

Muriel Anderson

by Jules Winterton, Librarian and Associate Director, Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, University of London

Muriel Anderson, former Librarian of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies died peacefully on the morning of 25 June 2006. Staff at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, where she spent much of her career, learned the sad news the next day and a brief notice was issued to the professional community:

“I regret to inform colleagues of the death of Muriel Anderson.

Muriel was the Librarian of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London from 1982 until 1991, when she retired, and she played a major role in the management of that library as its Deputy Librarian from 1960 onwards. She had formerly been Librarian of the Incorporated Law Society of Northern Ireland. She was a Vice President of the International Association of Law Libraries from 1983 to 1986 and Chair of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians for 1988/89. She had life membership of BIALL conferred on her by the Association for her outstanding and distinguished service.

Muriel displayed very considerable courage and willpower after the onset of motor neurone disease. She died peacefully yesterday morning”

Muriel’s funeral was held in Belfast on 30th June in a ceremony at which Muriel’s life was celebrated in the most positive and uplifting way among a large group of family, friends and colleagues. As a representative of BIALL and of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (IALS), I was very kindly invited to be among those who said a few words on that occasion. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to write something more about Muriel’s successful professional career as a law librarian and her other achievements. I am grateful to Muriel’s family, friends, and colleagues from around the world, who have shared their words and happy memories.

Muriel was a great achiever throughout her life while always remaining friendly, easy going, and great company. As a student at Queen’s University Belfast, in an age when women were at a great disadvantage, Muriel was one of only five women in her year to be admitted to the honours course; her subjects were French and German. In sport, Muriel was a keen and skilful tennis and hockey player who was only prevented from being selected for the national hockey team by a serious knee injury.

Muriel devoted the large majority of her working life to the specialised and important profession of law librarianship whose essence is not only a career in the service of others but also an important part in the service of the rule of law.

Muriel started her law library career in 1954 as Librarian at the Incorporated Law Society of Northern Ireland, after working for a year as a teacher at Dungannon and working in the Belfast Public Library from 1953 to 1954. In January 1960 she moved to the library of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London. Although her natural modesty would not have allowed her to say, she played a vital management role in a library which is probably the most significant legal research

library in Britain, one of the largest academic legal research libraries in the world and one which is international in its scope and readership. She was to spend the rest of her career there until her retirement in 1991, steer it through dangerous waters, re-house it in a new building, oversee a dramatic expansion of the library and the large-scale adoption of new technology, and put in place a staff structure to enable the long-term development by the Institute of a major specialist library.

Muriel joined the staff of the Institute as a Senior Library Assistant in the acquisitions department. Six months later, she was appointed to the post of Deputy Librarian (then styled Assistant Librarian) which had fallen vacant after the departure of Elizabeth Moys and soon thereafter of Janet Morton. Muriel was to be Deputy Librarian for twenty-two years. She was fortunate to work for two great law librarians, Howard Drake and Willi Steiner, and they were fortunate to have her as their deputy.

Muriel was Acting Librarian for almost a year from November 1967, following the sudden death at the age of 52 of Howard Drake, the first Secretary and Librarian of the Institute, the acknowledged British representative of law librarianship and a legendary figure. Willi Steiner, Drake's successor, wrote, "a great burden was placed on Kathleen de la Haye [Assistant Secretary] and Muriel Anderson They coped with the situation magnificently."¹

The collaboration of Muriel Anderson and Willi Steiner over the next 15 years was a great professional partnership acknowledged on both sides. That Willi Steiner achieved so much in law librarianship² was undoubtedly through his own talents and dedication but it was also achieved with and to some substantial degree by virtue of the support of Muriel. By their professional and personal qualities, they complemented each other so well and so successfully.

At Muriel's retirement, Willi Steiner wrote a profile³ of her contributions to the work and development of the Institute, to BIALL and to law librarianship in which he noted,

"Muriel and I always worked in complete harmony and I shall always remain grateful for her unflinching support.

