

The numbers and the distinction of those present, in your lordship's court today, speak more eloquently than I can hope to of the admiration and affection in which Lord Justice Laws is held at the Bar.

It is a real honour, albeit an intimidating one, for someone like me to be permitted to address such a remarkable gathering - but I do so simply to add a few words from the Bar about a remarkable man.

It is also fitting that the last days on which Lord Justice Laws sits, as the longest serving member of the Court of Appeal, should be in an even more crowded room than that which greeted his first days at the bar.

It was less than half a century ago – but only just – when a youthful and even more athletic John Laws took up his pupillage, in Garden Court – in an upper floor room directly below that in which Pip had embarked on his Great Expectations.

We then occupied a single floor in that building, it being widely assumed that the Benchers of Middle Temple had yet to secure vacant possession of the top floor from the heirs and successors of Pip and Herbert Pocket. For whatever reason, the overcrowding was such that our clerk – Wemmick in all but name – kindly permitted pupils to do the chambers typing in his room while he selflessly absented himself to undertake the lonely and onerous responsibility of running chambers from the Wig & Pen Club, being conveniently located between chambers and these Royal courts. There being no mobile phones, pupillage typing duties were not infrequently interrupted by the need for messages to be conveyed between the three buildings.

The Dickensian scene into which Mr John Laws, as he then was, gleefully bounced, was presided over by Mr William Macpherson, as he then was, with Mr Simon Brown and Mr Colin Mackay as they then were, – and Edwin Glasgow as I still am.

Those of us who were already in, what John kindly explained to us was, *statu pupillari*, fell quickly under his spell. Initially confused by the fact that he appeared to have arrived somewhat late in the legal year, we soon appreciated that he regarded the Gregorian calendar as a rather modern, vulgar, and European invention and preferred to organise his affairs in line with its more classical Julian predecessor. Little did we guess that this was the man who in years to come would deliver such robustly modern rulings on the criminality of selling bananas, or even haddock, by the pound. But the late start did not prevent him, over the following 49 years, from overtaking me, by some considerable distance. I was comforted by the fact that I was not only one who was overtaken – all 12 of us who then comprised 2 Garden Court, soon appreciated that, despite having frittered away his time at Oxford as the Senior Open Classical Scholar, he had somehow also acquired more knowledge of the law than most of us put together. That was, needless to say, until My Lord the Master of the Rolls volunteered his enthusiasm to join us.

In later years, Simon Brown was not long into his tenure as First Treasury Counsel when he returned from court, and disarmingly enquired at “chambers afternoon tea” (yes – we had it) whether any of us had heard of a case that had something to do with Wednesbury corporation. It rapidly became apparent that John had not only heard of it, he had read it, and had written about it; but the gentle charm with which he provided Simon, not only with what is now called a hard copy, but also with kind advice that the case might come in quite useful in his new role, was typical of the way in which he looked after us all – even those of us who did what he tactfully referred to as “fact cases” – imbuing that simple word with more well-intentioned and sympathetic irony than it had ever before been blessed.

Even at that early stage of his meteoric rise to fame it was fairly plain to all of us that he was the one person who would be able, effortlessly, to follow in the footsteps of Mr Justice Brown as he was about to become.

By the time John was appointed treasury devil, his fame was already such that the Dickensian tranquillity of Garden Court was invaded by the BBC; desperate to film him - if only at his desk. Knowing John's views about self-promotion, we suspected that some financial transaction might have been conducted in the Wig & Pen but, whatever its nature, the film crew were duly admitted and huge lights were erected in John's room to await his return from court. The youngest of Wemmick's assistant clerks, on walking me and my book back from another day's toiling over a fact case, and on seeing the scores of kilowatts of tungsten-blue light, shafting out of the windows of John's room, into the autumnal dusk of Middle Temple gardens, admiringly observed that it would appear "that Mr Laws has been bending over again"

It came as some relief to us all when Sophie appeared on the scene. It was at last John's turn to share his time with someone who was cleverer than even he was; whose theological influence made him even more tolerant of the limitations of ordinary mortals; and whose sartorial influence brightened his appearance so much that he became the only person to join the Garrick, in order to get hold of a comparatively pallid tie that would enable him, on his annual visit to the Chelsea Flower Show, to pass without being either recognised or mistaken for an exhibit.

As friends and colleagues, we marvelled at his capacity for handling the most challenging cases; and we marvelled even more at the fact that, while doing so, his door was always open (quite literally) to anyone who needed advice, whether silk or pupil, and whether member of our chambers or not; and when he was appointed to the High Court, still only in his mid 40s - and to the Court of Appeal at the age of 53 - he continued to give lectures of a quality and at a rate which full time academics have found it hard to keep pace with, while also reeling off seminal judgments - and doing so with kindness and courtesy to all - yet with economy that usually enabled him to get to the Garrick in time for lunch.

It goes without saying that it would be impertinent and inappropriate for me to suggest that the perfection that is the Supreme Court could be made any more perfect by even your lordship's addition to it - but you will recall that Cicero, without even having the advantage of reading your recent lectures on advocacy and on oratory, observed that "in virtute sunt multi ascensus"

You will also need no reminding of Horace's gentle comment:

*Principibus placuisse viris non ultima laus est*

*Non cuius homini contingit adire Corinthium.*

Your many friends and admirers know what he meant.

The Goodhart chair at Cambridge is honoured that you have accepted it - but I say to you John, many members of the bar whose lives you have enriched and who have benefited from your wisdom, your example and your kindness, will miss you a great deal.