



PROFILE

Elizabeth Lane was born on 9 August 1905 in Bowden, Cheshire, the daughter of Edward Coulborn and Kate Wilkinson. After being educated by governesses and tutors, she boarded at Twizzletwig School in Hindhead from the age of thirteen and then attended Malvern Girls' College from the age of fifteen. She later described herself as "not the studious kind", much preferring games, particularly hockey, to schoolwork. She chose not to go to university, planning that once leaving school she would "have done with academics and have a good time".

In 1924, Lane went to Montreal to stay with her elder brother, Rushton. While there she met his friend Randall Lane; within three weeks they were engaged. They were married in Didsbury Parish Church, Manchester, on 14 January 1926. They had one son, John, born in August 1928; as a toddler, he suffered brain damage as a result of epilepsy, and he died of pneumonia at the age of fourteen.

In 1936, Randall decided to read for the Bar. When Lane became interested in the material he was studying, he said that she knew the subjects better than he did, and should become a barrister herself. In November 1937, Lane became a student member of the Inner Temple, and the two studied law together. Lane sat and passed her final examinations in October 1939, and was called to the Bar the following summer. After a pupillage under Geoffrey Howard, she began practising on the Midland Circuit, where her main interest was in civil work.

Lane's legal career involved many firsts: after becoming a KC in 1950 (only the third woman to do so), she was the first woman to be appointed Recorder of Derby in 1961, the first woman to be appointed a County Court judge in 1962, and the first woman to be appointed a judge of the High Court in 1965; when she became a Bencher of Inner Temple in 1965, she was the first female Bencher of any Inn. This sometimes led to logistical problems. Having agitated for a separate robing-room (she was initially expected to share the men's), she notes that county courts sometimes had difficulties with this. "In one of them my persistence was rewarded by the exclusive use of a room on the door of which was a large notice 'GAS KEEP OUT'." Despite these difficulties, she said that "once I had become an established practitioner I think that I was treated in the same way as any other member of the Bar".

ELIZABETH LANE

BORN 1905
DIED 1988

ADM IT 1937; CALL 1940;
KC 1950; BENCHER 1965;
DBE 1965



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MEMBERS PROFILES

Upon her appointment to the High Court, Lane was made DBE; her husband had previously been made CBE for his work as legal advisor to the British Council. She was assigned to the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty division, which later became the Family Division. In 1971 she was asked to chair the committee to review the working of the 1967 Abortion Act, and wrote the majority of Volume 1 of its Report herself.

Lane retired in 1979, four years after Randall's death. She moved out of the Temple to Winchester, returning to London from time to time to sit as an additional member of the Court of Appeal. She was made an honorary member of the Western Circuit, allowing her to attend Circuit dinners, and greatly enjoyed having a garden, which had not been possible in London. In 1986 she became an honorary fellow of Newnham College, Cambridge, a women-only college; she always encouraged young women considering a career at the Bar. She died in Winchester on 17 June 1988.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lane, Dame Elizabeth. *Hear the other side*, 1985

