

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023: SPOTLIGHT ON BARBARA CONNOLLY KC

7BR



For International Women's Day, Chambers' Marketing and Events Executive, Christianah Babajide, interviews Barbara Connolly KC, who is one of the most senior female barristers at 7BR.





How many women barristers
were tenants in Chambers
when you joined?



I joined as a pupil in 1986. Chambers consisted of 22 tenants, including three female tenants, and I was one of two female pupils that year. Louise Varty and I were both taken on in 1987. At that time the Bar was overwhelmingly male. Many sets had no female tenants; indeed, some had never had female pupils. I had two very young children at the time and I was the only mother amongst the barristers in Chambers for several years. We are a multi-disciplinary set and juniors undertake many areas of practice. It was hard work because there were a lot of late nights spent looking up the law and early morning starts.



(contd)



Nevertheless, I found myself in a set that was friendly, collegiate, and extremely supportive. At a time when some at the Bar felt unable to take proper holidays or even maternity leave, I spent lengthy school holidays with my family. I frequently discussed cases and sought advice from colleagues, including silks, when the need arose. There was a lot of sexism and discrimination against women at the Bar, but that was not my experience within 7BR. I was supported in my work and to develop my own area of interest and specialism in family law.





How many women barristers are there now and what's the impact of having more women?



We are now 35 female tenants in Chambers (just over a third) including 4 KCs. It is great to see so many successful women. Rachel Langdale KC is our Head of Chambers, and many other women in Chambers hold a variety of roles in the management of Chambers, including in recruitment, financial matters and career development. Former female members of Chambers have gone on to have successful careers in the Judiciary, including Lady Justice Kate Thirlwall, who is a member of the Court of Appeal. The impact of having more women at the Bar is hopefully to encourage other women to appreciate that the Bar and judiciary can be a career for them.





Do you think you faced any barriers in your legal career as a woman, and if so, how did you overcome them?



Undoubtedly the first obstacle was being a woman in what was then a man's world. To be told in one pupillage interview (not at 7BR) that the entirely male panel thought it was probably a good idea to have a female tenant at some stage in the future, although they had not taken on their only female pupil thus far, was pretty jaw dropping. I studied law and worked part-time with two small children. Although I did question whether and if so, how I would manage everything in practice, I did. In my early days, I was also aware of times when clients wanted to be represented by a man – and they got me. I just put my head down, gave my best and carried on with the job. There is huge satisfaction in achieving that which others thought was not possible.





What would be your main advice to another female barrister, aspiring to take silk?



Keep at it. Take a careful look at your practice. How can you improve it? Is it, or is it capable of being a silk's practice? If not, take advice and make changes. And remember all silks were juniors once.



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Barbara Connolly KC has been a specialist in Child and Family Law for over 25 years. She undertakes disputes concerning children (including surrogacy), financial remedies, and cases in the Court of Protection involving both welfare and financial issues.