



CUTTING THROUGH

THE QM BAR SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



QUEEN MARY
BAR SOCIETY

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MAKE THE MOST OF IT



ADVICE TO ASPIRING BARRISTERS

OLIVER KELHAM

CALL: 2018

Oliver Kelham is a young barrister practising in crime and extradition. He has a broad defence practice across the Crown, Magistrates', and Youth Courts. He also prosecutes in the Crown Court. He regularly accepts instruction in cases across the range of criminal offences. Oliver joined 3 Temple Gardens in April 2020 following the successful completion of his pupillage.

If you could write a letter to your past self at your early steps towards becoming a barrister, what would this letter say? What would be the best piece of advice you wish you had known?

First, I would ensure that the letter was concise!

One of the crucial skills that I have learned, and that I am still learning, is to keep my advocacy and correspondence succinct. My first pupil supervisor emphasised this point to me from the outset. Professional and lay clients, opponents, and tribunals all appreciate an ability to get to the point.

Verbose rhetoric may sound impressive, but all too often, the point could be made more efficiently and more effectively. That, in fact, is the piece of advice I wish I had known when embarking upon my GDL studies back in 2016.

Secondly, I would encourage my younger self to get involved in even more extracurricular activities, from mooting and parliamentary-style debating to lectures and pro bono projects. Academic attainment is, of course, vital, but it is the extracurricular activities that really teach you about the nature of the job and nurture the crucial skills of written and oral advocacy.

"get involved in even more extracurricular activities, from mooting and parliamentary-style debating to lectures and pro bono projects"

Most of our readers will be applying for mini-pupillages. How much time did you devote to each of your applications, and what are the big dos and don'ts? Did you face any rejections, and how did you deal with them constructively?

I devoted a good amount of time to my applications. I honed my CV and tried to add as many extracurricular activities to it as I could. I then drafted the requisite cover letter or application form, ensuring that it was written in a persuasive way. A simple thing, which is often repeated but very valuable, is to make sure that any letter or form is grammatically accurate. Additionally, scour the website of the relevant set and focus in particular on the work being done by those of between five and ten years' call. They are the people doing the work that you are going to be aspiring towards (initially) if you end up obtaining pupillage there.

Mini-pupillages are a great way to see barristers and get a glimpse behind the scenes. Mini-pupillages come in all shapes and sizes, from two days of shadowing up to week-long, assessed experiences. I did nearly all of my mini-pupillages whilst studying for the GDL and tried to fit them into reading weeks or the holidays. I did have several rejections, and I think the best response is to take on board any feedback you receive, try to shrug off the disappointment as soon as you can, and apply for another one. There are plenty of sets of Chambers out there. Keep fighting for them because once you have one, it is easier to get another.

Aspiring barristers need to equip themselves with a plethora of skills. When you're developing a new skill set, it is possible to neglect your existing ones or to undervalue some of your attributes. How do you integrate new-born skills while preserving your authenticity, and in the end, what will make you stand out in an application?

I am afraid I do not know of any magic recipe for learning new skills whilst maintaining others. My simple advice would be to keep practising. Challenge yourself by signing up for activities that might feel like they are outside your comfort zone; you will adapt, and it will raise your level.

Standing out in an application for pupillage, or even for a mini-pupillage, is difficult, but please do not let the statistics put you off! All of you will have valuable skills, and it is about playing to those strengths. Emphasise the things that make your journey to the Bar unique.

"Challenge yourself by signing up for activities that might feel like they are outside your comfort zone; you will adapt and it will raise your level"

Another important thing to remember is to try and explain any weaknesses that you are aware of in your application. It might be that you messed up an A-Level because of external factors, for example, so make sure that the reason for it is made clear.

What was the most significant benefit of your volunteering experience at the Haringey Migrant Support Centre, and how did it contribute to your career at the Bar? Which are the criteria to consider when applying for a volunteer position?

Volunteer, or pro bono, positions can give you an interesting insight into the work of practitioners whilst providing the opportunity for you to improve your own skills. I volunteered both at the Haringey Migrant Support Centre and as a mentor for the Vocalise programme at Gray's Inn. The Migrant Support Centre experience helped me to improve my communication skills by talking to the visitors to the Centre. It also allowed me to see, first hand, how the barristers who attended the centre conducted conferences. It was fascinating and eye-opening in many ways.

My work as a mentor with Vocalise, teaching debating to inmates in various prisons, was also immensely rewarding. I saw genuine development in the individuals who attended our coaching sessions. Some pro bono initiatives are quite high profile, such as the Free Representation Unit (FRU) or the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA), and can really boost your CV. Any volunteering work which involves advocacy in some form or which has a legal slant will be very helpful.

