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A&O Alumni Yearbook
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The 2012 Alumni Yearbook is published as part of the Alumni Network of Allen & Overy LLP. It is distributed annually to registered Allen & Overy alumni, partners and selected third parties.

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Designed and produced by Engage Group Ltd
New City Cloisters, 1st Floor, 196 Old Street, London EC1V 9FR
www.engagengroup.co.uk

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Printed in the UK by Park Communications Limited
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Another year, another interview: how has the past year been for Allen & Overy?

David Morley: We’ve had a good year. Conditions remain challenging, as everyone knows, but our performance has held up well. Revenues were up by six per cent, profits by seven per cent. We have more than 500 partners – 512, to be precise – working in 42 offices in 29 countries. We’re making great strides to becoming the world’s most advanced law firm.

Of the new offices, why Vietnam?

We regularly do business in more than 100 countries around the world. When we see an opportunity, or we come across someone who really impresses us, then at that point we think about whether that person would be right for us, a good fit, who could help develop a particular market. And that’s what happened in Vietnam.

Vietnam is a good example of the continuation of the strategy that we’ve been pursuing for some years now, which is of global reach and local depth. We think that clients are looking for a firm that can handle their transactions seamlessly across borders, but they’re also looking for genuine, granular, inside, expert knowledge of what’s actually happening on the ground. In other words, not just what the law says but how it is being interpreted by regulators, by the Courts, so that they can make proper business decisions.

Could you not just have continued with the relationship firm in Vietnam? Why did you decide to open your own office?

We’re quite flexible in how we operate in different markets. In some markets, we’ll have exclusive alliances, some non-exclusive alliances, and in some we’ll have our own office. Our preferred model, though, is to have people who are full partners in the firm, fully integrated with us and who are economically and culturally aligned. We have one profit pool for the partners.

Do you have different variations of lockstep, depending on the country?

There are variations. In some countries, the ladder may start lower and end lower, but the principle is that it’s all out of one
Getting involved

This edition of the Alumni Yearbook features two A&O partners, David Wootton and John Wotton, who served in high-profile public service positions in 2012. Is this something that A&O encourages?

We do encourage our people to pursue those roles when it's right for them and for the firm in terms of their career and so on. It is something of a coincidence that David has been Lord Mayor and John president of the Law Society in the same year. There’s also Michael Reynolds, who takes over as president of the International Bar Association in 2013.

They’re all prominent positions. But I think it does reflect a sense that, as a firm, we have wider contributions to make to society.

We’ve agreed to sign a Law Society initiative to encourage more solicitors to become judges. It won’t suit everybody, of course, and there will be a trade-off in terms of people’s careers. But, in principle, we would encourage partners who are at a particular stage of their career to think about that as a possible option.

Beyond that, we have an extensive community programme, which is growing all the time. Our people have skills that can be put to good use outside the firm for the greater good.

You may recall that last September, A&O and 22 other law firms across the UK launched PRIME, which is a commitment from the legal sector to provide fair access to quality work experience for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. We already have more than 80 firms signed up and have broadened out the initiative to include clients. This is a way that we, as lawyers and professionals working in a law firm can help level the playing field for people entering the legal sector, and I would encourage alumni to consider becoming involved. Our aim is to get as many law firms across the UK as possible signed up.

For information on PRIME, visit www.primecommitment.org/for-law-firms

pool. We don’t have local profit pools. We want all the partners to be working collaboratively around the world to provide the best possible service to the client. If you have local profit pools, the concern is that people will tend to focus only on what’s going on locally and won’t necessarily work together in quite the same way to deliver the global piece.

Can you practise local law in Vietnam?

Yes, partly because the legal system is relatively under-developed, and there aren’t that many lawyers. There isn’t a kind of strong local bar who want to protect their home turf, in the way that there is in China.

Is Vietnam viewed as a good potential economic market?

It’s a big economy in its own right. There are 85 million people. To a certain extent, we’re placing a bet on its long-term economic development. In the meantime, it’s still quite difficult to do business there because it’s largely state-controlled, but inward investment is on the increase, and that interests us.

Vietnam is one of a number of potential growth markets. Others include Indonesia, Latin America and Africa. Global businesses are looking for new markets, because the growth is not coming from Europe or the US. That’s good for us, because there’s a premium on high-quality legal advice in new markets.

What about Istanbul then, the other office you’ve opened this year?

Turkey is another fast-growing market, particularly for project finance; there’s a massive amount of infrastructure spending. As I mentioned, markets are different, and in this case, our decision was to send a partner from London (Charles Lindsay), who knew the market well, to open the office and recruit the best local lawyers. We’ve now hired two Turkish partners.

How has that affected your relationship with existing Turkish firms?

We want to maintain a good relationship with them. Our philosophy is: why wouldn’t we want to be friends with everybody?

In the past, you’ve spoken about the unstoppable force of globalisation, yet this year another term has crept in: fragmentation. Are the two contradictory?

No, and let me explain what I mean. We’ve thought about this a lot this year. Globalisation is irreversible. Our clients’ businesses are everywhere. No market is out of reach. The forces of economic production are global. The trend is definitely for that to continue. Yet, at the same time, we’re seeing a great rise in local regulation and control. That’s what I mean by fragmentation. But the important point to note is that both trends are happening simultaneously.

The metaphor I like to use of is of the world becoming a series of walled gardens. You put a wall around your garden to protect what’s inside, to look after what you have created. There are points of access – the garden gates – but only those who are welcomed will be let in. And whether you’re let in depends on what you have to offer (your brand and reputation), and whether you’re seen to be doing the right things and conforming with the local norms (adding value). This is a trend we’re seeing. Actually, it plays perfectly to our model of combining global reach with local depth.

We’ve researched this in some depth. Regional groups of partners around the world met to consider what the world might look like in 2020. The idea was to sketch out scenarios to assist us with our planning, not to change our strategy but just to prepare for different eventualities. Then, to consider the impact on our clients, how we adjust our service, the consequences for our people, and so on. We called this Long View: the world in 2020.

What conclusions did you reach?

Too many to mention in a single interview! Also, I should add that the findings are really for our internal use. But I can share with alumni a number of findings: the global economy will still be sluggish by the end of the decade; the world will be multi-polar, with strong regional variations; there’ll be a new global middle class; and, more specifically for the legal market, commoditisation is inevitable.

The important point is that the Long View project is equipping us to cope with a series of eventualities, and is flexible enough to adapt to unexpected events.

One of the big challenges is the US market, isn’t it?

Yes, and we also addressed that in the Long View. If you look at the future, pretty much on any scenario, the US will still be probably the most important legal market in the world. That reaffirms our sense that we have to be there in some shape or form. We’ve made good progress, but we’re not yet where we want to be.
I said earlier that our preferred model is a fully integrated model, with one profit pool and so on. But the US is different from the rest of the world, and it may be that this is a special case and we need to adjust our thinking accordingly. For one thing, the market is much more litigation-dominated than others. But this is at an early stage of thinking and not something I can share just yet.

You have also spoken about rethinking legal careers, not just involving networks of lawyers but also about starting careers at differing points in their lives. Can you expand on this?

A number of forces are at play here. One is the differing requirements of clients. They’ve understood that a lot of the work we do can be sliced into different portions: a high-end piece, the strategic advice, for which they know they need to pay high prices; and the lower end work, such as due diligence, which they want done cheaper. That’s legal process outsourcing.

So, over time, we may have to look at a new model of career development. We call it ‘fluid resourcing’. This might involve a core of key partners and associates, an inner circle around which you might build other networks. You have the next circle, perhaps those not necessarily working full-time for the firm, but contracted for particular projects or periods of time. And perhaps a wider circle still, of those who work very occasionally for us.

A second factor is that we’re entering a world of greater volatility. Levels of business go up and down. There are greater peaks and troughs. Our ability to match our resources to demand is very constrained with our current model. This has an impact on profitability: if you’re over-capacity, it kills your profitability and if you’re under-capacity, it kills your people. Neither is a good outcome.

A third force is coming from work/life balance. People start their careers after university; they work for a number of years and perhaps make partner. Just at that point, a lot of people may start having a family and that gives rise to the whole trade-off between having a demanding job but wanting to have time with the family. So why not have people start their careers, for example, after they have had a family? We now have four generations in the work force. Why should someone not start at 35 and work until their mid-60s?

In the long term, I think that would be very positive for legal careers and positive for alumni, in particular. Why alumni? Because we can be confident of the quality of the people, their expertise and knowledge, and secondly the ability to involve people who can quickly fit into a team or project.

That requires a different level of project management, doesn’t it?

It does, but nothing that is insoluble. It’s somewhat paradoxical, potentially: the firm may be smaller but the network will be larger. We’ll have a wider pool of people with whom we have all sorts of different relationships. Once you accept that concept, then the rest is logistics.
Dear Alumni Members

One of the questions we asked in our 2011 alumni survey was “Do you agree that the Alumni Programme caters for your individual needs?” Many of you replied with the characteristic frankness (perhaps emboldened by anonymity) born of a career at Allen & Overy. “How can it expect to cater for my individual needs?” was typical of your comments, as was: “It has never asked me what my individual needs are.” Allowing for regional variations, many of you said: “I appreciate the invitations to events in London, but I live in the United States.”

Of course, I agree that it may seem like an impossible task for a team of one full-time manager and two half-time executives and me (even less than half-time sitting at my desk in rural Hampshire), to “cater for” the requirements of nearly 5,000 individual registered alumni members all over the world of differing generations and roles. It is inevitable that with such a small team we get drawn into generic publications and events. But, perhaps, there is more that we can do to make the Alumni Network both individual and local, as well as general and global and we have been giving this some thought.

One of the key aspects of attending an alumni event is meeting friends of your own generation. This is very difficult if you find yourself at an alumni party, facing a sea of faces, none of which you recognise. The greater the distance that time puts between you and your time at the firm, the more likely this becomes.

It seems to me that an advanced alumni network would be one which really does help you to meet your friends and contemporary colleagues (and not just anyone who has ever worked at A&O) – and of course we want to be the most advanced alumni network that we can be.
So in this connection, I would encourage you to read the brief thoughts of John Fisher (right). John took the situation into his own hands, got together a list of his old friends from A&O and encouraged them to attend the annual Alumni Reunion drinks last year. Subsequently we helped him organise a supper party for them at A&O.

We want to encourage initiatives like this and the network mentioned on page 16. If any reader would like to meet up with their own contemporaries and colleagues, then please get in touch with Jenny Enever or Stella Ekkeshis in the Alumni Team at thealumniteam@allenovery.com

We would be happy to assist you in meeting up with them. We could also help organise small catch-ups for particular teams – groups who worked for a particular partner during a particular decade for example.

We want the A&O Alumni Network to be a platform for individuals to be able to reconnect with other individuals, whether or not the firm is involved, and we think that if we can achieve this then the question we asked you in the survey will be more meaningful.

While we continue to work through your feedback and suggestions from the 2011 alumni survey, we’re always open to new ideas for developing the Alumni Network to work in a way which is useful for you. If you would like to get more involved in shaping our plans for 2013, please do let us know.

Alex Pease
Chairman, Alumni Programme

Getting the old team together

On 3 July 2012, nine of my old Allen & Overy colleagues and I had a very enjoyable dinner at A&O’s London office. It was fun to reminisce about the old days and catch up with what they were doing. As Laurie Adams said, those were great days in the A&O rugby team!

The reunion supper came about as follows. When I first started coming to the annual A&O Alumni Reunion drinks, I appreciated the effort that the firm was putting into these alumni occasions but I was not getting the commensurate enjoyment out of it. This was simply because I knew nobody as I had left A&O more than 30 years ago, in 1980. So I decided to do something about it.

For those whose careers I knew about, it was easy to go to their firms’ websites and send a personal e-mail to them. For one who had opened an art gallery, I Googled his name and art.

With regards to those whom I had lost contact with, as it was likely that many of them would be in private practice with other firms, it was simple to go on the Law Society website www.lawsociety.org, click on ‘find a solicitor’, insert their name and then either send a personal e-mail or telephone them.

After my article on the A&O rugby team was published in the 2011 Alumni Yearbook, I e-mailed all the players in the photos whom I had lost contact with and suggested that they join the Alumni Network to obtain a copy.

Without exception, the response was good. I now have an ever-increasing e-mail list of names and just before an alumni event, I send a circular e-mail, so now I am guaranteed to have someone I know to talk to!

John Fisher

Alex Pease
Chairman, Alumni Programme
When Canada’s legendary ice hockey player, Wayne, was asked about the secret of his brilliant play, he responded that he simply skated to where the puck was going to be. Former A&O partner Carl Sheldon believes it’s a perfect analogy for how law firms should conceive their strategy.

“Law firms need to anticipate where the market is going”, says Carl. “Put simply, law firms should set themselves the objective of doing the most interesting and demanding work for the most interesting and demanding clients. That will dictate who you are, where you are and what you do.”

Carl speaks from experience. He moved to Frankfurt in 1974 to open the A&O office, and went on to head the New York office at a time of significant growth, before becoming general counsel and now chief executive of TAQA, the Abu Dhabi National Energy Company.

TAQA certainly fits the bill as one of the most interesting and demanding clients. In seven years, it has become a multi-billion-dollar company with operations in utilities (electricity and water) and energy (oil and gas production) in 11 markets, from Canada to India as well as Abu Dhabi. TAQA is majority-owned by Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Authority, a government authority listed on the Abu Dhabi stock exchange, and has revenues of more than USD6 billion. “We are really a giant-sized start-up”, says Carl.

Carl took over as chief executive in 2009. While heading a global energy business might seem several steps removed from being a partner in an international law firm, the experience and knowledge from 25 years with A&O (with a break of four years) set him up remarkably well.

Alumni spotlight

The power of anticipation

A&O alumnus Carl Sheldon sees interesting and demanding work as the key to shaping an identity in the legal profession.

By Humphrey Keenlyside

Alumni Yearbook 2012
Firms that make the effort to help us manage the risks we can plan for and the ones we cannot will build the kind of deep and abiding relationships that benefit lawyer and client the most.

At A&O, his main focus was on the energy sector. “I was involved in power and oil and gas projects around the world”, he says. “I’m a finance lawyer with particular expertise in project finance and the debt capital markets, which is very valuable in relation to a highly leveraged company, which TAQA is. I’m dual-qualified in New York and English law, the governing laws in which we mostly operate for our international deals.”

Before becoming CEO, Carl first served as the company’s general counsel after he left A&O in 2008. He already knew TAQA well as a client. When he joined, there were three lawyers, including François Duquette, one of the founding partners of A&O’s Morocco office.

At that point, the company had completed seven acquisitions in 18 months. The priority was to integrate the separate businesses to an enduring institution “of which the Emirate of Abu Dhabi would be proud and for which Emiratis would want to work”. The company grew fast, its Abu Dhabi team expanded five-fold to about 150 and it now has about 2,800 people in its businesses around the world. Being general counsel and then chief executive has given Carl an excellent vantage point from which to judge the value that law firms can provide and how they can differentiate themselves. “In my business, I am not going to lose sleep about a law firm making a mistake; the firms we use are always going to clear the quality hurdle. They will seldom decisively ‘outlawyer’ their competition.

