

FENNERS CHAMBERS: THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

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Fenners
Barristers



PART ONE:
THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, 1973-98
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The genesis of the set now known as Fenners Chambers was the foundation in the spring of 1973 at 90-92, Regent Street, Cambridge of an annexe to the chambers at Lamb Building in the Temple, the head of which was then Stanislaus Seuffert QC. This early history is almost certainly unknown to those who have joined chambers in the past 25 years, but the support from outside was a vital factor and indeed the concept of setting up chambers in Cambridge was essentially the brainchild of one man, Kenneth Wheeler, who was then a senior member of Lamb Building.

It is salutary to bear in mind that although the foundation of annexes, and indeed sets, in relatively small provincial centres is now commonplace, in 1973 it was novel. The Bar was largely confined to London and to large cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle, in all of which chambers had been in existence for many years. The unofficial rule then and for many years before that time was that if a member of provincial chambers took silk, he or she (nearly always he) had to move to London, and that had undoubtedly handicapped the development of the Bar across the country.

In 1973 Norwich had what was then a very small and rather rural local Bar at Octagon House, which was a set of pre-war foundation. It expanded much later quite vigorously for a time, but for many years it was not a dynamic force in the area and nearly all its work was in Norfolk.

The set now known as East Anglian Chambers had started in Colchester in 1948 but was still small. It was

founded by V.G. Hines, who had been a solicitor in the town before being called to the Bar: he later took silk and moved to London, in accordance with the practice described. When we opened, Colchester Chambers had recently established an annexe in Norwich, which was to become its main centre in later years. It then took over a failing chambers in Ipswich, opened in Chelmsford, and eventually closed its original base in Colchester, which was handicapped because there was never a Crown Court there and the County Court was then closed as part of the short-sighted retreat by the Court Service from providing proper, accessible local facilities.

Cambridge itself had not had a local Bar before 1973. For a few months, some years previously, a common law practitioner had had his plate up in Warkworth Street, but this experiment was short-lived and not successful. There were two Chancery practitioners who practised partly from their respective homes in Cambridge, one of whom, Tom Poole, who was blind, became a door tenant of the new enterprise for a short time. He had a somewhat chequered career thereafter and spent his last years living in a converted lighthouse in the Channel Islands.

There were of course a number of chambers who specialised in circuit work in East Anglia (particularly in crime) and there still are today.

It is clear now, with the benefit of hindsight, that the conditions for expansion of the Bar, and in particular the local Bar, were very favourable at that time. The Courts Act 1971 effected a revolutionary increase in the number of judges. Prior to its implementation, there had only been four full time judges in East Anglia, and they all sat in the County Courts. All the criminal work, other than that dealt with by the High Court Judge on assize, was heard by part-time Recorders or

Chairmen of Quarter Sessions. Cambridge, Huntingdon, Norwich and Ipswich were all visited by the High Court Judge and in fact one consequence of the changes which came into effect in 1972 was that there were no longer Red Judges in Cambridge and the serious criminal work was instead listed in Norwich, in the old Assize Court in the centre of that City. While I was an undergraduate, I saw the last visit of an Assize Judge to Cambridge, in 1971.

However, from 1972 there were Crown Courts, sitting all through the year, locally in Cambridge, Huntingdon, Chelmsford, Ipswich, Norwich, Bedford and King's Lynn. In later years Peterborough replaced Huntingdon and Luton replaced Bedford, which had had an outpost in Hertford.

In the 1970s Legal Aid was widely available and reasonably, although tardily, paid. The gap between remuneration for private and legal aid work was nothing like as great at that time as it has later become. The breadth of the availability of public funding was both in relation to the work covered and to the percentage of the population which was eligible.

Apart from these general considerations, there were local factors of considerable significance. East Anglia was expanding economically and demographically. The towns around Cambridge, such as Saffron Walden, Haverhill, Ely, Huntingdon and St. Neots, were increasing their populations particularly quickly. New firms of solicitors were seeing the potential and setting themselves up in these towns. As important in the long term was that Cambridge itself was to be transformed by the influx of new high technology industries, bringing with them not only some commercial work, but also a sharp increase in prosperity, and in particular in house prices, over the region. The indirect importance of Dr. John Bradfield,

Bursar of Trinity College and father of the Science Park, to the long-term success of Chambers should be noted. Cambridge itself has changed immeasurably in the past 50 years.

It is right to say, however, that while the conditions in which a flourishing local Bar could exist can easily be seen with the benefit of hindsight, it took the vision of one man, Kenneth Wheeler, to see the possibilities and to translate them into reality. Because Cambridge was so readily accessible from London, there had been no real impetus before 1973 to provide such a facility, but the outlook was changing.

Kenneth Wheeler (1921-2001) was brought up in Woolwich. He did not go to university but took a commission in the RAF and then proceeded to the Bar. By 1973, he was an established civil practitioner in London, but he had no interest in a judicial appointment. He was then a bachelor but married relatively late in life: confusingly his wife always referred to him as Richard, which was his second forename.

Ken Wheeler, as we called him, researched carefully the possibilities of establishing an annexe in a provincial centre reasonably near London and eventually, having looked seriously also at Reading and Maidstone, both a comparable distance from London, concluded that Cambridge offered the best opportunities for expansion. An additional factor was that he and other members of Lamb Building already had some work in Cambridge, mainly from Vinters, as the firm was then known prior to its merger with Taylors of Newmarket: it was then a fairly recent amalgamation of a number of smaller practices in the City, one of which had had operated from a previous building at 90/92 Regent Street. Vinters' offices were then on the corner of Station Road and Hills Road.

Although the concept of a set in Cambridge was Kenneth Wheeler's own, he received active cooperation from a number of other members of Lamb Building chambers, including the head, Stanislaus Seuffert QC (1899-1986). It is a salutary reflection on the passage of time that the first head of chambers, 50 years ago, was born in the Nineteenth Century.

The chambers at Lamb Building from which we sprung was started in 1954 when Alan King-Hamilton moved his set there from 4, Temple Gardens, which was to be demolished as part of the reconstruction of the Temple after the bombing had destroyed large parts of it. Lamb Building itself had just been rebuilt after it too had been completely destroyed. King-Hamilton (1904-2010) took silk in 1954 and remained head of chambers until 1964 when he became an Old Bailey Judge, retiring in 1979. He had a large number of the sensational cases of the time before him and was frequently quoted in the tabloid press because of his outbursts.

When King-Hamilton was appointed as a Judge, the chambers merged with those of Stanislaus Seuffert, which had previously been in Goldsmith Buildings and Seuffert became the new head of chambers. He had been a leading family practitioner for many years, although he did not take silk until 1965, but by 1973 much of his time was spent sitting as a Deputy High Court Judge in the Family Division, as the increase in work outpaced the ability of the full-time judiciary to deal with it. It is another interesting reflection on the passage of time that among the others who took silk with him were the politician Geoffrey Howe, and many future High Court Judges, including the famously robust Leslie Boreham and also Tasker Watkins VC, who was (uniquely) thereafter able to put the initials VC QC after his name. He became a formidable presence on the Bench and later in the Court of Appeal.

