THE SOUTH EASTERN CIRCUIT

The South Eastern Circuit
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The Circuiteer

INSIDE

03 Leader's Report
07 Breastfeeding at the Bar
12 Light in the Dark
14 A Snapshot from the Employment Bar
16 Circuit dinner and photos
18 Atticus, Elle, Rumpole and Kavanagh QC
20 Judges' drinks



LAW IN ART

The story behind Gerard David's diptych, *The Judgement of Cambyses*, painted in oil on oak in 1498.

Page 10



Q&A with The Honourable Ms Justice Obi

We are very grateful that Ms Justice Obi agreed to answer some of the Circuiteer's questions for her.

Page 6

Supporting Litigants in Person

The volunteers at Support Through Court helping keep justice accessible.

SUPPORT THROUGH COURT

Page 8



Briefs, Barristers & the Sunshine State

How do you kick off an unforgettable week of advocacy?
... start by diving headfirst into Walt Disney World in Orlando.

Page 22



Two Years as Recorder of the South Eastern Circuit

Answering those who have asked *"but what is a Recorder?"*.

Page 5

Young Citizens Mock Trials competition



Young people are given the opportunity to play the roles of advocates, witnesses, defendants and jurors.

Page 9

Thirty Years of Advocate: the Bar's Commitment in Action

advocate

This year, Advocate celebrates 30 years as the Bar's charity, connecting people who cannot afford legal help and cannot access legal aid with barristers.

Page 15

CO-EDITORS' COLUMN

Phew! After a four-month period of a gazillion emails, WhatsApps and calls, I am so proud and pleased to present this bumper edition of the Circuiteer. It is a takeover by me and James, for the first time ever, as co-editors and non-criminal practitioners. Our heartfelt thanks to Claire for giving us this opportunity and letting us run with whatever took our fancy.

So what took our fancy? We wanted to create a publication that celebrates the charities who work closely with the Bar (Advocate, Support through Court, Young Citizens) and looks at life outside of the Bar, with articles examining Law in Art and why Elle Woods is the greatest fictional lawyer of all time. There are of course, serious articles. And lots of photos. Importantly, this Circuiteer highlights how #WeAreOneBar and all the hard work Claire has undertaken to welcome non-criminal practitioners to the SEC. We very much hope that our next leader continues to embrace this. After all, we have seen how the Bar all pulled together to argue against the loss of jury trials. And of course, together we are stronger.

Personal thanks from me to all the contributors who have been subjected to my cajoling, wit and charm and occasional threats. You are awesome, as are the articles you have lovingly produced for this edition. Special shout out to Mark Watson whose article has had to have a significant trim after the sudden closure of the Inner London Court Cafe.

To our readers, I hope you enjoy.



Rachel Chan

- Family law barrister at 42BR Barristers, and herder of cats
- Co-editor of *The Circuiteer*

Welcome to the Autumn 2026 edition of the Circuiteer! It has been a pleasure to pick up the reins of this publication. I hope all of you will find something of interest.

The Bar undoubtedly continues to face its challenges, not least with the seemingly never-ending dispute over funding. However, there are signs of hope. The government's decision to pull back on some of its more radical reforms to jury trials shows that public advocacy can be just as effective outside the courtroom. Good arguments, effectively and persuasively delivered, are difficult to ignore. There is clearly more to do and more to say, but good news is still good news.

Through it all, the camaraderie between practitioners remains the bedrock of the profession, ensuring that the wheels of justice can turn effective to secure the rule of law and justice for all. I hope the updates and columns in this edition reflect that spirit.



James Arthur Sharpe

- Family law barrister at 42BR Barristers
- Co-editor of *The Circuiteer*

If you wish to contribute any material to the next issue of The Circuiteer, please contact:
leader@southeasterncircuit.com



LEADER'S REPORT

Claire Davies KC
LEADER OF THE SOUTH EASTERN CIRCUIT

Well 2 years has flown by and this is my last column for the *Circuiteer*. What a fantastic edition Rachel Chan and James Sharpe have produced and fitting they are editors of this last edition under my term. It has been an aim of mine whilst in this role to attract more practitioners from other specialisms to the Circuit. It really showcases the strengths of the Circuit and I hope you enjoy it.

The end of my term fast approaches and I wish to thank you all for allowing me the privilege of being your Leader. I could not have done it without the support of the Committee and of course, my Recorder Harry O'Sullivan. Congratulations to Arabella for surviving! Thank you to whose elected terms come to an end on 31st December and 'friends' who allowed me to co-opt them onto the Committee for the last 2 years. I also want to thank Danielle Buckett for her contribution to the Circuit in her role of a junior for three years when her term ends.

It has been a very difficult time over the last 2 years for the public bar. The Criminal Bar have shown that they will fight for what they believe in. There have been challenges to fees as usual, but in recent weeks, the Government have announced they have listened to us and confirmed that there will be no Crown Court Bench Division. But there is still much work to do.

The Family Bar begin their fight on fees and they of course have the support of the Circuit behind them.

We are now a year on from the Harman Review. Dame Maria Miller has now been appointed the Commissioner for Conduct, and it was good to see some of you at the Meet the Commissioner event in September this year. We must work together to ensure that there is a culture change and the Circuit plays a vital role in supporting those who are victims of bullying.

I have continued to have regular meetings with HMCTS, Chief Crown Prosecutors, Bar Council, Specialist Bar Chairs and other Circuit Leaders. Our mentoring schemes are being actively used and a testament to the members of the Circuit who give up their time to support others. Our CPS/SEC Liaison Committee continues to run. Please do get in touch with Colin Witcher if you have any issues that need raising.

Our Bar messes continue to ensure there are close links between the Judiciary and the Bar, representing you at the Court User meetings. Please do attend your local meetings. The judiciary welcome your presence; they want to work with the Bar. I am pleased to report that most robing rooms, thanks to your Bar mess, have kettles and fridges. These small touches make our days easier so do support by joining your local mess.

Now is the time that Christmas Events are advertised. Do attend them as it is so important to mix socially with one another and enjoy the social side to the Bar.

I had the honour again of judging the Bar Mock Trial Final run by the fantastic Young Citizens at the Royal Courts of Justice. The standard is so high at such a young age that it gives comfort that the Bar will be going strong with talented people for years to come. It was a highlight watching teams progress through the day and budding actors playing the roles of witnesses. I hope you enjoy reading the article by one of my fellow Judges Mrs Justice McGowan on page 9.

This year, the Circuit has able to publish a list of all courts, with contact details, that have undertaken to provide private facilities for breastfeeding/expressing mothers. It is an example of how the Circuit can work with HMCTS on your behalf. I am delighted we have been able to achieve this to make the lives easier, and contributes to ensuring the attrition of women at the Bar decreases.

LEADER'S REPORT

Our annual Circuit drinks with the Senior Judiciary, Resident Judges and designated Civil Judges took place in June at Middle Temple. The relationship between the judiciary and Circuit is vital particularly in the present time with the backlog and the demands of work on members' time no matter the specialism. Communication is key to our profession and it is nice to be able to enjoy these occasions away from the courtroom to encourage relaxed conversations.

Our annual Florida Advocacy Course took place and you can see how much fun they had in the article on page 22. If you are an advocacy trainer and are interested in attending on behalf of the Circuit, do keep an eye out for the vacancies for both Civil and Criminal courses next year. Scholarships are available for juniors who wish to attend.

To mark the end of the summer break, I was delighted to attend the internationally renowned Tim Dutton Advanced International Advocacy course aka "Keble". This really is the flagship of the Circuit and I cannot commend it to you highly enough. Those that attend as students are from all over the world at all levels of their practice. Many return to help on the course in the following year as they enjoy it so much. I am grateful to Course Director HHJ Whitehouse KC and to Aaron who ensures it all runs smoothly. Thank you to the tutors, judges and helpers who give up their time to ensure the continued success of the course.

A new legal year and a new Lord Chancellor; this time Alex Norris MP who was sworn in on the morning of the Opening of the Legal Year. I was privileged to be present at the swearing in and to lead the procession of silks into Westminster Abbey alongside the other Circuit Leaders. Whilst much may be made of our ceremonial robes, it is a sight to behold with all judiciary present in their finery. I am told there is a Tik Tok video of us all crossing into Westminster Hall. Let's hope this Lord Chancellor is in post longer than the last so there is some stability in the Ministry of Justice.

Just 2 days after, I joined the Irish legal profession in celebrating their opening of the legal year which was quite the contrast but equally enjoyable.

On 30 October 2026, the Circuit gathered for our Annual Dinner at Lincoln's Inn and I was delighted to welcome our guest speaker The Rt Hon. Baroness Hale of Richmond DBE. It was an excellent evening. I hope those who attended enjoyed themselves and the photographs in this edition.

The Circuit's new website will be launching this autumn, with a members' area built around what you have told us you need, from events and bookings to court information all in one place.

Many of you will not see the work the Committee undertakes on your behalf. I want to thank all those I have worked with over my term; people who never say no in the finest traditions of the Bar when their Leader comes calling, whether it be responding to consultations, writing for the Circuiteer, attending court user meetings, meeting MPs and showing them round the Courts, attending Parliament with me, or just general assistance. My particular thanks go the Circuit Leveson Working Group who have given up their time often very early in the morning or late at night at very short notice when a sounding board was needed. We owe those who give up their time a great deal of thanks. I could not have done it without them so thank you.

Over the last 2 years as Leader, I have met some wonderful people in our profession, who I would otherwise not have and they will remain friends. As someone once said to me, our profession is not just a job but a family and that certainly has proved to be true where the Circuit is concerned.

I also am grateful for the warm reception and support I always received from the Judiciary even when difficult topics are under discussion.

Finally, my thanks go to Aaron who works behind the scenes to assist with the running of the Circuit and its events so brilliantly.

I wish my successor well and I will always be there to support the Circuit.

Thank you.

Claire Davies KC

- Farringdon Chambers
- Leader of the SEC

Two Years as Recorder

of the South Eastern Circuit



The publication of this edition of the *Circuiteer* comes towards the end of my two-year tenure as the Circuit's Recorder. I take the opportunity to attempt to answer those who have asked me "*but what is a Recorder?*" and the many more who have mistakenly congratulated appointment as a fee-paid judge.

Historically, a recorder was an officer appointed by the Crown or by a city's mayor to keep a record of important ceremonies and proceedings. They would be responsible for taking and keeping notes of Court hearings and civic decisions. This historical role survives today in our use of Recorder to denote a part-time fee-paid judge of the Crown or County Courts, and as the honorary designation of the senior judge at a given location, such as the Recorder of London (a role dating back to 1298).

For the South Eastern Circuit, the role of Recorder calls back to a time before the Crown Court was created in 1971, when the judiciary would only reach beyond London on a travelling, 'assize' basis to mete justice to 'the provinces'. Royal judges assigned to one of the circuit areas of England and Wales would ride in pairs, trying cases in each county town as they came to them.

The Circuit as a local organisation would provide facilities for the Bar and the visiting judges, arranging lodgings, food and drink, libraries and other facilities missing when so far from Temple. The Recorder of the Circuit began therefore responsible for the important business of making sure that a visiting High Court Judge would have sufficient wine to make it through a fortnight in, say, Luton.

Today though, what does the Recorder of the South Eastern Circuit do? It is largely an administrative role, with constitutional duties towards the taking and preserving minutes of the Circuit's meetings. I hold one of the Circuit's seats on the Bar Council and attend meetings of the Criminal Bar Association. I often attend meetings delegated in place of our ever-busy Leader. There are functions assigned to the Recorder which relate to the holding of any elections to Circuit positions and making decisions with the Leader and Treasurer about the handling of Circuit funds, including considering applications to the Circuit's hardship funds.

Another role which has fallen to the Recorder has been the co-running of the Circuit's new mentoring scheme for established junior members. The scheme aims to pair juniors who want help with the big-picture problems of establishing a practice, considering a chambers move, switching to another area of work, returning to practice after a period of maternity leave, to name several examples. The scheme has so far been a success. We were inundated with offers from senior Circuit members willing to give up their time and in its first few months of operation, the mentoring scheme has paired around 20 mentors with applicants asking for guidance.

Given the Recorder's roots as a position dedicated to preserving a continuous history of an organisation, it is apt as a description for what the role means within the modern Circuit. It is also fitting that, to achieve a seamless transfer of power, the Circuit Committee keeps its 'immediate past Recorder' hanging around at meetings for another year. So just like a retired member of the bench returning as a deputy, they won't have got rid of me quite so easily when my term as Recorder ends this December.

No recorder of any kind works well alone, and this one is particularly grateful to the rest of the Committee and to the Leader for their work and their excellent company during the last two years.