“They will differentiate themselves by speaking with authority about issues that are of concern to me – issues that contribute to risk or price on a transaction and the areas of law that are changing that have a bearing on my business. Those who really think about what matters to our business are the ones we will instruct.”

With businesses operating in emerging markets and in OECD countries, much of what TAQA does requires understanding and managing political risk. Nor is political risk confined to the developing world, as Carl notes. “The biggest political risk to befall TAQA last year was the decision by George Osborne to raise the rate of corporation tax payable by oil and gas companies in the UK”, he says. “It cost us USD100m in net income.

Firms that make the effort to help us manage the risks we can plan for and the ones we cannot will build the kind of deep and abiding relationships that benefit lawyer and client the most.”

For Carl, the big difference between his past and present roles is that now he has to make the decisions, not give the advice and do the drafting. “The change has given me the chance to observe life in a corporate”, he says. “For a business at scale, a corporation is a more effective medium for managing than a partnership.”

A salutary lesson

When Carl was general counsel, he led the process to appoint a panel of law firms to TAQA. The procedure involved sending simple instructions on a single page of a letter to the interested law firms. “I wanted to find out from the law firms what they could do for us,” says Carl. “I wasn’t interested in anything that I could easily find out elsewhere. So that is why I framed the letter the way I did.”

Yet only two of the 10 firms which presented showed they had actually read the letter and presented accordingly.

We leave it to readers to determine whether A&O was one of those two firms.

Do

Read this RFP (including its appendices) carefully
Respond thoughtfully
Be concise
Focus on what distinguishes your firm by reference to what TAQA needs – we are interested in what you will do for TAQA, not in what you have done for other clients
Adhere to the process set out in the RFP

Don’t

Show quotes from commentators or other clients
Tell us about awards you have won or where you rank in league tables
Send us lists of deals you have done
Include things we can read on your website
Try to influence the process by special pleading
Valuable learning

Carl says taking over at TAQA was “the biggest challenge of my professional career in prospect – daunting, but not intimidating”. He credits skills he acquired as a partner at A&O for helping him make the transition to the corporate world he now inhabits. Many were core to the new job.

“A&O has always had a strong culture: paternalistic, tolerant, meritocratic and absorbent. This culture has, more than anything, enabled the successful internationalisation of the firm.

“Doing complex cross-border projects as a lawyer involved understanding how to balance up a wide range of stakeholder interests. At TAQA, where we are often investing in assets with 20- to 40-year economic lives in capital-intensive, regulated businesses, understanding that balance is critical.

“Understanding what is important in an organisation, how to find, keep and cultivate people, and, above all, working in a culture that was tolerant and inclusive of other cultures: those were very valuable learnings that I took with me.”

“Taking over at TAQA was the biggest challenge of my professional career in prospect – daunting, but not intimidating.”

“I’m not going to lose sleep about a law firm making a mistake.”
Friends first, network second

Nine women who joined our litigation team in the mid-90s and went on to pursue highly successful careers elsewhere explain to the Alumni Team what holds them together as close friends, the debt they owe to A&O and why they’ve even begun to think of themselves as a network.

By Simon Beavis
Almost like family: from left, Justine Edelman, Sara Collie (back), Jenny McKeown, Kate Jackson, Arabella Murphy, Sofie Hoffman, Harriet Parsons and Karin Melling. Stephanie Pagni was unable to make the group photo.
Spin back 16 years to 1996 and to Allen & Overy’s former London headquarters at One New Change, opposite St Paul’s Cathedral: it’s an exciting but intense time to be starting life as a City lawyer.

The Maxwell fraud trial has finished but there’s talk of a second; it’s a year since Barings collapsed and the hotels group, Queens Meat Houses, is in the midst of a Companies Act investigation following its own spectacular demise. The Asian and Russian economic crises are just around the corner, but the City of London – rapidly stealing a march on New York as the world’s most important financial centre – is cooking.

The domestic political and economic environment is changing too. After 18 years of government, the Conservatives are about to lose power. Not everyone, perhaps, believes Labour’s ‘Things can only get better’ theme or the hype about Cool Britannia, but a general readiness for change is palpable.

It’s a great time too to be qualifying at Allen & Overy. Although a quarter of its current size, with around 720 lawyers, the firm is growing fast and becoming increasingly global. And it is an even better time to be joining Litigation’s banking and finance group, a small team which, despite its size, has already gained a formidable reputation for being among the brightest and the best, or the private client team (one of only a handful then left in City firms), whose heritage dates back to the Abdication Crisis of 1936.

This, then, is the environment in which nine women, who mostly joined the firm between 1994 and 1998, first came together. And it’s where they first came to form a bond which remains as strong today as ever, even though all have now gone on to pursue successful careers elsewhere: three as partners in their respective law firms, three as independent operators and three as leading in-house litigators at major international banks.

You can feel the strength of that bond when you spend an hour with them. What follows is a stream of wonderful anecdotes, accompanied by a glass or two of champagne – tales of shared personal and professional experiences, often told in irresistible unison, and through frequent peals of laughter. This is a group of people clearly just very comfortable to be in each other’s company.

You hear a lot today about the importance of women’s networks in business. Many big organisations are struggling to retain their most talented women, unable to offer them a workable balance between career and home life.

So what is the secret behind this particular and clearly dynamic network? What above all else holds them together and allows them to continue supporting each other in their senior roles and in their busy everyday lives?

Perhaps not surprisingly, the word you hear most often from them is “friendship”; network is a term they’ve only recently begun to use.

“We’re friends first, a network second,” says Justine. “Big firms don’t tend to do networks very well; it tends to be forced. A network has to be organic.”

“I think what holds us together is the fact that we grew up together,” says Jenny.

“And that we care about each other,” adds Harriet. “We were forged in the fires of A&O and, although you couldn’t get a more disparate group of personalities, we have A&O and 16 years of shared experience between us.”

Kate sees it as a case of “friends with benefits” (cue laughter). “To be honest, I haven’t really thought of it as a network. If a friend starts up a business, then of course you want to help them. It’s been that way, really.”

“We’re there for each other through good times and bad, at all times of the day, and we generally know what makes each other tick,” says Karin. “That’s why we’re still here together after 16 years.”

Those intensely busy early days provided plenty of opportunities for friendships to develop. Kate recalls bonding with Sara for the first time on a sedate trip to South Africa. After a long serious day of work, she was scooped up by Sara in a beaten up VW Beetle and whisked off to a Pete Tong rave in downturn Jo’burg.

Harriet and Sofie remember being sent out on a fraud case raid on a ghastly house in Surrey and both sticking to the filthy floor after hours of sitting on the carpet, sifting through documents.

“You have to remember that being in the litigation department meant working very long hours. It didn’t leave much

**Sara Collie**

joined A&O in 1996 and worked as an associate in litigation until 2001, spending six months as a Judicial Assistant at the Court of Appeal and six months on secondment at Greenwich NatWest. For the next four years she worked for a Cayman Islands law firm, Maples and Calder, as a corporate and commercial associate. Between 2005 and 2010, she was senior legal counsel at Brevan Howard Asset Management LLP. She then took an 18-month sabbatical from the law, before setting up as an independent consultant solicitor dealing with corporate, commercial and litigation matters.

**Justine Edelman**

worked as marketing manager in A&O’s litigation department from 1998 to 2001, as well as troubleshooting in corporate, private client and real estate and helping to manage the marketing aspects of the integration of the merger with Belgian firm Loeff Claeys Verbeke in 2000. She moved to become marketing director at Howard Kennedy, leaving in 2005 on the birth of her second child. A friend then tempted her to launch a freelance career and she now works as marketing consultant for a number of key clients including Bella and Jenny’s firm Maurice Turnor Gardner.

**Sofie Hoffman**

is a partner at Boodle Hatfield, where she specialises in contentious trusts and estates litigation. Having trained at Holborn Audley, she joined A&O’s litigation department in 1996, where she gained experience working on cases such as the Executors of Francis Bacon’s Estate v. Marlborough Art Gallery and the Trustor v. Smallbone litigation. While at A&O, she spent six months on secondment to Standard Chartered’s litigation team. She left A&O in 2001 to join Lloyd’s of London, leaving in 2006 to return to private practice as a partner with Boodle Hatfield.
time for other friends,” says Sofie. “You found yourself in some extreme situations together – you get to know someone pretty well when you work eight days in a row until 4am preparing bundles for a big banking client.”

Senior colleagues, male and female, played a big role in cementing the team and the Balls Brothers wine bar in the basement of One New Change, rather than some antiseptic meeting room upstairs, became a regular venue for evening team catch-ups as well as socialising.

As Bella recalls: “The private client department had a balcony right over the top of Balls Brothers – I could have practically abseiled straight into the bar.”

As time went on and the women began to leave the firm, opportunities for bonding centred on regular meet-ups – they get together every couple of months. There have also been some away trips to places such as New York and Paris, where dancing often features on the agenda, led by Stephanie or ‘Paggers’ – the only one of the group unable to make our photo shoot and interview.

Increasingly their family lives became more enmeshed. Justine introduced Sara to her partner, Harriet introduced Bella to hers, Karin’s hen party was held in Bella’s house, Jenny was Karin’s chief bridesmaid, others read and sang at Bella’s wedding, when its first litigation partner arrived in the city in 2002, giving the group thereafter. A secondment to JPMorgan Chase in 2002 gave her a first taste of in-house work and she was invited to become the bank’s first permanent litigator outside the US with responsibility for litigation in the EMEA region. Five years later she was head hunted to be Standard Bank’s first litigator outside South Africa, a position she still holds today.

“You found yourself in some extreme situations together – you get to know someone pretty well when you work eight days in a row until 4am.”

of women who are the main breadwinners for their families. “That brings another dimension and is another reason we are very close. Outside this group, I don’t know many women in that position. Our daughters may look at us now and think it’s okay. But they might grow up and say ‘I wish you’d been there more.’”

They’ve supported each other through some tricky times too, they all agree – the answers again coming in unison: “We’ve done tough working stuff… tough relationships… tough career choices… tough issues with children… tough husbands!” (More laughter.)

“We keep an eye out for each other,” says Sofie. “If we haven’t heard from someone for a while, an e-mail will go round to check everything’s okay.”

This network, though, isn’t all about life outside work. They agree, for instance, that they are more likely to refer clients to each other because they know and trust each other deeply.

And it extends to the jobs they do today. As Justine points out, she provides marketing support to Maurice Turnor Gardner, the firm created when A&O’s private client business demerged, where Bella and Jenny are now partners. “That’s real networking. In fact, we’re just trying to find jobs for all the other girls!”

As an independent consultant – and the most peripatetic of the group – Sara values the network, which she says has grown much stronger since they all left A&O. “Since I switched to consulting, everybody’s been brilliant. You know you can ring anyone, any time, for advice and you can ask the silly questions without feeling the least bit embarrassed. That’s really important when you are working on your own.”

A&O remains hugely important to all the women. Karin goes back to her school days to explain why the firm stood out from its competitors. At her all-girls school, it was drummed into pupils that women had to do everything twice as well as men, and work twice as hard, to succeed. It was only when she then went to a boys’ school that she saw a more egalitarian approach.

“It was a real eye-opener and I began to have doubts about the mantra I had grown up with at the girls’ school. At the boys’ school, it was pretty even-handed; we were all just told to get on with it. When I came to A&O, I found the same approach – it doesn’t matter who you are, just do it!”

Kate Jackson
joined A&O in 1996 after six months in Australia. During training, she spent six months in New York and returned there in 2000, seconded to Morgan Stanley. A&O had no US litigation team at the time so she joined the US firm Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett, passing the New York Bar exam, before rejoining A&O when its first litigation partner arrived in the city in 2002. She then transferred back to London with her husband. In 2009 she set up as an independent commercial mediator, which gives her “the great mix of a challenging and exciting job and the ability to spend time with my family”.

Jenny McKeown
joined A&O as a trainee in September 1995, qualifying into litigation in September 1997. She left the firm in 2001 joining Mercer Limited (part of the Marsh & McLennan group) as a senior litigator, latterly partner, in the internal legal team. During this time she had three children. She left Mercer in August 2010 to join Bella as a litigation partner at Maurice Turnor Gardner.

Karin Melling
joined A&O in 1994, qualifying into the litigation department two years later and working with Bella from day one and with all the women in the group thereafter. A secondment to JPMorgan Chase in 2002 gave her a first taste of in-house work and she was invited to become the bank’s first permanent litigator outside the US with responsibility for litigation in the EMEA region. Five years later she was head hunted to be Standard Bank’s first litigator outside South Africa, a position she still holds today.
Before joining, she looked carefully at all the rival stats from leading law firms on women achieving partnership. A&O did not have many, but it had more than the rest.

Somewhere A&O got it very right. All of the group maintain strong links with the firm and with individuals still working there. The partner Kate trained with remains a mentor to this day.

As Bella puts it: “A&O has always been good at recruiting people with a similar outlook even if they have very different personalities. It’s what makes the firm so collegiate. I’ve worked in other places and never come away with the same kind of mates.”

Justine agrees. “We had the feeling that we were among the brightest and the best. We were being treated really well and, though we were working very hard, we were having such fun.”

The benefits these friends share may also be flowing back to the firm itself. “I’m very fond of a number of A&O people I worked with while at the firm and since. They’ve been good to me,” says Harriet. “It may be all about individuals and relationships, but it’s also a very good strategy.”

Chemistry lesson: “You know you can ask the silly questions without feeling the least bit embarrassed.”

Harriet Parsons
“photocopied her way into the history books”, starting as a paralegal first at Lovells then A&O in 1993. She was offered a training contract and sponsored through law school by A&O before joining the firm in 1996. In 2003, she was seconded to Citi and a year later hired by the bank as an in-house litigator. She married in 2003 and has two children. This year she joined the Bank of New York Mellon as managing director and EMEA head of litigation, enforcement and investigations.

Stephanie Pagni
joined Allen & Overy in 2001 having spent six months there on secondment from Credit Suisse. She undertook her training contract part-time while working at the bank. Having originally practised in the area of derivatives, she decided to join Allen & Overy’s litigation team in 2001. Her son was born in 2002. She left A&O in 2006 to join Barclays Legal Department where she went on to become Head of Litigation for Commercial and Retail Banking and is now Head of Litigation for Corporate and Investment Banking.

Arabella Murphy (nee Saker)
trained at Simmons & Simmons before joining A&O’s private client team in 1996. She left briefly in 2000 to join another firm but found A&O a hard act to follow and returned after just six months – a period known teasingly as her ‘sabbatical’. In 2007 she made partner but two years later the private client team demerged to set up Maurice Turnor Gardner, which maintains a ‘best friends’ relationship with A&O and has an 80 per cent female staff, with many (of both genders) working flexibly.
The art of networking

Jeremy Thomas, former London Corporate partner and now an executive coach, offers practical advice on building your professional network.

