

LAUDATIO: SIR STEPHEN SEDLEY

THE RT. HON. LORD WOOLF, CH*

The Right Hon Stephen Sedley QC

NOTHING gives me greater pleasure than to personally express my immense admiration for Sir Stephen¹. Both as an advocate and a judge, he is and has been for many years one of the great figures of the English legal system.

At the Bar we were frequently opponents, Stephen usually ably defending the rights of the individual while I was appearing for public bodies who had not always acted with the propriety they should have. Championing the individual was very much a role that came naturally to Stephen. While he could no doubt have appeared on the other side, this would not be his first choice. However, irrespective of whom he was representing, appearing against Stephen was always a challenge. He would never miss a trick. He was an incisive but an impeccably fair opponent.

As a judge, Stephen was an outstanding colleague. I regarded it as a privilege to share the Bench with him. For me, it was always an educational and often an entertaining experience. On the Bench, he would identify a dimension of the case which we were considering, which neither the advocates appearing before us or myself had previously noticed.

* Former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, Royal Courts of Justice, United Kingdom

¹ Because of the inability of Lord Woolf to attend, the speech was read by Professor Spyridon Flogaitis in honour of Sir Stephen Sedley at the *Laudatio* which took place on the occasion of the EGPL Annual Reunion 2016.

Stephen was assisted by his immense knowledge of many areas of the law. They included administrative law, human rights, the law of libel, anti-terrorist measures, immigration and constitutional history. Irrespective of the subject, Stephen had an ability to express himself, whether orally or in writing, with unmatched eloquence. He also possesses a wonderfully entertaining wit. If there is any doubt as to this, a search of the web will reveal “Sedley’s Laws of Documents”. It is a splendid demonstration of Stephen’s sense of humour. “The Laws” ironically reflect the failings of lawyers which can occur in their preparation of documents for the use of courts. An alternative source of verification is his own book, published about the time of his retirement from the judiciary in 2011, *Ashes and Sparks: Essays on Law and Justice* (Cambridge University Press 2011). No lesser authority than Ian McEwan said of this “you could have no interest in the law and read his book for pure intellectual delight, for the exquisite, finely balanced prose, the prickly humour, the knack of artful quotation and an astonishing historical grasp”. A further alternative are the many articles he has written for *The London Review of Books*.

Not surprisingly with his qualities, both while he was on the Bench and since he retired, Stephen has been asked by a vast array of bodies, both in this country and abroad, to make contributions to their activities involving different aspects of the law. I hope his involvement continues for many years to come. It may require a great deal of hard work on his part, but will be a delight for those who will have the opportunity to learn from him. Stephen, you richly deserve the honour you are receiving today.