

## Everybody needs good Neighbours

Lawyers of a certain age – that is to say, somewhere in their thirties – will have no trouble recognising the chap on the right in this delightfully cheesy pic. Yes, it is none other than 'Neighbours' star Harold Bishop (aka actor Ian Smith), former husband of Madge and general twittering buffoon (Harold, that is. Not the actor himself). Harold is seen here with a very excited Basil Preuveneers, Law Society Council member for Croydon and North Kent, and a keen brass player.

Mr Preuveneers was one of about 400 volunteers all playing the 'Neighbours' theme tune on their trombones and tubas in Trafalgar Square last week, in a publicity stunt organised by television channel Five to 'trumpet' the fact that it has nicked the Aussie soap from the BBC. Mr Preuveneers managed to get himself snapped

with the tuba-playing soap star, and also found himself interviewed on Australian television. He was probably singled out because he had two koalas attached to his trumpet bearing the slogan: 'Harold, your playing is hard two bear.'

Any readers assuming that our brassy solicitor is too long in the tooth to be a genuine 'Neighbours' fan must think again. He confessed to *Obiter* that he catches the soap every day. 'I have a shed at the back of the office and I go in there every lunch time for a sleep', he says. 'As soon as I hear the theme tune I'm asleep. Then I wake up again with the end theme tune.'

So was it a rousing rendition of 'everybody needs good neighbours'? Apparently so. The good thing about playing with several other people, Mr Preuveneers says, 'is that you're always in tune with somebody'.

### Slings and arrows, outrageous fortune

A defence solicitor's lot is traditionally a truly human one, with the full breadth of life's joys and sorrows presented daily, often within the colourless confines of a police interview room. Most defence solicitors can name some local characters they have represented, a few of whom they may even like. But the *Gazette's* current favourite 'representee' is Simon Eastwood of Puncknowle in West Dorset, for his joyous inability to stay within the bounds of mealy-mouthed copper-speak – or even modern English.

After being arrested for 'disorderly behaviour and an assault on a policeman', according to the *Dorset Echo*, Mr Eastwood 'quoted Shakespeare throughout his police interview' and 'needed to be told continually by his solicitor to be quiet' so the prosecutor could outline her charges.

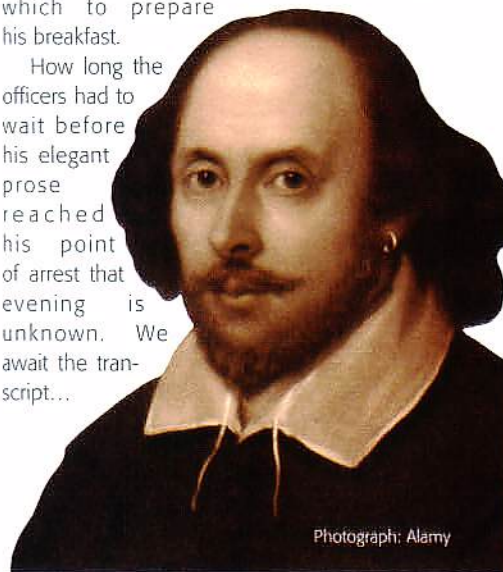
Ms Dytham, prosecuting, said that in interview Eastwood described himself as 'a human animal that would have kicked out at anyone – even a police officer'. Eastwood allegedly even interrupted his solicitor's mitigating address, saying he had 'given up the demon cider'.

But the facts, as recorded, often obscure the human nature of the crimes at hand. Mr Eastwood's solicitor, Ian Brazier, told the *Gazette* that 'the whole interview was just hilarious', but stressed that his client is an erudite man who lives mostly by candlelight, and is also suffering

the deleterious effects of sheep dip poisoning.

In the police interview itself, Mr Eastwood was not to be rushed, harking back to days of yore, when people wore hats and cloaks, and had attention spans measured in whole minutes. When asked what had happened on the day of the arrest, he answered in words from the time of Shakespeare (pictured) and Dryden, and commenced his oration by describing the fire he lit outside at five-thirty in the morning on which to prepare his breakfast.

How long the officers had to wait before his elegant prose reached his point of arrest that evening is unknown. We await the transcript...



Photograph: Alamy

## Risk and regulation

**It is unfair to expect other areas of the profession to subsidise those that cost more to regulate**

The Solicitors Regulation Authority's (SRA) long-term plan for a 'polluter pays' allocation of the costs of regulation is bound to cause a stir among the profession. Those firms concentrating on what are seen as high-risk areas will not welcome the prospect of paying more than everybody else. However, there is clear logic in the argument that it is unfair to expect other areas of the profession to subsidise those that cost more to regulate.

If higher fees are charged to some firms, it will be interesting to see what happens if solicitors are offered a choice of regulator in the future. Would a conveyancing firm facing higher rates still choose to be regulated by the SRA?

The regulator has promised 'light-touch'

regulation of modern Author watch tempta it really The s differer a fascin will no confide an ano: represe provide legal ai

## Dangerous passions

**The hysteria which followed Dr Rowan Williams's comments on Sharia law exposed a worrying ignorance, argues Professor Tariq Ramadan**



The storm that followed the Archbishop of Canterbury's statement on Sharia law was both worrying and revealing. Worrying when it became clear people seemed unable to listen to what was really said, and revealing because the use of the loaded word Sharia spread a wave of fear throughout the country and beyond. Let us try to transform this sad story into something from which one can draw lessons for now and for the future.

The Archbishop was not speaking about a parallel system – Sharia law – to be set beside the British legal system. His point was to make clear that there is scope in the latter to integrate some of the provisions Muslims find in Sharia laws. As this is already the case for Christians and Jews – and even for the Muslim community within existing arbitrary Sharia courts – the object is an official, positive recognition of Muslims' presence by respecting their potential needs.

Acknowledging the growing number of Muslims, Dr Williams sees no other way for the British legal system but to be more inclusive. One may disagree with this vision, but it remains necessary to be fair to the Archbishop's actual statement and to stop feeding the debate with

unwise passions and fears.

From a Muslim viewpoint possible to draw some important lessons about the state of affairs within both British society and Muslim community. There is a great deal of ignorance within British society: when one hears the word Sharia, the first images spring to mind are of cutting hands or stoning. Moreover, reference to 'Islamic principles' is heard as Muslims 'cannot want to integrate' and are asking for special treatment.

Ignorance, fear and suspicion setting the scene for the debate. This is so much the case that Muslims ask for the same rights as other religious communities are perceived as trying to claim for the common system: 'they' are putting 'our' culture at risk. Sharia law offers important scope for religious communities to set up councils, courts and contracts on a voluntary basis as long as they do not contradict the fundamental principles of common legislation. An official acknowledgement of these procedures would help to complete the picture and shed some light on how it is done. Frightened blindness based on ignorance is never good. In times of crisis, such blindness could lead to religious and social fractures.

For Muslims, this story highlights important questions and calls