



# CELEBRATING GOTELEE WOMEN



*With a workforce comprising 80% women, a team of partners of 50% women and with over half of staff (both male and female) on flexible working to accomodate positive work-life balance, we asked a number of female colleagues at Gotelee Solicitors about life as a woman in the workplace for International Women's Day. We wanted to find out the challenges they have faced, the obstacles that they have had to overcome, and who they have taken inspiration from in their career.*



**Renitta Uter -  
Trainee Legal  
Executive**

**Tell us about  
your career path:**

'My career at Gotelee has been somewhat unexpected. Hugh, our head of the criminal team needed an assistant and after a year he asked if I was willing to train as a Legal Executive and I gladly accepted his offer. Prior to working at Gotelee, I worked as an assistant at Suffolk Police and Suffolk County Council, but it wasn't until I started working for Hugh that I really found what I was passionate about'

**Have you had to overcome any obstacles as a woman in your career?** 'I cant say I have had to overcome any obstacles. Being a woman and a woman of colour can be an obstacle in itself, but I have never let that get in my way!'

**Is there anyone that you take particular inspiration from?**

'Inspiration is definitely taken from Hugh. In this field, it is not always what you know but who you know! Hugh (and Gotelee) is very well respected in the courts and by other practitioners which is very helpful in our team! He is trustworthy and has a wealth of knowledge and I am still amazed how dedicated he is to his clients (don't tell him this, he will get a bigger head!!).'

**What is it like being a woman at Gotelee?**

'Being a woman at Gotelee can be a bit of a challenge. The law is male orientated and the majority of the equity partners here are male, so you need to be opinionated and strong willed. You have to be that bit louder to make sure your opinions are heard and taken on board.'



**Nicola Weldon -  
Partner**

**Tell us about  
your career  
path:**

'Having been heavily involved in athletics as a teenager, I had always planned to be a PE teacher. A last minute change of plans led me to a Law degree. I decided early on that I wanted to pursue a career as a Solicitor and so undertook the Legal Practice Course (LPC). Having completed my Training Contract in Bromley, Kent I returned to Ipswich in 2003, to be nearer to family and friends. I subsequently worked at the same law firm for 12 years. During this time, I got married, had two children, passed the STEP Diploma and progressed my career from a Solicitor to Associate and then Partner and Head of the Private Client Department. I moved to Gotelee Solicitors 2 years ago to take up the role of Partner and head of the Melton office.'

**Can you think of any obstacles that you've had to overcome as a woman in law?**

'It isn't always easy being an ambitious working mum, but with the support of my husband, family and Gotelee we manage well and I hope that I am inspiring my children to 'aim high' for their futures.'

**Do you draw inspiration from anyone in particular?**

'It is really my clients who inspire me every day. Working as part of the Private Client team, we are there to help people at particularly difficult times, to make those times easier and also to plan ahead so that the difficulties can be alleviated or removed completely.'

**What is it like to be a woman at Gotelee?**

'Being a woman working at Gotelee is not different from being a man working at Gotelee! Since joining Gotelee I have been warmly welcomed and involved in the development of the firm. It is a great firm to work for. As well as being ambitious, the firm is flexible and has a number of part-time employees, myself included, which really helps with school pick-ups and the like. The firm strives for excellence and I'm looking forward to developing myself and my career over the coming years with Gotelee.'



**Diana Infanti -  
Partner**

**Diana's career  
path:**

Diana obtained a first class degree in English at the University of East

Anglia after a career in nursing. In 1997 her career path took a different route. She completed the GDL law conversion course and obtained a training contract with a Norwich law firm. Towards the end of her training contract she transferred to Gotelee, mainly due to their prominent criminal law team. She attained Higher Rights of Audience in November 2008 enabling her to represent her clients as a solicitor-advocate in the Crown Court. When the firm's Clinical Negligence department gained traction and started to grow, Diana joined the team as it provided an obvious outlet for her to combine both her legal skills and medical knowledge and expertise. Since joining the team she has specialised in clinical negligence claims for misdiagnosis, delayed diagnosis and sub-standard treatment or surgery with a particular emphasis on breast and skin cancers and gynaecological cases. She also specialises in claims for mistreatment of mental health conditions.

**Have there been any obstacles that you've had to overcome as a woman in law?**

'I think that one particular example sticks in my mind; In my days of applying for training contracts I remember going for an interview with a panel of (male) partners at a prominent law firm. I didn't get the contract and when I received the feedback, the main reason that I had been given was that I was 'too intimidating'. This really shocked me, because as any new hopeful trainee will attest to, the overriding feelings when competing for training contracts is overwhelming nervousness. I remember thinking that if I had, by some chance been able to convey confidence that surely this should be a positive thing and it struck me that 'intimidating' might not be a word that would be used to describe a male applicant.'

**Have you taken inspiration from anyone in your career?**

'When I first joined the Criminal team at Gotelee, I was inspired by all of the solicitors in the team I worked with. However, Tanya Thomas was great inspiration to me as her knowledge of the law was second to none and I was impressed by her dedication to standing up for and helping some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Tanya also had an unwavering loyalty to her team so you always knew that she had your back, so to speak. In the law, I have come across many inspirational women, not only lawyers but clients also.'

**Do you have any advice for other women in law?**

'I think you certainly have to pick your battles. Try to surround yourself with people who have as much enthusiasm and dedication for the law as you do. And, take pleasure in developing the careers of those around you. I love my job and seeing justice done for my clients. However, what I really love about my job and find very rewarding, is developing the knowledge of the young trainees and paralegals who join Gotelee and watching them grow into accomplished and enthusiastic lawyers.'