Harry O'Sullivan

- 5 King's Bench Walk
- Recorder of the South Eastern Circuit



Q&A with The Honourable Ms Justice Obi

The Honourable Ms Justice (Margaret) Obi was appointed as a High Court Judge on 3rd October 2025 after a fascinating and varied legal career. Having worked as a criminal defence solicitor for over 15 years, she left the firm of which she was a partner and developed a portfolio career, which included advisory work in relation to matters of public international law and international criminal law. Her previous appointments include the Decisions Committee of the Financial Conduct Authority, Service Police Complaints Commissioner (of which she was the first) and Acting Judge of the Supreme Court of the British Indian Ocean Territory. We are very grateful, especially knowing how busy she is, that Ms Justice Obi agreed to answer some of the Circuiteer's questions for her.

When did you decide on a legal career, and why criminal law in particular?

I certainly wasn't one of those people who knew from an early age that they wanted to be a lawyer. The original plan was medicine. Some work experience in a GP's surgery and hospital caused me to change my mind fairly quickly.

I loved fiction, poetry, history and philosophy, and by A levels I had narrowed the choice to English or Law. Law won, partly because it seemed to offer a clearer career path, although I had absolutely no idea then that I would end up in criminal practice.

Criminal law came about more by experience than design. After rather more unsuccessful applications than I care to remember, I finally got some work experience. From there I became an outdoor clerk, sitting behind counsel in Crown Court trials, then a legal assistant and eventually a trainee solicitor. What drew me to criminal defence was the mixture of law and people. The consequences were real and immediate. You had to understand people from very different backgrounds, often at difficult moments in their lives, and explain complicated things clearly. It was challenging, unpredictable and never remotely dull.

And I was lucky enough to work with some exceptionally committed lawyers.

How does your experience of being a criminal solicitor, help you as a High Court judge?

Probably more than I appreciated when I first became a judge. A solicitor often sees a case from beginning to end: the client, the evidence, the procedure, the practical problems and, inevitably, the things that go wrong. Criminal practice teaches you very quickly to identify the real issue, distinguish what matters from what doesn't and make decisions when the information is imperfect and the pressure is real.

It also teaches you how to communicate. You meet people who may be frightened, angry, vulnerable or simply completely unfamiliar with the legal system. There is no great virtue in explaining something perfectly if the person listening hasn't understood it. That lesson translates directly into judging.

Solicitors and barristers have different roles and develop different expertise; neither is inherently superior. Solicitors bring analytical and legal skills, but also case management, organisation, dealing with people and an understanding of the practical realities of litigation. They are used to dealing with competing demands, making judgments about priorities and finding practical solutions when things do not go according to plan. I have found all of those skills valuable as a judge.

But perhaps the most important lesson was this: a case that is one of many for the lawyers may be the most important thing happening in the lives of the people involved. That includes defendants, victims, witnesses and others affected by the proceedings. The legal process should not become so familiar to those working within it that we lose sight of its significance for those who do not. I try not to forget that as a judge.

Which of your other previous roles has been most useful?

That is difficult, because I think the honest answer is the combination rather than any single role.

After leaving partnership I developed a portfolio career: advisory work, regulatory and quasi-judicial roles, arbitration, public appointments and, eventually, appointments as a Deputy High Court Judge, a judge of the Supreme Court of the British Indian Ocean Territory and a judge of the Upper Tribunal. If forced to pick, I would probably choose the decision-making roles. There is quite a profound shift from being the person whose job is to advance a case to being the person who has to decide between two competing arguments. I discovered that I was more drawn to deciding the issue than advancing one side of it.

Sitting as a Deputy High Court Judge was obviously the most direct preparation. But breadth of experience makes you more comfortable with unfamiliar subject matter. You learn that knowing little or nothing about the particular area of law does not mean that the process of decision making is new to you. The challenge is to find your way into the subject, identify the questions that matter and concentrate on what you actually need to decide. Whatever the field, the essentials are remarkably similar: understand the evidence and arguments, apply the law, listen properly and make a reasoned decision.

So the slightly unhelpful answer is: all of them.

What are counsel's best and worst habits?

The best advocates make the judge's job easier. I don't mean by making concessions or avoiding difficult arguments. I mean that they identify the real issues, know the papers and the law, and present their case clearly and proportionately.

The very best also listen. They answer the question the judge actually asked, rather than the question they were hoping to be asked. They recognise when the judge has got the point and move on. And good advocates are willing to acknowledge a weakness. Pretending an obvious difficulty does not exist rarely makes it disappear; acknowledging it often increases an advocate's credibility. The best advocates can also explain why, despite that weakness, it should not determine the outcome.

As for less helpful habits, unnecessary repetition is fairly high on the list. If a point was good the first time, it rarely improves on the fourth outing. Another is taking every conceivable point simply because it can be taken. One of the marks of really good advocacy is knowing what not to argue and when enough is enough.

Finally, courtesy matters. Robust advocacy does not require discourtesy to opponents, witnesses or court staff.

Good advocacy, in the end, is an exercise in judgment rather than theatre: know your case, know what matters, listen to the tribunal and then say what needs to be said.

Introduction and questions by Laura Kenyon

- Criminal barrister at Red Lion Chambers

Breastfeeding at the Bar



As junior practitioners in the criminal courts, the most demanding working days are often the ones not when we are in trial, but covering a multitude of different hearings for our colleagues in chambers. For the most part, these aren't confirmed until gone 5pm the day before. On such days, we arrive at court at the crack of dawn with a view to reviewing any overnight emails about the day's cases, liaising with opposing counsel, finding out when our clients are due to arrive on prison transport, booking and locating a conference room for bail conferences or remote hearings, speaking to the court clerk about digital case access or hearing clashes, and then circling back to see a defendant in custody. All before the court sits at 10am.

Once the day's hearings start, it's a tightrope; a late-arriving opponent or a judge taking longer to determine a sentence than the list office expected can have a domino effect on the rest of our day, leaving us to run, frantically, apologetically, between courtrooms (virtual or otherwise) and clients, all whilst keeping a meticulous note of attendance to provide back to our colleagues and those who instruct us. Respite comes between the hours of 1 and 2pm, during which we can grab a quick sandwich (if facilities allow) and rush back to the cells to see a client who may have been wondering what has been going on since you last saw them at 09:55.

It was against this backdrop that I returned to work from maternity leave, still breastfeeding my 8-month-old. I knew that I would have to express milk at court, and that I needed to be pro-active about finding out how to make that work amid all of the other day-to-day juggling.

Fortunately, HMCTS published guidance in 2019 which stated their commitment to facilitating breastfeeding and expressing milk at court. It seemed to me that upon my return to work (in 2025) I simply needed to find out what those facilities actually were in each court. This information wasn't readily available online, so I contacted Claire Davies KC, leader of the South Eastern Circuit, to see if she could help. What we thought would be a simple exercise in asking a question and receiving an answer from each court, turned into something of a mission for Claire and her PA, Harriet Devey.

Whilst the breastfeeding policy had been in place for years, it seemed that none of my regular courts had ever been asked how they put it into practice. A common response was, if you can let us know in advance when you'll need it, we'll happily book you out a room. The problem with that, as any criminal junior will know, is that we often *can't* let courts know in advance when we'll be there. Another issue was some court staff not immediately appreciating that this could not be an ordinary conference room. Many have windows, or don't lock, and the last thing you need is a knock on the door every 5 minutes from different counsel, all looking to use a room for conferences or remote hearings.

However, once Claire and her team started pushing for appropriate accommodations to be made, we sensed a real enthusiasm from court staff and resident judges for putting policy into practice. I did have to have some slightly awkward conversations with oblivious security staff, but on the whole, everyone who I came across dealt with me kindly and sensitively, and sensible decisions were made about the space to allocate to breastfeeding and expressing.

Now, as a result of our efforts, I am gratified to see the breastfeeding facilities being clearly advertised in all of my regular courts, and the SEC has been able to publish a list of available facilities to its members. Having been unaware of the scope of the Circuit's work prior to this experience, it was a great example of how real progress can be achieved when we ask for help from those who are there to help and support us.

Maya Chopra

- Criminal barrister at Farringdon Chambers

Supporting Litigants in Person



The volunteers at Support Through Court helping keep justice accessible

"Timely intervention and help from a volunteer can be the difference between a case continuing on track or being adjourned or dismissed, benefiting both the litigant and the judiciary."

Support Through Court is a charity that provides free practical, emotional and digital help to litigants in person. Every 90 seconds, their dedicated volunteers support people before, during and after court, helping them understand papers, prepare what to say in court, and face proceedings with dignity and confidence. The charity helps anybody who needs their help, regardless of income.

This year, Support Through Court celebrates its 25th anniversary of supporting thousands of litigants in person through a national network across England and Wales. Today, it continues to evolve its services in response to areas of unmet legal need.

Lisa and Rosalind – two volunteers from Support Through Court's Central Family Court Office – provide their reflections on the value of the charity's work and the real positive impact they have seen on the people who need their help. Having worked in family law previously, they reflect on the benefits of the charity's services both for individuals facing court alone and the judicial system, and why they would encourage others in the profession to support the charity's work.

"Having had an extended career break after practising as a family law barrister, I was looking for something meaningful to do that would fit around the demands of a young family. I stumbled upon the charity Support Through Court and was excited at the prospect of volunteering in a law-related setting where I could put my skills and experience to good use.

Before volunteering, I had not appreciated how little legal aid was available for family law cases, so I was somewhat shocked at the huge number of litigants in person coming through our doors. The problems they encounter are numerous and varied. People seek our help, unable to see their children, fearing domestic abuse or wanting to get a divorce. Most of our clients are anxious about attending court alone, especially when the other party is represented.

As volunteers, we can really make a difference. Although we do not give legal advice, we can guide clients through each stage of their case, including making applications, drafting statements and explaining court orders. At the hearing itself, we give practical and emotional support, often resulting in the person feeling that they are on a more-even footing in the courtroom. Timely intervention and help from a volunteer can be the difference between a case continuing on track or being adjourned or dismissed, benefiting both the litigant and the judiciary. For me, every client I help gives me a feeling of satisfaction."

Lisa Stanton, former family barrister at St Albans Chambers

"Many of the clients who seek support from our charity are not litigants in person by choice: having been denied legal aid, they have been unable to get legal representation in the Family Courts. This was not the case when I worked for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) as a Family Court Adviser in private law over 15 years ago. When I became aware of Support Through Court, I was keen to offer my services to support those people who find themselves thrust into a legal minefield, which may be both bewildering and frightening for them.

There have been clients during the past year who have expressed gratitude for the support they have received, both in and out of court. This gratitude has occasionally taken the form of tearful hugs, thank you cards and small gifts.

I feel it is vital to listen to their stories and to make every effort to give them both practical and emotional support, including information about court procedures so they don't feel so anxious and unprepared for their time in court and have the best possible chance of presenting their cases."

Rosalind Park, former Family Court Advisor at the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass)

SUPPORT THROUGH COURT

Every year, Support Through Court helps thousands of people navigate court proceedings without legal representation. This support is only possible thanks to the generosity of donors and supporters.
To make a donation or find out how you can help keep justice accessible for everyone, visit www.supportthroughcourt.org**.**

To discuss joining their exclusive supporters' network, please contact Jacob Crossley, Deputy Senior Supporters Manager, at J.Crossley@Supportthroughcourt.org**.**

Young Citizens Mock Trials COMPETITION

Bar Mock Trial (ages 15-18) and Magistrates' Courts Mock Trial (ages 12-14)

Some of the most encouraging experiences I have had in the courts have involved not lawyers or judges, but school students.

Each year, through the Schools Mock Trial Competition, young people are given the opportunity to play the roles of advocates, witnesses, defendants and jurors. They are asked to analyse evidence, formulate questions, present arguments and think critically about fairness and justice. I am always impressed by the seriousness with which they approach the task and by the insight they bring to it.

For many students, this is their first real encounter with the law. The courts can often seem distant, mysterious or relevant only to those who work within them. Mock trials help to change that perception. They demonstrate that the justice system is not an abstract institution but a practical process founded on evidence, reasoned argument and the rule of law. For those students who have had contact, personally or through family members, it is an opportunity to see and understand that the process really is based upon an impartial and fair process.

The educational value of the competition is obvious. Participants develop confidence, public-speaking skills and the ability to think analytically under pressure. Its wider importance lies in helping young people understand how disputes are resolved in a democratic society and why fairness, impartiality and due process matter.

I have always found the conversations with students to be one of the most rewarding, and terrifying, aspects of these events. They ask thoughtful and perceptive, sometimes too perceptive, questions about the work of judges and lawyers, how decisions are reached, and what motivates people to enter the profession. Their curiosity is a reminder that there is a genuine appetite among young people to understand the justice system when they are given the opportunity to engage with it.

The competition also provides an important opportunity to widen access to the profession. Many participants will have had little or no contact with lawyers or judges before taking part. Seeing legal professionals volunteer their time and share their experience helps to make the law feel more accessible and encourages talented young people from all backgrounds to consider futures they may never previously have imagined.

None of this happens without volunteers.

The Schools Mock Trial Competition depends on the support of judges, barristers, solicitors, legal executives, academics and law students who are willing to give a little of their time. Whether acting as judges, providing feedback, helping schools prepare or assisting with the organisation of events, volunteers make an enormous contribution to the experience of every participant.