It is the case in many libraries that the Deputy Librarian substantially runs the administration because of the Librarian's commitments. Muriel, however had to perform some of the duties of the Librarian in addition to those of the Deputy Librarian. Not only did Howard Drake and I have numerous outside commitments and travelled extensively; we both had heavy inside commitments in addition to the Librarianship. Until 1971, the Librarian was Secretary and Librarian of the Institute and, from the autumn of 1959 until I retired, the Librarian was also General Editor of the *Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals*. The arrangement was flexible. When we were once asked by a visiting librarian what the division of responsibilities between us was, we felt unable to answer his question. It is an indication of Muriel's position that she acquired herself many outside commitments while still being Deputy Librarian and even then became known as one of the leading law librarians in this country and beyond."⁴

For her part, Muriel wrote a generous personal appreciation⁵ of Willi Steiner who died in May 2003. She got to know Willi during his visits from Cambridge to the Institute and "felt completely at ease with him" when he took up his post in August

1968.

“Willi, was not, however, comfortable in his role as Secretary of the Institute. His attributes were scholarly and, by his own admission, he was no administrator”⁶

By contrast, “Muriel was a very successful administrator and it is clear that, in choosing that profession, she had found her true metier. Her clear mind, orderliness of method and grasp of detail formed a sound basis, but she has always been open to new ideas and developments, even revolutionary ones, and she has always been able to see wider perspectives.”⁷ Muriel displayed great practical management and organisational skills as well as being the Institute’s human face, winning a large network of friends and admirers for the institution.

Willi picked out two matters for special comment in his profile of Muriel, both relating to the new building which the IALS occupied from 1976 onwards. “She was responsible for much of the planning of the library in Charles Clore House; it can in fact be said that the library, as it gradually took shape, was largely her creation. In the second place, she masterminded the move of the library into the new building.”⁸

Plans for permanent purpose-built premises for the IALS were under discussion by the mid-nineteen-sixties and the new building opened in January 1976. The building designed by Denys Lasdun was much later listed as a building of special architectural interest. The process of planning, building, relocating and adapting to the new building took not less than a decade and probably somewhat longer. That the library worked so well and developed so well, despite the enormous burden of this project, is a credit to Muriel.

“The move of the library was chiefly organised and supervised by the Deputy Librarian and by Mrs L R Brown, the Head of Readers’ Services.”⁹ This was a complicated operation because the holdings had by then been dispersed into several different locations and had to be reintegrated on being brought back into one building. The move went without a hitch over a period of six weeks and gave new life and potential to the Institute and its library.

Muriel’s contribution to the *Manual of Law Librarianship* published in 1976, the year in which the Institute opened in its new building, was an analysis of the particular requirements for accommodation and space planning of law libraries.¹⁰ The chapter is a model of concise and practical explanation and is clearly drawn from a great deal of personal experience. In 1978 she used the expertise she had gained to advise the Scottish Law Commission on their library extension. Muriel showed just the same thoroughness and sustained effort in the remodelling and extending of her new home in Belfast, displaying the same attention to detail that she applied to earlier projects during her professional career. The resulting refurbished house, modified to her needs after the diagnosis of her illness, was admired by all who visited.

When the Institute library was under threat of losing its identity and being amalgamated with the declining University of London Library, Muriel, together with Sir Jack Jacob, Director of the Institute, organised the successful campaign to overturn the proposals. At the same time, Muriel collaborated in the major

investigation and report on the Institute carried out by the Policy Review Sub-Committee of IALS, whose chairman was Sir Robert Megarry.¹¹ The recommendations, which established the framework under which the library currently operates, owe much to Muriel's vision. During the periodic bouts of frantic reorganisation in which the central offices of the University of London have found themselves and which are also inflicted on the Institutes attached to them, Muriel always protected the library's ability to offer those specialised services, which flourished under her management and are so valued by researchers. These are examples of Muriel's commitment to the institution for which she selflessly gave so much time and effort and an example of the sheer amount of hard work and determination which she applied to her duties.

Willi Steiner had been involved in the earliest automation of catalogue and index production and later praised Muriel for the automation of the Institute library's procedures without any sacrifice of the highest standards of librarianship. Muriel, always receptive to new ideas and by nature intellectually curious, spent a month in the United States in June and July 1979 to learn about the use of computers in law libraries. She recorded in an article the first adoption of computer-assisted legal information retrieval systems there and the imminent introduction of the first systems into the UK.¹² Muriel could clearly see the potential of automation both for legal information retrieval and for the management of library processes and she was excited by the leading edge of the huge changes which were to sweep over libraries. In those early days IALS subscribed to Eurolex and Lexis, adopted the LOCAS system of cataloguing on a microcomputer, purchased a Sirius microcomputer (on the market before the IBM PC), established a very early form of local area network, and implemented a microcomputer-based acquisitions system. The encouragement she gave to young staff to take some risks and get involved in these changes was a credit to her and tremendous boost to them. On her retirement Muriel bought an Apple computer and set about improving skills which she had never had time to learn properly while managing the library and making all these developments available for her staff.

