Welcome from the Chair

Welcome to our fifth issue of AWS London’s online newsletter and my first as Chair.

What a fantastic start to the year we have had! At the AGM, it was wonderful to see a selection of the Athena Project photographs of women role models, mentors and leaders and to hear the amusing and empowering words of our guest speaker, Dame Margaret Hodge MP. I certainly left feeling proud to be a woman working in the Law.

There is still work to be done to increase the number of women in more senior roles in the profession. It is important that women share their experiences in the workplace with each other – both good and bad - and that we support each other to achieve our goals. I hope that AWS London can help with that.

Listening to what AWS London achieved last year reminded me of how busy we have all been. We organised so many interesting events last year as well as responding to consultations and successfully nominating Sara Chandler as an Honorary QC.

I am very excited about 2016 which we intend should be another year of growth for AWS London. We have already had some fantastic events, including the new fitness event at 1 Rebel and our celebration of International Women’s Day at 4-5 Gray’s Inn Square, with addresses by Andy Slaughter MP and Dame Linda Dobbs, which you can read about later. We have lots more educational and social events to come where I look forward to meeting you.

Details of our events can be found on our new website and as usual if you have any comments or ideas please do not hesitate to contact me or any member of the Committee. You can also reach us through social media.

Best wishes,

Jess

AWS Chair, Jessica Standley

How to contact us
Linda Davies, our administrator, who is also a Committee member, will forward your messages to the Committee if you contact her on AWSLondon1@gmail.com

Don’t forget that you can also keep up with our activities by joining our LinkedIn group, or our Facebook group, or by following us on Twitter.
Camilla Palmer is an inspiring example of someone who has taken advantage of often chance circumstances to build a career of benefit to herself and to others. In this issue Elizabeth Cruickshank interviews the third of our AWS London Honorary Members.

First Steps
Born into a “traditional” family at a time when the (domestic and academic) expectations of her brothers and herself were very different, Camilla left the girls’ boarding school, where her education had been designed to prepare her for wifedom and motherhood, with “very poor A-levels”. Going to university was such a rarity that the school celebrated with a day off. After completing a secretarial course in Oxford her “a bit of a rebel” nature which “is something I’ve never quite grown out of” led her to escape by spending a year travelling across Africa, paying her way by using her recently acquired shorthand and “very fast” typing skills.

Returned from what she describes as a “very enjoyable early gap year”, and without any settled career plan she tempted as an “efficient but stroppy secretary,” unclear about her future but very clear about her rights. In one office having fulfilled her job description to the letter, she refused to allow her employers to take advantage of that very fast typing speed to give her additional work in another department, simply threatening to type more slowly. She much preferred to read “War and Peace” in her down time.

For a few years Camilla moved through a series of “one thing led to another” occupations, gathering skills, ambitions and insights into others’ working lives. There were also fortunate encounters with insightful colleagues, who encouraged her to escape the traditional secretarial mould. One such was Jo Tunnard, “my boss at Child Poverty Action Group, where I acquired knowledge of welfare benefits by typing others’ advice letters.”

At Gingerbread, a charity for single-parent families, she obtained experience as a counsellor, “although the title was somewhat misleading, because strictly speaking I was an advice worker.”

Further Education
Now convinced that a return to formal education would increase her ability to give more useful advice, she applied to several universities, all of whom rejected her except the London School of Economics. “This was probably because of the LSE’s emphasis on mature students”. As a mature and independent student she obtained substantial financial support. She says that “I was delighted to find that returning to study was not as difficult as many told me it would be”.

Camilla was at the LSE in the late Seventies. The LSE took up her suggestion of creating a cross-departmental “Women in Law” course and later at the College of Law she was part of a small group of students who repeatedly objected to many incidents of sexism. “One lecturer told us that we would enjoy Family Law because it would contain lots of sex and violence.”

Although there was a glut of newly-qualified solicitors in the early Eighties, Camilla obtained a training contract with Michael Seifert, now a Vice-President of the Haldane Society, who was “a brilliant negotiator and a fantastic mentor. The firm was very political, acting for miners during the 1984-85 strike (and she accommodated some in her home) and for women at Greenham Common”.

Camilla’s concern for “social justice”, a phrase frequently on her lips, led her to take her qualified expertise to various organisations which both enhanced her skills and directed the path of her future – North Kensington Law Centre, where she wrote her first book on discrimination in 1986, the National Council for One
Parent Families, where she worked as their lawyer and briefly at Maternity Alliance.

