



**British Institute of  
International and  
Comparative Law**



Advancing legal  
knowledge in global  
affairs for 60 years



**Neville Hunnings**

### **From modest beginnings to an international network**

Neville Hunnings was appointed as a junior researcher at BIICL in the early 1960s, while the institute was still in its infancy. During his time with BIICL, Neville saw the Institute grow from modest beginnings – in Middle Temple Lane – to a thriving research organisation with new headquarters in High Holborn and developing international connections.

Hired by BIICL's first director, Norman Marsh, Neville was one of the 'three musketeers', a trio of young researchers selected to cover the Institute's main themes: international law, commonwealth law and European law.

Having just completed a course at the Hague Academy of International Law, Neville took up that focus, working under the supervision of Elizabeth Evatt, an eminent Australian lawyer who later served as President of the Australian Law Reform Commission.

"I applied for the job at BIICL, having already been a member, because the work it was doing was interesting. There was quite a bit of freedom around the work we undertook as well – we were really intended to find something that inspired us and get on with it!" recalls Neville.

What Neville found particularly interesting, it turned out, was comparative law. With the support of Elizabeth, he started a newsletter, called the Bulletin of Legal Developments. Launched in 1966, this was a fortnightly survey of UK, European, foreign and Commonwealth legal events sent out to all BIICL members. It continued to be a mainstay of BIICL's publications portfolio until the last edition was produced in 2006.

Another of BIICL's early ideas, that would become an annual highlight of its events calendar, was the London-Leiden meetings. Now in their 57<sup>th</sup> year, the meetings are organised in partnership with the Europa Instituut of the University of Leiden and offer an opportunity to discuss developments in European Law.

"It seems strange, now, to think of us getting together with colleagues in Holland to discuss this new-fangled thing called the Common Market," says Neville. "But it's continued, one year in London, the next in Leiden, each year discussing a new topic. I went along to the very first meeting and, for me, it was a huge benefit to get this opportunity to meet interested and interesting people from academia, business and government, and get some real insight into what was going on."

Neville worked at BIICL for seven years, during which time Norman Marsh left to help set up the Law Commission. He was succeeded by Kenneth Simmonds, an expert in international and European law, who brought a very different range of skills to the job.

Neville recalls: “Kenneth very much liked mixing with influential people and he really expanded BIICL’s membership, as well as its research interests. He brought an international standing to the Institute, as well as attracting a full range of lawyers, from academic, commercial and government backgrounds – that was very unusual at the time.”

The late 1960s was an exciting time to be part of the British legal establishment and BIICL played an important part in easing its early mastery of the UK’s membership of the European Union.

“We were fortunate to include outstanding lawyers such as Lord Denning, Sir Kenneth Diplock, and Richard Wilberforce among our supporters,” says Neville. “Their expertise and influence facilitated our smooth transition into EU membership, and helped open the UK up to all the new things that came with that membership.”

During his time at BIICL, Neville was able to pursue his interest in editing and publishing and finally left the Institute to edit the *Common Market Law Reports*. This journal was established by the barristers Louis Blom-Cooper and Peter Benenson – the latter a founder member of Amnesty International. Neville continued to work at the Journal until his retirement. Today, he remains an enthusiastic member of BIICL, and still attends events, when he is not occupied with editing the Encyclopaedia of EU Law.

“I think today BIICL is in some ways a very different institution – it is to be applauded particularly for the way it has developed its staff,” says Neville. “It’s moved from having just three senior and three very junior people to have a range of extremely interesting researchers who are active both in the institute and its events, as well as in their own academic work. That means the Institute is able to delve into topics at far greater depth than they were able to before. That’s enormously important – and never more so than now!”