

OBITUARY

CATHERINE MCARDLE 1962–2024



It came as a sad shock to many in BIALL and the wider profession to hear of the passing of Catherine McArdle in January of this year, after battling cancer since 2016. Here we have given some of her friends and colleagues the opportunity to write some words in her memory, starting off with a contribution from current President Julie Christmas.

Julie Christmas (President of BIALL 2023/4)

In her professional life outside of Lincoln's Inn Catherine was a dedicated and active BIALL member. As you will read in the testimonies below, she took on many different roles over the years and was an active volunteer right to the end. Aside from her own involvement she made a huge contribution to the Association by encouraging others to volunteer, including at least one future President and very probably more. In 2013 Catherine's work was recognised by her being awarded Wildy Law Librarian of the Year, although as you will learn she may not have appreciated having to transport the award home from the Conference. And it is with the Conference that I will always associate Catherine. It is where we first met, with me as a completely terrified first-time attendee and Catherine with that knack of spotting at 50 paces those needing a little help and reassurance. Over the years we would often first encounter each other at the bar

stocking up on fresh milk to take back to our rooms to make tea, but then she would be everywhere – in front at all the sessions, chatting to all the exhibitors and then out on the dance floor, as you will see from others' conference memories. Lincoln's Inn and the Conference will not be the same without her.

LIFE AND WORK AT LINCOLN'S INN

Dunstan Speight (Librarian of Lincoln's Inn Library 2016 to present)

For an organisation where long service is not unusual, Catherine's 35 and a half years in the Library of Lincoln's Inn is remarkable.

She arrived on 1 August 1988 – Yorkshire Day as she liked to remind us – as a young librarian who had begun her career at the library of the Central London Polytechnic (now the University of Westminster). Work at the Inn clearly suited Catherine. She had read History at the University of East Anglia and the Inn's rich heritage appealed to her. More than this, however, she responded to the Inn's sense of community. It was always obvious how very much Catherine loved the Inn. She clearly derived much support from the Inn's members and staff and contributed so much in return. She was very mindful of the feelings of new members of staff joining the Inn and made a point of getting to know them, putting them at their ease and introducing them to colleagues, members and the Inn's traditions. She treated everyone with the same friendliness and consideration. It is no wonder that we all adored her.

Catherine swiftly developed an expertise on legal research sources and an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Library's vast holdings. Her reputation for finding esoteric documents and information was legendary among generations of Library users as was her patience in assisting them with enquiries. In the weeks since her passing there have been many library users who have obviously felt that Catherine was there for them in a way which transcended doing her job. For decades she had been there as a mentor, a reliable and approachable expert and a friend.

As an extremely 'hands-on' Deputy Librarian, responsible for overseeing acquisitions, Catherine knew all the quirks of the publishers and publications, sometimes to the exasperation of her staff. "I do wish there would be an occasion when, just for once, Catherine didn't know the answer," lamented one graduate trainee. That trainee might not have had her wish fulfilled but did, however, benefit from Catherine's unflinching generosity in sharing her knowledge and training younger colleagues.

She immersed herself in so many elements of life at the Inn – as a tour guide, a devoted member of the Chapel's congregation, a trustee of the pension scheme, and attendee at countless events.

She was a joy to work with – always positive, always the same. She always believed whatever she said and would never say something just because it was convenient. She was a person of the utmost integrity and scrupulously fair. I valued her opinion enormously (apart from on the subject of mushy peas – the one topic we really did not agree on).

She was utterly extraordinary in the years since her cancer diagnosis in 2016. Obviously, talking about illness is difficult, but Catherine was so open and matter of fact that it was not an awkward topic. She was utterly devoid of self-pity and could even joke about it: I recall sitting with her at lunch some years ago when the newspapers had been running some scare story about roast potatoes being a cancer risk and Catherine cheerfully saying: "Well that's not a problem for me – I have cancer already. I can eat as many as I want."

