



# CUTTING THROUGH

THE QUEEN MARY UNIVERSITY BAR SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



What's inside this issue:

## FEMINISM & FEMALE SUCCESS AT THE BAR

FILM AND PODCAST  
RECOMMENDATIONS

INTERVIEWS WITH FEMALE  
BARRISTER

CALENDAR OF EVENTS, BALLS AND  
BOATS

THOUGHT PIECE FROM OUR  
INNSIDER

## CALENDAR

### 25th of November

Life within the Criminal Justice  
System

### 27th of November

Lincolns Inn Tour

### 26th of November

Law & Bar Society  
Collaboration: Law for Non-Law  
students

### 22nd of November

Law Soc Boat Ball  
[Tickets £15 for non-members]

THIS WEEKS INTERVIEWS



## CUTTING THROUGH

Welcome back to another edition of the Bar Society Newsletter. This edition we are again doing something slightly different. In honour of a hundred years of women practicing law we are focusing an edition of feminism and female success at the Bar [and Bench]. As our Supreme Court is now presided over by Lady Hale, and her gorgeous spider brooch [halloween costume inspiration for any and add] it appears that female representation is increasing steadily in the justice system. So welcome to another edition where we will be pondering female success and hearing personal stories of barristers and their routes to the Bar.

## JUDGE REA

### Do you believe there are adequate provisions in place to accommodate women at the Bar?

I consider that the Bar today is far more inclusive for women and is certainly better than it was 40 years ago, when I was Called to the Bar. To dwell for a nano-second on the banal, the days, I think...I hope, are over of having just one toilet for all the barristers to use, as was the case in my first ever set of Chambers as a "first six-month-er". A hitherto male bastion of commercial high talent, the venerable members of that set were wholly unused to having the female form waft across their collective paths and we were a batch of 20 pupils, of whom 4 (gasp) were women. The whole ethos has changed, thankfully, and there are now facilities of all varieties, physical and academic, available in Chambers for women at the Bar. The days of blatant mocking and ridicule by the male Bar of female barristers whilst on their feet in Court are also over. I had it happen to me, and I have seen it, first hand in the High Court, happen to a senior female QC at the hands of her equally senior male QC colleagues; it was shocking to witness. If that type of bullying, harassing behaviour takes place nowadays, then steps can, and will, be taken by all who are custodians of our profession, from the Judges in Court, through to Chambers, the Inns and the Bar Council/Bar Standards Board.

### What would be your top tip to females aspiring to a career at the Bar?

Be gender neutral in your approach, in your conversations, in your interviews, in Court....in fact, everywhere. This reduces any subtle or even blatant opposition to your gender. It does not mean you have to take a male approach; it simply means you are being yourself and, to my knowledge, as all genders have the same physiological brain for the most part, that alone should trump any nonsense about women "thinking differently to men", as has been said in the past even with books written on it. What utter drivel. If a female barrister reasons differently to a male barrister in a particular case in Court, that is probably either because they are opponents and are being paid to think differently about the issue in the case under scrutiny, or they are just two different PEOPLE...fact.

*Turn over for more advice from Judge Rea*

## Did you have any issues with accessing the Bar as a female? If it is applicable, did these difficulties also relate to your ethnic background, race, sexuality or family life, i.e. being a mother?

