

GIRTON VISITOR'S ANNIVERSARY LECTURE 2019

100 YEARS OF WOMEN IN THE LAW

This year we are of course celebrating 150 years since this great College was founded, marking the first opportunity for women to study at the ancient English Universities. And it is fitting that we are also celebrating 100 years since the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, marking the first opportunity for women to enter the legal profession in the United Kingdom and to become magistrates and eventually judges. So the first thing we must do is say 'thank you' to those early women pioneers who showed that women could successfully study the law.¹ As with so much else in the law, the pioneers were Girtonians. Three of them – Janet Wood, Anne Tuthill and Sarah Mason - studied law in the 1870s and passed the 'special examination for women', as women were not then allowed to take the tripos examinations which could lead to a degree. But the examination was said to be of degree standard and two of them passed at first class level. After the tripos was opened to women in 1881, the first woman to pass it was a Newnhamite, Frances Green, in 1889. Four more Girtonians and one more Newnhamite studied law in the 19th century. On the whole, it appears that the law academics were well disposed towards the

¹ The information which follows is largely taken from R Auchmuty, 'Early Women Law Students at Cambridge and Oxford' (2008) 29(1) *Journal of Legal History* 63.

women and willing either to teach them in separate classes or admit them, suitably chaperoned, to mixed classes. But of course Cambridge did not allow any women to take degrees until 1948.

Eliza Orme was the first woman to gain a Law degree in England, having studied law at University College London in the 1870s and set up a practice in Chancery Lane, drafting documents for conveyancing counsel, in 1875, before gaining an LLB degree from the University of London in 1888. But she was not allowed to qualify as a legal practitioner.

Cornelia Sorabji was the first woman to study law at Oxford, from 1889 to 1892, when she passed the BCL examination. She was able to gain a special dispensation to practise in India, where she provided legal assistance to women in purdah who were not allowed to consult male lawyers. Two other women studied law in Oxford during the 19th century, Alice Adams and Ivy Williams, who later became the first woman to be called to the English Bar. Like many Oxford women students, she took an external London degree in 1901. But at least Oxford allowed women to take proper degrees in 1920.

Meanwhile women in the UK were fighting for the right to qualify as professional lawyers and being denied it.² The very first was a Scotswoman, Margaret Howie Strang Hall. In 1900, at the age of 18, while working as a clerk in a law agent's offices, she applied to the Society of Law Agents (as Scottish solicitors were then called) to take their examination in Latin, as the first step towards qualifying as a solicitor. They refused, on the ground that they 'would not be justified in admitting ladies to the examinations and making a departure from long-continued practice without being authorised by the Court to do so'. So she petitioned the Court of Session. Her petition was referred to the full court of 13 judges. The Society of Law Agents was admirably neutral – they did not argue that women should not be admitted, but merely demonstrated that so far they had not been. Miss Hall argued that the Law Agents (Scotland) Act of 1873 referred to 'persons' and a woman was a person. Not only that, section 4 of the Interpretation Act 1850 (Lord Brougham's Act) provided that 'In all Acts, words importing the masculine gender shall be deemed and taken to include females . . . unless the contrary is expressly provided.' The court took six months to decide that Miss Hall was not a person:

² Much of the biographical information which follows is taken from chapters in E Rackley and R Auchmuty (eds), *Women's Legal Landmarks – Celebrating the History of Women and Law in the UK and Ireland* (Hart, 2019).

‘The Court is authorised to admit persons, a term which, no doubt, is equally applicable to male and female. But in the case of an ambiguous term, the meaning must be assigned to it which is in accordance with inveterate usage. Accordingly we interpret the meaning ‘male persons’ as no other has ever been admitted as a law agent.’³

This is pretty incomprehensible, as there is nothing ambiguous about the word ‘persons’ and if there was, the Interpretation Act should have resolved it in her favour. In reality, the court was saying that women were disqualified from becoming lawyers by immemorial custom.

Bertha Cave met a similar fate in 1903, when she applied to the Benchers of Gray’s Inn for admission as a student with a view to being called to the Bar. They turned her down, citing Miss Hall’s case as demonstrating that apparently gender-neutral terms had to be construed as applying to men only. They also cited the case of *Jex-Blake v Senatus of the University of Edinburgh*,⁴ in which the Court of Session held (this time by a majority), not only that women had no common law right to be admitted as students to the University, but also that the

³ *Hall v Incorporated Society of Law Agents*, 1901 9 SLT 150.
⁴ (1873) 11 M 784.

