

# Register

## Obituaries

# Johnny Veeder, QC

Leading arbitration lawyer with a penchant for shabby restaurants

On being assured that Johnny Veeder was in his chambers, a new pupil observed with trepidation that his room looked like the immediate aftermath of a bomb blast. The distinguished lawyer was nowhere to be seen. Papers were strewn everywhere. Books were piled haphazardly on every surface. Then a voice was heard from under Veeder's desk, where he was on all fours. He announced that he "had had a clear up" but could no longer find a vital document. The two of them spent a good while searching, until the pupil pointed out that Veeder was standing on it. The pupil had entered the redoubt of one of the world's most brilliant arbitrators, scholars and teachers in dispute resolution and international law.

Taking pupils under his wing and teaching them about law, arbitration, ethics and good practice, Veeder would also school them in the art of devising complex practical jokes, often working late into the night creating spoof letters and faxes. He would attack the keyboard with two index fingers or use a broad-nib fountain pen that would discharge ink all over his hands and produce a script that nobody, including him, could decipher.

For many years breaks were taken, at Veeder's insistence, at a small and shabby Tibetan restaurant in Leicester Square. Thankfully, it was later closed by the Health and Safety Authority. Veeder took special delight in minority (or unsafe) establishments; the more dignified the company, the less salubrious his choice of restaurant. Many will recall the member states delegates' dinner at the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (Uncitral) working group session in New York that Veeder took great joy in arranging in the most unappetising "hole in the wall" in Queens. Never before had so many state representatives bonded and agreed on key issues in such haste.

He liked nothing better than blowing the dust off old documents and leafing through antiquated case law; he was a frequent visitor to the National Archives in Kew. Russian law became a particular fascination.

As a visiting professor at King's College London he would regale students with stories of Stalinist Russia, the American Civil War (another passion), Peru's revolutionary Communist Party (the Shining Path) and much else of seeming irrelevance that by some ingenious tangential device he would bring to bear on investor-state arbitration. He never used the title professor, once claiming to a colleague that he was so fed up with other people using titles to promote themselves that he was searching online to purchase a doctorate.

For 20 years he was editor of *Arbitration International*, and ensured the continued success of the journal despite a paucity of contributors, lawyers being increasingly unable to find time in their busy schedules. As such, a Mr Ylts (an unknown arbitration scholar claiming to have been legal secretary to the Macau Sardines tribunal) wrote a number of significant articles. As the years rolled by, Mr Ylts's rise through the academic ranks was impressive. Later articles credited Mr Ylts with a doctorate,

then a second doctorate, 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 Veeder admitted, under pressure, that Mr Ylts was in fact him.

The pièce de résistance came in the year 2000, amid all the concern about the Y2K computer bug, when the index to *Arbitration International* announced the 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." His humour was always good natured.

Van Vechten Veeder was born in London in 1948 to John Van Vechten Veeder, who came from a prominent family of Dutch heritage in New York, and Helen Letham Townley, a Scot who had studied chemistry at St Andrews University. Always known as Johnny



Johnny Veeder took silk in 1986

after his father, he was a direct descendant of one of the Dutch families that had founded New Amsterdam in the early 17th century.

His father worked for an American oil company in Paris and the boy was initially educated at the Ecole Rue de la Ferme in the French capital. Aged seven he was sent to board at Clifton College in Bristol, where his uncle, Nicholas Hammond, was headmaster.

Already well on the way to his full height of 6ft 4in, Veeder excelled at rugby, playing for All England Schoolboys. He would play rugby for Cambridge, where he studied modern languages and then switched to law at Jesus College. After graduation he would turn out for the Harlequins B team, but as his legal career quickly developed he would soon have to content himself with a seat at Twickenham.

He was called to the English Bar in 1971 and began to practise at what was then 4 Essex Court. There he built a busy practice in employment and commercial law and took silk in 1986. From the early 1980s, notably under the guidance of Johan Steyn (later Lord Steyn), Veeder, a keen traveller, worked on cases such as Joc Oil in Bermuda

and Pilkington Glass in Russia. He increasingly focused on international disputes, fighting 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 rebirth of the London Court of International Arbitration (LCIA), which kindled a massive expansion of the field in London.

