

**National Eisteddfod of Wales
Montgomery and the Marches 2003**

ANNUAL LAW LECTURE

**HIGH STREET SOLICITORS
IN WALES**

by Emyr O. Parry



Cymdeithas y Cyfreithwyr
The Law Society



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Let me first of all thank you for your generous introduction.

Indeed, it is a great honour for me to have this opportunity to deliver this lecture at the National Eisteddfod, here in Meifod, Montgomeryshire.

Montgomery – this part of Wales so renowned for its beauty – or rather, this land that overfloweth with milk and honey, as my mother was so fond of telling me.

She would, of course, say that – because she was born in the village of Hirnant, near Penybontfawr, which is where she spent her early years. Then in 1910, her mother died and the family moved to Llangollen. Her father, Edward Edwards, was a very religious man. He would read his Bible every day, and he literally believed every word of the Good Book. It had always been his hope that I would, one day, become a Minister of Religion myself, and he was both bitterly disappointed and very shocked when I told him that I was seriously thinking about becoming a solicitor. He retorted “You’ll never go to Heaven my boy”, words based upon his fervent belief that solicitors made their money from telling lies, that they were therefore all sinners, and that there was no room for them in Paradise.

And who could blame him? After all, Welsh Bards and religious leaders had already expressed the same sentiments. In 1703, Elis Wynne o Lasynys – Y Bardd Cwsg – the Sleeping Bard, had written in his Visions of Hell “Roast solicitors in a bonfire made of their parchments and papers until their learned intestines drop out.” And I also think

that it was he who wrote somewhere that solicitors “drink the blood and sweat of the poor”.

Mercifully, grandfather did not live long enough to see me become an established member of that band of sinners, although I have to confess that sinners or not, I have enjoyed every minute of my chosen professional career.

Last May, I reached the promised age, and I retired. If I include the time that I had spent at Aberystwyth University studying for my law degree, and the years undertaking my articles of clerkship, I have spent more than half a century grappling with the laws of our country.

I had the honour of being a High Street Solicitor myself in the town of Llangefni, Anglesey for some 35 years, followed by 11 years as a District Judge. During that time I was responsible with others, for the County Courts at Caernarfon, Llangefni, Colwyn Bay and Rhyl. In addition I spent nearly 20 years sitting as a Recorder of the Crown Courts. As a result of that background, I have had the opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the trials and tribulations facing the High Street Solicitor in Wales – the topic which I have chosen for this lecture.

Lecture? Well, that is what I was requested to deliver, but I must be completely honest with you and say that I have never been a lecturer, nor indeed an academic lawyer, so if some of you have come here in anticipation of an erudite and polished lecture, I regret to inform you that you are going to be greatly disappointed.

After spending so much time as one of their number, High Street Solicitors have always been very close to my heart – some might even say that the topic courses through my veins. Having said that, I have to admit that I am quite concerned about their future.

But first let me clarify who I am including in the category of the High Street Solicitor. I am talking about those small legal practices that are to be found in all the rural towns throughout Wales. These range from single partner firms, the one man band if you like, to those comprising of perhaps half a dozen partners. Practices that have their roots in the local communities which they serve; practices which provide a service to those communities by offering a range of run of the mill services such as drawing up wills, dealing with estates, conveyancing transactions, acting for landlords and tenants, disputes between neighbours, various personal injury claims, and a smattering of criminal work.

Fifty years ago, High Street Solicitors would have offered all these services to their local communities as general practitioners, and this nurtured a close relationship between solicitor and client, both of whom would have put their trust in each other, hence the phrase “Family Solicitor”. Against this background, High Street Solicitors played an important role in their local communities wherein they were held in high esteem. The Family Solicitor got to know about not only the affairs of his client but also those of the

whole family. When a client came to the office to discuss his business, the solicitor used to have to set aside the first quarter of an hour of an interview to discuss the health and wellbeing of his client's family, for which, no charge was made. By demonstrating such interest in the client's family life, he would gain his trust and friendship. And when it came to preparing the bill, the solicitor would know full well that the client expected a discount – a fact which the solicitor would have borne in mind when preparing the bill in the first instance! Sometimes the solicitor knew full well that the client would not be able to pay his bill in ready money – and very often it was not paid in cash but in kind – perhaps a sack of potatoes, a brace of pheasants, a dozen eggs, or a chicken or turkey at Christmas.

