

# Centenary Yearbook

## 1913 to 2013

From very small beginnings the firm has grown and flourished to become a leading law firm in the Thames Valley and more recently a firm with a national presence through our offices in London and Cardiff, as well as being a founder member of one of the world's largest legal networks. So what qualities have driven this sustained story of success? And how might we develop further over the years ahead?



•clarkslegal

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# Forward.

## A century of success.

The pace of business these days rarely gives us time for reflection. Occasionally however, something forces us to take stock. Inescapably perhaps, the celebration of a centenary is one of those moments. Arthur F Clark founded this firm in Reading in 1913 and I feel privileged, having recently taken over as Managing Partner of Clarkslegal, to be leading the firm into its second century.

From very small beginnings the firm has grown and flourished to become a leading law firm in the Thames Valley and more recently a firm with a national presence through our offices in London and Cardiff, as well as being a founder member of one of the world's largest legal networks.

So what qualities have driven this sustained story of success? And how might we develop further over the years ahead?

## Work hard and focus clearly.

In reality, there is no mystery about Clarkslegal's success.

We have done and continue to do what most successful businesses do – work hard and concentrate on what we do well. That means retaining close links with our clients, learning about their businesses and offering them cost effective, user friendly services.

By doing the basics well, allied with a focus on niche specialisms, we have been able to record 10% turnover growth for each of the three years in the run-up to our centenary year – and that is despite the worst effects of the recession.

Significantly some of our biggest recent projects – such as the outsourcing of accommodation services on behalf of The University of Reading - have been on behalf of clients for whom we have worked for many decades. This bears testimony to our long-term commitment to providing the highest level of service to our clients. I am delighted that we have been able to help so many of our clients to achieve their goals for such a long time.

# Staying innovative.

However, we also understand that what worked in the past won't necessarily work in the future. In fact, if there's one thing that defines Clarkslegal for me, it is this culture of not resting on our laurels. Clarkslegal people are always looking for the next opportunity, always trying to broaden our services and develop innovative delivery models.

A good example of this was when Carillion told us about their Carillion Advice Services – the company's Newcastle-based team of paralegals, already well tried and tested on a Government contract for legal services. We quickly realised that we could use the same team to offer experienced but economically priced services to our other clients. The agreement we have with Carillion to work together providing a managed legal service is a model of market-leading innovation with the potential to benefit everyone. It is the embodiment of what we do so well.

Similar innovative thinking has led to highly significant and imaginative initiatives such as our agreement with the Royal Commonwealth Society to progressively roll out the Commonwealth Environmental Investment Platform across as many countries of the Commonwealth as possible. This will help to establish a unique community of business interest in the environment, enabling entrepreneurs to access investors, and small to medium sized businesses to develop international links and opportunities.

I wonder what Arthur F Clark would have made of these and the scores of other successes achieved under his name by his successors, ranging from his son Kenneth Clark, grandson Peter Clark, to my immediate predecessor and continuing Chairman Michael Sippitt. I would hope that he would be a little amazed but also very proud. I know that I am.

I hope that you find this history of the firm interesting. At the heart of it are the partners, associates and the other staff who have consistently achieved high standards in our name. Within these pages you will find the stories of some of those individuals as well as the firm as a whole. On this significant occasion I thank them all - *David Rintoul, Managing Partner*

# Introduction.

Since 1913, the name Clark has been central to the commercial and civic life of the Thames Valley as one of the area's leading solicitors firms. Over time the practice that started out as Arthur F. Clark renamed itself Clarks Solicitors in the 1970s to become the Clarkslegal LLP of today. But at every stage, characteristic core Clark themes emerge as constants - dedication to client relationships, outstanding service and the impetus to be 'ahead of the game.'

It has been a story of extraordinary growth. For almost half its life Clarks had just a single partner - the founder Arthur F. Clark - but since the end of the Second World War there has been steady expansion so that today the firm has sixteen partners and a total team of about one hundred. In addition, there are a further eighty freelance consultants across the law firm and its two separate specialist 'human resources' and 'environmental scientific' subsidiary consultancies.

Our founding partner could never have foreseen how the firm would grow or how the legal profession would change so much within a century, but this is a brief account of how it all happened.

Throughout our centenary year, Clarkslegal has held various events across our three offices in Reading, London and Cardiff to help raise awareness of our nominated charities - Alexander Devine Children's Hospice Service, Contact the Elderly and Cardiff Foodbank. In addition, staff have volunteered a cumulative total of one hundred days, supporting charities of their choice.

The photos throughout this book are taken from some of the charity events we have hosted and the volunteering activities undertaken by our staff in our centenary year.

*Written by Edward Fennell*

*Edward Fennell is a legal columnist for The Times*



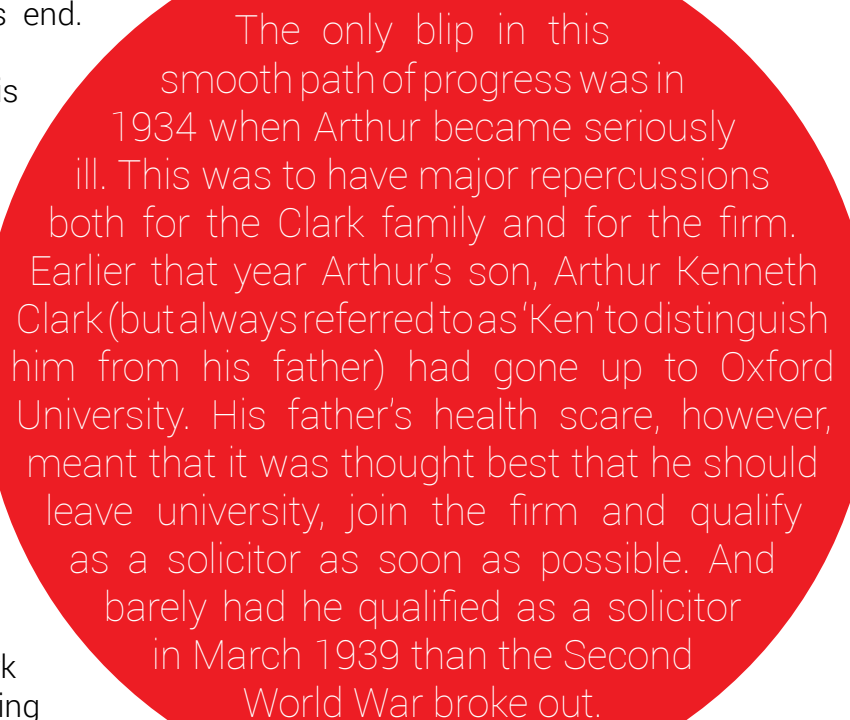
# A law firm which leads – “first in the first class”.

The foundation of Clarkslegal’s success today can be seen in the personal story of Arthur Frank Clark who first established the practice in Station Road, Reading in 1913. Arthur was aged 32, recently married and with a wealth of experience already behind him. His roots lay in Wantage where his family was well-known in the milling industry and where successive generations had made their mark on the local council, in their churches and also as magistrates. Maybe it was this contact with the law which inspired Arthur to qualify as a solicitor, completing his training clerkship in 1902 with Meredith, Roberts and Mills, a firm based in New Square, Lincolns Inn.