Networking, said comedian Arthur Smith, is for “people who like having their picture taken and going to parties. I can’t really be bothered. Talent always prevails in the long run.”

He probably got a laugh, but I don’t think he’s right. Firstly, like many people, he’s equating networking with the ability to ‘work the room’, which is a good skill to acquire but only part of the story. Secondly, in today’s legal market at least, relying on your supposed technical superiority won’t necessarily win you work. Why? Because a client will have lots of good lawyers to choose from and you’ll need to work harder to differentiate yourself. Being effective at networking is one way of doing this.

So what is networking?

I would define it as keeping in touch with like-minded people who can help you in your career, might give you work or recommend you to others. It’s also a way of honing your understanding of your market and what clients want.

As for benefits, networking can help you get new work; it’s a source of intellectual stimulation as it exposes you to different people and thinking outside the boundary of your office; and it can be a source of your next role.

Even academia takes networking seriously: Cass Business School has just appointed Julia Hobsbawm as its first Visiting Professor of Networking.

The good thing is you don’t have to create a network. You’ll already have one made up of the people you know. But you need to be selective. Only network with people with whom you have some form of connection or empathy. Life is too short to schmooze someone you don’t like. And don’t do it via activities which bore you. If you don’t like the opera, don’t go.

Networking is not the same as marketing but the aim is often the same – to get someone to buy your services. Research has shown it can take up to 12 interactions before someone will buy.

Think strategically about what you’re doing. Who is worth keeping in touch with and why? Anthropologists think we can keep in touch meaningfully with around 150 people. Your efforts will be best directed at a smaller number than that.

Distinguish between personal, business and support networks. The main article on these pages is essentially about a support network.

A lot of discussion about networking refers to social media and how tools such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn can help. I’m sceptical about Twitter in this context. LinkedIn can be a good organisational tool, but not more. And Facebook can be a good way of keeping in touch with some people. However, the essence of networking is building personal relationships and you can’t do this effectively just by relying on online communication.

This brings me to my key point. If networking is a way of building those relationships, you have to acquire or burnish the skills needed to do so. These will include how to create empathy, listening – an important skill, but often deployed by lawyers simply as a way of identifying the next legal point to be pronounced on – and selling.

Selling is a skill, and to be adept at it you need to conquer any fear of failure (lawyers aren’t good at this as their training emphasises getting everything 100 per cent correct, i.e. no failures). Anyone can acquire these skills, but if you don’t your networking will be a waste of time. As Arthur Smith says, you’ll simply be going to parties and having your picture taken. There are no rules. You choose who you network with and how. Having a coffee at Costa with someone counts as much as taking someone to see the Ring Cycle, and can often be more effective. My preferred method involves pubs and alcohol. Just get out there, relax and enjoy it.

For more information, or to reconnect with Jeremy, visit his website at www.outsideinsight.org.
Go mobile

Access the Allen & Overy Alumni Network on your mobile. You can now access all our current A&O and alumni news and views on the go, wherever you are.

www.allenandoverby.com/alumni
My Lord Mayor,
Mr President

In 2011-12, by a quirk of timing, Allen & Overy people served in two important and influential roles, partner David Wootton as Lord Mayor of London, and alumnus John Wotton as President of the Law Society. They spoke to Humphrey Keenlyside about their experiences.
A time for safe hands

John Wotton served as president of the Law Society from July 2011 to July 2012

“If you are interested in different types of law, the diversity of law firms and the sheer variety of people you meet, being head of the professional body for solicitors is hard to match,” says John Wotton, past-president of the Law Society.

“I was extremely fortunate in that my period of office coincided with major regulatory and commercial challenges facing the profession, which made it doubly rewarding. I can honestly say that every single day of my presidency was fascinating.”

We’ll take that, then, as a resounding affirmation of the experience.

For John, former A&O partner and consultant, leading competition lawyer, keen cricketer and fruit farmer, it was a great privilege to represent the profession about which he feels so strongly.

The experience, while demanding, was the culmination of many years’ involvement with the Law Society. He has been on the Council since 2007, and has been a member of various boards and chair of the EU Committee. Before taking on the top office, he was deputy vice-president and then vice-president, as is customary.

As president, John travelled the length and breadth of the country and made several trips abroad. He met ministers, members of the judiciary, regulators,
officials and his counterparts in other professional bodies. He encountered lawyers from the largest law firms to sole practitioners, practising across the range of disciplines. He chaired meeting after meeting, faced the press, gave speeches, glad handed and did everything that a politician might do.

Unflappable as he is, it's easy to imagine John remaining equable throughout. He attributes this as much to his experience at A&O as to his personality. “As a competition and regulatory lawyer, I came across the same types of organisation and people that I did as president. I was therefore already familiar with the way corporations and regulators work. I had learned the art of informal advocacy, which is especially important when dealing with people with large intellects and big egos!”

The profession, if readers can indulge the cliché, is certainly at a crossroads. The market environment is dire. Legal aid cutbacks will make it difficult, if not impossible, for several thousand lawyers to stay in practice. At the top of the list of critical issues is the alternative business structure (ABS) which throws open ownership of legal practices to those outside the law.

ABSes came into being under the Legal Services Act 2007, but it is really only this year that the impact of that change is being felt within the profession. Of those that have applied successfully for ABS status, the most prominent is the Cooperative Group, which already employs several hundred lawyers.

The Legal Services Act continues to be highly controversial. Many smaller law firms, and sole practitioners, fear that the ABS will pull the rug from under their feet by exposing them to competition and capital that they will not be able to match. This is not a negligible interest group: at any one time, there are between 10,000 and 11,000 law firms, of which around 3,000 are sole practitioners.

John has had plenty of opportunity to hear arguments on both sides. His verdict? ABSes will do more good than harm, and the profession need not take fright provided it responds in the right way. “The heart of the issue is service,” he says. “ABSes are posing the challenge, not because of their financial muscle, but because they know they will need to serve their clients well to succeed. Many have experience doing so in other fields.

Those who feel threatened should respond in kind, by concentrating on improving their client experience.”
The international dimension

A key role of the Law Society president is meeting counterparts in other countries. Here again, the implications of ABSes have often been the principal subject of discussion.

“We have had to work with bar associations and law societies around the world to defuse latent opposition,” John says. “The changes to the way lawyers are being regulated in England and Wales have been watched closely and widely misunderstood by others. We have had to put many people straight.”

Even where they have understood the system, there are further issues to address. Will ABS law firms be allowed to practise in those jurisdictions which do not permit any form of outside ownership of law firms? If not, will they have to create different structures for each country in which they wish to operate, which might prove administratively burdensome?

The Law Society has also been preparing the ground for a review by the European Commission of the EU Lawyers Establishment Directive, which enables English solicitors and law firms to practise and establish branches in other EU member states.

It is not just Europe. John went to 13 countries during the year. They were all memorable trips, during which he could almost expect to be called upon to display a wider range of skills than diplomacy and speech-making.

His particular favourite was a trip to Moscow when he was unexpectedly required by the Russian Ministry of Justice to row in a boat on the Neva river, near St Petersburg. Also rowing were Russian ministers, the British consul general and his staff, and officials from both nations. The stroke was a retired judge who had rowed for Oxford 50 years before.

John is very appreciative of the support he has received from A&O. The firm has made available the use of an office, a PA and its IT platform. On his first day in office, John organised an away day for his Law Society leadership team at One Bishops Square.

He also consulted and tested his ideas on A&O colleagues, among them Stephen Denyer, Susan Hazledine and Heather McCallum, whose feedback proved invaluable. He is particularly grateful to Senior Partner David Morley, who offered full support as well as advice of his own, and to Andrew Clark, who has been chairing the Law Society’s Rules and Ethics Committee.

John says there are interesting parallels between what he and David Wootton have been doing over the course of the year, as he observed when joining David’s Lord Mayoral visit to Moscow in July.

“I have had to carry the torch, domestically and internationally, for the whole range of UK legal services, just as David has carried the torch internationally for a wide range of legal, financial and business services provided from within the City of London. Between us, that is a lot of representing!”

At the end of the year, John’s fundamental belief in the unity of the profession is undimmed. “Across the entire legal landscape – from local law centres and legal aid practices to high street conveyancers and the large corporate law firms – I have been struck by how much we all share in terms of our values and aspirations.

We are indeed one profession.”

But there is something of a sting in the tail. To represent the profession fully, the Law Society requires the active participation of its members. John is therefore keen for A&O lawyers and alumni to consider how they might do that.

“It is not all committee meetings and procedure. We have active groups lobbying on behalf of the profession, for example, in response to the Vickers report on banking. There are plenty of good networking events on an extraordinary range of subjects.

“But it is very important that we get more people involved, especially from the commercial law firms, who tend to be under-represented. It is your profession, and it needs you!”

Warming to his theme, John says: “The traditional way of delivering legal services in the high street has not always provided the best customer experience. We all hear stories of people not knowing quite what their lawyers are doing on their behalf and struggling to get a response.

“The key to me is that law firms need to see themselves as their clients see them. If the existence of ABS law firms helps to precipitate this, then that is a good thing.”

There is time to adapt, he adds. The number of firms applying to become ABSes has been comparatively small to date. Applicants have to be vetted by the Solicitors Regulatory Authority (SRA), a process which is as thorough as it is lengthy.

John believes that the Law Society itself needs to become more service-oriented and be more responsive to the requirements of its members. “The Law Society was, in my view, too rigid. My aim was to help transform it from an administrative bureaucracy that was more concerned with processes into a client-focused service organisation.”

The practical steps toward becoming more service-oriented included the establishment of a dedicated division for in-house lawyers, for which John had long been pushing. It also involved making the management structure of the Law Society simpler (divided between corporate affairs and commercial services), and creating a new board to manage the shared operation serving both the Law Society and its sister organisation, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), and to oversee the regulatory performance of the SRA.

In terms of changing its ethos, John aimed to make the Law Society a more open organisation, encouraging natural communicators to come forward. He is full of praise for the chief executive, Des Hudson, and his own successor, Lucy Scott-Moncrieff, who have helped push the reforms through.

Shortly before the end of his term of office, the Law Society issued a Declaration of Support to encourage more solicitors to put themselves forward to become judges. Within a week of its launch, 20 law firms had signed up. Among them was A&O, but with two prominent alumni – David Mackie (see Alumni Yearbook 2009) and Ed Murray – having successfully gone this route, it’s hardly surprising...
More than just a figurehead

Partner David Wootton’s term as Lord Mayor of London ran through Jubilee Year, from November 2011 to November 2012.

The eyes of the world were on David Wootton – quite literally – on 5 June 2012. He was the man, resplendent in ornate robes, who led the Queen up the steps of St Paul’s Cathedral while carrying a sword.

Not just any sword, of course. As Lord Mayor, it was David’s role to hold aloft the Pearl Sword used by Queen Elizabeth I at the opening of the Royal Exchange in 1571. It is brought out whenever the reigning monarch enters the City of London, as the Queen was that day to attend a service to mark her Diamond Jubilee.

“Afterwards, people asked me how it felt to be part of such a historic event”, David says. “To be honest, I wasn’t thinking about that. My attention was focused on putting one foot in front of another, without stumbling!” As millions of TV viewers will have seen, he succeeded with aplomb!

David, who served as Lord Mayor for the year from November 2011, did his fair share of putting on the ceremonial robes, but not as much as people assume. By his estimate, he spent about five per cent of his time wearing the full ceremonial outfit, complete with robes, chains and occasionally a hat. Another 10 per cent of the time involved wearing part of the ceremonial garb, for formal civic events.

But for the majority of the time, he was involved in business promotion, where business suits are the order of the day.

As the 684th Lord Mayor, David took as his theme for the year ‘Fit for the Future’, to emphasise that the City plays a vital role in the success of the UK economy and is essential for its development.

“I wanted to demonstrate that the City is not only interested in itself”, he notes. “I wanted the debate about the City, what has gone wrong and how we put it right, to be calm and reasoned, not histrionic and vitriolic.”

Fending off attacks

David could hardly have picked a more challenging year to be Lord Mayor. The crisis in the Eurozone, an increase in global regulations affecting financial services, the UK in recession, and Occupy UK were just a few of the issues that came up in his discussions. David feels that the City, while having to learn lessons, does not deserve the criticism. His observation is that other countries are less self-critical than the UK.

More worrying is the impression that many outside the UK have that the UK is no longer interested in promoting its financial services sector or, worse, is intent on destroying it. He found himself working hard to disabuse people of that impression instead of promoting the strengths of the City. Attacks on the City by the national media, and by Westminster politicians, have not helped the cause. “We are trying to get British politicians and the media to talk less – how shall I put this? ‘colourfully’. I was asked all the time by people on my foreign travels, ‘Does the UK want a financial services sector or not?’ I responded, ‘Of course it does’, but our task is not made any easier.”

David was certainly not fazed by having to argue his corner. “We Yorkshiremen are famed for speaking our mind. But I wanted the debate about the City, what has gone wrong and how we put it right, to be calm and reasoned, not histrionic and vitriolic.

“I think I was able to introduce some measure into the arguments, but there is still a long way to go.”

Similarly, his experience as a lawyer stood him in good stead. What he had not fully appreciated until he took up the role was the platform provided by the Mayoralty to project important messages and not simply be a figurehead. The speeches, conferences, meetings and social gatherings, which ran into the thousands (on average there were eight to ten events to attend each day), all provided opportunities to “get the message across”.

He also tried to put in place (much as John Wotton has done in the Law Society) a more seamless transition between Lord Mayors. “The Lord Mayor’s office is the only high level office held for just one year, and however hard one might try, no Lord Mayor is going to make a real difference in one year”, he reasons.

“So that makes it all the more sensible for each Lord Mayor to coordinate with predecessors and successors.”
The A&O influence

David is not the first Allen & Overy partner to be Lord Mayor. Sir Christopher Walford beat him to it by 18 years. So it was natural that David turned to him for advice before taking office.

“Christopher was very helpful”, he says, “especially advising on the local government aspects of the role, but generally preparing me for what was in store.”

What else did David take with him from his experience as an A&O partner? He responds that, as someone who has practised in the City for more than 30 years, he had already accumulated a large network of contacts. He had also worked on some of the major corporate deals over three decades which gave him a strong legal perspective on the workings of the City. But he was also clear that he did not want to be known as the “legal Lord Mayor [because] my interests in the City are much wider.”

As a corporate lawyer, David is used to managing multiple transactions. While he brought that experience with him to the role of Lord Mayor, he also acknowledges the exceptional quality of the staff at Mansion House who support the Lord Mayor.

Like John Wotton, he believes that lawyers are well suited to public service, and that more A&O lawyers, staff and alumni should seriously consider going into some form of public, social or charitable organisation, if they can. “Public service is very worthwhile, and we can use the skills we have learned at the firm for the greater good of society”, he says.

He adds: “If you had asked either John or myself a few years ago whether we would see ourselves in the positions we were in during 2012, we would both have said no. But both of us have done so, and I am pretty sure that both of us have found the experience very rewarding. I certainly have.”

