

# Tapping, hacking and bent coppers in Greater Snoring

Those who were familiar with the delights of Greater Snoring in the very heart of Norfolk's idyllic countryside will need no further description. For those of you in the cold north, the Welsh west, the crowded south or the watery east, it was a conurbation so blissfully rural that most gardens had a spreading chestnut tree, a babbling brook running through, a small herd of cattle that obediently stared at passers by and a house that was so fascinating in its design that it featured in every edition of Pevsner since doomsday book.

It was also a happy place, where all the shops were privately owned and there was not a Tesco or a Sainsbury or an Asda within miles. Here solicitors' offices nestled among the local baker, the butcher and even the candlestick maker (for the owners of many of the great houses preferred to eschew the burgeoning electricity charges imposed by foreign owned energy companies that hold this country to ransom). Practitioners were held in high regard and local people, when gathered in the town's many hostelrys would argue late into the night over who had the best solicitor serving their needs.

And because the Greater Snoring and district Law Society voted back in the seventies to retain the scale fees for conveyancing, the local legal economy remained buoyantly based on property transactions, with wealthy solicitors' firms unobtrusively providing for all the needs of the locals, charging modest fees (or none at all) for taking on those causes that were once supported by that ancient method of funding cases called legal aid.

But nothing lasts for ever, and the great Greater Snoring phone hacking scandal rocked that happy community to its core.

It started insidiously with Sir Fritz Trunchski the cigar smoking, Rolls Royce driving, womanising proprietor of the Greater Snoring Enquirer calling all his reporters into his plush office one morning. As they slunk in, he was sitting at his window with a long rod dangled over the great moat that surrounds GSE House.

Suddenly he emitted a loud yell:

"Gotcha" and tugged hard at the rod. Far below him a very small minnow struggled ineffectually three feet above the water.

With a leer of satisfaction he turned to view the pale faces of the reporters.

"That vill teach zhe little blighter a lesson it will not forget in a hurry" (he tried to be the archetypal English gentleman, but occasionally when he was excited his German accent returned).

With a voice rising to falsetto he boomed (or rather squeaked) that the paper was becoming dull and anaemic. He wanted more gossip, more intrigue and more windows into the lives of the people of Greater Snoring, especially solicitors.

"Go out there and find out what they are saying to each other. Get the dirt on the dirty cases. Get the low down on low down life. Find out who is scr...". - but he did not end his sentence because one of the braver reporters interrupted him to ask how it should be done.

"Easy" he said, producing a hack saw and making a sawing motion over his gold plated telephone. He then took a small hammer and gently tapped his mobile phone. Finally he pulled an old fashioned copper penny out of his pocket and with a pair of pliers he bent it and placed it a five pound note. Loudly he said that everyone must stay within the law but his left eye (the one without the monocle in it) started twitching uncontrollably.

A week later a fire engine was called to a telegraph pole on the outskirts of inner Greater Snoring. A cub reporter (at least it was thought to be a cub reporter: he was wearing a tightly fitting bear costume) had become entangled in the telephone wires and needed to be rescued. He explained that he had made a lifelong study of telegraph poles and found this an interesting specimen. He was however unable to explain the Bakelite headphones and the bear suit.

The pages of the Greater Snoring Enquirer began to ring with juicy snippets of tantalising information:

- how little Jimmy had missed the school bus,



- how the magistrates (sitting in private session) had rebuked a local solicitor for not wearing a waistcoat and
- how Miss Harold of the typing pool of one of the larger firms had sent a faintly erotic text message to an articled clerk (in Greater Snoring they do not do trainee solicitors).

It soon became apparent that the local copper was bent, and that the whole community was resounding to the noise of hacking and tapping. The legal profession was outraged. They demanded the resignation of Sir Fritz Trunchski. They asked the Chief Constable of Greater Snoring to arrest their bent copper (which proved to be difficult as the Chief Constable was in fact the only constable and he had considerable logistical problems arresting himself).

In the meantime, Sir Fritz threw all his toys out of the pram and into the moat, closed down the paper and moved out of Greater Snoring. The only problem was that he owned most of the high street and instantly evicted all the local traders including solicitors.

So now Greater Snoring is like every other town in the country with chain stores everywhere, not a solicitors office in sight and bungalows where there used to be cows and chestnut trees. The fine houses are now residential homes and those who need legal advice have to spend hours on the telephone to call centres. There are no more late night solicitor praise sessions in the pubs because the pubs have closed.

The moral (if there is one) is that the geese that lay golden eggs are not necessary very pleasant creatures but you should think twice before killing them.



Richard Barr is a consultant with Scott-Moncrieff & Associates LLP. He can be contacted by email [Richard.barr@paston.co.uk](mailto:Richard.barr@paston.co.uk)