Seuffert was a strong supporter of the new venture. He came from a Polish/South African background and his wife had been the widow of a South African General. He had been Mayor of the old Metropolitan Borough of Fulham in 1944-5 in the Labour interest and was also a devout Roman Catholic. In 1954 he was appointed as a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre and later became the Secretary of the Order in England and Wales. Certainly in later years, Seuffert suffered from a complete inability to recall names and members of chambers who had known him for many years were sometimes taken aback when appearing before him when he whispered to the clerk asking him to find out the name of the advocate in question.

The venture was also backed, financially and otherwise, by a number of other members of Lamb Building. Among these were Leonard Krikler (1929-2018), who subsequently succeeded Seuffert as head of chambers on the latter's retirement in 1975 after 50 years at the Bar. Len Krikler was appointed as a Circuit Judge in 1984 and sat mainly at Willesden County Court, where he was renowned for his facility in dealing with cases efficiently and quickly, but also fairly. He and his wife were always active supporters of Cambridge social events and he entertained many gatherings of members of chambers and others with his superb after-dinner speeches, which were incomparable in their timing, and all delivered in his unforgettable Southern African accent: he was born in what was then Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe.

Other prominent supporters from Lamb Building were Leonard Krikler's sister Fiona Stoll, Timothy Ryland and Valerie Pearlman. Fiona Stoll later became an Employment Judge, and both Tim Ryland and Valerie Pearlman were appointed as Circuit Judges. Some more junior members also

paid regular sums for a time to enable the new annexe to get itself going.

In order to establish chambers, Kenneth Wheeler took on the lease of the top (second) floor of then recently constructed office premises at 90-92 Regent Street. That itself was a departure from the then conventional picture of barristers' accommodation. The furniture was modern, uniform and leased. The premises were relatively small but quite smart and could be partitioned according to the requirements of the particular tenant: after a few years, the original arrangement was altered at the behest of chambers so as to use the space more efficiently. The lift at 90-92 was in the middle of the building, with the rooms around it, one of which became the clerk's room, and one larger one was used for conferences with a number of participants and for meetings. Ken Wheeler intended that it become a place where arbitrations could be held, but that never in fact happened.

In order to retain as much square footage as possible for the tenant, the main door opened outwards rather than inwards into the lobby where the lift was. This caused many difficulties once the notoriously accident-prone Andrew Gore joined chambers, as he frequently forgot this and tried to walk through the door. There was another unfortunate incident when a new tenant was admitted as a consequence of a breakdown in communication between Cambridge and London. He lasted only one day after the Judge in his first case, at Norwich, rang to tell the clerk that the new tenant had appeared in court hopelessly drunk.

The premises were owned by the Pearl Assurance Company, which had an office on the first floor immediately beneath chambers. On the ground floor at that time were recruiting offices for the RAF (on one side) and the Royal Navy

(on the other), but their premises were later converted to bar/restaurant establishments. Pearl vacated in due course, and the top two floors were taken for a long time by a firm of patent agents.

The premises were reasonably central and also near to many local solicitors' offices, which at that time tended to be concentrated in the Regent Street/St Andrew's Street area. In 2021 the building was comprehensively refurbished, and it now looks nothing like it did during chambers' occupation.

The decision had been made by Kenneth Wheeler that in order for the set to succeed, young members of the Bar would establish their practices from there, with the senior work initially being carried out by established practitioners from Lamb Building. In due course it was hoped that Cambridge-based tenants would take over the heavier work. That vision, in fact, succeeded well. In the very early days, the new chambers functioned mainly on returns from Lamb Building, most of which were in London. As time went by, the local work rapidly grew and eventually the two sets were held together only by having a common head of chambers and by some work which continued to go from Cambridge solicitors to London: Kenneth Wheeler was appointed as head in 1984 on Leonard Krikler's appointment and retired from Lamb Building in 1996.

Fenners was technically an annexe of Lamb Building until as late as 1994, when a new written constitution was adopted and Jonathan Haworth was elected as the first head of chambers under it. Kenneth Wheeler's immense contribution to the growth of the enterprise was marked by his appointment to the honorific post of President, but he retired shortly thereafter. By this time, the ties between the two sets were largely restricted to use of each other's premises for conferences (which did happen from time to time). Eventually

even those residual connections fell away, largely after Stanley Mott, the clerk in London, who was always helpful to us, moved on. There was no rancour on either side and there are now very few involved who can recall these arrangements, which were so important to the establishment of chambers. Once Kenneth Wheeler retired in 1996, the main connection between the two sets finally disappeared.

The other important decision taken by Kenneth Wheeler at the time of the foundation of chambers was to employ a young but Temple-trained clerk. This sent a message to local solicitors that this was a serious enterprise and not a cheapskate operation. Peter Wright was the same age as the junior tenants taken on, which was also an advantage. He had been very well trained in a top civil set. In addition, his own personality, able to deal with every caller from senior partner to temporary typist, was a most material factor in the success of the venture. His contribution to chambers over the next 24 years was central to the success that was achieved. Initially he was the only employee and short-term arrangements had to be made with Lamb Building when he was on holiday. In that pre-digital age, we had no typist for some time but then we were able to expand into employing a receptionist/typist, which made matters easier. The amount of paper being generated then led to more than one typist being required.

Kenneth Wheeler originally planned that Chambers would begin its operations with eight members: two in fact declined the invitation to join, and with hindsight six was probably a more realistic number. Because of the strategy of taking on the newly qualified, and the need to finish pupillages, the six original members actually commenced practice at various dates in 1973. Jonathan Haworth started on 7 May, and his first case was at Cambridge Crown Court

three days later, brief at court. Nigel Mahoney began on 7 June, and David Levin and myself on 2 July. My first brief was on that day and was at the long-closed Biggleswade County Court.

The other original member, Piers Herbert, was the only one in a different category. He came with Jon Haworth. He was an established practitioner with some local connections and then lived in Saffron Walden, but his time with chambers was to be short and difficult and before the end of 1973 he left for pastures new.

Athol Page then joined us on 3 September, so the original group of six was complete. He immediately began sitting in the Rent Tribunal, the first quasi-judicial role taken on by a member of chambers.

Recruitment in those days was somewhat haphazard. The Bar was just beginning a substantial period of expansion, but tenancies were hard to find. I learnt of the proposal to open in Cambridge from a casual acquaintance whose name I have long-since forgotten, over tea in the Temple: it was a short conversation which changed the whole course of my life. Cambridge had obvious attractions to one who had been educated there and the early intake had a strong bias in that regard. I was also attracted by the idea of earning some extra income by teaching undergraduates and I did that for a number of years, as did others. The entry in the diary on 9 August 1973 has gone into folklore. I had been married five days earlier and by my name is written: "Honeymoon-Available if necessary". In fact, on that day I did my first case for Francis & Co., later absorbed by Mills & Reeve, who were to provide me with a great deal of work in those early years. I was instructed on it by the litigation clerk, Roger Broom, who was somewhat out of water in a very respectable

establishment. The diaries bring back many memories of long-defunct firms of solicitors and indeed of courts now closed.

