

In and Out of Court: Reminiscences of a retired solicitor and employment judge

Book Review by Gordon Turner*

This biography charts the career of a curious and open-minded lawyer. A farmer's son, the writer arrives in London just in time for the swinging 60s and enthusiastically immerses himself in a range of legal and cultural adventures, including jazz, dancing and regular visits to the opera. Calling on a sharp memory (and a good diary) the writer recounts a 50-year career, beginning in the humble world of the traditional articled clerk, through an eclectic litigation practice, and culminating as an employment judge with some significant decisions to his name. Much of the work alludes to social changes and legal developments. There are some quirky experiences. Stuart starts work alongside three women all called Bridget and then, in the 80s, we learn of him cycling up Downing Street to pick up a bottle of champagne signed by Margaret Thatcher.

Helpful insights are provided for lawyers at all levels, such as an outcome-based approach to taking instructions and looking for practical solutions. Heeding his tips about advocacy and case preparation could save junior lawyers much humiliation, with court work being compared to an iceberg – 'one-tenth above water and nine-tenths unseen'. Lawyers should consider the purpose of their communications and ask themselves what kind of response they anticipate, he advises. Stuart shares his more day-to-day planning prescriptions and recalls adventurous marketing initiatives, including jaunts around Europe and South America to build a network of commercial lawyers.

The greatest appeal of this book lies in its modesty and open-mindedness and the way the writer embraces the challenges of his profession. However, this modesty is a bit of a shortcoming. On occasions, I hoped for more insights. I wanted to know how he managed to develop a network of lawyers in South America without email and a mobile phone and what

became of this audacious plan. And as an employment lawyer, I hoped for insight into what kind of strategies might persuade a tribunal panel, and his thoughts on how workplace litigation can be streamlined. Overall, I felt that some of the detail should have been surrendered for a more developed and personalised point of view on the bigger themes. That said, this is a benign and uplifting account.

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Readers' comments

Sally RAMAGE 10 November 2015 02:33 am

I enjoyed reading your book review. It contains healthy observations and criticisms.