

The ICLG 25th birthday party, by Lisa Billingham

The ICLG 25th birthday party was an impressive affair - not celebrated with raucous laughter, but with controlled enjoyment like you would expect from industrial librarians.....

On 23rd January 1997, 70 members met at Ove Arup in London. We were then shown around the library by **Annette O'Brien**, the librarian, and had a chance to browse through the stock. This is certainly an impressive library, holding approximately 16,000 books and 180 journal titles. There were several library technology demonstrations, organised by the library staff. These were of Arup's new SAILS journal management system; the Infodisk document / standard control system; Reuters Business Briefing; Barbour Construction Expert and the Internet.

Excellent food and drink were provided for us all, followed by a 25th birthday cake for the group. This was decorated with an open book - most appropriate !

We heard from the Director of Arup Partnership, **Turlogh O'Brien**. He commented on the importance of the library to the firm, which was proven by its location - facing visitors as they entered the building. He added that potential clients are often shown around the library, to help demonstrate the resources available to the firm. He added that the firm has been involved in building of academic, public and special libraries for a long time. He remarked that recently there had been fewer public library assignments!

He was followed by **Ross Shimmon**, Chief Executive of the Library Association, who said he regarded commercial libraries as crucial to the library profession. He assured us that he was not saying this just to please the audience. Notably, he also said that he would like to link the organisation with the Institute of Information Scientists, and that this was the first occasion on which he could say this publicly.

Elizabeth Dwiar (current Chair of ICLG) then thanked those involved in arranging the evening and all others present, for helping to make the party such a success. She commented on the opportunities opening up in commercial libraries, urged us to promote ICLG to our colleagues and a growing group, and recounted some tales she had heard during the evening.

Later, I had a chance to talk to some of the other attendees.

Kam Sandhu is one of our new members. She works at The Institute of Chartered Accountants (ICAEW), and joined to increase her knowledge of industrial libraries. She is keen to attend more evening meetings, and sees this as an important part of the group's activities.

Long-standing members who attended the celebration include **Angela Abell, Judith Crowe and Rob Palmer**. They were persuaded to talk a little about the group's history. Together with information gleaned from *'Information for Industry - 21 years*

of the Library Association Industrial Group', edited by Donald Mason and published by Library Association Publishing, their comments are summarised below.

The group was born because of the public library orientation of the professional bodies, and the pioneers had a very real struggle to be recognised. It was first suggested publicly by **Barry Nuttall** of BPB Industries in a letter to the Library Association Record in February 1970.

A meeting was held on 14 October 1970 at the Library Association. The formal request for creation of the group was made in May 1971, and the first issue of the newsletter went out in January 1972. Barry Nuttall was both the first Chairman and the first Newsletter Editor.

When Barry left special librarianship for the academic sector, his role was taken on by **Doris Palmer**. Many people have fond memories of this Chair / Newsletter Editor. She made a special effort to meet each newcomer to the Group, often travelling long distances to do so. (See the letter written by Doris to the Newsletter Editors after publication of this article.)

The group originally dedicated itself to setting up one-day study meetings, visits, and its most popular event, the Conference / Annual Study Weekend. One of the first training events was in November 1971 for library assistants. In those days, a fee of 4.50 pounds included course fees, coffee, lunch and tea!

The first Conference (forerunner of the Study Weekend) was held at Civil Service Staff College at Sunningdale in May 1973. This tackled problems of practical significance, and even 21 years ago, the discussions included copyright, freedom of information and definition of the term 'special library'. The central purpose was to help librarians appreciate the needs of industry.

Study Weekends then replaced the Conferences. Even twenty years ago, employers were more willing to support activities with practical applications. From 1979, the Conferences were held at Lane End Management Centre near High Wycombe. The events were always oversubscribed with many day visitors. Exhibitions were organised to run alongside the conferences. One year, the conference was held in York and all attendees dressed up as Vikings.

During the early years there were a lot of events held jointly with Aslib, LA Government Libraries Group, IIS, and HERTIS. The members of the fledgling LAIG were invited to sit on many committees, and their efforts helped to get commercial libraries recognised as a distinctive sector. The group also expanded into publishing, and notable successes in this area were the '*Guidelines for special libraries*' and the proceedings of the annual study weekends.

This discussion would be incomplete if we did not mention the Ridgmount Street Christmas parties. Members were responsible for the catering, and produced an excellent spread. Guests travelled from as far as Chester-le-Street, Birmingham, Manchester and Dorset, and invitations were very much sought after.

The second decade continued with all the work started in the first. Arguably, the biggest event in the second decade was the formation of LAIG Scotland. Scottish librarians formed their own regional branch, and held meetings in Aberdeen and Edinburgh which were attended by delegates from across Scotland. Inaugural meetings were chaired by **Mary Lakie** of Syntex.

So, looking back over the history so far, we see the role of the industrial librarian becoming more prominent and further removed from public library work. We also see intense pressure on library budgets and increasing need to justify our existence in the organisation. ICLG has contributed to the progress in these areas, but there is still a great deal of progress to be made.

Upon receipt of the newsletter containing this article, Doris Palmer wrote the following letter to the Newsletter Editors:

5.4.1997

Dear Editors,

Congratulations on the Winter News - even if it is somewhat prematurely dated. Rather different from the duplicated issues of my day - but then, they didn't cost the Group anything - my employers absorbed the costs and publishers were pleased to pay the postage in exchange for the insertion of their 'blurbs'.

So sorry I missed the 25th celebrations... I don't like our winters and was enjoying myself in the sunshine in January.

There are a couple of points I must correct, in the report of the party a somewhat surprising statement is made. I certainly did not visit ALL our new members, what I did do was to try to make a personal welcome of all the attendees at our meetings (sometimes quite a job when we had 120 plus at some events). I also did visit many members - if I was in their neighbourhood.

The other point is rather more important. In her note Jacqueline Cropley says that in her early days the Group was not predominantly of Special Librarians, sorry Jacqueline, you are quite wrong there. In the early days, certainly whilst I was an active committee member, the great majority of our membership was of industrial and government librarians- plus learned societies. I once did a private check and found that over 95% of members were in non public or academic libraries. In those days our membership was around 1200.

Many of our members were in One Man Bands some of their libraries are now most impressive, thanks to the efforts those pioneers made to prove their value.

I hope to attend some of the Group sessions at Umbrella 4 - which I hope to attend in my capacity of Hon. Book Review Editor of the Record.

If I'm still around I hope to attend the 30th birthday celebrations but please don't hold them in January or February.

Best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Doris Palmer