Until the end of last year, she disguised her pain so well that I don't think any of us knew quite how ill she was – and she had bounced back from treatment so many times we kept thinking that she could defy the odds and do it again. We have all been in awe of her refusal to be cowed by the illness or let it interfere with life.

She has been a huge inspiration to so many people. There are not many people who can claim to have done that.

Guy Holborn (Librarian of Lincoln's Inn Library 1985 to 2016, now retired,) adds:

As Dunstan says, Catherine's length of service at the Inn was remarkable. Little did I know back in 1988 she would still be there 35 years later; little did she know that she would have to tolerate working with me for 28 of those 35 years. Today she would be considered very young to take on the responsibilities of being the Deputy Librarian – she was indeed appointed as that; it was not a subsequent promotion.

I can recall some of the appointment process. It was untouched by any vestige of HR protocol, but that turned out self-evidently to be without any adverse consequences. A first interview was conducted by myself and the Accountant (as the Inn's Director of Finance was then called). There was not anyone even called a Personnel Officer, let alone a Human Resources Department. I can remember little about the interview itself or of any of the other candidates. All I know is that we had little doubt that it was Catherine we wanted. Nonetheless, I thought it wise that the Chairman of the Library Committee should see her before the appointment was confirmed. This was to cover my back, I expect. It was true, though, that I had caused the unprecedented event of an extraordinary meeting of the

Library Committee to be convened. It included the matter of the Deputy's responsibilities, which were relevant to my ambitious plan to introduce things called 'computers'. The second interview was surplus to requirements. After a minute or two the Chairman gave me a look as if to say, "Why have you wasted my time?" The rest of the 'interview' was taken up by discussion of Richard III – Catherine had indicated on her CV that she was an enthusiastic member of the Richard III Society (a topic I learnt to keep well clear of).

She took over the duties of her predecessor – even I was uncertain what these were, with the exceptions of acquisitions and binding. The former included dealing with overseas suppliers, of which the Library then had a large number from all parts of the Commonwealth. Payment was made by overseas draft, in paper form requisitioned from the Inn's bank and sent by post. Since time immemorial, the envelopes containing such drafts had to be sealed with sealing wax to prevent tampering by 'foreigners'. Catherine knew only that this involved a stick of wax and a naked flame. After several attempts resulting in much smoke from burning envelopes (and the ordering of expensive replacement drafts) the measure was dispensed with.

But her principal initial duty was to be 'Systems Librarian'. The Inn then owned not a single computer (though a Wurlitzer-like dedicated Lexis terminal had been installed in the Library, paid for by barrister-users of it, not by the Library). She and I bravely went up to one of the showrooms that had then sprung up on High Holborn and bought two standalone '386' PCs (i.e. the latest model with the processing power of a slide-rule as opposed to an abacus), and, very daringly, colour monitors. They could be locked to prevent unauthorised use by means of a large Yale key such as you would use for your front door. I was extraordinarily grateful in having Catherine with me in dealing with the computer salespersons, then with a reputation on par with second-hand car dealers – Dunstan's portrait of her, rather too tactfully, only alludes to her no-nonsense side. I was rapidly learning the art of delegation. Indeed, the first part of her job designation, 'Deputy' Librarian, was rapidly to become otiose: she was at the absolute core of the running of the Library.

Dunstan highlights the extraordinary rapport with the Library's users that Catherine established, and how they responded with such devotion over such a long period. One cause of this should not be overlooked. Although Bar students continue to form an important part of the Library's constituent users, it now seems extraordinary that until 1997, so for nearly the first 10 years of Catherine's tenure, there were no facilities for students other than the Inn libraries. The numerical bulk of Library users had long been students, but undemandingly using only a handful of prescribed student textbooks. In 1989, however, just a year after Catherine arrived, the new Bar Vocational Course was introduced, but with no concomitant library provision. The Inn libraries were

overwhelmed. Students were sitting on the floor. Use of practitioners' texts was rationed by hourly slot. Students were supposed to undertake proper legal research (counting towards their assessment marks). At Lincoln's Inn, it was Catherine who bore the brunt. She rose to the challenge. One happy side effect, and a consequence of her natural disposition, was that she got to know hundreds of students. And then she would follow their careers closely – their pupillages, tenancies, taking silk, and appointment as judges. A significant number of her youthful proteges are now Sirs or Dames. They all got the same warm welcome whenever they came back into the Library either as users, or just to say hello.