Of the original members, none now remain in chambers and indeed the last remaining was the author, who left in 1998; hence the span of this first part of the history. Jon Haworth was appointed as a Circuit Judge in 1996 and I in 1998. Nigel Mahoney transferred to Lamb Building in 1975, but later left the Bar and became a solicitor, initially in Government Service but afterwards practising for some years in Hertford, specialising in liquor licensing. He then accepted an appointment as an Employment Judge, from which he retired in 2016.

David Levin emigrated to Australia, his wife's home country, in 1977, after four successful years here, and practised as a barrister in commercial work, especially computing and construction, in Melbourne: he took silk in 1998 and has visited chambers on his trips to this country, including attending the 40th Anniversary. Indeed, he has become a door tenant of Fenner's.

J. Athol Page, a gifted musician, had retired early as an Inspector of Schools and then requalified for the Bar and so was very much older than the rest of us: he was born in 1911. Sadly he was plagued by ill health, worked part-time for some years, and died in 1980 after a relatively short period in practice, by chance on the very day when a Chambers party was due to be held on his lawn. His widow outlived him for many years and died in 2012 aged 103.

Within a short time, chambers began to expand and Gareth Hawkesworth and Geraint Jones joined in 1974 and Andrew Gore in 1975: his first brief came from the late Peter Masters, whose son is now a member of chambers, and was to

appear in the Linton Magistrates' Court, opposite where Andrew now lives. They were all Cambridge graduates, and all soon developed practices of their own, although in those days everybody had to do everything and both Geraint and Andrew were to be found in the criminal courts. Gareth Hawkesworth was also found (occasionally) doing family work. This continued for many years, before specialisation took over. I liked variety and continued taking on whatever came through the door. I was also reluctant in later years to give up crime, because at that time appointments were nearly always dependent on willingness to sit on criminal work, at least initially.

There was considerable camaraderie in those early days and we all knew each other well. Nicknames, for internal use, were a feature: Gareth Hawkesworth, whose first name is Walter, was known as "Wally", David Levin, whose middle name is Samuel, as "Sammy", Jon Haworth as "Bathgrip" (because of his obsession with domestic products), and, most predictably, Andrew Gore as "Smasher". There was a scrapbook, in which newspaper articles were pasted if those involved had the same name as a member of chambers, such as "Davies powers her way into the big league". There was also a copy of instructions sent to Andrew Gore with some original workbooks and the request: "Please could you ensure that Mr Gore does not lose [the documents], if this is possible".

It became clear to me after about 18 months, so by the end of 1974, that the venture was succeeding and what has happened since amply supports that judgment. The 1974 diary is one of the very few which seems not to have been preserved, but real progress was made that year.

It would be tedious to chronicle in this narrative the arrivals and in some cases departures of members over the

first 25 years but the general picture throughout was one of gradual but real expansion. The first two women members were taken on with the arrival of Lindsay Davies in 1977, rapidly followed by Susan Espley later that year, and others followed. There was still at that time considerable feeling at the Bar against the recruitment of women as tenants, more so in the more old-fashioned chambers in London, and women judges were very rarely found.

By the end of 1977, there were 10 members of chambers, who were all on the whole busy: 1978 was one of those rare years in which no new tenants were taken on, but also no one left. 1981 was similar, but in January 1982 Caroline Worthy, the third female member, arrived.

The situation generally was eased by the lack of schisms, by the fact that no large chambers from London set up in opposition, and by the loyalty of the earliest and busiest members, who did not defect. The lack of effective local competition, especially before chambers was really established, was of considerable importance. It is an interesting contrast to the more recent developments for solicitors, as many of the old-established family firms have closed and a large number of London firms have opened satellite offices in Cambridge, drawn by the increase in commercial and tech-driven work. It was also the case in the early days that more specialised work tended to go elsewhere, until the members of chambers acquired more expertise and in due course those could be recruited with a background in more esoteric work.

In those early days the Crown Court, the County Court Judge and the City Magistrates all sat in the Guildhall. The Crown and County Courts used what later became the Crown Court room on alternate fortnights, with the Crown Court usually migrating to Wisbech in the other fortnight, and the

Magistrates used the other court, which was later converted to a waiting room.

HH Judge Conolly Gage, father of Lord Justice Gage, was then the County Court Judge. He sat not only at Cambridge and Peterborough but also in Bishop's Stortford, Ely, Huntingdon and Newmarket, all of which then had their own courts. He also heard criminal cases in Huntingdon: there was at that time no Crown Court in Peterborough.

Judge Gage was a no-nonsense, old-fashioned, County Court Judge who, had followed an unusual path even for the time when he was appointed, by resigning his seat in the House of Commons as the Ulster Unionist Member for South Belfast in order to take his judicial appointment. He was somewhat deaf but some thought his deafness was somewhat selective and he heard what plaintiffs said rather better than he did defendants. He was however a sound lawyer and scrupulously fair; he also strongly favoured members of the Bar appearing before him, which assisted us.

The County Court office and the Registrar's chambers were in Sidney House, Sussex Street, on top of what was then Ginn & Co.'s office. Ginn & Co are one of the many long-established small firms of solicitors which are no longer in existence.

The only regular Registrar, as District Judges were then termed, was John Tyrer, who was renowned for his failure to be affected by whatever happened or was said in front of him. The word "inscrutable" applied exactly to him and he was a kind and careful tribunal. He famously only raised his eyebrows when in the course of a lengthy address by a local solicitor to the effect that his client was not an alcoholic, the lady in question slid quietly from her chair under his table.

The best-known story about Registrar Tyrer concerns Norman Benton, a well-known Cambridge legal executive who was also a Football League (as it then was) referee and linesman. After a lengthy application for summary judgment by a rather plummy-voiced young barrister from London, he was asked for his response on behalf of the defendant. In that moment he had a mental blind spot and forgot that he was not on the football field but rather in court. He replied shortly: "I think it is a load of fucking rubbish". The Registrar did not blow a fuse, as most Judges, then and now, would have done, or even comment. He thought for a moment and said "I agree with you, Mr Benton, the application is dismissed with costs".

Judge David Wild was the Crown Court Judge. He was said by some to be wild by nature as well as by name and some of his sentencing was certainly somewhat erratic in both directions. In later years he was removed from Cambridge (where he was resident from 1973 to 1984) and despatched to Lincolnshire, where he finished his judicial career. He was criticised from time to time by the Court of Appeal, but those who said that he was not affected by this were wrong. On one occasion I defended a very respectable lady of Asian heritage before him. She had shoplifted underwear in a Cambridge clothes store and concealed it beneath her sari. The prosecution case was overwhelming. However, Judge Wild had just been criticised from on high for making racially inappropriate remarks about an Arab defendant who had appeared before him and he reacted to this by directing the jury in extravagant terms in effect not to convict the lady, who was meritlessly acquitted.