His talents must have been obvious to everyone. Hard-working and very bright he enjoyed the exceptional distinction of having been placed ‘First’ in the ‘First Class’ in his professional examinations for the Incorporated Law Society. For the next ten years he remained in the City, gaining invaluable contacts and experience. But his real ambition was to return to the Thames Valley and open his own practice, which he achieved just as the great Edwardian era of prosperity and peace came to its end.

Within a year or so of putting up his brass plaque Arthur’s world was overtaken by the outbreak of the Great War. Newly married and with too many responsibilities (including a son born in 1915) to join the armed forces, Arthur found a role as acting Town Clerk for Reading during the war years. This kept him busy and put him in a good position when peace returned in 1918 to take advantage of his profile in the town to start building a high quality local practice.

Over the next twenty years Arthur F. Clark established itself as a leading Reading firm handling property, conveyancing and family work plus various commercial matters. Arthur also emerged as a powerful local civic figure, joining the local Council, becoming an Alderman and serving on various charitable boards. Major clients such as the local hospital were won during this period – all helping to lay down significant foundations for the future.



The only blip in this smooth path of progress was in 1934 when Arthur became seriously ill. This was to have major repercussions both for the Clark family and for the firm. Earlier that year Arthur’s son, Arthur Kenneth Clark (but always referred to as ‘Ken’ to distinguish him from his father) had gone up to Oxford University. His father’s health scare, however, meant that it was thought best that he should leave university, join the firm and qualify as a solicitor as soon as possible. And barely had he qualified as a solicitor in March 1939 than the Second World War broke out.

# Testimonial.

## David Savage University of Reading.

The University of Reading is one of Clarkslegal's most long-standing clients with links going back to the 1940's. Despite all the changes since, the firm has continued to meet almost every aspect of the University's legal needs.

*"What is very impressive about Clarkslegal is that they are so versatile," says David Savage, the University's Chief Operating Officer. "This stretches from the writing of the University's statutes - which was undertaken by Michael Sippitt - through to more mundane work like property leases and routine employment contracts."*

*"What's really impressive is that as a client one feels really 'loved' by the firm. You never feel that you are in a queue and their level of responsiveness is amazing. It's no wonder that we continue to work with them despite the fact that we are constantly being approached by other law firms."*

*"The University has always shied away from lawyers who claim to specialise in the university sector. Instead it wants the best service in specific areas of legal activity. This is where Clarkslegal's breadth and depth has paid off."*

*"Recently the firm assisted us in the development of a strategic partnership with a private sector organisation for the provision of our student accommodation. This has been a major project for us and they have handled every aspect of it very effectively. At the same time there has also been an incredibly complicated piece of contentious work which I have entrusted to them and am absolutely confident in their ability to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion."*



# The fruits of war.

Ken Clark volunteered for the army and went on to have a successful career in the Middlesex Regiment, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and being awarded an OBE at the war's close. It was during his time in the Far East that Ken became friendly with Norman Brown, an impressively intelligent fellow officer who was interested, as the war ended, to embark on a career as a lawyer. "Could Ken help him in any way?" he asked. Ken consulted his father and an offer was made to Norman to join the firm as an articled clerk. The pieces were now in place to shape the firm for the whole post-war era.

The first thing to be done was to bring some order to the administrative confusion that had developed during the war years. Arthur Clark, now in his 60s, had struggled on virtually single handed despite ill-health and minor disasters such as bomb damage to the firm's offices in Cross Street (to which the firm had by now moved). He had continued to give advice to clients throughout the war.

Gradually, through perseverance, order was re-established as the small firm – consisting of Arthur Clark, his son Ken and Norman Brown together with two secretaries and two assistants in the general office – started to look around for new opportunities in the post-war world.

Norman Brown was taken into the partnership (the firm now being known as Arthur F Clark & Son) fairly soon after he had qualified so there were now two ambitious and able men in their 30s, both with the benefit of military experience, riving the firm forward. Moreover they got on extremely well and their relationship provided the solid base which the firm needed as it prepared for expansion. "Ken was a VERY nice chap," says Norman Brown looking back over the decades. "We never had a cross word between us in the forty years in which we worked together."

Meanwhile Arthur - the 'Old Man' as he was called - still played a background role and continued to hold the title of Senior Partner until his death in 1958. This enabled the firm to capitalise on Arthur's old pre-war connections and good name whilst turning them to new account. The result was that the business started to grow as the local economy began to pick up and fresh horizons opened up.

This applied, for example, to the National Health Service in Berkshire. Newly created, it built on institutions such as the Royal Berkshire Hospital with which Arthur Clark had a long-standing professional relationship. This enabled the firm to create a substantial and diverse NHS practice which continues to this day. But then, as now, it was important to have a range of work going on to deal with the ups and downs of business. Crime offered another string to the Clarks bow and it also had another benefit – it brought profile to the firm.

*"In the years after the War the way to get known was by doing criminal work," recalls Norman Brown. "That was how you ensured that you were seen in the local newspaper every week!"*

This involvement by the firm with crime continued through right to the early 1980's when it was run down as the firm became exclusively commercial in its character. But in its heyday in the 1940s and 1950s this was very much Norman Brown's field of interest and he went on to undertake, always dispassionately and with complete professionalism, significant amounts of both prosecution work on behalf of the police as well as defence work. Some of the defence work was especially high profile and attracted interest from the national newspapers.

What is especially striking – looked at from a distance of forty years – is that this high profile criminal work was all part of a mixed bag for Norman Brown. Versatility was an essential skill as the firm showed itself ready for almost anything from the large to the small (including regular probate work with the firm's notices being frequently seen in the London Gazette).

*"My grandfather was a very good lawyer. He knew what was right professionally and he was a very persistent person. His office, though was always in a bit of a mess! My father worked very hard all his life. He managed very well and was always looking for consensus amongst his partners." Peter Clark*



# Conveyancing stands out.

One very important relationship was with Reading Council which sent the firm a regular supply of work. Familiarity with its working methods meant that it was well-placed to take on new areas of activity such as planning applications and appeals. And, as Reading started to expand, attracting new developments in the late 50s and 60s, there was plenty of demand for traditional conveyancing services.

To handle this side of the business a self-contained department was set up under David Haylock, a qualified legal executive. David had joined the firm direct from school as an office boy in 1953 and, showing ambition, he was sponsored to achieve the Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX) qualifications. "When I told Ken Clark that I wanted to study for the ILEX exams he said, 'That's fine, we'll pay all of the costs,'" recalls David. "So over a period of four-to-five years I went regularly to a law tutor in Oxford paid for by the firm. I took all their examinations and, in due course, became a Fellow of the Institute."

It was highly detailed work at a time when home ownership was growing fast.

