

# Leading the way in maritime law

HFW partner Hazel Brewer is closing in on 30-years as a maritime lawyer. Here she speaks to Kendall Carter about her interesting career and offers some advice to those considering a career in maritime law

## How did you get into maritime law?

By accident. I expected to go into criminal law and started work as an articled clerk at a London law firm that had a reputation for dealing with difficult criminal law and civil rights cases. I worked for a year on serious medical negligence cases, which ignited my interest in litigation and working with people and experts from other professions. However, I also worked on a few criminal cases and realised I did not have the passion for criminal work. I requested a release to transfer the second year of articles (and eventually got the release after a lecture on the sanctity of deeds of article clerkship being second only to marriage vows) and then moved to a boutique city firm which primarily specialised in commodities and shipping. I had the opportunity to work for a number of the shipping and commodities litigation partners during that year. On qualifying I was offered a position in the property department, but held out for shipping and commodities, and did not look back.

the bill of lading); and one in the Court of Appeal, on a case that confirmed that being entitled to call on a performance bond was not an automatic entitlement to keep the proceeds by way of windfall profit if no loss had actually been suffered. However, there are many others which are memorable, one due to the loss of a vessel and terrible loss of life in days before port state control had the teeth it now has, and others due to the particular facts or the quirks of practicing in different jurisdictions.

## What makes maritime law special?

I think it has kept me mentally challenged and entertained because it is so varied. You have many different types of clients and people involved in maritime and international trade. In any one day you may be assisting blue chip companies, that have complex contracting and risk allocation regimes and internal processes to be followed, as well as taking calls from individuals or small companies looking to leverage gaps in the market, trading on



Hazel Brewer, partner, HFW

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### Did you have a maritime background?

Apart from being born in the port city of Bristol, UK, and, as a child, being dragged around the SS *Great Britain* (the first iron built ocean liner with a screw propeller and the longest passenger ship in the world in 1843) as a summer holiday ritual, I had no maritime connections.

sale terms practically on the back of an envelope and fixing a vessel spot to carry their cargo.

### Are you able to mention any big cases in which you might have been involved?

I was involved in a case which went to the House of Lords on a question of what amounted to taking or demanding delivery under COGSA 1992 (first foot sampling of LPG at the berth prior to discharge did not amount to a demand for delivery under

### How have you been able to balance career and family?

When I had my first child my firm at the time had no maternity policy until I asked for one – they'd never had the need. Women lawyers now are thankfully much-better placed. Choosing the right life partner helps but it wasn't easy. I was a partner in London and when the eldest of my two children turned five and started school I found it incredibly tough. There was no longer any flexibility around his bedtime and with my hours in the office,

travelling etc there were weeks at a time when I barely saw him. When I asked (and then looked elsewhere) for flexible hours or a four-day week part-time work there was the attitude, 'you are a partner, why would you want to go part time?'. I left that firm and joined one in Dubai where I was working not as a partner but on different terms that worked for me which gave me an opportunity to keep working while also balancing family life. So I have had to step back in my career in order to keep going.

### Would you encourage young women to consider a career in maritime law?

I have had such an interesting and (mostly) enjoyable career to date (and I hope to last a bit longer yet) and made some very good friends along the way. It feels curmudgeonly not to be singing the praises of maritime law, but it is a tough market. Young lawyers need to be realistic about work volumes and levels of competition for pure shipping work, particularly in Australia. They may need to travel and work in-house to pick up higher volumes of experience. ■