**Motherhood**

Camilla and her barrister partner wanted to have children and with typical determination she spent two years “persuading” her partner to agree to a scheme of (slightly) shared parenting which eschewed week-end working and required both to be home by 6 pm every evening. When the first of her two sons was born in 1986, legislation to protect the rights of pregnant women did not exist, so Camilla’s forward planning included carving out a career with less likelihood that she would be sacked or made redundant because of or during a pregnancy and which chimed with her own political convictions. This included Camden Council Housing Department, Camden Law Centre, Islington Council, as Deputy Head of Law (where ironically she was made redundant) and a five year stint as a Consultant to Bindmans, where she built up a claimant employment practice before leaving to set up Palmer Wade with Joanna Wade in a practice which focused on discrimination work.

**YESS**

There’s certainly no shortage of variety in Camilla’s legal life. She has worked for the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Equal Treatment Advisory Committee, headed up Leigh Day’s Employment and Discrimination team, written several books including three editions of “Maternity and Parental Rights” and for fifteen years has sat as a fee paid Employment judge. That might have been enough for some, but not for Camilla.

Using her employment law experience, her latest venture is YESS, a charity, which she founded with two other solicitors in March 2014. It is “not a law firm” though it is authorized by the SRA. It does not offer litigation nor is it a mediation body, although one solicitor is a trained mediator. YESS provides clients with information and advice on their rights, their options, their legal remedies and crucially how to go about seeking to negotiate themselves. Most employees do not want to sue their employers but want compensation, and an amicable leaving; they like being empowered to negotiate what they deserve. Although “I enjoyed litigation, acting mainly for employees so being in a David and Goliath situation,” in her new role she is convinced that clients often get a better, cheaper, quicker and more amicable deal through constructive dialogue between the parties without the immediate threat of litigation – “though litigation is always in the back pocket.”

“The unpredictability and cost of litigation can have a potentially destructive effect on an individual’s, health, time, pocket and even personal relationships. Raising a grievance often does more harm than good and should be seen as a last rather than first resort.” Camilla herself acts mainly for employees, but YESS also advises employers, such as charities, schools and not for profit, to try to obviate the expensive damage that can be done to both organisations and employees through litigation.

So that its services are not restricted to the affluent, YESS has designed an unusual fee structure, indicating upfront to potential clients that the organisation operates on a cross subsidy model. “What we charge you is dependent on your income and what you can afford, not necessarily on what we could charge you on an hourly basis.” And there is much need for YESS services, Camilla points out, “because it has been estimated that 54,000 women per annum lose their jobs by reason of pregnancy – and they need to be compensated”.

Stepping out the legal mainstream to found an organisation whose aim is to facilitate the best possible outcomes in workplace disputes without litigation accords not only with Camilla’s pursuit of social justice for those who cannot afford traditional law firm fees, but is much less stressful for all concerned, including the lawyers. She plans to work less – and has so planned for many years – not very successfully as “there are so many things I’d like to do”. With a smile she points to the Fitbit, a gift from her sons, which now sits in black splendour on her wrist checking on whether she has reached her objective of walking at least 6 kms on work days and 15 kms on week-ends. Mondays have now become (almost) sacrosanct to a variety of interests, from regular tennis, hiking and photography, to visiting the Lee Miller exhibition at the Imperial War Museum and the latest Caryl Churchill play at the Royal Court Theatre.

**The AWS and some advice for our members**

A member of the AWS for “longer than I can remember, I am very grateful to our association for supporting my appointment as an honorary Queen’s Counsel.” Although she has just stepped down as an AWS London Committee member, she is still “very keen” to be involved in the dissemination of information concerning maternity and employment rights to members.

“As women lawyers we must support other women lawyers, as only then will we increase the shockingly low number of equity partners in law firms.” Solidarity is a concept which has very real meaning for Camilla, both in terms of the workplace experience and of family organisation. “Don’t let your partner get away with doing less than his share of home care,” she advises, “and if
you are thinking of having a baby, think also about how you can keep your job. It’s not so difficult to predict what can go wrong, so think carefully about how you can protect your position. After all, 35% of working women end up being the main breadwinner. Keeping in touch while on maternity leave is so important, keeping informed about what is going on at the office, keeping track of major developments in your area of expertise and,” Camilla says firmly, “making sure that you are still in the running to be considered for promotion. You should not be disadvantaged just because you’re having a baby.” And with her usual pragmatism she points out how important it is to have legal expenses insurance – “just in case things do go wrong.”

For further information on YESS visit http://www.yesslaw.org.uk

Courting Trouble by Kathy Lette

Kathy Lette is a modern feminist described in the frontispiece of “Courting Trouble” as an outspoken comic writer with an inimitable take on serious issues. The cover, title and beginning of the novel suggest pulp fiction but escapism it is not.

