

As you all know, there are no speeches at the Admiralty Bar dinner, though I am slightly apprehensive the Mr Justice Steel will egg the Master of the Rolls on to make some tactful extempore remarks. But I want to welcome our guests, and I shall have to identify them to do so.

I shall start with the Elder Brethren of Trinity House. Although the clean air acts, the demise of London Docks and improved electronic navigation aids have rather reduced the frequency of their participation in trials in the Ad Ct, they are still an integral part of the Ad Ct system and their rôle has survived the reforms introduced by the C.P.R. Historically the relationship between the Ad Ct and Trinity House was the origin of and justification for this dinner, so it is a particular pleasure to see them tonight.

We are able to welcome the Deputy Master of Trinity House, R-Ad Sir Jeremy de Halpert. One of the few advantages of allowing so many years to elapse since the last of our dinners, is that we are able to congratulate him on the knighthood he received in the last New Years' Honours.

We also welcome back Captain Duncan Glass and Captain Colin Stewart who were here at the last dinner. Captain Duncan Glass is I think the Warden of Trinity House and he has for ten years been the Trinity House Director of Navigation and Lighthouses. Captain Stewart has set as an assessor several times, and Captain Nigel Pryke, who is the one newcomer has only recently sat with Steel J to hear a collision action.

I know that many of you were sorry to have to leave at home your DFCs and your CDMs, and you may have noticed that the Elder Brethren haven't entirely followed this self-denying ordinance. This is because I was asked whether they should come in ordinary dinner jackets rather than the formal wear particular to them. Many of you will know that I am interested in the variants of the English language and the way new linguistic developments move from social group to social group. The Elder Brethren have scored heavily here, because when Sir Jeremy asked me if they should wear their specialised formal wear, which of course I thought essential, he told me that its proper title was "mess-undress". If that wasn't enough for a linguophile, he told me that he would be happy to go along with that, provided we didn't mind that mess undress came with a bit of bling. I'm delighted to see the bling, and to see the Elder Brethren.

Turning to the judiciary, we are privileged to have Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers. At the last dinner he was still Master of the Rolls since when

he has gone on to achieve the same full house as Lord Bingham, Law Lord, Master of Rolls, Lord Chief Justice and Senior Law Lord. In October, he will be able to set up an unbeatable record by being the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court as well. As most of you know, he was for several years himself a member of the Admiralty Bar, and we can be proud of that connection. He left for Brick Court while I was in pupillage, and I can only suppose his departure was caused by his horror at what was to come.

The Master of the Rolls stuck it out. Sir Anthony Clarke's distinguished judicial career (how *would* Gerald Darling have reacted to that phrase?) has recently culminated in his appointment as the first Supreme Court Justice to be appointed as such. The other members of the House of Lords will have to transfer in October but he will get there without passing Go. He tells me he is looking forward to those Fridays when the Lords do not sit and he can take the time to consider the deeper socio-jurisprudential implications of what I suppose we shall have to get used to calling judgments rather than speeches.

Mr Justice Steel was at our last dinner, when he was already presiding over the Admiralty Court with the same genial ferocity. Unlike carpet-baggers such as myself, he has genuine nautical, or at any rate aquatic, connections. It is fair to say though that when once I asked him whether the Oxford blue boat was successful when he rowed in it the answer was unclear, because I was carried some distance away by the force of the explosion. He remains the Admiralty judge and has delighted all, when the judge in charge of the Commercial list, by committing his view of the Chancery Division to an email, with all the security implications that that carries.

Mr Justice Gross is also a returning guest. As all good Admiralty and commercial judges must, he spent most of last year trying three alleged terrorists at Kingston Crown Court. He enjoyed it so much that he persuaded the jury to disagree so that he could spend many more months trying the three of them again. I am happy to say that he is back in the land of shipping (if that's not an oxymoron).

It is the first time that Mr Justice Teare has attended as a guest rather than as a member of the Admiralty Bar. He has been too little seen among us, but he assures me that it is his intention to try a collision action as soon as possible. As Mrs Beeton said: first catch your collision action.

I first met Judge Dolliver Nelson when we were both newly appointed lecturers at the LSE in 1970. I remember him as a delightful colleague and an appalling squash player. Our paths diverged a few years later when we both left the LSE. I was fortunate enough to bump into him last year at a silk's party. I discovered that he was not only a judge of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea at Hamburg but, although he modestly concealed this fact, had until he retired from that office, been Chief Judge of that Court. It is a Court in which one would have thought that members of the Admiralty Bar would often appear. But so far they have not done so with any frequency. I hope we can correct that.

Mr Paul Miller was the first Admiralty Registrar to be invited to this dinner. He retired last year, but many of us will remember with pleasure the friendly chats which we used to have with him in his room, some of which often related to the dispute which were all there to resolve. Perhaps I can digress just for a moment to congratulate Jervis Kay QC on his appointment as successor to Paul Miller, and still more on his good taste in leaving the announcement so late that he has come as a host rather than a guest.

At the time of the last dinner John Willmer QC was the recently retired appeal arbitrator. We have had two since, though his influence can still be felt as issues of principle which came to the surface for the first time in his Awards have only recently been the subject of consideration by the Admiralty Court. The Admiralty Bar has no constitution, no premises, and no list of members. All it has is a Leader, a dinner and, as a result of John's generosity at the last dinner, a book.

We have two solicitors with us tonight, James Gosling and Ben Browne. James works extremely hard in his capacity as secretary of ASG. That's difficult enough to combine with his ordinary practice, but the events of the last year or two have imposed an even heavier burden on him. What has been going on off Somalia has meant that James has had to turn himself into one of the world's leading experts on piracy. Not just the law of piracy but the sociology and economics of piracy. I missed his recent talk on the piracy, but everybody I met who went said it was fascinating.

Ben Browne is also a member of the ASG. He has been a partner of at least three shipping firms and I can tell you that he is only slightly better at squash than Judge Nelson. He has done a great deal for shipping law and lawyers over the years. He was a prime mover in the drafting of SCOPIC contract which struck an excellent balance between the needs of

the shipping community, who need solutions, and shipping lawyers, who need problems. He has also drafted the York-Antwerp Rules 2004. Even if his claim that no-one uses his edition is true, he is to be congratulated on getting his head round the subject at all. I'm sure his draft will turn out to be the laws of Oleron de nos jours.

Inverting the order of gallantry requires, I come finally to Pauline Roberts. She is of course far too young to have clerked Lord Phillips, but she did clerk the Master of the Rolls, Mr Justice Steel and Mr Justice Teare. She is the doyenne of Admiralty clerks; and indeed is probably the only clerk left who can properly be accorded that title. At any rate she has been a beacon of calm and good sense to whom many members of the Bar, and not just from her own Chambers, owe many thanks for salvaging them when in peril and preventing them from becoming wrecks.

Those then are the guests. I am sorry to have taken so long to tell you who they are. But I am sure that you are all the more ready to rise and join with me in welcoming and drinking their healths — Members of the Admiralty Bar: the guests.