The commitment is relatively small. The impact can be profound.

At a time when public understanding of the justice system cannot be taken for granted, initiatives such as the Schools Mock Trial Competition have never been more important. They help young people understand not only what the law is, but why it matters.

As preparations begin for the next competition, I hope members of the profession will consider becoming involved. Supporting these students is an investment in the future of the legal profession, the rule of law and public confidence in our system of justice.

Most of all, it is an opportunity to inspire the next generation.

The Schools Mock Trial Competition is seeking volunteers. I would encourage colleagues across the profession to take part. The experience is immensely rewarding, and the difference you can make to a young person's understanding of the law may last a lifetime.







Photographs courtesy of Young Citizens

The Hon Mrs Justice McGowan DBE

- High Court Judge and Bencher of the Middle Temple



LAW IN ART

Gerard David, *The Judgement of Cambyses* (consisting of *Arrest of Sisamnes* and *Flaying of Sisamnes*), 1498, oil on oak, each 182 x 159 cm, Groeningemuseum, Bruges, Belgium.

> Otanes' father, Sisamnes, had been raised as a judge to the royal bench; but then, because he has taken a bribe in exchange for delivering a crooked verdict, King Cambyses had had him butchered, and flayed from top to toe. Then, when the skinning was finished, thongs had been made from the hide and used to string the chair on which Sisamnes had always sat to deliver his judgements. After this stringing was completed, Cambyses had appointed Sisamnes' own son as judge, in place of the freshly executed and skinned Sisamnes. 'Bear well in mind,' Cambyses has instructed him, 'the chair on which you sit as you deliver your judgements.'

(Extract from Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Tom Holland (Penguin, 2013), Book V, para. [25], p. 346.)

Thus, in Book V of his *Histories*, Herodotus describes a grisly episode in the reign of Cambyses (the ruler of the Achaemenid Empire between 530 and 522 BC). A judge, Sisamnes, had been found guilty of corruption. As punishment, he was flayed alive. Sisamnes' son, Otanes, was chosen as his successor. As a warning to discharge his office honestly, Otanes thereafter sat in judgment on a chair draped with his father's skin.

This is the story behind Gerard David's diptych, *The Judgement of Cambyses*, painted in oil on oak in 1498. The diptych is substantial, consisting of two panels each measuring approximately 182 by 159 cm, and now on display in the Groeningemuseum in Bruges. On the left, we see Sisamnes in his judicial robes looking apprehensive as Cambyses confronts him with the charge and a guard grips his right arm. We are left in no doubt of his guilt as, above Cambyses' head through an open arch, we see an earlier scene where Sisamnes, whom we recognise with his red robes and blue hat, is accepting a bribe. In the right panel, we now see Sisamnes tied down on a table, his skin being cut off by four men each going about his job in a methodical and professional manner. Cambyses looks on the scene surrounded by his retinue. Sisamnes' face is scrunched up in agony and his teeth clenched and bare. His pain is even more pronounced in his right hand, which is facing outwards with the fingers and thumb bent. The orange of his face contrasts sharply with the paleness of his body. As in the left panel, the right panel is complemented by another scene, this time in the top right. We can see a young man sitting on a chair seemingly draped in cloth. If we compare the scene with the main scene on the left panel, we



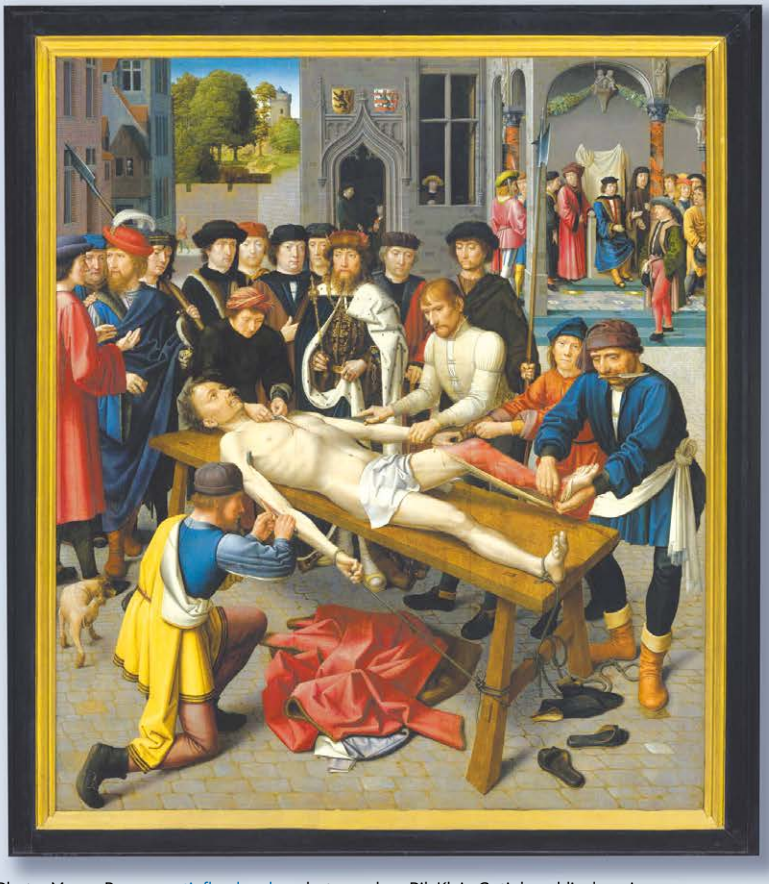


Photo: Musea Brugge, artinflanders.be, photographer: Rik Klein Gotink, public domain.

can see from the tiled flooring, the marble pillar and the stone cherubs that this is the same room and the young man is Otanes now sitting on his father's skin. The paleness of the drapery of Otanes' chair with its delicate folds contrasts sharply with the deep blue of the drapery of Sisamnes' chair with its geometric pattern. The painting is replete with detail, most notably the buildings and paraphernalia one would see in a fifteenth-century Flemish city. We are a long way from ancient Persia. There are also some rather entertaining dogs.

Gerard David (c.1460-1523) was a major artist of the Northern Renaissance who worked for most of his life in Bruges. A fairly limited body of work can be safely attributed to him, and it is only since the late-nineteenth century that critical attention in him has revived. *The Judgment of Cambyses* is perhaps now his best-known work, though it is untypical of his *oeuvre*. Almost all of his known works are religious scenes, several of which can be seen in the National Gallery in London.

The diptych is like an action sequence. The story unfolds from left to right, starting with the bribe and ending with Otanes as a judge. However, it is Cambyses' role as the ultimate dispenser of justice which is key. Absent from Herodotus' account, but included in David's diptych, is the arrest of Sisamnes in the left panel. In David's conception, Cambyses is present, confronting Sisamnes with his crimes, communicated to us by Cambyses' placing his right index finger onto his outstretched left thumb. Rather than simply giving final judgment, Cambyses is integrated into the whole system of justice. Indeed, he should be: as in our system, ancient justice derived from royal or imperial authority. The historical context can help us here. In the one to two decades before this painting was painted, Bruges had revolted against the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian, who ruled on behalf of his son who was not yet of age. The painting is likely commenting on Maximilian's inadequacies by presenting Cambyses as an *exemplum* of an ideal ruler.

Cambyses is not alone, however. In both panels, he is surrounded by a group of men. Just as Cambyses and Sisamnes are repeated in both panels, so are each of these people. One art historian, Maryan W. Ainsworth, has suggested, through technical examination of the underdrawing, that these are double-portraits of the aldermen of Bruges elected in 1496-97. It was not unusual in this period for scenes relating to justice to be produced. Another notable example is *The Justice of Emperor Otto III* produced by Dieric Bouts (c.1415-1475) for the Town Hall in Leuven. They were commissioned for public buildings to serve as a reminder for those in power to act justly. This painting was a way then for the aldermen to associate themselves with Cambyses' courtiers and, by extension, to let contemporary viewers know whose side they were on.

James Arthur Sharpe

• 42BR Barristers



A LIGHT IN THE DARK

Few subjects can claim the nearly universal level of moral condemnation afforded to acts of torture. 175 states have ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which imposes an absolute and non-derogable prohibition in international law. Yet despite this moral and legal consensus, the use of torture remains widespread. Over the last five years, Amnesty International has recorded reports of torture from a total of 141 countries. Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan E. Méndez, has described the huge loss of moral authority brought about the response of the United States to the terrorist attacks on 11th September 2001. However, a recent military court ruling has thrown out evidence obtained by CIA torture. Does this decision give reason for optimism about US engagement with international human rights norms and the rule of law?



That the US carried out acts amounting to torture against many of the High Value Detainees ("HVDs") is not in doubt. In 2014, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence released the executive summary of its report into the CIA's Rendition, Detention and Interrogation ("RDI") programme, which had run up until 2009. The report made a series of damning findings about the RDI programme, noting it *"was not an effective means of obtaining accurate information or gaining detainee cooperation"*. The CIA relied on enhanced interrogation techniques ("EITs") which the committee found *"were brutal and far worse than the CIA represented to policymakers"*, and were justified by the CIA by *"inaccurate claims"*. Detainees were moved between black sites around the world. One such location, Detention Site Cobalt, was later described by a military judge as *"like a dungeon…like an old Nazi concentration camp, and something out of a horror show"*. Despite claiming to have always used the *"least coercive technique possible"*, interrogators kept detainees awake for periods of up to 180 hours, during which they were kept shackled in stress positions, subjected to 'walling' (a technique whereby a detainee's head was repeatedly slammed against a wall), or waterboarding, which in the case of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was described in an internal CIA memo as *"a series of near drownings"*. The graphic brutality of this treatment can be seen in the drawings of Abu Zubaydah (www.abuzubaydah.com), some of which have been declassified for release, despite US government policy that claimed it was the holder of the copyright to the sketches.

Towards the end of the RDI programme, it became apparent to the US government that the material it had obtained

had little chance of being considered admissible in any subsequent prosecution of the detainees. The solution it chose was to conduct 'fresh' interrogations, which were to be carried out by the FBI in what was euphemistically referred to as 'clean teams'. The HVDs were transferred to Camp VII at Guantánamo, where they were greeted by the Camp Commander who assured them the conditions of detention were consistent with the obligations provided for under Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. Nonetheless, some detainees reported the conditions at Camp VII to be harsher than previous black site locations. The 'clean team' interrogations required the HVDs to be taken from Camp VII to a small site, known as Camp Echo II. The interrogators had been provided with material obtained by the CIA during the RDI interrogations, and they were instructed not to give a *Miranda* warning to the detainees. Interrogators failed to tell detainees their previous statements could not be used against them. When Khalid Sheikh Mohammed asked for a lawyer, he was told he had no right to one as he had not been charged. What happened next comes as no surprise. In the words of one military judge, one detainee, interrogated under virtually identical circumstances over the previous five or six years, *"did what he was trained to do: comply"*. The US government finally had what it regarded to be untainted confession evidence.

The legal untangling of this original sin has been monstrously complex. The motion to supress made by one of the 9/11 defendants, Ammar Al Baluchi, took more than seven years, spanning the tenure of more than seven different military judges, and amassing in excess of 31,000 pages of transcript. Gradually a trend began to emerge from the slow-moving machinery of the military court system. In 2023, in the USS Cole case, Judge Lanna Acosta ruled the 'clean team' confessions given by Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri should not be admitted on the grounds it would *"infect the trial with unfairness sufficient to make any resulting conviction a denial of whatever process is due"*. The government appealed, but Acosta's decision was upheld by the Court of Military Commission Review.

In April 2025, the then judge in the 9/11 case, Colonel Matthew McCall, described in a 111-page ruling how the statements given by Mr Al Baluchi were little more than a conditioned compliance from his experience of more than a thousand previous interrogations over the course of the preceding three-and-a-half years. In McCall's words, *"if he did not comply with his training and answer in the way that he had been taught, he knew he might be tortured again and lose any limited amenities that he had. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that* [he] *continued to implicate himself"*. It is notable that McCall's judgment makes repeated references to the binding obligations imposed by international law and the Convention Against Torture.

In August 2026, a third military judge took the same approach to the confessions made by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. The judgment makes for stark reading. Not only did the judge conclude that the 'clean teams' were *"insufficient to sever the psychological tether of his prior abuse"*, he remained subject to *"inherently coercive conditions"*, including sensory deprivation measures and shackling, and was deliberately denied advisement of his rights. The judge is yet to rule on similar applications by two other defendants in the 9/11 case Walid bin Attash and Mustafa al-Hawsawi. What makes this ruling the most significant of the three, is that a week before the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the US government announced it would not seek to appeal the ruling, ostensibly on the basis that it might imperil the currently trial date of June 2028.

The US government has never been more hostile to the international legal order, with its sanctions and threats to dismantle the International Criminal Court *"brick by brick"*. Whilst international law has been haunted by the moral stain of Guantánamo for a quarter of a century, there is a certain irony in its having provided a reminder of the power of the rule of law when it is deployed by tireless and committed advocates.