Catherine's professional achievements, which naturally this journal celebrates, were, indeed, inextricably linked to her personal qualities. And it is very much as a friend rather than as her (theoretical) former 'boss', that I will remember her.

COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPING THE CAREERS OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Tracey Dennis (Deputy Librarian, The Honourable Society of the Inner Temple 2006 to present)

I first met Catherine in the autumn of 1988 when I went for an interview for the Senior Library Assistant post at Lincoln's Inn Library. I was a nervous 24-year-old fresh

from library school and was pretty much overwhelmed when I walked into that beautiful but imposing library. Catherine took me around for a tour and I was quickly put at ease. We had quite a lot in common (both Northerners and both redheads) and when I was appointed we got on extremely well from the start.

My position at Lincoln's Inn meant I was on the Enquiry Desk a lot. This was quite terrifying at first – when someone asks for "the green book" and half the library seemed full of green books, it was perplexing. Catherine was always on hand to help and offer suggestions for the more difficult questions (the green book query obviously not being a difficult one in the end!) and she did so in such a way that I never felt inadequate.

As both of us were new to the Inns of Court we went on visits to the other Inn libraries and again I was thankful to have Catherine to accompany me. I was nowhere near as confident then as I am today and Catherine helped with asking pertinent questions and giving me the chance to chip in when I wanted to. As a new law librarian it meant a great deal to feel a part of the Inns of Court librarians when I knew so little and had so much to learn.

Catherine had already made many contacts by the time I was working with her but she always introduced me and made me part of the conversation. It was through Catherine that I was able to start building my own network which has been so useful over the years, not just for work purposes but also making valued friends.



Catherine pictured at the 2023 BIALL Conference in Belfast. She was a great supporter of the event and attended 34 in all

As fellow law librarians know, attendance at the annual BIALL conference is essential for members to meet colleagues and learn new things and it was Catherine who looked after me at my first conference. This was another pretty daunting event for me – several days with much more experienced law librarians filled me with trepidation, but Catherine was there to make sure I was okay and feeling included.

After that first conference, I went to many BIALL conferences over the years but not nearly as many as Catherine who managed over 30 in her working life. I have so many fond memories of those times. Catherine was very diligent and went to as many talks as she could and always made copious notes. She also enjoyed herself to the full and participated in all the social events. Over the years we also got up to a fair amount of mischief (usually involving dragging people on to the dance floor) but no-one seemed to mind. I know it was not only me who Catherine helped at the conferences. She always took care to make sure new colleagues at Lincoln's Inn Library were looked after and I know she undertook mentoring duties at the conferences with great enthusiasm.

Catherine was a long-standing member of BIALL and held positions on various committees. It was her example that encouraged me to do the same and take part in the administrative side of BIALL. She was a great advocate of giving back to the organisation that had helped her and I hope I have done a small part myself, following her example.

It became clear to me very quickly that Catherine really enjoyed her job and this enthusiasm and energetic approach to her work made her a key part of the Lincoln's Inn team and the wider law librarian network. I am sure this rubbed off on me and on others who came under Catherine's guidance as trainees or colleagues. To continue to enjoy and feel stimulated in a job after so long is something that not many people experience.

I thoroughly enjoyed my years at Lincoln's Inn and as a first law library job it could not have been better. Much of this was due to Catherine's guidance. She was so knowledgeable, professional and patient. All qualities that I hoped I could emulate as my career progressed.

