

# Golden legal eagles

With record profits for top firms and hugely expensive litigation brought by the likes of Roman Abramovich, London is the legal capital of the world. **Joshi Herrmann** introduces its highly paid stars



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## PERFECT PLANNER

### DAVID COOPER, 70 £1.5 MILLION A YEAR

Cooper is the king of planning – he makes oligarchs' property dreams come true for £1,000 an hour, and says he has worked with 31 billionaires in the past few years. He's best known for his work on Arsenal's move from Highbury and recently represented the owners of Yorkshire stately home Wentworth Woodhouse, the biggest house in Europe. The hourly fees on big projects can be "disastrously low", he told the Standard: "Once it starts going down to £400 it's not worth me doing it." Despite getting all the wealthiest clients, Cooper – who has owned Zondas, Aston Martins and Porsches, and once owned 26 cars – says he doesn't work for the money any more: "I'm cash-poor but asset-rich."

## DEAL JUNKIES

### ADAM SIGNY, 56 £2 MILLION

Signy surprised the legal world a few years ago by leaving his job as head of mergers and acquisitions at Clifford Chance for Simpson Thacher – a move that is said to have added more than half a million to his salary thanks to the more flexible pay structure used by American firms. He acts for big-money private equity houses.

### NIGEL BOARDMAN, 61 £2 MILLION

A partner at Slaughter and May, he's the best-known corporate lawyer in the country. His aggressive manoeuvring was credited with fighting off Sir Philip Green's hostile bid for Marks & Spencer in 1999 and this summer the avid Gunners fan worked on Arsenal's transfers, including star striker Robin van Persie's £24 million move to Manchester United.

### MATTHEW LAYTON, 52 £1.3 MILLION

Advised on the sale of EMI's recorded music business last year and, as Clifford Chance's global head of corporate law, is considered the best private equity corporate partner in London. Currently advising Dutch aerospace group EADS on its potential merger with BAE Systems.

### FRANCES MURPHY, 54 £2 MILLION

She may have acted for Boots and Burberry, but this rare female face in the cut-throat world of corporate law is known as a tough nut. "No one has ever described me as fluffy," she said a few years ago, and now she leads Slaughter and May's corporate practice.

## DARLINGS OF DIVORCE

### FIONA SHACKLETON, 56 £1.5 MILLION

Known as the "Steel Magnolia", Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia is Britain's most recognisable lawyer, after working for the Prince of Wales, Paul McCartney and – presently – the Duke of Cambridge and Prince Harry. She reportedly earned £3 million from representing McCartney in his divorce case, and left court on the final day with wet hair after Heather Mills threw water over her. She got into hotter water last year for allegedly "marking up" bills to clients, and after receiving a \$221,000 payment from client Madonna, wrote an email to her friend saying: "We obviously shd have asked for more!!!!!! F x."

### HELEN WARD, 59 £1 MILLION

Famous for winning a then record £48 million payout in 2007 for Beverley Charman in her divorce from insurance magnate John Charman – a legal landmark because it was the first time that judges recognised a wife's equal contribution to a marriage. She guided Andrew Lloyd Webber through his divorce from Sarah Brightman and tied up Guy Ritchie's split from Madonna. Last month she shocked the traditionally loyal world of family law by quitting her firm Manches – where she was the star partner – to join rival Stewarts Law.

## TAX WIZARDS

### GRAHAM AARONSON, 67 £2.5 MILLION

He currently represents almost every multinational operating in this country, often in tax disputes that last years. Legal 500 said he was "in a

league of his own" last year, which is probably why David Cameron asked him to take time off to recommend new rules to stamp out tax avoidance. Tax lawyers have lost work from the drying up of massive company mergers since Lehman Brothers, Aaronson told the Standard, but HMRC's redoubled zeal to collect every penny has created extra work for him and his colleagues. He says his most lucrative case took up half his time for four years and involved about 1.6 million documents – "Everyone earned a lot of money, but by God we worked hard," he recalls. And what is the biggest tax sum he has saved a client? "Over a billion."

### JOHN GARDINER, 66 £3 MILLION

Known for his discretion and his

towering stature, Gardiner is instructed by some of the City's biggest solicitors. He owns a stud on the Essex-Cambridgeshire border and can be seen at Epsom or Doncaster watching his horses. Other weekends are spent at his 11-bedroom Château de Garibondy, which he has restored and rents out to the great and the good during the film festival in nearby Cannes.

### DAVID GOLDBERG, 65 £3 MILLION

A popular and eccentric character, he is known for his letter writing and once said that he took up law because he "admired the bravery and apparent integrity of men like Chief Justice Coke and Sir Thomas More". In the "battle against the Inland Revenue" – a phrase Margaret Thatcher once used in a letter to him – Goldberg is among the best operators around.

