

## The Way of Ignorance

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploration  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time<sup>1</sup>*

In 1991 I traveled overseas to attend a law library conference in a foreign city in a country I had never visited before; it was a long journey and a hot and humid arrival in July on the banks of a great brown river. It was, of course, the annual meeting of AALL in New Orleans, an unforgettable experience and the start of many valued friendships. It was my first visit to the United States, although several AALL members insisted that, "This is not the States!" Since then I have attended another nine annual meetings of AALL – for me attending the AALL annual meeting is international networking and an essential and enjoyable part of my job. So I guess it was entirely reasonable for Janis Johnston to ask me to write a little about the opportunities and the benefits of international networking. It also fits with the themes which are being addressed by the Association and by the annual meeting in Boston this year: globalization and the larger environments of legal information in which we work.

In case my employers are reading, I shall keep the anecdotes to a minimum and try to concentrate on the more professional aspects of networking. So I won't relate in detail the incidents when I sent back a bottle of wine in a French Jewish restaurant in New York, or when I was mistaken for someone important in Sausalito, or when I was briefly given control of a public address system at the former Robben Island prison in South Africa.

The lines above from one of Eliot's *Four Quartets* provide one of the best explanations and justifications for international networking that I could imagine. Conferences often give you an insight into other approaches to law librarianship, perhaps the philosophical underpinnings of our profession or perhaps a good solution to a particular problem back home, a new way of expressing one's aspirations or a simple new procedure. Beyond the specifics, one returns from a conference and looks at one's own library with new eyes, a new sense of perspective that helps to clarify priorities and perhaps unsettles one's sense of satisfaction with the status quo.

The copy of *Spectrum* which is lying on my desk as I write has on the cover: 'Cross-pollination: learning each other's roles and realities'. The process of learning each other's roles and realities which takes place in an international dimension may take a greater intellectual leap than when one attends regional and national conferences because you may have less in common with other delegates but there is more to learn for the same reason. The process of international networking can often offer an opportunity to contribute. There may be a chance to set up a publications exchange program or internship, to volunteer some time or effort. However, anyone who has been involved in programs of assistance, consultancy or voluntary work will know that the teacher rapidly becomes the student. The two-way nature of the process of learning is extremely important; the benefits are reciprocal.

My predecessors as Directors of the Library of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in London were all internationalists. Muriel Anderson was given leave of absence for an extended period to assist in setting up the Library of the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in Lagos. In the process she forged an enduring link that led both to the supply by our library of duplicate books to the Nigerian Institute over many years and the building of a strong Nigerian law collection in London. The late Willi Steiner, who was for many years Editor of the *Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals*, was one of a generation of émigrés from continental Europe who enriched legal scholarship and law librarianship in the common law world. As we lose that generation, it becomes increasingly important to cultivate a new cadre of foreign, comparative and international law librarians with an understanding of foreign legal systems, a need expressed in the strategic plans of the Association. K Howard Drake, the first Librarian of the Institute, was a figure of international standing in law librarianship and was one of the moving forces behind the creation of the International Association of Law Libraries of which he was President at the time of his early death.

If international aspects of law and law librarianship were important then, they are far more important now. We all know about the globalization of law. Today we are faced not just with a growth of transborder economic activity, but every aspect of law is affected by the interconnectedness of our world. Legal systems are increasingly interpenetrated. Whole areas of law are subject to some degree to supranational regimes whether emanating from international entities such as the United Nations or the European Union, or from international treaty regimes. The movement of information or people creates challenges that national law is struggling to keep up with and bring in their wake more and more complex problems of both public and private international law. Even the local law practice and local judiciary need to be aware of the international aspects of litigation as matters of rights, family law and inheritance increasingly require consideration of the provisions of another legal system apart from our own.

The process of rebuilding and reconstructing the legal order of many countries around the world continues in this decade. Huge strides have been taken in the introduction of new constitutions and new legal frameworks for economic activity. Armies of legal advisers have been made available to advise on the best models, on which to base new legislation. This may be a process of imparting knowledge but, in order for that to be a success, it is necessary for the local legal systems and their history to be understood.

In some legal systems, comparative legal research has been built into the fabric of the law. For example in South Africa the contemplation of constitutional rights, not just during the framing of the constitution, but also in its interpretation by the courts relies on the comparative study of legal norms in other countries.

One of the interests and challenges of law librarianship has always been that each country has a different legal system and a different system of legal publications, indeed each country may well have multiple jurisdictions. The legal systems may belong to larger families of legal systems, they may have influenced each other, but they still remain an expression of the culture and identity of a

jurisdiction. This has always been the case and globalization has not reduced the complexity but the demand for access to legal information from these jurisdictions has increased.

As law librarians, we increasingly need to be aware of foreign and international legal systems, understand the sources of law, and have recourse to expertise beyond our local resources. International contacts not only broaden our horizons and make us aware of other legal systems and responsive to enquiries about them, contacts also give us back-up for materials, language and expertise. Many of us are thankful for our international contacts at the end of a phone or an email. Discussion lists provide much needed expertise, although the cost-effectiveness of numerous people helpfully going off to do the same thing may be questionable. The right contact for the right problem is a much better answer.