After I left Lincoln's Inn our professional relationship continued, and Catherine was a great source of information and advice. She was always happy to listen and was full of common sense. Catherine took many colleagues under her wing and it always amazed me how she remained in touch with so many of us over the years. She had an amazing capacity to keep in contact and to be there if advice was needed. Celebrations for Catherine and Joe's significant birthdays were always full of former colleagues – a glowing testament to Catherine's enormous network of contacts and colleagues. Keeping in touch with people never seemed a big deal for Catherine – she just did it.

When I look back, I was very lucky to have worked at Lincoln's Inn for my first law library job. I consider myself to have been blessed twice over because not only was

Catherine an amazing colleague and mentor at the very start of my career, she also became the most wonderful friend and a very important part of my life.

CONTRIBUTION TO BIALL

Loyita Worley (Director of EMEA Library Operations, Reed Smith 2007 to 2020, now retired)

Catherine started her career as a law librarian as an Assistant Librarian at the Polytechnic of Central London in 1985. She then moved to Lincoln's Inn as Deputy Librarian on 1 August 1988. She found her niche there and recently completed 35 years at the Inn Library of which she was very proud. Within the Inn she was renowned for her helpfulness, empathy and ability to find esoteric materials.

Very soon after starting at Lincoln's Inn Catherine joined BIALL and this was another organisation that she embraced with open arms. She quickly became involved and devoted much time and energy to the association throughout her life.

I don't remember when I first met Catherine, but I do know that we both started very long running jobs in the same year – namely 1988. I definitely recall getting to know her better at the early BIALL Cheese and Wine parties which were held at (the then) Richards Butler from 1990 – initially to raise funds for the Wallace Breem Award – and which were subsequently moved to the splendour of Lincoln's Inn Old Hall in 1994 with me still organising them and then Catherine taking over in 1997. They carried on for many years after that under Catherine's excellent management and are remembered fondly by BIALL members. It is no coincidence that Catherine and I bonded over a glass of wine and a good chat! I recognised in Catherine a friendly and knowledgeable colleague.

She loved her job at Lincoln's Inn and was happy to share her library skills and knowledge with BIALL members. She wasn't one to stand by and watch and so over the years she took on many roles for BIALL and was never afraid of getting involved in new areas. Even when her illness was diagnosed, she retained her involvement in BIALL and took on new responsibilities. She always liked to keep busy and derived a lot of enjoyment through the relationships she had made within her professional and personal lives.

The *Pepper v Hart* research course started at Lincoln's Inn Library with Catherine fully involved and acting as the organiser. The first was in 1995 and provided background on statutory interpretation, the rule in *Pepper v Hart* that allows citation of Hansard in court, and covering developments since it was decided in 1992. It included showing how to find Bills, Hansard and other parliamentary materials and then teaching how to use them. The subject always provided an excellent opportunity to practice advanced legal research skills using the Inn's extensive

legal resources. It proved to be one of the most popular courses that BIALL ever ran and was frequently over-subscribed. It continues to run today.

Between 1996 and 1999 Catherine was Chair of SCOPSAD (Standing Committee of Professional Standards and Development) and that was soon followed by becoming Honorary Secretary of BIALL from 2001 to 2005.

Not letting the grass grow under her feet, she moved on to the newly formed PR & Promotions Committee in 2006 and was Chair from June 2008 to 2011. As one of the committee's activities, Catherine and Barbara Tearle were on the BIALL stand at the Ark KM legal conference in London in April 2008. This seems to have been the first time BIALL exhibited at such an event.

Shortly after that term ended, she reinvigorated the Duplicates Exchange Scheme (which had started in 1972) and continued as the Administrator for this to the end.

In 2013, she was awarded the Wildy Law Librarian of the Year Award at the BIALL conference. It was very well deserved and a popular choice as Catherine was well known and had helped many people's careers along the way. Needless to say, she didn't stop there and the following year Lincoln's Inn Library won the Halsbury Award for Best Legal Information Service (Non-commercial). Of course, that award was a team effort but as ever it was Catherine who drove it forward and who deserved a lot of the credit.

