

Editorial

Well! I was delighted to be informed by the Editorial Board of LIM in late July that my application to take over as Editor from Laurence Eastham had been successful and that I would be expected to start work on the Autumn issue immediately. As this issue is normally devoted to Conference papers, it seemed that my reintroduction to the joys of editing LIM, as I had been the Honorary Editor immediately prior to Laurence, would involve a fairly painless transition back to the Editorial chair. Not a bit of it. Just as the quiet summer season normally enjoyed during August began, the logo on the Lawtel site quietly changed overnight on the 1st and 2nd of August and when we dialled up on Friday morning to get our Daily Update, the sharp-eyed amongst us noticed that the strapline had changed to inform us that Lawtel was now being supplied by Sweet & Maxwell. There was considerable surprise as there were few, if any, whispers on the street about the likelihood of Lawtel changing hands.

This issue is therefore devoted to two major themes – the Sweet and Maxwell takeover or acquisition of Lawtel and the few Conference papers which we have managed to extract from the speakers. Wendy Beecham, Managing Director of Sweet & Maxwell was able to give us a lengthy and wide-ranging interview on both the acquisition and her work at Sweet & Maxwell since she took over as Managing Director in 1999. From a personal point of view, it was also valuable to be able to talk to Rachel Lesiter about her perspective on the acquisition as, to those of us who have been around for the last few years, her name is synonymous with Lawtel and she has always been a passionate advocate for it. She will not be moving to Sweet & Maxwell but will remain at Centaur as Managing Director of the Lawyer.

Roger Cook and Michelle Celik have both given the law firm librarians' perspectives on the acquisition. Laurence Bebbington has given a measured response on how he sees the deal affecting academic librarians, where it would seem that there are less concerns than within the law firm sector. Those of you who belong to LIS-LAW will have seen the flurry of exchanges about the acquisition, perhaps best summed up by Jackie Fishleigh, who speculated "Wouldn't it be great if Lawtel and Westlaw merged and combined the user-friendliness of Lawtel with the superior content of Westlaw including the wonderful Legal Journals Index.....full text Solicitors Journal and a low cost customer orientated charging structure would complete my dream.... Aaaaaah..... but will it ever happen???"

Susan Singleton, who is a very well-known competition lawyer, has given us her views on the competition aspects of the deal. All these contributions were written at very short notice and I am very grateful to everyone for reacting so quickly. We will now sit back and let time take over as we observe how the parents absorb the active new baby particularly as it has been announced (8 October) that the deal will not be referred to the Competition Commission.

There is a considerable depth of feeling within our world that a duopoly between Butterworths and Sweet & Maxwell is looming and this leads me on nicely to the other major theme of this issue.

Liverpool, as we all know, was the venue for the first BIALL conference in 1970 and Barbara Tearle gave a most enlightening paper describing that conference and the papers presented there. In view of the concerns about legal publishers expressed above, it is interesting to note that thirty-two years ago there were only two major publishers – Butterworths and Sweet & Maxwell – who exhibited at the Conference and provided sponsorship for various of the events. Other small publishers existed, and in the intervening years many have come and gone, but the problem of duopoly would seem to have been around for some time without huge amounts of concern being expressed by the profession except for the fact that the cost of law books continues to seem prohibitive.

Paul Maharg gave a fascinating account of his fictional town of Ardcalloch which is used at the University of Strathclyde to give students practical experience of the world of legal practice. The amount of work involved in putting together such courses must be phenomenal but doesn't it just beat having to sit through boring lectures on the law relating to perpetuities! Law students of today are certainly benefitting from the technological revolution and it is astonishing what can now be achieved in the e-learning arena. Lorraine Boyd of the Royal Bank of Scotland took us outside our own environment to illustrate how technology has enabled such a huge organisation to introduce training without the need to send staff on expensively run courses in purpose-built conference centres. Sonny Leong continued on the theme of e-learning by describing Cavendish Publishing's electronic book initiatives. Students can now buy chapters of books online which must beat queuing up at the photocopying machine. Unfortunately, his paper was based on a slide presentation and will not be published. This may become an issue for us in the future as more and more speakers give whizzy powerpoint demonstrations to accompany their talks. Some of the presentations are available on the BIALL website but reading through a set of slides is not as helpful for posterity as a well set-out paper, which is why I am particularly grateful to Barbara, Loyita Worley (who gave a most interesting presentation on the knowledge management project at Richards Butler – ouRBase), Paul Maharg and Lorraine Boyd, who all submitted papers. We plan to include Tim Owen's and Michael Maher's contributions in the next issue as they were both extremely interesting and deserve to be seen by the membership!

The Conference was a great success and I am sure everyone enjoyed it as much as I did. It is such a good occasion to catch up with old friends, to swap news, views and experiences, and enjoy the Beatles! The organisers are to be congratulated and in particular Valerie Stevenson who

was faced with the news that John Miller would be unable to take over as incoming Chair only very shortly before the Conference but nevertheless carried out her duties faultlessly and delivered an excellent closing speech.

The Joint Study Institute which was held in June in Victoria, BC was also a resounding success and two British delegates, Aynsley Gough and Phil Stant have kindly supplied their impressions of it. Roger Jacobs, who acted as Rapporteur, has written up each of the papers and I make no apology for reproducing his text more or less in full as the quality of the speakers appears to have been uniformly high and they supply a fascinating overview of the legal, political and governmental processes in Canada – with due note taken of the “French-English thing”.

Last, but of course not least, our best wishes and thanks go to Laurence Eastham who retires as Editor “leaving the journal in a better state than when he arrived”. Laurence has devoted lots of time and effort to steering us through not just a name change but also a complete and extremely successful makeover, thus dragging us into the twenty-first

century. He has undertaken a very long and successful stint as Editor and I only hope that I can emulate his efforts and keep the journal at the cutting edge (dreadful expression) in monitoring and reporting on legal information developments of interest to all the many and varied members of the Association. The Editorial Board has been extremely supportive of Laurence and I have already been very impressed by the amount of work which they all put in voluntarily towards the journal. Without them, it would be a much less good product and the Editor’s job would be very much harder. I look forward to a happy and productive working relationship with them all.

We plan to continue the “themed” idea where each issue, rather than being devoted to one subject, which may not be of interest to everyone, will cover two or three topics as well as continuing our standard columns. We will be covering ethics, data protection, and e-government in future issues but always welcome suggestions from any of you.

Christine Miskin