

MARTIN BRIDGEWATER: REFLECTIONS ON 37 YEARS AS A LAWYER (AND ANCIENT COIN COLLECTOR AND FILM POSTER EXPERT)

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“Civilised, is how I would describe Herbert Smith Freehills, at least compared to the other firms I’ve known.” That’s the verdict of Martin Bridgewater, an English solicitor who had been at four other law firms before working for Herbert Smith Freehills in London as a senior consultant from 2004 to 2011.

Perhaps that’s one of the reasons why Martin stayed with Herbert Smith Freehills for seven years, when he originally planned on only staying for three. He joined after over 20 years as a projects lawyer and was tickled that the partner to whom he reported was Nicholas Downing, who had originally been one of his trainees, then his assistant, then partner and was now his boss. While at Herbert Smith Freehills Martin worked on a range of construction and energy projects, from wind farms to nuclear power stations, where his knowledge and experience could add value. He particularly enjoyed working on the development of the Francis Crick Institute, a project that spanned over five years.

Martin reflects on a happy time with the firm: “It suited me very well. They kindly treated me as if I were a partner but without too many partner responsibilities. I therefore rather floated along and really enjoyed it.”

However, after 37 years as a lawyer he was keen to turn his mind to other things, and he finally called it a day at 11am, French time, on Armistice Day 2011 (11/11/11). His termination agreement even said, “the guns shall fall silent”.

Initially a corporate lawyer in Birmingham and Hong Kong, he started a non-contentious construction practice in his then London firm in the early 1980s when this was a new field of law, and for 10 years headed their newly-formed construction department. After finishing at Herbert Smith Freehills he did not give up the law completely and is now an occasional consultant for specialist construction arbitration firm, Corbett & Co, but since his retirement his focus has very much been elsewhere. He says he has at last learned to “seize each day” and now makes a point of never letting any day go by without doing both something productive and rewarding and also something really enjoyable, including copious amounts of travel, the arts and sporting events.

But the achievement in which Martin takes most pride is finding a publisher for his late wife’s novel - *On Wandsworth Bridge*, by Hattie Pond. He now very much regrets having spent so many evenings working late in the office throughout his career rather than going home to Hattie, as their retirement plans were shattered by her diagnosis of terminal cancer in 2012. Shortly before her death in 2013 she asked Martin to destroy the manuscript, disheartened that it had already been turned down by a number of agents and publishers, but he refused, saying that he was resolved to get it published somehow.

Five years later, *On Wandsworth Bridge* at last saw the light of day, published by Sylph Editions, and has since received rave reviews from both *The Literary Review* and the influential US website, *The Complete Review*. An imaginative and intelligent literary novel that is hard to characterise, it includes vivid storytelling, social satire, humour, time travel, a love story and a weird and wonderful cast of characters, and explores the dangers of allowing a separation between the sciences and humanities. While obviously sad that the book had to be published posthumously, Martin is delighted that Hattie’s legacy will now live on.

Sylph Editions is also due to publish one of Martin’s own works later this year, a book he has co-authored about the Japanese film director, Akira Kurosawa, featuring images from Martin’s extensive collection of film posters and other cinema ephemera. Over the past 25 years, he has also built up the best private collection of British Iron Age (i.e. pre-Roman) coinage, and a four-volume record of this is in preparation. His interests are truly wide-ranging.

- If you wish to connect with Martin, he can be reached at:
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