### STEVE EDGE, 61 £2 MILLION

The only non-barrister on our list of tax wizards, Slaughter and May's Edge is described by a top QC as "the best tax solicitor in the country". The Exeter graduate and Lancashire boy likes his cricket, and can regularly be spotted at Lord's, where he's a member of the MCC.

## CRIMINAL MASTERMINDS

### CLARE MONTGOMERY, 54 £1.5 MILLION

Known as "two brains", Montgomery is a colleague of Cherie Booth at Matrix Chambers and turns up at some of the best publicised criminal cases for either prosecution or defence. She helped Sion Jenkins get his conviction for the murder of his foster daughter quashed and successfully represented Sweden at the Supreme Court earlier this year

at Julian Assange's appeal against extradition, an intriguing match-up against leading human rights lawyer Dinah Rose.

### JOHN KELSEY-FRY, 55 £2.5 MILLION

A charismatic figure at the criminal bar, the Cloth Fair Chambers star won Harry Redknapp's tax-evasion case in February, after which he blasted the prosecution for pursuing the case and wasting millions of pounds of taxpayers' money. Kieren Fallon and Steven Gerrard are among the others to have paid Kelsey-Fry's reported £20,000-a-day fees and he will act as Chris Huhne's defence counsel in his upcoming trial, in which the politician is accused of perverting the course of justice over a speeding ticket. Huhne's wife, Vicky Pryce, will be represented by Clare Montgomery.

### BRIAN ALTMAN, 55 £1 MILLION

When high-profile murderers and serial killers step into the dock, it is more often than not the bewigged figure of Brian Altman they see before them. Acknowledged as the best criminal prosecutor in the land, he has brought home a string of exceptionally difficult cases including Milly Dowler's killer Levi Bellfield (twice) and the "Scalp Hunter" John Sweeney, who murdered two former girlfriends and dumped their remains in canals. He has successfully prosecuted three murders without bodies – always the most challenging to prove.

## LETHAL LITIGATORS

### MARK HOWARD, 53 £4 MILLION

But for a last-minute out-of-court settlement, Howard would have starred in the Cherny-Deripaska

## SILKY SKILLS

It's on the skill of London's top lawyers that the fates of Julian Assange, Chris Huhne and BAE Systems will turn in coming months, not to mention News International's Andy Coulson and Rebekah Brooks next year.

The financial crisis might have brought down the stars of British banking but the capital's legal men and women have seen their reputations grow in recent years, boosted by the challenges of the new financial age and enriched by divorce and litigation "tourism" by numerous oligarchs and sheikhs.

Our list profiles London's top legal stars in corporate, criminal, tax and family law, responsible for the outcomes of some of the most famous appeals, prosecutions and commercial deals in recent memory.

The earnings quoted are estimates based on information from industry insiders. While the top firms pay their most senior partners evenly, on the basis of profits, the barristers are at the mercy of the market. "It really is feast or famine," says top tax silk Graham Aaronson. "You are absolutely on your own."

case this month, a £1 billion private litigation brought by aluminium tycoon Michael Cherny against oligarch Oleg Deripaska, which was set to be one of the biggest battles in British legal history. He is known for his calmness under pressure, and his collapsing of the Office of Fair Trading's claim for a record £112 million fine against Imperial Tobacco last year wowed legal-watchers. Aside from eye-watering litigations, his appellate work is highly rated, with several appearances before the Supreme Court booked in for next year.

### LAURENCE RABINOWITZ, 52 £2.5 MILLION

A shining star of the commercial bar. He represented Boris Berezovsky against Roman Abramovich in the High Court this year, where his questions about whether the Chelsea owner had completed his dissertation, and how much he knew about business when he came into his fortune, made headlines. The Manchester United season ticket-holder once compared litigation to football: "The QC is the centre forward, there to deliver the goals."

### ANTHONY GRABINER, 67 £3 MILLION

As head of chambers at One Essex Court, he is Rabinowitz's boss. After a career at the top of litigation that has also taken in work for the Bank of England Financial Services Law Committee, he recently found his name in the headlines after being hired by the Murdochs to chair the committee they set up to get to the bottom of phone-hacking at the News of the World, a role which reportedly earns him £3,000 an hour. Two years ago he was credited with a match-winning performance for Liverpool Football Club against its former owners at the High Court.



ILLUSTRATION: PAUL DALL'AMORE



I am the law: (left to right) Fiona Shackleton, Nigel Boardman and Clare Montgomery

NIGEL BOARDMAN: MICHAEL THREINER/CITY AM/REX FEATURES; GRAMMY JEPSON