The names of the High Street Solicitors in Caernarfon where I was born and grew up, were as familiar to the local people as the names of the local preachers. My father would often talk about Sir William Ellis Davies a Member of Parliament, or Michael Edward Nee the Mayor, John Trefor Roberts the Clerk to the Justices – “Twrne Cig Moch” or the “Bacon Solicitor” as the townspeople, “the Cofis” would call him. According to my father, when these luminaries walked along the street, men would raise their hats as a token of respect, and the ladies would bob a little curtsy. And when I arrived in Llangefni in 1958, I realised that the same kind of respect existed there too. One day the Chaired Bard, Rolant o Fôn, a quiet red haired man, who was literally a High Street Solicitor in Llangefni, was returning to his office one afternoon when a tramp approached him on the street and asked “What is the time, oh lawyer divine?” to which Rolant replied like a shot “Quarter to two thou flea ridden shrew”. And when this Eisteddfod came to Llangefni in 1957, Rolant was standing in a queue for the toilets in the Eisteddfod Field when one of his clients approached him and asked “Rolant Jones – what queue is this?” to which Rolant replied “Q.P. dear boy, Q.P.”

In addition to their work as solicitors, they also gave of their time generously to their local community. Many were deacons in their chapels, or local councillors, or trustees of some local fund or other. This, of course worked both ways. By sharing their experience and abilities with fellow members of these establishments, they also expanded their links and increased their client base. In those days they had more time to do this. They might be at their desks by 10 a.m., go home at mid day, return at 2 in the afternoon before leaving for home at 4 p.m. and NEVER do any work in the evening! But oh, what a change that has swept over this comfortable, idyllic lifestyle during the past forty years or so. These days I know of many solicitors who start at 7.30 in the morning, take work home with them where they labour on until late, and also work at week ends. This is not with the object of making money, but simply to keep up with the workload!

Over the years, one of the main complaints levied against the legal profession has been, that we are reluctant to move with the times. I believe that there is some justification for this criticism. Because the solicitor's livelihood is closely linked to his local community, it has become necessary to face up to the numerous social changes within that community that have come about over the years and to respond to the ensuing new challenges and to

adapt in order to accommodate them.

As a society we have seen major social changes – women going out to work rather than staying at home to look after the family and who have thereby gained both in independence and self confidence. They are no longer content to acknowledge the husband as the head of the family and insist that he too must play his part in running the home. This has created tensions in many homes, often resulting in marriages breaking down. Whilst divorce used to bring shame or disgrace to the family, it has now become acceptable or even fashionable, as society has come to realise that maintaining an unhappy marriage often causes more harm than terminating it. This change in attitude has led to vast changes in Family Law. It is now accepted that the wife, as well as the husband has contributed to building up the family assets; in the old days, if the wife left home, the husband was not obliged to support her and there was never any recognition that she should have any share in these following a divorce. As we all know revolutionary changes, far too numerous to mention, have occurred which solicitors now have to deal with.

In the field of employment law, the employer can no longer rule the roost in the same way as he used to. Systems encapsulating the rights of employees have been introduced, and the employees rights to compensation for unlawful or wrongful dismissal are regularly upheld.

In the old days, land owners had the power to do what they liked, even to make their tenants homeless as and when they felt like it. But there have been massive changes in this area of the law as well. Numerous Acts of Parliament have been passed to regulate the landlord and tenant relationship, and to afford the tenant protection against eviction at the whim of the Landlord or the consequences of oppressive conduct on his part.