The Magistrates' Benches had not then been consolidated and it was only the Cambridge City Division which sat in the Guildhall: there was a separate County Bench which sat in its

own premises in Hobson Street, clerked by Patrick Halnan, the then editor of *Wilkinson's Road Traffic*, who was later to be elevated to the Circuit Bench; he then sometimes sat in Cambridge.

There had originally been a multitude of separate Magistrates' Courts across Cambridgeshire, but by the time chambers was established the Bottisham and Caxton Benches had ceased to sit in their own villages (although they still sat with their own lists in the Cambridge County Magistrates' Court). However, there were still courthouses in Linton and in Melbourn, as well as in other towns around such as Ely, St Neots, Royston, and Saffron Walden. Newmarket by then only had one courthouse (there had originally been two), but still had two separate Benches, namely Newmarket (Suffolk) and Newmarket (Cambridgeshire).

The provision of courts across the country was even more marked in Norfolk, where it was possible to appear in the County Court at Cromer or Fakenham, or in front of one of many rural benches. I think I am one of the few still about who ever appeared at the Freebridge Marshland Magistrates' Court in the village of Terrington St Clement, between King's Lynn and Spalding.

There were at that time a substantial number of Judges who had been appointed because practice at the Bar was very difficult in the 1950-70 period, but on the other hand judicial pay was then so low that it was unattractive to many. It was also the period when a number of judges returned to this country from outposts of the Empire and took up appointments here. The inappropriately termed "Jungle Judges" were often of poor quality and appearing before some tribunals at that time was something of a lottery. In some ways, this brought work to chambers, because the local

solicitors were unwilling to appear before those who were too unpredictable. It is also right to say that Judges of that age had nearly all fought in the Second World War, and often distinguished themselves in combat, but the psychological after-effects remained with some of them for many years and had never been addressed. Judge Buckie, who sat in Southend, had had an extraordinary war in the Royal Navy, but he took it out on advocates and litigants for many years afterwards.

Some judges of the time were also extremely rude, often to women in particular: some on the other hand were reluctant to commit themselves to anything as confining as a decision in any case. This latter was particularly so with Judge Adrian Head, who sat for many years in King's Lynn and eventually dealt only with civil cases, after the Court of Appeal was so astounded by what he had done in matters before him that it was ordained that he was not to be listed in crime or then in family. When many years later I was myself appointed, I resolved that if faced with a difficult decision I would consider what Judge Head would have done and take the opposite course.

Appearing in front of him was a nightmare for advocate and litigant alike and he was one of those who helped the growth of chambers, because the local solicitors were reluctant to wrestle with his idiosyncratic concept of logic.

There were then a number of other tribunals with their own concept of fairness. In Ipswich Crown Court sat HH Judge Bertram Richards, who was known for his extravagant comments about those appearing before him. On one occasion in my earlier years, I was mitigating hard on behalf of my client on the basis that his girlfriend was expecting a baby. The judge leant forward and asked: "Does your client ever

doing anything else but run around Suffolk fathering bastards?”, a question which it was not easy to answer. However, his sentencing was in general rather more lenient than many. He too was the subject of adverse criticism for the comments he had made about a complainant in a rape case and these led directly to the “ticketing” of criminal judges to hear sexual offences.

Judge Richards finally met his match when sitting in the splendid Victorian court at Bury St Edmunds, which retained for many years quill pens for the advocates in the well of the court. The cells were underneath the court, so a convicted defendant was literally taken down to be locked up. However this created a sound tunnel which magnified voices from below and one unfortunate exploited this when, as a new case was beginning, the booming sound of “Bertie Richards is a bastard” was heard resonating through the court. On another occasion the judge, who was prone to an early morning swim followed by a very speedy drive to court, arrived still in his wet suit, which he had been unable to remove, and another new role was found for his usher.

If we went to Norwich County Court, the judge was HH Judge David Moylan, the father of the present Lord Justice of Appeal. He was not noted for his commitment to getting through a list, and he thought that a 10.30 start was rather early for him.

At Christmas 1973 chambers held its first annual dinner, which that year was held in the University Arms. The round table provided was so large that the few present had to shout to each other over the yards separating them. Subsequent annual dinners have taken place at various restaurants and colleges and other institutions over the years and within a few years the tradition commenced of having a summer party with

children also invited, initially at members' homes and later, when the space became available, in the garden at Chambers. The first Chambers child was Charlotte Yelton, born 4 January 1977, followed rapidly by Rachel Levin and then about a year later by Nicholas Haworth.

A Chambers cricket team began early on, with varying success, and there were also some other sporting ventures later, such as football and mixed hockey. When Martin Beddoe joined chambers he asked on one occasion whether his friend could play for the cricket team and as we always needed keen recruits this was met with approbation. The opposition however protested when they found that our ringer was Derek Pringle, who had recently retired from first-class cricket and from playing for the England XI.

After some years, additional staff were taken on and of course some thereafter left. It would be wrong to overlook the long service afforded by Jane Longhurst, who worked, initially part time but later full time, for Fenners in various capacities for over 20 years and Bobbie Thompson, who arrived during this first period and retired only in 2012. Other long-serving members of staff from this era include Susan Reader (née Grapes), Karen Thompson, and Mandy Butt (née Jakes), all of whom were primarily typists, and Adrian Brown, the first junior clerk to be employed: he transferred to us from Lamb Building. The need in the pre-computer age for typing gradually declined as most members learned to use their own equipment.

One colourful recruit to chambers in 1975 was John Slade, who became a legend in his short lifetime (1944-84): he died of a heart attack at 39. Immense in size, with a piratical beard, he was a former solicitor and prosecutor, who was more popular among the Norfolk criminals than with the other

members of the Bar in Norwich, who regarded him as less than a gentleman because he played cards in the robing room (which was under the main court in the old Crown Court there) whilst the jury was out: he thus joined chambers in Cambridge rather than those in Norwich. His oratory and his asides (often derogatory of whoever he was appearing before) were as well-known as his capacity for food. His greatest treat, which normally followed a particularly meritless acquittal, was to visit the Norwich Wimpy (in the days when they had waitress service), order the largest combination on offer of adorned burger and chips, repeat the order, order the biggest knickerbocker glory and then repeat that also.

In January 1979 an annexe was opened at 19-21 Red Lion Street, Norwich, which was a small, rented suite which had at one time housed the offices of Norwich City FC. John Slade practised mainly from there, together with Philip Sapsford, who moved out of London to live in a converted mill in Norfolk, Stephen Franklin, who moved down from Leeds, and later Paul Leigh-Morgan. The Norwich venture did not however last long, and closed in 1982. The annexe was too far away and Norwich was too sewn up by the existing local bar. It was also expensive to maintain a staffed annexe with only four members. A former member of Octagon House, Ray Chance (1916-2009), joined Fenners at this time for his last period in practice, but increasingly was only sitting, in a variety of positions.

