



Lord Justice Widgery and Me

Judith Goulden rolls back the years and recalls her journey through life and law

During the never ending lockdown I sat in my study and glanced up at my certificate from the President of the Law Society congratulating me on completing 50 years on the Roll and thought of the years which had rolled by (almost without me noticing them) and the many memories of my journey as a lawyer. Here are some snapshots.

Articled clerk

I was articled to my father initially. Bad idea but, since I had no intention of being a solicitor, might as well. The first day I remember so well. I arrived at his office and his secretary (Mrs Burke) had told all the staff that I was to be addressed as Miss Judith. That went down well. My father took me into a room and gave me a lease to read, a chore so incredibly boring that I thought I wouldn't last the day.

I had to go for a meeting at the Law Society for an interview to see if I was suitable to be a lawyer. There were three grantees. The meeting started and ended like this:

'We see that your father is a solicitor'

'Yes'

'Thank you my dear'

My articles had begun.

Qualification

I qualified as a solicitor in 1966. Every year of my articles I thought of giving it up. Lethargy paid a large part but the College of Law in Lancaster Gate was fun. I was now in the job market.

My first job was in Bedford Row with a sole practitioner who was always impeccably dressed with perfect manners until lunchtime, when he came back inebriated and

started ranting about Jews and others. It is still a matter of shame that I said nothing at the time, but I was young and it was my first job, although that was no excuse.

The years went by, years in which I was assumed to be a secretary, a tea lady and even, on one occasion, the office cleaner. Now married and bringing up children I opted for locum work. An interesting period. From offices which were so cold that the staff all wore coats—and gloves—to work and where the senior partner bought the cheapest coffee for his staff while he had his own cache of expensive coffee locked in a cupboard in his room, to a local firm where an occasional crash from the senior partner's room above mine denoted that he had thrown the phone (again) at the wall or floor in a rage, to a sole practitioner who had had a nervous breakdown and was so tearfully grateful for my help, that I would have worked for nothing, to a firm which was at the top of a building in central London and where the remainder of the building was completely empty—a frightening experience. I used to run down four flights of pitch black stairs past dark brooding empty offices as fast as I could—to get out.

South London

I ran a small practice in south London for many years. It was above a newsagents. On the first day someone came up the stairs to ask me to do the conveyancing on a Right to Buy property. I thought a friend was winding me up. You don't go and buy a newspaper and walk up to engage a solicitor—you are recommended. Wrong. In that part of London that is exactly what you do. At the same time, you bring out a crumpled piece of paper showing the charges

on which your new client is due in Camberwell Magistrates Court that day. You cannot work in that area without dealing with criminal matters, emergency ex parte injunctions, free advice on green forms (for those on income support) and the like. I enjoyed helping those clients (even the considerable number of whom were villains or, as they liked to put it, 'duckers and divers'). My car was always safe, since it was parked outside small shops owned or run by my clients—and I was their Brief. I occasionally gave work experience to would be lawyers, some of whom ended up as partners of Magic Circle firms. We were all aware that doing a stint in a rough area with this particular client base would not hurt on their CVs and would show diversity, even though one told me that he thought he was going to be axed every day he came into work.

Later years

I was appointed a chairman of the London Rent Assessment Panel in 1997 and spent many happy and fulfilling years. This became the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) Residential Property and I was then Judge Goulden until I retired. I still miss it. I miss the lay defendant who (copying opposing counsel and too many episodes of *LA Law*) made a lectern of books and starting saying things like, 'I put it to you....' 'objection' and 'may I approach the Bench'. I miss junior counsel honing their way to becoming a Silk. I miss the law students who were starting out on their long career (some of whom were clearly going to make it and others who weren't). I miss the camaraderie of my colleagues.

And Lord Justice Widgery? As I was going through the (increasingly messy) bookcase in my study, I smiled as I saw Volumes I to IV of Stephen's Commentaries on the Laws of England—well-thumbed over the years. I had bought them second hand (of course) from Wildy & Sons Ltd, Lincolns Inn Archway WC2. But there, and for the first time, I saw the name of the first owner of those volumes written in bold blue ink, J P WIDGERY, 3 TEMPLE GDNS aka John Passmore Widgery, Baron Widgery QC in 1958, Judge in 1959, High Court Judge in 1961, Lord Justice of Appeal in 1968 and Lord Chief Justice in 1971. He had died at the age of 70 in 1981. He had started life as an articled clerk and was admitted in 1933 (although he did not practice) before he changed course and became a high-flying member of the Bar. But sometime, somewhere, he had read Stephen's Commentaries on the Laws of England. He too had read the case of *Carlill v Carbolic Smoke Ball Co* (1893). And yes, I did feel a connection.

NLJ

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