

# Greater Snoreing running out of solicitors



There were so many clients jostling to visit the solicitors' offices in Greater Snoreing that the local policeman had to be called to keep public order, particularly among a group of militant elderly ladies who had become convinced that unless they topped up their wills that very day they would die at sundown and all their relatives would be disinherited.

But inside the offices there was a different story as grey (and in some cases green) lawyers in the great legal powerhouses of Greater Snoreing crept exhaustedly over the finishing line from one tax year to the next.

They briefly glanced back nostalgically at all those billable hours that represented last year's efforts but they had to kiss goodbye to those achievements (or failures) and start all over again on the treadmill.

They would soon be visited by the smiling head of department with her clipboard and persuaded that they could surely bill an extra few hundred hours in the coming year.

Let me briefly tear myself away from the bucolic Norfolk charms of Greater Snoreing and reflect on the woes of a profession of which Greater Snoreing is but a small part.

## The end of prosperous

When I set out on this career all those hundreds of years ago ours was a reasonably prosperous profession. Some of us could afford new cars, others always paid off their credit cards at the end of the month and had no overdraft. Now each member of the profession (except those genuinely fat cat lawyers whose individual incomes far exceed the gross annual takings of many small practices) represents a microcosm of the woes of this country: desperately in debt, with a diminishing income and no foreseeable hope of things getting better.

Those who are affected by the absurd and largely unworkable reforms contained in the LASPO bill will at least be able to blame the government. In fact, we can probably blame the government for most things: the drought, the poor performance of our cricket team and the abysmal failure of the gelding 'legal aid' even to get a place in the 2.40 at Wetherby.

We have a government that speaks with many tongues. Kenneth Clarke, speaking at a reception in a large City law firm last September, spoke of "a vision of the future of litigation where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. My aim is a system which: encourages people only to resort to the courtroom where sensible; cuts costs where costs are unavoidable; and promotes UK law wherever and whenever possible."

Tell that to the lawyers scraping a living in East London courts (just a few miles down the road from the City). Yet access to justice is just as important for a family struggling against the odds to make ends meet as it is for those involved in a £1bn dispute. I fear that this new bill is going to reduce access to justice and devalue the justice to which our remaining clients do have access. I would love to be proved wrong and hope I am.

Having depressed you thoroughly let me offer some small crumbs of cheer for the rest of 2012 – on the basis that there must surely come a time when things cannot get worse; there are theories that simply by becoming optimistic we can in a strange quantum way influence all our destinies.

## Think positive

The Queen's diamond jubilee celebrations will soon be on us. There is a real spirit of community in these parts and (if *The Archers* is anything to go by) everywhere else in the country. In our village we are laying on a hog roast, free to all villagers (£1 for outsiders – so come and join us), contests for photographs and garden tubs, a '50s afternoon tea in the village hall with entertainment, and a 'poke fun at lawyers' stand. I just invented the last but it might be the biggest draw of the lot.

Then in July and August a lot of people are going to come to London and run around, leap over jumps, swim like mad and pole vault into Stratford.

I am disappointed that the scope of the Olympic events is so narrow. The organisers have not catered at all for the unfit, the sedentary and the lazy. I would like to see events that would enable ordinary people like us to compete, such as:

- time-recordathon (how many hours of time recording can you achieve in ten minutes?);
- the pen-tathlon (a highly skilled activity involving finding a pen on your desk that actually writes in the shortest available time); and, of course we must have
- a fat (cat) solicitors race (ten metres from the Olympic bar to the gents).

But I have left the best for last, for 30 May is tax freedom day. By that date most of us, having worked for the government since 1 January, will have started to work for ourselves because all the income we will have generated by then will have been used to pay the various taxes that are levied on us (income, national insurance, VAT and so on). From then onward we will be able to keep what we earn, or that at least is the theory, but it probably does not take into account fuel prices which will no doubt keep rising to ensure that we work for the government at least until December in each year.

Remember the Easter delivery tanker drivers strike that did not happen and the wise men in the government telling us not to panic but to top up our tanks and fill our jerry cans just in case. Not to be outdone, the president of the Greater Snoreing Law Society instantly issued a statement denying that there is a shortage of solicitors, but, just in case, anyone needing the advice of a solicitor would be well advised to fill up with good legal advice, and store some in their garages for good measure.

As we have seen, the effect was immediate. As I write this, there is still fighting in the streets: queues of desperate punters desperate for that suddenly rare commodity – a bit of legal advice.

(Memo to Chancery Lane: please issue an instant denial nationwide that we are running out of solicitors.)



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