This month, we received our exam results. How important do you think is to have excellent academic performance? What would you say to aspiring barristers who did not achieve their grade-goals, but also to those who did?

First, I hope everyone got their desired results. To those who did well, congratulations! To those who are disappointed, do try and look at the positives and analyse where you might have put a foot wrong.

There is no way of getting around the fact that academic attainment helps in advancing your progress towards the Bar. You do, of course, need to obtain a qualifying law degree and then complete the vocational part of your studies.

There are ways of coming back from a poor result here and there, though. I achieved a 2:1 in my undergraduate degree, a commendation for the GDL, and a very competent on the BPTC, so I never quite reached the higher echelons. Looking through the CVs of barristers on Chambers' websites can be a daunting experience, with many having first-class degrees and a host of other academic accomplishments. That being said, there are many barristers who make it to the Bar without being complete academic superstars. Take advice from your tutors, study hard for the next exams, and do not give up. Even if you eventually decide that the Bar is not for you, the qualifications and knowledge you obtain will be of great value in many walks of life.

"There are many barristers who make it to the Bar without being complete academic superstars"

Amid mounting pressure, you may question your suitability for a career at the Bar once or twice. What would you advise our readers to stay motivated, focused, and, most importantly, inspired to achieve their career aspirations?

I work in criminal law and extradition. Both are, for the most part, publicly funded. The Legal Aid system is frequently lamented by those who practise in these areas, and the hours can be long for an insubstantial monetary reward. The Criminal Bar can be stressful, it can be frustrating, and it will not make you a millionaire. On the other hand, it can be immensely rewarding, varied, and interesting.

"Standing out in an application for pupillage, or even for a mini-pupillage, is difficult but please do not let the statistics put you off!"

If you are under any illusions about the nature of the publicly-funded Bar, spend a morning at your local magistrates or Crown court, sitting in the public gallery, and ask one or two of the lawyers about their role. I hope you will receive a friendly response! Court visits can be very informative and inspirational. If you work part-time and cannot make it during the working week, magistrates courts are open on Saturday mornings, with the courts sitting from 10 am.

Overall, I would say that although the independent Criminal Bar is under threat, both because of the continued cuts and the pandemic, I am eternally optimistic and would always encourage people to apply for pupillage in a criminal set. I would advise, however, that you do so with your eyes well and truly open to the realities of the role. I cannot speak with any authority about having a civil practice, I am afraid, but court visits would, I am sure, be valuable in that arena too.

"I am eternally optimistic and would always encourage people to apply for pupillage in a criminal set"

-editor's opinion

Run, Forrest, Run!

Regular exercise is mostly associated with disease prevention, good figure, and weight control. But what if we considered exercising part of our work and studies? Imagine this. You have a part-time job, full-time studies, three best friends, a family outside the UK, applications, essays, you name it.

And yet, when that deadline for an adverse possession problem essay written in a Harry Potter-style comes closer, you don't think of not doing it; even if you don't have the time for it, you find the time to write an advice note to Petunia. It is what you do. Therefore, we more than often miss a window to exercise, not for any other reason than that it is not our priority. But what if your performance was measured, and the statistics proved that when exercising, you write better, stress less, score higher? What if QM issued a new syllabus where exercise was a 30-credit module assessed through participation? Would you find the time to run 5k, even if 'you didn't have time'?

The Harvard Business Review in 2014 outlined some of the benefits of exercise that would tempt a work-driven individual to go to the gym. These include sharper memory, enhanced concentration, faster learning, mental endurance, and better interpersonal skills. Considering that all the above are essential to a career in law, what are we waiting for? Excuses of not having time could not stand before academic demands, jobs, or in court; why would they when it comes to exercising?

It seems that it is not about finding the time but making the time to exercise, as we do with everything else in our hectic schedules. On top of the all-inclusive online fitness programmes available in light of COVID-19, I would add the traditional, always-free, running. With the numerous parks surrounding London, I cannot think of any good reason for not running every day, if just for 10 minutes. The only thing we need to do? Consider exercise as part of our programme.

Become a mentor

Mentoring can offer you incredible opportunities to grow, identify your progress, and give back to your university or school community. You could become a Student Buddy for first-year law students at QM by sending an email to the Undergraduate Office. Why don't you also ask your school, or previous university, for mentoring opportunities in person or online? You will be surprised by how much they would appreciate your input and participation. Have a look at the QMBS' mentoring programme organised by Tanisha and get inspired!