One of the watchwords of modern librarianship is collaboration. We know we need each other. Take the example of digitization of materials. We need to collaborate in terms of standards, by utilizing international standards for data format, for electronic manipulation of metadata, and for metadata content. We need to collaborate in order to make the most efficient use of available funds for digitization projects and ensure that no material is digitized twice, that no project unnecessarily duplicates the efforts of another. Such collaboration is important not just locally or nationally but internationally. One has only to look at the huge LLMC Digital 'Common Law Abroad' project, which is dear to my heart, to see the value of collaboration. In that case the project to digitize materials from the countries of the British Commonwealth prior to independence is a collaboration of great research libraries within and outside the US. So many initiatives and collaborative projects rely on coordination of efforts and these ultimately rely on contacts, on contact between a relatively few people and on meetings between individuals.

There are other aspects of globalization that can give us cause for optimism. As standards become global rather than regional, there are more opportunities to learn from each other and share experience. It is always reassuring to discover that we face similar challenges, serve researchers with similar motivations and needs and hit similar snags. It is also extremely helpful to know we are using increasingly similar data formats, are able to employ similar strategies and utilize similar bibliographic utilities, communicate with each other's systems and indeed often use the same automated systems. When I attend the workshop of our automated system supplier at AALL, I learn much more than I would back home. I also meet a large number of law librarians who use the system. One of their number, Mary Jane Kelsey of Yale Law Library, accepted an invitation to become a Visiting Fellow in Law Librarianship at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in London. Through this scheme, which I will describe in a little more detail below, the IALS Library has been fortunate enough to benefit from the expertise of a range of law librarians from overseas. In this case we were given the encouragement and the know-how to take us further down the path of implementation of recent system products together with good practical advice which arose from observing our local requirements.

So how do you go about it? As you already know, the AALL annual meeting provides opportunities to attend sessions on foreign, comparative and international themes (usually not enough of them - but I would say that). These formal sessions are often sponsored by the Foreign, Comparative & International Law (FCIL) Special Interest Section of AALL which recognizes an increasing need among our members to gain experience in working with foreign legal information sources and to develop personal and professional relationships with law librarians around the world.

AALL has been working to make it easier for overseas delegates to attend the annual meeting by providing more information and hosting arrangements. The FCIL SIS annual general meeting and the reception which follows are a great opportunity to meet overseas delegates, all of whom are invited. The FCIL SIS administers the Ellen Schaffer Foreign Librarians Grant to provide financial assistance to ensure the presence and participation of foreign librarians at the AALL annual meeting and to enrich the event by sharing global perspectives; the grant recipient is presented at the FCIL event.

In common with some other associations, the International Association of Law Libraries sends an official representative to the AALL annual meeting and hosts its own reception, open to all comers, which attracts overseas delegates, FCIL members and plenty of others. That is another opportunity to cultivate overseas contacts and also to hear about the upcoming IALL conference of which much more below.

So international networking can start at home and, of course, networking can be virtual. You can participate through lists and discussion groups, membership of other associations, reading their publications, and building up contacts by email. There are plenty of associations of law librarians and law libraries around the world from South Africa to the Nordic countries, from Britain and Ireland to New Zealand. There is also a wide range of discussion lists with a focus on foreign and international law and legal information. The organizations and the discussion lists are summarized on the web (see the key web sites below).

Just because you have a great annual meeting right there at home (even if it isn't always right on the doorstep) and have all the bandwidth you want, don't think that you don't need to go further. I'm here to tell you that you do, there's a whole wide world out there waiting to meet you. Some may maintain that 'thinking is the best way to travel' but, as we all know, traveling is the best way to travel. Particularly if you find that you are increasingly dealing with foreign law enquiries, start thinking about a trip to meet your international colleagues, maybe at another meeting in the US or maybe overseas. The key websites below include an international calendar of events on the IALL website which might interest you; the calendar also appears in the *International Journal of Legal Information*.

Each of the national and regional associations has a meeting. In recent years the American, Australian, British and Irish, and Canadian associations have also held a biennial joint study institute to cultivate interchange and give an opportunity to learn about the legal system, heritage and traditions of the host countries in turn. As I write, the Joint Study Institute is about to take place in Sydney.

The International Federation of Library Associations is a massive meeting and not one which concentrates on law librarianship. There is a short session each year to bring law library matters to the attention of a wider audience of librarians in different sectors, traditionally arranged by the IALL. However, the importance of IFLA is its role in international policy issues, such as intellectual property and international trade, which now impinge on all libraries so strongly. AALL has a strong agenda in the public policy arena and overseas members always admire its participation in advocacy, lobbying and policy-making at regional and national level. AALL also has an important role to play in international policy making and the IFLA conference is one of the forums for that participation. More recently national associations, notably AALL, with IALL have formed a law library association discussion group under the auspices of IFLA. This is international networking at a strategic level and may offer us all a stronger voice in advocacy at an international level. These issues are expertly addressed in another Members' Briefing by Robert Oakley.<sup>2</sup>

An extended visit to a library in another country provides a more immersive experience than a conference and potentially a much more valuable experience. The FCIL SIS channels information to interested law librarians on opportunities to visit libraries abroad through the Clearinghouse for Internships & International Personnel Exchanges (see the key web sites below). The IALL is also working on a program which will facilitate internships and exchanges.

