



A profile of Liz Chapman

At school, Liz was made to take Latin in the sixth form as they wanted her to apply to Oxford. Little did she realise that years later she would be a Professorial Fellow of Somerville College and the Junior Proctor required to admonish Oxford graduands in Latin in the magnificent Sheldonian Theatre.

Liz is the Taylor Institution Librarian at Oxford, but for one year until mid-March 2003 has a full-time job as the Junior Proctor of Oxford University. This is a complex job combining ceremonial duties and being one of two ombudspersons for the whole University, responsible only to the Chancellor. Each year a Senior Proctor for the graduate students and a Junior Proctor for the undergraduates are elected from the Fellows of the colleges whose turn it is to nominate for that year. The position goes back to at least the thirteenth century, and Liz is the first librarian Proctor, even though Thomas Bodley of 400 years ago was also a Proctor.

Originally a Home Counties girl, Liz initially wanted to be a teacher of English, as did all her friends, and studied modern languages, including French and Italian, at Durham. Having seen the other potential teachers at first hand, and also having watched the University Librarian at Durham, she decided that being a librarian would be much better. What she did not realise was that her role model was the only female university librarian at the time. During

her course at Durham, she spent time with a family of lawyers in Calabria – as a status symbol au pair – and (almost fatally) discovered she was allergic to penicillin in Dijon. She also met her husband, Frank Webster – a local Durham boy – at a football match at Roker Park (former home of Sunderland AFC for the aficionados amongst us).

After graduating, she went to the Polytechnic of North London for her Diploma in Librarianship, and worked at the Law Library at University College London as part of her training. She remembers the Monday afternoon cataloguing classes as being something she never thought she would use – little did she know! Moving to Southgate Technical College in North London as a Tutor Librarian, she did do some teaching in French, English and Liberal Studies, and had the opportunity to do a teacher training course. She then joined Nick Childs at Brunel, soon after it became a university, while Frank was doing his doctorate at LSE. She remembers this as being a really satisfying job, with a good boss, and all the Assistant Librarians were on the same grade, rotating functions – this is where the cataloguing came in – but with specialist subject skills. As the engineering subject specialist she was working on really innovative projects like video introductions to the library, and also developed an interest in Marc Brunel, the much more talented father of Isambard Kingdom

Brunel and Chief Engineer of New York. Nick Childs encouraged her to write up her work and she produced books on cataloguing and on acquisitions. Somehow she and Frank found time to get married on the fifth anniversary of the day they first went out together, and here the series of five year plans (that Liz claims were actually planned) kick in. (Her five-year courtship by Frank was the first in the cycle.) Their first child arrived five years later, and the second five years after that. Five-ish years later again came fellowship of the Library Association. Frank moved to Oxford Polytechnic (later Oxford Brookes University) and they settled in High Wycombe, halfway between their two jobs.

While at Brunel Liz went back to PNL to do an MA part-time with Edward Dudley, a great experience all round.