All in all, it was an extraordinary year for David. To be Lord Mayor in a year which included the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee and London 2012 is “an extraordinary honour and an exceptional privilege. I have memories to last a lifetime.”

David stepped down as a partner at the end of 2012 to concentrate on promoting business links within the UK and between the UK and other countries. At least, he won’t have to worry about carrying the Pearl Sword again.
Home and Away: New York

New York through the eyes of two A&O Banking associates, one a native, the other a newcomer. Kate Barth thinks her home town is the greatest city in the world. Lien Delvoye agrees but was happy to return to Brussels at the end of her secondment. They spoke to Humphrey Keenlyside.
When I joined A&O in 2010, I had a choice of working in London or New York. I had spent a month in London and enjoyed my time in the office and living in the city. I had also lived in London as a student. But New York is where my heart is. It also happens to be the greatest city in the world.

I chose New York, and that’s where I am now.

I was born in the city itself, on 84th Street, and lived there until I was 18. Then, for 10 years, I did a lot of travelling, to Spain, Argentina, Namibia and China among other places. I let my interest in international development and Latin dance lead me through Latin America prior to law school and then seized opportunities to study law in diverse African and Asian contexts and countries. I have been back in New York for two years.

As a child, I felt I had the freedom of the city. There was always so much to do. I spent a lot of time in Central Park, which was near my school on 91st Street. The Museum of Natural History was also within easy reach and became one of my favourite places. Naturally, I made lots of friends.

Now that I have grown up, New York still offers a wealth of things to do. I love walking and spending time in Central Park. I still spend a lot of time with friends. My parents live close to the A&O office, and I can easily pop by after work.

I have a passion for the theatre, particularly musicals. My current favourite show is *Memphis* (I’m generally a sucker for big showy dance numbers set to rock-and-roll rhythms). My A&O mentor took me to see it. Having a mentor was one of the really nice things about joining the firm – it is very welcoming and certainly helps the new recruits to feel part of the A&O family.

New York is a city that stays open 24 hours a day. That’s particularly good for lawyers, since we tend to work unpredictable hours. Whatever time of day and night, there are always places to eat. I like Mexican food, but I live close to Chinatown and frequent a particularly good Chinese restaurant on my corner which sells delicious dumplings for next to nothing.

People always say that New York is a better place to visit than to live in, but I think it’s the other way around. Tourists tend to visit the obvious sites, but when you live in the city, you keep uncovering more and more great places.

Look on New York as an inter-connected web of villages, each of which has its special character. New York’s reputation as a dangerous place is long gone. The public transport is fantastic, as are New York’s celebrated yellow cabs. And thanks to Mayor Bloomberg, cycling has become easier and safer.

So my advice to anyone visiting is to get off the beaten track. If you want to see the Statue of Liberty, you don’t need to book an expensive tour: use the Staten Island Ferry. That’s what I’d do.

What I really love to do outside of work is to dance. At one point, I was even considering becoming a professional dancer, and while I was studying at the LSE in London in 2006/7, I made a little extra money teaching swing dance, hip-hop and jazz classes to fellow students. But ultimately I realised that my strength lay more in the vigour of my intellectual pursuits than the precision of my pirouettes.

Here again, New York is great for dance studios and schools, and many are open late. After a busy day, I like nothing more than to dance for a couple of hours at a studio within walking distance. My favourite styles are jazz and hip-hop. We have a few salsa aficionados in the office, and group excursions to a local salsa club are not unknown.

I also play soccer. That’s what we Americans call football. It’s interesting to note that there is more women’s soccer in the United States than in any other country. I play in a mixed league at weekends. It’s fun, of course, but you would be surprised at the networking opportunities that the sport provides.

As a junior associate, I do a mixture of project finance and banking work. I am likely to concentrate more on project finance, and particularly on the Latin American-related projects, where my Spanish is useful. I am US law-qualified, but have found on occasion the law I learned in China (where I studied for one semester as part of my JD qualification) has also proved helpful.

The New York office is very friendly. The atmosphere is informal, but of course totally professional. Partners take time to find out how people are getting on, and offer a lot of support. They get us to think like business people. They’ve encouraged us to start a practice of arranging associate drinks and inviting our friends who work in the banks and other financial institutions – the clients of the future.

We are friends as well as colleagues. On Friday evenings, after work, we often go out for a meal. New York spoils us for choice of restaurant – it’s just as well that I take all that exercise!  

Kate Barth gets a kick out of dancing and soccer.
Impossible to be lonely
Lien Delvoye, Brussels

Even before I joined in 2006, I considered the international nature of the firm (read: secondment opportunities) as one of A&O’s big selling points. From the beginning, I started name-dropping New York as an excellent secondment destination. I was interested in getting to know the US style of working, the business environment and cultural differences, and I had met some great colleagues on projects and other global off-sites.

Besides, the non-professional attraction of New York for any high-heel fanatic, twenty-something woman was obvious…

The die was finally cast in Spring 2010 when my application was approved for a six-month secondment in New York starting April 2011.

My first and continuing impression is that New York is a city on the go all the time. Once you get used to the inevitable ‘buzzing’ of New York (cars, air conditioning, sirens etc) it is an amazing feeling to live in a city that literally never sleeps. You can do almost anything at any time of day or night. As a result, you don’t sleep all that much yourself either…

However, peace and quiet are never that far away. My flat on 58th Street between 5th and 6th Avenue, provided by A&O, was within easy reach of Central Park. That became a favoured location for me. I would go for an early morning run in the park, before walking to the office. There is also a great cycling path down the western part of the city, along the Hudson and down to Battery Park, or you can admire the post-modern bird houses on the Highline.

New York has a neighbourhood for any kind of mood or activity. The West Village has amazing shops, and it’s great to mingle with the well-heeled in the Meatpacking District, but I also loved strolling around in the Lower East Side in search of a more laid-back restaurant or bar.

The cocktail culture in New York is grand, with spectacular Prohibition-style hidden cocktail bars all over town, serving the traditional Old-Fashioned and more daring combinations involving chilli and mezcal. I indulged in Asian food and oysters, and was spoiled for choice in available restaurants. I would particularly recommend Maison Première, an oyster bar in Williamsburg (Brooklyn).

I also discovered plenty of excellent places to visit near or outside the city. The Dia:Beacon museum of modern art, which is in a converted Nabisco factory, is astonishing for the range of works on display. During the summer, we often took the train out to Connecticut for the beaches.

There is always plenty of entertainment available. Central Park often had free concerts. I once saw the English band Florence and the Machine playing at the unlikely hour of 7am, when they performed on Good Morning America, which was being broadcast from the park.

The first striking difference between Brussels and New York was in the location of the offices. The Brussels office is in a converted convent outside the city centre, quite remote and peaceful, as you would expect from a former convent. The New York office is mid-town, right in the heart of the city, surrounded by high rises. I could see Times Square from my office window.

I found it incredibly easy to adjust to life in New York, and I felt I fitted in very well at the office. People invited me to drinks on my first evening and I joined some of the excellent summer trainee events, including a party in Battery Park and dessert-tasting in Little Italy.

Surprisingly, I also found myself bumping into people I knew. In my apartment building, I ran into a Dutch client who was also on secondment for six months!

It is impossible to be lonely in New York. People are always inviting you to things, and they are very used to people passing through or spending a limited time in the city. They welcome you just as much as their own friends.

If I have one piece of advice for someone about to go on secondment, it is to establish contact with your A&O colleagues before going, let them know you are coming, and ask their advice about what to do. Do the same with your friends and contacts. My experience is that people respond very well, and will go a long way to help you fit in.

My secondment was a thoroughly worthwhile experience. I got to know and work with colleagues in a different jurisdiction. I enjoyed operating in a new working atmosphere and culture, learning about new solutions to existing problems (in terms of how certain legal issues are dealt with), and being exposed to a familiar but different way of life.

It was a wonderful six months, and now that I have quite a few local friends (with sofa beds), I will definitely be going back!
“It is an amazing feeling to live in a city that literally never sleeps. You can do almost anything at any time of day or night. As a result, you don’t sleep all that much yourself either...
It takes an impressive amount of education to qualify, but some practising lawyers don’t want to stop there. Three A&O alumni who returned to the world of academia reflect on the freedoms – and privations – of academic life and where their new level of expertise leads.

The LLM student
Mirea Lynton-Grotz

My family is half-German, half-American. We lived in Germany until I was nine, then moved to China where I stayed until I was 19 and I became fluent in Mandarin. I came to the UK to study law with economics and started as a trainee at A&O in 2007, qualifying into the international arbitration group of the Litigation department.

In 2011, I left to study for an LLM at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. It’s the only university in the UK that allowed me to study Chinese law in the context of an LLM, and I also took a course in African politics. This centred my research on China’s regulation of its outbound investment, particularly in Africa.

Why did you decide to make the move into academia?

Academia is important to my family and something I enjoy, so it was certainly on the radar for me. After four and a half years at A&O, I thought, well, I’ve learned an incredible amount but it would be nice to specialise and get some academic depth and expertise in an area.
I’d become interested in Chinese investment in Africa and was seeing articles of varying quality that took a political or economic angle, but what I wasn’t seeing was any discussion of Chinese law in this context. I wanted to know how it was regulating these investments.

My research examined the whole responsible investment debate: to what extent is China trying to prevent companies from engaging in problematic behaviour? What steps do Chinese companies have to take to invest abroad, and what is the government control over these investments? If something goes wrong where you can’t use international law or host state law, can you use Chinese law as a remedy?

Of course, these are all big questions, and my LLM dissertation is only 15,000 words, but it’s part of a bigger project for me. When you read about the subject in western newspapers, investment by Chinese companies abroad is often characterised as Chinese government-controlled and part of a geopolitical masterplan, regardless of whether the companies are state-owned or private. I’m addressing various preconceptions and trying to make the debate a little more comprehensive.

What were the biggest challenges of going back to school?

It was a huge change going back to academia – it’s quite hands off and you don’t have assignments to do all the time, so a lot of it is time management, being focused and feeling like you’re keeping on track. A&O has great support for whatever you want to do, from photocopying to checking library articles, but as a student you’re pretty much on your own. Professors can be accessible, but it’s very much up to you: nobody’s going to chase you.

And of course you have big questions about what will happen in the future and an awareness that financial resources won’t last forever.

What was the best part of it?

The best part was really the freedom – freedom of schedule, freedom to sink into a subject and seek to contribute something new to an area. And there were lots of opportunities to go to interesting conferences or to meet leading experts.

What lies ahead for you?

After I finished my dissertation, my fiancé and I moved to Washington. I thought if a great research position came up, I’d take it, but I was also interested in working in a policy or legal advisory role.

What advice do you have for others thinking of a similar move?

Make sure you’re in a financial position to do this, so plan well ahead. Talk to a lot of people – institutions, but also colleagues – and discuss your career plans.

For me, it was great to have this clear research focus and to think through how the move was doing something for my career, rather than just ‘I want a break’. To leave A&O with its prestige and practical benefits, I needed to know what my purpose was. This decision needs to be part of a logical progression rather than an arbitrary move. It needs to be part of a story.
The MBA student

Geoff Bungey

I went to law school in Australia, then joined A&O in London in 2007 and worked as an associate in the Corporate M&A team. When I left in 2010, I was working with a partner, running a team and running transactions. That was exciting and I got an extraordinary amount out of it.

But I always knew, even at university, that I wanted to be involved in business. I still don't know how, but I'd like to end up in senior management or some style of entrepreneurial environment.

I went to do my MBA at INSEAD in France and in Singapore. It was amazing – the best year in my life, without question. When you’re a bit older, you appreciate studying and learning new things, and it gave me an excellent basis to become a senior manager. I actually think I would be a much better lawyer now, too.

Since then, I’ve had the opportunity to work in two online businesses. The first was Adzuna, a job aggregation website, where I worked on business development – that primarily means sales. I’m now with a 30-person start-up called Mendeley.com, a collaboration tool and social network for academics. They’ve completed a series A and now they’re doing a final big round in order to have some liquidity to take them until exit, so I’ve been helping them with strategy.

My next move is going to Australia to work as a strategy consultant for Booz & Company.

What prompted your decision to do the MBA?

I was coming up to senior associate and I felt that it was the right time because, if I stayed, I was committing to go for partnership and, even if I could get it, I wasn’t sure it was what I wanted.

I didn’t think partnership would make me happy as a career. So I wanted to make the move earlier rather than later.

What are the biggest challenges of your new roles?

I’ll be doing almost entirely quantitative work and being evaluated and judged against people who have done this their whole lives. But I’ve had the advantage of these start-up roles and the MBA, where I worked hard on things like building models and analysing data.

The other big challenge is that it’s a little difficult to take a step back to being the junior person in the team. I’ll have senior people who are younger than me who will be directing me. So I think it’s important to be humble and accept that it’s going to be hard work.

Of course, it’s been a massive financial investment. But I believe it’s an investment for the future – I feel incredibly rich for having had the opportunity to study at INSEAD.

What’s the best part of your new roles?

The best part is the opportunity to influence the direction a business is going. A lot of the work I’ve done in start-ups has been about creating something new – trying to create a sustainable and profitable business with basically nothing. It’s a big challenge – and really exciting.

What lies ahead for you?

I want to end up in senior management of a large listed company, or to be running my own entrepreneurial business. The fun is in the journey. My intermediate goal is to spend two or three years in Australia while I figure out which of those two directions I want to go in.

What advice do you have for others thinking of a similar move?

It takes a long time to make the step to an MBA and you need to prepare in advance. It took me about six months to do my tests and to write my application – and I applied only to INSEAD.

I also think it’s important to prepare yourself financially. You can get a lot more out of it if you don’t need to be so mindful of money.

The other thing is that it’s important to network with people. All my jobs have come through connections that I’ve made through networking. And part of that is maintaining your contacts at Allen & Overy.
The university professor
Chul Choi

I originally studied business administration for my BA in Seoul and did an MBA in international business and strategy. But then I changed my mind and decided to study law. I went to the UK and took LLMs in intellectual property law and international finance and banking law, before joining A&O London in 2000.

Back in Korea, my career plan had been to become a professor in management, but when I was doing my MBA in the ’90s, there was a trade dispute between the United States and Korea. The U.S. government invoked section 301 of the Trade Act to take sanctions against Korea. The sanctions had a huge impact and I was shocked to realise how important the law was, so I came to the UK to undertake legal studies. I felt that the integration of European countries would create a major opportunity for the Korean economy and almost no Koreans were qualified as English lawyers at that time.

What prompted your move back into academia?

After spending some years in London A&O, I moved to the Hong Kong office and then went on secondment to a law firm in Seoul. The original plan was that I was expected to stay there for one year.

Six months after I came back to Seoul in 2007, a new law was passed by the Korean parliament to adopt the American-style law school system – a revolutionary change. It caused serious competition among Korean law colleges to get government approval as law schools – and they needed new staff with practising experience. They approached a number of experienced lawyers, judges and prosecutors in Korea and invited them to become faculty members. And that’s what happened to me. That’s why life is so interesting!

