

Q: What are the main challenges in working as a deputy high court judge?

A: Well, there are challenges – especially in the Administrative court! I always like to learn about new areas of law and I’m grateful to my colleagues at KN who support and help. I do think it’s important that solicitors get involved in this sort of work and I must say that everyone I’ve been in contact with in the High Court – and the Crown Court, too – has been a model of courtesy and assistance. I know there are some who believe that some judges are anti-solicitors. That may well exist but it is a very tiny minority.

Q: What is your career history?

A: I was at Kings College London. During articles, I was attracted to criminal law and licensing. I came to Kingsley Napley in 1978 and have been here ever since. I came here to do crime and regulatory work. While I’ve been here the firm has partly moved more towards regulatory work. The client base has developed and grown.

I sit as a Recorder, a Deputy High Court judge and as a chairman of the Police Appeals Tribunal. I have also recently agreed to become the first chair of the City of London Law Society white collar crime committee.

It was a very great honour to be appointed QC, (though I had to work out how to put the tights on with a straight seam!) It was another way in which solicitors have been recognised. The profession has come a long, long way.

Q: You appear in the media a lot: does the public need to be better educated about the law?

A: You shouldn’t lose an opportunity to explain the position to the public and solicitors are best placed to do that. But, as in all things, you have to get the experience to be able to do it; and so, provided it is appropriate (from the client’s point of view), I’ll take any opportunity to do it. And behind the scenes, the TV and papers will contact me for an explanation of what something means.

I am concerned about the portrayal that lawyers get in the media. The image of the rich lawyer who’s a bit of a shark is wrong. Perhaps people ought to go round and see what happens in a small legal aid practice, quite frankly.

Q: What are your personal hobbies, interests and pastimes?

A: I’m a great sporting enthusiast. I go to the gym and I enjoy watching all sports. I’ve always had a soft spot for Spurs and Crystal Palace – and Wimbledon because, as a boy, I used to go and watch them before they got into the football league. I also particularly enjoy watching cricket.

I’m very fortunate because my wife gives me encouragement and support in everything. My children are aged 29 and 26. I allowed them to make their own decisions about their careers – and it did not surprise me that neither of them became lawyers!

The Prison Legal Visit

“The Prison Legal Visit” – it sounds like a title for the new Peter Moffat TV show. I have visions of Rupert Penry-Wotsit, floppy hair flopping magnificently in the crisp air of a beautiful spring day, followed by a trail of sharp-suited (and witted) assistants hanging off every forensic observation he makes on the case. Serenely, he and his team are ushered into the clean confines of the prison, greeted with deference by the staff as he strides into see the inmate....

Reality

Sadly, I am at Belmarsh. It’s only taken three months to get the visit, which is better than most others. There is a remote chance that the inmate I intend to see may actually still be there. (Actually, I won this appointment on eBay: 2,000 bidders and I came top!)

Having got into a cab at the station and nervously watched the meter rise (and thinking that the bus from Woolwich station would also have got me there, as long as no-one had nicked the wheels on the way), I go to the visits centre. The staff there are as lovely as

you can get, as they know only too well the torture that awaits. Pensive experienced practitioners gather nervously around the fingerprint reader, hiding their new shiny passports from all others. (We are all too poor to travel abroad now, so we don’t use them for any purpose other than ID). Getting into Boujis following a chambers party is easier than this.

Half an hour in the queue (who needs waterboarding?), then they relent and agree that you are who you are. Having forensically checked your fax for the tiniest of errors, you are allowed to proceed to stage two, which is placing anything worthwhile you may have in a locker with a clear plastic door so anyone can see it. This might, of course, encourage them to break in and nick it. There are also lovely signs, saying that if anything does get stolen, it’s all your fault (even though they forced you to leave it there).

It goes on...

Still, on to stage three. I walk out into the rain getting soaked (no umbrellas allowed...security risk: “Have

you seen Mary Poppins. sir?"). I worry that I may have something on me that should not be there: class A drugs? Phone? Booze? Assault rifle?

After more delay – and nervous now – I get searched again. I hand over the papers. Beads of sweat start to form as the X-ray machine starts on my file. This is like Midnight Express. I am sure that I only used plastic treasury tags rather than metal.

Then I am searched and bang! The game is up. They have found it. All over. No visit for me, just the walk of shame back to the visits centre.

They have found my train ticket. It was in a pocket that I did not even know existed. In vain, I point out that it's mine and I cannot afford another one and, in any event, trains don't run properly any more and no self-respecting absconder is going to use Plumstead mainline station as the jump-off point of their escape but no, I have to go back.

Whenever I lose anything in the future, my first port of call will be HMP Belmarsh, as they always find everything.

Prisons parade

That led me to think about what differentiates the other prisons. Perhaps, as practitioners, we ought to have a Trip Advisor-style website where we can share our views.

Pentonville would be flagged as extremely elite (who has ever got a visit?), shabby chic, with a sauna in every visiting room irrespective of weather. In December's snow, I had the window open during a visit there. I would also say it has a faint odour of

cabbage and corked wine.

Wandsworth is decent to get in but does possess the world's shortest lift ride, which, for some reason, I always seem to be taken on. It has a curious machine for snacks, which takes your money but never lets anything out.

Wormwood Scrubs ought to be avoided at all costs. If you fail to arrive obscenely early, you are made to join the long and sad queue of social visitors. Even after you have queued for over an hour, once you are inside, they will still contrive to keep you waiting while they strive to "locate" your client in his cell.

And Brixton? Do I really want to be arrested and be added to the national DNA database for the crime of placing my memory stick in the wrong locker? No.

Success

For those who are interested, I finally did get into Belmarsh. In the 15 minutes that remained of my two-hour slot, I managed to achieve something and sorted out the client's confiscation matters. It was his second time up for drugs, and, on this one, even Keith Richards would struggle to maintain personal use.

We dealt with the finances and, as we parted, he nodded and said, "In 'ere, it's alright but, at night, it's grim. *You* get to go home. It's not all about the money, guv, as that can't help you buy your way out of here."

"No," I agreed, wondering how much money it might take to make it easier for me to get in.

– Keith Wood
Lewis Nedas & Co

How to Sparkle in Court

Can you remember when going to court was exciting, when advocacy itself was the biggest buzz in your life?

Advocacy is a challenging art form. Simple, yet complex, it should provide enough stretch and enjoyment for a lifetime. Yet this rich professional opportunity is at odds with much experience. I recently spent a morning in my local magistrates' court, just watching and listening. There was no sign of advocates rising to a challenge, little evidence of applied and skilful persuasion. Examinations-in-chief wandered around while cross-examination seemed a scatter-gun affair. Direct addresses to the tribunal were cliché-ridden and fumbling.

The problem

Gordon Turner, an employment lawyer, has written in the Law Society Gazette about his stint as a juror. "Being drip-fed information, particularly when there is no context or direction, creates more sensation in the pit of

the stomach than in the receptive organs", he ventured. It sounded familiar to me. The problems of sad advocates and pedestrian advocacy do not stop there.

Last autumn, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Judge, wrote about the "internet generation". He said, "A generation is going to arrive in the jury box that is totally unused to sitting and listening." He then called for "deep thought" about how this risk might be managed. The risk is not fanciful. Currently, the NHS spends £31m a year on drugs to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD). Today's ADHD sufferers are tomorrow's jurors. Will our sad, skill-depleted advocates be up to the task of grabbing and then holding the attention of these jurors?

The remedy

Good training should open the mind of the developing advocate to all the richness of his or her art. Solicitor advocates get little of this. They do not learn about the