In the context of health and safety at work, the Factory Acts and other Health and Safety Legislation have been extended to improve working conditions and matters of health and safety. As a result, there has been a great increase in the number of claims for damages arising in accidents at work.

There has also been a frightening increase in the volume of traffic on our roads and in the legislation to control it. As a result, damages for personal injuries arising out of road traffic accidents have spiralled to the extent that this is now a growth industry.

In the field of Criminal Law there have been vast changes – indeed an explosion linked to social changes, fuelled in the majority of instances by the use of illegal drugs. Given this increase, immense pressure has been brought to bear upon the Police to curb this rise in crime, and as a result, the public has expressed much concern about Police tactics when questioning suspects. This has led to a system being introduced which gives the suspect the right to have a solicitor present when he is being questioned by the Police, whatever time of the day or night it might be. Thereby, a Duty Solicitor must be available around the clock to give advice at Police Stations. Neither the one man band, nor the small

legal practices have the means to provide such a service and consequently the work has passed to the much larger firms who are able to provide the staff to do it.

We are all aware of the immigration problem in this country. It is a national problem, but in the main it affects the solicitors in our larger towns and cities. One can understand why the decisions taken by the Immigration Tribunals strike at the very roots of Human Rights. As a result it is essential that legal assistance be available to protect the rights of these people. I am not for one moment begrudging this right, but because of the scale of the problem, this has resulted in a huge increase in legal aid expenditure, as a result of which the Government is calling for a cut-back on the legal aid fund

Another development that has led to a big increase in the number of cases coming before the Courts, and consequently the drain on the legal aid fund, results from society's changing attitudes towards children. Many years ago, the abuse of children, was part and parcel of the social structure. Most of the abuse took place behind closed doors, and because they did not know any better, children would accept this kind of behaviour as a normal part of their upbringing. But as society has advanced, more and more of these cases have come to light, and with the greater medical awareness of the harmful effects of such abuse on children, society now roundly condemns such behaviour and has insisted that statutory steps be taken to protect young children from such abuse. Probably the most striking example of this new awareness is what happened in Cleveland during the 1980's culminating in the Butler Schloss Inquiry and consequently the passing of the Children Act 1989.

Time does not permit a detailed study of this very important piece of legislation, but it has had a dramatic effect upon the private law rights of children and their parents – applications for residence orders, orders for contact, the changing of surnames and so on. The Act also deals with the public law rights of local authorities to intervene in family matters where there are concerns about the way children are brought up by their parents, children at risk, etc. – and provisions give to the local authorities the right to take the children away from their parents and to place them with foster parents, or indeed in the most extreme cases, the right to arrange for them to be adopted.

All these cases again bring pressure upon the public purse, but not only that, if the solicitor is to reap the best financial benefit out of dealing with such cases, he or she must be a member of the Law Society's Children's Panel and must invest in appropriate training in order to become an enfranchised solicitor. The one man band and small practices cannot afford either the time or the expense to undergo such training. Consequently, it is often the case that for this reason the work goes to the larger practices.

These are only a few examples of the changes that have taken place within local communities which have resulted in more cases coming to the courts. When Legal Aid was introduced in 1949, this made the Courts more readily available for the litigant, but now such are the pressures upon the legal aid fund that legal aid is far more difficult to obtain

in some instances, the rates paid are far less than private rates, all of which are a matter of grave concern to the profession.

At face value, one might think that the High Street Solicitor would welcome this increase in work, but in fact this has caused many of the smaller firms to review how their practices are structured.

Because of the vast changes in the law, it has become totally impossible for the smaller practices to cope with them. Because there is such an abundance of legal work, the common or garden solicitor has been unable to develop the specialist skills that have become necessary if he is to provide the right advice upon every facet of the law. In the old days it was easy enough to cope with the routine cases of land law, or wills, with a bit of criminal law thrown in, but now, given the plethora of legal work, it has become impossible to cope with all these changes and consequently solicitors have had to start specialising in different areas of the law. In order to provide a comprehensive service to their clients, many have had to expand by employing more solicitors in their practices so that they too could specialise, and as a result, their business overheads have increased dramatically.

