

Moats and beams

"OF COURSE," SAID Beryl, "if you are going to have a moat, it must be a Trunch Troubadour. It may seem more expensive initially but you save money in the long term. Besides you can get it on expenses."

"I see," said Basil sceptically. "Surely a moat is a moat is a moat."

"Absolutely not. You have to make sure that it has the 30-year guarantee of leak proofness. Also it cannot be too shallow. There is no point in having a moat just a few feet deep. It must be deep enough to drown an intruder."

"Drown? You can't go round drowning people even in Norfolk. I mean, their relatives might sue you, and what if innocent people fall in and cannot get out?"

"These moats," retorted Beryl, "have been approved for use by Members of Parliament, so they must have thought of that, but we will have a couple of lifebelts to throw at intruders. But darling, I don't think we will have much problem. They have to get past the Rottweilers before they reach the moat, and that's after getting over the razor wire."

Basil looked puzzled. He gently asked Beryl why she was taking such precautions to repel intruders. After all, as a high street solicitor she was hardly engaged in a high-risk operation. She had been engaged in legal aid work for years, so she would not have anything worth stealing surely.

"Ah, that was before," she responded enigmatically, touching the side of her not insubstantial nose as she spoke.

In the House

Leaving Basil and Beryl peering into the moat, let us ponder on the new opportunities that are opening up to members of the solicitors' profession by the slurry of sleaze that is oozing from all Parliament's pores at the moment.

Because it is time our profession took a stand to cleanse politics of sleaze. David Cameron wants more people to stand as MPs and he doesn't care if we are Conservatives or not. Currently there are 38 solicitors in the House of Commons – just 6.2 per cent of the total – scarcely more than barristers, even though there are many times more of us than there are barristers. So what are you waiting for, guys and girls? Many of us lost our jobs in



the current recession. Assuming that you will not want to depose fellow solicitors who are already in residence, that leaves 577 seats ripe for occupation by solicitors.

Leaving expenses aside for the moment, the terms are good: salary of £64,766 a year and no requirement to time record and no managing partner coming round with a clipboard at the end of the month to tell you that once again your figures are bottom of the league table. Some may be snooty about 64 grand a year, but I hear that partners in some areas are struggling to take home as much as the minimum salary paid to a trainee solicitor.

So let's respond to the call from David C. He has promised to make it easier for independent minded individuals to join in by offering more free votes. So, we would not have to be Conservative for very long as we drift off into independent minded activities – like restoring legal aid to its pre-1980 level (in real terms), introducing laws banning judges from criticising solicitors and imposing a law that requires everyone to see a solicitor first before buying a house, making an accident claim or picking their nose.

In the bin

Then we could all settle down to ponder the excessive amount of legislation thrust upon us by the present incumbents at the moment (running at some 3,500 new pieces of legislation a year, much of it in statutory instruments and 50 per cent more than the 2003 level). It is a safe bet that most sitting MPs do not have clue about most of the law that is passed, but with 630 of us we would soon make light work of 3,500 new sets of regulations – and bin them.

After that we could work on making the law comprehensible to ordinary mortals. We could introduce the 'MJAN27AA' test – which, as it is not yet widely known because

I have just invented it, is the 'Mrs Jenkins At No 27 Acacia Avenue' test. It is very simple. If a particular clause in an Act cannot be understood by the said Mrs Jenkins, then the clause becomes unenforceable until it has been re-drafted with clarity.

We will still have to have some pleasures in life. No one claims that all solicitors are saints (most of us are heroes though). One pleasure will be our retreat to our country piles after a hard week of de-legislating.

We will need to rewrite the Green Book of MPs' expenses to provide a level of fairness across the board. Thus all MPs should be allocated a moat allowance, along with a beam payment to lend authentic antiquity to our 1980s bungalows.

Once the public becomes used to MPs having moats, then the odd duck house will not seem so... odd; and then as we become rich on our thoroughly legitimately gotten gains we will be forgiven our occasional faux pas when after a couple of gins (entirely properly claimed on expenses) we casually accuse our constituents of being jealous of our very very large house (resembling a bungalowoid Balmoral) and point out that it is none of their business to enquire what we claim for expenses.

And at that point we cross our mock Tudor drawbridge, pulling it up behind us and watch as hapless reporters try to hurl questions at us from the murky waters of our carp infested moats.

"So that," explained Beryl, the MP for Greater Snoreing East, "is why I have the moat. Now that a majority of MPs are solicitors, we don't want the public prying into our private lives do we? Especially after we have repealed the Freedom of Information Act."

Richard Barr is a consultant with Scott-Moncrieff Harbour and Sinclair and can be contacted by email: Richard.barr@paston.co.uk