University had no power to pass regulations enabling them to study medicine there. Fortunately for Sophia Jex-Blake (aunt of Katherine Jex-Blake, mistress of Girton from 1916 to 1922), medicine is a universal discipline, unlike law, and she was able to qualify as a doctor at the University of Berne in Switzerland.

Miss Cave appealed and appeared before the Lord Chancellor and other Judges in the House of Lords in December 1903. I cannot resist quoting, yet again, the account given in the New York Times for 5 December:⁵

‘Clad in a navy-blue walking suit with a bolero of the same material trimmed in white, and balancing a rather piquant black hat on her head, she carried her comely self into the presence of the august Judges. She deposited a purse and a package that looked like corsets on the table, and then pleaded her case. There was no question of ability raised, it was solely a matter of sex. So she told the Judges what other countries were doing for women who desired to practice law.

⁵ Quoted by The Hon Michael Beloff QC in ‘Sisters-in-Law: The Irresistible Rise of Women in Wigs’, the Gray’s Inn Barnard’s Inn reading at Gresham College, 25 June 2009.

The Judges listened smilingly, and when Miss Cave was through promptly advised her that there was no precedent for admitting women students at any of the Inns of Court, and that they did not feel justified in creating one. “I wish your lordships good morning.” said the little woman frigidly, and picking up her purse and her corsets she quitted the judicial presence and went out in the cold, cold world.’

Christabel Pankhurst met the same rebuff from the Benchers of Lincoln’s Inn in January 1904. And in the famous case of *Bebb v The Law Society*⁶ in 1913, Gwyneth Bebb, together with Karin Costelloe, Nancy Nettlefold, and Girtonian Maud Ingram met the same answer from the English courts as Miss Hall had received from the Scots – that women were not ‘persons’ within the meaning of the Solicitors Act 1843, even though that Act expressly provided that ‘every word importing the masculine gender shall extend and be applied to a female as well as a male’.⁷

The judges relied on what they thought was immemorial custom to keep women out of the legal profession. But what were the real reasons? In mid-19th century

⁶ [1914] 1 Ch 286.

⁷ Section 48.

America, the judges had appealed to ‘the natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex’ and also to ‘the constitution of family organisation, which is founded in divine ordinance as well as in the nature of things [which] indicates the domestic sphere as that which properly belongs to the domain and functions of womanhood’.⁸ Not only that, the law was a nasty place to be: the legal profession ‘has essentially and habitually to do with all that is selfish and malicious, knavish and criminal coarse and brutal, repulsive and obscene in human life’. This was bad enough for men. But ‘it would be revolting to all female sense of the innocence and sanctity of their sex’ and (which may have mattered more) ‘shocking to man’s reverence for womanhood and faith in women’ if they were allowed to mix professionally in all this nastiness.⁹

But by the early 20th century women had been allowed to become doctors: the Medical Act 1876 allowed all United Kingdom medical authorities to license all qualified persons ‘without distinction of sex’ (which meant that Sophia Jex-Blake could also qualify in Dublin). So women’s timidity and delicacy could no longer be an objection. Nor could their intellectual ability: Christabel Pankhurst, for example, graduated with first class honours in Law from the

⁸ *Bradwell v Illinois*, 83 US 130 (1872).

⁹ *In the matter of the Motion to admit Goodell*, 39 Wis 232 (1875).

University of Manchester in 1906; Gwyneth Bebb studied law at Oxford and gained first class marks in 1911. In the Court of Appeal, the Master of the Rolls admitted that:

‘in point of intelligence and education and competency women – and in particular the applicant here, who is a distinguished Oxford student – are at least equal to a great many, and, probably, far better than many, of the candidates who will come up for examination.’

Women were already working as clerks in solicitors’ offices and effectively doing much of the work that qualified solicitors could do. So there was no real doubt about their competence.

In Miss Bebb’s case, Phillimore LJ raised another objection: that a married woman still did not have an ‘absolute liberty’ to enter into binding contracts, so it would be a serious inconvenience if a woman got married in the middle of a piece of litigation and was suddenly unable to make contacts. But this makes no sense, because the Married Women’s Property Act 1882 had given married women the right to own property in their own right – they could already keep

their earned income – and contractual capacity in relation to their separate property.

