

Law Society Excellence Awards
Sole Practitioner of the Year #2021
Nominee: **Penny Raby**



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Now't but a babe..



The Lady in her favourite chair



Waiting for a sign.. 07/10

Summary

Inter Mutanda Constantia**

.. Constancy Amid the Storms of Life!

A **FIERCE** (**F**ormidable... **I**nspiring... **E**nergetic... **R**ounded... **C**onfident... and **E**nthusiastic) advocate for her clients... staff and fellow Sole Practitioners.

A lifetime of passion for the practice of law... *but Penny is not yet spent!*

**my old [School motto](#) 1967 – 1973 FYI

Full Entry

Introduction by the Nominator

This narrative is obviously set against a background of legal, economic and social upheaval arising from Brexit and #CV19 on a global scale, and Penny's personal journey which saw March 2020 start with daughter Jessica's continuing cancer treatment, and Penny's own fortuitous early diagnosis which led to a mastectomy and three other cancer procedures in 2020/21. None of which was anticipated in our Lexcel Business Continuity Plan BTW 😊... *but enough already...* she's still here!!

[Mike Gordon](#) (Forensic Accountant & Devoted Husband)
Penny Raby & Co.

Creative approaches to running a successful business

- The first #CV19 lockdown brought in a rapid restructuring of operations so that all but two staff occupied the office on a rota basis and telephone/mobile/video and desktops were all networked to four staff WFH by end March.
- An interim review in October rearranged the working week to operate an extra hour Monday-Thursday so that the office closed at 12.30pm Friday with a social event and business review (see People testimonials). So no late dramas Friday PM .. and a bonus for clients and opposing solicitors except in exceptional circumstances obv!
- The office had a makeover in early 2021 which is best illustrated online [here](#) and [here](#). Penny may have resisted some of the ideas... but she is clearly a democrat... and the clients now returning to Harmony House love the new atmosphere.
- We also restored the previous habit of ringing the bell (see Picture board) when any money hits the office account – whether by cheque – cash – BACS or transfer! Ding dong!

Innovative responses to cybersecurity and data protection issues

- Penny's role as Chair of [SPG](#) – extended because of #CV19 – has involved her directly in high-level conversations with the Law Society, NCSC, SRA and PI Insurers (as evidenced in her Peers' testimonials).

Excellence in client care

- Lexcel records show that Penny Raby & Co. was only the 4th SP firm in England to achieve that status in 2004, which award has been retained to current date. Our current Office Procedures Manual is now a fully integrated part of our supervision process and with the benefit of LawTech runs to only 50 pages (previously 150+ with appendices)!
- It is a measure of Penny's approach to litigation – in tandem with negotiation – that our firm which specialises in contentious financial disputes has only taken matters to trial in 4 cases from some 110 closed matters in 2018-2020

Future-focused thinking and collaboration to reduce the regulatory burden

- As an integral part of her staff appraisal process, Penny encourages us all to think smarter and introduce new ideas and ways of working via a Bright Ideas channel on our #TEAMS chat. So in process or completed in 2020/21 :
 - With Penny's encouragement and early notice via her SPG duties, we adopted e-Bundling at the very outset of #CV19
 - Penny Raby & Co. is now a paperless office - well some 75% less - and heading toward 90% in the coming year. Some 400+ storage boxes now archived online and open matters being handled on that basis
 - We started thinking of a new Penny Raby & Co. consultancy hub concept in response to much legal chatter and the many WFH life-balance conversations in late 2020. It is hoped we will recruit three very able colleagues by the time of these Awards!

And more ..

- Mention must be made of our unique three cani-legals – Oscar Toffee and Sprout – who regularly convert wavering

enquiries into instructing clients. And only £60.00 per hour (no CAT) 😊

Sound business and financial planning

- #TEAMPenny has the resources, enthusiasm and connections to make best use of our long standing and trusted providers in IT ([Quintech](#)) CRM ([LEAP](#)) .. Accounts ([Xero](#)) and WWW ([Priodev](#)).
- Our day-to-day and annual recurring cashflow and budgetary control is assured with a 1:1 ratio of lawyers: accountants in the practice!