I had no issues at all coming to the Bar. Having said that, I was somewhat naive about the whole process; but, curiously, perhaps that naivety served me well. I had a strong willed and determined mother. She was from Luxembourg and had endured untold hardship as a 17 to 21 year old when she was deported by the Nazis to a Forced Labour camp in Germany. She escaped and went on to emigrate to the UK, where she met my father, another immigrant from Southern Ireland. No one in my family had been lawyers, but when I was aged 7, out of the blue, I expressed a desire to become a barrister (I think I liked the wig and red ribbon, as I remember that I traced a picture of a wig and a brief for a school project!). With a brief excursion away from the Bar ambition, whilst I became a Registered Nurse (that's another story), I became "an Utter Barrister" in July 1980. It was my mother, who, without meaning to, inculcated in me the work ethic and something I will call the "sex-blind" ethic. In other words, it was totally accepted, without more, in our household, and, as it happened also at my all girls' school, that whatever you wanted to achieve in life, provided that you worked hard, you could get it. The question of being a female never entered my mind nor, indeed, the minds of any of my female school friends. So, my approach when I entered the profession was to plough on regardless and I was totally immune to any sexism, save for a very few blatant incidents; perhaps I missed some nuanced jibes or comments along the way, but I have to say that any such matters of being denied access to the profession, or parts of it, by reason of my sex never really troubled me. If the male barristers seemed alarmed if I entered the male robing room to "barter" a plea bargain (in those days the male robing room was where any "deals" to be done were discussed before the criminal trial), then they usually did not seem at all bothered, and if a comment was raised, I would tell them not to worry, as I was a qualified nurse and I had seen more specimens of the human form than they had had hot dinners. That generally worked.

## What would be your top tip to females aspiring to a career at the Bar?

Have the confidence in your abilities and talent. Have faith in yourself and your thoughts and submissions. In preparing your case, always take some time to act as Devil's Advocate of your own case/cross examination questions/submissions, so as to be prepared for any onslaught from the other side or from the Judge. That way, if you do come upon sexism against you, you can identify it easily, because you will know it cannot be by reason of your performance in the case. Then you can be prepared to address it at the time perhaps, if appropriate, or afterwards with the Judge and/or your Head of Chambers and/or your Inn of Court and/or The Bar Council/Bar Standards Board. You might well have the confidence to nip it in the bud with the miscreant there and then, possibly in the robing room; but do not feel obliged to deal with it this way, as it would be perfectly proper to take some or all of the steps I have referred to afterwards.



JUDGE KAREN REA

Barrister and Deputy District Judge (and a rather out of date Registered Nurse!)

We were lucky enough to be joined by Judge Rea earlier this term for an informative and inspirational evening about her own journey to the Bar.

You can find more wonderful advice from Judge Rea herself on the QMUL Bar Society Website.

GOT A SPARE HOUR?

## GUILT FREE ENTERTAINMENT

REMAIN IN THE SPHERE OF LAW WHILST REMOVING YOUR NOSE FROM YOUR BELOVED TEXTBOOK

### FEMINISM AND FEMALE SUCCESS AT THE BAR

#### FILM: SAINT JUDY [2018] WHERE TO FIND IT - NETFLIX

The story follows Judy Wood, an immigration attorney in L.A., faced with a seemingly impossible case. She was the only one to fight for an Afghan woman who was going to be deported and feared that would mean her death. But Judy Wood was not willing to give up and the movie is the captivating tale of how she single-handedly changed asylum law to better protect women!



#### DOCUMENTARY: KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE WHERE TO FIND IT - NETFLIX



Follow the stories of the new hopefuls making waves in America. Politics is a divisive issue, and the election of the 45th president has raised issues of representation and equality in houses. Watch the inspirational journeys of four women hoping to change the political world around them from the outside in. Grab the popcorn, its a bumpy ride.

#### PODCAST: THE GUILTY FEMINIST WHERE TO FIND IT - SPOTIFY

Do you need light-hearted relief whilst remaining productive and inspired? Brilliant - the Guilty Feminist is here for you. The comedy chops of Deborah Frances-White, alongside her panel of esteemed guests will have you chuckling away and learning simultaneously.



# KATE TEMPLE-MABE

CHAMBERS: 7BR

## **Do you believe there are adequate provisions in place to accommodate women at the Bar?**

I think there are increasingly better provisions for this, but there is still work to do. In particular, colleagues I know who have children contend that there could be better provision for them in the Inns, e.g. by providing creches or nursing rooms. We have thankfully moved on in most places from segregated men's and women's robing rooms at court, although the segregation persists at the Old Bailey. Many chambers are now moving towards having better flexible working systems - and openness to paperless working assists with this - to reflect the fact that it remains the case that women take on more caring responsibilities than men. Encouraging male barristers to take advantage of these systems too can help ensure that they are normalised.