The Gray's Inn archives suggest another objection to qualifying as barristers. In those days – and indeed when I was called to the Bar 50 years ago this year – becoming a barrister involved eating a great many dinners: you had to 'keep' four terms a year for three years; and keeping term meant eating at least three dinners in hall during dining term; a minimum of 36 in total. It was thought unseemly that men and women should dine together – either because the men would vie for the honour of sitting at a woman student's mess or because the men would resent the presence of the women who might spoil their fun – dining was quite a rowdy affair in the 1960s and was probably even more so in earlier days. I think this is the more likely explanation, as this was the objection raised in 1969 to women becoming full members of the Northern Circuit Bar mess – we might spoil the men's fun at Grand Court.

But perhaps the most likely reason is that summed up by Amos Chiseler, in a poem published in the *Glasgow Evening Times* on 15 July 1901, three days after the petition of Margaret Howie Strang Hall was rejected by the Court of Session, entitled 'Cockie Law: Is a Girl a Person?':

‘But the thirteen clocking Judges
Shook their feathers out and swore
That the only kind of “persons”
They had ever passed before
Were young men with shaven faces
And they could not recognise
This fair lady, in her laces
As a “person” in their eyes.

But the public are the judges
Of the Judges on the Bench,
And the public roared with laughter
At this answer to the wench.
If the lawyers won’t let women
Pick from out their well-filled bowl
Better say so straight than argue
That a hen is not a fowl.’

Maybe he’s put his finger on it. They didn’t like the idea of competition. But the First World War came along and changed everything. By then women were doing all sorts of jobs, including serious regulatory work, such as being a Factory Inspector like Gwyneth Bebb, or an enforcement officer for the Ministry of Food, like Girtonian Sybil Campbell, who later became the first woman Metropolitan Stipendiary Magistrate. Middle class women aged 30 or more got the right to vote in Parliamentary elections in 1918. And of course, a great many young men who might otherwise have joined the legal profession lost their lives during the war. (It has been suggested to me that the American

Civil War led to the States' legislation allowing women to practise law for similar reasons.)

So along came the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 allowing women to qualify as lawyers. Once again, the Scots were the first. Madge Easton Anderson was a graduate of the University of Glasgow and had been taken on as an apprentice Law Agent in 1917, despite the fact that women could not then qualify, but her sponsor, John Alexander Spens, thought (rightly) that the law would soon be changed. She completed her apprenticeship in 1920 and graduated with an LLB degree that same year. The Society of Law Agents initially rejected her application to complete her qualifications because her apprenticeship had started before the 1919 Act was passed. But she petitioned the Court of Session, which this time took a more sympathetic view, and she was formally registered as a Law Agent in January 1921.

Girtonian Carrie Morrison was the first woman to be admitted as a solicitor in England, in 1922. She qualified ahead of the other three women who passed their Finals at the same time, including Girtonian Maud Crofts, who as Maud Ingram had been one of the four plaintiffs in Miss Bebb's case, because she had served with MI5 during the First World War and this qualified her for a

reduction in her articles from three years to two. But Maud Crofts was the first to set up in practice as a solicitor.

The first two women to be called to the Bar in the United Kingdom were also not from England but from Ireland. Averill Deverill and Frances Kyle were called to the Bar by the King's Inns in Dublin in November 1921, presumably because the Kings Inns did not require them to eat so many dinners. Averill Deverill joined the Law Library and set up in practice there in January 1922. This was a year before the Irish Free State was established and the south of Ireland ceased to be part of the United Kingdom.

The first woman called to the English Bar was Ivy Williams, in May 1922. She too stole a march on the other women who also joined an Inn of Court as soon as the 1919 Act was passed, because she gained first class marks in the Bar Final examination and was therefore excused two terms' worth of dinners (as indeed was Girton's law fellow, Cherry Hopkins, née Busbridge). For once, the Scots came last to the Bar. Margaret Kidd became an advocate in 1923. But for 25 years she was the only woman advocate in Scotland. But she did very well and was the first woman to 'take silk' – become a King's or Queen's Counsel –

in the United Kingdom, doing so in 1948, a year before Helena Normanton and Rose Heilbron took silk in England.

The hostility – even misogyny – which some of these early women faced is quite astonishing. The Law Journal noted that Ivy Williams did not intend to practise at the Bar – she went on to become the first woman academic lawyer, teaching law at Oxford for the next 25 years – and commented that the admission of women ‘was never likely to be justified by any success they will achieve in the field of advocacy’. Helena Normanton, the first woman to join an Inn of Court, on the day the 1919 Act received Royal Assent, and to practise at the English Bar was described in these disparaging terms:

‘A warhorse from the old feminist days and the terror of her male colleagues . . . a comic character quite without fear, and physically unattractive. She can only be described as large and blowsy . . . incredibly common not to say vulgar . . . a menace to the movement for she was always trying to organise the women into forming separate groups from the men.’

