

**ADDRESS AT ADMINISTRATION CEREMONY FOR NEW SOLICITORS –  
19 JUNE 2009**

I was delighted and very proud to be invited by Ian Smart to join him in one of his first duties as the President of the Law Society of Scotland at this admission ceremony. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to address young lawyers at the start of their professional careers and to be able to share with your parents and friends, the pride which they must feel, at your success.

I join them in congratulating each and every one of you on achieving your professional qualification as a solicitor. It will have involved a great deal of hard work and there possibly were times when you wondered whether it was all worth-while. This must be particularly so recently when one considers the challenging predictions in relation to the world economy and for job prospects in particular.

Less than three years ago Lord Hodge, standing where I am now, indicated that there were wonderful opportunities for young lawyers “In Edinburgh substantial financial services ...”. Times have changed dramatically since then and what was a thriving and expanding area has seen major contractions in the last few months.

But in the same way that things can change dramatically in one direction so I believe that prospects will improve soon. The future is not all doom and gloom. There is now, more than ever, a need for the high standards of ability, industry and integrity which the possession of a practicing certificate authorised by the Law Society of Scotland represents.

When I started as a solicitor, having graduated from Glasgow University, there was no diploma and one started an apprenticeship at the miserly salary of £500 per annum. I was very fortunate to have the opportunity of working in Shepherd and Wedderburn and I shall always be grateful to the partners and staff there for the training which they gave me. It introduced me to a world in which colleagues were willing to share their experience and knowledge and to assist in maintaining the high standards expected of solicitors.

I hope that you, for your part, will continue this practice, will retain friendships from your time at university and within the legal world but that in particular you will feel able to repay the support which you have and will continue to receive from other colleagues in your dealings with other members of the profession.

Forty years ago when I became a solicitor, we did not have an admission ceremony, all that I was required to do was to appear before a panel of what seemed to me ancient but were probably middle-aged solicitors. The only pearls of wisdom which they offered were to tell me what I already knew, namely that my handwriting could be equated to a wandering spider who had fallen into an ink-pot. With that advice I was let loose on the unsuspecting Scottish public.

It was at that point that I realised how important the support network which until then I had taken for granted was. I was able to speak to more experienced colleagues and seek their advice in particular, when problems arose. It is that comradeship which makes the position of a Scottish solicitor very special. Other professions appear, on occasions, to condone doubtful practices and to discourage mutual support. This seems to me to be a betrayal of the public who we are all expected to serve in one way or the other.

So I urge you to retain your friendships and your contacts within the profession and to make full use of the Law Society of Scotland and their staff and Council who are willing and eager to advise and help in cases of difficulty. Do not hesitate to seek help from colleagues who may have experience in the particular field with which you are grappling. In time others will look to you for guidance, help and support. That is one of the pillars on which this profession stands, mutual respect and trust.

All this is well, you may be saying to yourself, but where are the opportunities at a time when many people are losing their jobs and the economy appears to be in a total mess. We have sadly been here before at least twice in the course of my professional career and on

both occasions the Law Society of Scotland and its members led the way back to recovery. While undoubtedly there are fewer jobs at present in the financial sector and the Conveyancing market appears to be in the doldrums there is a crying need for people to advice and assist in relation to employment issues and as Government and Bureaucracy produce more and more form of regulations and red tape there is an expanding need for solicitors to advice people of their rights and entitlements.

We sometimes forget too easily that the knowledge which we gathered at university and in the course of our professional training as to what the law is and what restrictions it places on bureaucrats is not known by the general public. They are very easily frightened and intimidated by officials and by formal documentation and it is a solicitor's duty and privilege to help such people. Whether it is an asylum seeker, a man who is under undue pressure in the workplace, an elderly lady who has fallen because nobody has bothered to upgrade the pavement or a child torn between warring parents, all need the reassurance and knowledge which you now have. Without a well-trained and properly run legal profession willing to stand up and fight for the rights of everybody, whether an accused or a victim, we cannot hope to maintain a civilised society. On each and every one of you now falls the responsibility of making your contribution to maintain and enhance what your predecessors have built up in the last sixty years since the Law Society of Scotland was created.