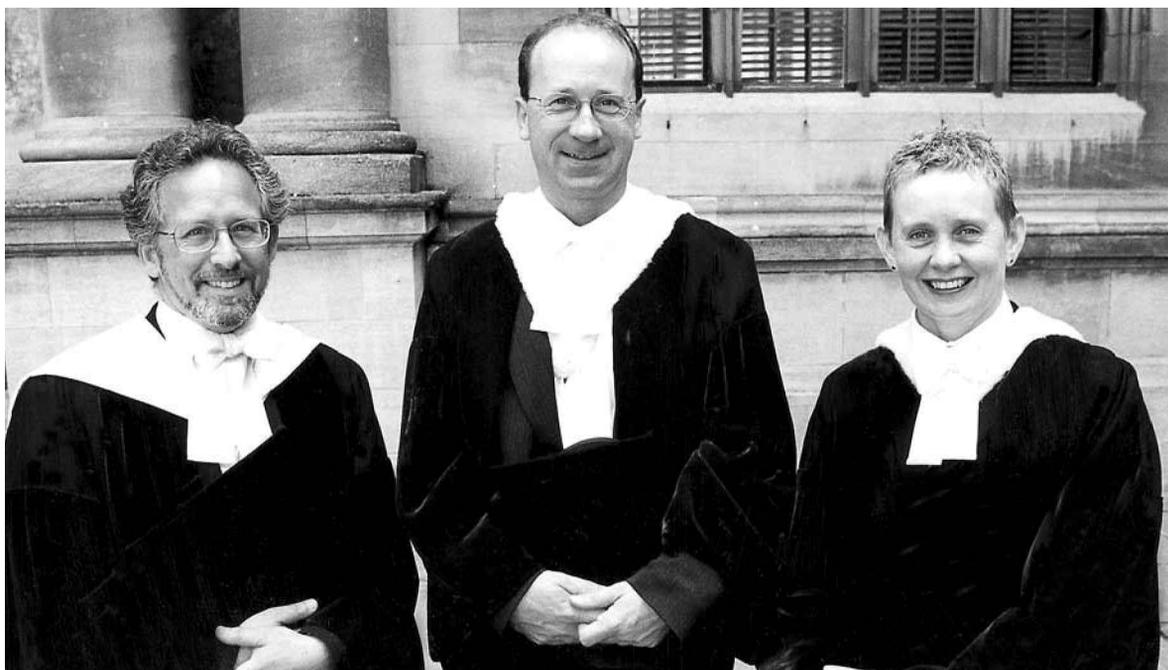
Liz was looking for a job in Oxford when she saw a post in the Institute of Economics and Statistics. This meant learning a new subject area, but worked well except for library budget meetings where the economists picked holes in everything. In 1986 there was no automation, and she later got involved in planning the new library in the new Social Sciences and Economics Building. This is when she first became really involved in University politics, joining the University Buildings Committee. Norman Foster was chosen as the architect, and Liz really enjoyed working with the partnership because of their involvement and understanding of the project. They visited existing buildings including the recently completed Cambridge Law Library, and of course Cranfield University Library. Just before construction started, the post at the Taylor(ian) Institution was advertised. At this time all the Oxford University libraries were being reorganised in a central way under Reg Carr, the Director, and Liz was included on the reorganising and appointing committee. More recently the whole university has been reorganised, and Liz feels that unfortunately libraries lost ground in this reorganisation, as they end up in a non-academic grouping with museums and computing services, with less political clout, whereas they had been previously associated more closely with academic departments. The budgetary systems have changed, and some academics have a perception that their budgets were being taken away to pay

for the libraries as an infrastructure charge. At least during this year, when her responsibilities include attending all major university committees, she can keep an eye on this, and raise the profile of libraries whenever possible.

The post at the Taylorian was an exciting one which would use all Liz's subject and professional skills. It was also an "entitled post". This meant that she would become a Professorial Fellow at Somerville, Member of the Governing Body and Keeper of the College Pictures (although not teaching). It also means that she is an alternate tutor, dealing with student problems, and sitting on appointment and grading panels. The interview was preceded by what Liz called "trial by knife and fork" at a dinner at Somerville in the private dining room with the candidates interspersed with the Fellows. What the Fellows hadn't realised was that the candidates knew each other. Liz obviously knew her knife from her fork, as she got the job and became the happy Librarian of one of the best collections of European literature in the country and maybe the world. European literature and language is collected from all parts of the world, including the more unexpected regions such as French from Vietnam and Central Africa. As well as the four main continental European languages, it is also strong in Latin American, Slavonic languages and Russian. In the past five years, the number of visitors has increased, and Liz is concerned that this is because other libraries, including the British Library, are cutting back on their acquisitions in these areas. Unusually the Taylorian is a lending library as well as a research library, with a tradition of extensive personal service to researchers. It is also such a lovely place to work that many researchers and students from other areas come just to soak up the ambience.

During her time in Oxford Liz has been heavily involved not only in committee work in the university libraries but also in the profession, with tours of duty on the local LA committee, on LA Council and IFLA. She has run courses on enquiry skills in all sorts of libraries and continued her interest in acquisitions and collection development. She has also been an active member of ALA, attending their conferences as often as possible.

