Welcome to our CENTENARY ISSUE!

23 December 1919 - 23 December 2019

Welcome to this AWS London Special Edition to mark the approaching Centenary of Women being allowed to enter the legal profession. We are delighted to have received so many excellent articles from members reflecting on how things have changed as well as the progress needed for the future.

It is particularly gratifying to see the number of superb role models available. In this edition, we have included an overview of the women featured on our website and we will also be tweeting the full profile of each role model over the month leading up to the centenary.
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A massive thank you to our editors and contributors for this very special edition. We were delighted to receive excellent articles, although due to space, not all could appear in this edition. We will use them in a future newsletter.

Thanks to the Women’s Library Collection at LSE Library
Welcome to this centenary issue of the AWS London newsletter. When in 1992 we started the AWS London group it was definitely last century - before electronic communication - so mailings, flyers and hard copy newsletters were the methods we used to communicate. Without mobile phones we still managed to meet regularly to organise our programme.

We did have word processors in the office but in common with most women solicitors of my generation we did not learn to touch type as otherwise we would be given secretarial rather than legal work to do. However, we could use our secretaries – those very helpful women who have disappeared from legal life - to help with typing our communications provided we kept this activity under the radar from most of our employers. Women solicitors were still very much in the minority in the office, so it was common to be mistaken for your own secretary when answering the telephone.

Male solicitors were starting to realise we were here to stay and asked, “Where is the Association of Men Solicitors?” To which we replied “That’s called the Law Society”.

In that atmosphere the main purpose of AWS London was to provide women solicitors with different opportunities for networking in a relaxed atmosphere. Many of the women I met through AWS remain good friends and we enjoy recalling events, venues and speakers from the past. We also tried different types of events – Ladies’ Day at Ascot was quite an experience – it rained!

It is good to see AWS London carrying on with a good mixed programme of events. 100 years on we have made a lot of progress in increasing the numbers of women in the profession, but we still need to support one another in the fight for true equality.
It is somewhat scary to think that AWS London started when I was two years old and now here I am steering the ship.

As solicitors, we have so many demands on our time and in a crowded market, these time pressures become more and more acute. My friends joke that they need to ask to see me at least 3 months in advance - I wish that it was a joke! I am sure I am not alone in this and therefore with work, Bake Off, spin classes, childcare and networking events, it is understandable that AWS London activities may not be number 1 on people’s priority list!

It has been challenging at times to make sure that we are delivering a range of events that people want to attend, but I am pleased with how this has developed; feedback is positive and events well attended.

The challenge for us as a committee is to make sure we stay relevant and worthy of your membership subscriptions. We strive to keep our membership costs reasonable and have not increased our subs for many years. One of the ways this is achieved is that we as a committee take on administrative tasks ourselves. We therefore thank you for bearing with us when there are hiccups. We will keep asking you for your feedback whenever we host events. We will keep asking you what you want to see us doing and will continue to go out there and make it happen. We also work quietly in the background challenging the SRA and asking questions of the JAC. We meet with other women’s groups to share knowledge and build on good practice. None of this we could do without you.

So, in my welcome I want to say thank you. As someone with only 3 years PQE, I remember starting out with no appreciation of all of the other things, apart from just practising law, that being a solicitor entailed. In many ways I was massively underprepared. What AWSL has shown me is that there is a way through and that there are hundreds of thousands of inspiring women who have paved the way for our lives as solicitors to be just that little bit easier. AWSL has given me community and a shared sense of purpose. It’s been a thrilling nine months as Chair (if not slightly shattering!).

I can’t profess to have always gotten things right, but I have tried to make things a little better in my own small way and hope that I have achieved this: “Deeds not Words”.

Amy Wedgwood
AWSL Chair 2019-2020
2019 marks 100 years since women were first, and finally, admitted to the legal profession with the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919. The Act, which was the culmination of over 40 years’ campaigning by women to be admitted to the profession, removed all legal barriers to women, including married women, working as lawyers on the ground of their sex. Before 1919, women made many attempts to be admitted to the legal profession, with the first woman applying to sit The Law Society’s examinations in the 1870s. Their attempts were repeatedly obstructed by male members of the profession as members of The Law Society, the judiciary and Parliament.