When the Society was founded one of its principal supporters was Sir Ernest Wedderburn. At the inaugural meeting he affirmed that the Society's main purpose was that it should "first of all encourage high professional standards" and so it has. But it has sought to do much more. It has striven to diminish what another speaker at that first meeting described as "a long standing and deep rooted suspicion of the law and lawyers" within the public. Such progress as has been made in the last sixty years has depended on countless solicitors the length and breadth of Scotland who have given of their time and experience to serve on the Council of the Law Society and its many committees. I hope that some of you will in

years to come feel able to make your contribution to the continuing welfare of the profession in this way.

Others may want to follow the route which I took and seek an appointment as a Sheriff and thereby hopefully, maintain the high standards of the administration of justice for which this country has for centuries been justifiably proud. When I was appointed to Airdrie twenty-three years ago it was comparatively rare for a solicitor to obtain such a position. Nowadays more than half of the complement of Sheriffs throughout Scotland began their careers as solicitors. I believe that that is recognition of the standards of industry, integrity and service to which I have referred.

As everybody struggles through the current economic downturn the need for somebody who can be trusted and relied upon has become all the more important. There have been a number of these dips in our economy since I qualified in law and looking at the records of the initial meetings of the Society the same applied in 1949.

After each such period there has emerged new and exciting opportunities for lawyers and as the creation of a proper criminal Legal Aid scheme and the wide ranging effects of the Feudal Reform helped to restore the fortunes of solicitors thirty and forty years ago so I believe that as industry and the financial world recovers from the present slump there will be a desperate need for men and women of integrity and ability to whom others can turn. And that is what being a Scottish Solicitor represents. It represents stability, trustworthiness and competence and that is what is going to be needed in the period ahead and you are the people who can provide it.

The ideals of the original founders of Law Society remain as true today as they did then. They sought to ensure that the principles of hard work, of service and of integrity would be maintained by a united body representing all the solicitors within Scotland. You have already experienced the necessity for hard work and I hope that amidst that hard work you

have found interest and enjoyment. Solicitors will always have a vital part to play in the life of Scotland and elsewhere.

In this connection it is worth remembering that the qualification of a Scottish solicitor allows you to work in numerous parts of the world. As far away as New Zealand or the Falkland Islands, in Canada and South Africa to mention just four places a qualification in the Law of Scotland remains highly respected and regarded.

But as well as hard work and service the originators of the Law Society of Scotland placed considerable emphasis on integrity and it is this point which I wish to emphasize.

At a time when papers are full of stories of manipulation of claims for expenses and when we are all still reeling from the apparent greed and inability to accept any responsibility from leading bankers for the chaos which we all now have to pay for it is very easy for the public to regard all professions as corrupt, self-serving and only interested in making what they can at the expense of everybody else.

This must never be the image which people have of Scottish solicitors. At this time, more than at any other, it is essential that we all show no matter what part we play as solicitors or former solicitors that integrity and honesty are fundamental and never wavering elements of a solicitor's code.

I can do nothing better than repeat the words of the new President when, in a recent edition of the Journal he reminded all solicitors for the need to protect "the badge of solicitor, the status and reputation attaching to the term which many members regard and recognise as making a practising certificate worth-while". "The badge lets other people know exactly what your role is and also entitles all to expect a certain standard of behaviour and ethics that you would engage in as a member of the solicitor profession." That is the important prize of integrity which surrounds the badge of solicitor. That badge is now yours and in all your dealings with courts, with other professional colleagues and with the public all will

know that you will each be doing your part to ensure that the standards of the profession to which you are now entitled to regard yourselves as members will continue to reflect the traditions of the Law Society of Scotland and the high regard in which solicitors are entitled to be held.

Integrity and the resulting respect which it leads to are hallmarks of the profession. The resulting high regard in the eyes of many has been achieved as a result of standards which earlier generations of solicitors have maintained. In a world in which the apparent arrogance and greed of a few politicians and bankers has resulted in a total lack of confidence by many in them it remains essential that solicitors are regarded by all as honest, straight-forward people who merit the trust of all. That high position has been obtained over many years by the profession and by the Law Society. As new members I am sure that you will continue that tradition and I wish you well in the future whichever aspect of the law you choose to follow. As a member of the Law Society and a former solicitor I welcome you to our band and I share your family's good wishes for a happy and prosperous future.