

President's Newsletter November 2021

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The “*Annual Awards ceremony*”, within our professions, is a social fixture which has grown exponentially over the last decade or so. As in many areas, Nottingham Law Society was “*ahead of the game*”, having instigated its Annual Awards well over ten years ago and before many of our sister law societies had taken such a step. The awards are now established in our calendar and provide an opportunity to look at ourselves and celebrate outstanding examples of professionalism and other, altruistic activity amongst our membership. When some may find it easy to forget or overlook the high standards our professions impose and the extent to which so many of our number do more than just their job on a daily basis, such awards allow us to remind them of some positive aspects of legal professional life.

Last week we held our second “*Pandemic*” Awards Night. As last year Covid had caused a cancellation of our Annual Dinner, so, instead, NLS members were treated to a Drinks Reception and Awards in the Old Chemistry Theatre at Nottingham Trent University.

The awards for Junior Lawyer of the Year, Practice Manager of the Year, Barrister of the Year and Solicitor of the Year reflected achievement during 2020 and into 2021 and each went to fine examples of their professions, **Callum Scott, James Firman, Clive Stockwell QC** and **Sam Sharp**. The Lifetime Achievement Award was made to **Richard Grosberg** of Nelsons for a remarkable and lengthy career in Nottingham, specialising in Court of Protection work, for which he built an enviable reputation and watched his firm prosper and grow over 4 decades.



There are four awards that I want to dwell on however. **Martin Lee** won our new and unique **Lockdown Hero of the Year**, an award instigated to reflect a remarkable contribution during the period of the pandemic and presented to Martin for his steadfast chairmanship of the Civil Court Users Possession Group which, with Judge Godsmark QC, took the lead in steering the management of possession cases in the Nottingham County Court once Practice Direction 51Z was lifted. The wider benefit to the public at large of efficient management of those cases, which carry enormous significance for the parties, is too obvious to me to have to emphasize, and the hard work put in by Martin and his Committee went well beyond their day to day professional lives in benefitting those who were struggling.

Similar observations may be made about **Rob Bevan**, who won the **Contribution to the Community Award**. Rob has spent over 30 years administering and conducting the Thursday evening Advice Clinic at Nottingham Law Centre in Hyson Green. The sessions provide free advice to the local community in areas of law which fall outside those customarily handled by the Law Centre, and for which local practitioners volunteer their services. Rob started to helm the sessions over 30 years ago, often arriving with a fish supper in hand, and leaving with his badminton racket ready to go. It is impossible to count the number of people who have been advised by him over those years and probably fair to say that these sessions would not have thrived as they have done, nor continued so long without his presence. A simple and, I would suggest, shining example of how anyone can put something back into their community by making time to do so. Rob demonstrates, with a minimum of fuss, exactly what we all might strive to be and how small things can prove to be of enormous significance for those we help.

Nottinghamshire Law Society has also, when occasion demands it, conferred a **President's Award** on an individual who represents the very best that the professions in Nottinghamshire have to offer, leading, not only in terms of professional standards but also in giving of their time and expertise freely in order to benefit others, so going beyond the provision of exemplary service to clients to make a return to the wider community which surrounds us. The award is not made every year, but when presented, it is to an individual of the highest rank, who exemplifies the sort of excellence for which we all can strive. **Sharma Gupta** and **Deborah Hutchinson** were both recipients of the President's Award last week.

Sharma qualified in 1985, practicing initially in the field of property and real estate and becoming, for a period, a Senior Lecturer in Law at Bournemouth University and an External Examiner for the Solicitors Regulation Authority, before returning to the profession, in Nottingham, with Freeths in 2006. It is Sharma's commitment to diversity and to representation of the profession which is most noteworthy. A Council Member of the national Law Society for many years, representing Nottinghamshire but finding, most recently, that her constituency has extended to represent Derbyshire as well.



She was the Law Society Council member with responsibility for Ethnic Minorities and an Ambassador for Social Mobility, inspiring others by her experience of entering the profession and overcoming challenges and currently sits on the Lawyers with Disabilities Division and serving as a member of its Wellbeing taskforce. Added to this is her

membership of our own Education & Training Committee, bringing her own expertise to bear in ensuring high standards of training for young lawyers in Nottinghamshire.



Deborah Hutchinson, in the speech made by our Vice President, Janine McKinney, was described as “*a trailblazer for women in our professions*”, and it is no understatement. A Partner at Ashton Bond Gigg for over 26 years, she advised on wills, succession and tax planning, work which brought her into contact with the charitable sector to which she has personally given her time over many years. Before turning to that, I note that she was President of Nottingham Law Society in 2010, the fourth woman to rise to that position, leading by example for her female colleagues and the Presidents (both female AND male) who followed. Deborah now serves as Under-Sheriff for Nottinghamshire, demonstrating not only a legal career of the very highest quality but a lifetime commitment to service and leadership, extending, now, outside the legal profession.

She is actively involved in charitable work, being the Chair of the Trustees of the Joliba Trust, which helps the people of Mali restore their livelihoods through sustainable grassroots development and, showing the extent of her involvement, in 2018 she took part in the “*Big Sleep Out*” for the Framework charity, raising over £5,000 with High Sheriff Nick Ebbs. If that were not enough, she organises the annual birthday service for Her Majesty the Queen at Southwell Minster.

I have singled these four out for special mention because they each show what every one of us is capable of in giving something back to our fellows, including colleagues, clients and the public. These four show what can be done, in large and small ways and serve as an inspiration for each of us, without fuss or grandeur. Lawyers sometimes present an easy target to those who want to fire at us, but so long as we can boast people of the calibre of these four amongst our number, it is just as easy to stand tall in the face of any criticism.

Our awards will resume again in January 2022, when nominations will be sought in the same categories, reflecting work carried out in 2021. I very much hope that next year the awards will be presented at the Annual Dinner, which I expect to take place in April 2022.

What I would like to do is to invite people to look around themselves and nominate colleagues in appropriate categories when the time comes. Our commitment to equality and diversity means that we particularly encourage nominations from the widest possible range of members of our professions. Furthermore I am pleased to announce that in 2022 there will be a new award for the “*Equality and Diversity Champion*”, a person who, in the course of the year, or perhaps more widely, has worked for the promotion of the interests of diverse or minority groups within our professions, or shown a tangible commitment to ensuring that standards of equality are properly met and maintained. Please look to see who you might nominate (for all awards), when the opportunity to do so opens in January (it will be publicised on the NLS website and in the newsletter) and provide our judges with the largest number of examples of excellence from our professions as you can for our first Awards Dinner since 2019.

Finally, I hope very much to see as many of you as possible at the Christmas Drinks Reception which takes place at The Cosy Club on Tuesday 14th December 2021.

With best wishes,

Philip



Philip Turton

President 2020-2022