

Fund Finance Friday



Influences: Geoff Woolf

May 29, 2020 | Issue No. 79



By Jeremy Cross

As I write, Geoff Woolf, one of my former colleagues and partners who I have always regarded as a mentor, is severely ill with COVID-19. We have written a lot in many recent editions of *Fund Finance Friday* about the impact of this awful virus on our world, the economy and Fund Finance in all its aspects, but underlying all of that, of course, are the innumerable ripples being felt by so many people around the world at this time as their families, friends and colleagues are impacted.

The news of Geoff's illness has caused many moments of reflection, and among them – as I look back on my interactions with him over the years – is the significant and (to my embarrassment) often unacknowledged and even unintended influence that he has had on me and many others both in the Fund Finance space and elsewhere. It is here that I want to focus.

It is right to say (but others will say it better and with more force and more personal knowledge) that Geoff is a remarkable individual, with a superb legal career behind him and with a fund of wisdom, intelligence, generosity and humour that makes it both a privilege and a pleasure to know him. All of these qualities are admirable, noteworthy and influential in and of themselves, and they have all certainly influenced me, even if many times only aspirationally.

There are, however, two or three particular instances of his qualities and influence that I wanted to focus on here.

The first is that while Geoff's is not a name that will be widely known in the Fund Finance world (outside, of course, those who have worked with him directly over the years), his influence on it has been significant. The reason for this is simple: Geoff loves the law (more of that below), but his interests and passions lay elsewhere. However (veering to the autobiographical for a moment), what he did do when I arrived in what was then SJ Berwin in late 2003 was to very generously use his influence and reputation to introduce me and others to a team at The Royal Bank of Scotland (then known as the "FIG" team) who were, among their other activities, making bridging loans (and more) to funds. From that fairly simple beginning, I and others got to work with many of the team at The Royal Bank of Scotland and, through them, with many others on these types of bridging loans as the industry developed and expanded into what we would now refer to as Subscription Finance and to Fund Finance more widely. We, in turn, over the years brought in many others to work with us, so I am pretty sure that many (particularly but not only in Europe) will have come across firms like Mayer Brown, Reed Smith, Ashurst, Haynes and Boone, and Simmons & Simmons, as well as Cadwalader – most of whom are part of the landscape of the Fund Finance legal industry, and all of whom have partners and others who started at SJ Berwin and whose lender-side experience in Fund Finance started there and with what Geoff initiated.

The second is Geoff's love of the law. While not (perhaps surprisingly) a prerequisite for lawyers, loving or at least somewhat liking the law is a common characteristic of pretty much every successful lawyer (and certainly of every successful and happy lawyer). Geoff's standard interview question (to which I and I am sure many others were subjected) was "Do you love the law?" I was able to figure out that there was only one right answer at interview to that question, and even more fortunate to also figure out that this is the only way to be for any successful lawyer. Geoff in his career was a constant exemplar of that, and immensely valued by colleagues and clients for the way he demonstrated this.

Finally, and underlying all of the above, is that because of all the qualities already mentioned at the outset, Geoff not only made a very successful career as a lawyer but also became an important and much admired and respected colleague, supporter and friend to all of those he worked with. I am, and will always remain, immensely indebted to him for his support, friendship and example. I am sure many others who know Geoff will share those sentiments.