In 1913 in Bebb v Law Society the Court of Appeal held that women were not persons for the purposes of the Solicitors’ Act 1843 and were therefore not eligible to sit The Law Society’s examinations, a prerequisite for qualification as a solicitor. The Court of Appeal justified their decision stating that ‘We are not here to say what should be the law… Our function is to declare the law.’ Numerous Bills were introduced to Parliament with the aim of opening the legal profession to women both before and after the decision in Bebb. However, as a commentator in 1913 pointed out, with the ‘vast majority of Parliamentary members … themselves legal men’, legislative change seemed far off.

...although institutionally opposed to the admission of women there were individual solicitors who supported women’s claims to access the profession

The first bill on the question of women lawyers was introduced in 1912 and there were various attempts thereafter to legislate for women’s admission. Among the Bills to be introduced was the 1914 Solicitors (Qualification of Women) Bill. The Bill was introduced by a member of The Law Society, revealing that although the Society was institutionally opposed to the admission of women there were individual solicitors who supported women’s claims to access the profession. Concerted steps were taken to block the Bill by The Law Society, which before 1919 worked actively to block any bills introduced to Parliament on the question of women solicitors.

Ultimately, women succeeded in forcing the issue of the admission of women up the political agenda and by 1919 there were three Bills on the question of women being admitted to the legal profession being debated in Parliament. At a special General Meeting of The Law Society held on 28 March 1919, a Resolution was passed by 50 votes to 33:- ‘That in view of the present economic and political position of women, it is in the opinion of this meeting expedient that the existing obstacles to their entry into the legal profession should be removed.’ The 33 members who voted against the motion were derided in the press as ungracious and ungallant. However, as Maud Ingram, one of the Claimants in Bebb recognised, ‘It must be admitted that the legal profession itself is by no means unanimously in favour of the change’ and when it was passed the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act was not a watershed moment. Attitudes did not change markedly after 1919.

Katie Broomfield is reading for a PhD in History at Royal Holloway, University of London and is a co-author of First: 100 Years of Women in Law.
Timeline of ‘firsts’ for Women in the Legal Profession

**Arabella Mansfield**
First female lawyer in the US. Admitted to the Iowa bar. The bar exam was restricted to males only, but Arabella scored very highly.

**Charlotte E. Ray**
First African-American female lawyer in the US. Admitted to the Columbia bar. However, Charlotte only practiced for a few years due to prejudice.

**Ethel Benjamin**
First female lawyer in New Zealand. First female to appear as counsel in court, representing a client for the recovery of a debt.

**Flos Greig**
First female barrister in Australia. Male students at her Law school were initially opposed to her studying there, but they voted at the end of Greig's first year that women ought to be allowed to practise law.

**Clotilde Luisi**
First female lawyer in Uruguay. She was also a professor, pedagogue, translator, feminist activist, and the first Uruguayan woman to study Law at the University of the Republic.

**Natividad Almeda-López**
First female lawyer in the Philippines. She was also the first woman to defend a woman in a court of law and first female judge of the Municipal Court of Manila.

**Frances Wright**
First female lawyer in Sierra Leone. She left the country in 1981 due to the Civil War.

**Ai Kume, Masako Nakata and Yoshiko Mibuchi**
First three women to be admitted to the bar in Japan.

**Irene Antoinette Geffen**
First female lawyer in South Africa. She published the Laws of South Africa affecting Women and Children in 1928.

**Carrie Morrison**
First female to have completed articles and become a solicitor in England and Wales. She was 34 years old and had a varied career beforehand.

**Ella Negruzi**
First female lawyer in Romania and civil rights activist.

**Eva Andén**
First female lawyer to be admitted to the Swedish bar association. She often wrote articles on the law and women's rights in issues of marriage, inheritance, abortion and prostitution.

