

THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

ALEKA MANDARAKA SHEPPARD, director of the **LONDON SHIPPING LAW CENTRE (LSLC)** was born on the shipowner's island. She doesn't come from a shipping family, but she was inspired by the sea. In turn, she has inspired others whose interest in the sea has been commercial in its origin. She herself was inspired by the legendary Professor Francis Cadwallader, and is likely to be remembered with equal affection in her own specialist parish.

Aleka enjoyed growing up on the Greek Island of Andros, but she still had a burning ambition to leave. After attending the wonderful Embiricos School on Andros, she went off to Athens University to study law. She had harboured an ambition to be a writer, but she also wanted to know how the law worked. She was destined to achieve both ambitions.

Aleka qualified as a lawyer in Greece in 1974. But, in truth, Greece was not the place to be a woman lawyer in the mid-70s, and it was not long before Aleka was off on her travels once more, this time to London. She had a yearning to study shipping law. She had a first-class honours degree from Athens, but she had no money. So she applied for — and got — a Chandris scholarship, which paid for her studies in London.

Aleka knew nobody in London, but it was her good fortune to study shipping law under professors Cadwallader and Hardy-Ivamy, who are to shipping law what Gilbert & Sullivan are to light opera. Having got her LLM, Aleka did what you would expect her to do — she got another scholarship, this time from Interocean (as it then was), and took a PhD in psychology and, in particular, the behaviour of people in organisations.

By this time, Aleka was beginning to feel very much



Aleka Mandaraka Sheppard

at home in London. "I felt like it was my city," she says. While studying for her PhD, she took a number of part-time positions, which included spells with Richards Butler, Sedgwick Forbes and the Britannia P&I Club before she completed her studies and decided she had better find a job.

She was taken on by Holman Fenwick in 1982, in the process becoming the first Greek lawyer to work in the shipping department of a London law firm. It was at Holmans that Aleka met — and subsequently married — Colin Sheppard, who at that time was one of the firm's senior partners and who today is the honorary secretary of the London Maritime Arbitrators' Association. She stayed at the firm for 11 years,

becoming qualified in 1990 as a solicitor in England in what she calls the “traditional” way, as opposed to the EU route followed by many European lawyers aspiring to become solicitors today.

In 1993, armed with valuable case law and client-handling experience, with a concurrent desire to travel, and with a fascination for studying people, Aleka decided it was time to move on. She had already spent some time teaching at University College London, and in 1993 the Faculty of Law there approached her with an offer to take over the shipping law department. She accepted, and the first thing she did was to set up the Cadwallader Memorial Fund, in honour of her great mentor, to promote excellence in teaching and research, and in the hope of getting more good teachers into the law faculty.

When it became clear that the fund wasn’t going to bring in the sort of money that was needed, Aleka recognised the need for something else, something to offer the industry that would bring a worthwhile return. The answer was the London Shipping Law Centre (LSLC). Aleka contacted likely law firms and barristers’ chambers and realised that the support was there, so she formed her Steering Committee group. The faculty approved the idea in 1995, and the London Shipping Law Centre was inaugurated in the House of Lords in 1997.

It has been a great success. The aims of the LSLC are, broadly speaking, to provide an industry forum for education, discussion, interaction, and the development of professional links. The intention is also to give to various sectors of the industry the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas for new initiatives, to promote reform in shipping law and practice, to conduct research projects, and to raise awareness in all sectors of the industry of legal and commercial risk management. Aleka is proud of what has been achieved, and pays generous tribute to the role played by Lord Mustill in his capacity as president of the LSLC and, of



An infectious enthusiasm, and a fierce determination to succeed

course, to the Steering Committee and supporters.

The Cadwallader legend, meanwhile, lives on. The first Cadwallader Memorial Lecture was held in 1998. The fifth lecture, in 2002, attracted over 400 people to the Captain’s Room at the Lloyd’s building in London. Aleka is visibly delighted at the celebrity which her old men-

tor continues to enjoy, 10 years after his untimely death. She explains what made Cadwallader special.

“He showed that it was possible to be a brilliant teacher and still to be fun,” she says. “He was loved by his students, and particularly by the overseas

students, perhaps because he understood what it can be like to be in a strange place, away from friends and family. He also used to give the students his notes to work from, which was so appreciated by them. He was a good man with a good brain.”

Aleka, meanwhile, is a good woman with a good brain. She has set herself a series of challenges since leaving the idyllic peace of Andros for the hustle and

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bustle of commercial shipping, and the pursuit of excellence in the practice and teaching of maritime law. She brings to her role an infectious enthusiasm, and a fierce determination to succeed. "I am not a person who gives up easily," she says. "I am an ideas person, and I like to see those ideas bear fruit."

Most of them do, witness a successful marine risk management company which Aleka has established, and a well-received book on modern admiralty law which she has written. The risk management venture brings together a team of people with expertise in a range of different areas to offer commonsense, rounded advice on how best to prevent claims. She says shipowners and operators are more receptive to the idea of loss prevention and risk management than they were, say, 10 years ago, and are more committed to stamping out sloppy practices. "There is a lot of psychology in risk management," says Aleka, in whom the psychologist is never very far from the surface.



Aleka has a PhD in psychology



The driving force behind the London Shipping Law Centre

The wonder is that Aleka has time for anything very much outside her career. But she says, despite joking, that "The only time I'm not working is when I'm in my car." She has her interest in psychology, of course, which she tries to blend with what she does. She is fascinated by people. And she has her family. The one great sadness in her life is the tragic death of her baby daughter in 1986. But she and Colin have a son, Emmanuel, whom she describes as "our treasure".

Aleka likes to relax by listening to vibrant classical music, especially Verdi and Vivaldi. She also engages regularly in Pilates, an exercise programme which, she says: "harmonises body and mind." She finds interior and garden design "very relaxing". And she likes the theatre and opera, but she has little time to enjoy these pursuits as much as she would like.

Aleka also enjoys her short time in the sun every year at the family home on Andros. And there is even a little bit of Andros at Aleka's home in the UK. She has installed a waterfall and fountains in the family garden to remind her of her birthplace, "where the water falls abundantly".

Asked what she is most proud of, Aleka replies: "I am proud of a lot of things. But, above all else, I am proud when I see my students go out into the world and become an important part of the shipping industry. Wherever I go in the world, I see them more and more, and it never fails to give me a feeling of pride."

The students feel the same sense of pride at having come under the wing of the redoubtable Dr Sheppard. Professor Cadwallader would have been proud. ❁