Muriel's appreciation of the wider perspectives of librarianship led her to understand the position of IALS and informed her work for library cooperation and networking. The Institute library always played a key role in law library cooperation and Muriel reinforced that tradition. She served on the BIALL Committee on Cooperation appointed 1970. "The committee reported in July 1971 and its report¹³ ... formed the basis on which the Executive established various standing and sub-committees and pointed the way for future work."¹⁴ She served as Secretary of the British Library Working Party on Provision for Law in 1980-82, which was chaired by Professor Aubrey Diamond, Director of IALS.¹⁵ The Working Party produced prescient recommendations on library collaboration, although funding was not made available to implement them despite her subsequent work with BL staff.¹⁶ The climate within and outwith the British Library is only now beginning to favour the envisaged level of collaboration.

During all that time she was a leading member of her profession, well known and respected both nationally and internationally, to the great benefit of IALS. Muriel had attended the International Congress of Comparative Law in Uppsala in 1966 accompanying Howard Drake and Willi Steiner. She also attended the meeting of

the European members of the International Association of Law Libraries (IALL) at The Hague in 1965 together with Howard Drake, Willi Steiner, and many colleagues from the UK and the Continent. Muriel Anderson was the joint director with Willi of the second course in international law librarianship which was held by IALL in Cambridge in March 1968. She served on the Board of Directors of the International Association from 1968 to 1971, a second term from 1971 to 1974, and later became a Vice-President for three years from 1983 to 1986.¹⁷

Muriel had been one of the members of the first Executive Committee (later the Council) of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians (BIALL) after its founding in 1969 and served on various other committees, chairing some of them. She was elected Chair of the Association in 1988/89 and was responsible for its annual conference at New College, Oxford, entitled 'The Challenge of the Nineties: the changing legal information environment'. Muriel produced a copy of (if I remember correctly) Shackleton on the Law and Practice of Meetings at one particularly knotty point in the AGM. On her retirement in 1991 BIALl invited her to the honorary post of Vice-President which she held for five years. BIALl also conferred life membership on her in recognition of her outstanding and distinguished service to the profession. She is one of only a handful of people to receive this honour over the past 37 years. Despite all these honours, I'm sure she would have found just as much pleasure in reading a note which one law librarian sent to me recently: "Muriel was always a friendly face when I first attended BIALl conferences and other functions back in the 1970s and 1980s".

Muriel was generous with her time and professional advice and also rather adventurous. She accepted an invitation to spend November 1977 to March 1978 in Nigeria helping to establish a library for the new Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in Lagos (NIALS). This enabled her to apply her knowledge gained in the setting up of IALS Library in its new building. Willi remembered that the remit was fairly general but that she was particularly concerned with the organisation of the technical services, including acquisitions procedures, and she devised a system of financial control. My memory is of Muriel talking about shelving and the physical setting up of the building. Knowing Muriel it was, of course, both and more. Oluremi Jegede, later Librarian of NIALS, became a firm friend of Muriel after they met the next year in the USA; Muriel became 'Auntie' to Remi's children when they studied in England, as she had been to her own family in earlier years when they visited Muriel in London.

Muriel regularly attended conferences abroad and found much to admire and emulate; she gathered information on coming trends, met agreeable colleagues and won many friends abroad for the Institute. Muriel's hospitality was always unforced and generous. Carol Billings, State Law Librarian of Louisiana and former President of the American Association of Law Libraries, for example, recorded "By far the best part about going to the BIALl meetings has been making wonderful friends, who have extended warm hospitality. Before proceeding on to Cardiff, we stopped in Bath to visit Muriel Anderson, retired Librarian of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London. Before cooking us a delicious dinner, she drove us to the beautiful town of Bradford upon Avon and then to Lacock Abbey,"¹⁸

In many ways Muriel sacrificed her own interests to her work for the University. She had, for example, hoped to complete a law degree in her 'spare time' but her busy life and the responsibilities of her post never allowed it. Her delight in the achievements of others, both relatives and friends, was conspicuous.