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People's approach to work and child-rearing differs wildly and it is, of course, a very individual choice. What the AWS London and many other groups have campaigned for is the opportunity to make that choice. Here are three very different accounts and certainly you will see the difference in treatment between the solicitor in the 1960s and the last example from this centenary year.

**JANET CORKE: author and non-practising solicitor**

**Maternity Leave in 1960**

In 1960 Janet Corke qualified, married and a few months into her first employment as a solicitor discovered that she was pregnant. She had assured the solicitor who interviewed her that she was not planning to have any children “for a couple of years at least.” She now decided to inform the senior partner who “was elderly and not very approachable, and I knew I had been the first woman solicitor to work in the firm.” Nevertheless, she rehearsed a little speech, which “I hoped would lead to my principal suggesting a return to work after a few months maternity leave.”

At the end of the day she approached the senior partner and told him that “I thought I’d better let you know I’m expecting a baby next spring.” He carried on working in almost total silence until finally he looked at her before delivering his verdict.

“When you are six months pregnant Mrs Corke, you will be required to leave. Clients would not wish to be embarrassed if you stayed any longer. Thank you. Good evening.” Trembling with anger Janet left him to his work. “He never spoke to me again – Such was the lot of the woman solicitor who fell pregnant in 1960.”

**JANE CRAIG: partner Penningtons Manches**

**Maternity leave in the early 1990s**

In February 1992 I was promoted to partner after four years with my firm. I was thrilled, because I had joined from a legal aid practice and had been told on joining that there were no plans to grow the family department and that partnership was therefore an unlikely prospect. I got married in May of the same year.

The firm did not have many female partners at that time. Most of the male partners had wives who had given up work when they had children. I discovered I was pregnant in early 1993. When I looked at the Partnership Deed I found there was no provision for maternity leave for partners mirroring that for assistant solicitors or, indeed, at all.

There was admiring talk of one partner who had taken just two months off and worked right up to her due date. Although I was not told this in so many words, I knew that if I wanted my career with the firm to progress, I would not be able to take very much time off following the birth of my baby. I took four months off. There was no possibility of working four days per week on my return as so many new mothers do now. Partners did not do that and associates were allowed to do so only very rarely.

Twenty-six years on, I am head of department at the same firm and the experience for our partners and associates who choose to have children is very different from my own. A year’s maternity leave is customary, including for partners. Working a four-day week on return is the norm, at least when children are younger. Modern technology and our agile working policy make it possible for parents to fit their work around school sports days, parent teacher meetings and the like. It will be interesting to see what further progress is made in the next twenty-six years.
LAURA UBEROI: Immediate Past President of Westminster & Holborn Law Society

Maternity Leave in 2019

In life some years are busier than others. My past year has been one of the most extraordinary in my 30 years to date and certainly one of the busiest. In September 2018, I was delighted to discover that I was pregnant with my first child. The next day I was offered a role with a new firm. You can’t accept, I was counselled – the stress of a move can hurt you and the baby.

In October 2018, I was elected as President of Westminster & Holborn Law Society (“WHLS”), one of the youngest presidents ever of a local law society and one of only a handful to take office whilst pregnant. ‘She’s naïve’, I overheard on election night – ‘she'll never manage a baby and leading us’. I also sit as a council member of The Law Society’s governing body. ‘Do you have to step down now you’re pregnant?’ I was asked.

When news of the baby spread I was amazed at how much unsolicited advice centred around “calming things down” – your career plans can wait until you’ve had your family, one well-meaning peer suggested.

Of course, it is vitally important that parents have the space needed to focus on family. However, it is also crucial that they are supported to work and take on new challenges as they wish. I accepted the new job and spent my four months there before maternity leave getting up to speed on their work. I found that a growing stomach was a great conversation starter with new colleagues and clients!