When I got an offer from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, I thought it was a fascinating and rare opportunity for me to move into academia. Professors in Korea are well respected – they are considered neutral, so they’re invited onto a lot of committees in different sectors of society.

Another reason was that when I came back to Korea, my wife became pregnant for the first time after 12 years of marriage. So I thought, yes, it’s good to be in academia because I’ll have more time to see my baby than if I was a practising lawyer.

What are the biggest challenges of your new role?

I’m an Associate Professor of Law, specialising mainly in IP and also international finance. I also serve on the expert committee of the Presidential Council of National Intellectual Property Policy. One of my research areas is combining the finance sector with intellectual property. It’s a hugely important sector because of the rising importance of intellectual property rights as key assets for companies and for the economy, as seen in the case of Apple v Samsung.

Since it’s so new, there are not many references I can rely on so I need to look continuously into what’s happening at the moment. It’s not just theory or past history, so it is a challenge. That’s the beauty of this area.

What’s the best part of your new role?

Probably the best part of being a professor is teaching, giving lectures and discussing things with young students – it’s very refreshing.

And being in a neutral position without representing any other interests, I have good access to wider sectors of society and I meet a lot of different kinds of people.

Personally, the very best part is that I can decide my own schedule and have the liberty to choose my own area of research.

What advice do you have for others thinking of a similar move?

My story is a bit different from others – sometimes the opportunity comes quite suddenly and unexpectedly, but if you are open-minded and prepared, you can grasp it.
Three ways to keep in touch

It’s even easier to stay connected to A&O’s Alumni Network through LinkedIn and Facebook.

You can join the LinkedIn group at: Allen & Overy Alumni Network

Like us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/AllenOveryAlumniNetwork

You can also see the latest tweets from A&O on Twitter: @AllenOvery
Georgiana Capraru Ianus: “If I did it again, I’m not sure I’d choose the same punishing schedule.”
We all know how hard it is to write a CV that stands out. So it’s refreshing to read one that opens not with a straining personal statement, as some do, but with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi.

At just 27, Georgiana Capraru Ianus already has plenty of achievements to light up her own CV, but decides to start with this: ‘You must be the change you wish to see in the world.’

And as you talk to Georgiana, who left the firm in 2011 to join the European Commission’s Competition Directorate, it quickly becomes clear that these powerful words mean a great deal to this eloquent, quietly passionate but extraordinarily energetic woman.

Born in the Romanian capital, Bucharest, she set her sights on becoming a lawyer after leaving the city’s JW Goethe German school. A strong linguist – she speaks Romanian, German, English, French, some Spanish and the distinct language of her own ethnic community, Aromanian – it was perhaps inevitable that international law would appeal.

Fortunately the University of Bucharest, in partnership with the Sorbonne in Paris, offered a double degree in Romanian and French and European Law. In 2006, she completed the French/European part of the degree, achieving a Bachelor of Law from the Sorbonne. A year later, she completed the four-year Romanian law degree and added a Masters of European Business Law from the Sorbonne.

Not satisfied with the commitment involved in that, she became an Erasmus exchange student in her last year of

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Alumni spotlight

Talent, drive and a few moot points

A&O MLB scholar Georgiana Capraru Ianus explains how a simple but powerful philosophy underpins an already impressive career.

By Simon Beavis
“With competition law, you really can influence how markets work in a positive way, to the benefit of the consumer, by getting the law right.”

With competition law, you really can influence how markets work in a positive way, to the benefit of the consumer, by getting the law right.

It turns out this is an understatement. In 2007, she also took part in the International Arbitration Moot and the European Law Moot Court competitions, which involved travelling to cities across Europe and arguing cases both verbally and on paper.

But there were team and personal successes to compensate. Her teams finished in the top four in each competition, and in the European Law Moot Court competition, Georgiana was named both best advocate general in the Maastricht round and overall best speaker in the All European finals held at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

Languages spoken: English and French.

Study did not stop there. She applied successfully for an A&O scholarship to study for a Master of Law and Business in Hamburg, a programme offered by the Bucerius Law School, one of Europe’s leading law schools, and the WHU Otto Beisheim School of Management.

“A&O’s support was fabulous,” she says. It provided her with €20,000 to cover her tuition fees. A grant from Romania’s Ministry of Education helped cover her living expenses.

She also got the chance to complete a two-and-a-half month internship with the firm. Offered the chance to work in Hamburg, Paris or Brussels, she chose the latter – already clear, from early on in her studies, that competition law was for her.

David Gabathuler, a senior associate in Brussels, acted as the second supervisor for her Masters thesis, which focused on competition rules. After graduation, she was invited to join the competition team in Brussels as an associate where she worked from 2008 to February 2011. She then moved to become a case handler in the European Commission’s Competition Directorate, focusing primarily on transport, post and other services such as real estate, tourism or health services.

“I think it’s the interaction between law and economics that makes competition law so fascinating,” Georgiana says. “You’re close to business and your legal assessment is anchored in the reality of the market place. With competition law, you really can influence how markets work in a positive way, to the benefit of the consumer, by getting the law right.”

But why decide to move out of private practice, and into the (potentially) far more bureaucratic world of public service law?

“In public service, you have to take a different perspective. You have to be objective about each case and ultimately defend the consumer interest. You have to collect all the facts and make your decision based on those facts.”

There is “inevitably” a bureaucratic process in the Commission but she adds: “It’s a system you just have to manage. Often you have much less time to complete your enquiries than the public think.”

She has already been involved in important rulings in high profile airline cases. The Eurozone crisis, she admits, has seen M&A activity fall sharply from its 2007 peak, but the cases coming under scrutiny now tend to be difficult ones.

“The crisis is forcing companies in many sectors to consolidate and often it’s a matter of survival. There’s often an awful lot at stake.”

It’s a very busy time. And being in Brussels with such a time-consuming job leaves little time these days to continue her involvement with a number of NGOs back in Romania. During her school and university days, she worked with both youth projects and for a folklore group protecting the culture, song and dance of the Aromanian community, spread across much of the Balkans. Like the words of Gandhi, it enriches her CV.

So how does Georgiana try to put Gandhi’s thoughts into practice in her hectic life? It’s a tricky question and she has the chance to avoid it if she likes. But she doesn’t.

“I think what I try to do is to change anything I see in my environment which can be improved. If things can be done differently or better, I try to do it. If I can’t change things directly, then I speak up.”

There’s a short pause, and then she adds: “I don’t complain about things that I can change.”

Which, in itself, would not be a bad way to start a CV.

Alumni Yearbook 2012
“I think what I try to do is to change anything I see in my environment which can be improved. If things can be done differently or better, I try to do it.”

“It’s the interaction between law and economics that makes competition law so fascinating.”
A word before you start
If you want to write a novel, you’ll find no shortage of advice but I suspect that the number of books available on how to write a law book must be rather few. In fact, I have never heard of such a publication, although there is no shortage of schoolish admonitory dissertations on drafting, which seems to be considered a separate subject from actually writing anything.

This state of affairs must result from the laws relating to demand and supply. Sometimes I think that practically everyone I know has confessed at some point to writing a Great Work of Fiction. So there is much demand for how to do it and, as a project, writing a work of fiction is a low-entry job not requiring any particular qualification.

It is, however, hard to make your mark in fiction. I believe that around 200 works of fiction are published in the UK and the US in English every day. Publishing industry authorities normally say fewer than one per cent of manuscripts sent to agents and publishers make it into print, so one’s chances of getting heard in the field of fiction are rather low, not much above winning the lottery.

On the other hand, if you truly want to write a law book and actually do write a law book, there are so few people who last the course that, if you do, your chances of publication are high, if you can live with the thought that your book might not actually be read by somebody, a possibility which cannot be overrated.

There are two fundamental questions which I have found an author has to deal with right upfront. These two questions are nothing to do with content or the data which you collect, organise and synthesise. The first fundamental question is the issue of style, which comes down to answering the question “who are you writing for?”

My approach was to write as if I was explaining something to somebody who had the experience and technical knowledge of a first year trainee, that is somebody who knew what the law of contract was but not much else. The advantage of this approach is that the author has to work out how to explain things simply, which is generally a good discipline in any event. This is one reason why I often find that student books are better than others in any field, from economics to history and science, as well as law. The author’s objective is to elucidate, not to show off or display membership of a secret esoteric cult, or to waffle.

The fact that you are explaining something drives the style. Any student of literature will know there are many literary styles, from heroic epic at the top down to the vulgar limerick at the bottom, with a huge range of tones in between. Although it is hard to do, it is worth thinking about...
mixing styles, eg switching between the tones of a spoken address (which is the usual approach in a technical book) into vernacular which creates a sense of surprise, or switching the other way from classical evenness up to the rotund grand resonances. Images are always powerful, provided they are not clichéd. It seems a pity that books on legal drafting do not actually deal with these possibilities, but instead are mainly directed towards ‘keeping it clear’, whatever that means.

The second fundamental issue is format. A large part of the work involved in writing a law book is not gathering the data but editing it and dealing with the mechanics of language. For example, do you say “by way of illustration” or “by way of example” or do you say “eg” and, if you do say the latter, do you have stops or no stops?

How much signposting do you put in by way of headings and how many levels of headings do you have? I would say as few as possible. What is the point at which slab text becomes too fragmented and unconnected bits? Should you have many cross-references (no)?

If you do not sort out these mechanical considerations at the beginning, they become obstacles to actually getting things done quickly and consume much of the effort.

It is usually best to write the first chapter last instead of trying to get it in all at once.

There are other things too. For example, it is not a good idea to use acronyms unless they are really standard, such as the US or the EU. There are several reasons for this. In the first place, capital letters scream from the page. Secondly, if you are writing for an international audience, you are using an unfamiliar orthography. Thirdly, using acronyms makes the text opaque and gives the reader the sense that you have to belong to some special club to be able to understand these abbreviations.

I am in a tiny minority in never using footnotes. Indeed, in the nine books which I published on the law and practice...
of international finance in 2007-8, there is not a single footnote. I am not going to add to the already sumptuous and disputatious literature about the footnote, other than to say that I personally find it most tiring when an author writes a book in two places at once and when physically your eye has to flick to the bottom of the page and then hunt around for where you were in the text to resume the reading.

Instead, I include in the text what others might put in footnotes, because of course people want citation. It is much quicker for the eye to travel over something which is obviously a case or statutory citation instead of having to pick up the incessant babble at the bottom of the page. Sometimes this babble is so overbearing that the text itself can hardly creep through at the top of the page, strangled and suffocated by the rising tide of names, numbers and clever asides in small writing down below.

I did think of putting a footnote right at the end of the last of the nine books. It would have said: “Thank God that’s over”, but I felt even that would pollute the purity of my position.

It is for this reason that I rarely write for American law journals unless my ‘no footnote’ rule is agreed in advance, an agreement which is difficult to obtain. They are addicts.

I can quite understand why people want to write novels, but why would anyone want to write a law book?

If you want to make any money, I have news for you, even if your law book is top of the publisher’s sales list. If you want glory, there are many other easier and more effective ways of achieving this ambition.

To tell you the truth, I really don’t know why I ever got into writing law books outside my day job. It just does not make sense in terms of costs/benefits or in terms of any aim in life which is rational and measurable. For me, I suppose I was just trying to explain things to myself.
They’re jocularly called ‘boomerangs’ – alumni who return to the firm – and A&O has welcomed many of them over the years. Whether they rejoin in a similar or different capacity, they tend to fit effortlessly into the corporate culture and mindset. Does coming back work both ways? Recent ‘boomerangs’ Akshata Cooke, Tracey Jepson and James Mills offer their views on the subject to Jenny Enever.
Tell us about your time at A&O in London.

A&O has always had a special feel to it. The people are professional but friendly and that’s what sets it apart. When I joined, I was lucky to be part of a close-knit intake; many of us are still in touch and remain the closest of friends.

I qualified into the ICM department, working for Andrew Wilson. We did a mixture of general capital markets, repackaging work and some project finance work. It was always varied and interesting.

I also had the opportunity to go on two short client secondments, firstly with the transaction management group at Merrill Lynch (as it was known at the time), and secondly with the legal team at Citibank’s alternative investments strategy group. Both secondments provided valuable insight as to what working in-house was about.

What made you decide to leave A&O?

A former colleague who had left the firm in 2001 for UBS legal told me that the in-house team was looking for an additional capital markets lawyer.

Although I wasn’t actually looking to leave A&O at the time, I realised that I had to make a realistic decision about my future, particularly as I had just got married and I knew that I would at some point want to start a family. I felt that working in-house would provide a more beneficial work/life balance and, having enjoyed my two client secondments so much, I knew that I would still have the chance to work on exciting and high-profile deals.

Tell us about your role at UBS.

I joined the Transactions legal team in UBS and started off with mainstream capital markets work. However, it wasn’t long before I started to specialise in the emerging markets – most of my work in the following seven years focussed on executing bond transactions for entities in Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

The work was challenging and exciting and I still had the chance to work with former colleagues in ICM at A&O, which was great.

I liked the fact that I was involved in deals from the outset. There was often a considerable amount of work being done before the deal was outsourced to a law firm, something I had never appreciated at A&O. I was also more involved in commercial decisions and got to see the big picture of a deal rather than just working on small parts of it.

How and why did you return to work for A&O in Hong Kong?

When my youngest son started preschool, I started to think that it might be good to get back into the workplace, but I didn’t feel ready to return to work full-time. Part-time work in Hong Kong is pretty non-existent, so when a legal recruitment friend sent me the A&O job spec for a qualified lawyer to work part-time in the training department, I jumped at the chance, not least because it meant coming back to A&O.

How does your experience help you back at A&O today?

Working in the training department means that my role is a support function rather than fee earning. I think my legal background has proved useful in planning what in-house seminars would be beneficial for the fee earners and what would be interesting and relevant for the various departments.

Do you see any significant changes to A&O after a decade?

The firm still retains that open door and friendly atmosphere that attracted me to it in the first place. Some of the partners were colleagues of mine when I was in London so I don’t feel that it’s all new and scary. I’m very lucky that Andrew Harrow (current head of ICM Asia Pacific) is in the Hong Kong office too. He was my trainer in the Singapore office when I did my last seat there in 1997 and has been incredibly helpful and supportive.

The main changes I’ve noticed have been more in technology – Omnia was only just being introduced when I left A&O, so filing was still very much paper-based and we didn’t have BlackBerrys either.

What’s the best thing about living in Hong Kong?

Hong Kong is such a vibrant and exciting city and I love it (except maybe when it’s so humid and polluted outside you can hardly breathe). Compared to London, life in Hong Kong is easier; for example, the commutes are shorter. I now think a 45-minute journey in Hong Kong is really far!

Most people have some form of help at home which, at least in my case, has proved invaluable especially now that I have two young boys. It means that babysitting is not an issue so I can still go out in the evenings and enjoy Hong Kong’s fantastic restaurants. Hong Kong is also a great place for hiking and walking.

I miss my friends back in the UK; that for me is the main drawback of being here, but we do try to go back every year.