Innovative business practice

- As indicated by the judges of [Worcester Law Society's 2014 Awards](#) .. Penny's practice still remains the exception where mediation is ALWAYS considered first... and indeed reconciliation where it is judged appropriate by the parties via the [Harmony House](#) brand. When she comes up with a better innovation... we'll let you know!

Building a strong reputational brand

- The SP brand IS the practitioner and besides all other aspects revealed in this portrait, Penny is uniquely memorable for the role of *Snow White... and the Seven Sole Practitioners* (SPG AGM Prague 2016). Just ask [Robert Bourns](#)

A passion for the practice of law

- We rest our case!

Penny Raby... as viewed by her Peers

As the Recommended Insurance Partner for the Sole Practitioner's Group, I have had the good fortune of working with Penny over the last 3 years in her extended role as Chair of the Sole Practitioners Group.

Whilst I recognise that she is a first class practitioner in her practice specialism of Family Law, at the same time as giving a great service to her clients, she is also tireless giving back to her peers within the legal Profession of England & Wales.

As Chair along with her fellow committee members Penny is selflessly providing support, whether this be training and regulatory representation to her peers, whether they be long standing custodians of the profession or those considering starting their own practice she lends her ear and provides support.

Penny embodies all the great facets of what it truly means to be a sole practitioner, with her commitment, dedication and selflessness to the profession as well as the wider sole practitioner community highlight why Penny would be a deserved winner of the Sole Practitioner of the Year and I fully support and endorse the recommendation.

[Brian Boehmer](#)

Partner

Lockton Companies LLP



As engagement lead for the NCSC legal sector Penny has been instrumental in helping me to increase cyber security awareness across her network. As Chairperson for the SPG Penny recognised a fundamental weakness in the e-bundling process for the transmission of highly sensitive client data to virtual courts.

Penny worked with NCSC and MOJ to express her concerns and to agree on a secure system that would work with her members.

She has become part of a working group to ensure the needs of the SPG members are considered when implementing changes. All whilst managing her own day job and attending hearings for her own client's needs.

[Karen J](#)

Engagement Lead Legal and Accountancy Sectors



I have known Penny and have worked alongside her in many cases as her counsel over the many years when I have been in No 5 Chambers and in the Family Law Group.

Penny is definitely one of those solicitors who goes the extra mile for her clients and when it is said that she is the "caring" solicitor, that is no idle boast. Her client's objectives are always at the forefront of her mind, and she will try to achieve them while at the same time having sound judgment about what is or is not feasible in this jurisdiction, and giving sound advice at every stage.

Penny is also a very good judge of character, and is well aware that in terms of representation, the term "horses for courses" is a very apt one: she chooses her experts from the ranks of the most able, and her counsel from some of the most experienced available in matrimonial finance. She pays the same attention to detail to every case, whether it involves so called 'big money', or is a case where funds are stretched and money is tight: by far the harder cases to resolve.

Her support to her clients throughout the often painful and stressful process of divorce is never wavering, and she makes herself available as freely as possible within the remit of her role as a lawyer. She can be very tough on occasion if that is what the case requires, and she commits herself totally to her clients' needs during the time that she is conducting their cases. She has a well deserved reputation for high quality representation.



[Anne Smallwood](#)

Barrister

Having worked with Penny for just over 12 months supporting her in her role as Chairwoman of the SPG I have been inspired by her leadership skills, determination to get the job done, her willingness to help others and her fun, caring nature. I thoroughly enjoying being a part of the team led by Penny.



[Anika Holm](#)

I've known Penny for five years or more in her capacity as member of the executive of the Solicitors Sole Practitioners Group. I have been a member of the group of 20 years and understand that she was a member of the committee before me.

Over the last three years she has been vice-chair and then for the last two years chairman with her term extended by Covid. This is coincided with two bouts of serious ill-health during which she has continued with her duties as Chair.

Penny is always proactive and has "led from the front".

She was enthusiastic in arranging the entertainment for our Prague conference with a Christmas Pantomime.

She had arranged an extravaganza conference in Malaga for 2020 which sadly had to be cancelled. However she was prepared to continue with the conference even though she would have to delay important medical treatment if the conference had gone ahead.

She has been enthusiastically leading the support for sole practitioners during the lockdown.

