

From then to now

To commemorate the Law Management Section's 10th anniversary, the present and former chairs reminisce about their terms in office and the changes and challenges they faced



Nicola Manning, 1997–1999

As a member of the original Advisory Committee set up in 1997, then finding myself voted onto the Executive Committee as the very first Chair, I felt both proud and privileged to have been involved in the birth of the concept of law firm management. The importance of the practice and its status in the modern business world was just being recognised, and it was rightfully starting to be seen as a vital part of the future of professional legal practice.

Looking back, it hardly seems possible that almost a decade passed since those early days when we were poised to launch into the new millennium. We had the spectre of the Y2K bug crashing our technology at the stroke of midnight, but the reality of the Legal Services Commission (LSC) unified contracts, Home Information Packs, referral fee issues and anti-money laundering legislation had not yet reached us.

The Section was formed to enable lawyers and others involved in management issues within law firms to exchange and share ideas, information and challenges. Back in the early days we looked to raise management's profile, increase membership numbers and run regional

seminars at which like-minded members could meet locally to discuss relevant issues without the traditional threat of competition or rivalry between neighbouring firms.

The Section's quarterly newsletter strove to highlight some of the important management issues. Although concepts discussed in the early articles, such as risk management and disaster recovery, are now firmly entrenched in our psyches, these were important issues that were then only just coming to the fore and needed to be addressed.

The past 10 years proved a constant challenge to the modern law firm, which now faces many external threats to profitability and sometimes to its very existence. Successful firms recognise that they must adapt, often quite radically, to survive, and predicting economic problems and challenges before they engulf us has become essential.



Angus Andrew, 1999–2001

I chaired the Law Society Committee that gave birth to the Section and acted as Chairman until its members elected the first

officers. Consequently, my memories relate predominantly to the Section's formation and, in particular, its struggle to carve out a separate identity while remaining within the Law Society family. That we were ultimately successful was due in large measure to the guile of Maureen Miller and Marga Aúz who, 10 years on, remain the bedrock of the Section.

To declare an interest I eventually left both the Law Society Council and private practice to take the Queen's shilling as a Legal Services Commissioner and Tribunal Vice President. Nevertheless, 10 years ago the pace of change for most law firms was set (as it is now) by what came to be called the Legal Services Commission (LSC). It had recently published its proposal for exclusive contracting introduced a year later. For the first time, approximately 5,000 high street firms had to come to grips with issues such as quality audits, file reviews, supervision standards, business plans, departmental profit and loss accounts. Although none of those initiatives were welcomed, it began to dawn on a reluctant profession that no future existed in accepting work unless one had calculated the cost of completing it.

The profession now must come to terms with fixed fees and price competition. Last year, I walked into the Legal Aid Practitioners Group annual conference to find that it had been organised and planned by the LMS. To know that the LMS continued to help the profession adapt for the future left me with a deep sense of satisfaction.

My short association with the Section confirmed my long held view of our profession: it has both an innate resistance to change and a consummate ability to adapt and profit from it – a paradox that constantly frustrates and amazes me in equal measure.