Thom Dyke

- Member of the Executive Committee of the Bar Human Rights Committee

A SNAPSHOT FROM THE EMPLOYMENT BAR

As we put the long, hot summer behind us, scan through our photos and look back on what we have been up to, hopefully there has been some fun alongside the work.

In the world of employment law, the overwhelming majority of preliminary hearings are conducted via video; so many of us sweltered from chambers or homes during hearings. Tribunal hearing rooms are fairly hit and miss as to whether they have air con – but at least there is no question of having to think about wigs or gowns! There is very much an issue about having a lengthy diary to hand as the wait between preliminary hearings, (which often take place about a year after issue) and final hearings is up to three years now. And the backlog, currently standing at just over 70,000 single claims (i.e. excluding the huge "multiples" in equal pay cases) is up by over 50% and is growing.

Why? More claims in, yes, but those claims are, we think, getting increasingly complex as litigants are using AI to identify causes of action for them. It seems AI is not being prompted to identify strong or plausible causes of action... so a simple two-day unfair dismissal case has all sorts of weird and wonderful add-ons making it a much more complex 4 day case. The irony of AI constantly asking us if we want documents to be summarized is not lost when a recent appeal judgment started by noting that the AI generated skeleton argument (in support of a single ground of appeal) was some 320 pages.

As for the holiday reading – for many of us this year, it involved getting up to date with the biggest changes to the black letter law in the last 15 years or so as the very many and varied changes included in the mammoth Employment Rights Act 2025 are starting to come into force. As well as reducing the qualifying period for unfair dismissal to 6 months (down from 2 years of service which had been needed previously), and getting rid of the cap on compensation, the Act introduces about 12 brand new causes of action, so a further increase in claims can be expected! I have just finished a talk on union access to workplaces and am now fully on top of the newly inserted Chapter 5ZA in the Trade Union Law Reform Consolidation Act 1992... section 70ZA(a) is just about tripping off the tongue.

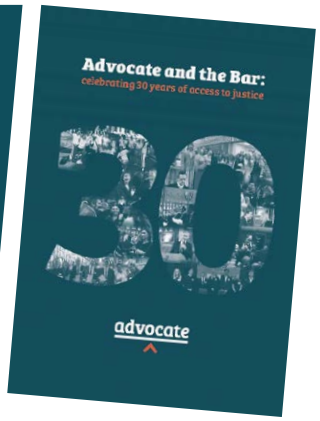
And now for a return to the substantive disputes ... For those who didn't get the right combination of the memo shown in one of my favourite snapshots of the summer ...



Rebecca Tuck KC

- Employment barrister at Cloisters

Thirty Years of Advocate: the Bar's Commitment in Action



This year, Advocate celebrates 30 years as the Bar's charity, connecting people who cannot afford legal help and cannot access legal aid with barristers willing to provide the specialist advice and representation they need, free of charge. Many things have changed in that time, but two things remain central: the simple but powerful founding principle that a lack of means should never be a barrier to accessing justice; and the incredible support and commitment of so many people that help us deliver on this mission.

Thirty years ago, Advocate began as the Bar Pro Bono Unit, with a part-time administrator and 350 volunteer barristers. Today, more than 5,000 barristers volunteer with us, and more than 7,000 help fund our work each year (including via the Authorisation to Practise process). Advocate now works across England and Wales and across every area of law, assessing applications and finding barristers with the expertise to help. We are supported in that work by the Bar Council, the Bar Standards Board, the Bar Mutual Indemnity Fund, the Inns of Court and the judiciary, as well as by chambers, barristers, clerks and chambers staff.

This is really something to be celebrated. At the same time, the need for our work is growing significantly. Between July 2025 and June 2026, Advocate received more than 5,600 applications – an increase of more than 34% compared to the previous year. The figures tell only part of the story. Applicants come to us facing problems with their housing, employment, families and other matters with profound consequences for their lives. Legal aid is unavailable for many of these issues, while the cost of legal advice is beyond many people's means. Delays in courts and tribunals can leave them living with uncertainty for longer.

A former applicant described what receiving help meant to them: *"The legal system can be terrifying and receiving the help from Advocate has been invaluable. The barrister was perfect to represent my voice at a time when I couldn't speak for myself."*

That is the difference we can make, together, through a single piece of work.

Advocate's role is to make that contribution possible. Our casework team identifies what help an applicant needs and seeks an appropriate volunteer. Work is staged and manageable: volunteers agree to undertake a particular piece of work – perhaps a piece of written advice, assistance with drafting, or representation at a specific hearing – rather than committing to an entire case. Alongside this work, Advocate has expanded specialist and on-the-day schemes that support people attending court without representation. We encourage a lasting culture of pro bono through the Pupil Pledge, Pro Bono Champions, the Chambers Pro Bono Framework, the Pro Bono Recognition List and the Bar Pro Bono Awards. We have established a mentoring scheme so that senior practitioners can support those more junior.

As a national charity, we have a caseworker based in every circuit in England and Wales. That matters because the cases people bring to us, the barristers available to help and the practical barriers to taking on work, differ from place to place. Local relationships help us understand those differences and respond to them.

The South Eastern Circuit is central to Advocate's work. Its barristers contribute expertise across an exceptional range of practice areas, while clerks and practice managers play a crucial role in helping members find room for pro bono alongside their other commitments, and making the connection between a request for assistance and a barrister able to provide it. We want to build on those relationships, hear where members see unmet need, and make it easier for barristers to find opportunities suited to their skills and capacity.

Our new three-year strategy is designed to ensure Advocate can continue to make the best use of the Bar's generosity as demand grows. We are improving our systems, data and processes so that we understand need more clearly and can match suitable cases more effectively. We will use that knowledge to strengthen our relationships across the circuits, engage more barristers in pro bono and work alongside other advice and support organisations.

Advocate has grown enormously in 30 years, but none of that growth would matter without the people who turn a request for help into action. To every South Eastern Circuit barrister who has accepted a case, reviewed an application, mentored a colleague or supported our work, and to the chambers teams who have made it possible: thank you. We hope you will continue to work with us as we shape the next chapter of pro bono at the Bar.

If you are a barrister interested in taking on a case, or a chambers looking to strengthen its approach to pro bono, we would love to hear from you. We would be delighted to see new barristers joining our panel (more experienced members can also join the panels of those who help to assess applications from clients, or who mentor pupils and junior barristers taking on pro bono cases), and we would like to encourage new and existing panel members to consider taking on a suitable case. We can share more information about appointing a Pro Bono Champion, joining the Chambers Pro Bono Framework and Pupil Pledge, and how financial donations from chambers and individuals (including as part of the Authorisation to Practise process) are vital to funding our operations. We can visit chambers to deliver a presentation, or to discuss what involvement could realistically look like for your chambers and what support we can provide.

Thank you, again, for all of the support you have given us over the last 30 years. We look forward to continuing to work together to help more people move through the legal system with the specialist support and confidence they need.

Sharif A. Shivji KC

- Chairman on Advocate's Board of Trustees
- Joint Head of Chambers at 4 Stone Buildings

Eleanor Holland

- Trustee and barrister at 4 Stone Buildings

South Eastern Circuit Annual Dinner 2026

The South Eastern Circuit held its Annual Dinner on Friday 30th October 2026 in the splendour of the Great Hall at Lincoln's Inn. The dinner (of salmon, followed by lamb) brought together members of the Bar, the Judiciary and invited guests to celebrate another year of our work together. The Leader of the Circuit, Claire Davies KC, spoke on the Circuit's work during the past year and gave thanks to those who contributed to our successes.

The guest of honour for this glittering, black-tie event was the former President of the Supreme Court, The Rt Hon The Baroness Hale of Richmond DBE PC FBA. Lady Hale delivered a fantastic and uplifting speech during dinner on the subject of "Reasons to be Cheerful", highlighting amid the doom and gloom the real progress we have made for our profession and for society.

Also in attendance were representative members of the other Circuits, former leaders of the Circuit and members of the Judiciary. The Circuit extends its warm thanks to the events team at Lincoln's Inn for their impeccable hospitality and assistance in hosting the dinner. See you all next year!

Harry O'Sullivan

- Recorder of the South Eastern Circuit





















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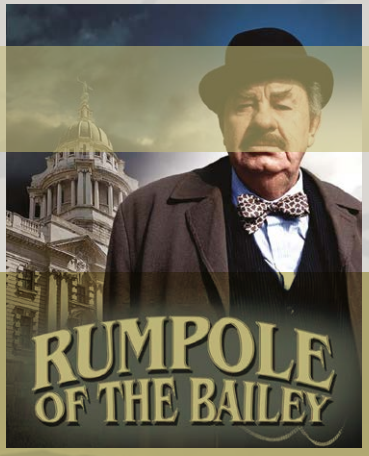
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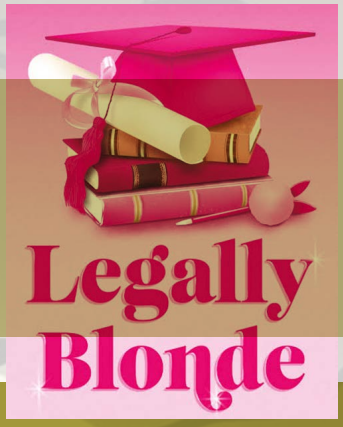












Images used are of book and video covers

From Atticus to Elle and a Rumpole and Kavanagh QC in between

When I was a Bar student, a young woman in my seminar group declared she intended to be the first woman judge in the House of Lords, this having been her dream since she was three years old. When I was three, I would not have known a Law Lord if he'd jumped up and slapped a well considered obiter dicta in my face, which was likely to have been smeared with one of my mother's lipsticks. Sadly for my fellow student, she didn't achieve her ambition. One Brenda Hale got there first and I have since learned to apply lipstick. But the memory got me thinking about why people may be drawn to the profession.

Family history and connections were probably more common when entry to the law was less egalitarian, and idealistic visions of fighting for justice will always be somewhere in the background. But give a truth serum to many a practising or wannabe lawyer and they will sheepishly admit to having been inspired, initially, by a fictional advocate.

Your age group will usually determine whether it's crumpled old wit Rumpole of the Bailey, glamorous Joyce Davenport from Hill Street Blues, the slick and impossibly attractive attorneys from LA Law, adorably lovelorn Ally McBeal, the crusty but principled Kavanagh QC, judicial stud Judge John Deed, the feisty Martha Costello from Silk, or the myriad of other memorable characters who have walked into a courtroom on screen and won the day or lost their way. Some of these are of their time. Others are timeless.

My earliest legal memory, if you can call it that, is from around the age of seven or eight. I had the mumps and feeling very sorry for myself, huddled on the sofa, mesmerised by one film about two children in dungarees wandering around a sleepy Southern town in the USA trying to glimpse a mysterious neighbour people only spoke of in whispers. I knew nothing of race and rape then but I knew a handsome hero when I saw one, and Gregory Peck, as the children's father, Atticus Finch had a nobility to make your heart ache.

Ask most lawyers what first drew them to the profession and a good number will say reading or watching To Kill a Mockingbird.

It forever set the media image of a great lawyer as that of a fiery advocate trying to save a man from the gallows. It's an extremely powerful image that embeds itself in a young mind.

Admittedly, defending a man accused of flashing grandmothers walking their dogs in the local park, on your first day in court, isn't quite so lofty a reach. Even so, perhaps Atticus Finch's best known line 'In these courts all men are created equal' applies – even pervs exposing their nether regions to horrified passersby deserve to be represented.

So, why does Atticus stand, for many, as the gold standard for what a lawyer is or should be?

In 2018 I hosted an event at Middle Temple Hall which included a debate 'Who is the greatest fictional lawyer?'. I invited speakers from across the profession to argue for their chosen fictional lawyer hero. The great and the good from the four Inns signed up to do so.

The widow and daughter of John Mortimer, creator of Rumpole attended the event to support Bernard Richmond KC who was speaking for grumpy old Horace, Ian McEwan who had created the character of Judge Fiona Maye in his novel, The Children Act sent his best wishes for my colleague George Butler who was speaking for Judge Maye. Suits heartthrob Gabriel Macht tweeted his best wishes for his speaker. The Charles Dickens Estate sent a message of support for the speaker for Mr Jaggers.

Obviously, Atticus Finch was one of the fictional heroes. The following was said on his behalf:

'Atticus Finch never has to rethink his position. He agrees to represent Tom Robinson because he believes in justice, even though it's not his usual field of practice. He takes on the case knowing he will lose because he believed that his client deserved the best representation he could get. He believed that justice should be colourblind, which was no small thing in the time and place he lived in. His skill as a lawyer is obvious as he politely destroys Bob Ewell's story. He's respectful in his questioning and doesn't engage in haranguing.'

Perhaps Atticus Finch, therefore, represents the kind of lawyer many of us aspire to be, someone to look up to.

