

Jill Black

Doctor of Civil Law

Durham Cathedral, 6 July 2022

The Rt Hon Lady Black of Derwent is the second-ever woman to join the UK Supreme Court and a leading expert in family law. Her career spans the bar, academia and the judiciary, in the fullness of a lawyer's life.

Lady Black attended Penrhos College in North Wales before studying law at Durham University where she was at Trevelyan College from 1972 to 1975.

She was called to the Bar in 1976 at the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple. The first lawyer in her family, her initial career at the Bar involved a broad range of criminal and civil work. She later came to specialize in family law, to allow more time for her own family, a field in which she is pre-eminent authority. She took silk in 1994.

For a period in the 1980s, she then taught law at what was then Leeds Polytechnic. Importantly, she has written several books.

In 1986 she co-authored *A Practical Approach to Family Law*, and continues to serve as a consulting editor. The definitive guide to family law, the bible as we say tongue in cheek for practice in England and Wales,

While one might expect this, there is, also *The Working Mother's Survival Guide* which she published in 1989, clearly ahead of her time.

The dominant feature of Lady Black's career is, however, the roles she has fulfilled in the national judiciary.

Lady Black was appointed to the High Court in 1999 and assigned to the Family Division. In 2004, she became the Chairman of the Judicial Studies Board's Family Committee, until her appointment as a Judicial Appointments Commissioner in 2008, where she served until 2013. Lady Black was appointed a Lady Justice of Appeal in 2010. She was Head of International Family Justice.

In 2017, she became the second woman to join the top bench following only Lady Hale, the former President of the UK Supreme Court. Lady Black retired as a Supreme Court Justice in 2021.

During her time with the Court has made an enormous contribution to the Court's work through her judgments, on divorce, and the care of children, and above all human rights.

I had the opportunity to speak with Lady Black over the phone – not a Teams call – and we discussed our shared interest in international law and transboundary law. She pointed out to me that the cases dealt with real people in these difficult transboundary family cases, and to find out whether the disputes really are intractable.

Her works displays a contextual understanding of law in society and also the close role that international human rights now play.

In *An NHS Trust and others (Respondents) v Y* on the withdrawal of life support, Justice Black, says: The questions for us are questions of law, “[b]ut behind the questions of law lie moral, ethical, medical and practical issues of fundamental importance to society.” The weight of that consideration anchors the legal decisions which I would make.

These achievements demonstrate a longstanding commitment to the practical – and academic – study of law operating in a social and international context. It is a remarkable achievement of dedication, ability and promoting greater equality and diversity.

Moreover, Lady Black has been a great friend of the Law School and her College over the decades making several return visits to meet with staff and students since. She is an inspiration to us all, as a ground-breaking alumnus and trailblazer fully deserving of a Doctor of Civil Law.

Chancellor, I present Jill Black to receive the degree of Doctor of Civil Law honoris causa.