

Robin Simpson KC

1927 – 2025

An Appreciation



Robin Muschamp Garry Simpson KC died peacefully on the 10th November 2025, surrounded by his family. He was aged 98, narrowly missing out on a 'ton', as he liked to call it.

He was a giant of the criminal Bar, and a member of the "Quartet" of pre-eminent criminal advocates who practised from these chambers in the 1970s and 1980s: David Tudor Price (Common Serjeant and High Court Judge), Richard Du Cann QC (Chairman of the Bar) and Kenneth Richardson QC (First Senior Treasury Counsel).

He was called to the Bar by the Middle Temple in 1951 and obtained a tenancy at the fashionable QEB chambers (chambers later moved to our present location at 3 Raymond Buildings in 1989). The Head of Chambers was Derek Curtis-Bennett, who had defended the WWII traitor William Joyce (nick-named Lord Haw-Haw) and the Rillington Place murderer John Christie. QEB had amongst its members some of the most famous practitioners of the day, including Jeremy Hutchinson QC, later Lord Hutchinson of Lullington, and Victor Durand QC.

Robin was a supreme advocate, whether it be before a jury or a bench of licensing justices. His genius lay in his incorrigible sense of humour and in his acute judgement of people, enabling him to gauge judges, juries, justices and witnesses brilliantly and to turn seemingly intractable positions to the advantage of his clients. His appetite for mischief was boundless.

His practice spanned the criminal and licensing courts and committees for over 40 years. He appeared in the obscenity trials of the 1960s and in cases involving everything from bingo halls, betting offices and bars to murder and armed robbery throughout the 70s, 80s and into the 90s.

After taking Silk in 1975, he represented the only defendant to plead guilty in the Playland vice trial in 1975 and, in 1977, he defended one of the six members of Scotland Yard's Obscene Publications Squad convicted of having helped the Soho porn trade to flourish by their systematic acceptance of bribes, receiving corrupt payments from pornography dealers of more than £36,000 between 1965 and 1972.

In one criminal case before the Court of Appeal, he was appearing in an appeal against conviction, with Sam Katkhuda as his junior. As he was advancing before the full court what might be thought of as 'jury points', Lord Justice Tasker Watkins VC, no mean tribunal himself, boomed to Robin, "Mr. Simpson, you are not addressing a bench of licensing justices, you know!". Robin, quick as a flash, turned to Sam and said in a voice that all could hear, "Bloody fool, you never told me!" Even Tasker Watkins was amused - and Robin won the appeal.

In 1981, Robin represented Terry Sinclair, the principal defendant in the 'handless torso' case, then one of the longest and costliest trials in English legal history. The trial began in January 1981 at the historic Lancaster Castle and the trial judge was the legendary QC and High Court Judge Dame Rose Heilbron. The case concerned the gangland execution of Marty Johnstone, whose body was found in a water filled quarry near Chorley in October 1979 with his stomach slit open and his hands and teeth removed. In the trial, Robin led Dermot Wright (then in these chambers) and Terry Sinclair's girlfriend, barrister Karen Soich, who was also a defendant, was represented by Robert Harman QC ("Harmonium", as Robin called him) leading John Nutting.

That year he also appeared with Howard Godfrey as his junior in the seminal case of **Galbraith**, in which the Lord Chief Justice Geoffrey Lane provided the principles to be applied in a submission of no case to answer in a criminal trial, which are still in use today.

On the move from Queen Elizabeth Building to 3 Raymond Buildings, Robin took over as Head of Chambers, succeeding Victor Durand QC and remained so until his retirement in 1992. Thereafter for many years he continued to enthuse following generations with his dedicated work as an advocacy trainer to these chambers and to his Inn.

Robin was much loved in chambers and extremely popular with barristers, solicitors and court staff. Robin was known to have said that nothing is ever too serious that you cannot have a little bit of mischief with it, but that was only possible because of his innate ability to charm. He referred to his good friend and the famously austere Dick Du Cann as "Robespierre"; to the eminent Victor Durand as "Trader"; to Jeremy Hutchinson as (for obvious reason) "Starsky" and to Sir Richard Beckett KC and Sir John Nutting KC, respectively, as "Rigor Mortis" and "Nutmeg". He was admired and respected by judges, even if some of them fumed at his sharp wit and occasional habit of appearing in court late.

Robin was a Recorder of the Crown Court from 1976 until 1986. He also acted as an appeal steward of the British Boxing Board of Control. He was an MCC member for decades and President of the Bar Real Tennis Club.

He will be greatly missed by all that knew him, particularly at the Bar and in these Chambers. Our hearts and sympathies go out to Charles, Anna, Kate and Hugo, and Robin's nine grandchildren.