However, perhaps we secretly know that Elle Woods is the lawyer we actually are; a bit clueless, messy personal life, mind full of seemingly useless information which occasionally comes in handy just when we need it – after all everyone knows that her forensic demolition of the main prosecution witness, due to her intimate knowledge of perm maintenance, is the greatest cross examination of all time -and maybe just a little insubstantial.

If we do see ourselves as Elle, perhaps we do ourselves a great disservice by comparing her to Atticus; the way we might compare ourselves to colleagues who we think have got it together far better than us. Miss Woods is deceptively frothy. Underneath the pinkness, she's tenacious and resilient. She's an effective advocate, a fully rounded woman and replete with bubbly character. She overcomes sexual harassment by senior legal opponents who underestimate her due to her physical appearance. She's kind, generous and always willing to help others, not least with her very effective bend and snap skills!





And when it comes to inspiring others, she's just as effective as Atticus. The internet also tells us that 'Legally Blonde is widely credited with inspiring a generation of women to pursue careers in law, contributing to a cultural shift where female law students in the US now outnumber male law students. Many female lawyers on social media attribute their career choice directly to watching the film as young girls, noting how Elle Woods made the profession feel accessible and empowering without requiring women to suppress their femininity.'

It was inevitable, therefore, that evening at Middle Temple, that Elle Woods was voted the greatest fictional lawyer at the debate. Frankly, the others didn't stand a chance. Two barristers and a solicitor turned up on the evening dressed as her, complete with Chihuahua in handbag (not a real one, I hasten to add), Tony Arlidge KC as master of ceremonies gave her a huge boost with his witty innuendos and the speaker for Elle, Jeremy Hall, delivered the funniest speech of the night.

Did she deserve to win?

Why not?

Law is fascinating to those who don't practise it. At any given time, there will be a legal drama in production on television and in film industry. We real life lawyers may not always like the depiction of the practitioners in a book or on the screen but at a time when fewer and fewer young law students are choosing to go into important areas such as family or criminal Law, we should be grateful to the creative fields for making law a desirable career choice.

Rehna Azim

- Family law barrister at 42BR Barristers
- Editor of itsalawyerslife.com and founder of the Legal Style Awards

Judges drinks at Middle Temple Gardens

12 June 2026























Court Café

Inner London Crown Court

When I think of Inner London, my immediate thought is "R.I.P Mercato Metropolitano". I'm not sure I'll ever get over it.

And don't even mention El Vergel. Some more veteran members of the Bar get misty-eyed and still talk in hushed and reverential tones of that fine institution. Again, gone before its time.

However, Terry's Café on Great Suffolk Street remains steadfast, and well worth a visit.

The relentless march of modernisation, and the gentrification of Elephant and Castle, has relegated some titans to memory.

Despite all of this, there was an oasis; the Court Café at Inner London Crown Court was one of those rare court cafés that has earned a loyal following among barristers, solicitors, court staff and regular court users alike.

The seating options were hysterical. The coffee was hot, food was served quickly, and the choice was wider than one might expect from such a small footprint.

Unfortunately the Café has suddenly closed. So here are some other options:

If you're interested in stretching your legs, there are other options, given the proximity to Borough.

Loathed as I am to continue to blow the spot up, Lo Banh Mi opposite the Court is incredible. I have yet to venture beyond the Old Quarter Banh Mi, because, well, if it ain't broke.

Best to try to slip out before 1pm, though as the queues are long, and I have seen many a counsel getting nervous waiting for their order at ten to two, and then running back to court whilst inhaling a perfect banh mi.

I'd also recommend St John Bakery further up the road towards London Bridge. Why? Because, Fergus Henderson.

Mark Watson

- Criminal barrister at Mountford Chambers, and a very greedy boy.

Briefs, Barristers & the Sunshine State

No Objections From the Brits



Tyler Smith (33 Bedford Row), Kellina Gannon (Goldsmith Chambers), Kitan Ososami (One Pump Court) and Jennifer Morris (9BR) received scholarships from the South Eastern Circuit to attend the Gerald T. Bennett Prosecutor/Public Defender Trial Training Program held at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

They were led by Cameron Brown KC (Red Lion Chambers) who accompanied them as faculty on the course.

How do you kick off an unforgettable week of advocacy? If you're us, you start by diving headfirst into the magic of Walt Disney World in Orlando. We traded our wigs for swimsuits, spending an epic day conquering terrifying water slides and chasing adrenaline rushes. Facing down those summits together completely broke the ice, perfectly setting the stage for a whirlwind week of advocacy.

We may have started as strangers, however, by the end of it, we could rattle off each other's Dunkin' Donuts order by heart. Between brainstorming and travelling, we also managed to squeeze in some serious "cultural research" checking off a staggering number of legendary US fast-food establishments from our collective bucket list.













With our fast-food bucket list ticked off, it was time to transition from the diner drive-thru to a fictional crime scene. We were incredibly lucky to attend the prestigious Gerald T. Bennett Training Program at the University of Florida, Levin College of Law, courtesy of scholarships from the South Eastern Circuit. The case of the week felt straight out of a movie: a fictitious armed robbery at a classic American diner. Buried under mountains of witness statements, depositions and plea-deal paperwork, our team split up for court. Jennifer and Kellina bravely volunteered as tribute for the Prosecution, while Kitan and I stepped up to nobly defend our clearly "innocent" felon.

The week quickly evolved into a profound deep dive into the art of the courtroom. We spent our days learning from the best in the business, listening to insights from State Attorneys, Public Defenders and Judges, who broke down every facet of an American jury trial. We studied everything from voir dire and opening statements to examinations-in-chief. The undeniable highlight, however, was a stellar masterclass in cross-examination delivered by Cameron Brown KC. After refining our approaches, we broke into smaller workshops to put our theory into practice. Known affectionately as the "Brits", we initially focused on demonstrating our distinct courtroom style. But as the days rolled on, the lines began to blur. We couldn't help but adopt the vibrant flamboyance and fierce passion of our US colleagues, happily tossing out a few increasingly theatrical objections just to keep everyone on their toes.



> *"The value of this experience really came to light when we were divided into smaller advocacy groups led by experienced attorneys, with faculty from the University and Circuit Judges providing feedback.*
>
> *American courtroom advocacy is unapologetically thematic, dramatic and engaging, and it was fascinating to watch the difference in style. We were encouraged to experiment, tell the story of the case, use the occasional flourish and generally embrace the idea that advocacy needs not be quite so restrained – or indeed, quite so typically British. Our exercises were filmed, so there was nowhere to hide: we could watch ourselves back afterwards while faculty dissected what worked, what did not, and how we could utilise our voice to captivate a jury. It was an invaluable opportunity to borrow some of the Americans' courtroom theatre, whilst working out which parts might survive the journey back across the Atlantic.*
>
> *Our American hosts also made sure we experienced a little of Gainesville beyond the university, organising a walk along the La Chua Nature Trail. Despite the drought, there was no shortage of Florida's most famous residents – the alligators. The wildlife encounter that received rather less enthusiasm was a gigantic spider, the size of a human hand."*
>
> Jennifer Morris

As the intensive course began to wind down, it was time for us to step up in a completely different venue: hosting the highly anticipated "Brits Night." The faculty wasted no time informing us that the bar had been set incredibly high by previous cohorts.

Kellina Gannon, our pub quiz co-host with Cameron Brown KC, had the following to say regarding this legendary evening:

> "We had the opportunity to host a 'Brits Night' in turn demonstrating in the best of British traditions, a proper British evening – Pimm's and Gin and Tonics followed by a pub quiz in our very own 'Saucy Sue Pub'. The night started with a tutorial on witness handling, with the episode of Captain Blackadder being Court Martialled played. What followed was ten rounds of general knowledge ('what drink do you split the G to'), cockney rhyming slang, bizarre laws, and very British problems.
>
> By the end of the evening, attendees, faculty members and Judges grouped into teams were sprinting to the front of the room, answers in hand that the only acceptable response for Brits when the weather hits 22°C, is to declare a heatwave and panic-buy disposable BBQs.
>
> The night ended with a group selfie, Americans trying on our British wigs and the realisation that, for all the differences between British and American legal traditions, there was one thing capable of bringing everyone together: Cadbury's chocolate and British treats as prizes for the winners."

Not everything would survive contact with an English courtroom, and we suspect some of our newly acquired enthusiasm for objections may need to remain firmly in Florida but the emphasis on simplicity, storytelling and connecting with a jury certainly will.

None of us would have had the opportunity without the support of the South Eastern Circuit and Cameron Brown KC, who somehow managed the dual role of faculty member and unofficial leader of the British delegation. We are enormously grateful to the Circuit for continuing to offer junior members of the Bar access to an experience that would otherwise be difficult to replicate.

If you are a fellow member of the Junior Criminal Bar looking for a sign, this is it: apply for this course. It is a rare opportunity to step outside your comfort zone; examine the habits you have developed in court and experiment with an entirely different style of advocacy. But the real value of the week extended far beyond the courtroom.

Somewhere between the advocacy exercises, diner food, alligators, questionable objections and Brits Night, we arrived as colleagues and left as genuine friends. Those friendships, and an alarming number of shared memories, will undoubtedly follow us back to court, ready to be revisited whilst sitting on a broken chair on a rainy afternoon in the absolute grubbiest of robing rooms.

Tyler Smith

- Barrister at 33 Bedford Row Chambers

A Day in the Life of a Senior Crown Advocate

A day as a Senior Crown Advocate, as per a self-employed advocate, rarely goes exactly to plan – and I guess that is part of the attraction.

My day usually starts with that continued preparation for my cases listed at court or pre-charge: reviewing evidence, considering the issues and working with CPS and defence colleagues to ensure that we are ready for the day ahead, or a future date.

One of the things I value most about the role is the collegiate environment. You work closely with reviewing lawyers, caseworkers, and other CPS colleagues, as well as investigators and the defence. Having direct access to the people involved in the investigation and prosecution of a case makes a real difference, particularly when dealing with complex cases or matters requiring prompt action.



Shutterstock

Having previously practised at the self-employed Bar, I have found that the advocacy itself is not fundamentally different. The key distinction is the support and access that come with being part of a large multi-disciplinary organisation, and a broader Civil Service, with all the opportunities that brings.

Within the CPS, direct lines of communication and access to the organisation's structures and systems make collaboration much easier.

Although I remain an independent advocate and counsel, I am also a Crown Prosecutor. That means taking ownership of my cases and making decisions at court, rather than focusing solely on advocacy. It is a combination of responsibilities that I find both challenging and rewarding.

The CPS has a substantial advocacy team, with approximately 250 Crown Advocates and growing, and advocates working at different levels of seniority and experience, including Senior Crown Advocates ('SCAs'), Principal Crown Advocates ('PCAs) and King's Counsel.

As an SCA I conduct Grade 4 prosecution work and I am also part of a wider CPS community of lawyers and paralegals, sharing the same commitment to the effective and fair administration of justice. Part of that commitment includes providing training in my areas of expertise and having an input with aspects of how the CPS creates and implements policies, in addition to my role as a Pupil Supervisor.

Ultimately, the role combines the independence and challenge of advocacy with the benefits of being employed and being part of that wider team.

The variety means that no two days are quite the same, and there is always something new to learn. Above all, it is rewarding to work alongside talented colleagues and play a part in delivering justice.

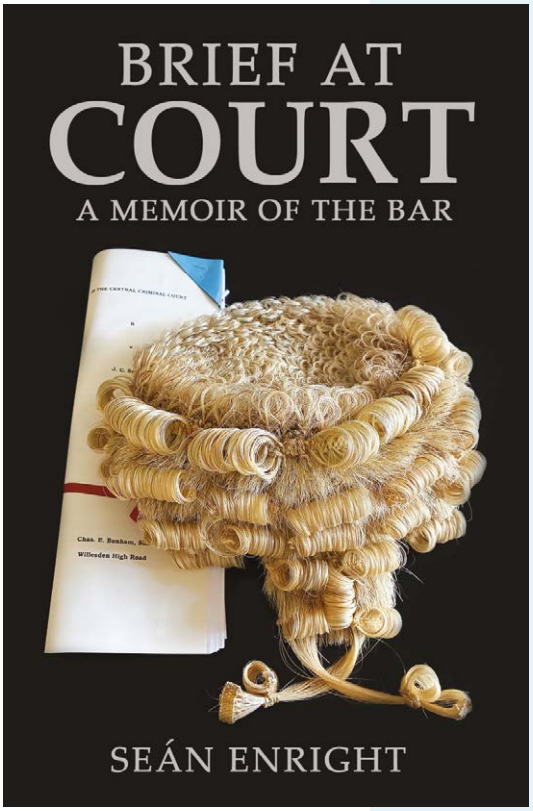


Rio Pahlavanpour

- Senior Crown Advocate with the CPS

HHJ Enright's Memoir: A Review

Publisher Candy Jar Books



Michael Procter

- Practising barrister at Fenners Chambers, Cambridge

Divided into 42 chapters, each concisely, elegantly and drily written, this memoir covers Judge Enright's long and varied career at the Bar and stops just short of his appointment as a Circuit Judge. That Judge Enright is already a published author of historical works on Irish history is obvious from the crisp, prose style. Those expecting a string of interesting and humorous anecdotes of a rich and varied life at the Bar will not be disappointed: there is the narrative of Judge Fred Beezley's "Judgement of Solomon" involving knives and forks, the salutary story of a drunken barrister's final closing speech at the Old Bailey, the story of the "Penis Enlargement Company" fraud trial and many more.