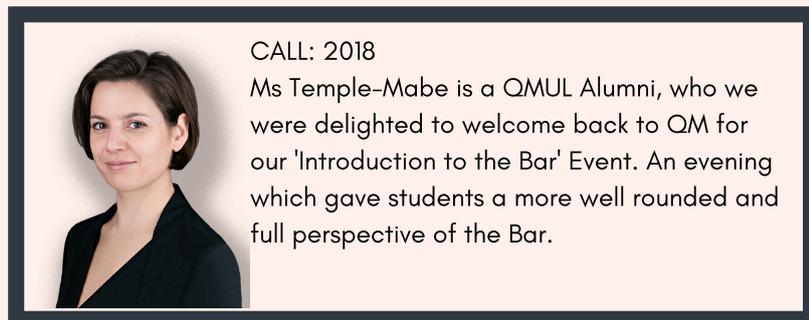
## **Did you have any issues with accessing the Bar as a female? If it is applicable, did these difficulties also relate to your ethnic background, race, sexuality or family life, i.e. being a mother?**

I did not find this to be a particular obstacle, as at the start of my career I was young, childless, had had a previous career during which I'd saved up some money, and I enjoyed other sorts of privilege. Fortunately for young barristers, we do not as commonly come up against ingrained doubts about our ability.

We had previous generations of women at the bar to thank for this. The difficulty for young women entering the profession is retention: it isn't enough to say that more women than men are now entering the profession (which is true); we need to be able to say that also that those women are *staying* in the profession at the same rates as men.

## **What would be your top tip to females aspiring to a career at the Bar?**

You should not see your gender as a disadvantage in accessing the profession. But you may find along the way that there are certain obstacles that make life at the bar more difficult for you than for your male colleagues. When you see what those things are - whether it's as major as a lack of sufficient maternity leave provision in chambers, or as minor as a lack of hairdryers in the chambers shower rooms - speak up and say what you need. Do not feel as though you are so lucky to be here that you don't have the right to make demands.



# JESSICA PURCHASE

CHAMBERS: 36 FAMILY

## **Do you believe there are adequate provisions in place to accommodate women at the Bar?**

I think that this depends on which chambers you are at. The things that attracted me to 36 Family were how many women there were in the team and the fact that at my interviews the female panel members told me that it was the most supportive chambers that they had been at, which was why they had chosen to stay there. However, I know that a lot of women still feel that they have to choose between being the primary carer for their children and throwing themselves into their careers. I also think that a lot more needs to be done by judges to recognise that women have periods and may need comfort breaks during hearings when men don't.

## **Did you have any issues with accessing the Bar as a female? If it is applicable, did these difficulties also relate to your ethnic background, race, sexuality or family life, i.e. being a mother?**

Other than receiving the sadly standard amount of sexism and patronising mansplaining, no more issues than other women! But if I had been trying to access the Commercial Bar, which is still incredibly male-dominated, I probably would have faced far greater issues. I was told during the GDL by a male career advisor that I shouldn't go for the Bar because I wouldn't make it, so should try the solicitor route instead, which I do not think a man with the same CV would have been told.

I've also been asked "How did YOU manage to get \*insert position/experience here\*?!" by various privately educated Oxbridge males.

## **What would be your top tip to females aspiring to a career at the Bar?**

For women who are aspiring to a career at the Bar, don't ever let anyone tell you that you can't do it or that you won't make it. Throw yourself at this with everything you have and absolutely believe that you can. For women who have made it and are building a career at the Bar, do not feel like you have to have a bull-dog persona at court. You can still be a fierce advocate without trying to be an alpha male.





CALL: 1996

Ms Johnson is a specialist in Family and Personal Injury law, practicing at 7BR alongside Ms Temple-Mabe, having recently been her pupil supervisor.