*"Regular work for us in the 1950s consisted of domestic conveyancing and will-writing. We did the wills for ten shillings each – that's fifty pence in today's money!"*

Norman Brown

*"There was a lot of work involved in preparing contracts and 'abstracts of title.' The majority of land - at least in the early days - was unregistered so there was an enormous amount of preliminary work. I often had to visit other firms' offices in order to exchange contracts and for completions. I knew all the firms well. There was no real rivalry between us - at least not openly. At Clarks we thought we were better than anyone else but we never publicly bragged about it – we were all very gentlemanly. Anyway, sometimes these transactions became very complicated. For example, I remember that on one occasion there were thirteen different firms in the chain! It was so long that I could see the danger of it breaking down so I thought it best to get them all into the office at the same time. So they came into our library and we managed to get it all settled there and then. It was very satisfying."*

Sometimes though David found himself in very deep water and he had to draw on his skills as an advocate. "I once represented a woman in court over a question about the title to her property," he recalls. "It was all very complicated because she had been married seven times – twice to the same person, once to a man who had been murdered in Cyprus and to two men with the same name. I think that the judge found my contribution very helpful and afterwards he asked me which Chambers I was from. I had to admit that I wasn't a qualified barrister! I think that he was quite impressed."

*"When I joined the firm it helped a lot if you played cricket. Led by Norman Brown we provided four of the regular members of the Reading Legal Offices cricket club. I must confess that wasn't my forte so I qualified as an umpire instead. We had some lovely times including when we went across to play in Windsor Great Park and met the Queen. Among the staff was Peter Andrews, an unqualified clerk, who did county court work. Peter also typed all the statements in the matrimonial cases because it wasn't thought appropriate to allow a lady typist to type that kind of thing!"* David Haylock

# Expanding expertise.

Every successful law firm knows that it is important to have a range of specialisms on offer in order to cope with the ups and downs of the economic cycle. So as business expanded from the 1950s to the 1960s, important new clients were added - such as The University of Reading - and fresh partners were made up including Christopher Ward (who led on the commercial conveyancing side), Frank Parkinson (jointly qualified as a chartered accountant) and Hugh Williams (developing the litigation practice). Overall the firm was steadily broadening its expertise.

This positive approach to people development soon became the hallmark of the firm. Although it was created by two generations of the Clarks - to be joined by a third one in Peter Clark in the 1970s - there was never an exclusive atmosphere. People were encouraged to fulfil their potential and, as the firm expanded, a number of trainees or newly-qualified lawyers were recruited who went on to thrive in their careers either at Clarks or subsequently elsewhere.

Another hallmark of the firm at this time was its involvement in public service and commitment to civic responsibility. This had always been a feature of life in the firm but it was to reach a high point during the 1960s.

Ken Clark - who had taken over as Senior Partner in 1958 on the death of his father - was a local councillor for the Redland Ward of Reading Council from 1968 to 1971 while Christopher Ward was elected as MP for Swindon in a by-election in the same year. Norman Brown was also a member of the local Council. *"I was a Conservative councillor for three years,"* he says. *"In fact at one point I was on 26 different committees!"*

*It was very interesting but, frankly, it consumed all my time. It was becoming impossible so it had to stop. But when I did withdraw we then started acting professionally for the leading figures of both the Conservative and Labour groups of the council. One of the Labour people actually ended up in the House of Lords!"*

Meanwhile Peter focused more on property matters and private client business. The growth in this property practice over time was aided by what were, at the time, avant-garde legal offerings overseen by Peter and Christopher including comprehensive auction packs on behalf of the Rodenhurst Estate. Peter also worked with Norman Brown and Frank Parkinson to grow and develop the firm's wills, trust and probate practice, a specialism that Peter was to retain, alongside his property practice, until his recent retirement. To this day the firm continues to serve its traditional and important private and smaller business sector client base built up over nearly a century of hard work by three generations of the Clark family.

Perhaps even more important for Norman, though, was his work as a District Judge to which he gave seventy days service a year right up to his retirement (and, indeed, beyond). *"I was a District Judge for twenty years. That meant 70 days a year in Slough and the other surrounding towns. I mostly did divorce and civil work and I quite enjoyed it. It meant that I was away from the office a lot which was a drawback in some respects.*

*But it was a significant step for the image of the firm, I think."*

Meanwhile there was another shift up in gear in the early 1970's with the arrival, amongst others, of Michael Sippitt, who was to go on to play a central role in the growth and management of the firm to the present day. *"I had spoken to other law firms but when I came to Clarks for my interview the firm instantly impressed me as being highly professional and made up of the kind of people I wanted to learn my law from,"* says Michael. *"Ken Clark struck me as absolutely top-notch with all the character and professionalism that I thought a solicitor needed. I was looking for a role model and Ken was it. Nothing ever altered my perception of him in that way. He was a lawyer and manager in equal measure - highly professional but totally practical about getting things done."*

Peter Clark (the son of Ken) also arrived shortly after Michael and was to go on to develop, alongside Christopher Ward, a substantial residential and commercial property practice. For a number of years after qualifying both Peter and Michael handled a very wide range of work covering property, planning, probate, divorce, crime and other litigation. However, with the establishment of industrial tribunals, employment law started to become a growing field of opportunity and this was where Michael began to focus his interest together with litigation, construction and commercial business.

*"The firm has always punched above its weight and has been both commercial and progressive through all this time. There was a deep desire to do high quality work within a very cohesive approach. We were never short of work because as my father said, 'If you do the work well then the clients will come back to you and recommend you to others.'" Peter Clark*



# The 1970s: Not so bad after all...

As the 1970s progressed business was starting to boom in the Thames Valley, new buildings were springing up, providing early indicators of the 'Silicon – Thames Valley' to come. The feeling amongst lawyers at Clarks was that if you wanted to develop a high grade commercial practice outside of London then Reading was as good a place as any in which to do so. So although the 1970s tends to have a poor reputation today for endless strikes and economic decline it was a different story in the Thames Valley. As Michael Sippitt observes, *"You have to look at the history of Reading. At the start of the 1970's it appeared a bit drab but it began to be transformed by the arrival of the large firms of accountants and the growth of 'Silicon Valley.' You started to get a feeling that things were going on. There was a lot of investment in the Thames Valley because of the proximity of Heathrow and London."*

Despite all this investment in new buildings by 'inward investors', however, Clarks itself – in common with many other law firms at that time – felt no particular necessity for smart premises. As Michael Sippitt puts it, *"When I joined the firm the office in Cross Street - formerly known as Gutter Lane - looked like a bookmakers shop. It didn't look like a professional firm at all. Ultimately, as we expanded, it stretched along the street above the ground floor shops. People would arrive at this very small, rather nondescript street level entrance and then be directed to a remote office, via higgledy-piggledy stairs."*

Not that this seemed to put off potential clients. They kept arriving in their droves largely because - in every respect aside from its office - the firm had its eyes focused firmly on how to keep ahead of the game. Hence, the firm was now undertaking property and licensing work for Courage, the local brewery (in striking contrast, it must be said, to its association with the Temperance League back in Arthur Clark's time). This work, allied with that for both the University and the regional health service, meant that the firm had an enviable status as a leading local adviser to both public and private employers in the Thames Valley.





# A new generation as BMW roars in.

Ken Clark remained the dominant figure within the partnership through the 1970s and into the early 1980s and, as Michael Sippitt described him, *"The older that Ken grew the more he was open to new ideas and developments."* Consequently it was a great shock to his family and the firm when he died, very unexpectedly, in 1984 having retired only a few months earlier. Under his leadership the firm had expanded very considerably in size, having established itself in new fields and attracted a portfolio of big name clients in both the public and private sectors. As Ken had correctly observed, *"If you do the work well, then the work will come to you,"* a dictum which the firm to this day holds close to its heart.

