

The boulevardier

By Justin Gleeson SC

Earlier this year an eerie calm descended over Phillip Street. Coffee shops were strangely silent during the usual morning rush hour. Female solicitors reported they were attending conferences in court without undue male charm and attention. Young CJ in Eq was puzzled that the Equity Division was churning through double its normal workload. He could only put it down to the surprising circumstance that both counsel were now usually present when the matter was called on. The Federal Court found in its bankruptcy list that desperate debtors with novel defences based on the fusion of Roman law with modern insolvency law were increasingly running them in person. What was the explanation for this strange set of circumstances?

Early in the year the answer seemed to be that Lee Aitken had left the Bar, and possibly the legal profession, for good. Rumours abounded. Was it the ever increasing strain of producing more articles on Bullfry QC without being entirely self-referential? Had Aitken taken up practice at the London Bar? Had he decided instead that the answer to life lay in practice as a US attorney conducting class actions against negligent banks? Had he, like his hero Ovid, simply been banished into exile?

Gradually reports filtered through that he had not truly disappeared. He was seen lunching with Heydon J at The Barracks, developing a sophisticated and intense legal proposition which had the interest, if not the acceptance, of Heydon. Coffee sales began to return to normal levels. Pace in the Equity Division slowed. Coles QC began complaining that it was back to the bad old days when he would have to wait patiently in court while his opponent was detained elsewhere.



Lee Aitken: Blood pressure now below 200

The truth then emerged: Aitken had managed to secure a full-time position at the University of Sydney as an associate professor, teaching in the areas of real property and litigation and pursuing further his academic interests in equity and trusts, insolvency and federal jurisdiction. Clearly a life-transforming experience had occurred. His blood pressure had been reduced below 200. Alcohol was now treated with disdain. The University of Sydney web site described him as follows: 'married with three daughters, Lee enjoys reading and dozing'.

Notwithstanding this fulltime academic appointment, Lee has continued to practice at the Bar. He churns out many advices in his favourite areas of equity, banking and insolvency. He is appearing in shorter cases in the Equity Division, the Federal Court and sometimes interstate courts, consistent with his conscientious attention to the needs of his students. For the time being at least he has avoided turning into Bullfry QC.