If you were to start a new career, what else would you do?

As a child, I wanted to be an astronaut (yes really!) and then a surgeon, but unfortunately sciences were never my forte. I don’t regret any of the decisions I have made in my career; I consider myself very lucky to have had the opportunity to work with some fantastic people and to have made some very good friends along the way.
How was your time in the London office?
I first arrived at A&O after a backpacking holiday around the world during which, incidentally, I had met my husband in Australia.

I was offered a job in the Leveraged Finance department in Banking, otherwise known as B3. I spent the next decade working as a group secretary and senior legal PA in the delightful New Change building before moving to Bishops Square.

A&O was a much smaller firm back then. We were very busy and many times were working late into the night. However, the promise of a freshly cooked roast dinner in the staff canteen always made it worthwhile.

My fondest memories are of the many finance dinners and Christmas parties. I'll never forget the vision of Jonathan Horsfall-Turner dressed up as Father Christmas each year handing out the Secret Santa presents from his huge black sack.

The highlight of my time in the London office was attending the Global Banking Partners Conference in Marbella, Spain, which I helped organise. It was wonderful to meet so many global partners and be part of this great ‘coming together’ of personalities. At the time, I was five months pregnant with my first child and was slightly perturbed at not being able to partake in the free bar!

What made you decide to leave A&O?
My husband and I had discussed emigrating to Australia for some time and we finally decided to take the plunge in 2008. We wanted to make the move while our two sons were young enough to adapt and so that they wouldn’t object too much.

There must be an interesting story behind your decision.
We were initially unsure where to start our new life in Australia. We didn’t have friends or family there and it’s such a large and diverse country, which makes it difficult to choose where to settle. My husband favoured Perth and I favoured the east coast. Eventually we decided on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland.

What challenges have you faced in emigrating?
Queensland has some large and deadly beasts lurking around and some rather scary animals too. I don't think I'll ever get used to the size of the spiders here, or having snakes in your back garden. The Aussie lingo can also be quite challenging at times but once you understand that ‘rubber thongs’ are worn on your feet and not as dodgy underwear and that ‘snags’ and ‘tinnies’ are consumed at ‘barbies’ you can’t go wrong!

What’s the best thing about emigrating to Australia?
Being able to spend the weekends down at the beach without freezing to death! If I am feeling homesick, a few minutes sitting under a palm tree breathing in the fresh air and listening to the waves of the Pacific Ocean lapping on the golden sand soon reminds me why I left the UK.

How and why did you return to work for A&O?
We had been running a fencing business in Queensland for two years, but ran into difficulties following the floods in 2010. My husband was keen to get into the mining industry, and as the Queensland mines were all under water, we decided to try our luck in Perth, Western Australia, where work was plentiful and A&O was hiring. It was wonderful to be part of the A&O family again and to be in a position to share my knowledge with my new colleagues in the Perth office as they had only been operating for seven months when I arrived.

What are the greatest differences between the London and Perth offices?
There is certainly some adjustment needed when working in a small office such as Perth, especially after spending 12 years on the ‘Mother Ship’. I was overwhelmed by everyone’s friendliness and their hands-on approach to work and I also enjoyed the diversity of my role. The opportunity to reconnect with my former colleagues back in London has been great and just goes to show how small the world is becoming, or maybe, more to the point, how large A&O has become!

What advice would you give others thinking of making a life-changing decision to move abroad?
It’s harder than you think. It takes at least two years to adjust to a new lifestyle, so don’t give up too early. Be prepared to do something different and take risks.

What are your future plans?
We’ve decided to return to the Sunshine Coast as we really miss our friends and the laid-back lifestyle of Queensland. It was a hard decision as we’ve been amazed by everyone’s kindness here but our hearts are back on the sunny coast. However, if A&O ever opens an office in Brisbane, or, even better, the Sunshine Coast, I’ll be the first to apply!
Sydney and back

James Mills joined A&O’s London office in 2004 as a corporate associate in the Insurance team. He went home to Australia in 2006 and rejoined Freebills. After just 19 working days, and a few thousand dollars out of pocket, James returned to London, reuniting with A&O and his colleagues in the Insurance team for a further four years. Today, he is Legal Counsel at RSA Insurance Group in London.

Tell us about your time at A&O.

It was a great experience personally and professionally and shaped me into the lawyer I am today. Being surrounded by such professional and hard working people encourages you to raise your game.

I made lifelong friends and regularly get together with fellow alumni Paul Koffel and Michael Brown, as well as former colleagues still at A&O – Philip Jarvis, Kate Mcinerney and Andrew Barton to name a few. While, for various reasons, the time was right for me to move on from A&O, it was still a tough decision. As any A&O alumnus knows, it’s a big part of your life.

The best thing about my role in the Insurance Group was working across all of A&O’s offices and practice areas on up to 30 matters at any given time, so it was extremely varied and interesting.

One of my greatest professional achievements was working with the UK Government and members of the insurance industry in putting together a new Trade Credit Insurance Scheme in the space of one month following the collapse of the retailer Woolworths. I also worked with complex multinational organisations such as Nokia and Barclays. Now I see that what was considered controversial and ‘innovative’ (one of the more polite descriptions from one insurer) at the time is now considered standard market practice.

What made you decide to leave A&O first time around?

We both realised very early on that moving back was the wrong decision and that London was where we wanted to be. It wasn’t that we didn’t like being back in Sydney; we simply missed our London friends, the lifestyle and our local North London community, as well as the work that we had both been doing. So, we decided to put up our hands, admit we’d made the wrong decision and set the wheels in motion to move back to London as soon as possible.

I was fortunate to be offered my job back – although I’m sure I could hear Philip Jarvis’s laughter down the phone – and as a senior associate.

What are the main challenges you have faced in emigrating?

It took me a while to get used to everyone else starting work so late in the day. A typical day for me – even after years of living and working in London – starts at 5.15am. I’m usually at my desk working by 7.30am. I enjoy the peace and quiet in the morning, so long may Londoners stay in their beds during the best part of my day.

Of course it’s hard at first being so far away from your friends and family, but it gets easier as time goes on and you make new friends, work out what’s what and who’s who (and that when a utility company or cable TV provider tells you they’ll be at your flat between 7am and noon they don’t say which time-zone this refers to). You get into a routine that fits the pace of the city around you.

You are now Legal Counsel at RSA in London. What is it like working for one of the leading insurance groups?

I’d been advising RSA for years so I was reasonably familiar with the company, the people and its culture – indeed it was one of the things that attracted me. An in-house legal role, while certainly no less challenging, is different. It takes time to get used to a new working environment and to understand and appreciate how the work you do can best contribute to the needs of the business – and indeed what the business expects of you.

One of the biggest challenges I face on a daily basis is the fact that, while I am an insurance lawyer by trade and RSA is a company that sells insurance, many of the legal issues it faces are non-insurance related – those A&O lunchtime training sessions listening to Richard Rowland and Don McGown while chomping my way through the ‘age of austerity’ sandwich boxes have finally paid off.

It’s also a bit of a rude shock to discover that you no longer have the luxury of being able to send out advice subject to ‘commercial decision for the client’ type caveats.

What are your future plans?

RSA is expanding worldwide, so it’s a business that is constantly changing. If the opportunity were to arise, I’d be more than happy to consider working anywhere in the world. Of course, I would never say never to a return to Australia either.
Share your story

The A&O Story isn’t complete. Help fill in the blanks by sharing your most memorable A&O moment or telling fellow alumni about the significant milestones that have shaped your office’s history.

Send in your photos or volunteer to be interviewed by emailing thehistoryproject@allenovery.com

Access the A&O Story, the firm’s history portal, at www.allenovery.com/alumni
Pallavi Sekhri was just a teenager when, in 1994, TV news bulletins across the world began showing shocking images of the Rwanda genocide in which an estimated 800,000 people died.

“I was aware of the genocide, but I was very young at the time. It seemed very brutal and sad, but very distant”, she says. She obviously had no idea that, 18 years later, the Rwandan capital Kigali would be her home and that she would be working at the heart of a programme of reconciliation and reconstruction that has seen the country transformed in recent years.

A place of stunning natural beauty known affectionately as ‘the land of a thousand hills’, the East African country – barely larger than Wales – has won international admiration for clawing its way back from a period of war and anarchy.

It is now widely seen as one of Africa’s most stable and forward-looking nations, successfully charting its own course toward economic development and political reform. But many, many challenges remain.

Pallavi’s first real introduction to the country came during her six years with Allen & Overy, which she joined as a trainee in 2005, later becoming an associate in the litigation and arbitration department.

Always interested in pro bono work, she leapt at the opportunity in 2008 when A&O alumnus Judge David Mackie QC

Alumni spotlight

Developing ideas

Six years at A&O allowed Pallavi Sekhri to play a lead role in launching the firm’s acclaimed Project Rwanda. Now, using her legal skills, she is working in Kigali as a foreign policy adviser and planning to use fashion to empower Rwandan women.

By Simon Beavis

Pallavi Sekhri was just a teenager when, in 1994, TV news bulletins across the world began showing shocking images of the Rwanda genocide in which an estimated 800,000 people died.

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To read more alumni profiles, log on to www.allenovery.com/alumni
Pallavi Sekhri: “I wasn’t turning my back on my legal career, but I realised where my specialism now lay.”
“I wanted to get a broader understanding of development, foreign affairs and diplomacy. I wanted to really understand how a developing country works, how it goes about devising a foreign policy and how it looks forward and plans for the future.”

came to A&O looking for someone to carry out research into Rwanda’s legal system after he’d been commissioned by a legal NGO to explore how the profession could help in the country’s development.

What she found was another painful example of the wreckage left by the genocide. In the immediate aftermath, there were fewer than ten practising lawyers in the country, the courts were destroyed or abandoned, the rule of law extinguished.

Her report showed that rebuilding the legal system had already been made a priority. A new cadre of lawyers had begun practising (there are some 600 today) and a new law school had been set up.

But the need for modern, standardised legal training was obvious, not least in the commercial law sector which is so important to Rwanda in attracting much-needed foreign investment.

Here was somewhere A&O felt it could add value. It started doing this remotely, creating training materials and supplying legal textbooks, but it soon became clear that much more could be achieved if A&O lawyers could actually work on the ground.

Pallavi successfully pitched the idea that she should go with a colleague to carry out a needs assessment. Following three weeks in the country meeting all the legal institutions, and many judges and politicians, she came back with a smarter and more developed plan which became Project Rwanda.

“It was quite surprising that they weren’t always aware of all the resources and assistance available to them, but very relevant to the work happening out there – like using standard clauses in public private partnerships, or legal practice resources like PLC for instance. These were the kinds of things I just wouldn’t have known about if I hadn’t worked at A&O, and I realised I took for granted”, she says.

In 2010, Pallavi was one of ten A&O lawyers – from trainee up to partner level – who went to Rwanda to carry out intense training. In just two weeks, they taught some 200 lawyers and judges aspects of litigation, arbitration and corporate law. Similar missions have been run since, but the idea was always to make the project self-sustaining, she says – to hand over the baton to the Rwandan legal training institutions after four or five years.

After six “transformative and valuable” years with A&O, Pallavi felt pulled towards getting more deeply involved in development work – something she has always been interested in. “I wasn’t turning my back on my legal career, but I realised where my specialism now lay. I had gained a real understanding of Rwanda, its goals and priorities, and I had a great network of professional contacts and friends there.

“I wanted to get a broader understanding of development, foreign affairs and diplomacy. I wanted to really understand how a developing country works, how it goes about devising a foreign policy and how it looks forward and plans for the future.”

She secured a six-month contract working as a diplomatic adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, supporting Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo and Permanent Secretary Mary Baine, two strong role models for her. “They are both powerful, beautiful women”, she says. “It’s a real pleasure to work with them.”

She says her A&O training was pivotal to her getting the role, not least her drafting skills, her ability to handle a heavy workload at speed – “to work like a machine”, she jokes – and to negotiate hard with commercial contacts such as external consultants commissioned by the ministry.

Her job is about capacity building and modernising the ministry. Apart from being fully involved in the day-to-day running of the department, she has helped coordinate Rwanda’s bid to become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, helped draft a revised foreign policy and strategic plan, and carried out an assessment of the ministry’s future needs.

Another part of her job is promoting the image of Rwanda. She used her media contacts back in London to persuade the BBC to make two documentaries, currently in production, on tourism and the empowerment of Rwandan women.

Was her desire to work in development always there? “Having been born in India and coming to the UK when I was eight, I had a real awareness of the contrast between developed and developing
“Any job I do, I’d be happy to do it for free and, if not, then I change.”

countries”, she says. “I was always mindful of what it means to live in poverty. “It was a goal to work in development. But I wanted to first make use of all the resources in the UK and the world-class training at A&O – to equip myself with the knowledge, tools and the relationships to really add value through my work in developing countries.”

Her philosophy is simple. “Any job I do, I’d be happy to do it for free and, if not, then I change.” She cites the advice of Bill Gates to anyone wanting to do development work: “Just go and be a witness. You don’t need lots of money; look at the resources you have inside your current life already.”

Her next goal is to move from advising to implementing aspects of foreign policy through actual economic development. While in Kigali, she has begun designing beautiful handbags and totes made of Rwanda leather and fabrics. The next step is to see if she can develop the designs and work with a women’s cooperative to manufacture them.

It’s a long journey from city lawyer to ethical fashion designer but, as Pallavi talks about her ideas, a clear logic emerges. “What makes the biggest difference in development is giving people the chance to work and make money. I learned at A&O that the private sector has a big opportunity to make a big difference”, she says.

So what has been the starkest impression she has gained of Rwanda over the years? “If I’m honest, it came when I visited refugee camps in the region and saw the contrast between a country trying to get back on its feet and achieve stability and the realities of so many people who live in states of anarchy, hunger and insecurity. That shook me to the core – seeing what Rwanda could have been.

“It’s a spectacularly beautiful country working hard to make a future for itself. It has come on in leaps and bounds. It was the poorest country in the world in the direct aftermath of the genocide. Today, it is one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

“Rwanda is in the midst of an inspiring and ambitious reconstruction process. It is not only exciting, but also an honour to be part of this process.”
Hope for the future: “Aid doesn’t have to mean dependence.”
To support A&O’s fundraising efforts for AfriKids, please visit http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/allenover1

Northern Ghana is one of the poorest parts of the world. Families struggle to survive. Street children are particularly vulnerable, at risk of being trafficked to other parts of West Africa as child labour.

Turning this situation around is the goal of a charity called AfriKids. In May 2012, AfriKids became Allen & Overy’s new global charity partner on the strength of a vote by staff around the world.

That was how, in October, 40 people from 21 A&O offices found themselves travelling to Bolgatanga, a market town in the far north of Ghana, to take on the ‘Experience Challenge’ in aid of AfriKids. The participants, including senior partner David Morley and managing partner Wim Dejonghe, spent the week witnessing the work of AfriKids in the region. They spent three days and nights with a Ghanaian family to experience first-hand ‘the real Africa’.