Stepping into Ken Clark's shoes after his death was quite a challenge. Christopher Ward became managing partner with responsibility for the strategic direction and day-to-day management of the firm. This transition was eased by Christopher's experience in having helped Ken with day to day management issues for some years. Christopher had great organisational ability on top of his acknowledged political and legal skills. Under his stewardship, in conjunction with Hugh Williams, who had become the senior partner although still focused primarily on litigation, the firm began the long process of transformation throughout the 1980s. Criminal and family work were significantly reduced as the firm grew ever more commercially oriented in its focus.

This transformation was aided by the recruitment of lawyers such as Tom Howell (commercial property), Richard Lee (who went on to build the firm's first ever specialist corporate expertise), Antony Morris (commercial litigation) and David Rintoul (construction), and reflected the household name commercial clients for whom the firm was now acting. In addition to the, by now, well-established clients such as the University, Courage and the regional health service, vital new relationships were steadily being built in the logistics sector but also, most notably perhaps, with BMW. As Antony Morris recalls, *"When I joined Clarks in the mid-1980's it was widely recognized to be the best firm in the area for training. Yet the firm at that stage was just on the cusp of change. About 60% of its fees still came from conveyancing of various kinds. But we started to win some big corporate clients – notably BMW – and things then started to shift radically."*



In fact, as Antony emphasises, Clarks was already far ahead of its time compared with other Thames Valley firms in developing the corporate and commercial side of its practice. "Other local firms simply hadn't cottoned on to the importance of this," he says.

For Michael Sippitt, who was at the heart of this success story, the effect of securing the role as BMW GB's UK lawyers was electric. "It can fairly be said that the arrival of BMW as a client after 1981 was transformative," he says. "In particular it proved to be a catalyst for the firm becoming adept in motor industry law, supporting BMW across the UK for many years. Clarks also became involved in dealing with public enquiries into the industry."

"BMW had decided to establish a British subsidiary at Bracknell and at that point they needed a law firm to act for them over small cases. Slaughter & May recommended us and so BMW became our client, which I mainly looked after. Initially it involved dealing with minor debt claims and insurance excess issues. By 1984, however, BMW were very happy with us and moved to using us as their primary legal advisers for day-to-day business.



*"We were delighted but it meant that we had to acquire new know-how in that area. The benefit of this was that we became very expert in the UK on motor industry law. Subsequently we helped BMW deal with two competition inquiries and also handled big competition cases for them at the Court of Appeal."*

In addition to this high profile work in the courts Clarks took a characteristic step towards providing BMW with a comprehensive, all round service by setting up the first BMW legal training programme for managers. This ran for some years and in turn helped pave the way for launching more regular client in-house training programmes which remains an important component of the wider Clarks offering to this day. So as BMW grew in the UK so did Clarks. "BMW were constantly saying, 'Grow with us – we want you to do this work,'" recalls Michael.

*"Basically their position was, 'We prefer to work with lawyers whom we know and trust rather than striking up a new relationship with lawyers we don't know.' And what this taught me was that if you have a good relationship with a client then there is always scope to take on new areas of work. If you don't initially know the law then, if you are a good lawyer, you can learn it."*

This was an important lesson for the firm. And it has been central to how the firm has nurtured relationships ever since.

# Testimonial.

**Tom Purves**

**Chairman of the Royal Automobile Club.**

*"The great thing about Clarkslegal was that they were always very practical and pragmatic about giving legal advice," says Tom Purves, now the Chairman of the RAC, but previously a long standing client of the firm when he was a senior executive at BMW. "Above all I never found them time-wasters – and that's not something I can say about many law firms! They were always fast to respond and really added value by their contribution. Their legal advice was as good and their quality of service better than that of much more expensive City firms.*

*BMW in the UK was, obviously, the subsidiary of an enormous German corporation. So what Clarks, as our advisers dealing with UK matters, had to do was establish working relationships with lawyers elsewhere in the business and follow their guidelines without stepping on any toes or causing any awkwardness.*

*What I appreciated was that they understood the commercial issues as well as the legal points. In particular they were required to provide interpretation of local legislation while sticking within company rules which had to be respected even though there was sometimes a clash with the British way of doing things. I found that they were superb at achieving that balance while plugging into the company's international set-up extremely effectively. More generally Michael Sippitt seemed to me to be a brilliant leader. He was constantly able to adapt to new situations and demands and with a remarkable ability to re-invent himself in a very positive way in response to both new challenges and new opportunities."*

*"I always felt that we had an advantage being where we are here in Reading. BMW, for example, wanted a firm which was reasonably close to Bracknell but which would be very proficient without charging top City rates. And that became true of a number of other prestigious clients in this economically thriving area around the Thames Valley. Excellent service at affordable rates." - Michael Sippitt*



# New building, new image.

Clients such as BMW and the University of Reading never batted an eyelid when they came in the mid-1980s to the firm's homely but rather rambling and old fashioned offices in Cross Street. Nonetheless by the end of the decade it was felt that the time had finally come to move to accommodation which was better suited to the firm's increasingly modern character.

Fortunately the historic Great Western Hotel building, close to the station, became available just at the right time and following extensive remodelling the firm moved in during 1989. The impact of the move was substantial, bringing all the staff together in the same building – in Cross Street the offices had occupied both sides of the road – and transforming the way the firm operated and saw itself.

*“Our growth had been constrained by the shortage of space in Cross Street,” recalls Michael Sippitt. “So in 1989 we moved everyone into one large impressive-looking landmark building. Great Western House, originally a famous old railway hotel, was a major contrast to Cross Street and definitely what we needed.”*

*“Clarks was really ahead of its time compared with other Thames Valley firms in developing the corporate and commercial side of the business in the mid-to-late 1980's. Other local firms simply hadn't cottoned on to that. The move to Great Western House represented a big change in the culture. It more or less coincided with the introduction of computers and word processors. And of course our profile to the outside world changed dramatically. We were no longer down a side street but in a very prominent position opposite the railway station. Great Western House stated that we were in the business of corporate law but it also represented a wholesale programme of modernisation.”*

Antony Morris

David Haylock agreed, *“When we moved into Great Western House it was like moving into a palace. Everything changed.”* Meanwhile for Susan Hopes (then Finance Assistant and now the firm's Finance & Administration Manager) it was of social as well as business significance. *“The move to Great Western House was hugely important for us both commercially and socially,” she says. “We even stopped calling partners ‘Mister’ and switched to first names. For those who had been with the firm for some time it was quite a big adjustment to make.”*

In effect, the move to Great Western House represented modernisation. The process of bringing the law firm out of the side street and putting it in a pivotal position in the local community reflected the increasing importance of legal services in the business world. Clarks was by no means the only firm undertaking this kind of exercise. All over the City of London the role and status of corporate law firms was being better understood and it seemed only right that a firm like Clarks should establish itself prominently as a keystone of Reading's life.



