

End of an era as legal firm underlines its pride in tradition

An Edinburgh law firm says the end of a 145-year connection with the founder only underlines a commitment to traditional levels of service that are increasingly difficult to find.

Urquharts has been operating in Edinburgh since 1876 and the retirement of senior partner Roderick Urquhart will mark the end of its long link to the founding family. However, the remaining partners have promised there will be no dramatic changes.



Law Firm Urquharts, Heriot Row, Edinburgh
Partner Stephen Blane

Stephen Blane, who will take over as senior partner, said: “Roderick is the fourth generation of the Urquhart family to be senior partner here and we want to thank him for everything he has done over many years of service. His will be a very well-deserved retirement.

“For the past 145 years there has been an Urquhart associated with the firm. A number of people have asked us if this is a chance for us to modernise and shake things up.

“There is absolutely no need for that. We are extremely well prepared for Roderick’s departure and, the truth is there won’t be any radical changes. We will very much continue as we are while keeping an eye on what we can do to improve the already high level of personal service that we offer.

“What we keep hearing from our clients is that they appreciate our traditional and professional approach to looking after their interests. We will proudly continue to do the same

things in the same way that we have been doing them very successfully for a long time now.

“Transactions are partner led. If you instruct someone, you instruct the partner first and foremost and it is not delegated to the most junior person in the firm. Partners remain engaged and involved and take a direct interest in everything from start to finish.”

Preparation for Roderick’s departure has been underway for 18 months, with a key move being the recruitment of another partner, Alison Grandison, in April 2020. She is a specialist in residential conveyancing, which is one of the firm’s main strengths.

Based in Heriot Row, the firm has 24 staff, including 10 fee earners. Another major area of its practice is private client work, including wills, executries and powers of attorney, which is headed up by Sara Smith, while Stephen Webster leads the Commercial Property department. Mr Blane, a solicitor advocate, is also a respected litigator and one of a handful of Law Society accredited specialists in pursuing professional negligence claims against other lawyers.

Of the remaining partners, Gillian Black is the longest-serving, having been with Urquharts for over 20 years. She says that new business continues to be driven by word-of-mouth referrals.

She added: “Most of our new clients are referred by existing clients or one of our many professional contacts who appreciate our commitment to a level of service that can too often be sacrificed in the rush to online or volume marketplaces.

“In recent years there has perhaps been a move away from professional service towards doing things more cheaply. That may suit some clients, but our experience is that many are looking for a personal service along more traditional lines.

“It may surprise some people, but we are finding that younger, professional clients like our service. They are not looking for the quickest, low cost fix and contrary to popular belief, they are not all going to those firms where everything is done online.

“Of course, many of our clients are older and have been with us for a long time, through various house moves, changes to their wills, dealing with their parents’ executries and we’re now even handling their children’s first house purchases.

“But we are constantly attracting new clients and many are under 35.”

Roderick Urquhart, who joined the firm in 1982, said: “I’ve enjoyed my time with the firm and I’m incredibly proud of all that we achieved and of the quality of the team who will now take Urquharts forward. There may no longer be an Urquhart in the firm, but I’m delighted that the same values will continue to underpin everything that it does.”

His great-grandfather Andrew Urquhart established the firm after moving to Edinburgh from Aberdeen. He chose to study law rather than follow his father, who captained tea clippers plying their trade from China to the north-east of Scotland.

In 1911, his son William joined the firm and oversaw its move to become property specialists and its relocation to Heriot Row. In 1952, his son Ronald became the third generation of the family to join the firm – with Roderick joining in 1982.



Law Firm Urquharts, Heriot Row, Edinburgh
Partners L-R Alison Grandison, Gillian Black, Stephen Webster,
Stephen Blane and Sara Smith