“We’ve never done anything on this scale before,” says partner and head of social investment Susan Hazledine, another participant in the Experience Challenge. “But we wanted to show our commitment to AfriKids right from the start.”

Over the next two years, A&O has set itself an ambitious fundraising target of £250,000, most of which will support the AfriKids Next Generation Home in Bolgatanga.

**A remarkable home**

The Next Generation Home supports children living on the street. It houses around 30 children from as young as three up to 20 years of age. AfriKids aims to resettle children back with their own families or with foster families, but some are permanent residents. For all of the children, the home is a safe haven where they receive care, counselling and access to education and healthcare.

In addition to the permanent residents, the Next Generation Home provides a refuge for 70 other children at any one time. It offers street children a safe place to sleep where they can take advantage of the services provided.

If A&O reaches its fundraising targets, AfriKids will be able to take 200 children off the streets each year, provide support to a further 1,000 family members, and run extensive education programmes that will reach 10,000 more young people.

On top of fundraising activities, A&O is providing pro bono support to scale up AfriKids’ existing microfinance work into a fully-fledged institution that will benefit more than 5,000 women in Ghana, and eventually establish itself as a self-funding entity.

A&O is also helping AfriKids to produce materials on the Ghana Children’s Act and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for the students and teachers of AfriKids’ network of child rights clubs.

Says Susan: “One of the unique things about AfriKids, and something I think resonated with A&O people, is its aim to close its UK operations in 2018. “Many of the projects AfriKids has set up, like the Next Generation Farm, are designed to generate enough money to continue funding projects like the Next Generation Home for as long as they’re needed in the future. Key to AfriKids is the belief that aid doesn’t have to mean dependence. There’s an end goal in sight.”
Global firm – global action

AfriKids is A&O’s second global charity partner, following a successful three-year relationship with the British Red Cross. During that time, A&O contributed to the development of a new Model Law on disaster relief that aims to speed up the delivery of vital aid in the aftermath of natural disasters. A&O also helped the Red Cross to create an educational resource to teach school children about international humanitarian law and the concepts of fairness and justice.

Over the course of the relationship, A&O staff raised and donated more than £600,000 for the Red Cross’s work around the world.

“We’ve always had strong relationships with charities at a local level across our network,” says Susan, “and will of course continue to do so.

“But having a global partnership where everyone in the firm is pulling together on fundraising and volunteering delivers something really quite significant for a charity – something that we hope has a lasting impact. It’s also a great way to make our people around the world feel they’re working together toward something tangible.”

Susan hopes that all 50 Experience Challenge participants have returned from Ghana as “enthusiastic ambassadors” for AfriKids, and will encourage others in their offices to raise funds to support the charity.

“I was blown away after my first trip to Ghana,” says Susan. “The work AfriKids has already done there is incredible; children who were taken off the streets and brought to the Next Generation Home with literally nothing – many in a terrible state – are now thriving. They have bright futures and so do their families. “But the poverty in Northern Ghana is extreme. There’s so much more for AfriKids to do. We’re off to a great start and I just hope we reach our fundraising targets and can deliver what they’re hoping for from us.”

To support A&O’s fundraising efforts for AfriKids, please visit http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/allenovery1

Project Rwanda, three years on

You may remember alumnus Judge David Mackie QC telling us, back in the 2009 Alumni Yearbook, about the launch of Project Rwanda. This was a major pro bono initiative which sought to support Rwanda in its changes to the legal system and in securing increased foreign investment on pro-development terms.

Three years on, A&O continues to bring our collective legal and commercial skills to our partnership in Rwanda. Alumnus Paul Crook and A&O partner Stephen Denyer are among those involved with Project Rwanda. You can read their personal account by logging on to www.allenovery.com/alumni where you can also hear more about the training underway to equip Rwanda’s commercial lawyers for the transition from a civil to a common law system.
On target: A&O fund-raising will enable AfriKids to run extensive education programmes to help children like those pictured with A&O’s Katharine Taylor (left).
These are a selection of the tributes to former A&O and alumni colleagues and friends. To read the full obituaries, visit the alumni website at www.allenovery.com/alumni.

In memoriam

A significant influence on modern-day A&O

John Kennedy

John Kennedy, former senior partner of the firm between 1986 and 1994, played a significant role in shaping the modern-day Allen & Overy. He oversaw a doubling of the firm’s size, expansion of its presence across Europe and Asia, and an overhaul of its administration. John died at the age of 78 on 24 September 2012.

A man whose kindness and support was legendary, he began his career with A&O at the end of the 1950s with what could well be one of the briefest employment interviews ever. Former senior partner Godfrey Morley confessed to John that he wasn’t quite sure what to ask him, but then opted for the straightforward question: “Where do you live?” When Kennedy gave him the address (Lennox Gardens), Morley replied: “That’s fine. When can you start?” John joined A&O in 1957 and was only 27 at the time of being made a partner.

John was responsible for landing one of the most important clients the firm has ever had, the Saudi Arabian state oil company, Petromin. Not for the first time in the firm’s history, being in the right place at the right time was an important factor, as he related: “One day in 1962, I happened to be in the office of Courtaulds, advising Alliance (an A&O client); in another part of the building, representatives of the Saudi Arabian Oil Ministry were meeting with Courtaulds to discuss some deal and had got to a stage in the negotiations where they had to bring in lawyers.

“Courtaulds said, ‘Who are your lawyers in London?’ The Saudis said, ‘We haven’t got any.’ Courtaulds’ lawyer said, ‘There is an English lawyer in the building at the moment. Would you like to meet him?’ I was summoned and introduced to these Saudis. I was sufficiently suspicious to demand what was then a large sum of money as payment on account, £1,000. They agreed, and a week later I was in Riyadh.”
Petromin became a highly valued client over the next decade. More than that, the firm established a foothold in the Middle East at a perfect time, which enabled it to capitalise on the surge in the region’s fortunes in the early 1970s.

It was while on business in Saudi Arabia that another chance meeting of John’s proved to be more than profitable. While waiting to fly from Jeddah to London, he was asked by the person sitting next to him whether he had anything to counter an upset stomach (one of the hazards of doing business in the Middle East in those days). From the medicine bag which he always carried, John produced the necessary antidote. The much-relieved passenger turned out to be Adolf Brändle, visiting Saudi Arabia for the Union Bank of Switzerland. As the two chatted on the return flight, it transpired that UBS was hoping to set up an operation in London to manage Eurobond issues. Another of John’s cards changed hands, and the upshot was that A&O clinched a new client. UBS remains an extremely important client to this day.

His medicine bag was not enough to come to the rescue of John himself a few years earlier. In August 1972, he was advising the Spanish company Rumasa, owner of the sherry producer Williams & Humbert. The managing director of W&H had a farm outside Jerez at which he bred bulls for fighting. The Kennedy family visited this farm and, after a demonstration by professional bull fighters, John was enticed into the ring by his children to try his hand. Something about him must have antagonised the bull because he was caught and gored in the thigh, as the professionals around the ring came too late to his rescue. He spent several days in hospital in Jerez and was to be seen limping round the City with a stick for a couple of weeks.

Another of John’s clients was the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA). By dint of being the Saudi central bank, SAMA became, for a period, probably the world’s most important financial organisation as the Middle East became invested with power it had not previously had, with Saudi Arabia, the region’s largest oil producer, centre stage. Almost overnight, unimaginably large sums of ‘petrodollars’ were recycled by SAMA in the international markets through an extensive programme of loans to governments, foreign corporations and European banks. A&O was at the heart of this massive operation, as John was instructed to do all the documentation.

John was made senior partner in 1986. His eight-year term was characterised by an expanding network of offices across Europe and Asia and an overhaul of the firm’s administration – including the appointment of the first managing partner. Over a five-year period under his guidance, the firm also doubled in size. “Becoming senior partner was a bit of a shock because I was rather young, only 52,” John reflected. “I thought I could be senior partner in the morning and carry on with my practice in the afternoon. It didn’t quite work out that way.”

John is survived by his wife, Margaret (Marge), and four sons, Simon, Alexander, David and Hamish.

“I thought I could be a senior partner in the morning and carry on with my practice in the afternoon. It didn’t quite work out that way.”
Tributes to John Kennedy

John was senior partner when I became a partner in 1988. In those days, there was no discernible partnership selection process, communication or discussion (other than behind closed doors in a partners’ meeting). You either received a call from John to invite you to become a partner or you didn’t. Even to ask whether you had prospects was enough to disqualify you in the eyes of some partners. Fortunately for me, I didn’t ask the wrong questions and did get the call. John was gruffly welcoming. I felt privileged and do to this day.

He was a serious, thoughtful man with an often intent expression. He loved the firm, its clients and its characters. His face would light up when he recounted stories of some indiscretion by a member of staff, a sticky situation encountered by a client or a pompous memo from a partner.

Many partners have mentioned to me the personal kindness and support he extended to them at difficult times. He cared very deeply about A&O and its people and devoted his whole professional life to serving the firm. After he retired, he was a regular attendee of our annual London retirees’ lunch. He enjoyed the company of his former partners and staff and liked to keep up to date with the latest firm news (and gossip).

He was a great partner and senior partner. He will be very much missed by everyone who knew him.

David Morley, senior partner, London

As a founding member of the original ICM Group, he played a key part in building our practice and developing very strong relationships with a number of key clients. As senior partner, he was always open to hear, and support if convinced, proposals for new initiatives which, at the time, were very progressive.

Bryan Wills, partner, London

By the time I qualified, John (or JMK, as he was known) was one of the most senior partners, and had built a formidable client base and reputation. In particular he had grown (with Tony Herbert and Richard Sykes) a leading ‘Eurobond’ practice (the forerunner of ICM today); they had virtually all the classic ‘Merchant Banks’ (as they were known pre-Big Bang) eating out of their hands.

Thereafter, John became senior partner and oversaw the slow process of turning a traditional partnership into a more transparent business model, a process which continues to this day.

Richard Cranfield, partner, London

John was a formidable practitioner, one of the most famous and influential lawyers in the City, commanding amazing connections. He was a superb negotiator, measured in his judgments, decisive in his convictions and a font of common sense. When he was made senior partner, I expect other City firms heaved a sigh of relief that they would not have to face him across the table.

He was a man of principles and integrity and a great and loyal friend.

Philip Wood, special global counsel, London

John was approachable and, to someone like me almost straight out of law school, amazingly knowledgeable, pragmatic and helpful. Whatever question you might have, you could go along and pick his brains; you could confess to being at a complete loss. And of course, as you got to know him better, none of these discussions would go by without endless jokes and anecdotes, some more believable than others.

Tony Herbert, consultant and former managing partner, London

Nobody used silence as effectively as John in negotiations. The lawyer for the other side would make a point. John would either say nothing or give a very brief response – and then wait and see what happened. He understood how uncomfortable some people are with silence. Often it would result in his adversary saying far more than he should or conceding points that he didn’t need to – just to end the discomfort.

As the years passed, my fear disappeared, leaving only the warmth and the admiration.

Jonathan Brayne, partner, London

As a very junior associate, I was asked to drop some papers off to JMK (who was then the senior partner of the capital markets group) at his home one evening. Instead of just taking the envelope from me with a curt thanks (as would have been the norm back in the 1970s) he insisted I come in and have a drink with him and his wife, Marge. Several enormous gin and tonics later, I lurched off into the night. It was typical of John that he took such an interest in a very lowly member of his team and showed him such hospitality and warmth.

Paul Monk, former partner, London, Dubai, Hong Kong and Tokyo

John Kennedy was the cliché ‘perfect gentleman’ personified. I remember, at one of the dinner dances, he said to the whole firm assembled there, “In a way we are all lawyers.” It was an inclusive and heart-warming thing to say to all those people who weren’t lucky enough to have had the opportunity to become one. I’ve never forgotten that sentence or his gentle, kind manners.

Caron Palmer, former legal PA, London

In 1980, we (that is, SG Warburg, Paribas and our US affiliate, Warburg Paribas Becker) won a mandate to raise equity internationally for a new biotech company, Biogen SA.

I had known and worked with John previously and knew he would make the perfect addition to the team.

The project took over some two years to complete – the princely sum of just over US$20 million was raised. John’s imagination, flexibility, common sense and staying power were part of the winning formula. He proved to be a tough negotiator but was someone who was equally respected by his client, by the company and its legal team of high experienced Boston-based lawyers.

Anthony Brooke, a former director of SG Warburg & Co, and a client of John Kennedy and Allen & Overy

“He cared very deeply about A&O and its people and devoted his whole professional life to serving the firm.”

For full obituaries, please visit www.alenovery.com/alumni

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Katie Compson

Katie Compson joined A&O's London office as a trainee in September 2002 and qualified in September 2004 into the London Leveraged Finance team. Katie died on 11 November 2011 after a long and spirited battle with cancer. She was 33.

As part of her training, she spent six months in the Milan office. Then, in March 2008, she went on a business trip to Hong Kong – and never came back. She enjoyed Asia so much that she transferred to a permanent position in the Hong Kong office in August 2008.

Not one to rest on her laurels, Katie relocated to the Tokyo office in March 2009 and ‘conquered’ Japan. She embraced Japanese culture, reversed her opinion of sushi, took up karaoke and became an integral part of the Tokyo office.

Not content with sticking to the day job, in February 2010, Katie used her fantastic organisational skills and infectious enthusiasm to help set up the new Tokyo office.

Tributes to Katie

Katie worked with me on a particularly difficult deal. There was something very calming in the way she managed people and processes. That’s not to say it all came easily for her – she worked hard on the detail, to then be able to be in control. There was a huge amount of paddling going on under the water, but she kept it well hidden – most of the time. The language which came with some of the more stressful moments was always brilliantly sharp and yet never unpleasant. That was the thing about Katie: she was immensely kind, yet could be hilariously funny about people and we, the subject of the banter, laughed hardest.

Tom Brown, managing partner, Asia

Katie moved to Tokyo to join our projects team after her time in Hong Kong. She quickly became a key member of our somewhat boisterous pack of lawyers. Katie wanted to learn, and approached everything with enthusiasm, a positive drive and a great sense of humour, no matter what the occasion. She also kept us on our toes and, when needed, her colourful language – of which she was a master – got our attention! She approached her illness with the same positive drive as she approached everything else.

Aled Davies, managing partner, Tokyo

My main memory of Katie is her total conviction in the importance of luxury goods generally, and handbags in particular. Until I knew Katie, I had not realised that a lot of the world’s problems could be solved by having the right handbag. She completely opened my eyes in this respect and I am a good deal wiser for knowing her as a result.

Tim Polglase, partner, London

My memories of Katie are of her constantly swearing very loudly at her computer. After it was brought up in her appraisal, we decided that every time she swore she had to put 50p in a pot. That lasted about a week. You could probably have bought a pair of expensive shoes with the 50ps in that pot – in just over a week!

Rosetta Nasti, legal PA, London

Katie had the sunniest disposition. A chat with her would brighten up any day.

Robin Harvey, partner, London

“Until I knew Katie, I had not realised that a lot of the world’s problems could be solved by having the right handbag.”

