

## Johnny Veeder QC

14 Dec 1948 – 8 Mar 2020

It is difficult to find words to commemorate Johnny Veeder. Difficult because he was such an extraordinary person in so many ways. Difficult because everyone with whom he had contact was deeply affected and has their own special recollection. And difficult because his hatred of vanity and his complete selflessness was such that he would have loathed any such tribute.

Johnny is recognised worldwide as one of the most brilliant, visionary and respected counsel, arbitrators, scholars and teachers in the field of international dispute resolution and international law. He was, truly, a legend in his lifetime.

Johnny was called to the English Bar in 1971 and began practice at what was then 4 Essex Court. He built a busy practice in employment and commercial law and took silk in 1986. But from the early 1980s, under the guidance notably of Johan Steyn (later Lord Steyn), he began to develop a practice far beyond the confines of England, and decidedly “un-English” in its outlook. From experiences in cases such as *Joc Oil* in Bermuda (appearing with a young Albert Jan van den Berg), and *Pilkington Glass* (which reinforced a life-long fascination with Russia), Johnny increasingly focused on international disputes, and so began a period of over 35 years travelling the world, fighting or deciding arbitration cases of all shapes and sizes and becoming one of the world’s most sought-after arbitration specialists. Alongside Sir Michael Kerr, he oversaw the re-birth of the LCIA (later serving as Chairman and long-term Vice-President) and kindled the massive expansion of the arbitration field in London. And beyond the LCIA, Johnny played a key role in arbitration institutions and bodies worldwide, including ICCA, ICSID, the SCC, the ICC, the Milan Chamber of Commerce, to name only a few from a very long list. He drafted laws and rules. He formulated policies. He represented the UK at UNCITRAL. When comfortably over 40, he began the first under-40 arbitration group (the YIAG at the LCIA), which led to the under-40 movement across the globe. He taught. He mentored. And he captured imaginations with his genius mind and enormous heart.

Every step of this remarkable career was infused not only with an extraordinary intellect and inspiration, but also a sense of the greater good. He was principled to the core, and genuinely concerned that the right thing was always done. As an advocate he insisted on the highest standards. He taught his juniors never to refer to their opponents by name; never to use inflammatory language; and always to be entirely open and straight with the tribunal and the other side. As an arbitrator, however fraught a dispute might have been, he had a talent for bridging differences, and for leaving the hearing room with everyone feeling good about themselves and each other.

What was perhaps unique about Johnny, despite his exceptional achievements, was his consummate humility. He was forever unassuming and instantly disarming, engendering a genuine feeling of warmth in everyone he met. He had time for everyone, whoever they were.

And he made everybody laugh.

I first met Johnny in 1993, when I was a new pupil in chambers. I had heard a great deal about him and I was shown to his room with some trepidation. There I saw what looked like the immediate aftermath of a bomb blast. Papers were strewn everywhere. Books were piled haphazardly on every surface. And Johnny was nowhere to be seen. And then there was a voice that came from under Johnny's desk, where he was on all fours. He announced to me that he "had had a clear up" but could no longer find a vital document. The two of us then spent a good while searching, until I pointed out that he was standing on it. For years, like so many other members of chambers, I would sit in that room, often for hours (having only meant to pass by), working with him, watching him work, chatting, and learning more than I could ever have imagined about law, arbitration, ethics, and good practice. Not to mention the devising of complex practical jokes to be played on others (of which he was the undisputed master – often working late into the night creating spoof letters and faxes). Much time was spent marvelling at his work techniques (a system of two index-finger typing involving high impact thrusts at the keyboard, and the use of a broad nib fountain pen that would discharge ink all over his hands, and produce a script that nobody, including him, could ever decipher).

These extended sessions were usually punctuated by regular calls to the clerks' room and the exclamation "*Nightmare!*", which would produce panting clerks at his room, only to be told with a cheeky grin that there was nothing wrong. For many years, lunch breaks were taken, at Johnny's insistence, at his favourite local eatery: a tiny and dishevelled Tibetan restaurant in Leicester Square. Thankfully, this was later closed down by the Health & Safety authority. But Johnny took a special delight in minority (*i.e.* unsafe) food establishments, which he would search out in whatever city he happened to be. The more dignified the company, the less salubrious his choice of restaurant. Many will recall the Member States delegates' dinner at the UNCITRAL Working Group session in New York that Johnny took great joy in arranging in the most unsafe, and unappetising, "hole in the wall" in a remote part of Queens. Never before have so many State representatives bonded and arrived at a consensus on key issues.

He was a natural teacher and scholar, with a hunger for knowledge. He was Visiting Professor at King's College London, where his stories of the US Civil War (*The Alabama*), Stalinist Russia, Peru's Shining Path and much much else of seeming total irrelevance brought investor-State arbitration to life, and where he was loved by all the students. He was also an external academic advisor at City University of Hong Kong and Queen Mary & Westfield College in London. And yet, true to form, he never used the title "Professor". Having said this, I did once enter his room to find him heavily engaged at his computer. On being asked what he was doing, he told me that he was fed up with other people using titles to promote themselves, and he was now searching online to purchase a doctorate.

For 20 years, he was General Editor / Editor of *Arbitration International*, and worked hard to ensure the great success of this journal. And also the success of the contributor Mr Ylts. Mr Ylts began as an unknown arbitration scholar in the early years of the publication (claiming to have been Legal Secretary to the *Macau Sardines* Tribunal). He wrote a number of significant articles. As the years rolled by, Mr Ylts' rise through the academic ranks became meteoric. As is clear from the articles he published, he was awarded a doctorate, then a second doctorate, and then a permanent chair. And the quality of his contributions on the law of arbitration were as impressive as his accolades. It was only much later that Johnny admitted, under pressure, that Mr Ylts was in fact him – and a way to sustain the journal during times of thin contributions. The *pièce de résistance* came in the year 2000, amidst all the concern about the

Y2K computer bug, when the index to *Arbitrational International* announced the following article: “*The ‘Y2K Problem’ and Arbitration: The Answer to the Myth*” by Professor Dr Ylts (Vol 16, Issue 1, 1 Mar 2000, Pages 79–80). On turning to the relevant page, the following appeared:

*“[It is regretted that for technical reasons publication of this article was rendered impossible.]”*

The humour was always good natured. His sheer inability to be unkind meant that he never caused offence. Rather, through his humour he brought out the very best in everyone else.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Johnny’s wonderful family, who were always by his side, until the very end. Those who knew Johnny closely would know that he would have much preferred this tribute to have been about Marie or his dotting children, Anne, Tabitha and Sebastian, or his nieces and nephews – anyone but him.

It is hard to imagine a world without Johnny. We have all been orphaned. But through the mists of tears, we are left with a truly exceptional legacy from which generations to come will be enriched.

**Toby Landau QC**

**9 March 2020**