I'm afraid that the fear of a 'warhorse from the old feminist days' may have lingered on for a long time. I have recently been gripped by the fourth volume of Lord Hope's diaries, dealing with his years as a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary from 1996 to 2009. His entry for 31 December 2003, says this:

'A new team of Brenda Hale (Monday 12 January will be "Hale Day" says Alan Rodger), Bob Carswell and Simon Brown will inject a different atmosphere into the corridor. . . Of the three, Simon will keep up the spirit of good humour. Bob will drop neatly into Brian [Hutton]'s shoes as our man from Northern Ireland, and Brenda will be a source of some anxiety until we adjust to the very different contribution she will make.'

I'm not sure that I have ever assuaged all that anxiety. Three and a half years later he is describing me as 'a formidable, vigorous person with a strong agenda of her own' although he very generously goes on 'but many of her ideas are valuable and thought-provoking'.

But what is this 'Brenda agenda' and why should voicing it arouse such feelings? It is, quite simply, the belief that women are equal to men and should

enjoy the same rights and freedoms that they do; but that women's lives are necessarily sometimes different from men's and the experience of leading those lives is just as valid and important in shaping the law as is the experience of men's lives. So why is that 'an agenda'? Quite simply, because we have not yet achieved the equality we seek in the law, let alone in life.

Let's remember that, despite the courage of those early pioneers, progress was very slow for the first 50 years. In the 1920s eight or nine women a year were admitted as solicitors and in the 1930s the average was 16 a year; an average of 13 women were called to the Bar during those same decades. By 1957, there were still only 356 women holding practising certificates as solicitors in England and Wales, out of a total of some 19,000; by 1975 this had risen more than four-fold to 1563; but that's still a very small proportion. I'm not sure that I realised how rare practising women lawyers were when I came up to Cambridge to read law in 1963. So perhaps it's not surprising that it was not until 1962 that Elizabeth Lane became the first woman county court judge, although Girtonian Sybil Campbell had become the first woman Metropolitan Stipendiary Magistrate in 1945 and Rose Heilbron was appointed Recorder of Burnley in 1956 (a part time post).

But of course a lot happened for women in the 1970s. And that included a steadily growing number of women studying law in Universities and qualifying as solicitors or barristers. They have been close to or above parity with men for decades now. In 2017 the proportion of women admitted as solicitors was nearly 62% and the proportion of women called to the Bar in 2017/18 was 51.5%.

But this has not been matched by similar proportions in senior positions. The overall proportion of women partners in solicitors' firms is one third. But this masks big variations depending on the type of firm – lower in the big firms, more than half in medium sized firms, and lower again as sole practitioners. Nor do the published statistics tell us how many of these are equity partners, but the lament is that the proportion is much smaller. The proportion of practising QCs who are women has now reached nearly 16% - this has been going up at roughly a percentage point a year for the last decade, which shows how recent this is. In the judiciary, the percentage of women reduces the higher up the judicial hierarchy we go, although it is getting better at every level. We are up to nearly a quarter of the High Court, the Court of Appeal and, very recently, the Supreme Court. Circuit judges are 29% and District Judges in the county

and magistrates' courts are 39% and 35% respectively. The percentages in all kinds of tribunal judges range between 40 and 50%.

Why should we mind about this and want more women lawyers and more women judges? If justice is blind, should it matter who the judge or the lawyer is? I can think of at least four answers, but there may be more.

The first is that the rule of law is one of the two governing principles of our constitution. In *R (Unison) v Lord Chancellor*,¹⁰ Lord Reed explained the importance of the rule of law, and its relationship with the other governing principle, the sovereignty of Parliament, in this way:

‘At the heart of the concept of the rule of law is the idea that society is governed by law. Parliament exists primarily in order to make laws for society in this country. Democratic procedures exist primarily in order to ensure that the Parliament which makes those laws includes Members of Parliament who are chosen by the people of this country and are accountable to them. Courts exist in order to ensure that the laws made by Parliament, and the common law created by the courts themselves, are applied and enforced.

¹⁰ [2017] UKSC 51, [2017] 3 WLR 408, para 68.