LEGAL LADDER

by Tanisha , QMBS Vice President

For the first time, QM Bar Society is hosting a mentoring programme. Our society strives for advancing diversity and inclusivity in the law and works hard to promote greater participation of the BAME community.

Legal Ladder entails working with Mary Cunningham, advisor at Wandsworth school, who has partnered QMBS with 9 schools in the borough. As part of the programme, 12 law students, hand-picked from the QMBS committee members, will mentor students aged 15-18 who are interested in law. That is a fantastic opportunity for school students to get involved and gain access and insight into the legal world.

You will not find a better way to practise all the skills essential for a career at the Bar than taking part in a fight, a Barfight.

BARFIGHT

by Aakash , QMBS Head of Events

BARFIGHT is a cumulation of events that include Moot-Court, Advocacy, Cross-Examination, Alternate Dispute Resolution/Negotiation & Draft-Off.

BARFIGHT is an Inter-University Bar-Fest with universities from all over England taking part, fighting to be crowned the overall winners of BARFIGHT 2K20. The competition will be held online on the 17th and 24th of October 2020 via Zoom to help maintain social distancing.

Rounds will be held in the categories of:

- Public Law
- Contract Law
- Land Law
- Criminal Law

As a participant, you can expect increasingly challenging rounds, scintillating competition, unforgiving judges, and an experience you will never forget!

Stay tuned for more details or contact us at info@queenmarybarsociety.org, +44 (0) 73666 16077.

Top Networking Tips

by Alexi, QMBS President

The Research

Research the barristers/legal professionals attending the event, and find out what they practise so you can tailor your questions.

01

The Questions

Ask genuine questions that you are curious about, or need clarification with but not generic questions that are easy to research or Google.

02

The Comeback

Ask questions to extend what they've spoken about. If they are a pupil and discussed their journey to the bar, and what they have completed so far, ask them what they have coming up in their pupillage that they're excited about. Ask for any pupillage Dos and Don'ts or how they manage work-life balance at such an early stage in their career.

03

Last Step

If they have a specialised practice, ask them things they would advise for you to gain work experience/knowledge in their expertise.

04

After the event

Do add them on LinkedIn following your encounter.

05

PODCASTS

Build Your Dream Network,

Kelly Hoey

Listen to useful career and networking tips from Kelly Hoey, networking expert and author of *Build Your Dream Network: Forging Powerful Relationships In A Hyper-Connected World*.

More from Law,

Harry Clark

Episodes designed to equip you with all sorts of tips for your legal career; applications, pupillage, networking, LinkedIn, and much more.

DON'TS

Do not ask 'how do I get a pupillage' if they are on the pupillage committee. Chances are they have been asked this 15 times already. They most likely have already told you how to get one and discussed their marking criteria, and it is also very likely that this advice is listed on their Chambers website.

Do not share stories that are deemed unprofessional, such as a bender you had on a night out a few nights ago (yes, I have witnessed someone do this before); or speak about personal matters. It is inappropriate and uncomfortable to watch. Think about everyone present, having to witness this too, please.

Do not ask for a mini-pupillage or to Marshal at a networking event when you first meet them! I have witnessed this several times, and the Barrister/Judge just laughs. Do not do this. It is awkward, and Chambers can be strict about their internal recruitment policies.

Do not miss our How to Network event with Cake and Counsel on 2nd of November !



FILMS TO INSPIRE

In the Name of the Father is a 1993 courtroom-drama, based on the true story of Gerry Conlon, Patrick Armstrong, Paul Hill, and Carole Richardson, later known as the Guildford Four. Co-written by Terry George and Jim Sheridan (*My Left Foot* 1989), the Oscar-nominated film follows the tragic journey of Guildford Four through police mistreatment, forced confessions, and their wrongful convictions of the IRA Guildford pub-bombings in 1974. Sheridan skillfully brings on the screen the bond between Gerry, masterfully portrayed by Daniel Day-Lewis, and his father, Giuseppe (Pete Postlethwaite), who dies in jail. As the plot unfolds, you will be waiting with bated breath for the outcome of the efforts of defence lawyer Gareth Peirce (Emma Thompson) to expose the now widely-acknowledged corruption of the police in the case. The catharsis comes after a fifteen-year struggle, and one of the worst miscarriages of justice in the UK.

