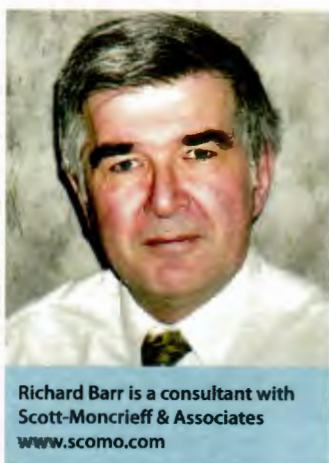


The home office

It's not all peaches and cream working from home, explains **Richard Barr**



Richard Barr is a consultant with Scott-Moncrieff & Associates
www.scomo.com

As you turn to this page in your *Solicitors Journal* in your open-plan pod, think of us poor workers who have to practise from home.

When I joined my present firm, I was the envy of many. How wonderful, they said, that you lie in bed and deliver wisdom to your clients or address your local judge by telephone while wearing a loud and insulting t-shirt.

To those who have not yet had the pleasure of giving up the pod race, let me give you insight into an average day at the home office.

I settle in just before 9am. My main task of the day is to sort and analyse a set of medical records for Mrs Grunge who claims that the doctors "didn't treat her right" when she was in hospital for her gallstones. Her records had arrived last week, and consisted of 893 pages.

Jumbled notes

Judging from the state in which medical records arrive, hospitals must throw them in the air during a gale and then gather them up in any order before sending them. Mrs Grunge's records were a jumble of different notes, charts, reports and letters in no discernible order.

At 9.20am there is general alarm: "Come quickly. You let one of the cats out and it is now raining ducklings."

The two events were not directly connected. We have indoor cats whose only aim in life is to become outdoor cats. One of the cats had slipped out when I opened the back door. He must have considered that Christmas, Easter and his birthday had happened all at once, because before his very eyes juicy fresh ducklings fell from the sky.

We have an annual invasion of ducks, one of which decided to make her nest on the roof. When the babies hatched, the only way to get them to ground level was to throw them down. That strategy would have been effective (ducklings bounce) had not Monty (named after the general) been waiting to catch them.

Mother Duck set up such a racket that we all came to investigate as Monty had started to gather them together, looking

up eagerly for the next one.

Eventually peace is restored: Monty is rounded up and Mrs Duck and her ducklings are ushered into the pond.

I had sorted 50 pages of Mrs Grunge's notes when there was an almighty bang and all the lights – and my computer – went out. There followed a spectacular thunderstorm accompanied by torrential rain.

Almost immediately the roof starts to leak in three places and I am again summoned away from the delights of Mrs Grunge to locate receptacles for the pouring water and mop up what had been missed.

Duckling elevenses

At 11.05am further entertainment is provided for the cats when a jackdaw comes down the chimney and starts liberally spreading soot on the wallpaper. Jackdaws are supposed to be intelligent. This one was not. It would not go out of the window I had opened for it. The cats did not have the same problem.

Twenty minutes later, I am still fruitlessly pursuing the bird with a fishing net as it crashes against everything except the open window. Of the cats, there is not one to be seen. They have all gone in pursuit of duckling for elevenses.

Things then go quiet and I manage to delve deeper into

the hypochondriac life of Mrs Grunge, before there is a knock on the door. It is the shearer.

I have mentioned before on this page that we have sheep – fourteen of them. They are Wensleydales and once a year have to be deprived of their thick coats. Now I have to play the part of reluctant shepherd – rounding up the sheep (not too difficult as they will follow you to the ends of the earth if you are carrying a bucket of food), locking them in a pen and releasing them one at a time for what they regard as the entirely undignified process of removing their wool.

That sets me back three hours and by the time I return to Mrs Grunge's records I am losing the will to live. When Nia, our delightful ex-guide dog, presents me with one of her toys with the clear message that she wants to go for a walk, I think, "Sod Mrs Grunge." As I get up I accidentally knock the records onto the floor where they scatter everywhere.

Half an hour later Nia and I return with smiles on our faces. A walk was what we had both needed. I can even face the sight of Mrs Grunge's records.

I cheerfully gather them up and I had to do no more sorting: throwing them on the floor had restored them to their correct order. **SJ**