She is unstinting in her support of the efforts of everyone else on. ***After a period of some disagreements on the committee she has brought a period of calm and agreement and positive thinking to the working of the Committee. My understanding is that she leads a busy fashionable life with a leading practice in matrimonial law.***

I commend her for an appropriate award particularly on the basis of the fact that she has being prepared to commit herself to the work of the group during her term as chair in spite of the fact that she has undergone significant health problems she has not allowed to affect her leadership.

[Clive Sutton](#)
Solicitors

[Clive Sutton](#)

Sole Practitioner

Having acted as the firm's independent Lexcel auditor for over five years, I am pleased to confirm that the firm has consistently exceeded the accreditation in client care, risk management and compliance requirements. The practice has a strong "client care" focus and an excellent reputation across the country for being extremely well versed in dealing with complex divorce and family matters.

The principal, Penny Raby, has embedded a culture of systematic and effective compliance across all areas in the practice, backed with an excellent governance and management structure.

In my opinion, this is one of the best law firms I have audited.

The firm is also a great example of how to survive and thrive in a world of challenging legal and economic issues, including the recent pandemic.

The team at Penny Raby & Co are also very passionate in supporting the local community and I would highly recommend Penny Raby and the practice for a legal award.



[Rudi Kesic](#)

Lexcel Auditor

I have worked with Penny for many years. She is thorough with a keen eye for detail but at the same time approachable and practical. Her sensible, positive approach to problem solving has been invaluable and her calmness and common sense has helped to resolve many difficult situations we have encountered.

[John B Hughes](#)



She deserves precisely everything she gets... not a Penny more... not a Penny less. In this extraordinary year of Brexit and #Covid... She's Got Things Done!!

Boris Johnson MP (overheard by [Mike Freddie Gordon](#))
Devoted Husband & Forensic Accountant

[Penny Raby & Co](#)
Family Lawyers

Penny Raby... as appreciated by her Public



"Dear Penny,
Just a note to say a big thank you to you and your team for all your help and understanding during what I found to be a really difficult and traumatic time.
Many Thanks."

Trevor



"Penny, as well as a bloody good solicitor you have been a good friend to me throughout.
Thank you."

Lesley



I have worked for Penny Raby since May 2019, having met her a few times previously in passing as I lived opposite the office.

As a qualified Chartered Certified Accountant, I never envisaged that my career would take me in to the legal world but *since joining the team as Penny's financial accountant I have been fascinated by her professionalism, commitment, knowledge, and approach to her work, so much so that I am now learning the ropes myself and supporting Penny and her team in all that they do. She makes me want to learn more and work harder as she is always appreciative of the effort put in and supports me in my learning.*

Trisha Ierston – Penny Raby & Co.



"Dear Penny and Mike,
No words can describe how grateful I am for everything that you have done to make this possible. Penny - you have been more than my lawyer throughout the ordeal; you were my friend. My warmest wishes"

Luisa



"I simply cannot praise Penny and her team enough! Penny is without doubt someone you want fighting your corner. Whilst in court she is a force to be reckoned with but with me, as her client, she was patient, understanding and incredibly kind. I will never forget Penny for all she has done for me and I don't think my ex-husband will either!"

Melanie



I joined Penny's team back in 2001 having zero legal experience after being recommended by Debbie, a fellow school mum that had worked for Penny for a year. Now approaching my 20th anniversary, I **have been by Penny's side as the practice has gone from strength to strength, we have seen many cases, births, deaths, and celebrations and always faced things together and come out stronger due to Penny's incredible strength, resilience, and character. Penny's professionalism, commitment, knowledge, and strength make it an honour to work for Penny Raby & Co, everything else makes it a pleasure.**

Sharon Thompson– Penny Raby & Co.

"A very big thank you for the help, through a very bad time of matrimonial breakup, the support and service was rating more than a 5 star, plus the dogs gave me a lot of comfort, you all will be in my thoughts.
Sincerely,"

Len



Penny Raby... her Passions & a few Proverbs!



Penny at Hay Festival



Popeye & Olive Oyl at
SPG AGM aboard HMS Warrior



Penny at Play!



So true!



The "Good News" Bell



A Unique Combination



Life & Business



QED!



The Three Cani-legals
Oscar, Toffee and Sprout!