That wasn't her last award as in 2015 she won a Special award at the BIALL Conference for attending for 25 consecutive years. It's impossible to write an article about Catherine and BIALL without mentioning the BIALL Conference. Catherine attended her first conference shortly after joining Lincoln's Inn and was very proud of the fact that she never missed one during her career. She loved dancing and was always one of the first on the dance floor at the conference. She attended 34 in total which I believe is a BIALL record and had all the conference bags to prove it! It was through the conferences as well as her job that Catherine got to know so many of the suppliers and they to know her and appreciate her friendliness.

Not all Catherine's work for BIALL consisted of being on committees and winning awards. In the background she was doing other things such as contributing to the formation of the BIALL Professional Skills Framework in 2016, representing BIALL at external conferences and serving on BIALL Council. There may even be other involvement that I haven't mentioned here. As recently as 2023 she joined the Supplier Liaison Group.

We all know that BIALL is run by people volunteering their time and effort and Catherine was a brilliant example of this. Her dedication and passion in all elements of her life could be felt by those around her and her positive approach to everything inspired many. She had a profound impact on numerous people's lives within law librarianship and her professionalism and outgoing nature will long be remembered and form her legacy to BIALL.

WORKING WITH CATHERINE AS A SUPPLIER

John Sinkins (Chairman, Wildy & Sons Ltd)

Such sad news, Catherine was our 'nearest and dearest' Law Librarian, just a three-minute walk up the square.

In addition to her legendary role as a Librarian and an avid BIALL supporter, she was also a close friend to all of us here at Wildy, slow to chide and quick to bless!

I have known Catherine personally for 35 years, since she first started at Lincolns Inn Library. She confided in me some time ago about her illness which she stubbornly fought until the end, so this was not a complete surprise, though the news was still a huge shock to me.

Catherine's legendary ability as a Law Librarian could only be equalled by her untiring, almost relentless, contribution to BIALL over so many years.

Clearly there are so many professional colleagues of Catherine who are far better qualified to comment on her work than I. But I have so many fond memories of Catherine, including the happy and sometimes crazy times we had at BIALL Conferences over the years, they will remain with me for ever.

So, I thought that one or two Conference vignettes might be appropriate here.

1997 Annual BIALL Conference, Newcastle.

In those days the conferences were held over the weekend from Friday to Sunday. The Friday night dinner was sponsored by Butterworths that year and was held at the Tyne Suite, Forte Crest. After dinner, a quiz was held sponsored by Legal Library Services Ltd and Catherine sat on the stage above us as adjudicator. The quiz was split into several parts and the answers given at the end of each round. At some point it was perceived that one of the questions might have had two possible answers and chaos (albeit good natured chaos) broke out amongst the delegates, whilst John Evans (who always prided himself on the accuracy of his Q&As) frantically consulted his notes. Suddenly there was a loud tapping on the microphone and Catherine's voice was heard to boom out "Judge's decision is final". Silence fell across the room, and we all sat down quietly like scolded school children!

2013 Annual BIALL Conference, Glasgow

The BIALL Awards are traditionally given at the President's Annual Dinner. The much coveted (and quite heavy) glass book awarded to the winner of the Wildy BIALL Law Librarian of the year was also presented on that evening. I was climbing up the long stone steps of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum leading to the reception for the dinner when Catherine came alongside. She asked me what I was carrying in the bag and when I told her she said: "I



Catherine pictured with John Sinkins (left) and James Mullan, receiving the Wildy BIALL Law Librarian of the Year award 2013

pity the poor sod who has to carry that home with them". Two hours later, she was declared the 2013 Winner of the Wildy BIALL Law Librarian of the Year!

Predictably, Catherine would come down to our stand on the first morning of the conference to complain about the practice of supplying UHT milk in the bedrooms. "How can you have a good cuppa, with that stuff?" she would always remark!