Dedicated to human rights barrister Helena Kennedy QC (guest speaker at our 2014 Dinner) and with further thanks to the author’s husband Geoffrey Robertson QC and to Kirsty Brimelow QC, this novel is well researched, albeit with one or two inaccuracies and some poetic licence. It offers a very witty account (I laughed out loud) and delivers on the promised themes of violence, vengeance and betrayal whilst also emerging as a serious study of rape following the author’s experience as a juror.

At 35 the heroine, barrister Matilda Devine, is sacked from Diplock Chambers after a complaint by a Judge when he overheard her referring to him as “moronic” when speaking to her instructing solicitor in Court. Matilda therefore decides to start up a new multi-disciplinary practice on Camden High St with an older solicitor, who happens to be her mother. The new practice, “Pandora’s” is then instructed to defend a feisty lady charged with shooting two young men accused of raping her teenage granddaughter.

This is the basis for the varied elements that spill out of the page through the comedy. Conflicts of interest, drug culture, sink estate gangs, corruption, money laundering and the mother/daughter conflict all feature, not forgetting the terrifying power of the 21st century social media. I enjoyed reading this book and was pleased to note the final sentence “to be continued.........”

By Christl Hughes

By Christl Hughes
Collaboration and Communication at the Hotel Russell

Coral Hill handed over the responsibility of being AWS Chair to Jessica Standley at the AGM on 10 February 2016 and set the theme of the evening in her summary of a year of achievement for our organisation.

“We have enhanced our profile through our new website, for which we have received many plaudits, including from the International Bar Association which itself has “a very glitzy website”, through our presence on Twitter, on Facebook and on LinkedIn, where we now have 350 members, some of them international, and through our Newsletter. Major institutions, such as the Cabinet Office and the SRA, are now reaching out to us, all because of the hard work by members of the Committee such as Darlene Waithe, who is stepping down after 10 years as Treasurer and Virginia Cannon, who is stepping down as secretary.

Having a new enlarged committee has enabled us to support a successful application for Sara Chandler to become an honorary QC. Making such applications is a considerable undertaking, especially for our Administrator, Linda Davies, which we feel is worthwhile because we need to be seen to be doing things and not just doing things quietly”.

Coral emphasised the importance of collaboration. “While we need and are proud to have role models such as Sara and those in the Athena Project photographic exhibition in the dining room, we should not succumb to pressure to be individual trumpet – blowers rather than collaborative. We need to help each other as there are still too many women well into their careers who suffer from “imposter’s syndrome”, a feeling that they are not good enough to occupy the positions that they have worked so hard to achieve.”

Helping each other
Christl Hughes, a committee member and only the sixth woman to chair the Solicitors Benevolent Association in its 160 year history, reminded us that it is “run by solicitors for solicitors to ensure that “no solicitor is left unsupported in times of crisis”. We should all be vigilant for colleagues and their families who are in trouble, particularly because one consequence of solicitors running out of money is that they fall out of professional groups and may not be identified by the organisation which wants to help them.

Angela Hogan urged us to join the International Bar Association, an organisation with 80,000 members from 160 different countries, because only 30% of its membership is female. “We come together to enhance cross-jurisdictional cooperation through frequent seminars and conferences – and if you like social events, you’ll love it!”

An inclusive organisation
Jessica Standley, our new Chair, echoed Darlene Waithe’s suggestion that we should encourage diversity within our profession, as we do not all have the same shared experiences of religion, age and nationality. “It is not enough just to include women, we need to embrace each other and when we see a woman struggling in the workplace, we should encourage and help her.” As part of an ongoing inclusion process, Jessica invited all our
members to communicate with others, to tell us what they think and what they would like the AWS to organise for them. “Communication by and for our younger AWS members would be particularly welcome, as they are the future of our Association.”

Guest Speaker
Our guest speaker was Dame Margaret Hodge, Member of Parliament for Barking since 1994 and recognised as being one of the top 100 most influential women in the UK, especially when she was Chair of the Public Accounts Committee. She was only the 166th woman to have been elected a UK MP; when she was elected “there were more women in Parliament called John than there were women MPs”. Although 29% of MPs are now women, this is certainly not good enough for this matriarch of four children and eleven grandchildren. She did not become an MP until she was 50, but since then “I have “cut and managed my life to include them.”

Dame Margaret is very conscious of the difficulties facing women in public office, whether locally or nationally. Even facilitating the passage of legislation to permit women to request flexible working proved very controversial as neither Tony Blair nor Gordon Brown wanted this to be made available when they were Prime Minister.

