



❖ What drove you to set up the Possession Practitioners' Group during lockdown?

- I don't believe I can claim credit for setting up the Possession Practitioners' Group.
- As someone who has practised housing law in the local courts for over 30 years, I fitted the bill to chair the Group, but the initiative was very much driven by His Honour Judge Godsmark QC and his fellow judges.

❖ How do you feel the group has made a difference to the Nottinghamshire Legal profession?

- One important aspect of the possession process is the significant number of those who regularly process possession claims who are not members of the legal profession.
- Public sector landlords, that is local authorities and housing association, have dedicated officers who administer their possession actions and appear before the courts on a weekly basis. It was vital that the Group included these representatives. Their input broadened the experience of the Group and enabled these non-lawyers to be part of the discussions as plans evolved to deal with the unprecedented circumstances that the emergency changes to the legislation created.
- I know from speaking with these representatives that they greatly valued being part of the Group as they felt their views were considered and they learnt a great deal about the courts' responses and plans for implementing changes necessitated by, initially the stay on possession proceedings, and then the staged return to normality.
- The universal stay on evictions between March 2020 and September 2020 inevitably resulted in a backlog of cases that would have to be resolved once the stay was lifted.
- The most important work of the Group was getting to grips with the procedural changes that set out new processes in preparation for the lifting of the stay. The Group provided practitioners both from the local legal profession who represent landlords and tenants, and the representatives of public sector landlords, with the opportunity to influence how the courts could plan for the implementation of the changes to the rules that had to be implemented as the Government and the senior judiciary sought to return the possession process to some sort of normality.
- The Group enabled the local legal profession to work cooperatively with the local judiciary, court officials and public sector landlords to design an approach that ensured there was a balance between the interests of those in difficulty with their housing and facing eviction once the stay was lifted, and landlords grappling with rising arrears or tenants acting in an anti-social manner.
- Members of the local legal profession had the opportunity to bring their expertise to bear in assisting the judiciary and court staff to meet the huge challenges they faced in implementing changes.
- I hope that in the future, in other circumstances, the legal profession will have the chance to work in this collaborative way to improve the court process for all involved.

❖ This is your first committee experience with Nottinghamshire Law Society, how has this been for you?

- It does seem a strange thing to say, as this experience arose as a result of such a traumatic situation, but I really enjoyed this opportunity to work closely with colleagues and make a difference in this particular field of practice.
 - The Group members were highly engaged with this process, and I hope we were of help to those “on the frontline”, that is the hard-pressed court staff for which the last 18 months must have been a very challenging time.
 - The leadership of HHJ Godsmark QC and his fellow judges brought real focus to our work and meant meetings were always conducted in a positive and productive atmosphere.
 - I must also thank Michelle for her excellent administration which meant meetings and feedback ran very smoothly.
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❖ How do you think the last 18+ months have changed the profession?

- The most obvious way is the move to home working, precipitated by the Government’s lockdown restrictions but obviously now a way of working for many in the profession despite the lifting of restrictions.
- I see this way of flexible working as being the future for many. The disadvantage of not having the face-to-face contact with colleagues is a concern, as I discovered during the lockdowns.
- As a litigator, the move towards remote court hearings either by telephone or video, has had a significant impact on my practice and, no doubt, of many other practitioners.
- I have found this is more efficient way of working in many circumstances but there are types of hearing that simply do not lend themselves to remote hearings. I must confess I did miss the familiarity of the court room and hope the right balance can be found in the future; remote hearings are obviously here to stay.

❖ What else could the Nottinghamshire Law Society do to support its members?

- I cannot praise enough the work of Michelle and the officers of NLS who have possible the work of the Possession Practitioners’ Group. This provided much needed support to the profession but also, through the Group’s work, to those engaged in the court process. If ever the profession faces similar challenges in the future, I hope NLS will step up and play an active role in representing our best interests.
- It’s difficult to think of additional ways that members can be supported over and above the excellent work NLS does in keeping the local profession informed of developments affecting our practices, the training programme and the enjoyable social events that we can now enjoy again. A special thanks to Michelle and all those involved in organising the recent Annual Awards Evening, which was a very enjoyable evening, and I don’t that just because I won an award!

❖ How do you feel winning the Lockdown Hero Award?

- I was very surprised and delighted that the work I did on the Possession Practitioners' committee was recognized this way.
- I have to thank everyone who served on the committee who gave their time generously to ensure everything could be done to tackle the huge task presented by the changes to the law and procedure that were introduced by the coronavirus regulations that impacted on the whole possession process.

❖ What else do you enjoy outside of the law & do you achieve a work/life balance?

- As a veteran footballer and cricketer I am now an avid spectator either live or on television. I'm ashamed to say I lead a very sedentary life these days although, until tearing a hamstring, I was considering a new career of football of "walking football"; that may have to wait until the weather gets warmer.
- The last 18 months have brought tremendous pressure for all of us and running my practice has proved the most challenging time in the 20 years since I set up my own firm.
- I've not achieved the sort of work/life balance I would like and I have missed the social interaction that was restricted so much by lockdown rules, and is still limited by the caution dictated by the current Covid situation.





What is the strangest thing you experienced during lockdown?

- Apart from random events like walking into a bank with a mask on or being dressed in jacket, collar, tie and tracksuit bottoms for a video hearing (don't tell the judge, I was under considerable pressure), the whole lockdown experience has been surreal.
- At the start, and when I was certain that my business had the resilience to deal with the extraordinary changes in working practices, largely due to the great support I had from my colleagues, I rather enjoyed working from home, cutting out the daily commute and taking the dog for a walk every lunchtime.
- After a while however, the isolation from my workmates and the reduced interaction with them that forms such an important part of our work as a team, put added strain on getting the job done in a creative and enjoyable way.
- I remember Judge Godsmark in one of our meetings describing the mood of the court staff having to deal with the challenges thrown up by the pandemic as "one of mild depression and anxiety". I suspect we all went through some of that in different degrees.
- I hope in 2022, we can put all that behind us and look forward to a brighter, less stressful year.



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Oosha are proud to have sponsored the Lockdown Hero award at the 2021 Nottingham Law Society awards

Congratulations to Martin Lee,
a truly deserved winner.



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