I also took full advantage of the external maternity coach my firm offers, who works to your agenda before, during and after parental leave and has been another support during this transitional time. We started by building a communications plan – a note to my team about all the updates I want to receive during my time away, such as client events and training sessions. Often those on parental leave can feel left out, whilst employers are rightfully wary of contacting team members that are away, so a communications plan resolves these concerns.

It was my choice to spend maternity leave serving as President of WHLS and a Council Member. Since then I have seen an increase in new parents participating in their local and national law societies, which is only a good thing. My baby comes to all meetings with me and I’m never short of a committee member who wants to hold her!

Laura and new baby entering The Law Society
Business Case for Diversity

Diversity and inclusion has an initial cost that blinds many employers to its benefits. It’s well-documented that an integrated workforce drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds has clear economic advantages. These organisations are more productive, as well as being able to recognise and react more quickly to opportunities in the marketplace. Many businesses have short-term projections so fail to see the economic value that comes with diversity but this is set to change. Bizarrely, not spurred on by campaigning groups, but increasingly because businesses are chasing the best employees from generation Y, men and women, and they are having to compete over the terms of work they offer. Often, these are the very terms, which have been a barrier to women progressing in their careers, to the most senior levels.

Generation Y, born during the 1980s and early 1990s, is one of the first generations, that expects to be less affluent than their parents, to work far longer and are more prepared to chuck it in and go travelling. As a result, employers are adapting to what generation Y want, to attract the best candidates. Critically, this involves moving away from the ‘ever-present in the office’ model to increased flexibility by use of technology. For many mothers, who still bear the lion’s share of child-rearing, ‘presenteeism’ is a major obstacle to senior positions.

Of course, not all women are mothers or want to be, but they are still likely to have more flexible work models than ever before. This can bring its own problems. Constant use of technology can lead to burn-out and some businesses are promoting shifts for responding to clients, in order to provide round-the-clock advice. This requires the client to accept that a team, not just one individual, will deliver the best service. Teamwork is an area where women regularly out-perform the men and the smartest employers will know that.

It’s an irony, for campaigners for gender equality, to find that one of the major barriers for women is coming down because men want flexible lives too! Next step is to tackle unconscious bias to see some major shifts in our workforce.

Coral Hill

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This article first appeared in The Lawyer
Why was the Association of Women Solicitors London created, and why is it relevant today?

The Association of Women Solicitors London (AWSL) was founded in 1992 as a complement to the National Association of Women Solicitors. AWSL’s original purpose was to provide: “local get togethers social and professional”, not unlike a Local Law Society. Our purpose has evolved over the ensuing 27 years and are current objectives are as follows:

The objects of the Association of Women Solicitors, London (“the Association”) shall be:-

1.1 To represent, support and develop the interests of women solicitors
1.2 To provide professional, business and social activities for women solicitors
1.3 To offer educational courses, lectures and seminars designed to benefit the standing of, and to improve opportunities for women solicitors.

But what does that include and what do we actually do?

To represent, support and develop the interests of women solicitors

In 2013 the National Association of Women Solicitors sadly had to close down due to lack of funds. Much of the discussion at that time concerned the loss of an independent voice for women solicitors particularly with respect to specific issues such as maternity, high attrition rate, under use of flexible working, gender pay gap, underrepresentation at the top etc. AWSL, therefore, decided to add that to its work and looking back we’ve been pretty successful.

For example, AWSL is a respected sounding board for the SRA and we have met with their staff both and London and Birmingham to discuss current concerns. This liaison has included work on the long running “Training for Tomorrow/SQE project” since its inception in 2014. We have also drawn attention to the gender aspects in SRA Consultations on Public Indemnity Insurance and Solicitor Competence for example. The advantage of AWSL is that we are completely independent and represent a diverse cross section of female solicitors at all stages of their careers.

The first AWSL Consultation Response in 2013 addressed the JAC proposal on a tie breaker, giving priority to female applicants in the event of a tie all other aspects being equal. We were quite clear on our support for that, the proposal was implemented and 6 years on it is clearly being utilised. We of course still want to go further- delegates at our Quotas v Targets Debate in 2016 voted resoundingly for Quotas.

