

Setting a precedent for scholarship

In 2019, **Alastair Ahamed** (2016, Law) received the university's White & Case Prize for best performance in Company Law. Three years later, and newly qualified as a solicitor, he is back to study for the BCL as our inaugural Bingham Scholar.

I wasn't sure what it would be like coming back to Somerville for the BCL. True, I had been returning to College fairly regularly since graduating in order to teach the Company Law paper, a practice I began the year I graduated. But travelling up for tutorials on a Saturday morning is very different to being a full-time student again.

I was completely surprised and delighted, therefore, to hear back in June that I had been awarded the inaugural Bingham Law Scholarship. It felt as if the College was extending a welcome of sorts, letting me know it was ready for me to come back more permanently.

It was also intriguing. I had never heard of this scholarship until the email arrived – but I had certainly heard of the lawyer after whom it is named. Lord Bingham was without a doubt one of the greatest jurists of our age. Having served as Master of the Rolls, Lord Chief Justice, and Senior Law Lord, Lord Bingham fundamentally shaped the development of the common law, and his lucid, and persuasive judgments are rightly familiar to any law student.

In the subsequent back and forth with College, I learned that my scholarship had been conceived and generously enabled by Mr Gopal Subramaniam, former Solicitor General of India and a Foundation Fellow at Somerville. Having learned more about Mr Subramaniam and subsequently having the pleasure of corresponding with him, I could see very clearly why he wanted to bring this scholarship to Somerville.

English legal practice is becoming increasingly specialised. However, Lord Bingham was one of the very few judges to sit as both Master of the Rolls (the highest ranking civil judge) and Lord Chief Justice (the highest ranking criminal judge). Indeed, the hallmark



Alastair Ahamed. Photo, Jack Evans



Gopal Subramaniam

of his judicial career is the variety of topics on which he gave judgment so authoritatively, ranging across criminal law, constitutional law, and commercial law. Similarly, Mr Subramaniam has been involved in some of the most important disputes in India across an extraordinary breadth of fields.

The respect of these great lawyers not just for law and legal education, but the role of law in society helped me to understand that the rigours of legal academia, and a constantly critical eye

when thinking about the law, are vitally important for a career at the Bar.

I started the BCL in October, and it's been all I could have hoped for. I study Corporate Finance Law, Corporate Insolvency Law, Restitution of Unjust Enrichment and Conflict of Laws, and I teach Company Law tutorials to a small group of excellent undergraduates. It's hard work, but it's also incredibly stimulating.

Without doubt, the best part of reading for the BCL is that I regularly find myself in a room with not just the cleverest law students from Oxford and Cambridge, but the cleverest lawyers from around the world. The advantage of bringing together so many excellent lawyers trained in different legal systems is the unparalleled opportunity it offers to engage in complex analysis and meaningful discussion of the law. Comparing different legal systems' approaches to the legal issues we deal with is not just fascinating, but extremely important. Some of the most significant developments of English law have been made by reference to the legal experience abroad.

Lord Bingham himself had great respect for comparative learning, and I believe that Mr Subramaniam would

also approve of the BCL's ability to facilitate such expansive, far-reaching discussion. At the very least, it represents another important facet in my legal education, one which I shall hope to bring to bear in the next stage of my career.

In January, I will submit my applications for pupillage, hopefully starting in Autumn 2024. I am confident that the Oxford BCL will stand me in good stead in this process, and I feel deeply grateful and honoured to have received such support in pursuing it.



I regularly find myself in a room with not just the cleverest law students from Oxford and Cambridge, but from around the world.

"My late husband, Tom Bingham, would have been delighted to learn of Mr Subramaniam's generous donation of a law scholarship at Somerville tied in with an internship at the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, housed at the British Institute of International and Comparative Law (BIICL).

Tom was not only a huge fan of BIICL but also of Hazel Fox, Somerville's first Law Fellow and the influential Director of BIICL between 1982 and '89. Many of Tom's law books came to Somerville and he would have relished the thought that some of his books may have helped the winner of the scholarship who will start his legal career at the Bingham Centre."

ELIZABETH BINGHAM, LADY BINGHAM OF CORNHILL



Lord Bingham