



INTERVIEW WITH  
**CALUM  
LAMONT KC**



## **You took silk in March 2022, can you tell us a little bit about your career and your journey to silk?**

After flirting unsuccessfully with selling premium cosmetics I came to the Bar in 2004 and have been at Keating for the entirety of my career. I've increasingly gravitated towards arbitration work and pretty much all of my instructions are now in relation to international disputes. Being willing to spend long periods in the Gulf certainly assisted in building that element of my practice, and I would implore other juniors to do so if they covet that kind of work. I suppose taking silk had been on the radar for a while, but it's really difficult in our line of work to get a run of substantial cases in order to put together a credible application. As those reading will doubtless appreciate, when lockdown hit, everything went crazy. I suddenly had 6 contested hearings in a row. All of them fought. It felt like it was time, and happily I was selected. It is quite a humbling process, but aside from getting married, and finding a red-eyed vireo on Scilly in 2019, it's probably the best thing that has ever happened to me. I am enormously grateful to those who vouched for me and I would like to make a difference now I have been made up. I feel passionately about access to justice and sit on the steering committee of probonoskills.com, which provides students involved in law clinics with practical education to represent those who would otherwise go unheard. Please do get involved.

## **What is the most interesting project you have worked on to date?**

There have been many, but the ones that stand out are always those which involve complicated processes that have gone wrong, with conflicting explanations as to why that might have occurred. I was once instructed by a confectionary company whose "licking" machines were not applying the correct amount of chocolate onto its sweets. The bespoke German-built machinery could not keep pace with the rest of the production line. What was to blame? The consistency of the liquorice, or a system which had not been correctly calibrated? It settled. They tend to. But sometimes they don't and when that happens, the process of getting on top of technical engineering matters is, in my view, the most fulfilling aspect in our line of work.

## **You are consistently praised by clients for your excellent cross-examination skills. In your experience what skills are required for an effective cross examination? Is there a particularly memorable moment from your experience in court that you can tell us about?**

Well that's quite easy. Preparation. You have to be completely on top of the subject matter and the documentary material. Effective assistance from lay witnesses and experts is key to the process. Increasingly there is a tendency for clients to ask for sight of cross-examination material ahead of the hearing. Some Counsel instinctively spike at such requests, but I have always found it quite useful to share ideas with those instructing me ahead of actually asking the questions. I think barristers could do with being a bit more open-minded about that kind of thing. I would not say that effective cross-examination necessarily gives rise to memorable moments, as the best bits are when witnesses make concessions that they are not aware they are making. But I do specifically recall an occasion last year when an independent certifying engineer had to accept in terms that

he had not been independent. I was quite surprised by that obviously damaging admission, and I have never sat down so quickly in my life, and was rewarded with extra Wagon Wheels from the IAC fridge.

## **As part of the pupillage committee at Keating Chambers, what advice would you give to anyone who would like to become a commercial barrister?**

It goes without saying that candidates need to be able to demonstrate intellectual rigour; without question, succeeding in examinations remains critical to success in what will always be a competitive process. However, those who are offered places to train at Keating are those who are able to demonstrate (i) a true aptitude for chambers' work, and (ii) interpersonal skills that will stand them in good stead in forging relationships with other members of chambers, solicitors, and clients. I'm always a bit surprised by applicants who are unable to articulate why they want to do the kind of work that we do. It is specialised, and it is not for everyone. But those who have thought hard about it and persuaded themselves that it is genuinely of interest to them are always the most impressive at interview. So, work hard, do the best you can academically, and focus in particular on why the practice area interests you. And never, ever, give up.

## **How has the role of a specialist construction barrister evolved since you were called to the Bar?**

The job has changed tremendously over the years. Juniors now can expect to be ploughed straight into large international arbitrations, which now account for around 50% of chambers' workload, an enormous increase from when I started. There tends to be an increasing expectation from clients that barristers will need to roll their sleeves up and get stuck into the detail, as opposed to merely delivering overall strategic direction, or advice on points of law. I've always thought that the job is at least 90% hard work. There is genuinely no role nowadays for those in ivory towers. It is a much more immersive job than it used to be. That makes it all the more rewarding.

## **Outside of the law, what are your other interests or passions?**

I'm a keen ornithologist and a member of the UK400 club (look it up). I have a petulant relationship with chambers' rock band, Demolition. Nobody practices and it drives me mad, but somehow it all comes together on the night. Come and see us in October 2022 at Law Rocks, taking place at the 100 Club.