

Middle Temple 2017 Amity Visit to Washington, D.C.

I am very grateful to the Family Law Bar Association and the Bar Council for assisting me to attend The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple's Amity Visit to Washington, D.C. in September 2017.

The grant provided me with an opportunity to accompany a UK delegation comprised of three Supreme Court Justices, four Court of Appeal judges, fellow committee members of the Middle Temple Young Barristers Association (MTYBA), and other members of the Inn. We attended four days of seminars and events aimed at strengthening the alliance between the US and UK legal communities.

The grant enabled me to participate in discussions led by senior US and UK practitioners on topics as wide ranging as terrorism and media law. One of the most interesting discussions was on human rights in the age of terrorism, which included remarks by Brigadier General (USA, retired) Richard Gross John B. Bellinger III. He shared first-hand information about the military commissions that were set up by various components of the US government. He pointed the delegation to a 1990 case decided by the US Supreme Court, *United States v. Verdugo-Urquidez*, 494 U.S. 259, which he summarised as a judgment determining that there were no Fourth Amendment rights (protection against search and seizure) for non-US citizens. This discussion prompted me to read the opinion of the court delivered by then-Chief Justice Rehnquist, and it opened a window into understanding some of the approaches in the US to preventing terrorism.

After such sombre discussions, it was refreshing to hear a light-hearted speech by US Supreme Court Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch at a reception and dinner at the Supreme Court. Justice Gorsuch was invited by The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple to be a bencher, as was the Hon. John G. Roberts, Jr., the chief justice of the US Supreme Court, several years before him. There were additional networking opportunities during the week, some with remarkable views including a reception on the rooftop of the Watergate hotel during an autumn sunset and a reception at a law firm overlooking the Capitol. I was fortunate to have interesting discussions with senior members of the Inn, whom I had not previously met during my service as a Hall Committee representative on the Finance and Resources Committee or as Treasurer of MTYBA.

One very interesting opportunity afforded to me by the generosity of the Family Law Bar Association and the Bar Council was to attend several sessions in a family court in Virginia. I was able to note the similarities and differences between practices in Virginia and in England. I was grateful to be taken under the patronage of a senior judge and allowed to observe three otherwise private hearings including a custody hearing, public law children proceedings with concerns of neglect, and a hearing to recover an adolescent girl who had run away. The Virginian family proceedings shared many similarities with English proceedings but also had notable differences, including court clerks who were armed with handguns.

Without the help of the Family Law Bar Association and the Bar Council, I would not have been able to meet and keep in touch with the English and American lawyers who attended the 2017 Amity Visit to Washington, D.C. I am very grateful and encourage others to apply for the grant to undertake similar work in international jurisdictions.

Lauren Suding
Field Court Chambers