The one man band and the smaller practices had to choose – they could expand in order to meet the challenges of the modern legal world, or they could restrict themselves to concentrating on the traditional areas such as conveyancing or drawing up wills. Some did just that, but then, estate agents, banks, insurance companies and others were given the right to deal with such work. The one man band had to compete with these, and it soon became obvious that estate agents and others could do the work more cheaply and that many members of the public resorted to these outfits when they were buying or selling property. Instead of the loyalty shown towards the family solicitor as in the past, the public tended to go for the cheapest option, without regard to the standard of the work or the quality of the advice given.

The other option was to expand. Bigger practices started to buy out the smaller ones; local practices amalgamated to create larger ones; this meant that the client had to entrust his affairs to a comparative stranger who just happened to have the appropriate qualification and expertise for the subject matter in hand.

As a result, old ties of trust and loyalty towards one solicitor – the Family Solicitor – have weakened and in the course of time may disappear altogether.

These days, because legal practices are so busy, and need to turn around the work so quickly in order to meet their overheads, there is no time to inquire about the client's state of health or that of his family, nor to give him time to pay his bill, nor to accept a sack of potatoes or a dozen eggs in part payment. No! These days every minute of the solicitor's work has to be accounted for and logged into the system so that he can be said for it. Unfortunately, many solicitors, I fear, now churn out work like a giant sausage

machine, keeping one eye on the clock and the other on the till, with no eye at all on the quality of the service which they provide.

What concerns me now is that the emphasis appears to have shifted towards running a business rather than providing a service – one direct effect of Margaret Thatcher's government and its supporters. I do not wish to create the impression that the quality of service has necessarily deteriorated in every firm, but what I am trying to do is to draw your attention to the dangers that accompany this change in attitude.

The background which I have already outlined clearly shows that the horizons of the law have broadened enormously over the past 50 years or so, which means that it is now impossible for the modern solicitor to run his practice in the same way as they were run in those far off days. The emphasis is now on specialising, but with so many fields that demand specialised skills, it is impossible for one man bands and the smaller practices to provide these specialised services.

There is yet another development that has had a detrimental effect on small practices. In view of the huge annual increases in Legal Aid spending, the Government decided that the system needed changing. The complaint was that the cost of providing Legal Aid was spiralling every year and in line with what was happening in every other public service, the Lord Chancellor was put under great pressure to curtail this spending.

When the Access to Justice Act was implemented in 1999, a revolutionary change was made to the way Legal Aid was to be provided. From April 2000 onwards, it became a requirement for solicitors wishing to undertake Legal Aid work to apply for a contract with the Legal Services Commission. The Commission will not issue a contract to any solicitor unless he or she is willing to adopt the standards of expertise set by the Commission. Hand in hand with these standards, solicitors need to adhere to the Commission's own franchising systems and agree to representatives of the Commission reviewing their files and the systems in place within their practices. This has resulted in great increases in the amount of paper work and administration, for which solicitors are unable to charge any fee. As a result, many solicitors have now decided not to take on legal aid cases. This has meant that many of their legal aid clients now have to take their cases to enfranchised firms, which may not be the firm of the client's choice, and once again, it is the small practitioner, who cannot undertake the administrative burden of becoming enfranchised, who will lose out.

Another change that has come about, relates to the fact that Legal Aid can no longer be used to pursue personal injury claims (except in cases involving medical negligence). It was decided that that it would be possible to fund these cases by taking out appropriate insurance. What this means is that the client funds his action through this policy, and as a result, the insurance company concerned usually insists that its own solicitor will undertake the work – and in most cases, these are the larger firms in the big towns and cities.