Veeder also played a key role in arbitration institutions and bodies worldwide. He drafted laws and rules, formulated policies and represented Britain at Uncitral. When comfortably over 40, he began the first under-40 arbitration group (the Young International Arbitration Group at the LCIA), which led to the under-40 movement across the globe. Delivering the Goff lecture in 2001, he said: "The absence of enforceable standards across national boundaries threatened a gradual deterioration in standards of legal conduct. The international arbitral process would then be brought into disrepute and, once its reputation was lost, it could take decades to rebuild confidence."

As an advocate he insisted on the highest standards. He taught his juniors never to use their opponent's names, never to use inflammatory language and always to be open and straight with the tribunal and the other side. He had a talent for bridging differences. Being taller than just about everyone else, Veeder had a way of hunching his shoulders down to the level of the per-

**The practical joker would work late into the night on spoof letters**

son he was talking to. He was unassuming and disarming.

His first marriage, to Hazel Burbidge in 1970, ended in divorce. In 1991 he married Marie Lombardi, who worked for the bank Paribas Capital Markets (now BNP Paribas). When they occupied neighbouring flats at the Barbican, Veeder had invited friends round for Sunday lunch and, with typical haplessness, locked himself out with the steaming joint ready to carve on the kitchen table. He persuaded his neighbour to allow him and his guests to troop through her flat, into her garden and over the fence into his. Their romance began with a thank-you note. They enjoyed relaxing at their home in Manchester by the Sea, Massachusetts, where Veeder would pilot his Concordia yacht.

She survives him along with their daughter Anne, who is studying zoology at Edinburgh University. He is also survived by a daughter and son from his first marriage. Tabitha works in human resources and Sebastian works in sales.

He was as uninterested in his appearance as in his choice of restaurant and was known to complete a multiplicity of tasks in one of his well-worn suits. One of his colleagues was wont to remark: "There are things he would do in his suit that I would not do in my pyjamas."

**Johnny Veeder, QC, was born on December 14, 1948. He died of complications from pneumonia on March 8, 2020, aged 71**



# Suzy Delair

French chanteuse who overcame the taint of Nazi collaboration to become a national institution

Like Maurice Chevalier and Coco Chanel, the vivacious Suzy Delair became something of a French institution — an Officer of the Legion of Honour, no less — despite being tainted by the whiff of collaboration with the enemy during the Nazi occupation.

In March 1942 she, with a small group of other French actors, accepted an invitation to visit film studios in Germany. That she was reportedly disappointed not to have met Joseph Goebbels, the propaganda minister, left a sour taste for many French filmgoers, but it did not seem to affect her popularity unduly. She may have been punished after liberation, but it was little more than a gesture and she enjoyed her greatest successes after the war.

These did not include *Atoll K* (1951), the final, inglorious, movie made by Laurel and Hardy. However, Delair earned the distinction of being the last surviving cast member of a Laurel and Hardy film.

The daughter of a seamstress and a saddler, Suzette Delair was born in Paris, in 1917 or 1918. In her early teens

she became an apprentice at the chic millinery boutique run by Suzanne Talbot on the Rue Royale. However, she was already known locally as a talented singer.

She soon quit her apprenticeship and was a regular performer at the many music halls in Paris, including the Bouffes Belleville and the Bobino. At the Bouffes Parisiens, the theatre founded by Jacques Offenbach and dedicated to the performance of operettas and their spin-offs, *opéras bouffes*, Delair emerged as a leading operetta star, a performer who ticked all the boxes for a leading lady of that genre: saucy, mischievous and playful.

Decades later she was fêted as an "outstanding Offenbachian" for her stage performances as Métella in the composer's *La Vie Parisienne* (1958) and as the tipsy title character in *La Périhole* (1968).

At the same time as she was making her name on the Parisian music scene, Delair appeared regularly in films. From the age of 13 she had non-singing bit parts in a string of dramas and come-