

CILEx President David Edwards FCILEx
Inaugural Speech
10 July 2015, Hatfield House



My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen welcome to Hatfield House which hopefully showcases some of the glories of Hertfordshire. For those interested in history, legend has it that the surviving daughter of Henry VIII, Princess Elizabeth, as she then was, sitting under an oak tree in these grounds was told she would be Queen. The office I inherit today, though far less grand, means just as much to me.

It is nearly 40 years ago that I first started in the legal profession at Manches and Co. I am very grateful to Barry Samuels who, despite the fact that I looked a bit like Jeff Lynne of ELO, gave me my first job as an Outdoor Clerk. I was lucky enough to come under the supervision of a Legal Executive, John Goodhind, who only gave me one piece of advice on my first day which was "it's mainly common sense". That piece of advice I have always found very helpful.

John Goodhind was a Managing Clerk at Manches and Co and he became a Legal Executive when the Institute came into existence in 1963. Our Deputy Vice President Millie Grant also worked with John Goodhind shortly after I left in the late 1970s. I am sure that if John Goodhind were here today he would be hugely proud as to how far we have come.

The trumpets have sounded and the walls of Jericho in the legal profession have fallen. The legal profession is constantly changing at a very fast pace. We are now the place where ordinary people who want to become lawyers will naturally go. We have our own practice rights and can regulate our own practices. With an increasingly specialized legal sector we will undoubtedly be a significant part of the future of the profession. We are not the fat-cats, we are the foot soldiers. We do not ask for special treatment, all we ask is to be recognised for the lawyers we are, and given a level playing field. We can then be judged on our own merits.

I hesitate on such an occasion to raise the concern about access to justice. Yet I doubt that there is a practising lawyer out in the real world who will not be concerned about access to justice. It is becoming, and it should not be, as one 19th century judge, who shall remain nameless, once said “in England, justice is open to all, like the Ritz Hotel.”

It is refreshing to hear Michael Gove speak candidly about the difficulties faced by those less well-off who try to navigate our justice system – it is not something we have heard from justice secretaries in the preceding five years. I will be seizing on the glimmer of hope that this gives us, and I am determined to work with Michael Gove to make a better justice system. We at CILEx, being the foot soldiers of the legal sector, have plenty of ideas for improving justice here in England and Wales.

I hope to hear something similar from the business secretary Sajid Javid; because access to justice is reliant on access to education. The paralegals, the lawyers, the advocates and judges of the future all require legal education, of which vocational learning is a necessary part of the mix. Indeed it is now all the more important – following the ending of student maintenance grants in Wednesday’s Budget, the poorest young people thinking about university study will have to borrow twice as much now to cover both fees and maintenance. This will place a further debt burden on the poorest students, and only makes the CILEx route into law – the affordable route, the accessible route – more necessary than ever. CILEx will be seeking to ensure that funding reductions to the FE sector do not similarly place further education further and further from the reach of ordinary people.

I should make it clear that a Presidential Inauguration is about the office and what it represents rather than about me. However on the long road that has brought me here I would wish to thank everybody in this room for their kindness and assistance to me along the way.

I thank my predecessor Fran Edwards, who is no relation, who has taught me many things, including to appreciate and understand Wales and the Welsh. It should be remembered that around three-quarters of our members are women and I am happy to be in a minority.

One thing you should know about me, and the reason I look as though I need a decent meal, is that up until recently I was a club standard long distance runner. I should perhaps explain that there are only 3 types of runner: those who are injured, those recovering from injury and those who are about to get injured. Most of the time I am all 3 of those. So to misquote Queen Elizabeth, as she then was, I know I have the body of a weak and feeble man but I have the heart and stomach of a Chartered Legal Executive and a Chartered Legal Executive of England and Wales too.

When I look at my recent career one thing has stood out. Many of the cases I have been involved in have been with the same advocate. We have done everything from Gypsy cases, Planning cases in various forms through to noise nuisance and dangerous buildings and from the Magistrates Court and Public Inquiries to the High Court and the Court of Appeal. There are, so they tell me, 5 rules of advocacy; preparation, preparation, preparation, clarity and confidence. I would suggest that there are two more. There is fearlessness and I say that not just because Matthew Reed my guest speaker is often to be found scaling a rock face or sea cliff. Furthermore there is the ability to understand and cross examine on very complex technical information with great forensic skill.

Public Inquiries on Planning issues can be extremely difficult to follow and Joseph Harper QC in Encyclopaedia of Planning Law and Practice Monthly Bulletin September 2013 put it succinctly:

..."most practitioners will have had experience of major inquiries where huge numbers of attending public on the first day rapidly disappear as the inquiry gets to grips with retail impact analysis, housing availability or the typical vegetation of calcareous grassland."

Hopefully Matthew is not going to talk about any of that. He is the top rated Planning Junior for 2015 in Planning Magazine. It is entirely my fault that he is not a QC but then if he was I doubt we could afford to use him.

So please enjoy the rest of the evening. It is a great privilege to serve for a year as President of the Chartered Institute and I hope that I can repay the confidence shown in me to fulfill the duties of the Office. This evening may not live long in your memory but it certainly will in mine.

Thank you.