

IS THE HISTORY OF HOW THE BAR WORKS BEING LOST?



THE LEGAL RECORDS AT RISK PROJECT

What is the issue?

Recent developments (changes to legal services; globalisation; digital obsolescence) have affected our legal framework, yet no concerted effort has as yet been made to protect and preserve the records which document these changes. The Legal Records at Risk project, led by the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies and working in collaboration with the legal profession, the research community and archives, including The National Archives and the British Records Association, seeks to develop a national strategy to identify and preserve our legal heritage and to save modern (20th and 21st century) private sector legal records in the UK that may be at risk.

Our initial findings indicate that the records of barristers and barristers' chambers are particularly at risk. The National Archives' [Discovery](#) portal lists only five sets of C20 barristers' papers in local archives (as opposed to 986 entries for the business records of law firms). If this trend continues we will inevitably have a skewed and inaccurate historical picture of legal developments and services in the UK. A recent article [The Humanity of Barristers: Stories from the Bar](#) points out that: "There is a general lack of knowledge about the Bar, with misconceived notions of what barristers do, how they work and their professional interaction with the solicitor branch and the public...Although much of barristers' work takes place in public courtrooms, much also remains hidden from view, with many working in the cloistered surroundings of the Inns of Court or in chambers across the provinces."

What does the Legal Records at Risk project offer? We will:

- Advise on, and help identify, records of barristers and barristers' chambers may be of long-term value both for business reference and external research.
- Facilitate the process by which selected records are deposited in archive repositories and ensure that confidentiality and access concerns are fully addressed. This does *not* mean inundating the Inns of Court libraries and archives with records if they do not have the capacity – we have arrangements with other local repositories.
- Provide generic recordkeeping advice to information owners as required (such as on digital continuity of records required long-term; email management; shared drive management).

What is the benefit to barristers and barristers' chambers?

Greater transparency and public engagement through the eventual release of records for research will enhance the profession's public-facing image and help address the issues raised above. There are other benefits too in terms of cost savings (reduced storage space, efficient records management).

Please contact us

To find out more about this project, visit our website <http://ials.sas.ac.uk/research/lrar/lrar.htm> or contact the Legal Records at Risk Project Director, Clare Cowling at clare.cowling@sas.ac.uk.