

My day at Westminster Abbey to mark the opening of the Legal Year



Notary Public, Laura Carter, on the steps of the Faculty Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury

I was honoured to have been invited to the service at Westminster Abbey to mark the opening of the legal year on the 2nd October 2017. The service, which is affectionately known as the judges' service is held annually to mark the opening of the legal year. The judges' service is a time honoured tradition, which has its origins in the religious practice of judges praying for guidance at the beginning of the legal term. This custom dates back to the middle ages when the High Court was held in Westminster Hall and judges would walk over to Westminster Abbey for the service.

The annual service is attended by the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Chief Justice, senior judiciary and other judges and members of the legal profession, barristers and delegates from the representative bodies of some of legal professions.

I attended this year in my capacity of Notary Public and it is fitting that the oldest branch of the legal profession be at, probably, the most long held tradition of the legal profession. I was in good company, with four of my notarial colleagues dressed in full Notarial garb, a red gown emblazon with the Notary's emblem to one side. Shortly before the service, with the judiciary and the profession assembled and attired in their full traditional dress, right down to the gold buckled pumps, the entrance hall of the Abbey was a sea of gold, red and mauve representing the various branches of the judiciary and legal professions. Friends and colleagues greeted each other enthusiastically and conversations were struck between strangers united by their common calling to the law.

Notarial robes are quite distinct so my colleagues and I were the object of curiosity. Our presence was certainly a good opportunity to be advocates for the profession and to educate others about our work.

A strict order was followed for the procession into the Abbey for the service, which was conducted by the Dean of Westminster. After the service, we took the short walk over to the Palace of Westminster where a reception was held in Westminster Hall. Luckily it was a sunny day, although a bit breezy, so there were plenty of tourists who were treated to an impressive procession of the judiciary and legal profession in full ceremonial dress.

After we had all been given the opportunity to be personally greeted by the Lord Chancellor, the reception itself was less formal with plenty of time for more socialising. Overall, it was an impressive day and an honour to have been given the opportunity to attend this most historical tradition. Certainly a day to be treasured in the memory box.