

Philadelphia's Temple Inn Crosses the Pond with visits to civil and criminal courts of the UK and Gray's Inn

By: Scott P. Sigman, Esq. and Hon. Ramy I. Djerassi

This March, we were a part of Philadelphia's Temple American Inn of Court Legal London trip as special guests of Gray's Inn, the barrister home of Temple American Inn leader Anthony Haller, Esq., who is also the American Inn of Court's international ambassador.

Our group toured the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom ("UKSC"), the Royal Courts of Justice and the Central Criminal Court ("Old Bailey"). Temple Inn members on the trip were current Inn president Stephen Tornone, Esq; past Inn presidents Hon. Sheila Woods-Skipper, Melanie Foreman, Esq., Hon. Ramy Djerassi, Hon. M. Teresa Sarmina, Hon. Annette Rizzo; and Inn Barristers Jacqui Coelho, Esq., Linda Henry, Esq., Hon. Sierra Thomas Street, Natalie Klyashtorny, Esq. and Hon. Natasha Taylor-Smith. Scott Sigman, Esq., representing the Philadelphia Criminal Inn of Court, also joined the group.

At the UKSC, the group was treated to an hour-long meeting with Lady Rose who has served on the Supreme Court since 2021. Before her appointment, Dame Vivien Rose completed her barrister



training at Gray's Inn. She became a specialist in antitrust law (the U.K. term is competition law) and served in various government roles including counsel for the House of Commons. She described her high-powered career in a low key and intimate way that was endearing. Lady Rose was happy to report that she is not a national public figure and takes the Tube home after work by herself. She emphasized the UK's judiciary is holding fast to a tight and highly regulated non-political structure controlled by lawyers and judges, and she described her own judicial appointment process. The take home for us is that a special judicial commission makes the Supreme Court appointment, and it is not subject to parliamentary consent.

Lady Rose also discussed the jurisdictional range of the UKSC which decides all final appeals from every part of the U.K.---England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Court also has an international reach as the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council ("JCPC"), a legacy inherited from the House of Lords whose former appellate duties were transferred to the Supreme Court in 2009. JCPC is

the final high court for Commonwealth Realm nations like the Bahamas, Grenada and Jamaica, but it also serves all British Commonwealth countries (there are 56 of them) if they select the JCPC to be final arbiter---which apparently happens quite often. The reasons for this reflect the high reputation of the UKSC and its institutional experience and precedents in handling complex commercial, constitutional and international law cases. Foreign governments often send cases to the JCPC as a way to assure its skeptical citizens that a matter of high importance is being handled fairly. Indeed, the JCPC Courtroom had the flags of all 56 Commonwealth nations on the bench and bar---and notably, the bench and bar were arranged in a circle; the judges were seated on the same level as the lawyers--no high bench for the high court.

The group also watched a murder jury trial at Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court. The case



involved a shooting in the Wood Green neighborhood of North London. The judge and lawyers wore blond or white- shaded wigs and were dressed in robes; lawyers wore black, the judge wore red. Court decorum was high. The wigged prosecutor meticulously introduced dozens of surveillance photographs to establish the timing of the shooting. He was trying to match the time the photos were taken---and the action--- to the time phone calls were made and received on defendants' smartphones. Though the contents of the calls were unknown, the prosecutor was able to show a video narrative of a five minute time-period leading up to the smoke and sound of gunshots. The photo/video times were compared to the

times from the phones.

The group was very impressed to see that the jury had the same document binder used by the lawyers and the judge, and the binder itself was over fifty pages filled with photos, cell photo location data, diagrams and descriptions of dozens of streets and intersections. One video used during the trial was captured from a public transit bus that included audio of the gunshots. Another video was taken from a gas station diagonally across an intersection from the shooting. Many in the group noted the deep concentration of the red-robed judge who was taking long hand notes. He swiftly corrected a lawyer's misstatement of evidence presented ten minutes before.

Also impressive, if not a bit creepy, was the sheer amount and



scope of the surveillance videos and photos themselves. It seemed that every block in the surveillance narrative, covering several miles of London streets, had one or more surveillance cameras. Whether this is true or not, the prosecutor had plenty of exhibits to prove his circumstantial case because, alas, he had no definite identification.

The group's visit to the Royal Courts of Justice was hosted by Justice Adam Constable, the Judge in Charge of the Technology and Construction Court ("TCC"). He gave the group an in-depth tour of the Rolls Building which is the primary location for the "Business and Property Courts of England & Wales." Justice Constable led a lively discussion about England & Wales civil courts and the group was able to observe two separate cases, both involving financial fraud cases arising in the Middle East. The Court's jurisdiction came through the UK banks that were involved, and the trials are in their second year.



Unlike Philadelphia's Orphans' Court, whose jurisdiction includes both guardianships and trusts and estates---and which had three judicial representatives on the Inn's trip led by Orphans' Court Administrative Judge Sheila Woods-Skipper, UK's guardianship cases do not take place at the Rolls Building's trusts and estates courts. The Philadelphia Orphans' Court judges had hoped to see a guardianship hearing, but no luck. The guardianship cases take place at Central Family Court, not far away, however there was not enough time to see all the courts on this trip.



The trip concluded with a gala dinner at the 16th Century Great Hall of Gray's Inn (restored after being severely damaged in "the Blitz" during World War II) with its oak-paneled walls---probably the template for Harry Potter's Hogwarts make-believe. Lady Rose's newly hung portrait was prominently displayed over the group while we ate a delicious meal amongst our British colleagues. At the front of the room were portraits of the Inn's Patron Lady Queen Elizabeth I and the likes of Francis Bacon and Edward Coke. The highlight---or lowlight---of our grand dinner at the Great Hall were the sing-alongs that are apparently traditional must do's by Gray's Inn members and

guests before dessert. We served up, and survived, a rendition of the Philadelphia Eagles Fight Song, "Fly Eagles Fly," complete with hand motions and body twists. Grading generously, our performance was middle of the pack--- not much applause--- but we consoled ourselves that the English have probably never heard "Fly Eagles Fly." Over dessert, we convinced ourselves that we had successfully met this storied Gray's Inn's tradition.

And so, the trip ended. Intact is Temple American Inn of Court's tradition of a foreign trip every two (or three) years going back to 2006. London had called us for a third time. On our fourth trip, we will not forget to visit the Central Family Court.

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