There was a time when firms such as Accident Direct, Claims Direct and others considered this to be a highly profitable enterprise. They advertised on television "No win – no fee", and members of the public were gullible enough to take their claims to them. By now some of these companies have gone into liquidation leaving the Claimants high and dry.

With the work being dealt with by the large firms in the big towns, spare a thought for the average Welsh speaker living in a rural village in Anglesey or here in Montgomeryshire contacting a solicitor by telephone and trying to explain his problem to a monoglot English speaking person, whose first priority was his loyalty to his instructing insurance company which would provide him with a lot of work, rather than the Claimant client, and whose goal was to obtain a lot of work from the insurance company in order to make money for his firm, irrespective of the kind of service provided to the Claimant. As a District Judge, I witnessed many such cases where the service provided was atrocious. Fortunately, however, there are also conscientious solicitors who are prepared to put the Claimant first. Usually, he will be a local solicitor who can find an appropriate policy for his client, whereby the local solicitor will do the work for the client thereby keeping contact with him and promoting his interest. Mind you, personal injury work calls for specialist solicitors, but there are many of these to be found even in rural Wales.

If I had served my articles with one of the big city practices, or after qualifying as a solicitor had joined one of the large specialist firms, it would perhaps, have been much easier for me to take on board all the changes that have occurred. But no, that is not how things were. I had the privilege of being in practice in the small towns of Caernarfon and Llangefni, and in both instances being part of a happy and close-knit local community. And now that the tide is turning, I am saddened to see the work moving away from the small firms, and observing links which have been built up over many years, being severed. But that is how things are. We have to move on, even if it does mean breaking long standing ties established between the family solicitor and his clients.

But then the situation within the legal profession is not unique in this respect. In the field of medicine, the General Practitioner no longer calls at the patient's home unless there are special reasons for him to do so. These days it is the patient who goes to the surgery. And of course, doctors have formed group practices, and because they are all under one roof, the overheads of running a practice are that much lower. It is rare for a patient these days to be able to see the doctor of his choice without an appointment- such appointment having been made many days in advance. If a specialist practitioner is required, the patient will have to travel to the large hospital to see one – probably involving a journey of 50 miles or so in many cases.

In the financial world, the same thing is happening within our banks. Rather than seeing their local branch manager, customers now have to contact a faceless manager in an office many miles away, and when we have a telephone inquiry, none of us know

who we are talking to. A friend of mine told me a while ago that he had telephoned his local branch of HSBC to enquire about his account. He had to wait for some considerable time while his call was re-routed to another office, only to discover that he was talking to a girl in India to discuss his problem.

I fear that the legal profession is rapidly going down the same impersonal route, and if we are not careful, there is a danger that we shall see a significant deterioration in the quality of the service provided. Unfortunately, I cannot see any way of stopping this drift altogether, even though I do believe that it is possible for the High Street Solicitor to harness these trends in order to try and keep the work local and thus preserve his links within the local community and to provide a quality service.

So, what options does the High Street Solicitor in Wales have to retain his role within the local community and to prevent the work being taken out of the area?

For some time now, the Law Society has permitted solicitors to advertise, and possibly many of you will have seen solicitors' adverts in Yellow Pages, in various newspapers, whilst some of the larger practices also advertise on radio and television. But in my view, in the Welsh speaking areas of Wales, the best way for the High Street Solicitors to strengthen their ties with their local communities would be to advertise in their Community Newspapers. Throughout Wales there are a number of them published in the Welsh Language, and in my view this would be an excellent way to remind the local community that their practice exists on its doorstep and that a comprehensive service is available for clients both in Welsh and bilingually.

