. A step sideways

In a moment of madness I thought I would try marketing as a career change, and became the Practice Development Manager in my law firm.

I wrote a paper on it in 1996, where I went through the skills we have in common with marketers:

Organisation, research, writing, public presentations, negotiating, computers, accounting, people management and procedures.

So what was missing that brought me back? Collaboration and openness and sharing. Marketing is a competitive enterprise, librarianship is not, and it was the collegiality I missed most of all. But as with every experience, I learnt much as well, because I saw my firm though a very different prism as a marketer than as a librarian. The long term benefit came when I went to my next firm, because I was able to support services for clients which I had not thought about before that experience..

The lessons I took from this:

Realise that whilst skills are transferrable, you need to be happy within your skin, and comfortable in what you do. Making a lot of money does not compensate for working crazy hours, and being treated poorly in your workplace by your employer. And there is no shame in saying that you made a mistake, and a change has not worked for you.

8. Stepping back in time

Not really, though moving from the corporate world to academia can seem like a slow down in pace. I was fortunate that the law library at the University of Melbourne needed some care and TLC. Two projects loomed here – firstly a re-classification, demanded by the Faculty but opposed by the University Library. The Faculty won and we set about reclassifying 150,000 books. And then the second project to refurbish the library was set in train.

There were several iterations of this plan over 3 years – from an underground extension to a purpose built building of 23 stories to the final result, a 10 storey law building with the library occupying 3 floors. The technology by this time was something much more familiar to you – the internet had gone live in 1994. But wi-fi in 1998 was still in its infancy, so we laid down 400 ethernet points across 3 floors to ensure access to everyone whether via pc or laptop.

Uni Melb also gave me the chance to get right into html and design and create the website for the law library, such a great learning opportunity. I devised the Holdings List and some super database user guides which became our 'White Book'.

And the other major thing was to be involved in the teaching within the faculty – we not only worked on inductions and first year legal research, we had a whole suite of classes, and were also embedded into some later year subjects, working with the faculty to devise research components to set assignments.

We also became a member of the Global Law Programme with NYU law school, and I taught legal research in Cape Town as part of that programme. We also worked with others on a meeting of IALL in Melbourne in 1999 where I gave a joint paper.

I was able to expand the size of law library staff by working with the faculty to show them the value of librarians who could do some research teaching, and I was very proud of the

team we had. We fought the central university library to keep our own technical services team intact because of the complexities of our materials, and I like to think I was successful with the staff, nurturing and encouraging and mentoring where I could.

The lessons I took from this:

You need to drive change if you want to achieve it, no-one will do it for you. And with any refurbishment project, you have to be at the table from the outset if you want a successful outcome. And lastly, it is better to work with your staff and bring them with you no matter what shortcomings you may perceive, because they will then work with you when tough projects need it.

9. The early internet

It may be hard for you to realise how exciting and new and adventurous the early 90's were for librarians. Here is one clue – in 1992 I upgraded the storage on my computer from 4 MB to 8MB. This was expensive and amazing!!!

So here are some historical recollections to ponder:

In 1989 we were able to download text based versions of American cases from Lexis by using acoustic couplers working on a 300 baud modem. The cases downloaded literally letter by letter. You would set it off and come back an hour later; the case would then print out on a dot-matrix printer using rolls of paper, not A4 sheets. We had modems that connected the pcs to the phone line, speeds were abysmal by today's standards,

In 1992 we started to use TCP/IP protocols to access the internet – transmission control protocol which used a packets system to transfer data. FTP was the earlier file transfer protocol. Gopher was a menu-based design for document retrieval, it was much more rigid than the later free flowing hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) which gradually became the standard. The early search engines for the Gopher protocol were called Archie, Veronica and Jughead. By 1992/93 the World Wide Web came to more general use, using hypertext transfer protocol which sat behind words and linked them to other WWW sites, with its graphical interface had come into being, using URLs (Uniform Resource Locators) based on the DNS (Domain Name System)

The web browsers we had were Netscape and Internet Explorer. The two interpreted the language for the creation of internet pages, html, differently. So when I was developing the website for the University of Melbourne, I had to do two versions, and constantly check the way they rendered to ensure the data looked the same whichever browser the user employed.

Early search engines were Excite, Altavista and Yahoo. Google was a late starter in 1998, and we librarians welcomed it with open arms, because it did not carry the advertising that was staring to creep onto the pages of the other search engines. It was different because it did

not create subject indexes to information, but roamed freely across the entire world wide web to search for your query.

This illustration shows you the developments since the time many of you were born. Just look at how recent some of the applications are, and what has gone by the wayside! It was the most exciting time to be involved in web developments.

The lesson I took from this:

Do not get stuck using some technology and ignore other developments. When you get a chance, get involved, stretch yourself outside the square, and have a go. Think how you can get the technology to work for you or your library.