That role includes ensuring that the executive branch of government carries out its functions in accordance with the law. In order for the courts to perform that role, people must in principle have unimpeded access to them. Without such access, laws are liable to become a dead letter, the work done by Parliament may be rendered nugatory, and the democratic election of Members of Parliament may become a meaningless charade.’

This means that the law must be there to serve every member of society, not just one section of it: the women as well as the men, the black as well as the white, the gay as well as the straight, the poor as well as the rich, and so on and so on. Everyone must be able to feel confident that the law is there for them if they need it. Everyone must feel confident that they will get a fair hearing if they are brought before the courts. This means that our courts, and the lawyers who serve their clients in and out of court, must be as reflective as possible of the society they serve. Women make up half of that society.

The second is closely linked to that. The guiding principles of our law are justice, fairness and equality. Three hundred years ago, we would not have included equality among those guiding principles, but in *R (Carson) v Secretary*

*of State for Work and Pensions*¹¹ Lord Hoffman referred to ‘the Enlightenment value that every human being is entitled to equal respect and to be treated as an end and not a means. Characteristics such as race, caste, noble birth, membership of a political party and (here a change in values since the Enlightenment) gender, are seldom, if ever, acceptable grounds for differences in treatment’. In one way or another, that notion of equality is reflected in all the modern human rights instruments and many national Constitutions. It has also been reflected in our domestic law since the 1970s – we moved from the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 to the Sex Discrimination [Removal] Act of 1975.

Those values of justice, fairness and equality should also be visibly embodied, not only in our laws, but also in the lawyers who administer them. Our absence – and that of other under-represented groups - means that they are not.

Third, and leading on from that, there is also equality of opportunity. This benefits, not only the individuals concerned, but also society, so that we don’t waste the talents that are available to us. But we are wasting them at present. There is a noticeable falling out of (or with) independent practice after between 15 and 20 years. The law is not alone in this, but it is particularly noticeable in

¹¹ [2005] UKHL 57, [2006] 1 AC 173, para 15.

the law. Women – and for that matter men – should feel free to put their family responsibilities before their own professional advancement if they want. But many of them want to do both and find this increasingly hard because of the way much private practice is organised. Even in academic life, where one is much freer to organise one’s time conveniently and can do such a lot of one’s work at home, the career expectations and trajectory are structured around the life of a person without demanding responsibilities outside work. In private practice it is much worse. Increasingly, it is motherhood rather than gender which holds women back.

All those able young women who go into the law should be enabled to stay in it, and not be forced out by the long hours culture in some parts of the profession. We need to find sensible, practical answers to some of the problems they face. They should be able to return if they decide to take a career break for family or other reasons. And they should have their merits and abilities recognised if they choose to step sideways, out of private practice and into some other kind of more manageable practice – in the public sector, government, local government, regulation, or in the private sector. We need to recruit good people from many different walks of legal life into the judiciary at all levels.

So the rule of law, democracy, equality and the efficient use of talent are all enhanced by increasing the diversity of the profession along all sorts of parameters, but the most of which prominent is gender – because we are not a minority group. But is there more to it than that? Might not the law itself be enhanced by a greater diversity amongst its practitioners? I used to be sceptical about this and many senior women lawyers still are. We are all servants of the law and we all tend to think of the law as a neutral set of principles and rules. But of course it is not, or at least not always.

Let's take an obvious example, the saga of the wrongful conception cases: that is, cases where medical negligence has meant that a child is born whom her parents did not want to be born. Until the House of Lords' decision in *Macfarlane v Tayside Health Board*,¹² the courts in both England and Scotland had held that, on normal principles, all the physical, psychological and financial damage suffered as a result should be compensated. In the Inner House, the Scottish Court of Appeal, Lord Cullen had stressed that the job of the judges was to apply legal principles in a consistent and coherent manner, unless there were overwhelming policy reasons not to do so. He summarised the competing policy arguments:

¹² [1999] 2 AC 59.

‘On the one hand is the argument that the rejection of the claim will vindicate the value of human life and the blessings which a child can bring to his or her parents. It avoids the risk of an undue temptation to seek abortion and the risk that a child in later life might discover that he or she was 'unwanted'. On the other hand there is the argument that these risks are overstated, that a child is not always a blessing, that the ability of couples to choose to limit the size of their family, in accordance with lawful and widely available means of contraception, should not be ignored, and that damages may help to alleviate hardship as well as meeting need.’¹³

It was not for him to evaluate these arguments. He was not persuaded that there was any overriding consideration of public policy against awarding the pursuers their damages.