# The recession of the early 1990s.

The irony was that shortly after Clarks moved into its impressive new accommodation the UK was hit by a recession which had a particularly hard impact on the construction industry. By this time David Rintoul had been asked to take over the management of the construction practice so he had a significant challenge on his hands in helping clients through these difficult times.

One major client, for example, was G. Percy Trentham, big, family-owned contractors in the Thames Valley which was badly hit by the turn-down in work. *"I had to do a lot of fire-fighting to help them and other clients manage cash flow and, as far as I could, keep the wolf from the door,"* recalls David. *"They were being sued left, right and centre and in return they were also suing their clients and customers."*

*"I was trying every trick in the book to manage the situation and keep them going. Having only then recently qualified as a solicitor, I gained an enormous amount of responsibility which I would not have had in, say, a City firm. This included for example, taking a couple of cases involving Trentham to the High Court. It gave me the experience of going up against Masons and other big City construction law firms, which was invaluable. I was responsible for taking strategic commercial decisions for them and other clients and advising them on those decisions. It was all very character-building. The post script to that story is that 25 years later one of the directors of Trentham, Ray Crabbe, who went on to start up his own consultancy business, is still one of my clients."*

*In my view we receive service which is often better than at top London firms but at Reading prices. I've always found individuals at Clarks commercial in their approach and prompt and effective in their responses. And they are also very 'user friendly' - starting with staff at Reception all the way up to partners."*

- John Davidson, formerly Crown's European General Counsel



The impact of that recession was also felt by the employment practice which, while not enormously important for the firm at that time, was nonetheless starting to show hints of the possibilities to come. Moreover, these opportunities were lapped up by new recruit Helen Beech.

*"In 1992 I suddenly had a huge amount of work when Blue Circle (as was) introduced a very big redundancy programme," recalls Helen. "Michael (Sippitt) immediately put me in charge of it. In effect he was throwing me in at the deep end but he was obviously confident that I could cope – and I did!"*

*"Basically I had to deal with all the redundancies in the company's various plants around the country. That then led on to handling the associated advocacy in the various Employment Tribunal cases. Through this I built up a very good relationship with people in the company. I made a point of learning everything that I could about the business and its processes. That's what I really loved about the job – getting under the skin of the clients and getting to know it as thoroughly as possible."*

Not being afraid to give responsibility to able young lawyers has been one of the hallmarks of Clarkslegal. It stretches and tests young talents but the benefits are enormous. And it meant that the firm had a team of experienced young lawyers ready for the new opportunities which arose when New Labour came to power in 1997.

*"As a Reading company Metal Box had been a long-standing client of Clarks and I decided to keep it that way when I was appointed as Head of Legal Services in 1989 after its merger with the French company Carnaud. I was very happy with the quality of service the firm provided and used them on a wide range of work – M&A, litigation, property - up to and beyond CarnaudMetalbox's takeover in 1996 by Crown Cork & Seal of Philadelphia USA. Subsequently when I became Crown's European General Counsel in Paris I continued to instruct Clarks on many UK matters as part of our international network of law firms."* -

John Davidson, formerly Crown's  
European General  
Counsel

# Focus on employment.

With the arrival of Tony Blair at Number Ten Downing Street in 1997, Britain was looking for a time of change. The same was true at Clarks with the election of Michael Sippitt as managing partner. Under Michael's direction the firm underwent re-inventing itself again, in a highly entrepreneurial way.

Michael was determined that the firm should expand into new markets and services and - thinking ahead to the priorities of the incoming Labour administration - he recognised that the employment law landscape in particular would change significantly. Consequently the firm began to gear up for big developments across the employment law field.

*"With an expected adoption of EU laws into the UK I had anticipated the rapid growth in employment legislation under New Labour,"* says Michael. *"As a result employment law progressively became the biggest team in the firm. However, you could never have foreseen that in the mid 1990s when we had just three lawyers. By contrast in 2013 we have thirty lawyers plus numerous HR consultants in a comprehensive HR and employment service which is spread across three offices. It was a big transition."* In driving forward this expansion a number of new high profile clients were won and there was notable success across a range of major industrial disputes. Led first by Michael then jointly with Helen Beech, and subsequently joined by the energetic Monica Atwal, the employment team developed into a leading practice with a national reputation.

*"In the year that I qualified both the Working Time Regulations and the Disability Discrimination Act came into effect,"* recalls Monica. *"I was in the fortunate position of being in the forefront of this new law. We were doing cutting edge Court of Appeal work from the start. Very early on I handled a disability discrimination case for a company director - a huge, precedent-setting case. I won the highest award ever and for a young solicitor it was terrific experience."*



Both Monica Atwal and Helen Beech have reputations for not being afraid of getting into a scrap on behalf of their clients. Indeed, resolute and pugnacious defence of the client is one of the hallmarks of the firm's style. "Monica will fight to the death for her clients - and they love her for it," says Helen. "She's a brilliant advocate and she loves to battle." A central factor is their confidence that most of the time they are on the right side of the argument.

"The key characteristic that distinguishes our clients is that, in general, they try to do the right thing," says Monica. "That's what they all have in common and as a result they are great clients to represent. Consequently I am pleased to say that we have a phenomenal record at Tribunal. This is critically important for employers because that helps secure their reputation. Losing at Tribunal can have a number of adverse consequences and employers need to avoid it if at all possible. That's why they come to us."

One of the principal reasons why Clarks' clients normally 'do the right thing' is that they have the correct processes and procedures in place – a vital requirement given the minefield which employment law has become today. And the basis for that is the extensive back-up services that the firm supplies. It is not just a matter of getting involved when something contentious explodes.

It is based on a lot of hard graft to ensure that clients are well-informed and have the tools to do the job.

"We have always done a lot of training for our clients," says Monica Atwal. "And this is at every level, from chief executive to first line of management. Our unique point is that our training is always fun. The illustrative cases we use are interesting – and we are always aiming to contextualise the issues in terms of our client."

*"In fact sometimes the most satisfying clients are those which are a disaster area when you start but by working with them over time you can change the culture and really see enormous improvements. That is also one of the satisfactions of doing mainly defendant work. It means the changes that you help to introduce will impact, potentially, on large numbers of people"*

Helen Beech sees client training and the development of strong internal processes as intrinsic to what the firm does. "I feel a great sense of achievement when I help clients improve their systems and do the right thing by the law," she says. "A huge part of my role over the years has consisted of training and educating clients in the complexities of employment law. With some big clients such as DHL I would go in and do 20 training sessions a year educating them in how to do things better. I love that kind of stand-up 'preventive medicine.'"

*"In fact sometimes the most satisfying clients are those which are a disaster area when you start but by working with them over time you can change the culture and really see enormous improvements. That is also one of the satisfactions of doing mainly defendant work. It means the changes that you help to introduce will impact, potentially, on very large numbers of people."*

In the end therefore it is both employers and employees who benefit from the Clarks legal effect.

# Testimonial.

**Andy Kemp**

**A serial client of the firm.**

No better example could be found of a client who realised that he had struck gold when he discovered Clarkslegal than Andy Kemp, currently the Group Director of Human Resources at De La Rue. It was over twenty years ago that Andy first encountered Michael Sippitt and he was so impressed that he has stuck with him – and the firm - ever since.

