

Dilatory lawyers

I refer to the letter from Mr Norman Mann complaining about the reluctance of members of the Bar to reply to letters. Mr Mann cites instances, which can be only called disgraceful, where counsel have failed to deal with papers for periods in excess of six months and telephone calls to chambers, letters to the clerk, and letters to counsel personally were all ignored. Such complaints are familiar. As a member of the Bar of thirty-six years' standing I feel ashamed, and write to express this shame. If it is any consolation to Mr Mann (probably it isn't), I would inform him that things are just as bad when it comes to answering of letters addressed by one barrister to another. A circular letter sent out by Mr John Griffiths CMG, QC, Treasurer of the Bar Council, asked for payment of an increased subscription to our new professional body. Appealing for a timely response, Mr Griffiths acknowledged, without commenting on the fact, that the Bar 'is notoriously dilatory in responding to letters'.

Why should this be? Such dilatoriness is unbusinesslike and discourteous. As the author of a book describing the standards of the consultant professions generally (*Professional Ethics*, Charles Knight, 1969), perhaps I may be permitted to add that it is also unprofessional. The advent of the computerised word-processor and printer, which I have personally used continually for the best part of six years, makes such behaviour now quite inexcusable. Every practising barrister should have one of these useful devices on his desk and use it constantly. It would be even better if he or she had one at home as well. I have known many solicitors who also rendered themselves virtually *incommunicado*. That does not excuse the Bar. It merely shows that both sides of the profession need to tackle this problem.

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