10. A new corporate challenge

The next move was really exciting. I became the Firm Legal Information Manager at a law firm which comprised several recently merged firms based in each Australian capital and also in NZ. My responsibility was the libraries in each office, plus establishing a Style manual for the firm, an accessible precedents collection online, and participation in corporate re-branding. During my time I became very familiar with the differences and similarities of Macs and PCs, because the offices were not uniform, and the challenge was to find web based software that would work with both operating systems. It seems fanciful now, but in 2001, this was a real issue, and our solution was a CMS called 42 – the answer to everything. Except of course it wasn't.

The other really good thing there was to align the precedents lawyers and librarians with practice groups in the firm, and to establish a vibrant current awareness service that fed to their specific requirements. We established an effective Knowledge Management system and intranet without using the KM terminology because the firm didn't like it.

The lessons I took from this:

Do not be afraid to take on new challenges at any stage of your career, and keep up with technology. And having a switched-on boss makes your life much easier.

11. Stepping into an adventure

In 2003 an advert appeared for the Bodleian Law Librarian position in Oxford. My husband and I were on our annual trip to Europe, and when we returned I mentioned the post. But I had sworn I would not go back to academia.

Well, you can't always stick to your guns. The temptation of a job based not that far from my beloved France & Italy was extremely tempting, so I gave it a go, and lo and behold, 6 months later, I was in Oxford, in a library that needed some TLC.

The Bodleian Law Library is only 50 years old, though the mother ship is over 400 years old. It was a library where there was a need to lift the service, introduce a range of legal research teaching, undertake some internal improvements to the spaces, and integrate more closely with the Faculty. The small projects included creating a reading room for taught graduates, increasing the size of the tea room, placing the rare books into conservation boxes, and inserting rolling stacks on the ground floor. A larger project involved bringing Official Papers from the Radcliffe Camera, into purpose built rolling stacks on our ground floor, some 2,500 lm, and integrating their staff with ours. But the really big refurbishment project will finally commence 3 weeks from now. It has taken 11 years for me to start on the project they asked me to do at my interview, but one thing you learn at Oxford is that nothing is ever hurried.

Before I went to Oxford I was told it was a non-lending library, and I planned to change this as one of my first projects. It took a year or two, and a survey of the users to convince me that this was not what they wanted. The Bodleian was based on the concept that a scholar should be able to come from anywhere in the world and find the book s/he needed on the shelf. There are faculty, and college, and even Bodleian lending libraries, but we are not one of them.

Sometimes you have good ideas that are transferable. Legal materials are mainly serial in nature and not easy to catalogue in a way that makes them user friendly. So I devised an alpha holdings list at Melbourne, and brought the concept to Oxford. It is now a paper list but also a searchable database. With a library of 550,000 books, over 90 jurisdictions, 2,000 current law report and journal titles, anything you can do to make it easier for readers to find what they want is worth the effort. And the database guides are now 3 or 4 minute Camtasia videos, embedded in our LibGuides.

The lessons I will take from this:

Work practices vary greatly from one country to another; Australians are often more open and adventurous than many others, and libraries are the great universal institution no matter where you go.

Learn when to revise your plans and back down gracefully. The reader comes first.

12. An enduring belief in teaching

One theme has permeated my work as a librarian. Those who are on the outside of our profession will say I am obsessed with organising things – my spice jars are in alphabetical order – but those within know that the thread has always been some aspect of teaching. In the past decade I have written about legal and digital information literacy, as an extension of teaching research skills.

I chaired a working group in the UK that developed the Legal information Literacy Statement in 2012, as a tool to help librarians plan and align their teaching to a common framework applicable in various legal work environments. I also contributed to the Public International Law version. Tools such as these help us demonstrate the value of what we do to those who think librarians shelve books. We are partners with our institutions, collaborating in a joint effort to improve research, scholarship, teaching, service to clients, service to the public, and adding recognisable value to the enterprise.

So the career I embarked on in 1979 has certainly enabled me to have many marvellous work experiences under the modest title of librarian. From schools to top level corporate environments, to world class academic institutions, from housing estates to the Inns of Court, from Frankston to Melbourne, to Oxford, via many marvellous cities and countries along the way, I have followed various trajectories, each one a new adventure. I learned to take a risk, to have a go, to add value wherever I worked, and most importantly, to make the most of every opportunity. I also learned that you make more friends via sharing and giving credit where it is due. Your career will be what you make it, and as long as your mind is open to change and challenge, you will have a marvellous life in librarianship, information services knowledge management, or whatever other name you choose for this enriching profession.

And finally, you need a vision to take you through the journey. I have always believed that I need to hasten slowly, taking risks, innovating and improving whilst retaining great existing services even if perceived as old fashioned.

This scrap of paper has been on my noticeboard in every job I have had since 1979:

The reputation of the library will be based not on the number of volumes in its collections, but on the range and quality of services available, the efficiency of their delivery, and the extent to which innovative methods are used to support research and teaching activities. The Library will be recognised for efficient management, the quality of its staff, for a commitment to service, and a high level of user satisfaction.

I hope you also have the good fortune to enjoy the journey through librarianship, and the unexpected trajectories that come your way. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.