

APPOINTMENTS

The Hon Justice Christine Adamson

Christine Adamson SC was sworn in as a judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales on 17 October 2011.



Photo: Courtesy of the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

Her Honour graduated from the University of Adelaide in 1986 with honours in law, and then joined the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department as a legal officer. In 1988 Adamson J came to work in Sydney at the Australian Government Solicitor's Office.

Adamson J was called to the Bar in 1989, and read with Stephen Robb and Michael Rudge. Her Honour took a room in Blackstone Chambers and built up a successful practice encompassing trade practices, administrative law, constitutional law, professional negligence, personal injury and disciplinary matters. Her Honour took silk in 2003 and in 2004 became a founding member of Banco Chambers. In August 2006 her Honour was appointed chair of the NSW Council of Law Reporting.

The president of the Bar Association, Bernie Coles QC spoke on behalf of the NSW Bar, The president of the Law Society, Stuart Westgarth spoke on behalf of the solicitors of NSW and Adamson J responded to the speeches.

The president described her Honour as

a thoroughly courteous, patient and articulate advocate with broad experience acting for both plaintiffs and defendants and an innately judicial temperament. In the eyes of many, a briefing solicitor and industrious junior, your Honour has been the epitome of a senior counsel, learned in the law, meticulous, diligent and quick to seize upon the essence of a case.

The president had commenced by referring to an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 27 May 2004 he had seen, which he described as a little surprising because of her Honour's 'well-deserved reputation for being thoroughly undemonstrative':

Your Honour featured front and centre in a quarter page photograph, flanked by three of the women barristers whom you had mentored, and not to mention inspired, during your time, up to that time at the Bar. The article dealt on the particular difficulties that women need to overcome in order to establish a successful practice at the Bar, but ended on a characteristically enthusiastic note.

Your Honour likened yourself to a born again Christian when talking up the Bar as a place to practice law and in relation to the prospects which it offered to the women who might follow your Honour's fine example and join it.

The president said that the article:

encapsulated your generosity towards junior women barristers and indeed, barristers generally. The vital encouragement you have given to so many is a theme that recurs throughout your Honour's own highly successful career.

The president referred as well to her Honour's speech as Ms Senior at the 2004 Bench and Bar Dinner:

...the first occasion of that kind your Honour had ever attended. During your Honour's speech ..., your Honour provided an interesting vignette recording that, following your Honour's appearance in younger days at a Jessup Moot, a member of the Melbourne Bar had taken your Honour aside and urged you to come to the Bar. As your Honour on that occasion so succinctly observed, a chance remark like that can change someone's life. There is, as I have said, some surprise that your Honour is leaving the Bar, given that for so long your Honour has been such a forceful and eloquent proponent of the Independent Bar, its norms and institutions.

Your Honour once described the Bar as a good place to practice law, if one has a certain temperament of intellect, doesn't mind anxiety attacks, insomnia, working on Sundays and irregular cash flow.

The president said that he:

dare not speculate on how ... the Chief Justice was able to persuade your Honour to join the bench of this honourable Court, save to say that his Honour would have no doubt have been required to muster all those very considerable powers of persuasion for which he was so universally renowned in his own career amongst us.

The president also referred to her Honour's appellate practice:

Although your Honour was understandably much in demand as junior counsel, your Honour embraced readily the pleasures and challenges of appearing unled in a very large number of cases of real significance. By the early 2000s, your Honour had begun to develop what became a very considerable practice in this court, and your Honour's eventual considerable appellate practice, appears to have commenced at least while your Honour was still in your Honour's 20s. A case reported in Volume 28 of the *New South Wales Law Reports* in 1992, records the Honourable R.P. Meagher giving the leading judgment with the words:

As a result of Ms Adamson's persuasion, the appeal must be allowed.

That case was doubtless noticed by many. It may fairly be said that, at least from the perspective of those contemplating what became briefed to your Honour in subsequent appellate practice, a star was indeed born.

The president concluded with a further reference to the professional conduct matters in which her Honour represented the bar:

Again, the citation of those matters would be lengthy, but your Honour invariably in those, and in every other case, conducted your Honour's cases with a deep sense of public duty and commitment to the protection of the public interest where that was at issue in the proceedings. As with your Honour's other cases, your Honour did so dispassionately and with an impeccable sense of fairness.

Mr Westgarth said that in her Honour's:

... first year at Lyndon Infants School at the tender age of four years, all the children were given 'flash cards' on which they could print the first word they wanted to learn and then practise. The Adelaide Festival of Arts program was being promoted at the time.

While other children were selecting words like 'ladder' and 'house' your Honour chose 'Saltzburg Marionettes' and, of course, had to be issued with a flash card about a metre long.

He had said that her Honour's voracious appetite for the written word was reflected in her Honour's

...room full of books – not a legal tome to be found among them ...

Favourite works are read and re-read – Samuel Beckett, Oscar Wilde, Simone de Beauvoir, Kazuo Ishiguro and Virginia Woolf. It is indeed 'A Room of One's Own'.

Your Honour's love of language and the cadence and beauty of words inspires you to put pen to paper, writing short stories and other works of fiction. Writing judgments should be a breeze.

Mr Westgarth referred as well to the many areas in which her Honour had made an outstanding contribution:

... – the Council of Law Reporting, acting on behalf of the Bar Association and the Health Care Complaints Commission with regard to professional misconduct cases, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Independent Commission against Corruption.

In addition your Honour has taken up many cases for the public interest and has frequently appeared in the NSW Court of Appeal.

Whether it is acting for the Environmental Defender's Office of NSW in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal with the aim of protecting endangered grey nurse sharks or encouraging more women to join the Bar, a unifying aspect is your Honour's commitment to social justice and the greater community good.

Your Honour has always been very supportive of women and the function they play in terms of presenting a different viewpoint; of being persuasive advocates without being excessively strident. Your Honour has taken a strong mentoring role in encouraging junior barristers to be the best that they can be.

Perhaps this harks back to your youth when you and your sister attended the 'Women in Politics' conference in Canberra in 1975. As your mother stated in the book *Women's Electoral Lobby: 21 years in South Australia 1972-1993*: We marvelled at the intellectual stimulation, and the feeling of common purpose that was generated there.

Mr Westgarth concluded:

It seems fitting to remind your Honour of the poem you contributed to the Walford Anglican School Year Book of 1979 entitled *Metamorphosis*: Once again: 'You stand with your foot in the door of the world knowing that behind you...is the impetus which will enable you to pass through'.