There is one specialist form of attachment to another institution which I am bound to mention. Several years ago the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies created a Visiting Fellowship in Law Librarianship as part of its academic research program. Although the fellowship provides no funding, it provides a powerful argument to a librarian's employer for paid leave. It is designed to place an experienced law librarian in a research and research library environment and encourages research of mutual benefit to the Visiting Fellow and the Institute Library. Visiting Fellows have come from the Squire Law Library of the University of Cambridge, the Law Courts Library in Sydney, the Diana M Priestly Law Library at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Harvard Law School Library, the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library, Yale Law School Library, Los Angeles County Law Library, the Law Library of the University of Bergen in Norway, and currently from the Alaska State Court Law Library. This has proved an exceptionally rewarding program.

Perhaps the quintessential example of international networking is the International Association of Law Libraries (IALL). The IALL is a worldwide organization of librarians, libraries, and others concerned with the acquisition and use of legal information emanating from sources other than their own jurisdictions. The IALL has been dedicated since its foundation in 1959 to bringing together and facilitating the work of law librarians who use foreign and international legal resources. It publishes the *International Journal of Legal Information* and holds a conference each year, its annual course in international law librarianship, and maintains a scholarship program not limited to association members.

Over the past few years IALL conferences have taken place at the Bar Council of Ireland in Dublin, at the Swiss Institute for the Comparative Law in Lausanne, Switzerland, at Yale Law School with an additional day program at Harvard Law School, and at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. The conferences do not generally address areas generally covered at the conferences of national associations such as transferable skills in librarianship. Rather they address in detail aspects of foreign and international legal systems both in substance and in their expression in legal information, seeking to give an understanding of the law underlying the information with which we have to grapple.

Recent themes of IALL conferences have been: 'A Common Law for Europe: legal systems and legal information', 'Comparative and International Law in a Multilingual Environment: current issues and information resources', 'Order from Chaos: contexts for global legal information', and 'New Rights, New Laws: legal information in a changing world'. The conferences have also included introductions to the legal systems of Ireland, Switzerland, South Africa and law of the Islamic world. Many of the papers from the conferences are published in the *International Journal of Legal Information*. The next conference, in August 2004, will be at the University of Helsinki in Finland with a day at the Estonian National Library in Tallinn with the theme: 'Protecting the environment: a challenge across borders'.

The most recent IALL conference was at the University of Cape Town, South Africa and attracted law librarians from over twenty countries. It dealt with the transformation of the legal system in South Africa and we heard from speakers including judges from the Constitutional Court and the Cape High Court, members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Gender Commission, and the Treatment Action Campaign, from people who helped to write the new Constitution, and people responsible for interpreting it. We also stood within the former Maximum Security Prison on Robben Island, now a museum, and listened to a man who is now Chairperson of the Museum Council and a former member of the government and who spent 18 years as a political prisoner within those walls, Dr. Ahmed Kathrada. Perhaps you can never really know about those experiences which are so fundamental to the understanding of law but you can get a little closer by being there and listening than by reading about it. International networking can take you to places where you cannot otherwise go.

By the way, the title of this piece is taken from another of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, 'In order to arrive at what you do not know you must go by a way which is the way of ignorance'.<sup>3</sup> Travel safely but not too wisely!

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<sup>1</sup> T S Eliot. Little Gidding V, l.26-29

<sup>2</sup> Robert L Oakley. International Public Policy and Libraries. *AALL Spectrum* 8 no.3, December 2003, 1-4

<sup>3</sup> T S Eliot. East Coker III, l.40

## **Key Web Sites**

Clearinghouse for Internships & International Personnel Exchanges.  
[www.lawsch.uga.edu/fcil/clearintro.html](http://www.lawsch.uga.edu/fcil/clearintro.html)

Foreign, Comparative & International Law Special Interest Section of AALL  
[www.lawsch.uga.edu/fcil/fcil.html](http://www.lawsch.uga.edu/fcil/fcil.html)

International Association of Law Libraries  
[www.iall.org](http://www.iall.org)

International Calendar [upcoming events of interest to law librarians] compiled by Lyonette Louis-Jacques, Foreign and International Law Librarian and Lecturer in Law, D'Angelo Law Library at the University of Chicago Law School  
[www.iall.org/calendar/show.asp](http://www.iall.org/calendar/show.asp)

Law Lists, a list of email discussion groups compiled by Lyonette Louis-Jacques  
[www.lib.uchicago.edu/~llou/lawlists/info.html](http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/~llou/lawlists/info.html)

List of national and international law library and related associations compiled by Lyonette Louis-Jacques  
[www.lib.uchicago.edu/~llou/iall.html](http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/~llou/iall.html)

Visiting Fellowship in Law Librarianship at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies  
[www.ials.sas.ac.uk/fellows/fellapp.htm](http://www.ials.sas.ac.uk/fellows/fellapp.htm)