At that stage Andy was heading HR at Transport Development Group. As he describes it, he was a 'one man band' at the centre of a widely dispersed organisation with a number of HR managers located locally. Times being what they were in the 1980's the company was heavily (and militantly) unionised and Andy faced a non-stop series of employment tribunals. *"I really needed support and shrewd advice to deal with it all,"* he recalls. *"Michael came in and immediately I felt that I was in safe hands. Very quickly we started to get on top of all the disputes."*

## **'They talk my language'**

Andy's next career move was to take a key job at News International at a time when Rupert Murdoch was trying to reform industrial relations in a fundamental way. Andy was in the front line in dealing with this and he immediately brought in Clarkslegal to help steer through the process. *"It might have been seen as a risky strategy,"* recalls Andy. *"There was an existing law firm in place which was very prestigious and well-connected. They were also very expensive. What I wanted in this challenging situation was a firm which would talk my language, get the job done effectively, help me to look good and be cost effective. Clarkslegal were the people to do that."*

In fact the work that Clarkslegal did at that time was groundbreaking and has stood the test of time. News International wanted to put in place an officially recognised, independent staff association and with Clarkslegal's advice it was able to do so. This put staff-management relations on to a sound footing and the firm has been retained by News International ever since (including dealing with the recent high profile issues which have affected the company). For Andy Kemp, however, News International provided a springboard to another career move, accompanying his boss to Aegis. Again Clarkslegal was introduced in Andy's wake and Michael once more played an important role especially in working with senior management in the company.

## 'They suit my style'

So by the time of Andy's next move to Rentakil a clear pattern and a very strong relationship had developed. As Andy points out, he knew that he could always rely on Michael – and increasingly on Helen Beech as well. They were always supportive and would be instantly on hand if any emergency blew up. They gave him the reassurance that in shaping his policies and in dealing with any contentious matters he was doing the right thing. This was particularly important at Rentakil where a major restructuring exercise was taking place involving a large number of high level departures. In these sometimes tense situations a steady nerve and excellent judgment is required. Clarkslegal could provide both. In his latest move Andy is at De La Rue and once again Clarkslegal is on-side. In Clarkslegal Andy Kemp has found the perfect match.

"They have never let me down in all the years I've worked with them and I don't think that we have ever lost a tribunal either. I am not saying that the firms they replaced were poor but that Clarkslegal were better and certainly suited my style. And ultimately that's what HR executives look for in their legal advice – someone they can trust, who is reliable and who works in a compatible style."

# News International



# Testimonial.

## Richard Tapp, Carillion plc.

*"Clarkslegal and Carillion have worked together since 2002, with Clarkslegal providing employment law resource as a single provider across the whole of Carillion's UK business – more than 20,000 employees in a contract environment with significant TUPE, employment, pensions and terms and conditions issues as contracts come into and out of the business.*

*Getting our employment law, and our employment relations, right is critical to us in such a fast-moving environment. Getting it wrong directly impacts the financial position of our business, and our relationships with our own clients.*

*Clarks has worked with us to develop solutions tailored specifically to our needs over the period. The use of Clarks' network of home-based lawyers, all working to Clarks standards, allows us easy and economical access nationwide to people who work to a known and proven standard. We have an insourced secondee from Clarks who acts as the first point of contact and operates a triage system to ensure that work is dealt with properly – whether by the HR business partner using Employmentbuddy, by the HR senior team, by the triage lawyer or by Clarks themselves.*

*We have now taken our relationship to the next stage using Carillion Advice Services – our own managed legal services paralegal team, which works in partnership with Clarkslegal to carry out process, witness, document preparation and a range of pre tribunal work. We now have a formal working relationship to offer that service jointly with Clarks to external clients.*

*Clarkslegal has worked with us over a long period of time, building trust and confidence with our teams – both legal and HR – and impressing us with its professionalism, probity, innovation and willingness to work with us to try new ways of working."*

*"Almost all our new clients come to us thanks to word of mouth or because key people who have used us at one client then move on and bring us into their new organisation. In my view, you can attend as many conferences and networking events as you like but because of the importance of word-of-mouth recommendation nothing beats doing a first rate job for your clients as a way of attracting new work."  
- Helen Beech*

*"I have always believed in the importance of long term relationships. Some of our relationships go back forty years and many of them go back over twenty years. We know the corporate history of some clients better than they do themselves"*

*Michael Sippitt*



# Building the construction practice.

The employment practice was not the only area to be transformed by changes which arose following the arrival of the New Labour administration. Construction also shifted in a major way in 1998 through the implementation of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 which introduced a new system of adjudication. The impact of this was that disputes could be resolved much faster and it offered exciting new possibilities for those solicitors who were up for the challenge.

*"We began to do more of our own advocacy – in fact we hardly used counsel at all,"* explains David Rintoul. *"To be honest the time available simply didn't allow it. The Act brought an end to long-running litigation and prompt payment down the supply chain was seen as vital. But this required a sea change in the way we operated. We needed to adapt to stay ahead of the game and it needed a whole range of new procedures and policies. But from our point of view it was entirely consistent with the way that we wanted to evolve. The change was forced on us but it was to our advantage."* Earlier in the decade David had decided that the firm needed to undertake both non-contentious and



contentious work. *"Advising clients on contracts and pricing risks into tenders would then give us an edge on the contentious side,"* he says. But that was just a start.

*"I figured that the best way to develop the construction practice was by building our reputation and profile in the industry and creating relationships with and acting for industry-based bodies such as the Building Services Research and Information Association (BSRIA), the Timber Research and Development Association and the Confederation of Construction Specialists. Getting to know the key people on industry bodies leads to new opportunities for work. These bodies have given me that platform on which to raise our profile and become known in the sector."* David and his team gave (and continue to give) a lot of pro bono support to various advisory boards in the industry and David went on to be elected as a non-executive Director and Chair of BSRIA. *"For a lawyer to be in that role is very unusual and reflects our standing in the industry,"* he says. *"These industry bodies need help in understanding the business and legal issues that they face. So it's a win-win. By sitting on these industry boards I am better able to put legal advice into a commercial context. And this, frankly, has enabled us to stand out as a firm."*

# Testimonial.

## Ray Crabbe, RJC Consultants.

*"I've been involved with Clarkslegal as a client since the 1970's. My company had instructed Michael Sippitt with whom they had worked for some time. Michael was very easy to talk to, he was approachable and he gave a lot of reassurance to the client. Above all he was a very good lawyer giving excellent advice over some pretty complex arbitration cases.*

*From then on I continued to work with Michael and, thereafter, David Rintoul who eventually took over the construction side of the practice. Certainly Clarkslegal is the firm which I have used longest and most consistently. In 1993, I set up my own consultancy business and continued to use Clarks (who then changed their name to Clarkslegal). Over the years the nature of the work has changed considerably. The reforms of the 1990's - which introduced a system of adjudication into the construction sector - have made the process much more user-friendly, faster and cheaper."*

*"The great strength of Clarkslegal is that they have always understood the commercial realities facing construction companies. They always view the legal options in the context of the client and what's best for them. They see the issues from the client's perspective and focus on cost-effectiveness from their point of view. That's why they are so good to work with."*



# The move to Forbury.

The changes to the firm's internal partnership structure and enhanced management resources, including importantly the appointment of Finance and Administration Director Peter Wright, to create the entrepreneurial culture the firm sought, took place over a period of about three years or so following Michael Sippitt's election as Managing Partner in 1997. This was achieved through internal partner discussion, with some external consultancy support and with general recognition by partners of the need to positively improve the profitable growth of the firm, having felt that the recession of the early 1990's was past. These changes reflected the firm's ambition to be a leading firm of the Thames Valley and attractive to new lawyers as an employer of choice.

