



## **ILA ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM 2023**

### ***Some (Good!) News from the Linen Hall Library***

*Samantha McCombe, Librarian*

The Linen Hall Library, Belfast, was founded as the Belfast Reading Society in 1788. Housed in a Victorian-era former linen warehouse, it's a unique institution: as well as the oldest library in the city, it is the only remaining subscription library in Ireland, continuing to generate a proportion of its income from membership. Founding members established the society on radical and Enlightenment ideals. Over more than 200 years, the Library has retained its independence, maintaining the principle that its resources are owned by the community for the community. Sitting at the heart of its city's literary, cultural, and educational life, The Linen Hall has certainly faced challenges familiar to many independent libraries, but also embodies many of our shared aims.

**Samantha McCombe** is the Linen Hall's 22<sup>nd</sup> Head Librarian, and the first woman to hold the position. She joined the Library from a career that began in academic libraries at Strathclyde and Queen's universities before moving to the Northern Ireland Assembly library and then the Bar Library. As part of the Bar Library team Samantha received the Halsbury Award for Best Legal Information Service in the UK/Ireland. She is also a past Chair of CILIP Ireland. Before taking up her post at The Linen Hall, Samantha fostered a young team at global law firm Allen & Overy. As part of The Linen Hall management team, Samantha oversees The Linen Hall's collections which support the outstanding public engagement programmes, with exhibitions, talks, performances, and digitisation all playing a part in communicating the collections to their local and international communities. As she told the *Belfast Telegraph*, her role is to be 'champion of the collections'.

The Linen Hall were set to host this year's ILA Annual Conference before the decision was taken to move it online for this year. The ILA Committee was inspired by the Linen Hall's vivid and inspirational theme – Exciting a Spirit of Enquiry – and we're delighted to have the chance to hear more how this significant independent library does just that.