A surprisingly mellow elder stateswoman to those who have seen the persistent tenacity of cross question in the PAC, which she chaired for five years, Dame Margaret has some extremely down-to-earth advice based on her many years of experience in public life. “It is important to learn to work together for the common good”, and as an MP to be willing to work with Conservative women as much as with Labour men. “We should be willing to mentor younger woman and not just to pull up the drawbridge behind our success. And we should remember that life is not a sprint, it’s a marathon. It doesn’t matter if you coast for a few years.” And she is very clear that she intends to carry on working for as long as possible. “I don’t want to be asked about my health and social care – I want to speak about what I want to do in the future. And there is much to do, because many battles that I thought we’d won are still being fought.”

The Parliamentary Accounts Committee
The PAC, which was set up in 1867 when Gladstone was Chancellor of the Exchequer, is the oldest Select Committee and is always chaired by a member of the Opposition. It is customary for the PAC Chair to “invite” an MP to attend a meeting. If the invitation is turned down, the Chair has the right to “order” the recalcitrant MP to attend, with an ultimate right to send the offender to “reflect on their sins in a closed room”. Being PAC Chair is a time-consuming occupation, for the Committee has the right to look at anything, whether it is the Duchy of Cornwall or Elder Care; in the five years when Dame Margaret was Chair it produced nearly 200 reports. As a woman Dame Margaret considers that she was able to build a team and to obtain consensus much more readily than if she had been male, “probably because I showed that I was happy to criticise my own political party.”
“Being focused on wasted money” is what she sees as the main function of the PAC. “When you take people’s hard earned money away from them, you have to be careful what you do with it and give value for money”. Taxation is necessary, but it is imperative that tax legislation is drafted and implemented fairly and as PAC Chair Dame Margaret saw HMRC every year “to see how they were getting on”.

Although she no longer chairs the PAC, she’s certainly not putting herself out to pasture because she is writing a book about waste in government. This should be, and ought to be, a bestseller!

International Women’s Day

AWS London celebrated International Women’s Day at 4-5 Gray’s Inn and were delighted to welcome two high profile speakers, Andy Slaughter MP and Dame Linda Dobbs.

The male point of view

Andy Slaughter, the MP for Hammersmith and Shadow Justice Minister talked freely and amusingly off the record about his years in office and in opposition. As far as women in the law are concerned he thought that the statistics were scandalous and that it was extraordinary that some firms set 20% as a target for the number of women partners; why so low? Given the equal numbers of men and women being recruited into the profession, he could not see that anything other than prejudice, unconscious or otherwise, that could be holding women back. For years now only 13% of the QCs at the Bar have been women. Again, he asked, how can that be?

Women’s difficulty in making progress in the legal profession could be compared with women gaining greater representation in Parliament. For politics, the only way forward proved to be women only lists for Labour MPs. Targets simply did not work. The selection process for Parliamentary candidates is particularly convoluted, but there is really ‘no excuse with the law’, particularly for larger firms which must have the resources to sort out the problem of parity.

And a female point of view

Dame Linda Dobbs became a High Court judge in 2004 but in 2013 she stepped down to pursue broader interests internationally; however, she still carries out high profile work in the UK, such as conducting the investigation into the activities of Stuart Hall while he worked for the BBC.

Dame Linda is concerned that for decades 87% of QCs have been men and that the judiciary still appears to be drawn mainly from the ranks of male barristers. After discussing the South African experience of quotas, she made it clear that the UK should not resort to quotas at the moment, although she did not rule it out as a future possibility.

She queried the use of the JAC Equal Merit Provision and called for everyone to reflect on what precisely it means and when it should be used. She felt that this should be aired more fully and that mentoring schemes should be extended, such as the current one for solicitors (male and female) in order to increase solicitors’ representation in the senior judiciary.

She recommended that women solicitors should push their firms to set targets with someone given the responsibility for keeping them on the agenda, because leadership from the top is vital, both in relation to
solicitors’ firms and the judiciary. Dame Linda is convinced that both society and the legal profession are missing a huge advantage by omitting women from senior positions in all sectors and solicitors from the senior judiciary.

**To the future**
AWS London intends to hold a debate on the topic of “Targets v quotas” later in the year, so look out for our flyers by email and social media. Hope to see you there.

By Coral Hill

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**Meet the committee**

Our new series of profiles to introduce you to our AWS London Committee members. For our first profile we have chosen Jessica Standley.

Jessica is the current Chair of AWS London and an Associate at Slater and Gordon Lawyers.