Another step would be to invest in information technology. Today, more than ever, there is a greater emphasis on using the computer, the web, and so on. Because of the nature of the Solicitor's work he is in daily contact with many other companies, and if those have the appropriate technology and the local solicitor has not, then he is at a disadvantage and cannot provide a commensurate quality of service. This, of course, involves a substantial initial investment, but on the other hand, once the systems are in place, there is less of a need to employ staff, e-mail is cheaper than the post, and solicitors will be able to keep abreast of recent changes in the law, and to look up decided authorities, by using the web; all of which would be advantageous to his practice.

It is also important for High Street Solicitors to have a policy of respect and integrity towards each other. In times gone by, there was a standard charging tariff for conveyancing work and normally, all solicitors within the area adhered to it. As a result there was no point in clients shopping around looking for cheaper deals. Unfortunately however, standard tariffs became a thing of the past, they began to compete against each other, and some solicitors started to charge less than others in order to cut the throat of their competitors. This created bad feeling amongst local solicitors which availed no one. While cheaper charges may have looked advantageous to the public, cut price conveyancing resulted in sub standard services. It is my belief that if solicitors within a

small area are to retain their status and respect, they must not do this kind of thing. It is far better that they meet from time to time to bring their costs into line with each other, to exchange views, to share information – and even to share resources – for example to establish a communal law library to which they shall all contribute, and thus cut down on the duplication of legal books and journals within their own practices. The Welsh Folk Group, “Hogia'r Wyddfa” used to sing “Together shall we stand”. I believe this to be true in the case of the High Street Solicitors. This is why I welcome the formation of the Law Society in Wales, and more locally the Mid Wales Law Society, and indeed in my own parish the Gwynedd Law Society. These provide a forum in which to air problems and discuss developments within the profession, and of course, they provide a channel through which solicitors can get to know each other better and therefore nurture friendship and co-operation, and thereby provide a better service for the community.

Another matter which we need to bear in mind is to remember the effect of the National Assembly on the laws of Wales. The Assembly has passed legislation that is specific to Wales, and if a person with a legal problem in Wales were to seek advice from solicitors from over the border, I wonder whether that solicitor would be aware of the fact that the legal position in Wales might differ from that which prevails in England. Would it not benefit the High Street Solicitors in Wales to immerse themselves in such legislation and thereby be able to correctly advise their local clients and thus keep the work local.

Since I myself am no longer a High Street Solicitor, I cannot claim any expertise in the burning issue of professional indemnity. As every solicitor knows he has to have such insurance in order to practise, but the premiums are very expensive and are a great strain on the smaller firms in particular. The public nowadays are issuing far more claims for professional negligence against solicitors. I do not take issue with that, but most of these claims arise in the populous large towns and cities rather than within the rural areas of Wales. So is there room for the Law Society in Wales to investigate the possibility of negotiating special rates for the small legal practices in Wales? After all why should they subsidise the huge claims that originate within the large towns and cities? I appreciate that premiums are related to gross fee income, but I feel sure that the Law Society in Wales could do much to assist in this respect. After all, there is nothing new in this proposal because a similar situation exists with motor insurance – smaller premiums are payable in rural areas than in the bigger cities because fewer claims arise therefrom.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the unique factors that appertain here in Wales. Because of the singular situation of the Welsh Language, here is an excellent opportunity to promote the interests of the High Street Solicitors. In the Welsh Language strongholds of North West and South West Wales, or indeed in any part of Wales where the language is habitually used, there is the opportunity to develop a totally bilingual service. It is high time that we buried once and for all the notion that English is the language of the Courts in Wales. That is not the case – it is only one of the two languages. Over the past 10 years in particular gigantic steps have been taken to promote the use of the Welsh Language in the Courts in Wales. I do not have the time to give you more than

a thumbnail sketch of these developments – it would require a separate lecture of its own to do so – but briefly, here are some of them :-

1. The Court Service has allocated a substantial budget for providing a service through the medium of Welsh in our Courts, and with the assistance of the Welsh Language Board, the Court Service has developed a Welsh Language Policy. As a result of that Policy, great improvements have been achieved.

