

My Route to the Bar



DEANS COURT
C H A M B E R S

A selection of stories from Members of Deans Court Chambers



By Michael Hayton KC – Head of Chambers – Former Leader of the Northern Circuit

I first decided that I wanted to become a barrister when I was in my early teens. I was the first person to do A levels in my family and we had no connections to the judicial system as my father worked in construction and my mother was a nurse.

I attended the local Grammar School in Blackburn after which I read Jurisprudence at St Anne's College Oxford. I always intended to practice on the Northern Circuit to remain close to home.

I moved Chambers after almost 5 happy years at my first set to join Deans Court Chambers in 1998. Since then, I have developed my practice from purely criminal work to one which is now predominantly Regulatory Crime, such as Health and Safety and Environmental prosecutions, as well as Professional Discipline work defending doctors and police officers amongst others.

I still do defend in regular criminal cases including murder, fraud and Organised Crime prosecutions.

The Bar is often said to be a vocation rather than a job; I heartily endorse that statement. I continue to thoroughly enjoy all that life at the Bar brings. I sit as a part time judge as a Recorder of the Crown Court, I am a Bencher of Lincoln's Inn, I am currently very privileged to be the Head of Deans Court Chambers and between 2017 to 2020 I was the Leader of the Northern Circuit.

All those roles which are outside the day-to-day court, bring challenges and rewards. After 30 years as a barrister and 10 as a Silk I can honestly say I love being a barrister as much now, if not more, than at any stage of my professional life.



By Julia Cheetham KC – Family Barrister – Deputy Head of Chambers

I went to my local comprehensive school and had no family connection to the law (I wanted to be an actress, but my father told me I had to go to University first). I decided to study at Nottingham University and was very lucky to be taught contract by the late JC Smith, evidence by Di Birch and tort by Stephen Bailey in what was an inspiring department.

I had a place to study law finals but one evening I was persuaded by a friend of mine to go to a talk by Robert Wright KC about Lincoln's Inn and life at the bar. The more he spoke the more I realised that being a barrister was really what I wanted to do.

In those early days at university, I was told by my one of my tutors that there was really no point in trying, that the bar was male orientated and without a double-first from Oxbridge I would not succeed. I took this as a challenge, joined Lincoln's Inn, took part in a moot and arranged mini pupillages. I was met with unqualified support from the Inn and was made a bursar and a Hardwicke Scholar both of which funded my year at bar school in London.

Originally, I had envisaged a mixed common law practice however I quickly realised that family law and in particular that relating to children was what fascinated me. I now mainly deal with complex child abuse cases including cases where children have been killed. It is challenging but important work with significant legal challenges. I have also been privileged in having had the opportunity to work in the British Overseas Territories.

Since I joined the bar, I have been very lucky to have been mentored and supported by some remarkable men and women who have given me the confidence to keep going. This has been particularly important because I have three children and the challenges of raising a family and a busy junior and silks practice are huge.

I am very fortunate to be in a Chambers which champions women and supports family life for everyone, whatever form that may take. Flexible working, outstanding clerking and feeling part of the wider family of chambers is hugely important and extends to all our members whatever their call. One of the great privileges of being in silk is the opportunity to work with junior barrister and I hope that I provide the same support that I had.



By Olivia Choudhury – Family Barrister

My journey to the Bar started when I read Law at Cambridge and was fortunate enough to be chosen for the Erasmus scheme in my third year. I was able to study in Utrecht for a year, giving me a chance to imbibe myself in the culture of international law, as I studied law at Universiteit Utrecht and took day trips to the Hague, meeting fantastic international lawyers at the ICJ and the Peace Palace.

The year in the Netherlands was fulfilling and gave me the confidence to do a variety of mini pupillages in England during the summer between my third and final year. After my undergraduate degree, I decided I wanted to merge the theory underneath and the practice of the law by undertaking the BPTC at Manchester Metropolitan University. It was during this time I secured a pupillage with Deans Court Chambers.