**Helen Stuart -  
Partner**

**Helen's career  
path:**

Helen Stuart is an Equity Partner at Gotelee Solicitors, she qualified in 1993 and now heads up the Family Law team. Helen also sits part-time as a Deputy District Judge.

**Are there any obstacles that you've had to overcome as a woman in your career?**

'Given the recent news concerning the gender pay gap and prevalence of sexual harassment, I have considered whether I have faced any career obstacles as a result of gender and can honestly say that thankfully, I don't believe I have. As a trainee, a newly qualified solicitor, in my current role and as a Deputy District Judge I am in the fortunate position of not having faced any gender-based adverse treatment.'

**Have you taken inspiration from any particular women in your career?**

'Yes. A local Circuit Judge whom I used to instruct when she was a Barrister, Caroline Ludlow. Caroline epitomised great work ethic. As a Judge she always showed the greatest respect for her colleagues and compassion for those she presided over and she was always encouraging and positive towards her female advocates. Within our own organisation, Lynn Cornforth our Accounts Manager achieves a vast amount with minimal fuss, we are entirely reliant on her and her skills and she always does a fantastic job.'

**What is it like being a woman at Gotelee?**

'I don't think it's any different to being a man at Gotelee. There is a great deal of mutual respect here amongst colleagues and I like to think that we have cultivated an environment that recognises and rewards achievement irrespective of gender.'



**Mary Canning -  
HR Manager**

**Tell us about  
your career path:**

'My career path is no different to that of many women. I joined a legal firm, worked my way up to a managerial level and then decided to take a career break to look after my family.'

**What obstacles have you had to overcome as a woman in law?**

'Like many women before me, when it came to the thought of returning to the world of work, I felt as though I was starting all over again. I did not have the confidence to return to the managerial level I had left, after all, the world had moved on, I might just not have what it takes any more. It was at that point I found just what I was looking for, a role in Gotelee Solicitors, in my specialism but without the pressure of being at a managerial level. I was appointed as the HR Administrator in October 2015,

supporting the HR Manager. This allowed me to build my confidence, refresh my skills and build relationships within the Firm.'

**What is it like being a woman at Gotelee?**

'As my role developed, I was promoted to HR Officer and finally to HR Manager. I thoroughly enjoy my job, working for a well respected firm, with professional, friendly staff and I have found that my experience, both professional and personal has proved invaluable in my role.'

**Do you have any advice for other women in law?**

The experience of every woman returning to work will no doubt be different, but in a marketplace where there is a shortage of skilled professionals, it is in the interest of employers to develop policies and procedures which will attract and develop those returning to work after a career break.



**Pam Newman -  
Deeds/  
Database Clerk**

**Tell us about  
your career path:**

'After having my children I knew that I wanted to go back to work, so once they had grown up and become a bit more independent, I started working in the accounts team of a local fruit packing company, from there I went to local Insurance company Willis, but felt I was still looking for something to get my teeth into so-to-speak. I saw the role advertised in the accounts team at Gotelee Solicitors and was instantly excited by the thought of working for a law firm as I loved the idea of working on a personal level with people at the most important moments in their lives. From the accounts team, I then moved over into databases and I haven't looked back since. Similarly, having worked at the firm now for twenty-eight years, I too feel that much of my life has played out against the backdrop of the Gotelee environment too.'

**Have you had to overcome any obstacles as a woman at work?**

Yes, in my very early career I think I could say that an obstacle was that in those days once you had your children, you simply had to give up work as a woman, there were no opportunities to work part-time or to have flexible working hours. Thankfully things have progressed since then.

**Have you taken career inspiration from anyone in particular?**

Lots of people over the years. At Gotelee I would say Hugh Rowland, as his capacity for

work is superhuman and he's always been kind to work for. Lynn Cornforth our Accounts Manager is fascinating as she has a degree in biochemistry and is so learned and yet always remains very modest.

**What is like to be a woman at Gotelee?**

I don't think it's any different to being a man at Gotelee. It's a very ethical firm, the partners are all very caring, it's a genuinely kind environment to work in. Credit to the firm, because at 72 I wouldn't still be here if I didn't absolutely love it. Plus the physicality of the job keeps me younger and fitter than most youngsters!



**Lesley Brett -  
Assistant to  
CEO**

**Tell us about  
your career path:**

My career has taken an unpredicted path. I joined the firm in 2003 as a legal secretary and have worked in many of our departments over the years. In 2014 when the firm appointed a CEO, I was approached about taking on the role of his assistant. In respect of my dancing hobby, I was born into a dancing family, my father taught me to dance and I have been dancing with my brother for about six years, improving year on year. In the 2017 Ballroom Competitions, we came 2nd in the Closed UK Championships in the Senior 2 grade (over 45) and 4th in the over 50s International Championships (our best result to date – we were the only couple from the UK in the final).

**Is there anyone in particular that you draw inspiration from?**

Over the years, I have probably helped out in every department and worked for most fee earners at some time. From my personal experience, I have been impressed by the way Catherine Abbott has been able to produce a draft document and get it right first time; Howard Catherall's dictation is so clear and easy to follow; Hugh Rowland and Andrew West take on over and above their fair share and somehow manage to deal with it; the way that Charles Rowett has managed to dig deep to find out how the firm and its people operate and is trying to structure it to make it better is inspiring. Outside of the firm, I am inspired by some of my dance teachers who carry on dancing at such a high level when ill or with broken bones because "it's their job".

**What is it like to be a woman working at Gotelee?**

Working as a woman at Gotelee is probably much the same as anywhere else – interesting and challenging.