



# 40 Years of Lester Aldridge – Interview with Roger Woolley

[Roger Woolley](#), Chair of LA and one of its longest-standing partners, is [celebrating 40 years being at the firm](#) this month. We caught up with him to reflect on how things have changed at the firm and in the wider legal profession over the past 40 years.

## When did you join the firm and in what role?

2 January 1981, as an articled clerk (AKA a trainee solicitor).

## How have things changed at Lester Aldridge over the past 40 years?

Hugely. I joined Mooring Aldridge and Haydon (one of the 2 firms that became Lester Aldridge) which was an 8 partner firm with offices in Bournemouth, Christchurch, Parkstone and Poole. Our main office was built for us in the 1890s. The partners were very scary and even had their own toilets! First names would not have been permitted. Even the work was different. We did criminal law and a lot of legal aid work, with only one partner doing commercial work. I started off as a litigator doing criminal defence work; prosecutions; matrimonial; PI, general civil litigation and a bit of conveyancing in my spare time!

## How has technology changed over the years and how has this impacted your role?

In 1980, there were two word processors (that was considered advanced), no photocopiers (only a Xerox machine in the basement at Bournemouth), no fax and no mobile phones. Documents had to be produced from scratch. We relied on books – there was no internet. Now, we have documents and information immediately available on our phones or laptops; documents are generally much better – but longer. The pace of work has increased exponentially. Nearly all my correspondence now is by email or phone – instead of by letter. I now edit my own documents and dictate letters and documents via my iPod (and, yes, I know that iPods are now old technology, but it works!).

When I first became a partner, I used to work through the night before going on holiday to get up to date and would leave my secretaries 15–20 tapes of dictation. They had usually just finished them when I got back! Now

the work follows me on my phone. Is that progress....? It makes going and coming back less stressful but the bit in between more so!!

## **What is the proudest moment from your career at Lester Aldridge?**

There are 3 candidates for this:

Being elected as managing partner in a contested election with 3 other candidates, seeing people who had been my trainees – like [Matthew Barrow](#), [Tom Alder](#) and [Lucy Stevens](#) became partners (more to come, I hope) and, in Matthew's case, following me as Managing Partner and lastly, getting the law changed when the Folkestone to Honiton Clearway Order had to be changed because I had successfully defended a roadside trader on a fantastically interesting point of law!

## **What made you stay with Lester Aldridge for more than 40 years?**

No one else made me a good enough offer! Seriously, I became a partner quite soon after qualifying and so, from an early stage, had the opportunity to shape the firm, which was important for me. I was part of the Mooring Aldridge committee that planned and negotiated the merger that led to LA being formed. On a personal level, I have been lucky enough to work with people I like and I am a big supporter of LA's culture. Whilst we sometimes get things wrong, it is generally a mistake or because we have overlooked something rather than because of any bad motives. I believe very strongly in the things that make LA different – our approachability; the absence of arrogance and hierarchy; the commitment to working with clients to find ways to do things, rather than telling them why they can't do what they want to do. As one client once said of us, we are "shockingly normal for solicitors". That led to a great marketing campaign.

## **What does the future hold for LA? How different do you think things will be in 40 years' time?**

Another 40 years of success, of course. Technology will continue to change how we work, but in ways we can't yet predict. 20 years ago a well-regarded specialist on computers and the law confidently predicted that we would all have been replaced by computers within 10 years. 35 years ago I confidently predicted that the fax would never catch on! So I may not be the best person to ask.

I think we have positioned LA to do the type of work where human interaction (i.e. people) will still be needed. Clients use us not just because of our technical ability but because they want advice, based on experience. We have some brilliant young lawyers and a fantastic committed support team. We have a strong financial position which means we can invest in both people and technology to secure the future.