John Slade was a fine advocate but a difficult colleague and he and Philip Sapsford were as chalk and cheese. Eventually John Slade moved to a London set, but died prematurely. Philip Sapsford changed his base to Cambridge and then left for London, where he took silk in 1992 and has conducted a great deal of commercial work, especially in Italy, together with Human Rights litigation from the West Indies.

Stephen Franklin went to Hong Kong until 1999, returned to Fenner's, and then joined East Anglian Chambers in 2002. He died tragically in a shooting accident shortly afterwards. Paul Morgan (1955-2005) relocated his practice to Cambridge and his unsurpassed joie de vivre lightened up many an occasion thereafter until sadly an underlying health problem ended his life at the age of 49. He was also an early pioneer of Alternative Dispute Resolution and was developing an expertise in that which was cut short by his death.

In 1982 the members of chambers bought property for the first time. It seemed at the time a reckless venture, although in fact it was nothing like as risky as the acquisition of the Stone House in 1990. The semi-detached house at 5, Gresham Road, not far away from Parker's Piece, had originally been owned by Gonville and Caius College, which still owned number 7, which was a hostel for undergraduates. They had sold 5 to a partnership of doctors, from whom the members of chambers bought it. Modifications were then needed for its new use.

The premises were far better than Regent Street, although fairly rapidly space became a problem yet again. At that time working from home was not an accepted option: some rooms in Gresham Road were quite small and the ground floor was taken up by the clerks' rooms and the library. The building also lacked a large meeting room, needed as the number of members increased.

With the property came a small flat at the back with a Rent Act protected tenant, Miss Ethel Screen, who had appropriately been a cinema projectionist. When she later became too infirm to live independently, the flat was used to provide residential accommodation for a pupil or junior

tenant: there was no planning permission for business use of it, unfortunately.

The Saturday on which we moved to the new premises will live long in the memory of all those who participated. We decided to do everything ourselves, to save money. The author drove the van, and there were teams at each end. The contents of 90/92 were taken down in the lift and then loaded on to the van for the short drive to Gresham Road. The rhythm of the day was interrupted only when the Fire Brigade had to be called after the lift broke down: it was no surprise to those who knew him that Andrew Gore was in it at the time, together with Oliver Heald and some furniture. It was in general however a very satisfying day's work.

The name Fenners was then adopted (at the suggestion of the author) because of the proximity of the cricket ground. Chambers had not had a distinctive name for marketing or the like before then but has retained it although it is no longer geographically appropriate, although it is a well-known appellation.

Although car parking was not easy at Gresham Road, at that time residents-only schemes had not been introduced so there were places available. The only person unaffected by such problems was the author, since in 1983 we moved to a house only 400 yards from Chambers. In due course, parking rights were taken in the car park of Owen Webb House, on the corner of Gresham Road and Gonville Place, which then housed the Farmers' Club, of which most tenants became members. The lunches there were convivial and almost on the doorstep. It has since been redeveloped into residential accommodation.

Another feature of the property was a cellar, which was soon racked for wine and for some years a cooperative buying scheme was in operation, directed by Gareth Hawkesworth.

The work continued to expand, both in quality and quantity. The turnover increased substantially following the move; by then there were 14 members. The County Court moved to 72-80 Hills Road, where it remained for many years and this was within easy walking distance of Gresham Road. After Judge Gage retired, the principal judges at the County Court were HH Judge Garfitt, HH Judge Bromley QC and then HH Judge Sheerin.

Alan Garfitt was a very unusual appointment for his time: he came from Norfolk, where his father had been a cobbler, and he never lost his strong accent. By the time he came to Cambridge he had a smallholding at Soham and ducks' eggs were sold by his usher to those appearing in the court. His hands were often stained with sheep dip, and he had practical skills beyond the ken of many judges. He was fond of telling litigants that he had an HGV licence. The story that he repaired the court vending machine with a screwdriver he kept in his desk is probably, but not certainly, apocryphal. Some, particularly those who did not know him, thought him uncouth and he was undoubtedly a maverick, but his heart was in the right place and he usually got the right answer, although sometimes by unconventional routes.

Leonard Bromley was a complete contrast. He had been a Chancery silk and was impeccably fair: he picked up family and personal injury work, which had been completely alien to him, and was always charming to all who appeared in front of him. He was however not fast at dealing with cases and the writer conducted before him the longest-ever case in the Cambridge County Court (39 days in all: it took two days to

deliver judgment). Sadly, he died at about the time he would have retired.

John Sheerin was another contrast. He had been a solicitor in Bury St Edmunds and acquired a wide knowledge of all sorts of litigation, as senior partners in provincial firms then did. He was somewhat unpredictable on the Bench and suffered from a volcanic temper which erupted on occasion. He died relatively young while undergoing a routine operation.

Once Judge Wild was moved, the Crown Court was presided over largely by HH John Blofeld, later Mr Justice Blofeld, the brother of the cricket commentator Henry Blofeld, and by HH Judge Frederick Beezley. Fred Beezley became the Resident Judge: he had practised in London but once he was made a judge he sat in Norwich and then in Cambridge. Thus it was that neither of the two senior judges of that era in Cambridge (Garfitt and Beezley) were alumni of the University, which some thought was unfortunate. Fred Beezley was on occasion somewhat pompous, which offended some who did not know him, but he was fundamentally a humane and compassionate man, who did not pass extravagant sentences. I learned a lesson from him, in a very serious case where one of the defendants was asking for an adjournment because he had to undergo a vital operation. Beezley granted the application, as most judges would have done, but then wished the defendant well in hospital, which most judges would not have done.

In these years a particularly strong presence was established by Fenners in Peterborough. Prior to the opening of the new Combined Court there, the Crown Court sat for a time in one of the new Magistrates' Courts, after vacating the old Assize Court in Huntingdon. The civil work was in the Victorian County Court in New Road, which is now a night

club, an ironic turn of events since HH Judge Macgregor, a dedicated but incredibly slow tribunal, often sat very late indeed. John Macgregor appeared to have no life outside the court, in which he sat for as long as he could. The pace was pedestrian: orders were dictated to include the punctuation and notes were taken in several contrasting colours. However, he did nearly always reach the right conclusion, even if it was after hours by the time he got there. After the old purpose-built but inadequate County Court was closed and the new Combined Court opened, he continued to sit all hours, but he remained much respected.

After the premises in Gresham Road became too small for the numbers of members of Chambers, it was necessary to consider a move. That was made more difficult by the extreme unhelpfulness of the Planning Sub-Committee of Cambridge City Council, who appear to have regretted that the personal permission for our use of Gresham Road had ever been given.