We have had letters and other items published in the Law Society Gazette (our Immediate Past Chair Gillian got in twice during her year of office) and the wider media. For example in 2015 when a senior Law Lord expressed unease at the number of women lawyers climbing the judicial ladder and suggesting that that could be putting off “talented” male applicants AWSL issued a strongly worded Press Release pointing out that all judicial appointments remain on merit and that female applicants are also talented. We have also more recently appeared the Times and the Telegraph and are regularly approached for a quote when gender issues and the law collide.

In 2016 we responded to the Government Consultation on the Gender Pay Gap. Last
year we came out in favour of retaining “beyond reasonable doubt” on the burden of proof for disciplinary proceedings, although the decision on that was of course to change to a balance of probabilities.

Our most recent Response in 2019 is to the Government Consultation on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace and we also covered that in our Response to the SRA’s “A Question of Trust” in which we stated our view that solicitors should be disciplined for e.g. sexual assaults outside the workplace.

To provide professional, business and social activities for women solicitors
AWSL offers a calendar of varied social events across the year. We try and be sensitive to varying tastes of our members and offer a diverse range of social activities including trips to the ballet, opera, musical theatre, women’s cricket, spin workshops with 1Rebel, cocktail making classes and our now annual festive quiz. Such events allow women at all stages of their career to meet and share their stories in an informal setting. It also provides an opportunity to meet women outside of your area of practice and to expand your networking circles.

To offer educational courses, lectures and seminars designed to benefit the standing of, and to improve opportunities for women solicitors
In addition to our social events, we also offer educational seminars across a diverse range of topics. We have focused both on soft skills, such as our recent Vocal Workshop Series and upcoming Witness Evidence Seminars and pure educational sessions, like our Flexible Working and Equal Pay talks. In addition to hosting seminars AWSL are not afraid of a debate and we host lively panel discussions where women can share their views on topics such as quotas in the judiciary and the relationship between the law and politics.

Notwithstanding all of the above, are we relevant in today’s society? For our part, we would say YES WE ARE. We are more than just a club or a social body, although that is a part of what we do. All of us are committed to challenging the status quo. We are constantly asking what impact will any proposed changes have on the women in our profession and are always pushing for greater parity with men at all levels in all types of practice.

In this centenary year, now more than ever we need to reflect on how far we have come but more importantly what work there is still to do. Only by sharing knowledge and working together can we speak with one voice and effect change. AWSL aims to be an approachable organisation where anyone can share their views and offer up their experiences. Our members and their experiences feed into everything we do and everything we strive to achieve so if you have any ideas for improvement or widening our remit do please get in touch.

Christl Hughes and Amy Wedgwood
Consultations Secretary and Chairperson
For some years, AWS London has ensured that female role models are made more visible, by storing profiles on our website and in our newsletter. For this centenary issue, we are delighted to receive so many recommendations and below we have captured some of the role models. For the full profile, please refer to our website and, in the run-up to centenary day, we will be tweeting in honour of each woman appearing here.

Madeleine Heggs
Non-practising solicitor
Admitted 1955

Madeleine Heggs set up her own practice and was the first woman and first practising solicitor to be appointed a Social Security Commissioner. We are honoured that Madeleine is still a strong supporter of AWS London and regularly attends our events.

Eileen Meredith Pembridge
Solicitor, Bishop & Sewell LLP
Admitted 1975

Eileen initially worked as a scientific translator for the International Atomic Energy Authority but changed career after being inspired by working with Release. She qualified in 1975 and started her own firm of solicitors, Fisher Meredith.

In 1976 she was the first woman to stand for President of the Society and was called ‘the most dangerous feminist in England’. Eileen worked on Council for sixteen years and was a member of, or chaired, many committees including Family Law, Dispute Resolution, Reputation, Legal Aid, Human Rights, Governance, Equal Opportunities/Diversity. She was instrumental in the creation of the Judicial Appointments Committee for the Lord Chancellor.

