

Those of you who have been keeping up with the entries in this *Exchange Pupillage Diary* (and for those who haven't, why not?!) will have become all too familiar with what has been a central feature of my pupillage over the past few months: Operation Lytton, the latest in a series of "Rochdale grooming cases".

At the time of the last entry the trial was in full swing, moving through examination-in-chief, cross-examination, all culminating with jury speeches from defence counsel. The trial had initially been listed for three months, and at certain points it felt like it could just roll on for months longer. But suddenly, the end was in sight, with the Judge's summing up signalling the endgame: jury deliberations.

It's difficult to describe the state of suspended animation that accompanies waiting for a jury to return its verdict or verdicts. Trial counsel have to remain on constant call as the verdicts could come back at any moment, but of course, the work never ends, which means that short hearings and bail applications are interspersed when time allows. This shuttling between different court rooms gives a coalface-insight as to the reality of the plate-spinning that goes on at the Bar; with the need to keep the details of different cases in your head at any one time.

The days ticked by, and guesses (based on nothing) as to when verdicts might come in came and went, and suddenly the three-month time estimate looked like it might be, worryingly, optimistic. And then suddenly, the news came in from the court ushers...verdicts had come back.

Counsel made their way to the court room as quickly as possible, and all the restless malaise at waiting for a result you couldn't possibly predict was replaced with an excited anxiety at the prospect of a long-awaited revelation being just moments away.

The court clerk started the process of reading out each Count on the 80-Count indictment with the jury responding accordingly:

*"Not guilty."*

*"Not guilty."*

*"Not guilty."*

Suddenly the excited anxiety that preceded the returning of the verdicts was replaced by, well, just good old fashioned regular anxiety.

*"Had the jury weighed the evidence of the Prosecution case and come to a totally different conclusion to the one we thought they might? Had the Prosecution case fallen short at every hurdle?"*

Whilst one of the most fundamental elements of prosecuting a case is to ensure the prosecution is a fair and objective process, it is difficult not to become invested to some degree in the outcome given how much time and work goes into everything preceding it.

And then...

*"Guilty."*

“Guilty.”

“Guilty.”

The jury started to return verdicts on “alternative counts”, which explained the initial raft of not guilty verdicts. For those who may not know, alternative counts are sometimes present on an indictment where the jury might decide that a particular factual scenario has taken place – in this case, sexual offending of some kind – but they weren’t sure that a necessary element of the main (more serious) offence – for example, a lack of consent – was present. As a result, the jury can only convict on the alternative count that, in this example, does not require a lack of consent.

It was a strange feeling knowing that the jury hadn’t agreed with the main thrust of the prosecution case, but had agreed that some of it had happened to varying degrees. It is one of the cornerstones of our criminal justice system that the privacy of the jury deliberation process is sacrosanct, but you can’t help wondering what goes on behind those closed doors, and how the jury arrives at the decisions it does.

And suddenly, it was over. The trial finished, a sentencing date was set, and the cramped, sweltering side room in which we had all been working was cleared out. It felt, somewhat bizarrely, like the last day of school. Everything that had been worked towards had come to pass, and everybody went their separate ways. It is certainly a feeling I’m sure I will become more familiar with as my career progresses, but the end of that first big trial is something I will likely remember for a long time.

Up next, the final month of my first six...