This was the start of an important transition stage for the firm whose aim was to boost profitability and reward effort but also to encourage a culture of enterprise along with much greater openness and transparency. This would also enable the firm to attract and retain talented young lawyers who saw they could go far in the firm's open and supportive environment. And it worked.

The firm's expansion was underlined by the decision in 2003 to forsake the grand but Victorian Great Western offices and move instead into the current, highly contemporary, multi-storey Forbury site in Reading which the firm occupies today. This was accompanied by a major re-branding exercise and the decision to become an incorporated limited liability partnership known as Clarkslegal LLP. These changes all helped to create a new and more user friendly image reflecting the firm's values of being "user friendly, up to date and to the point" in the delivery of its services.

*"People were initially very worried when we moved from the cellular approach at Great Western House to the open plan of Forbury," recalls David Rintoul. "However, we contributed to its design and it, along with the identical open plan designs of our London and Cardiff offices, has worked fantastically well for us. It's a better managed space and we haven't lost a single person as a result of moving to an open plan environment. By making management much more accessible everything has worked much better than before. It represented an end to the closed door culture – in every sense of that term. No-one - aside from Human Resources - has a separate office. It shows that we are an open, transparent and inclusive business."*

# Extending the footprint.

Alongside the move to Forbury Square, the early 2000's witnessed several other significant events in the development of Clarks' reach and client offering. With increasing globalisation many of the firm's clients were growing internationally and the need to be able to offer added value support to clients as they built new markets overseas grew apparent. In 2000, therefore, Clarks became a founder member of TAGLaw, which is now the world's third largest international network of independent, like minded medium size law firms, with members in nearly 100 jurisdictions.

Through its membership of TAGLaw Clarks has been able to recommend with confidence clients to law firms when they have needed help in other jurisdictions. Equally, membership of the network has been of help to Clarks as it has developed its inward investment work, helping foreign businesses locate to the UK. Moreover, in order to deal most effectively with this increasingly important area of work, the firm opened a new office in Covent Garden, London, which also provided a convenient base for handling the firm's longstanding London activity. Soon, the London office was boosted by the arrival of experienced commercial property partner Rachel Krol and a number of other lawyers.

Shortly after the London opening the firm opened in Cardiff in order to exploit emerging opportunities in South Wales. The Cardiff office was built on progress made under Simon Thorne, then a specialist environmental lawyer and partner in the practice, in winning major public tenders in South Wales involving environmental procurement. As in London, the firm found that having a presence on the ground in Cardiff opened the way to find promising local lawyers, and Dafydd Downes joined the growing employment practice, opening up more opportunities for this team across Wales.

The expanding geography, allied with the recruitment of specialist lawyers local to each of the three offices, has helped Clarks to serve new market niches with scope for growth. All three offices are vital pieces in the strategic vision of the firm. Niche specialisms such as projects and public sector procurement, business restructuring and transformation and immigration are now provided to both public and private sectors. Together they form an impressive panoply of commercial and private client services encompassing corporate and commercial, construction, employment, commercial litigation, commercial and residential property, renewable energy and wills, trusts and probate.



*"One of the new strategies we adopted," says Helen Beech, "was to ensure that we always had people in place to deal with major projects if they came in at short notice. This gave us greater confidence in going out to seek big clients. It meant that we could always say 'Yes'. More timid managements might have thought that this was risky over-recruitment. But we felt that if we had a big enough team then we would be able to attract large-scale work and then do it effectively. As a result we have a very fast turn-round. And we can do this because we have strength in depth in the firm to do it."*

# Testimonial.

## Reena Owen, City and County of Swansea Council.

*"Local Authorities in Wales face significant legislative and policy pressures in relation to the recycling, composting and disposal of municipal waste – otherwise they face financial penalties. The procurement of food waste and residual waste treatment are essential requirements in complying with the national targets.*

*The City and County of Swansea, acting as Lead Authority for the South West Wales Waste Consortium, sought to procure legal advisors who were able to provide expertise in all relevant fields of law relating to the waste procurements.*

*In 2010 Clarkslegal was appointed to provide legal support and advice in relation to the Consortium. Since then the firm has demonstrated wide ranging knowledge, providing constructive legal advice and expertise across a number of diverse and challenging areas that has contributed greatly to the development of long term contracts for waste treatment as well as inter authority agreements to provide governance for the region."*

*"The quality of the service is professional, of high quality and support has been timely with resources being diverted from the main offices, to assist and support the principality where necessary in managing the complex and varied activities associated with the procurements. In addition to responding to client needs, Clarkslegal have contributed to the establishment of an environment within the multidisciplinary project team for the efficient and effective achievement of team goals."*

# Trusting relationships with clients.....

Through constant adaptation and endeavour, Clarks has succeeded in winning clients that would be the envy of much larger firms. *“Our ability to attract new high profile clients is based primarily on our reputation,”* says Monica Atwal. *“It is the clients themselves who have been our best ambassadors. As we have grown, so have our clients. And then, of course, managers move on to other jobs and they decide to use us in their new role. And that’s how it all started to mushroom with increasing numbers of clients. Some of our biggest corporate clients go back at least to the mid-1990’s and they came to us because of our reputation.”*

Delivering value for money has been a key ingredient in the Clarkslegal offer. *“The firm has always worked towards the goal of finding ways to reduce legal spend for our clients,”* says Helen Beech. *“We have never set, as an objective, to seek increased legal spends from any particular client. That’s simply not how we work. The point is to develop the relationship based on trust and that way we will maintain the long-term relationship in a way that is good for both of us.”*

*The reality is, these days, that you cannot keep on hiking up hourly rates. Our clients are so savvy that you have to be looking constantly at ways of doing work for clients more cost-effectively. We have to be constantly innovative in order to pick up more work.”*

One relationship of signal significance has been with Carillion plc. In fact, the firm is proud to have provided more than ten years of service to Carillion as it has grown continually to become one of the UK’s leading companies serving the public sector.