Muriel was a particularly good manager of people; her style was open and she consulted with staff closely and with an honest attempt to learn from their ideas. She was a good communicator, who explained her reasoning and she consistently refused to overload her staff. The result of this managerial style was a happy staff who repaid her commitment to them with great personal and institutional loyalty. Muriel made many close friends amongst her colleagues at the Institute whom she retained throughout the rest of her life. They remember the warm and friendly personality shining through in her beaming smile and soon learned that was a hallmark of her whole style of management, making her staff friends and colleagues rather than subordinates. She engaged and challenged her staff. She was firm when necessary but she always gave patient and generous support if difficult personal circumstances affected any of her staff.

Muriel was a staunch defender of those in the profession and their role and status. She had an infinite care for fairness and for the underdog in any situation and positively encouraged and supported younger members of the profession as I can personally testify.

After the onset of motor neurone disease, those who witnessed Muriel's decline were amazed by her courage, determination and cheerfulness. Muriel's positive attitude and drive so impressed one of the occupational therapists that she invited Muriel to present a paper in October 2005 at a multidisciplinary care conference. Despite her illness, Muriel worked hard to prepare a paper detailing her experiences as a motor neurone disease patient and delivered the presentation from her wheelchair; it had a considerable impact on the audience of professionals present. Muriel always did a job thoroughly.

All those who knew Muriel Anderson will greatly miss her good sense and steadiness, her kindness and humanity and we will remember her successful and fulfilling life and her outstanding contribution to her chosen profession.

¹ Steiner, Willi. 'A note on the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies' in *Law at the Centre: the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at fifty* edited by Barry A. K. Rider. Kluwer Law, 1999, 1-18 at 7

² Winterton, Jules. In celebration of Willi Steiner. *Legal Information Management* **3**, 2003, 140-149

³ Steiner, Willi. Muriel Anderson – a profile. *Law Librarian* **22**, 1991, 110-112 and Muriel Anderson – an appreciation. *IALS Bulletin* no.8, April 1991, 4-5

⁴ Steiner, Willi. Muriel Anderson – a profile. *Law Librarian* **22**, 1991, p.110-112 at 111

⁵ Anderson, Muriel. Willi Steiner: a personal appreciation. *Legal Information Management* **3**, 2003, 150-151

⁶ *Ibid* at p.150

⁷ Steiner, Willi. Muriel Anderson – a profile. *Law Librarian* **22**, 1991, 110-112 at 111

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ Steiner, Willi. 'A note on the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies' in *Law at the Centre: the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at fifty* edited by Barry A. K. Rider. Kluwer Law, 1999, 1-18 at Law at 10

¹⁰ 'Accommodation' by Muriel Anderson. In *Manual of law librarianship* edited by Elizabeth M Moys. Published for the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians by Andre Deutsch, 1976, pages 602-626

¹¹ *Report of the Policy Review Sub-Committee of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies*. IALS, May 1986

¹² Anderson, Muriel. Automation in the law school library. *Law Librarian* **11**, 1980, 11-14

¹³ British and Irish Association of Law Librarians. Report of the Committee on Co-operation. BIALL, 1971

¹⁴ Blake, Mary. *A History of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians 1969-1999*. BIALL, 2000 at 25-26

¹⁵ *Report of the British Library Working Party on Provision for Law*. British Library, 1982

¹⁶ Anderson, Muriel, Barry Bloomfield and Geoffrey Hamilton. Future co-operation in library provision for law. *Law Librarian* **17**, 1986, 91-93 **and** Muriel Anderson, Barry Bloomfield and Geoffrey Hamilton. Future co-operation in library provision for law: a survey of responses. *Law Librarian* **19**, 1988, 63-64

¹⁷ During this period she had been a member of an editorial team responsible for the *European Law Libraries Guide* prepared by IALL under the auspices of the Council of Europe (Morgan-Grampion, 1971) and assisted Charlotte Lutyens, Librarian of Middle Temple, in compiling a timely bibliography, *Community law: a selection of publications on the law of the European Economic Community ...* (BIALL, 1973)

¹⁸ *De Novo, the Newsletter of the Law Library of Louisiana*, 2 no. 2, Summer 2003