

# Heads will roll

**IT WAS SEPTEMBER.** All the old lags were there, full of stories of their summer exploits – how they had fallen out of apple trees or been chased by an enraged bull, or had their pigtails pulled or had dangerously kissed a boy behind a haystack.

There was a small cluster of new boys and girls with shining faces and satchels, nervously looking for their desks and too afraid to ask for directions to the lavatory.

And in charge was Linda the new head teacher calmly but with diminishing patience calling on us all to stop flicking ink pellets at each other and to sit down at our desks. Then once she had our attention her role seemed to change and she adopted the air of an efficient flight attendant, as she took a device in one hand and a long cord in the other and proceeded to demonstrate how you should hold the former and where you should stuff the latter.

I am of course describing the new term at the Law Society's Council which resumed its meetings last month after the summer break. For some time we have been meeting in a refurbished council chamber which has all the leg and bottom room of an average bucket shop 737. Instead of an in-flight movie we provide the entertainment because as we speak our photographs are flashed onto a screen.

## Switched on

Our new president Linda Lee was explaining to us the new technology which had previously proved difficult for some of us – because when we rose to deliver our blue sky thinking to the assembled company we had to press a button on something that looks like a cross between a TV controller and a mobile phone. Many of us failed to master that art and would remain inaudible and invisible to our colleagues.

But now, as Linda so helpfully demonstrated, the tech guys at the side of the room switch us on when our turn comes to deliver our fit for purpose utterances – and all we have to do is pin the microphone lead somewhere near our vocal cords and press a button to join the queue of wannabe orators. Although I did half expect a presidential demonstration of life jackets just in case the council chamber became deluged and an



indication of how to apply the masks if all the hot air we generated suddenly became devoid of oxygen.

The business of the day got under way, but for the most part my lips are sealed as much of the discussion was under what is known as Part 2. This means if any council member dares even to hint outside the confines of the council chamber at what is discussed within, he (or even she) is immediately marched off to the Law Society dungeons which connect (I am told) directly with the Tower of London. Several of the heads you see on the spiked railings outside the tower belonged to solicitors (and their attorney predecessors) who flouted the Part 2 rulings.

## War of words

For the moment at least you do not get taken to the dungeons if you murder the English language. One council member, David Dixon (representing South Wales), has assumed the new role of guardian of the cliché count. Throughout the past few meetings he has been noting the extensive deployment of those exciting phrases we all use to brighten up communication with our fellow humans (you've probably already spotted a few here). There was general transgression throughout the proceedings, but at the end of the day the council member for the newly created seat representing the solicitors of that great conurbation Little Snoring East rose to make his maiden speech:

"This is a red letter day for me and for the constituents I represent. It is important to start as I mean to continue and I therefore want to flag up my agenda for the sea change that, as I go into bat, is going to impact on us all.

"We must err on the side of caution, but we must not let our balls be kicked into the long grass, for in this brave new world post Clementi we need to tee off onto a level playing field and ring the changes as we fight the good fight for a fairer and more

proportionate deal for our brethren [here he is poked in the ribs by a rather substantial female council member] (and sisteren).

"We do not need to reinvent the wheel, but we should start with a clean slate, because doing nothing is not an option and the bottom line is that we need a ball park figure for effective benchmarking, so that we can hit the ground running while at the same time grasping the nettle and ensuring a forward direction of travel.

"And what about Plan B? To those who feel that my all singing all dancing approach is not appropriate in these troubled times I say that unless we draw a line in the sand and grasp the low hanging fruit without moving the goal posts we will deny our comrades the much needed oxygen of publicity [here there is a pause as the yellow masks drop down onto council members causing mild panic] and the opportunity for joined-up thinking.

"Above all, and in any event we do need an exit strategy at the end of the day, so that we have equality of arms. That of course is a no brainer, for none of what I am saying today is rocket science and nor is it a question of turkeys voting for Christmas because turkeys as you know need a level playing field just like the rest of us if they are to be in a win-win situation and not to beat their heads against a glass ceiling if we clip their wings..."

At that moment a klaxon sounds. The president has pulled the plug. His photograph is replaced with a picture of a trussed turkey. The said member resumes his seat to – tumultuous snoring. He then tiptoes from the chamber, blurts out the details of item 23 of the Part 2 agenda, is immediately taken away by the guards and is never seen again – though tourists do later notice an extra head on the railings outside the tower.

Richard Barr is a consultant with Scott-Moncrieff Harbour and Sinclair. Contact: richard.barr@paston.co.uk