Helen explains *“We originally tendered for Carillion’s work back in 2002 because Richard Tapp, their Legal Director, had a prior working relationship with the firm while Legal Director of Blue Circle. He recommended the firm to be considered as a prospective provider of employment law services to Carillion when they were rationalising their legal network and inviting suitable tenders. In the event, Clarkslegal was successful in the tender and has been proud to be associated with Carillion as a major client of the firm ever since.”*

*Carillion is now our biggest client. Richard Tapp is highly innovative and is constantly challenging us to be more cost-effective and more efficient. And because he knows that we are highly responsive and adaptable he looks to us to help him develop ground breaking new ways of working.”*

In fact the need to meet Carillion’s changing requirements has stimulated significant mutual innovation throughout the past decade. *“One of those innovations was when Carillion acquired EAGA, an environmental consultancy, which brought with it a group of seventy paralegals who were working on Government contracts,”* explains Helen. *“Richard Tapp started to explore how that team could be developed. That was when he spoke to Michael and it was realised that there were some employment paralegals amongst them. So the question arose as to how they might help us do our work for Carillion.”*

*The answer came from unbundling the work that we were doing for the company to analyse which work we could actually give back to Carillion so that, in effect, they could do it in-house. There turned out to be quite a lot! So now we train, mentor and help supervise the Carillion employment paralegal team and the work they do.”*

Another key relationship, among many that the firm has been privileged to enjoy in recent years, has been with News International. This brought the firm into the fast moving world of print media at a challenging time and the role played by the firm was particularly important when News International ran into a number of high profile challenges in the period 2011-2012.

*"We had already been working for News International for a number of years – following our introduction by Andy Kemp, the Head of HR - when I was called to go in-house with News International when the News of the World closed in July 2011," recalls Helen Beech. "I love newspapers and found it fascinating to see how it all worked but in the midst of this critical time I didn't know what was going to come up from one day to the next. Basically they needed urgent help to look after the employment issues from someone who knew and understood the business. We had the advantage that we knew so much about how News International worked, including NISA – the News International Staff Association - because we had helped to establish it in the first place. In fact, it was that knowledge of that background and strong working relationships within the company which was so useful to the company and helped it to come through the other side."*

*"Carillion is now our biggest client. Richard Tapp is highly innovative and is constantly challenging us to be more cost-effective and more efficient. And because he knows that we are highly responsive and adaptable he looks to us to help him develop ground breaking new ways of working." In fact the need to meet Carillion's changing requirements has stimulated significant mutual innovation throughout the past decade.*



# Adapting to change.

As usual Clarkslegal had been able to provide its clients with strongly supportive legal counsel in a calm and commercially realistic way. Events at News International might have been unique but the way that Clarkslegal handled them was entirely characteristic of its service.

One of the most important lessons that Clarks has learned over the years is the important role that the clients themselves play in shaping the firm's development as they entrusted it with ever more significant business based on a track record of conscientious service. With one eye to the legal market reforms, ushering in Alternative Business Structures, and with another to the growth of specialist waste management and renewable energy and employment services, the firm decided in the mid 2000's to establish separate human resource and environmental consultancies known respectively as Forbury People Limited and Forbury Environmental Limited. These multi-disciplinary new ventures enable clients to benefit from specialist technical support as well as legal advice.

Additionally, following initial collaboration with the Environmental Industries Commission, Clarks founded Forbury Investment Network (FIN). The aim of FIN was to unblock a funding logjam and help early and growth stage companies in the environmental and technology sectors secure vital funding for new sustainable technologies and services.



The involvement of Clarkslegal in conjunction with its subsidiary environmental consultancy, Forbury Environmental now gives FIN a unique role in coordinating legal and technical expertise while tapping strong relationships with the UK investor community.

Arising from the development of FIN came another important new venture in the creation of the Commonwealth Environmental Investment Platform (CEIP). This arose from the firm's perception that there were interlinked opportunities in the growth of inward investment in to the UK and the need for investment in Commonwealth countries, particularly those which are in the eye of the storm of climate change.

Hence CEIP was developed in 2012/13 in an alliance between the Royal Commonwealth Society and Forbury Investment Network as a pan-Commonwealth network linking entrepreneurs and companies in the environmental sector to each other and to international investors. The Platform is designed to facilitate trade and investment in sustainable technologies, to improve international awareness of developments in green technology and sustainability issues, and to support low carbon economic growth across the Commonwealth. A highly successful launch event was held in March 2013 at the Royal Commonwealth Society in central London which attracted a wide range of Commonwealth bodies and representatives from High Commissions as well as entrepreneurs and investors.



# And so the firm today.

The past ten years have seen Clarkslegal go from strength to strength, fuelled by continuing focus on delivery of excellent traditional and more niche legal services. The firm and many of its partners are now top ranked by the leading legal directories, commended for their individual and collective legal and commercial expertise and the high quality of client service. Yet legal attainment is only one strand in a unique and sophisticated multi-disciplinary offering.

*"I've always felt - and Ken Clark was probably very influential in this respect - that innovation and trying to think progressively is the key to the long term success of the firm," says Michael Sippitt.*

*"For many years I have had an underlying vision of a multidisciplinary practice and felt that was the direction the legal profession should go. The important thing is for professionals to have the flexibility to provide what the client needs. Too often professionals let themselves down by insisting that clients take the 'ready-made' package rather than what really suits them best."*



*"It is important for lawyers to think outside their traditional training. They need to enlarge their professional awareness by working with other professionals in other disciplines. That is why I think that in the long run multi-disciplinary practices will become very attractive to clients – because it will offer them a broad-based, flexible service. So that remains the vision. And when we have highly innovative clients they are prepared for us to be innovative too - that is always music to my ears."*

For Monica Atwal it is the intense focus on the needs of the client which will continue to give Clarkslegal the edge over its rivals. *"What makes us stand out is our client service delivery," she says. "The reason that clients leave other law firms is due to a lack of client care. By contrast the reason they stick with us is the strength of client care which we provide defending their positions and helping them make decisions. We are regarded as part of their business. We aim to ensure that we have detailed practical knowledge of how they operate. Few other firms go to the depth that we do."*

# Looking ahead.

Looking ahead Monica anticipates a period of substantial change reflecting the developments in the legal landscape at a national and international level. *"I see the firm increasingly diversifying, building on our specialist areas and the other initiatives which we have taken," she says. "But things are changing very fast. The traditional methods of getting work have a limited life span. I see new clients coming to us through the other business structures and I think that clients will want us to offer much more holistic and strategic advice."*

To do that effectively will demand that the firm recruits the right kind of people to ensure that it progresses towards another century of success. *"When we recruit young lawyers we want academic excellence but we also need the right kind of personality who is going to get on well with clients and offer them down-to-earth advice,"* says Helen Beech.

*"We allow all our lawyers to develop relationships with their clients very early on. I suspect that at many large law firms the juniors simply do not have that kind of opportunity. But we encourage it because we have faith in our lawyers."*

David Rintoul - as managing partner the person with the responsibility for driving forward the firm to new horizons - endorses the view that the ability to develop a first rate relationship with the client is the vital hallmark of a Clarkslegal lawyer.

*"For junior lawyers we are looking for a high level of legal expertise and the ability to develop good, trusting relationships with clients,"* he says. *"They must have proven themselves to be people who can stand on their own feet and deliver a high quality service consistent with our brand values. In fact, all our solicitors must be brand ambassadors with a strong understanding of what we are doing across the board."*



So Clarkslegal continues - as always - to be both an entrepreneurial and a learning organisation, never standing still but constantly looking to move with the times. While this progress has always been made on the firm's own terms, by repeatedly backing its own judgment, clients have proved willing to lend it their most precious commodity: their trust. Although the width of the firm's expertise today would be unrecognisable to Arthur Frank Clark nonetheless the spirit with which it is done - polite, highly efficient with strong bonds between firm and client - still bears his imprint. After all the firm is still, above all, Clarks.



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