Judge Enright also covers legal personalities from a bygone age: quixotic, eccentric characters, judges and barristers, the like of which we are unlikely to see again, whose lives had been forged through traumatic WWII experiences. The author covers his involvement in the Lawrence Inquiry, and there are chapters entitled "Difficult judges", "Kind Judges" "Paid Late, Paid Badly and Sometimes Not Paid At All" and "Throw the Brief from a Train".

However, there is quite often a seriousness of intent that runs through the memoirs, and an empathy and understanding for all the individuals the author describes.

What's obvious is that the author's approach to his own career is not that of a "greasy pole climber". He is not dazzled by status and position and many of the tales he recounts are shocking in what they reveal of how far we have come in making some progress against deeply entrenched class hierarchy, racism, misogyny, homophobia, and discrimination of all types including disability. As a judge, Judge Enright often exudes an air of traditionalism but I found large parts of the book, startlingly progressive.

In 2026, in these times of a seemingly impregnable Crown Court backlog, sparse public resources, and a crumbling Crown Court infrastructure, a feeling of despair might not be misplaced but these memoirs display, nonetheless, a strong ray of hope: They are an invaluable historical reminder *as to just how far we have come,* and *how much has been achieved* that perhaps, current practitioners can take for granted.

A very personal thread also runs through this book, as the author reveals some of the not inconsiderable personal struggles that he has faced. I will not divulge their precise contents here, save what Judge Enright movingly notes: *"When I started at the Bar, I did not think that there was any problem that could not be overcome or just endured, and time has proved me wrong."*

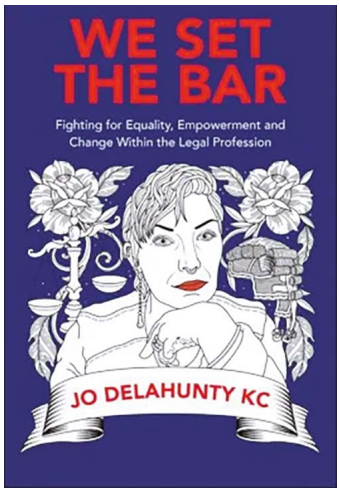
Whether Judge Enright intended it or not, there is, for this reader at least, a palpable sense of non-naïve, pragmatic idealism in this memoir: Warts and all – this is really a love letter to the Bar. Amongst the tales of antediluvian woe, there are recurrent tales, told with warmth, affection and respect for those members of the Bar, judiciary and court staff who have *always upheld* the highest standards even when they were not written down, who had the courage to show the way to future and necessary reform, and who showed kindness, support, and compassion to those who were most in need of it.

If this memoir is the first in an ongoing series, then I, for one, will be following the author's next volume, and I suspect many others will too.

https://www.candy-jar-store.co.uk/product/brief-at-court-a-memoir-of-the-bar

We Set the Bar

Publisher Bristol University Press



I know this must be one of the most reviewed law (?) books of the year but please bear with. Is it an easy read? Hell no. Is it important you read it? Definitely.

Delahunty is an extremely high-profile, award-winning KC. To those who don't know her well, she is a long-standing friend of the Circuit, mentor and champion of the vulnerable and downtrodden and was awarded Freedom of the City of London. In court, she is formidable, a tactician and an artist.

This book, which Delahunty describes as a 'love letter' to the profession, is a breath of fresh air. I heard about this book whilst it was in the pipeline. And it had been in the pipeline for a very long time. In fact, from the time that Delahunty led me herself, back in 2015.

I was looking forward to this book. But it was not an easy read. It took me an extremely long time to finish it, reading small chunks and having to put it down. Is it her writing? No, this book is like her cross-examination, carefully crafted, well thought out and a piece of art. The reason why it was not an easy read was because how much at times, it resonated with my own experiences at the Bar.

Whilst by far the most harrowing read of all was Eve's lived experience, which Delahunty recounts in the starkest of terms, there are inspirational tales, many from people I look up to or are good friends. Most important of all, the message that We Set the Bar, We Are the Bar is heard loud and clear. I for one will be responding to the call, led by Delahunty of course.

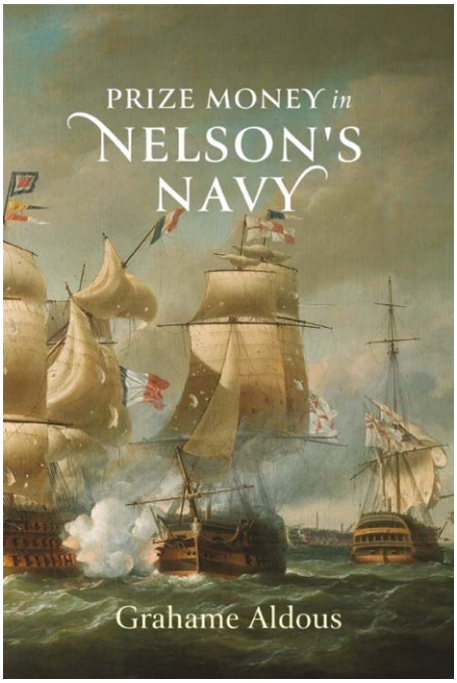
https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/we-set-the-bar

Rachel Chan

• 42BR Barristers

Prize Money in Nelson's Navy

Publisher Boydell & Brewer



Imagine a world where the world's navies capture ships on the high seas as part of an economic war to further their own interests in conflicts, and all on the basis of their own view as to the applicability of international law.

In ***Prize Money in Nelson's Navy*** Aldous tells the story of how it was done in the Georgian navy by the masters of the art of prize capture at seas, while protecting relationships with allies and neutrals. The author captures the attention of the reader, examining how command of the seas was about economic survival and the funding and execution of successful military conflicts. His analysis of the amazing salty stories revealed by contemporary Georgian case reports shows that British courts applied English law to further the war effort, lifting prize capture out of plunder and pillage and making it a more effective form of warfare.

In this book, Aldous recounts how, whilst fighting the French, the Royal Navy's most significant admirals, Nelson and St Vincent, fought each other in the courts over a period of four years, each claiming a share of prize money worth enough to buy a county estate. He examines who won, and why, and what it tells us about the workings of the Royal Navy reveals an aspect of naval history that has not previously been explored.

Prize cases before the courts also provide a window into unseen parts of Georgian life, including the role of women as executrices of their husbands' estates bringing actions over prize money in their own names, providing insight into the world of Jane Austen, both in her books and in the lives of her naval brothers.

GRAHAME ALDOUS KC, barrister, judge, ocean sailor and naval historian completed his doctorate at King's College, London

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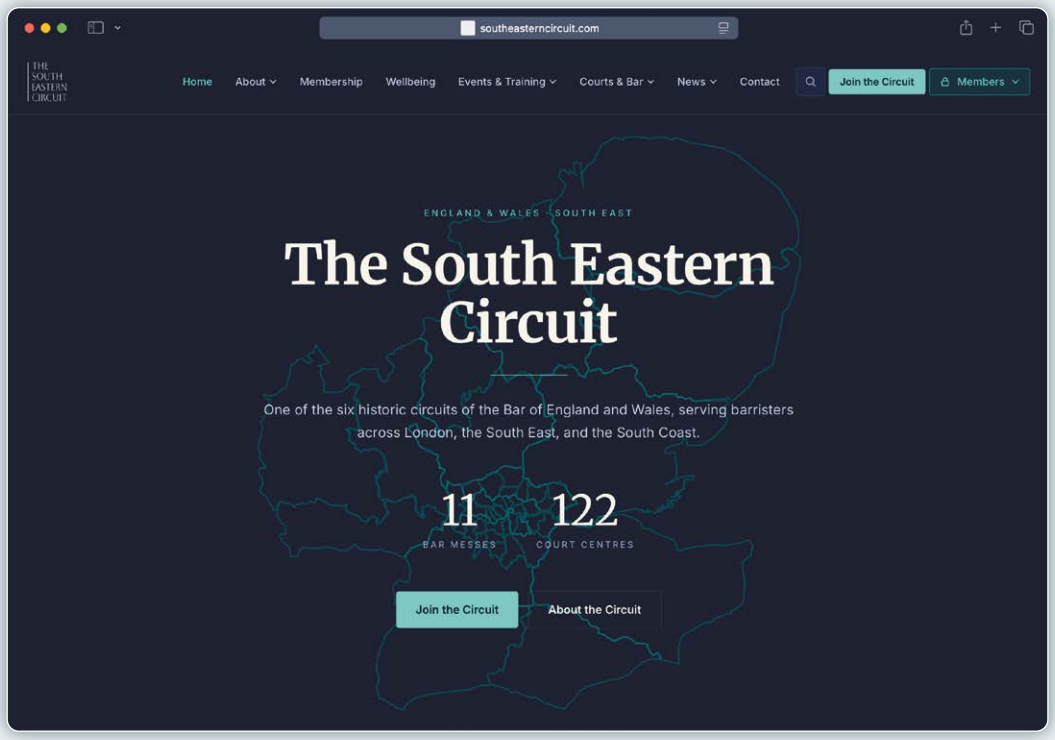
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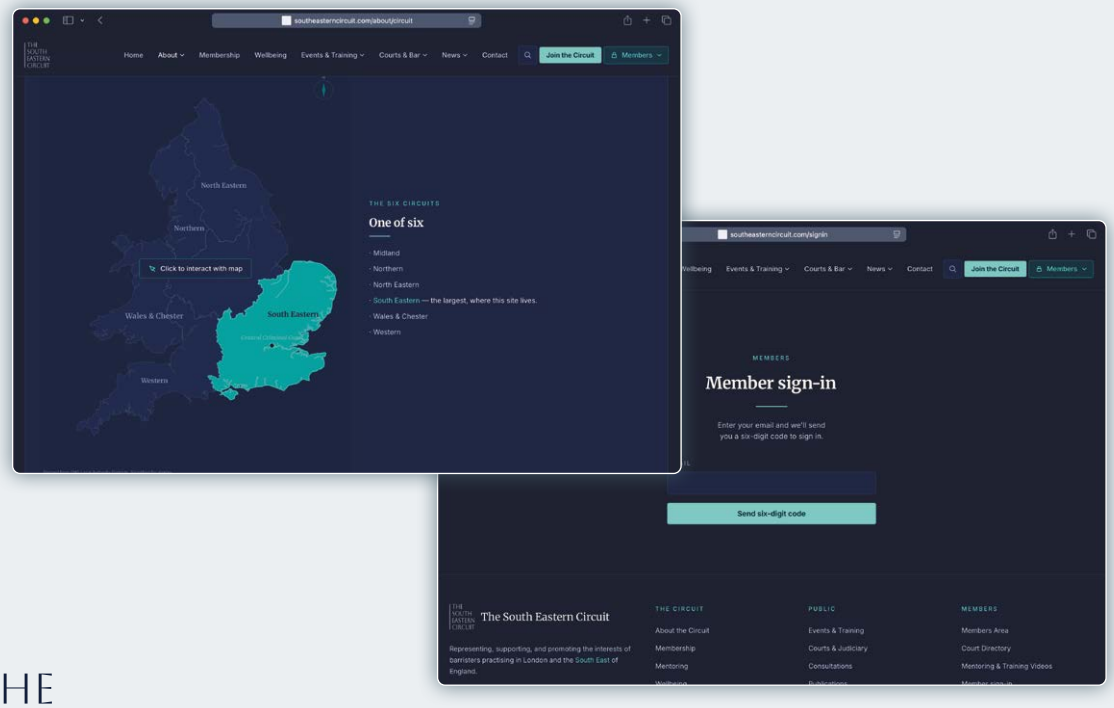
Review edited by Rachel Chan

• 42BR Barristers

South Eastern Circuit website

Check out our new website at: https://southeasterncircuit.com





THE SOUTH EASTERN CIRCUIT

The South Eastern Circuit
YOUR CIRCUIT. YOUR VOICE.



BAR MESS REPORTS

Bar Messes are a vital part of life on the Circuit, both for social and professional reasons.

Please do support your local Mess and get involved with their activities.