It was clear that any new premises would require both adequate parking and adequate access to roads leading out of Cambridge. It was in those circumstances that the Stone House, then the private residence of the entrepreneur Sir Clive Sinclair, was found. It was ideal in its appearance, in its location, and in the fact that there was space for more than sufficient car parking. Sir Clive was anxious to dispose of it. It appeared to cost far too much but a confident recklessness, encouraged by some constructive accounting figures from Geraint Jones, whose contribution to the move and all the work involved was immense, pushed the members on and convinced the more cautious.

The City Council granted personal planning permission for the Stone House, in exchange for the relinquishment of that granted in respect of Gresham Road, but failed to implement the corollary, namely the reversion to use of the

latter as a hostel, which would have enabled it to be sold back to Caius, who could then reunite it with number 7, which made considerable economic sense to them. A potentially very serious problem was only solved when the College elected to buy at a reduced price, without the permission, and then to apply themselves. They succeeded in due course, but the episode cost the members of Chambers some £50000 and was a salutary lesson to all.

A further substantial amount had to be paid to St. John's College to obtain the release of a restrictive covenant which it held over the land in Madingley Road, and the costs of conversion of the premises were also considerable. The move, which took place in the summer of 1990 and was less memorable than the previous removal, since professionals were employed, was in economic terms a manifest success.

The acquisition of premises of that quality, almost unique to any set of Chambers in the country, sent out a clear message that here now was a serious enterprise to which the most prestigious client could be taken for advice. Expansion in work and numbers followed rapidly and enabled the members to ride the worst of the recession which followed for a long time. In more recent times, the number of members has increased enormously but in due course many have effectively practised from home. In the early days it was de rigueur to be in chambers if you were not in court.

In 1993 it was decided to open premises in Peterborough and a lease was taken of the top floor of 8/10 Priestgate, near the courts and in what was then the central legal district. The premises opened on 4 October 1993 and were used as a conference and administrative facility and a member of staff who did the accounts was based there, but no tenants practised solely from that address. At that time nearly all the

solicitors were based in the same street: since then, they have almost all decamped.

Reform of administration and administrative procedures occupied a great deal of the time of members and staff alike following the move. In 1997 Peter Wright was replaced as Senior Clerk by Mark Springham, also Temple trained, who had been First Junior Clerk since 1989. Peter moved to take over the clerking of a set in Manchester. It was an unpleasant and divisive episode for all concerned.

One of the obvious problems with the structure of Fenners Chambers was the bulge of members called around 1972-3. The problem had partly been alleviated by the specialisation which had developed over years, but it remained a barrier to further upward development of the practices of those beneath them. However, in due course some of those concerned began to leave for appointments, thus clearing the field for those junior to them.

The number of appointments in relation to those who were in Chambers during the first 25 years has been substantial and far greater than in most provincial chambers of similar size, let alone so recently founded.

Jonathan Haworth began sitting as an Assistant Recorder in 1990, to be followed by myself and Gareth Hawkesworth in 1992 and Lindsay Davies in 1998. All four of us have subsequently been appointed to the Circuit Bench in, respectively, 1996, 1998, 1999 and after a long and underserved wait, 2012. Liza Gordon-Saker was made a District Judge of the Principal Registry in 2010 and then a Circuit Judge in 2014. Robin Chaudhuri was appointed as a District Judge (in 2008) and then as a Circuit Judge (in 2020).

Martin Beddoe, a former member of Chambers, was appointed as a Circuit Judge in 2007.

George Foxwell was appointed as an Employment Judge in 2009 and was elevated to be a Regional Employment Judge in 2020. Liza Gordon-Saker's husband Andrew was made a Supreme Court Costs Judge in 2003, and then appointed to the important position of Chief Taxing Master in 2014.

Caroline Beasley-Murray was made the full time Coroner for Essex. She had only been in Chambers for a short time, as had Peter King, who became an Immigration Judge. A number of others have sat in a wide variety of fee paid positions in the region.

In 1992 Oliver Heald, who had been in Chambers since 1979, was elected as Member of Parliament for North Hertfordshire, in the Conservative interest, and he rapidly rose to junior ministerial rank. In 1997 he successfully held the new North East Hertfordshire seat but of course lost his ministerial position because of the change in political flavour of the Government, which enabled him to resume part-time practice for a time. He sat in opposition on the Front Bench for many years, until returning to the back benches under the Coalition Government. However, in late 2012 he was unexpectedly appointed as Solicitor General and thereby elevated to the rank of Queen's (now King's) Counsel. On leaving that post he was knighted.

Although no member of Fenners Chambers has yet taken silk from Cambridge, three former members have done so, namely David Levin (in Australia), Philip Sapsford and Oliver Heald.

This is by nature an outline account, not a detailed chronology and any views expressed in it are of course mine

alone. It would be inappropriate for me to write anything about events since 1998, and I leave that to Paul Hollow to chronicle.

**PART TWO:
THE SECOND TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, 1998-2023
BY PAUL HOLLOW**

I have had the advantage of reading Michael Yelton's account of the establishment of Fenners Chambers and of its first 25 years and I will attempt to carry on that history through to the present day. I joined Chambers in 1982 when there were 12 tenants in total. Tim Brown had been a pupil in Chambers and became a tenant at the same time and we were followed very shortly by Peter Morris and Paul Sutton (who was a pupil when I arrived), so it was clearly a time of rapid expansion. I retired from practice in 2019 by which time there were about 50 active tenants and Fenners Chambers was a very different beast. Like Michael, I qualify what I am about to write by saying that this is a personal account and the views expressed are mine and mine alone.

When I started my career at Fenners it was still expected that all tenants were available to take on all types of work, although personal preferences – and the preferences of instructing solicitors – meant that there were members leaning more to crime or to family work even if they still operated in other areas of work. I joined with Tim Brown, who had been a pupil with Jon Haworth and Gareth Hawkesworth, so he naturally leaned towards criminal practice while I, as a result, tended to pick up junior civil and family cases that came in. Our respective practices went on to develop along these lines although I continued to appear in the Crown Court until well

into the 1990s and Tim was also to be seen in the County Court.

By 1998 that had changed very significantly. Chambers had organised around Teams- the Criminal Team, the Family Team, the Employment Team, the Property Team and so forth – each with an elected Team Leader and recruitment was very much on a Team footing. A final decision on recruitment remained a matter for Chambers as a whole with a vote taken at a Chambers Meeting, but each Team would identify its own recruitment needs and candidates would be interviewed not simply to join Chambers but to join a specific Chambers team. Generally, people would be promoted by the clerks as a member of the no more than two teams, although inevitably some people were in demand in more areas than that – the author of Part One being one of those.

The range of work had also expanded since Chambers inception. In common with most provincial sets at the time, the staples of Chambers work during the 1980s were crime and family. Those two areas remained significant in 1998 and on to the present day, although the criminal team is now rather smaller than it once was, but by 1998 a number of tenants, Geraint Jones and Andrew Gore among them, had developed practices purely in areas of civil law and it was possible to join Fenners Chambers on the basis of practising only in civil without undertaking any criminal or family work.