Katie and I spent a very happy and sunny six months working and playing together in Milan in 2004. By the end of our time there, we were highly qualified to advise on the best bars in town in which to have aperitivi – pub crawls had never been so glamorous!

Alys Carlton, associate, London

Not one to be shy of making an entrance or announcing her presence, Katie stormed into the Tokyo office and instantly the place became brighter and more lively. Having shared an office with Katie for her entire time in Tokyo, I can say that I thoroughly enjoyed the way she would often very directly (and loudly) explain exactly what she thought of a mark-up or email she had received from opposing counsel.

Scott Lovell, associate, Tokyo

Katie’s energy and confidence were perfectly suited for the delivery of ‘training’ and, boy oh boy, did she do this with style! Her webcast on ‘Introduction to Legal Opinions’ is a Katie classic. When we booked her to film the webcast, she was less worried about the timeline for producing her slides and autocue script than about whether she would have the time to get her hair done for the occasion (and whether she should wear pearls).

Rita Dev, global head of banking training, London

Katie was full of life and seized every day with energy, enthusiasm and fun. She put her family and friends first, was fiercely loyal and a friendly and caring confidante.

Fiona Cumming, senior associate, Hong Kong; Marie-Lise Christensen, A&O alumni; Grace Hakim, A&O alumni; and Katharine Taylor, client relationship manager, London
Theoni Papakosma

Theoni Papakosma joined A&O’s London office as a float secretary back in September 1995, before joining the Banking department shortly afterwards and working for Yannis Manuclides and many others. Theoni died on 13 November 2011 at the age of 51 after a brave and private battle with cancer.

Tributes to Theoni

Poverty forced Theoni’s family to emigrate to Germany shortly after her birth in Greece. She grew up and went to school there but, when her family returned to Greece, she chose to follow her own path, ending up in London. Although she didn’t talk about this to many people, this independence and sense of personal achievement mattered a lot to her.

Theoni gave many years to A&O; I had the privilege of working with her for 14 of them. She was a hard working professional; efficient, discreet, honest, taking pride in her work, ambitious to do things better. A friend to many, she was generous, had a sense of humour and was willing to help others in any way she could.

We remember her for all these qualities, but also for the high standards she set for herself, and her effort to achieve a genuine human touch with others. Her life is proof that achievement is properly measured by the distance covered, not by the prominence of the position reached.

Yannis Manuclides, partner, London

Cyril James (Jim) Read

Jim joined A&O in 1965 as a manager in the Litigation department. In 1987, after 22 years of service, he took early retirement at the age of 63. Jim died on 14 November 2011. He was 88.

Tributes to Jim

When I joined the firm in July 1975, Cyril James Read – better known to everyone as Jim or CJR – was the Litigation department’s guru on the White Book, the bible for all litigators which sets out the court rules, practice directions and procedures. If anyone had a query relating to court procedure, they would approach Jim without a moment’s hesitation. And being such a good-natured person, Jim would always welcome such queries and give the litigators – from articled clerks (trainees) to partners – the benefits of his enormous wisdom, rather than simply sending them away with a White Book reference and a flea in their ear.

Jim had joined the firm from Herbert Oppenheimer and, I recall, was recruited particularly for his Chancery Division know-how and expertise. Indeed, I recall that the first case I worked on with Jim was a major piece of patent litigation involving steel pipe couplings. In addition to his Chancery matters, Jim also dealt with the libel work for News Group Newspapers, who published The Sun and the News of the World.

One area of expertise that Jim made his own was the Privy Council work. Jim was on personal terms with the Privy Council Registrar – the most senior person below the Law Lords themselves – and it is through Jim that A&O earned its reputation as being outstanding in terms of the quality of its bundles, procedure and trial management.

I will always recall that, whenever he could, Jim would leave the office at around 4pm with papers under his arm and a crafty wink. “Off to the Privy Council,” he would say, and he wouldn’t return. It was only in later years, when I took over the Privy Council work, that I realised its office closes at 4.30!

Jim worked hard and always made himself available, no matter what pressure he was under. In recent years, I regret that I only saw Jim at the annual retirees’ events, but I know that he retained a network of friends from his time here, particularly Colin Crowe, who is to be commended for the friendship and assistance he has given Jim and his wife, Mary, since Jim’s retirement.

It was a pleasure to know and work with Jim. I am truly grateful for the mentoring and nurturing he gave me in those early days, as I know is Pete Smith. Maybe the best way to sum up the loss is to use the words of David Morley when he heard of Jim’s passing: “He was a gentleman; they don’t make them like that any more.” Unfortunately, they don’t. RIP Jim.

Vince Neicho, litigation support manager, London

Jill Gowtage


Tributes to Jill

Jill Gowtage joined the Allen & Overy tax practice in 1991, specialising in indirect tax. She had started her career as a barrister before joining the Solicitors Office of HM Customs & Excise, where she became a senior legal advisor. She subsequently returned to private practice with KPMG, before coming to A&O.

Over the next nine years, Jill established herself as an indispensable member of the indirect tax group, becoming head of the group in 1998 when Michael Conlon left to resume his career at the bar.

Jill was hugely respected in the indirect tax world for her knowledge and experience. Above all, however, Jill will be remembered by those who worked with her for her generosity and kindness of spirit. She was a genuinely nice person who, with a great sense of humour, provided encouragement and support to all around her.

David Lewis, consultant, London

For full obituaries, please visit www.allenavery.com/alumni.
Emma Slessenger

Emma Slessenger joined A&O’s London office in 2005 as a professional support lawyer (PSL) in the Real Estate group, becoming a Senior PSL in 2006 and PSL Counsel in 2007. Emma died on 28 February 2012, aged 54.

Emma was an absolute pleasure to work for – she always remained calm and was extremely organised. Emma had a fantastic sense of humour which was always welcome during busy times at work. Emma was one of the most generous, caring and selfless people I knew. We have lost a true gem.

Tributes to Emma

Emma was great fun. My abiding memories are of her irreverent, dry humour making me convulse with laughter either with stories or waspish observations. She was a very special human being.

Tributes to Ashley

Ashley Shameli

Ashley Shameli joined A&O’s London office as a trainee in March 2006 and qualified in March 2008 into the Employment & Benefits – Incentives team. Ashley died on 5 March 2012 at the age of 30.

Ashley was one of the most friendly people you could wish to meet. It didn’t matter who he was speaking to, from partners to PAs, Ashley treated everyone the same. He would chat to anyone about anything: football, politics, perfecting a New York accent, even the finer points of taxation for internationally mobile employees (though perhaps not with quite the same enthusiasm).

What impressed me most was the dedication and effort Ashley put into his work, even though he had decided quite early on that a legal career wasn’t for him. He had a strong sense of loyalty and didn’t want to let anyone down. Although Ashley had been suffering with cancer during his time as a trainee, he would never let anyone know about it, not wanting it to be seen as an excuse.

It was clear from the stories told by Ashley’s brother and sister at his funeral in Worcester that he had the same effect on everyone he met. It was inspiring to hear about someone who had made the very most of their short life.

Tributes to Beverly

Beverly Coosemans

Beverly Coosemans joined A&O in 2001 as a secretary in the Antwerp office. She died on 14 March 2012, aged 36.

Beverly was good company, a kind and generous soul who I will remember for most luxurious any of us had ever had, and probably will ever have!

Tributes to Rebecca

Rebecca Coosemans

Rebecca Coosemans was an outstanding real estate lawyer with immense knowledge, which she applied in a practical and commercial fashion. She was not afraid to challenge accepted views or to defend her own opinions no matter how senior or revered the person she was dealing with. She was almost invariably right.

Her professional expertise led to her being held in the highest regard both inside and outside the firm but it was her warmth, generosity and wry sense of humour which truly endeared her to her colleagues. She could even make a talk on the Rule against Perpetuities amusing.

After her first illness, Emma was advised to take up moderate exercise. She did not exactly relish this – her comments about exercise tended to be made through gritted teeth. She was a regular sight in the gym, among the more hardened and extreme real estate exercisers, in her trademark pink T-shirts with near matching trainers – but she continued to think they were all mad.

Many a tear has been shed in real estate since her death. Her professionalism, wise counsel but, above all, her generous spirit are sorely missed by everyone.

Tributes to Rebecca

Rebecca: beautiful, always cheerful, with a great sense of humour and a bubbling personality. It was fantastic to have her as a colleague. She never missed our annual Antwerp office dinner, nor the A&O Belgium parties. And if Rebecca was present, you could be sure there would be a great atmosphere.

In February 2009, Rebecca was diagnosed with ‘that’ horrible disease. She started treatment with courage and a positive attitude. However, it was an unfair battle. She faced her fight with courage and determination, especially for her little son and husband.

Despite all this, she continued to be the same Rebecca that she was before she fell ill. She always looked wonderful, kept laughing and made others laugh.

It goes without saying that we still miss Rebecca enormously. We will never forget her and remember her as a truly lovely colleague and friend.

Debbie Ward, senior legal PA, London

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Debbie Ward, senior legal PA, London

Beverly Coles


Tributes to Beverly

Beverly was one of life’s characters, an individual in so many ways, but most notably because of her love of bright colours. She was often seen sporting luminous orange and greens that only she could get away with wearing together. Beverley was good company, a kind and generous soul who I will remember for buying the team Godiva Easter eggs, the most luxurious any of us had ever had, and probably will ever have!

Laura Mitchell, document manager, London
Ben Ogden

Ben Ogden joined A&O’s London office in September 2010 as a trainee, having graduated from Oxford University in 2008 where he studied Law with Law Studies in Europe (German). He sat in ICM, Banking, Pensions and Employment and was on secondment at RBS from March 2012. In all these departments, Ben made many friends and became known for his energy, good humour, loyalty, work ethic and infectious enthusiasm. Not to mention his waistcoats and cravats!

Tragically, Ben died in a plane crash on 28 September 2012 on the outskirts of Kathmandu, the Nepalese capital. He had travelled to Nepal to join an organised trek to Everest base camp, following completion of his legal training and qualification as a solicitor. He was due to return to the office on 22 October to start work as an associate in the Employment department in London.

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Tributes to Ben

Ben was clearly a person who touched the lives of many, many people, and enriched them all. We, at Allen & Overy, have been privileged to share in his warmth and humour and in his great pride in, and enthusiasm for, the firm. Ben’s energy and cheerfulness, his conscientiousness and common sense, and his determination to wring everything out of life for the benefit of everyone around him means that, even though he will be greatly missed, he will not be forgotten. He has left us all better people for knowing him.

John O’Connor, partner, London

Even in a place like A&O, which is full of bright and likeable people, Ben stood out as being one of the best. He was smart, witty and popular. He was a great joker and could make anyone laugh, but he also had an underlying integrity and calmness which earned him the respect of everyone who knew him. It’s a tragedy that his life has been cut so short.

David Campbell, partner and training principal, London

Ben was an incredibly popular member of the Employment department, who impressed with his attitude, his hard work and keen sense of humour, not to mention his sense of sartorial style. He was always willing to indulge us with ‘cravat Fridays’. Ben’s colleagues commented not just on the quality of his work, but also what a pleasure it was to deal with him. He was ready to help out with any task and never complained. He was an excellent lawyer and an exceptional person.

Mark Mansell, partner, London

Ben was a huge asset to the firm in our graduate recruitment programme. I remember with pride and a smile how Ben ran the business game during our visit to Oxford last year. He arranged a room in his old college, Hertford, up in the eaves of one of the accommodation blocks. Securing a large turn-out seemed unlikely on first impressions, given our distance from the Porter’s Lodge and the six flights of spiral stairs to reach the final venue. Unabashed, Ben stationed his fellow trainees along the route while he marched up and down Holywell Street to usher the students (any students) into the college. It was the best-attended business game of the season. Later that day, he presented to more than 100 students in the Randolph Hotel on what it was like to be a trainee at A&O – his infectious enthusiasm and natural manner were a pleasure to watch. He was the perfect colleague to have on campus, not just as a professional but as a person too.

Richard Hough, partner, London

My main memory of Ben is the first (but not the last) time he turned up for work in his cravat and waistcoat. The Employment team is probably not the best-dressed department in the firm and so he spent most of the day being subjected to a torrent of gentle abuse from pretty much everyone who passed our office. As a new trainee in the department, it would have been easy for him to go into his shell. However, Ben took it all in his stride and gave as good as he got with everyone, from PAs to partners. He was a real character and his sense of fun and positive attitude made him incredibly popular. He was also an excellent trainee and would have made an even better A&O lawyer.

Olly Jones, senior associate, London

One of my favourite memories of Ben is the time he turned up slightly late to a meeting and announced to everyone that he had accidentally locked his girlfriend, Stephanie, in their flat. He couldn’t stay as he needed to run back home, picking up a suitable peace-offering on the way, and let her out so she could get to work. He reappeared at the meeting just as we were finishing and assured us that everything was fine and Stephanie was still speaking to him!

Laura Cowan, HR manager, London

When Ben joined the firm as a trainee, he worked exceptionally hard, but also got involved in numerous graduate recruitment activities. I will always remember Ben for his involvement with the 2011 University visits – he spoke with enthusiasm about his role to numerous undergraduates, and, more importantly, was a great team player during this busy season. He was an easy choice for the new website – his photoshoot was full of laughter as he got into character in front of the lens – as he was a fantastic ambassador for A&O.

Caroline Lutcher, former graduate recruitment manager, London

The first time I met Ben was on our induction day at A&O at the start of the LPC. Ben said something that instantly had me and everyone else in the vicinity in fits of laughter, and I knew from then on that we would be firm friends. I spoke to Ben on Skype two weeks before he...
Even in a place like A&O, which is full of bright and likeable people, Ben stood out as being one of the best.

I first got to know Ben on the LPC, where I was lucky enough to be in his class, and we soon formed a close-knit group. Aside from our combined efforts approach to tutorial knowledge, the main thing I remember from the LPC is the banter and laughter that was always coming from our table. That laughter continued as a feature of our friendship for the next few years. To me, Ben wasn't just a gifted lawyer with a promising future, but he was a brilliant friend who lent me his shoulder when I was upset, who carried me down Oxford Street at 2am when I tried to leave a club 'too early', who put far too much trust in my tandem sledge driving skills (a lesson we learned the hard way!), and who always had me in stitches with his funny stories. He is utterly irreplaceable – truly one of a kind.

Ben was always an exceptionally happy person, and I was amazed by his spirited approach to life. The fact he was travelling alone did not faze him in the slightest, and it was this courage which I respected the most. He was a well-known and respected figurehead for the whole trainee cohort, and it is no exaggeration to say that those who knew him loved him. It is hard to imagine life at A&O without him.

What I can say for certain about Ben is that, beyond having great style, he was not only a gentleman to all who knew him but a friend. He was human decency, genuineness and kindness personified and will always be remembered with a smile.

Feargus MacDaid, former trainee
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*Note: Jakarta office is not officially listed as an office of A&O but is included due to its proximity to the main office in Bali.
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* Associated office
** Representative office
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