

Her Honour Judge Penelope Wass SC

Judge Penelope Wass SC was sworn in as a judge of the District Court of New South Wales on 18 April 2016. Arthur Moses SC spoke on behalf of the New South Wales Bar.

Her Honour was born in Tamworth and raised on a sheep farming property just south of Uralla in the Northern Tablelands of NSW. She graduated from the University of Sydney in 1987 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. Her Honour subsequently undertook a Diploma of Law from the Solicitors' Admissions Board, during which time she worked for various mid-tier law firms like the then Moore and Bevins.

Her Honour completed the SAB diploma in 1991 and was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court in August of that year. For the next nine years she practised at the Commonwealth DPP, in what Moses SC called 'a remarkable cohort that included, among others, Tony Payne, Michael Wigney, Mark Buscombe, Robert Bromwich, Terry Buddin and Liz Fullerton – as their Honours were then'. Moses SC continued:

If Macquarie Bank is sometimes dubbed 'The Millionaire Factory' surely the Commonwealth DPP of that era ought to be given the title of the 'Judicial Factory'.

Her Honour began practising at the New South Wales Bar in February 2000. She read with Lucy McCallum and Ian McClintock as they were then. Her Honour found a room on 6th Floor Selborne Chambers, where she remained until the time of her appointment.

Her Honour became a much sought-after mentor to many women barristers, particularly in respect of advice in conducting criminal cases. Lunches were organised, dinners were had, but perhaps the most well known were the skiing weekends in the Snowy Mountains.

Her Honour built up a diverse civil and criminal practice, civil appeal practice and Court of Criminal Appeal practice. Her Honour's hard work and dedication was rewarded in 2013 when she was appointed senior counsel. As senior counsel she was regarded as an all rounder who was happy to appear in all jurisdictions, ranging from the Local Court to the High Court.

Her Honour also served on a variety of Bar Association committees, among them the Criminal Law Committee, the Equal Opportunity Committee and a Professional Conduct Committee. Her Honour has presented and chaired numerous CPD seminars and assisted with the Bar Practice Course and Bar Exams.

In paying tribute to an advocate of 'the highest skill, integrity, common sense and strength', Moses SC identified an appropriate metaphor in the form of a painting that hung on the wall of her Honour's chambers.

Judge Wass, there was a painting in your chambers, featuring a young girl with a looking glass. Entitled 'Looking for Clues'. It is an appropriate metaphor for one of our bar's most diligent, thorough and investigative female practitioners – one who readily accepted the most challenging cases in search of the truth. No detail was too small to escape your Honour's attention. Nowhere was this more evident than during the second coronial inquest in 2013 into the death of 33 year-old Nadine Haag, in which your Honour obtained an open finding on behalf of the Haag family, rather than one of suicide despite resistance from police investigations. There were many more cases, which were equally hard fought on behalf of worthy clients but for today it is suffice to say that your Honour brings to the bench of the District Court compassion, fairness, practicality and a wealth of experience before the District Court, the Court of Appeal and Court of Criminal Appeal.