Two examples from the early 2000s stand out in my memory. Terry Vaughan was a former Civil Engineer who joined in 2002 to do personal injury and building contract work and would not have thanked you for a brief in the Crown Court or in family work. At about the same time, Daniel Owen joined Chambers to do environmental work and, in particular, cases involving deep sea fisheries where the opposing sides

would be national governments rather than Mr and Mrs Smith from Fenstanton (for example - I do not know whether Chambers have ever represented a Mr or Mrs Smith from Fenstanton, but it is quite likely), and where the tribunal was definitely not Cambridge County Court.

Taking people on as tenants on these terms would have been unthinkable when Fenners Chambers was establishing itself in the 1970s and 1980s but both Terry and Daniel, and others who followed, built successful careers in their chosen fields.

This is perhaps an illustration of the character of Chambers changing from a young and developing set to one that was established and recognised as having a national reputation in certain areas. As a growing set, recruitment was based on bringing in newly qualified barristers to start at the foot of the career ladder and work their way up, and people were only recruited when it was felt that there was more work than the current membership could carry.

One test of an established set is its ability to attract well-established tenants from other Chambers who see a future for themselves in that set. In the 1990s and into the 2000s there were two well-established family practitioners from other sets who regularly appeared against members of Fenners in Peterborough. Robin Chaudhuri was in a set in Leicester, but lived near Stamford, while Jane Bennington was in a London set, but also living in East Anglia. The Family Team identified a need for more experienced practitioners to meet a growing workload and both Robin and Jane were identified as suitable candidates and invited to join us. It took something of a concerted campaign, but in 2002 both joined and became leading lights in our Family Team.

As time went on, others with established practices elsewhere joined us. Notable among them were Andrew Gordon-Saker (who would say that he applied because his wife told him to), Jeff Deegan, Celia Miller, Debra Gold and Araba Taylor, who went on to become the first (and so far, only) member of Fenners to become a bencher of her Inn. In some cases, people responded to adverts placed in Bar News or elsewhere, but in other instances people saw the growth of Fenners Chambers and made their own decision to apply. Tony Kefford was someone in the latter category. He was in Chambers in Norwich, where he was highly in demand in financial remedy work and well-known to all family practitioners in Cambridge. I had known him since my pupillage in the set where he was then the new junior tenant and he had spoken to me on occasion about the possibility of himself and Katharine Bundell moving to Fenners, for various reasons. When they did finally make a decision to move, Tony called me at what probably seemed to him like a reasonable hour, but I was on holiday in Antigua at the time and received the call at 3am! I was sufficiently in support of their publication that this early call did not put me off. The process of recruiting experienced people from other Chambers continues and more recent arrivals include Lisa Hannant, Anthony Tanney and Richard Balchin.

While we were looking to recruit senior and middle-ranking practitioners, the need for junior tenants remained as high as it had ever been and the process of recruiting pupils became altogether more organised and professional.

When I joined in 1982, I attended one interview with three current members and then subsequently received a phone call asking me to start – and this was for tenancy, not just pupillage. In contrast, by the late 1990s/2000s, we had a pupillage committee who had to work through a couple of

hundred pupillage applications each year, to decide which 20 or so should be invited for a first interview – and then arrange interview panels – before determining the five or six from that selection who would go forward for a second interview. Susan Espley was the head of the pupillage committee and did sterling work, greatly assisted by Rod Spinks and Penny Grewcock among others.

Filtering the many applications was a time-consuming process, but the result was that we usually ended up with two pupils each year who were serious candidates for tenancy – which had not always been the case in the past – to the extent that from the late 1990s it became the norm that one or both of the pupils would be taken on at the end of the year. A number of those former pupils have moved on, District Judge Josling, HHJ Spinks and Martin Kingerley KC among them, but the website currently lists 54 tenants and 20 of those were pupils in Fenners.

Another very visible change in the membership of Chambers is the significant increase in the number of female members. No doubt anyone under the age of 40 will wonder why that is worthy of mention – at least I hope they would – but even when I started out female barristers were a rarity and even rarer outside the realms of family law. I was a pupil in two sets; one had a female head of Chambers, but no females in the annex I was in, and the other simply had no female tenants at all. This was not uncommon.

Lindsay Davies became the female member of Fenners in 1977 and had the distinction later of becoming the first female head of Chambers; Meryl Hughes became the second female head in 2018. Susan Espley joined shortly after Lindsay and Caroline Worthy became the third female tenant in 1982, shortly after I joined. Of the 54 members listed on the current

Chambers website, 26 are female, and they are practising across a range of disciplines, not solely in family law.

I have so far focussed on the barrister members of Chambers but the support staff, the clerking team and the administrators, have been just as important to the character of Chambers and its success. No history of Chambers would be complete without mentioning the contributions of Paul Green and Cathy Hugo. Paul Green had been a senior clerk in London and in Chelmsford before coming to Fenners as senior clerk in 2007, at a time when there were a number of people in that role, with varying degrees of success and his experience and professionalism have been vital to the progress of Fenners Chambers from that point on. He has been aided in that by his deputy, Cathy Hugo, who joined Chambers in 2002 – so long ago that I barely remember a time when she was not there. Paul and Cathy have provided a solid base to the clerking team and in addition to carrying out their own roles have been excellent in training and supporting successive junior clerks.

The administrator's role has also been key to the character and stability of Chambers. Jane Longhurst took on the role in the early days and remained in post until her retirement, when the position was taken by Sharon Bannerman and then by Gemma Pask, who remains in post as Office Manager.

With the growth in numbers and in the range of work undertaken, the geographical area covered by Fenners has increased to include appearances in Liverpool and Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and even as far afield as Newcastle or the West Country: Michael Yelton had set the precedent for this, by appearing in both Penzance and Barrow-in-Furness County Courts and Haverfordwest Crown Court.

However, Cambridge remains the main court centre for Fenners Chambers in family, civil and criminal work, with Peterborough as a close second. The County Courts now have a single administration based in Peterborough (for better or worse) but both courts remain active while others in the region have closed.

In my time in practice new court buildings were opened in each centre. Cambridge has a new Crown Court and a new County Court (both now on East Road), and Peterborough has a combined court building opened in 1987. The extent to which the Peterborough building has been adapted since it was opened, to increase the number of court rooms (the original solicitors' robing room and the cafeteria have both become courts) speaks to the growing volume of work with which these courts have to deal.

In the circumstances it is perhaps fortunate that the rather eccentric characters who used to appear to appear on the Bench (see Part One of the History) have largely disappeared, a result of stiffer competition for judicial posts, and a far more extensive programme of judicial training. It has resulted in a more consistent level of justice, which is to be welcomed, although it has deprived the author of a sure supply of anecdotes.