The last time I saw Catherine was at dinner in November, along with my wife Inder and two other close librarian friends. The dinner was great fun with lots of laughing and banter with the usual BIALL anecdotes thrown in. We all chatted about the coming 2024 Conference to be held in Leeds. Catherine whispered across the table to me that she didn't think she'd be going to that one and then the moment was lost before the significance of what she had said to me had time to sink in.

UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEEDS OF PRACTITIONERS

Charles D Cole, Jr. (Newman Myers Kreines Harris, P.C)

Catherine McArdle was my friend. She was also the quintessential law librarian, perhaps the best I ever knew, and I've known quite a few.

Others have talked about Catherine's involvement with BIALL, her work with publishers and other suppliers, and, perhaps most important, her role at Lincoln's Inn. It goes without saying that her contributions cannot be summarised in the space available.

I want to talk about something else. Catherine's understanding of the role of the law librarian, especially the role of the law librarian within the legal profession. Law is unique among the learned professions in that its practitioners' tools, the cases and the statutes, are made up of words. Because the lawyer's tools are made up of words, the law librarian necessarily stands at the junction between the lawyer and her tools. In no profession does the librarian play such a crucial role.

Catherine understood that role and for more than 35 years worked to ensure that the library at Lincoln's Inn remained the preeminent practitioners' library in England and Wales. For those who do not practice as advocates in the courts, it may be difficult to understand that, when you need the most recent amendment to an act or an accurate copy of a judgment from centuries ago, the skilled law librarian is your best friend. In short, the law librarian, of which Catherine typified the best, is a critical player in the common-law system of justice.

It has been a truly unfortunate trend started over 50 years ago on my side of the Atlantic to require academic law librarians (and some other law librarians too) to hold

both a library and a legal qualification. As can be imagined, this has led some law librarians to think that they are lawyers when they never have appeared in court and wouldn't know what to do were they to do so. Like law librarianship, the practice of law requires far more than a professional qualification. It requires decades of dedication.

Fortunately, our British and Irish friends have resisted this trend, and so we find in both Britain and Ireland many exceptionally talented law librarians, few of whom either have or would want a legal qualification. And the law-library world is far better for it. Catherine was the quintessential law librarian because she appreciated her role, which was to use her abilities to collaborate with the barrister, not be one.

Another unfortunate trend is to call the law library everything but the library, such as the Law Library Center for Information and Technology, the vogue label adopted by the law school at which I used to teach. This trend has led, in turn, to the academic law librarian thinking that his or her role is to teach the law students how to use the latest version of some software, such as PowerPoint. PowerPoint could not be more user friendly. It requires no instruction. Practising with it for a few minutes makes you something of an expert. We don't need the law librarian for that.

This confusion surrounding the law library's role has led to still another unfortunate development: calling the law librarian everything but the law librarian. Just scan

the AALL job board and you see research analyst, legal research analyst, research coordinator, and so on. And when you do see librarian in a title, it's often coupled with phrases like research and instruction or student engagement or legal information. Catherine was the Deputy Librarian. And she worked in what Lincoln's Inn correctly calls the Library. No other titles were needed or were even necessary.

It is a wonder – but perhaps no surprise – that in our information age with its abundance of computer-based legal research tools so many practitioners' research skills are not what they should be. What many practitioners forget is that, while our information age has brought the resources of the ages to our monitors, the learned intermediary, the law librarian, remains essential to organise, index, update, and even access our tools, whether in print or electronic.

I have often remarked that William Blackstone, were he to brush up on the Civil Procedure Rules, could walk into the High Court or the Court of Appeal today and feel right at home. The magic of the common law is that the fundamentals don't change. A good advocate is a good advocate in any generation. But what separates the great lawyers from the rest is their legal research skills and their knowledge that they have an essential friend in the law librarian. Catherine McArdle was my friend and the quintessential law librarian. I shall miss her.