

# Society Outing

## LEGAL LONDON - *The Inns of Court*

26th May 2010

Reported by Joan Liggett

Between royalty at Westminster and commerce in the City, mediaeval lawyers found a quiet niche in which to practise their craft. They are still there in a part of London that remains hidden to many Londoners and most visitors. Under the guidance of our wonderful guide we toured this area tracing the history, traditions and peculiar practices of English Law.

Our first stop was for coffee in Fleet Street at 'The Old Bank of England' Pub, formerly the Law Courts' branch of The Bank of England. The Bank traded here for 87 years until 1975, when the premises were sold to a building society. In 1994 the premises

were taken over by London brewers who began a major refurbishment, restoring this splendid building to its former glory. The basement still contains the original vaults used to store bullion and some of the Crown Jewels during the First World War.

A gentle walk took us from busy Fleet Street to Middle Temple - one of the four Inns of Court exclusively entitled to call their members to the English Bar as barristers; the others being the Inner Temple, Gray's Inn and Lincoln's Inn. Middle Temple has at its heart Middle Temple Hall where the Inn's student barristers are still required to dine for a minimum



Old Bank of England, Fleet Street

Photo by J. Pople



Dining hall, Middle Temple

Photo by J. Pople

number of nights for several terms. In recent years it has become a much-used film location - the cobbled streets, historic buildings and gas lighting giving it a unique atmosphere. The Hall itself is a magnificent Elizabethan building with a double hammer beam oak roof and heraldic shields around the walls recording names of the Readers. The High Table consists of three 29 feet planks of a single oak, reputedly a gift from Elizabeth I to the Middle Temple, cut down in Windsor Forest and floated down the Thames to be installed in the Hall before the building was completed. The Benchers of the Inn still dine at it as they did that evening in August 1586



*The high table*

*Photo by J. Liggett*

when Francis Drake, just back from a successful expedition, was rapturously congratulated by Benchers and members. The hatch cover of his ship the *Golden Hind* was later used to make the present Cup

Board, which since medieval times has been the centre of ceremonies. This stands beneath the Bench Table and on it is laid the book which members sign when they are called to the Bar and by it the Readers stand when each Lent and autumn they give their lectures. Those early lawyers rented the land on which the Middle Temple stands from the Knights Templar whose round Norman church was our next stop.

*Cuthbert John Ottaway, born Dover 1850 and England's first football captain, was called to the Bar by the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple on 17th November 1876. He was officially a barrister-at-law and took up Chambers at Lamb Building, Temple, London. For more information on C. J. Ottaway see book review. Editor*



*Double hammer beam roof, dining hall, Middle Temple*  
*Photo by J. Pople*



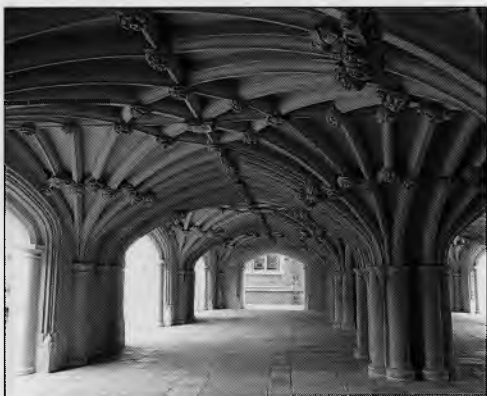
*Royal Courts of Justice*

*Photo by J. Pople*



*Hall entrance and lane*

*Photo by J. Liggett*



*Fan vaulting in the undercroft, Lincoln's Inn*  
*Photo by J. Pople*

To finish off the morning, we entered the Royal Courts of Justice housing both the Court of Appeal and the High Court. The main entrance in the Strand has two curved porches fitted with iron gates leading into a huge hall designed to reflect the majesty of the Law. Over the Judges' entrance there are carvings of a stone cat and dog representing fighting litigants. Here we saw Legal London at work: Barristers in wig and gown conferring with their clients or with lawyers. After lunch many returned to the Courts of Justice to attend one or other of the many Court Rooms. Each Court has an interior unique to itself as they were each designed by different architects.

Then back to our coach for a brief tour which included the Old Bailey and Staple Inn before stopping at Lincoln's Inn which is situated on Chancery Lane. Led by our Guide we went along lanes and through buildings, sometimes on cobbles, to the Medieval Chapel which was built on pillars forming an undercroft. Standing there under the Chapel in a rather dark place it was easy to imagine we had gone back in time. This place was used for meetings (sometimes by dissidents) but was also a place of recreation. Lincoln's Inn consists of three Courtyards around which the chambers were built. Old Square, built in 1525 with its magnificent Gatehouse is the oldest existing part

of the Inn. New Square was built in 1693 but altered in the 1800's when the open area in the middle was replaced by gardens and lawns. Stone Buildings was built in 1775 and houses today the headquarters of the Inns of Court and City Yeomanry, part of the Territorial Army.

Our Guide then led us round corners and through lanes to Chancery Lane where we found an imposing establishment, Ede and Ravenscroft, Wigmakers. Wigs were formerly made from human hair with the consequent problem of vermin - ladies purchased small silver mousetraps to put into their wigs whilst gentlemen shaved their heads to enable discreet scratching with the little finger under wigs. Humphrey Ravenscroft whose father was a tailor solved this problem with the patenting of horsehair wigs in 1834 and 285 years later Ede and Ravenscroft are the world's largest makers of lawyer's wigs.

Sadly, it was now time to rejoin our coach. Many, many thanks to Georgette for organising such a splendid day.



Middle Temple

Photo by J. Liggett

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

### Summer 2010

Thanks once again to all those members who have paid their current subscriptions.

Copies of our Newsletter have now been distributed to most local surgeries for their waiting rooms. Perhaps this will introduce the Dover Society to a wider range of potential members.

Elizabeth Dudley has given up her Newsletter delivery to members at the Gateway flats, currently numbering 17. We are very grateful to Elizabeth for contributing over 20 years of reliable distribution and thank in anticipation her successor, Jean Luckhurst.

Due to the sterling work of Derek, our Chairman, we have a record number of welcome new members:-

Mr D & Mrs J Moynan,  
Mr H & Mrs M Hutchison,  
Mr D & Mrs N Sheasby,  
Mrs A Walker, Mr D Hall,  
Mr B & Mrs M Gardner,  
Mrs J Taylor, Mr D & Mrs J Fagg,  
Mrs L Leach, Mr G Scrivener,  
Mrs V Jarvis. Membership is 435.

*Sheila R Cope*