The influence of Fenners Chambers in the local judiciary has grown over the years. Jonathan Haworth was the first member to be appointed to a full-time post and became the resident judge at Cambridge Crown Court, where he was joined and later succeeded as resident by Gareth Hawkesworth. Both have since retired and Stuart Bridge, who was a door tenant at Fenners, died in office, a huge loss to the court and to the Cambridge legal world in general. At the time

of writing, none of the Crown Court Judges have a history in Fenners Chambers.

In contrast, the make-up of the bench at the County Court has proceeded in the opposite direction. The first person connected to Fenners Chambers to sit in our home County Court was Michael Yelton, in 2007, but only after he had served his time in Essex. Lindsay Davies followed and became the Designated Family Judge (DFJ) for Cambridge on the retirement of HHJ Plumstead. Both Michael and Lindsay have now retired, but the current bench in Cambridge comprises Liza Gordon-Saker (the current DFJ), Robin Chaudhuri and Roderick Spinks, with myself, Nick Davies and Liam Varnam all appearing regularly as Deputy District Judges. It has been called, quite unfairly, the Fenners Mafia!

Fenners Chambers continues to operate from The Stone House, 3, Madingley Road, an attractive building purchased from Sir Clive Sinclair at a time when every tenant could be allocated a desk in a designated room and could expect to share that room with no more than one or two other tenants. The increased number of members means that this has long been impossible, and in reality, it is only the advances in technology that have enabled Chambers to keep The Stone House as its base. Technology has fundamentally altered the way in which legal authorities are accessed, the way briefs and instructions are received, the way that the barrister's work is delivered and the staffing needs of a set of Chambers. It is no longer necessary to come into the building to use the Chambers Library to look up authorities, or to access the Chambers' diary, or to pick up or drop off papers. As a result, many tenants live a distance from Chambers and work from home, making only occasional visits to Chambers. For a short period, as set out in Part One, Chambers had an annex in Peterborough, with the idea that we would be more accessible

to our Peterborough-based solicitors, but experience showed that this was unnecessary as less and less work was delivered in paper form. Of course, it was still necessary for people to attend court for hearings, but even that changed with the Covid pandemic in 2020.

The pandemic presented challenges to everyone involved with Fenners Chambers and with the court system. The Crown Court was particularly badly affected, as the requirements for social distancing meant that very few courtrooms could accommodate a jury trial, and for a period of time there were simply no trials taking place. The acquisitions of other locations as “Nightingale Courts” enabled some resumption of jury trials, but even this was limited, and it was really only with the lifting of social distancing rules that the Crown Court was able to return to anything like normal operation. The County Court did manage to keep going, more or less, with the hasty introduction of platforms for remote hearings, some of which worked better than others. To say that it was challenging to hold a hearing where everyone involved had to join remotely by their computer or phone would be a massive understatement. Most professionals had access to appropriate technology (but not all, it transpired) but many lay clients were defeated in their attempts to connect by mobile phone, especially if their only access to the papers in the case was via that same mobile phone.

However, through trial and error, the process became more reliable to the extent that I did a three-day hearing in Cambridge with one party on video link from Teheran, and they remained connected throughout. It was a change from looking into some barrister’s bedroom.

For the practitioners, there were advantages to remote hearings, no travel time, ability to do successive hearings in

courts geographically distant from each other, but real disadvantages in the loss of contact with other practitioners from one's own Chambers, or firm, or otherwise. For the clerking and admin teams there were also difficulties, as these are essentially office-based jobs, and the clerks' room at Fenners, and I suspect at many Chambers, was far too small to be functional, given the limitations of social distancing. Again, technology came to the rescue in enabling clerks to work remotely from home and to enable each person, at least for the most part, to see on screen what another had done. At Fenners, a rota system was introduced where two clerks would be in the building on any given day while the others worked from home and so Chambers carried on, at times even busier than prior to the pandemic.

As stated at the outset, this is a personal account of the second 25 years of Fenners Chambers. Geraint Jones (43 years) and Andrew Gore (48 and counting) have been in Chambers for the longest period to date. I was a member of Chambers for 38 years and Head of Chambers for two stints. As a part-time judge in Cambridge and Peterborough, professional links with Chambers remain, but it is difficult to think of Fenners Chambers purely in terms of professional relationships. When I joined, there was a definite sense of Fenners as a "family", mutually supportive and linked by a common purpose, and much of that sense remains, albeit that the "family" now spans generations and extends to "second cousins", and as with a family the losses are keenly felt. It would not be right to end this account without remembering and commemorating those we have lost. The death of Paul Morgan in 2005 hit everyone very hard. He was a central figure in Chambers and fondly regarded by all. The tragic losses of Lawrence Bruce in 2016 and Daniel Messenger in 2022 each had the same effect on everyone. Mention should also be made of Caroline Pointon and Stephen Franklin, who

each died shortly after leaving Chambers. All will be fondly remembered.

What of the future? There are challenges out there, but the need for expert lawyers and advocates to guide people through the legal minefield has continued, and to date Fenners Chambers has adapted to meet the challenges presented and gone from strength to strength. Under the leadership of the current Head of Chambers, Mike Magee, and with an exceptional body of young members as well as a number of experienced members, long that may continue.

BARRISTERS BY SENIORITY

Andrew Gore

1973

Tim Brown

1980

Anthony Kefford

1980

Martin Collier

1982

Debra Gold

1985

Araba Taylor

1985

Robin Howard

1986

Meryl Hughes

1987

Alasdair Wilson

1988

Jeff Deegan

1989

Bruce Monnington

1989

Clive Pithers
1989

Nicholas Saunders
1989

Polly Low
1990

Caroline Horton
1993

Shahin Ismail
1993

Michael Procter
1993

Anthony Tanney
1994

Katharine Ferguson
1995

James Earle
1996

Terence Vaughan
1996

Mike Magee
1997

Richard Balchin
1997

Daniel Owen
1999

Ian Newport
2000

Caroline Allison
2002

Penelope Grewcock
2004

Lisa Hannant
2005

Charles Snelling
2005

Nick Davies
2006

Sally Gore
2006

Elizabeth White
2006

Iain Bain
2007

Suhayla Bewley
2007

Carlo Coccaro
2007

Sarah Giles
2007

Liam Varnam
2007

Abigail Pilkington
2008

Laura Cooke
2009

Jonathan Masters
2009

Benjamin Phillips
2011

Davide Corbino
2012

Joshua Walters
2012

Gemma Stokes
2013

Clare Gould
2014

Jodie Drummond
2015

Alicia Theaker
2016

Ellena Forman
2017

Oliver Fuller

2018

Anne Hogarth

2018

Eve Chowdhury

2019

Abigail Robinson

2020

Louise Ballantyne

2021

Melanie Benn

2021

Nick Mason-Williams

2021

STAFF

Paul Green (Senior Clerk)

Cathy Hugo (Deputy Senior Clerk)

Gemma Pask (Office Manager)

Robyn Childs (Direct Access Clerk)

Sarah Banks (Fees and Billing Clerk)

Rosie Deane (Diary Clerk)

Sophie Stephens-Young (Junior Clerk)

Fenners
Barristers