2. A special Welsh Language Unit has been set up in the County Court in Llangefni, and although they have a staff of less than half a dozen, provision is made for the Welsh Language to be used in every Court throughout Wales. Forms are prepared either in Welsh or bilingually; arrangements are made to translate free of charge all documents to be used at a trial to be conducted in Welsh; it will arrange the provision of accredited translators for such hearings; and with the co-operation of the Courts Administrator on the Wales and Chester Circuit, arrangements can be made to ensure that Welsh speaking judges are available to hear cases tried in the Welsh Language. Under the appropriate Practice Directions Solicitors must give advance notice if the Welsh Language is to be used at a hearing, so that all these arrangements can be put in hand.

3. The Judicial Studies Board organises an annual seminar for Judges and the Chairpersons of Tribunals with a view to discussing progress and training, thereby ensuring that the level of service provided in Welsh is of the same standard as proceedings conducted in English.

4. When Judicial appointments are made within the Welsh speaking areas in Wales, it is now a requirement that applicants must be sufficiently fluent in the Welsh language to conduct trials therein.

5. The Assembly, along with the Court Service, is also playing a leading role in these developments. Programmes are under way to try to standardise Welsh legal terminology, and it is hoped that various establishments such as the University, be invited to undertake this task. This is a huge challenge and a very costly one at that but if everyone gives of their best, and providing that the enthusiasm of the people involved does not wane, this will be successfully achieved.

6. And talking about the University of Wales, I believe that before long, five of its colleges will have law departments. This in itself is a commendable achievement, but could not one or more of these establishments provide courses to teach law through the medium of Welsh? Perhaps running a whole three year course would not be practicable, but why can they not develop evening courses or vacation courses in order to train our prospective lawyers to conduct cases in the Welsh Language? I have already touched upon judicial appointments and the need for some judges to be able to carry out their duties through the Welsh Language. The provision of such courses would create a font of lawyers capable of conducting cases in Welsh and thereby providing themselves with the qualification needed to apply for a judicial post in the Welsh speaking areas of Wales.

7. I refer to one other matter. For those of us who support the use of Welsh in our Courts, we owe an immense debt to the judges and officers of the Courts and to those of the Assembly who have spent so many hours developing a language policy for our Courts. Our heartfelt thanks must go to our Presiding Judges, our Liaison Judge, Members of the Standing Committee on the Use of the Welsh Language who work on our Circuit as well as to the National Assembly for their tireless involvement. And I make this appeal today, here on the Eisteddfod field – this stronghold of the Welsh Language – that you, the young solicitors of Wales assume this cloak of responsibility so that these efforts do not go unrewarded. The present climate is extremely supportive of the Welsh Language, but if the flame is extinguished, it will be very difficult to rekindle it.

Not only is it vital for me to emphasise that these facilities are available, it is also necessary that the public utilise them. I believe that it is the duty of every Welsh speaking Solicitor to draw their clients attention to these provisions and to underline the fact that this is not a second rate service that is being offered for the conduct of cases through the Welsh language. Indeed it is an advantage rather than a disadvantage for the Welsh speaking public to be able to present their cases in their mother tongue.

I see that we have several High Street Solicitors amongst us today. Do please take heed. Here you have a unique opportunity to keep legal work local within the Welsh speaking areas of Wales. Offer a Welsh or bi-lingual service to your community, and convince your clients that such service is not in any way inferior to what is available in English. Explain to them these provisions that have been established in the Courts and assure them that they can have their cases presented in a totally confident and polished way. The more the demand for the use of Welsh in our Courts, the more will be the efforts made to improve standards.

It is said that God planted this lovely language of ours in every Welshman's heart so that he will nurture and cherish it.

These are worrying times for the High Street Solicitor in Wales. It is a period of change and challenges must be met. But with effort, co-operation, goodwill and perseverance, the clouds of uncertainty will disperse and the High Street Solicitor in Wales will preserve his standing and dignity within his local community.