**Why did you enter the legal profession?**

Originally I had set my heart on becoming a journalist, but the A Level Law Tutor at Uplands Community Technology College in Wadhurst persuaded me to opt for Law when choosing my A Levels and I have not really looked back since. It was she who taught me the legal basics fantastically well and inspired me to follow the path to becoming a solicitor. Now I enjoy the challenges my legal career brings every day and whilst there can be some frustrating days, I find the work I do incredibly rewarding.

**Career to Date?**

On qualification in 2010 I worked in Personal Injury. Shortly afterwards, when the Savile case started, I joined the Abuse Team to assist with the large number of cases. There I have remained, working both on Savile and on other abuse cases such as those involving schools, the medical profession and the Church.

**Barriers or Inspiration?**

From my original A Level tutor to my current supervisor, Liz Dux, I have been fortunate to be surrounded by inspiring women. Although a number of people have suggested that there comes a point where a woman has to choose between family life and a career, I believe that with the right support it is possible to have both. It is deeply inspiring to work in a firm with a large number of women in senior positions and to see colleagues achieve their goals both in and outside law. For women working in the law role models and mentors are hugely important, if only to show that our goals are achievable.

**Why did you join AWS London?**

I joined AWS London because a friend, who was a Committee member, asked me to join to help attract some younger members to our association. When she
passed away suddenly, I decided to fulfil her wish. Since then, I have realised the importance of AWS London for our members and what it can do for them at all different stages of their careers.

What would you want AWS London to do?

AWS London is unusual in that we have a very wide membership of all ages, who are at different stages in their careers and who work in different specialist areas. The AWS should continue to provide a community where they can meet to share their ideas and experiences and just to chat to each other. The Law is at times a difficult profession to work in, but belonging to an organisation whose members can support each other through their careers' inevitable challenges, can make it so much easier.

In addition, it’s important that the AWS responds to formal Consultations to ensure that women’s concerns are highlighted and represented, and that we continue to provide both informative educational events and relaxed social ones. It’s amazing how much informal mentoring goes on as a result of these!

Any other interests outside work and AWS?

I have a bad habit of not being able to say no to things! So I’m usually rushing around trying to fit everything in – which I am sure is a description of the lives of many AWS London members. I enjoy keeping fit both at the gym and through running - I completed the New York Marathon last year. Aside from that I enjoy theatre, holidays and anything relating to food and drink!!

1Rebel in the City

We decided to try out the new fitness concept at 1 Rebel. The name says it all. It’s a different way of exercising which uses music and group energy to enhance your determination to get fit.

We arrived in good time to register and to admire the impressive changing rooms. After we had picked up the click in shows we made our way to the studio and found our bikes. We were all in the front row so there was no escaping the hard work! But it was a great workout, great energy and a live drummer throughout – certainly not your average spin class! Afterwards we had just enough energy to drag ourselves to the bar where we had a few well deserved glasses of prosecco!

We all thoroughly enjoyed it and are looking forward to the next 1 Rebel workout on Tuesday 21st June!

Check out page 11 of this newsletter or the Events section on our website for more information.
Fabulous Cocktails at the Fable

Now we are ready for summer after the staff at the modernist Fable Bar and Restaurant at Holborn Viaduct demonstrated how to make our parties go with a swing.

We want to hear from you

Remember that you can follow us, contact us and send comments to us in several ways, all thanks to the wonders of modern technology. Click below to connect to our Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter pages.

www.awslondon.co.uk
UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday 15th June 2016
Holland Park Opera Joining AWS London ensures that you obtain a discount for most of our events and priority booking for our annual special events like the opera in the summer and the ballet in January. If you are not already a member, you can join by downloading and completing the application form on our website at www.awslondon.co.uk or by contacting Linda Davies by email at AWSLondon1@gmail.com.

Tuesday 21st June 2016
1Rebel Workout Join us for a high energy full body workout in the Ride Studio at 63 St Marys Axe. Expect high energy and heavy beats (see pictures of our inaugural session earlier in the Newsletter) followed by a refreshing glass of Prosecco. All levels welcome.

Thursday 4th August 2016
AWS Summer Party This year’s Summer Party will be held at 4-5 Gray’s Inn Chambers, who have direct and private access to the greens. Croquet perhaps? Last year’s party was full of laughter and sunshine (see September 2015 Newsletter for pictures).

And still in the pipeline...
We are in the process of finalising the following events. Keep looking at our website for more details www.awslondon.co.uk.

June/July - Lunchtime seminar
September - Wine Tasting
September - Talk on Forced Marriages
October - Photography
November - Quotas in the Judiciary
December - Cheese Tasting and Christmas Party