

Sandals in Chancery Lane?

Dress code in legal circles are a law unto themselves, muses *Richard Barr*



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What a pity we all have to wear clothes. Of all the species on the planet, we are the only ones who, out of choice, cover our bodies with extraneous material. I say “out of choice” because we extend this little human foible to those animals that keep us company. Dogs and cats in particular put on pained expressions as they are dressed up for Christmas or Easter. If the weather is chWilly no small dog is allowed out without its designer tartan overcoat. Even horses have to dress up in winter, wearing the equine equivalent of Gucci overcoats.

We are defined by what we wear. With no clothes on, most of us are not a pretty sight, fortunately seldom seen in public, unless we choose to streak across a football or cricket pitch. Our garments tell the world who we are or at least who we aspire to be. Thus we dress sombrely if we appear in court – unless it is a telephone hearing, in which case, anything goes. If we are City solicitors going to the country for the weekend we put on our country suits. I did my training in a City firm some decades ago and those partners who were leaving ‘for the country’ on Fridays would appear in loud chequered suits which, presumably, they assumed were the attire of us country dwellers. I expect a number of horses had to be treated for nervous breakdowns at the sight of them. Others power dress and succeed in intimidating those who wear suits acquired from the local charity shop. Some even affect superiority when dressed casually. I don’t. For me it means a threadbare sweatshirt and jeans that show the indelible effects of countless DIY efforts.


However expert we are at wearing the correct garb we all fail miserably when the invitation reads ‘*smart casual*’. What do you wear? This is a problem which, I find, appears to affect men more than women, partly because the dress code is usually addressed to the male of the species. How often do you see women wandering around in lounge suits or, for that matter, sporting black ties?

For me it came to a head last month when this was the dress code at a Law Society brainstorming meeting that went into the weekend.

The very pillars and entrance in Chancery Lane say: dress sombrely or go away. How brave could you be, and would there be a point where you were refused admission? I am a

coward when it comes to sartorial decisions. I opted for the usual dark suit but chose a shirt with daring thin red lines in it – *and no tie*. As it turned out, no one else was any braver. The women wore office clothes and the men wore suits. Some ties were slightly louder than would be permitted in Magic Circle law firms. A few wore no ties. One, and only one, wore a beach shirt.

Had we been Australians or Americans I am sure that the view would have been different. There, I am told, this dress code would be a licence to wear sandals, no socks, shorts and loud shirt. There would also be the expectation of cans of beer and a barbecue at half time.

Clothes define us but is it not time to remove that definition and impose our own requirements in the public interest in certain quarters? I have in mind the shambles that is currently our seat of democracy. Something needs to be done to persuade our elected representatives to jump one way or another if the Brexit saga is not going to last until the next century. So how about this: After the Easter recess all MPs, including the speaker are to be stripped of their clothes and ordered to wear only the basics to preserve decency. Thus undressed they will be required to remain until they resolve the Brexit crisis. I am sure it will work a treat. 

For more from the pen of Richard Barr check out *The Savage Poodle* available at £7.99 + P&P from Amazon UK or direct from Richard: richard.barr@paston.co.uk

