

Society of Legal Scholars

President's Annual Report 2009

1. During the past year, I have attended on the Society's behalf all of the routine meetings in which the Society is involved, such as the annual meeting with the Law Commission. Some new relationships have been formed during the year, notably through meetings with the Legal Services Board, and I hope these will prove fruitful in the future. I have also built on the Society's previous links with some other outside bodies, in an effort to increase our profile and standing; into this category fall the Judicial Appointments Commission, the Research Information Network and the Academy of Social Sciences.

As far as the Judicial Appointments Commission is concerned, I participated in a session at their annual away-day, on the topic of 'The Judiciary as a Career Option for Legal Academics' and probably rather shocked them by indicating that the preferred career option for most legal academics was – legal academic. However, I also spent some time pointing out all the skills that legal academics possess which give them the potential to be excellent judges, if the JAC could tempt us away from academia!

I have been the Society's contact with the Research Information Network (RIN) for some time. I have also had a meeting with Branwen Hide, RIN liaison and Partnerships Officer, who discussed ways in which SLS and RIN could work together, including obtaining more feedback from legal academics, and publicising RIN events and briefing notes more effectively to the legal academic community.

I have represented the Society at the meetings of the Academy of Social Sciences CEOs meeting for the past year, since the inception of this group. Other CEOs (who really are chief executives of learned societies) are amazed (and hugely impressed) that we can run a Society of this size, with a Journal, conferences, seminars and so on, on a largely voluntary basis. Meetings cover a lot of practical issues, which I have fed back to the Society's Executive Committee.

2. I have also been invited to attend various lectures etc on the society's behalf, and have either done so myself, or ensured that another member of the Executive Committee has attended to represent the Society.
3. The President's Reception in March was a successful event. I adopted a strategy of writing personal letters to as many of our guests as possible, which seemed to achieve the desired aim of encouraging them to attend. I was particularly pleased that 12 former Presidents of the Society attended the reception, so that they could start off our centenary celebrations.

4. That brings me to the Centenary itself. I hope you will feel that in planning what we should do to mark the Centenary, I have succeeded in leading the Society to have a balance between celebration and commemoration. Apart from the President's Reception, I also organised the first of a series of Centenary Lectures, delivered by our earliest living President, Professor William Twining, who chose as his subject 'Punching Our Weight – Academic Law and Public Understanding'; his lecture was very well received by those attending, and a written version of his paper will be appearing in Legal studies in due course. I would like to record my thanks to Gail Verasammy, a PhD student at Keele, who did the administration for the lecture – she did a very good job, and I could not have done it without her.

Another centenary matter was the grant of some money to the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies to catalogue the rest of the SPTL/SLS archive. There are currently over 30 boxes of papers uncatalogued, and I was very grateful when the Executive Committee agreed that making this grant would be a fitting thing to do in our centenary year.

The centenary has also been commemorated by the publication of the history of the society, which I co-authored with Professor Ray Cocks. I would just like to thank him for all his support, not just as a co-author, but also as someone who has been generally very helpful during my presidency.

5. You will have to make your own minds up about the success or otherwise of the Centenary Conference – suffice it to say here that I have enormously enjoyed planning it. I have thanked the conference team elsewhere, but here I would just like to thank the Society's Subject Sections Convenor, Professor Lucy Vickers, for all her work on the academic programme.
6. During this year, the Executive Committee also agreed to my request that we should have a PR person to attend Society functions and produce reports for our website and also help us to think about increasing the Society's media profile. I am grateful to the Executive for agreeing to employ Clare de la Torre, who has done an excellent job, particularly in livening up the website. This is an ongoing project, and as one of my last acts as President, I am asking the Executive Committee to form a small Working Party to assist Richard Edwards, our webmaster, in working on our website, which forms an increasingly important part of our public profile. I hope that Clare will agree to join us on that, and continue to provide us with her excellent reports of Society activities.
7. On a more personal note, I would like to thank Tony Bradney for all his support during the year – being a supporting act is not always easy, but he has done so with considerable tact and grace, and I would just like to thank him publicly for his support. At the beginning of my Presidency one member of the Society asked him how it felt to be 'the consort', while another put it more bluntly – 'What's it like being the bag carrier?' Actually, I hope Tony hasn't felt like either of those things, given

that he plays his own roles in the Society as Editor of the Reporter and a member of the Executive, but he has certainly been a huge support to me during the year.

8. I do not want to finish my report without thanking the largely unseen but vital support staff employed by the Society. Most of you will know Sally Thomson, the Society's Administrator, but there is also Mel who helps with the website and Sara Bladon, who helps the honorary Treasurer with matters financial. All of these people work on the Society's behalf and I would just like them to know that their contribution is much appreciated.
9. I would also like to thank the members of the Executive Committee for their support and their contribution to the Society. I have much enjoyed working with you, and am very grateful for all the work you put in, on a voluntary basis, to make the Society the success that it is. Clearly, I have worked very closely with Stephen Bailey, the Hon Sec, and David Miers as Hon Treasurer, but all the members of the Executive, including my successor Nick Wikeley and his successor David Feldman have been extremely helpful and ready to step in when needed. In that context, would particularly like to thank Matthew Weaite, who has represented the Society at a number of meetings, including those of the Academy of Social Sciences (not always the most rewarding task). Matthew – we are very grateful for all your hard work.
10. Finally, I would just like to indicate something that is likely to be concerning the Society in the future. About every ten years or so in the more recent past, Presidents have instigated a review of the Society's performance which have led to various improvements in the Society. Having discussed this with the Officers, and in particular with Nick Wikeley, we have decided to suggest to the Executive at its next meeting that we should consult the members of the Society about developments and improvements they might like to see during the next few years. I hope that some exciting developments will come out of this process, to give the Society a really good start to the first decade of its second century.

Fiona Cownie, Keele, September 2009.