Just before the Oxford libraries became



The Oxford University Proctors in ceremonial dress

integrated, Liz had applied for the first time ever for some study leave, and during this time she got a letter from the Principal of Somerville saying that they were being asked to elect a Proctor. Liz was interested as she enjoyed University politics and also there had never been a librarian Proctor before. Six people were interested, three dropped out and there was a serious election which Liz won. One of the losers is now her pro-Proctor (stand-in). As women couldn't stand for the Proctorship until the mid-1970s she is only the ninth woman to be a Proctor. The job is a very interesting mixture of pressure, pleasure and power. The proctors have to investigate any complaint that is raised and can ask questions of anybody. There is much committee work and this is combined with investigative and ceremonial work. They meet weekly with the Vice-Chancellor. They are elected a year before taking up the position, but there is little training and virtually no run-in. Although the Proctors do work together, they tend to investigate separately, for example in cases of plagiarism, or exam fraud. The Proctor's Court used to be all powerful, but was virtually abolished at the beginning of October this year. It has been almost replaced by a series of higher courts where Proctors only prosecute, they do not judge. The biggest responsibility for the Junior Proctor is examinations, where medical queries

have to be dealt with, exam rooms monitored for cheating, and complaints about grades dealt with. Oddly enough, the number of such complaints seems to have gone up this year, as has the number of complaints from libraries about defaulting borrowers, whose cards are marked to stop graduation until debts are settled.

Although Liz says there is no typical week, her most recent week included: on Monday a University Council meeting discussing the disbandment of the Proctors' university police force; on Tuesday the Ceremony of the Gloves – where a new Oxford circuit judge was presented with white gloves by the University; on Wednesday the dedication of St Frideswide's Shrine, followed by dinner in Christchurch; on Thursday a meeting of the Buildings Committee, followed by a meeting with counsel to take legal advice; and on Friday lunch at High Table with the Editor of *Serials* for this profile. As a delegate to Oxford University Press, she also goes to meetings of the Board, including those in New York, and this year had to wear black academic bands on the death of the Queen Mother. She went to two Buckingham Palace events, one to present the loyal address at the Jubilee, and a garden party when she was picked to speak to the Queen – mainly because of her “funny” clothes. Liz has to wear academic dress at all times, including on special occasions a blue velvet gown with ermine

trim and mortar board. She has achieved a historic change in the rules to allow women to wear the same white neckwear as men. At the most recent garden party, she met Sheila Corral, President of CILIP. Although Liz can attend any University committee, she has deliberately not attended any meetings related to libraries, but has focused on museums for a change. This avoids invoking either the Nolan Committee's or the Marquess of Queensbury's rules.

Liz is regretful that she is presiding over the demise of the "bulldogs". These are the University police who form the oldest police force in the country, and have full warrant powers. The student body has been campaigning for their removal, and have succeeded, but may not realise what a resource they have lost. One traditional event that may not be lost is the annual Proctors and Constables bowls match between Oxford and Cambridge, which is usually a draw, but is an ancient custom. As the custodians of student discipline the Students Union views the Proctors with some disdain, but in fact the two teams work very happily together, and Liz is much enjoying this aspect of her work.

The law has been a constant theme in this

profile and her son has just graduated from Durham, where his parents studied and met, with a First in History. The fact both his parents were also Durham graduates freaks out his friends. He is now being converted into a lawyer. Her daughter is in her long awaited last year at school, but has designed the cover for Liz's recent book (a plug here for *Managing Acquisitions in Library and Information Services*) and hopes to go to art school next year.

When she is not being a Proctor Liz likes to take an active and passive interest in art, collect small books and push her family ancestors into a tree.

When she goes back to her ordinary job, Liz gets three months' well deserved leave, as the Proctor job is 24x7, with Saturdays taken up by events like degree ceremonies, Sundays by the Official Sermon, and many early morning events on weekdays like University Communion in Latin. She will use this time to catch up, revise her latest book and also continue her research on Marc Brunel. But there is a "Proctor mafia" and former Proctors are frequently used for committee work later, so she is unlikely to be leaving University politics for a while.