**Do you believe there are adequate provisions in place to accommodate women at the Bar?**

Yes, although there's always more that can be done. Much has changed over the time I've been at the bar. My experience has been very positive and I have benefitted from a generous maternity policy for example. Each chambers is different, women are a diverse group and the challenges faced by individuals differ. I do think the bar as a whole has challenges to meet; most obviously with the rate of attrition at the higher end.

**Did you have any issues with accessing the Bar as a female? If it is applicable, did these difficulties also relate to your ethnic background, race, sexuality or family life, i.e. being a mother?**

I can honestly say no. I don't come from a legal background and for a while thought it wasn't for people like me: ethnic minority (mixed African/white English), state school, knew no one at the bar, non-Oxbridge university, but I was fortunate enough to get an interview at what is now my chambers and it all worked out from there. That said, assuming a candidate has the right abilities, I think there can be an element of luck. My now colleagues were willing to offer me a chance. I recognise that the experience of others is different however and I think real difficulties (particularly for those - of any gender - who don't come from privileged backgrounds or who don't have financial support) still exist.

**What would be your top tip to females aspiring to a career at the Bar?**

See as much as you can, talk to as many people as you can and get as much of a feel for the job as possible so that you make an informed decision about whether it's really for you. The job is great but it's also highly stressful at times. Give plenty of thought to how you're going to support yourself if you suddenly become ill, have a relative or other person to support or if you plan to have children. A supportive and partner who is willing to support you (on maternity leave for example) is a huge advantage. Take time to self-reflect and do a physical and mental health MOT every so often. And be yourself!

**OPPORTUNITY TIME**

Would you like to be involved in an information and technology paperless moot organised by CASEDO? If you would; please contact us

on [presidentsofqmb@gmail.com](mailto:presidentsofqmb@gmail.com), for the moot problem. The deadline for submissions is Friday the 22nd of November. We look forward to hearing from you.

**THE INNSIDER**

It is difficult for us to conceive that only a mere 100 years ago, women were not allowed to be solicitors or barristers. They had no access to the profession even though they were allowed to read law at university, but they weren't allowed to receive a degree at the end of their course. Then, in 1919 the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act was passed and it cleared the path for women to become lawyers. Equally important were the women that contributed in the social change that preceded legislative change. To name a few, Gwyneth Bebb the plaintiff in *Bebb v. The Law Society*, a test case in the opening of the legal profession to women in Britain, Ivy Williams the first woman to be called to the bar, Helena Normanton the first woman to practice as a barrister in England. The change in the tide was widely welcomed but how much has changed in these first 100 years? In 2018 it was reported by the Law Society that women solicitors outnumbered the men for the first time, making up more than 50% of solicitors in England and Wales. What's more, statistics also showed that the profession is becoming increasingly ethnically diverse jumping from 15% in 2014 to 21% in 2018. However, the change into an ethnically diverse environment is painfully slow as 71% of the legal profession remains white. When it comes to the bar, the statistics are even more dire. Comprised of roughly 16,000 members, only 6,000 are women and out of the total membership, only 2,000 are BAME. And it gets better. According to the SRA, when it comes to career progression, partnership remains predominantly male (66%) while the chances of becoming partner are higher for white men than any other group (75%). Another issue is of course the massive pay gap. The average pay gap for the largest UK firms was at 20% which doesn't seem too bad, but when looking at specific firms like Latham & Watkins, the gap was at 39.1%. A century has come and gone, and women are still very much in a supporting role rather than an equal one. The advancements achieved most certainly have to be applauded given that with only one century under our belt, women are already surpassing men in numbers. Nevertheless, this isn't all about quantity as it is blatantly obvious that in terms of quality women and BAME are lacking an environment that would provide them with equal advancement opportunity. Perhaps in the next 100 years there will be even greater change that delivers the position women lawyers so clearly deserve: equals in all measures. For that to happen we must continue to carry the torch that was lit by the ones that came before us, for without them we wouldn't be here at all.