Baroness Sally Hamwee
Member of House of Lords since 1991
Admitted 1972

Baroness Sally Hamwee is a Liberal Democrat spokesperson on Home Affairs in the House of Lords.

Sally was a partner in the firm of Clintons, which specialises in the entertainment, digital media and creative industries.

Alexandra Marks
Deputy High Court Judge, Recorder and First Tier Tribunal Judge
Admitted 1983

Alexandra was an equity partner at Linklaters (1990-2003). She was a Judicial Appointments Commissioner for six years and a Commissioner at the Criminal Cases Review Commission for five years. She holds a wide-ranging number of current roles including: a recent appointment as the Independent Statutory Reviewer of Access & Participation Plans for the Office for Students; Chair of CEDR, a Council member of JUSTICE and a trustee of LawCare.
Kim Beatson  
Partner and head of family department,  
Anthony Gold  
Admitted 1984

Kim Beatson started practice with a trade union firm before transferring her training to Russell Cooke. She was made a partner and head of the family department at just 26 years old; she was the second female partner at the firm.

‘Gender equality was still a struggle. I felt it particularly when I had a baby at 30 years of age and took only 3 months maternity leave. I feared being managed out of my job which did happen in those days.’

Elizabeth Cruickshank  
Author and non-practising solicitor  
Admitted 1989

Elizabeth Cruickshank is a past Chairwoman of both the National AWS and the London AWS. As well as having written many journal articles on women in the legal profession, she is the author of “Women in the Law: Strategic Career Management”, “All you Need to Know about Being a Trainee Solicitor” and “Sisters in Law” (in Nigeria).

Christina Blacklaws  
Immediate Past President of the Law Society of England and Wales  
Admitted 1991

Christina set up the first UK Alternative Business Structure (ABS) with The Co-operative Society and became a director of policy, responsible for all external affairs.

Christina was a representative of the Women Lawyers Division and in 2016, was elected as Deputy Vice President of the Law Society leading to the roles of Vice President and President. During her periods of office, she developed the three themes - Innovation and the future of legal services, access to justice and gender equality. A main strategy was the Women in Leadership in Law programme.

I. Stephanie Boyce  
Director of Stephanie Boyce Consulting Limited  
Admitted 2002

Stephanie has spent most of her career working in complex environments with challenging governance arrangements, from central and local government. Stephanie has recently been elected as Deputy Vice President of the Law Society of England and Wales becoming Vice President in 2020 and President in 2021. Stephanie will become the representative body’s sixth woman president and its first ethnic minority President.
UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday 27th November 2019
FESTIVE QUIZ!
6:30 – 9:30pm at the Yorkshire Grey, Holborn

Thursday 30th January 2020
Tackling Problems in Witness Preparation: An Interactive Workshop with speakers Amrit Dhanoa and Rosalee Dorfman Mohajer
6-7pm at 4-5 Greys Inn Square Chambers
Interactive talk to take you through the various stages of preparing witness evidence in a civil case.

Thursday 20th February 2020
AWS Annual General Meeting
6-11pm at The Ivy – Tower Bridge
Our very special annual AGM with guest speaker Laura Devine.

Remember... AWS London members get discounted or even FREE tickets for most events, plus priority booking for our special events such as Opera or Ballet. If you would like to join, download and complete the application form by clicking HERE, visiting www.awslondon.co.uk or contacting Amy Wedgewood by email at awslondon1@gmail.com.

We currently have capacity to join our wonderful AWSL Committee!

2018 was a momentous year of change for AWSL, we went through many transitions to digitise and modernise AWSL. Naturally, the time came for a few of our dear long-time Committee members to take a step down.

If you would like to find out more about being part of the AWSL Committee, please email our Chair, Amy Wedgewood on awslondon1@gmail.com and she will be delighted to give you more details.