The House of Lords took a different view. Lord Steyn was quite explicit:

‘It is possible to view the case simply from the perspective of corrective justice. It requires somebody who has harmed another without justification to indemnify the other. On this approach the

¹³ 1998 SC 389, at p 397.

parents' claim for the cost of bringing up Catherine must succeed.

But one may also approach the case from the vantage point of distributive justice. It requires a focus on the just distribution of burdens and losses among members of a society.’¹⁴

He was firmly of the view that commuters on the underground (his replacement for the man on the Clapham omnibus) would say that the parents should not recover the costs of bringing up the child they never meant to have. I don't know how he knew that. There was no properly informed and properly designed public opinion survey to support him. Can it be right to set the views of a random collection of commuters against the application of long and well-established legal principle? Parliament can always put it right if public opinion is strongly opposed to what the judges have decided (as it did in the Compensation Act 2006, section 3, after the House of Lords' decision in *Barker v Corus UK Ltd*,¹⁵ that the damages for mesothelioma caused by wrongful exposure to asbestos by several employers should be apportioned between them rather than borne by the one who happened to be solvent but might not in fact have caused the damage).

¹⁴ [1999] 2 AC 59, at p 82.

¹⁵ [2006] UKHL 20, [2006] 2 AC 572.

The wrongful conception saga continued with *Parkinson v St James and Seacroft University Hospital NHS Trust*.¹⁶ The Court of Appeal permitted the claimant to recover the *extra* costs of bringing up a disabled child. I indulged in a lengthy explanation of what having a child she never wanted to have means to a woman – not so much in terms of the financial costs of bringing up the child but in the loss of autonomy and the freedom to live her life as she chooses because of the responsibility to care for the child. The reasons given in *Macfarlane* for denying what would on normal legal principles be recoverable were ‘various and elegantly expressed’ but all arrived at the same result. At heart it was ‘a feeling that to compensate for the financial costs of bringing up a healthy child is a step too far’ (para 87). But ‘the notion of a child bringing benefit to the parents is itself deeply suspect, smacking of the commodification of the child, regarding the child as an asset to the parents’ (para 89). The defendants did not appeal.

The saga ended with *Rees v Darlington Memorial Hospital NHS Trust*,¹⁷ where the mother was disabled but the child was healthy. The Court of Appeal awarded her the extra costs of bringing up the child occasioned by her disability. This time the defendants did appeal. The House of Lords rejected the

¹⁶ [2001] EWCA Civ 530, [2002] QB 266.
¹⁷ [2003] UKHL 52, [2004] 1 AC 309.

mother's attempt to overturn *Macfarlane*. Three of the seven Law Lords (Lords Steyn, Hope and Hutton) would have held that this too should be an exception to the *Macfarlane* rule, so the mother should have her extra costs. The majority (Lords Bingham, Nicholls, Millett and Scott) held that the rule must apply to the birth of a healthy child. But they invented a wholly new remedy - an award of a conventional sum, put at £15,000, to recognise the invasion of the mother's right to live her life in the way she had planned. They attributed this recognition of the serious loss of autonomy to Lord Millett in *Macfarlane*, but I dare to hope that my own prolonged account, in *Parkinson*, of what having a child means to a woman, may have had some effect. Lord Hope, in his diaries, says that the case was about how, rather than whether, to compensate the mother.

This is an obvious example and I could give many less obvious ones. There are many, many other areas of the law where the different experience of living a woman's life may bring a different perception of normality and fairness from the perception brought by the experience of living a man's life. Sometimes one will be more apposite than the other. But both are entitled to equal respect.

As we celebrate 150 years of Girton's history, we should also celebrate the many firsts which Girton's women have achieved in the law – from Janet Wood

and the other early law students, to Carrie Morrison and Maud Crofts, to Sybil Campbell, to Mary Arden, first woman High Court Judge in the Chancery Division and first woman to chair the Law Commission, to Rosalyn Higgins, first woman Judge on the International Court of Justice in The Hague, and to your fourth Visitor, following in the footsteps of Lord Balfour (Visitor from 1924 to 1930), Lord Baldwin of Bewdley (Visitor from 1930 to 1947), and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (Visitor from 1948 to 2002), the first woman to be given an honorary degree by this University, in 1948. If I had known when I came up to read law in 1963 how recently it was that women had been allowed to take degrees and how few women there were practising the law, would it have put me off? I hope not!