Does the law say that a woman is a better parent by virtue of her sex? **Kramer vs. Kramer** (1979), depicts the dramatic custody battle between Ted Kramer (Dustin Hoffman) and his wife Joanna (Meryl Streep) after their divorce. Based on Avery Corman's novel (1977), Robert Benton exceptionally directs the five Oscar-winning film challenging perceptions about single parenthood, gender roles, and women's rights, set on a fantastic soundtrack.

The Children Act (2017), based on Ian McEwan's homonymous novel (2014), begins with the court decision in the case of conjoined twins. Although there is no reference to *Re A (conjoined twins)* [2001], the case summary is almost identical. The film revolves around the 17-year-old Adam Henry (Fionn Whitehead), who is diagnosed with leukaemia and is in critical condition. Adam, bound to his religious convictions as a Jehovah's witness, believes that mixing blood for any purpose is contamination, and against God's will. Thus, he refuses a life-saving blood transfusion without which he will most certainly suffer a horrific death. As Adam is not an adult yet, the matter is under court review, and the film follows Justice Fiona Maye (Emma Thompson) in one of the most challenging decisions: freedom of choice and expression of religion or the welfare of the minor following section 1 of the Children Act 1989?

#female empowerment

DOCUMENTARIES

RBC, Netflix

"Why are you at Harvard Law School, taking the place of a man?" said the dean of Harvard Law School to Ruth Bader Ginsburg when she was a student at the university and one of the only nine women studying law in a class of 500 men back in 1956. Ginsburg repeatedly encountered obstacles to her education, employment, and development because of her sex. Her battle against gender discrimination led to her worldwide recognition. She was appointed a Supreme Court Justice by President Bill Clinton in 1993 and is serving till today.

Seeing Allred, Netflix

She named them and shamed them: Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, Donald Trump, Bill O'Reilly, Jeffrey Epstein. The distinguished civil rights attorney Gloria Allred has been fighting for women's rights over the decades showing incredible stamina and persistence against all the odds. Her views about sexual harassment, gender, race, and child support seemed radical at the time. Today, these are the rights we assert every day, building a more inclusive and respectful society. A champion for victim's rights, Allred taught people how to transform their traumas into power and inspiration for everybody else, starting from herself.

Mrs. America, BBC i-Player

Follow the movement to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1970s, the efforts of the front-runners, and the opposition by the 'homemakers' led by Phyllis Schlafly (Cate Blanchett). Enjoy following Gloria Steinem (Rose Byrne) when she launched *Ms.* (magazine), Betty Friedan (Tracey Ullman) and her seminal work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Shirley Chisholm (Uzo Aduba), the first black woman elected to the US Congress. Get a full picture of the women's liberation movement with nine critically-acclaimed episodes that you can binge-watch in a day (at least I did!).

CALENDAR

DEADLINES

Mini-pupillage

Monckton Chambers
30 September

4 New Square Chambers
16 October

Farrar's Building
21 October

2 Temple Garden
23 October

Fountain Court Chambers
30 October

EVENTS

Introduction to the bar,
29th September

Non Law Panel,
6th October

OPPORTUNITIES

Mentoring For Underrepresented Groups: a scheme run by Commercial Barristers' Chambers. The Chambers participating for the academic year 2020-2021 are:

Blackstone Chambers
Brick Court Chambers
Essex Court Chambers
Fountain Court Chambers
One Essex Court Chambers
Three Verulam Buildings

The deadline to apply is 2 October 2020. Find more and apply [here](#).

BOOKISH

'Somebody must have made a false accusation against Josef K., for he was arrested one morning without having done anything wrong.' There are criminal proceedings against K. a senior bank clerk who is questioned unexpectedly before his breakfast. The nature of his alleged crime is not revealed to him or us. K. enters into a foggy maze of unidentified authorities while he maintains, and tries to prove his innocence inside a dimly lit criminal justice system. Franz Kafka's **The Trial** (1925) takes you on a journey of obscurity and riddles, where every chapter confirms you know nothing about K; his nightmarish reality 'robs him of his composure' and inevitably leads to his self-destruction.

Chris Daw QC, drawing from his 25-year experience in murder, fraud, and drug trafficking trials, makes a case for a radical change in the criminal justice system. With exceptional insights from a distinguished insider, **Justice on Trial** (published just a few weeks ago) will make an excellent read, especially if you are interested in criminal law.

Finally, why don't you [pre-order](#) **Fake Law** by The Secret Barrister (due to be published on September 3rd) and share your thoughts with us? If you wish to write a review for Cutting Through, please get in touch by sending us an email at info@queenmarybarsociety.org with the subject 'Book Review'.

Until then, keep in touch! Next CT issue: 15/9.