Cambridge & Peterborough

Chair: Azza Brown
Junior: Emma Fielding and Sally Hobson (rep)

Central Criminal Court

Chair: Tom Little KC
Junior: Philip McGhee

Central London

Chair: James Thacker KC
Junior: Emilie Morrison
Woolwich Crown Court: George Penny
Inner London Crown Court: Alex Matthews
Central London County Court: Taylor Blair
Southwark Crown Court: Faras Baloch

East Anglian

Chair: Stephen Rose KC
Junior: Joanne Eley

Essex

Chair: Allan Compton KC
Junior: Marc Brown and Laureen Husain (rep)

Hertfordshire & Bedfordshire

Chair: Kevin Molloy
Junior: Fiona McAddy

Kent

Chair: Nina Ellin KC
Junior: Stacey-Lee Holland,
Amy Nicholson (rep) and Emin Kandola (rep)

North London

Chair: Philip Misner
Junior: Jessica Peck
Harrow Crown Court: John Warrington
Wood Green Crown Court: Shabeena Azhar
Snaresbrook Crown Court: Sonya Saul

Surrey & South London

Chair: William Hughes KC
Junior: Gabby Lewis
Isleworth Crown Court: Neil Griffin
Kingston Crown Court: Keith Hadrill
Guildford Crown Court: Ryan Richter
Croydon Crown Court: Gabby Lewis

Sussex

Chair: Alan Gardner KC
Junior: Sarah Thorne
Criminal: James Hay
Civil & Family: Charmaine Wilson

Thames Valley

Chair: Daren Samat
Junior: Adam Williams
Reading Crown Court: Tom Godfrey

CAMBRIDGE AND PETERBOROUGH BAR MESS REPORT



Members of the Cambridge & Peterborough Bar Mess, now called the Cambridgeshire Bar Mess, voted in a new Constitution and a Harassment and Bullying Policy. A reminder that new members are always welcome and those interested should please email abigail.robinson@drystone.com for an application form.

On 11th September 2026, we held our annual Bar Mess formal dinner at Magdalene College, Cambridge. A perfect



setting on a warm late summer evening for pre-dinner drinks on the lawn before a candlelit dinner. The 16th-century hall preserves a medieval setting without electricity. And so it was within those historic walls that we wined and dined; members of the Mess mingled with judges, past and present, and ensured our esteemed Circuit Leader, Claire Davies KC, enjoyed the unrivalled hospitality of the Mess!

Post-dinner, we were entertained by HHJ Enright who offered a brilliant display of his sharp wit and intellect in a speech that had us wiping our eyes whilst also reminding us, with an aubergine, that we can enhance our advocacy with props! This was followed by a brilliant speech by Katherine Blundell (4PB) who steered us through the advantages and perils to be encountered when grappling with AI.

The perfect backdrop of Magdalene served as a sharp reminder of just how far we have come since the 1500s. Our very grateful thanks go to Abigail Robinson for all the hard work she once again put into organising another successful event.

It was, as always, such an enjoyable evening, getting together with colleagues to catch up and laugh, as well as to remember those who are no longer with us. We are already looking forward to the 2027 dinner.

CENTRAL CRIMINAL COURT BAR MESS REPORT

On behalf of the CCC Bar Mess, the only news is that His Honour Judge Lickley KC has been appointed by HM The King to the High Court, and the CCC Bar Mess congratulates him on his appointment which began on 1st October 2026.

CENTRAL LONDON BAR MESS REPORT

Inner London Crown Court

Mess representative: Alex Matthews.

ILCC continue to have meetings with the CPS and defence regarding which cases are ready for trial. Clerking teams are also able to engage in this. If you are overrunning and there is no counsel to cover, please get your clerks to liaise with the listing team as they want to help where able to do so.

Custody cases being fixed 1-2m out of CTLs. For cases with t/e of 5 days + – fixed c. 3m out of CTL. RASSO cases being targeted within 18m. WL currently 2 weeks. Being reduced to a 1-week WL from March 2027 to assist diaries. Currently sitting 11-12 courts including 1 at RCJ and 1 sometimes at CCC.

PTPH engagement between parties needs to take place prior to hearing. If there is a problem with instructed advocate attending due to unavailability court will adjourn upon application because court most concerned with advancing case. If defence need more time (days or a couple of weeks at most) will be looked upon favourably.

If any advocate makes any request, please include a solution as that makes the judicial decision easier.

Place remember to include contact details on CCDCS as early as possible.

Advocates to sign cracked/ineffective form and agree reason. Advocates to sign in on CP before hearing. Advocates to be polite to court staff please. A 'good morning' is welcomed.

Accommodation needs a new roof. Two CVP rooms are available outside court 5. If you seek consultation room, speak to security or Petrina at the counter. Facilities, mainly the poor state of the toilets, continue to be reported. Should you have any concerns please report to the Operations Manager at Court or please inform Alex or me. We continue to attend the Court User Meetings.

You need the correct ID to access cells.

Woolwich Crown Court

Mess representative: George Penny.

All courts are now sitting at Woolwich, and work continues to identify other venues to hear Woolwich cases. Court 6 at the RCJ has been made available to Woolwich over the summer vacation which has been successful, with particular thanks to HHJ Welsh and the list office. It is hoped this facility will be made available again in the near future. A remote court using a room in Sheffield is also being trialled on two afternoons a week. A remote court will be opened in Woolwich soon.

A Woolwich Local Court Listing Plan following a national template is being prepared for the approval of the Presiding Judge. That plan will become available it is anticipated within 6 months. Woolwich will be adopting the form of Flexible Date listing as a defined period, not exceeding one-week, other details will follow.

HHJ Ruth Downing has retired after many years sitting at Croydon and Woolwich. She will be missed including her incredible baking skills. The mess wishes her well in her retirement.

HHJ Lees extends his thanks to the Bar for all the hard work in helping Woolwich Crown Court get through its work.

Southwark Crown Court

Mess representative: Faras Baloch.

Two new Southwark Practice Notes came into effect on 1st September 2026: No.1/2026 (Economic Crime and Other Complex Criminal Cases, which replaces Southwark Practice Note No.1/2024) and No.2/2026 (Applications for Investigative Orders).

The intention is that the new notes will carry over to the Crown Court sitting at the City of London Law Courts when those courts become operational in Spring next year.

The most significant procedural innovation in the Note No.1/2026 is the creation of a Prosecution Core Documents Schedule and corresponding Defence schedules ("CDSs"). The CDSs ask the parties to:

- identify the key document or category of documents on which they rely;
- (for the Prosecution) link those documents to the relevant paragraph of the Case Summary;
- explain their significance; and
- where the evidence is circumstantial, identify the inferences that are invited from them.

One of the purposes of the CDSs is to avoid unwieldy jury bundles. The default position adopted is that only documents which feature in a party's CDS should form part of the jury bundle. The CDSs will also assist the Court and the parties to understand how the party relies upon a document or category of documents in support of its case, and the judge in directing the jury on circumstantial evidence. This feature is designed to assist the Court and the parties in focusing on and narrowing the real issues in the case, to bring greater discipline to the selection of documents for a jury bundle, and to lead to shorter trial times overall.

Congratulations to HHJ Baumgartner who has been appointed as Resident Judge for the new City of London Law Courts with effect from 4th January 2027.

EAST ANGLIAN BAR MESS REPORT

Norwich Crown Court

On 30th April, we marked the retirement of the Resident Judge, HHJ Robinson, the Recorder of Norwich. The President of the King's Bench Division presided over proceedings and delivered a warm tribute. She was followed by the Mess Chair, the Norwich List Officer and Ollie Haswell who was assisted in his task by some memorable photographic evidence.

The previous week the Mess hosted a dinner in HHJ Robinson's honour at the Maids Head in Norwich, featuring fabulous food and champagne. The event was well attended by both Judges and the Bar.

On 1st May 2026, we were delighted to welcome HHJ Katherine Moore as the new Resident Judge. She is settling into her new role and is a very familiar face having sat as a Circuit Judge at Norwich Crown Court for more than a decade.

Ipswich Crown Court

Ipswich Crown Court hopes to phase out warned list trials. From 6th July 2026, all warned trials were moved into a one-week warned list only.

ESSEX BAR MESS REPORT

The Spring Dinner held on 1st May 2026 at Essex County Cricket Club was a great success. We were able to thank HHJ Leigh for her tenure as Resident Judge at Basildon Crown Court and welcome HHJ Cohen into that role.

The Annual Essex Bar Mess Dinner is to be held in The Crypt at the Bleeding Heart, 14 Ely Place London on 13th November 2026. Anybody wishing to come who has yet to buy a ticket please contact Marc Brown: ebmjunior@18rlc.co.uk

The former Basildon Crown Court Resident Judge, HHJ Lodge (now resident at Harrow Crown Court), will be retiring next year. A dinner, organised by the North London Bar Mess, will be held for him on 12th February 2027.

A new constitution for the Bar Mess was approved at the AGM. Peter Clark was elected Leader of the Mess, Laura Kenyon treasurer, Nick Bonehill the social secretary and Lauren Husain the Circuit representative. All take up their posts on 1st January 2027. Marc Brown remains Junior of the Mess. We thank Allan Compton for his leadership over the last 3 years.

HERTS AND BEDS BAR MESS REPORT

HHJ Lana-Wood has stepped down as Resident Judge and has been replaced by HHJ Mann KC. HHJ Mann KC sent the following to all stake holders:

I have had the privilege of being appointed as the new Resident Judge at St. Albans Crown Court.

I am very keen to establish a positive working relationship with all our partners and colleagues. We all do our best within a system of limited resources, and the more we know and understand about what is going on for everyone else, the better, I hope, we will all get along and work together, better.

This is more important now than ever given all the changes in practice and procedure that will take place over the next few months; less immediate custodial sentences, more community based orders, early release and of course the LCJ's new listing protocol.

Although we have had in the past occasional court user meetings, I want to open these up so that more organisations and groups can attend. Changes in policy and new protocols affect us all.

I would also welcome an opportunity to discuss some plans I have for St. Albans, going forward. We have a very high trial crack rate on the day of trial that I am keen to ameliorate.

I will circulate an agenda in advance and all attendees will be encouraged to add to it.

I plan to have these every three months or so, and, if you (or anyone sent on your behalf or of your organisation) attend in person we will hold the meetings in the large mess that we have here. Coffee, biscuits etc will be provided. Teams will be available as an alternative, of course.

I have picked the 8th of October at 4.15pm.

I am happy for Barrister's Clerks to attend and any solicitor – when I was at Woolwich we would always have someone attend from the LCCSA. I am not in London but if any of you want to pass the invite along, I'd be delighted to have them join us.

A new listings procedure at Luton is to be put in place in October at Luton, if that impacts on the Bar directly remains to be seen.

KENT BAR MESS REPORT





This year there has been considerable cooperation between the Bar and the Judiciary to assist in making improvements to the listing of cases in Maidstone. To that end a joint meeting was held between clerks, counsel and the judiciary in Middle Temple where a number of issues were aired and the plans for Maidstone going forward were set out. It does appear that there have been changes including the recruitment of new staff in the list office and there has been a noticeable improvement.

There was an open day at Maidstone Crown Court on 9th May 2026, which was a great success with about 1800 people coming through the door that day watching mock sentences and mock trials. Stalls from probation, police, CPS, magistrates and Serco – all of which gave talks about careers in their field. Donna Longcroft and Stacey-Lee Holland gave a talk about careers at the Bar and increasing the diversity of the profession. There was also a talk from the Judges about life as a Judge, as well as police dogs, armed response officers and a prison van which people could explore. It was a very successful day.

HHJ St John Stevens retired and a valedictory was held on 22nd May 2026 with many in attendance both in person and remotely.

HHJ Richard Scarratt's valedictory was held on 10 June with Jeremy Hall of 42BR Barristers speaking on behalf of the Bar. His Honour's retirement dinner was held at Eastwell Manor on 18 June 2026, organised by Rachel Chan and was extremely well attended by the local judiciary, Bar, solicitors and CAFCASS. Kent practitioners will be pleased to note that His Honour will continue to sit in retirement, subject to his wife Sarah's approval!

HHJ Tim Parker (civil judge) also retired from Canterbury and his valedictory was held on 11 September 2026.

The Kent Bar Mess dinner will be held on 20 November 2026 at The Brewery, Faversham.

Nina Ellin KC (KBM Chair)

NORTH LONDON BAR MESS REPORT

Harrow Crown Court

HHJ Lodge states as follows:

- HHJ Wood is back and in situ
- HHJ Kaul KC transferred from Wood Green and arrived on 5th October.
- There was an expression of interest exercise for the position of Resident Judge at Harrow, which closed on 14th September.
- We have taken on board the issues with the Robing Room and they are being addressed.

Snaresbrook Crown Court

On 8th October 2026, Snaresbrook Crown Court hosted a mental health roundtable: A discussion for mental health professionals, judges, barristers, CPS, defence solicitors and the police to improve access to justice and handling of cases involving individuals with mental health issues. Confirmed panel attendees were: HHJ Cuthbert, chairing the event; Dr Chao, psychiatrist based at HMP Pentonville; Dr Okoro, consultant psychiatrist at Goodmayes hospital; Dr Teresa Wolowiec, Clinical Lead for Men's Mental Health Treatment Requirement Service, North East London and Interim Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Service Lead for Men's Mental Health Treatment Requirement, Pan-London; Phillip Dick, Services Manager, Interim Mental Health Acute Response Service Manager; and Youssuf Aden, NELFT Liaison and Diversion Practitioner

HHJ Dean reports:

- they are implementing the new CVP guidance;
- they are aiming to produce more defendants at PTPHs as finding in person more effective;
- they are thinking about their listing plan; and
- they are also very happy to welcome first six pupils to attend for days.

