

## **SWEARING-IN CEREMONY**

### SPEECH

1. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Royal Courts of Justice, at the heart of this country's judicial system. I cannot think of a more impressive location for an occasion such as this. Since I will be retiring in a few weeks' time, today's swearing-in ceremony will be my last. On a personal level, I'm particularly pleased that it should take place here, where I was formally sworn-in as a Circuit Judge nearly 20 years ago.
2. It has been an immense privilege to serve as Chief Coroner for the past three and a half years. Ours is the oldest surviving judicial role in this country – more ancient even than the lay magistracy. As you know, the office of coroner dates back at least as far as the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, and probably further.
3. By contrast, the posts of Senior Coroner and Area Coroner are of very recent origin. The particular importance of Senior Coroners lies in the judicial leadership they provide: leading the coroner service locally and ensuring that bereaved families are kept right at the heart of the coronial process. Area Coroners are also important. They tackle some of the more demanding inquests and provide support to their Senior Coroners. As you know, I have made it a priority to increase the number of Area Coroners. That is because I firmly believe we should join other jurisdictions in cultivating a more collegiate approach to our work. Besides providing greater flexibility and resilience in the running of a coroner area, Area Coroners can be a source of sound advice to those Senior Coroners who are wise enough to ask for it. The days of the isolated and sometimes idiosyncratic coroner are over, I'm glad to say, and we need an

experienced pool of Area Coroners from which to select the Senior Coroners of the future.

4. The position and status of coroners within the broader administration of justice is, I'm glad to say, more widely appreciated and understood than ever before. Coroners work to explain unnatural deaths, and make reports, where appropriate, to prevent future deaths. There is today a greater public appreciation of the fact that coroners are judges. That, indeed, is precisely why each of you will today be giving exactly the same solemn undertaking that your judicial colleagues in other jurisdictions are required to give.
5. I should like to congratulate each of you on your appointment as a Senior or Area Coroner. You and your families will be justifiably proud of your achievements in joining the ranks of the judiciary of England and Wales. Fortunately, all of you have plenty of previous experience as assistant or Area Coroners. None of you will be doing the job for the first time. I can't resist telling you a true story concerning an old friend of mine, a retired circuit judge. He did his very first case as a young barrister back in the 1970s, representing the wife in a contested divorce hearing. When he turned up at court, he found her so upset that she couldn't give him coherent instructions. She spent their conference before the hearing in floods of tears. Eventually, between sobs, she managed to stutter a few words of explanation: "I'm so sorry," she said, "but I've never been in a court of law in my entire life". "Don't worry," he replied, "neither have I".
6. With those remarks, let me welcome you to your new posts and wish you every success in your future judicial careers. Mrs Yallop will now administer the oath or affirmation, as the case may be.