In the intervening year, I chose to pursue an activity that would bring together my love of the law and my desire to travel: gaining an LLM in Children’s Rights and Family Law at University College Cork. When I returned to the UK, I headed into pupillage, gained tenancy, and I haven’t looked back since.

The Bar is a difficult but extremely rewarding career. You can meet new people from all walks of life every day, which, coupled with the collegiate nature of the Northern Circuit in particular, never fails to delight me. I am passionate about widening access and increasing diversity in this profession, and I know Deans Court Chambers reflects this passion by, for example, setting up talks with the Black Solicitors Network and encouraging all its members to participate in outreach programmes if possible. Deans Court Chambers not only offers exciting opportunities to further my career, but also a friendly, welcoming, and supportive environment in which I know I can thrive.



By Eleanor Myers – Crime Barrister

I was fortunate to have a family member at the Criminal Bar which provided me with insight into life as a barrister from a young age. I took great interest in criminal law, drawn to the varied and people-orientated nature of it.

I knew the Law Conversion Course was one route to take, and therefore stepped away from studying law at university, instead studying music at the University of Bristol. This was a central feature of my pupillage applications. Many of the skills I had developed, for example, self-discipline in work as well as management of a self-employed practice, were applicable to both being a musician and working at the Bar.

Music remains a significant element of my life now, for which I am grateful. Life at the Bar is tiring, so fostering interests outside of work is difficult but vital to ensure a healthy work-life balance and allow for optimum performance at work.

After completing the Law Conversion Course, I undertook the BPTC LLM at ULaw Leeds. Undertaking the LLM allowed me to benefit from a student loan and provided greater opportunities for advocacy and pro-bono work.

For the year before commencing pupillage, I worked as a paralegal in a criminal solicitors' firm in London. This afforded me valuable experience in the litigation process and in handling clients, and my knowledge and understanding of criminal law and procedure grew considerably over this time.

I wanted to work in a field that provided constant room for development and learning, that was people orientated, and in which no two days were the same. I knew that the Criminal Bar would provide that. I did not expect the great level of support and companionship offered by member of the Bar to those around them.



By Molly Gill – Recent Family Pupil – Now Member

Although higher education was an option, no one from my immediate or extended family pursued it. I was the first generation in my family to attend university and pursue a career in Law.

I studied Law at The University of Liverpool. The Family Law modules interested me the most, such as Children's Rights Debates and The Right to be Heard: Children, Autonomy and the Courts. I became aware of and interested in access to social justice and improving social mobility and provided advice at the Liverpool Law Clinic and Citizens Advice. In my second year of university, I became a Mentor for Debate Mate, an international educational charity that aims to improve social mobility by teaching employability skills to school students. I organised and ran extra-curricular debate workshops and taught children who had never debated before how to tackle controversial current affairs, structure their arguments and present a case confidently. The children entered debate competitions and won the regional round two years in a row. These experiences solidified my decision to become a Family Law Barrister as I wanted to work with people and enjoyed advocacy.

After my degree, I studied the Bar Professional Training Course at The University of Law, Leeds, while I completed a Masters of Law. I continued volunteering and undertook the Yorkshire Tribunal Advocacy Project and Street Law.

Upon completing my studies, I moved to Manchester and became a Family Court Clerk. Clerking allowed me to experience the day-to-day reality of being in court and have a front-row seat to the barristers at work. I gained valuable insight into family proceedings, and I was able to meet members of the Northern Circuit. When I saw how meticulously prepared the barristers at Deans Court Chambers are allied with their incredibly high standard of advocacy and approachable style, I decided to apply for pupillage.

Each day in my second six is different. I have taken on a pro bono case, prevented an Occupation Order, and secured the placement of a mother and child in a mother and baby unit at a Removal Hearing. I am thoroughly enjoying my pupillage. I do not doubt that I am lucky to be a part of such a motivated, hard-working, and supportive team and I am excited to see how my practice will progress.