Wood Green Crown Court

HHJ John Dodd KC reports the following changes on the judicial front:

- HHJ Kaul moving to Harrow;
- HHJ Walker moving to Lewes;
- HHJ Keeling arriving for a 12-month secondment; and
- Court manager, Tracey Grant, moving to manage Snaresbrook.

Hot off the press – the NLBM will be having a drinks and nibbles evening on:

Thursday 3rd December 2026, 5 – 8 pm
at Tempio,
3-7 Temple Avenue, EC4Y

£15 per ticket in advance (before 26 November), £20 on the door; if you are already a £20 p.a. member, it's free.

SURREY AND SOUTH LONDON BAR MESS REPORT

HHJ Nick Wood

The current year for the SSLBM and throughout the SEC has been overshadowed by the untimely death of His Honour Judge Nick Wood on 15th January 2026. The esteem and affection in which Nick was held has been universally echoed in the many tributes throughout the Bar, Judiciary, Court Service and beyond.

The Valedictory given by HHJ Martin Edmonds KC at Isleworth Crown Court on 19th January was to a packed Court 7 and over 250 attendees online, with many others unable to join due to the event being oversubscribed.

Nick's funeral on 27th February was similarly well attended. The service was both moving and amusing, with eulogies from Nick's son, James, his close friend, Johnno, and Peter Finnegan KC and Selva Ramsammy KC. Underpinning the overall theme was Nick's love of Leeds United FC.

As well as being a Judge who it was always a pleasure to appear before, Nick was a friend to the Bar in general and many others. Like his beloved Leeds United, the Mess and beyond 'Marches On Together' in our affection for Nick. Nick is greatly missed and will never be forgotten.

Isleworth Crown Court

In other Isleworth news, in May 2026, the Court was attended by local MPs to hear from the Bar regarding the Government's proposed curbing of jury trials. There can be no doubt the strong feelings against the proposals were conveyed to those Parliamentarians attending, and hopefully instrumental in changing the Government mindset.

On 9th July 2026, the Judges at Isleworth Crown Court held their Garden Party for staff and Court users. This was an excellent evening. The SSLBM would particularly like to thank the Resident Judge HHJ Martin Edmonds KC for hosting the event and HHJ Hannah Duncan who organised the whole evening together with SSLBM stalwart, Neil Griffin. The food and drink were plentiful, the samosas delicious!

Croydon Crown Court

Early in the new year HHJ Ed Connell took over as new Resident Judge at Croydon, after many successful years sitting at Isleworth. The SSLBM welcomes HHJ Connell as the new Resident Judge and looks forward to working with him, particularly at the Court user meetings.

In May 2026 William Hughes KC, Alan Compton KC and other Croydon Court users met with Liam Taylor, MP for Sutton, to discuss the Government's proposed curtailing of trial by jury. Liam Taylor was very engaged with what he was told by us all and was very much 'onside' with our representations. We were very encouraged by what Liam had to say about the proposals and his opposition to them.

The SSLBM still seek a Court representative for Croydon. Please contact William Hughes KC or Gabriella Lewis (Secretary) if you are interested or know anyone else who is (or can be encouraged too!).

Guildford Crown Court

At the most recent Court users' meeting in May, chaired by the Resident Judge, HHJ Patricia Lees, the following matters were raised:

- Guildford cases at Kingston and Croydon: Guildford cases have been listed at Kingston and Croydon in order to reduce backlog. Very positively, this worked well and it meant that was instrumental in reducing case backlog.
- A new Court café will be opening in September 2026. The Clink Charity will be running the cafe, and it will be used to train up to 40 young people each year, with 14-week programmes so that they leave with gold standard certificates in five different qualifications, which will prepare them for employment or further education or training. 97% of those who have previously been trained have obtained employment thereafter.
- CVP Hearings: The Court is cooperative in listing cases for Counsel to attend via CVP. However, requests for CVP listing cannot be at the expense of the Court being unable to conduct a list and so being forced to a complete halt as an advocate is overrunning elsewhere. Therefore, Guildford Court users wishing to attend via CVP should ensure they are able to attend at the appointed time. It is the responsibility of the Counsel/Advocate to make sure they can attend; if a clerk to chambers is being unreasonable and asking Counsel to cover two hearings (or more) with the same time marking in two courts, push back is necessary. Compliance is important otherwise Counsel will be required to attend in person to ensure effective hearings.
- Members of the SSLBM and SEC attending Guildford are reminded that the Court's car park is available, free of charge, for those appearing at Guildford. The Mess expresses its grateful thanks to HHJ Lees for working so tirelessly to enable this extra facility for the Bar.

On a more joyful note, on 2nd July 2026 Guildford Crown Court hosted a Judges, Bar and Court users party in the rear gardens of the Court building which was a most enjoyable evening. The SSLBM would particularly like to express our thanks to the Resident Judge HHJ Patricia Lees for hosting the party and to HHJ Claire Harden-Frost for her great assistance in organising a memorable evening.

Kingston Crown Court

To complete a triumvirate of parties, on the 16th July, Kingston Crown Court hosted a Judges, Bar and Court users social in the main foyer of the building which proved to be an excellent event. The SSLBM would particularly like to express our thanks to the Resident Judge HHJ Peter Lodder KC for hosting the event and to HHJ Mark Bryant-Heron KC for his assistance in organising the event and providing the groovy sounds!

All three events at Isleworth, Croydon and Kingston demonstrated how important regular liaison in a social setting between Judges, Bar, Solicitors, Court staff and other Court users are. The SSLBM will do its utmost to ensure these events continue.

SUSSEX BAR MESS REPORT



The Mess continues to be busy. We are welcoming new members. A Garden Party took place on 28th June at the Hove Club.

We had our Sussex Bar Mess Dog Show on 12th July. It was a lovely day. Many thanks to HHJ Huseyin for being the Judge! Everyone who entered a dog won a rosette. Some more than one! We raised over £100 for Sussex Pet Rescue. The weather was very hot so thanks for all who attended, we managed to do most of it in the shade and were well provided for by Mel who runs the Lewes Crown Court cafe so many thanks to her too.

We hosted a retirement dinner for HHJ Christine Laing KC, former Resident Judge of Lewes, following her valedictory on 29th May. We wish her a happy retirement. The dinner took place at Hotel du Vin in Brighton on 4th September and was attended by over 50 members of the Mess, Judges and Recorders past and present. All current Circuit Judges sitting in Lewes were present. Thanks also to HHJ Talbot who represented the family judiciary and it was great to see so many family practitioners present. The evening included music from a cello and violin duo and the food and mood were excellent. Judge Laing thoroughly enjoyed it all. It was a great send off for a popular Judge and also a lovely welcome to the new Resident HHJ Henson KC.

We have been liaising with the new Resident Judge who has arranged better facilities for the robing room at Hove and we have new bike locks for Hove CC paid for by the Mess.

The Kent and Sussex FLBA held a valedictory drinks event for HHJ Farquhar at the Helm Gallery in May this year, attended by the Bar, a few local solicitors, civil practitioners and Court of Protection practitioners. The drinks was also used as an opportunity to welcome four new District Judges to the Circuit and a good time was had by all. HHJ Farquhar was forced to do an impromptu speech where his sarcastic sense of humour did not disappoint. Jacqueline Roach, head of the family team at 1 Crown Office Row regaled everyone with excellent stories about appearing before him.

THAMES VALLEY BAR MESS REPORT

Aylesbury

The TVBM will be doing an event for the whole of the TV area in Aylesbury later this year. Further details will be released shortly.

Aylesbury continues to operate at both Aylesbury and Amersham making it a 5-Court centre.

A drinks event is currently in the planning stages for all court users at Aylesbury.

HHJ Francis Sheridan DL Honorary Recorder of Aylesbury is due to retire in April 2027

TVBM will be organising a retirement dinner for him at that time – more details to follow.

Oxford

Oxford continues to operate as normal despite providing a Court room to the Magistrates' Court whilst the building across the road undergoes repairs.

Reading

Earlier this year we announced that HHJ Nawaz took up the role of Resident Judge at Reading Crown Court. We continue to wish him well in that role.

As some will be aware, Reading has had building works ongoing for some time with the Robing Room having been located temporarily to a different part of the building. The Court has provided an update on where the building works are up to and they are hopeful that all works will be completed by February 2027. New facilities will include:-

- New Jury reception & waiting area;
- New ground floor public toilets;
- New advocates room and CVP virtual booths;
- New ground floor Courtroom;
- A "Virtual Courtroom"; and
- New reception area which will include a café kiosk and new entry points.

IN MEMORIAM

Graham Trembath KC



It was with great shock and sadness that 5 Paper Buildings had to report that Graham Trembath KC unexpectedly died at home on 30 June 2026. Graham was called in 1978 and took silk in 2003. He was still actively in practice, defending the most serious cases with skill, humour and a lightness of touch which were the hallmarks of an outstanding career as a criminal advocate. Whilst he would be the last to admit it, Graham was a serious lawyer who thought deeply about his cases. He joined Chambers over 30 years ago and was in constant demand, regularly appearing at the Old Bailey and across the South Eastern Circuit.

His many friends at 5PB and across the Bar will remember a warm-hearted and genuinely funny man, whose enjoyment of advocacy and life was infectious. His rapport with juries was legendary as was his kindness and generosity to others in the profession to whom trial advocacy may not have come so naturally. His passing has devasted us all.

We extend our condolences to his family, friends, colleagues and all who knew him.

A Tribute by 5 Paper Buildings

Richard Wormald KC



Richard Wormald KC died on 28 May 2026, aged just 59, after a brave and ferocious battle with cancer. Richard was one of the most well-known and popular advocates at the criminal Bar. He had an enviable practice, spanning all aspects of criminal work, and was particularly renowned for his forensic skill.

Richard was called to the Bar by Gray's Inn in October 1993, after reading English and Philosophy at York University and obtaining a MA in law at City University. He joined Three Raymond Buildings in 1994, notably without any need for interviews or practical assessments in light of his obvious ability. He quickly developed a busy practice as a junior and was much in demand.

His charisma allowed him to woo clients, solicitors, and judges alike, whilst his fearlessness made him a formidable opponent. He was instructed by solicitors across the profession in relation to 'heavy' criminal cases involving charges of murder, robbery, GBH and the like, but also high profile 'white collar' cases including fraud, insider dealing, perverting the course of justice and corruption. During his career, he appeared in over twenty murder trials.

In 2013, he won Criminal Junior of the Year at the Chambers and Partners Bar awards and took Silk in 2019.

We extend our thoughts to his wife Hannah, all his six children and his wider family.

A Tribute by Three Raymond Buildings

HHJ Gordon Murdoch KC

7 June 1947 – 8 July 2026

Gordon Murdoch, who died this summer in his eightieth year, was a much-loved member of the Family Bar and the Kent bench.

Born and educated in Falkirk, he read law at Cambridge and never lost his gentle Lowland brogue. In 1971, he joined 4 Paper Buildings, as the tenth member of a set that did a dozen kinds of civil, criminal and family work.

In 1976, Gordon married Sally, with whom he had two sons, Thomas and Alexander, and two grandsons, Arthur and Monty.

Gordon was a proper lawyer, equally capable in all types of work. From 1995 he had seven busy years in silk. His standout brief was *Conran v Conran [1997] 2 FLR 615*, in which he represented Lady Conran. The decision paved the way for *White v White,* three years later, and the yardstick of equality.

Gordon became a circuit judge in 2002. The reputation he built could be seen from the outpouring of admiration and affection on his retirement in 2015. A senior colleague described him as the most conscientious and hardworking judge that he had ever known, and his judgments as a model of clarity and succinctness. A barrister wrote that *"It is evident each case weighs heavily on his mind. His intellectual ability, coupled with plenty of common sense, makes him a delight to appear before."*

Gordon was meticulous in preparation, wise, pragmatic, and respected. He was a fine lawyer and judge, but above all he was a kind, decent, humorous man who made hard work feel more human. These lines, written 250 years ago, were read at his funeral. Gordon knew his Burns, and you'd think Rabbie knew Gordon too:



Catherine Wood, Gordon Murdoch, Jonathan Cohen, Amanda Barrington-Smyth and Peter Jackson (Sept 2024)

Epitaph on My Own Friend

An honest man here lies at rest,
As e'er God with His image blest:
The friend of man, the friend of truth;
The friend of age, and guide of youth:
Few hearts like his, with virtue warm'd,
Few heads with knowledge so inform'd:
If there's another world, he lives in bliss;
If there is none, he made the best of this.

Peter Jackson

Edited by Rachel Chan, 42BR Barristers, with permission. A longer version can be read in the FLBA Family Affairs Autumn/Winter 2026

THE SOUTH EASTERN CIRCUIT

The South Eastern Circuit

YOUR CIRCUIT. YOUR VOICE.



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