



Charles Phipps

Education

M.A. (Oxon.) (Literae humaniores, First class) Dip Law (City)



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Profile



Charles has a particular interest in disputes relating to obligations of confidentiality (including legal professional privilege) and is the co-author, with Sir Roger Toulson, of *Confidentiality* (3rd edition, Sweet & Maxwell, 2012).

He specialises in professional liability claims involving lawyers, accountants and auditors, financial services professionals, insolvency practitioners, surveyors and valuers, construction professionals and insurance brokers, and is also instructed in more general chancery and commercial litigation.

He has been rated for several years by both Chambers & Partners and the Legal 500 in the Professional Negligence section. The Directories have described him in the following terms: "...attracts particular praise for his knowledge of financial disputes"; "Very good at the detail, and embraces the larger, more complex problems"; "Charles Phipps ... is regarded by many as something of an unsung hero of the Professional Negligence Bar. Clients say he is 'unbelievably clever and hard-working...'. He has had great success in high-value claims relating to a number of professions." "Renowned for his incredible intellect, Charles Phipps has a 'wonderfully analytical brain' that lends itself to handling complex cases". He "has 'an amazing ability to grasp a large volume of detail, quick turnaround on papers and a sensible approach to difficult legal issues'...

Professional Liability

"He has the ability to get to grips with extremely detailed factual and regulatory issues and present them to lay clients in a clear and orderly manner. He provides robust and pragmatic advice in a calm and measured way and is a pleasure to work with." "Charles's preparatory work is of the highest order - he prepares very insightful and useful written submissions, often within very short timescales." - Chambers & Partners, 2016

'He has a brilliant legal mind and looks at cases upside-down and back-to-front to absolutely get to grips with the issues.' - Legal 500, 2015

The successful conduct or defence of professional liability litigation requires clear analysis of underlying legal issues and a firm grasp of forensic practicalities. In his advice Charles aims always to cover both aspects thoroughly. He seeks also to ensure that his clients' cases are presented in a manner that is both articulate and forceful.

Charles has specialised in professional liability cases since he first began to practise at the Bar in 1993 and has seen more than one full revolution of the business cycle (with all its attendant economic side-effects). A large part of his practice is devoted in particular to claims of all kinds against lawyers, auditing and tax-related claims against accountants, negligent investment and mis-selling claims against financial services professionals and over-valuation claims against surveyors.

Charles (led by Patrick Lawrence QC) was instructed on behalf of the respondents to the appeal to the Supreme Court in *Jones v Kaney* (relating to the immunity of expert witnesses).

Charles also has recent experience, in particular, of claims relating to the tax treatment of a number of film finance schemes (eg Imagine, Charity Shell, Eclipse, and Scion), and has been instructed to represent both tax advisors and accountants defending such claims.

Accountants, Auditors & Actuaries

Charles is regularly instructed to act for both claimants and defendants in accountant's negligence cases concerning liability for, among other things, audit services and tax advice. He was editor of the chapter on accountants in Jackson & Powell's *Professional Liability Precedents* (Sweet & Maxwell, loose-leaf).

He was instructed on behalf of the liquidators of BCCI in the audit litigation against Price Waterhouse and Ernst & Whinney (as they then were), at that time the largest accountant's negligence claim ever to have been brought. The litigation eventually settled, following a successful appeal against an order striking out large parts of the claim: *BCCI (Overseas) Ltd (in liquidation) v Price Waterhouse* [1998] Lloyd's Law Rep (Banking) 85.

Other more recent cases in which he has been instructed include:

- a claim against a firm of accountants in respect of their alleged failure to provide an adequate expert's report (*Baker Tilly v Makar* [2009] EWHC 1715 (QB));
- a claim by a further education institution against its auditors for failing to detect substantial defalcations by a trusted member of staff over a lengthy period of time;
- a claim by a commercial property investment company against its accountants for failing to advise it of its right to claim capital allowances in respect of its expenditure (amounting to several million pounds) on plant and machinery;
- a claim against a firm of accountants arising out of fraudulent investment advice given by one of its partners;
- the defence by a firm of accountants of a claim alleging negligence in relation to a film finance tax scheme;
- the defence by a firm of accountants of an action alleging negligent advice relating to CGT liabilities arising on the disposal of the majority shareholding in a restaurant chain;
- the defence by a firm of accountants of an action alleging negligent conduct resulting in the avoidance of business interruption insurance cover;
- the defence by a firm of accountants of an action alleging negligence advice in relation to the winding-up of a partnership;
- a claim against a firm of accountants by beneficiaries under a will alleging negligence in the course of their retainer by the deceased;
- the defence by a firm of accountants of an action alleging negligent reporting under the Solicitors' Account Rules, resulting in thefts from the office and client accounts of a firm of solicitors;
- the defence by a firm of accountants of a claim alleging negligent tax in relation to a company's PAYE and NIC liabilities;
- the defence by an insolvency practitioner of negligent conduct of the claimants' IVAs;
- the defence by a liquidator of a claim made by the directors of an insolvent company.

Construction Professionals

Claims against construction professionals require (more than most) a willingness to grapple with factual detail in a legal context. Charles's belief is that a clear focus on the crucial issues can reliably emerge only from a proper mastery of the facts. Cases in which he has been instructed include:

- a claim against engineers alleging negligence in the design and supervision of a scheme to underpin residential property;
- the defence by engineers of an action alleging the negligent design of electronic equipment;
- the defence by quantity surveyors of an action alleging a negligent failure to identify asbestos in a survey of commercial premises;
- the defence by architects of an action alleging negligent design of a factory roof;
- the defence by project managers of an action alleging negligent administration of a building contract relating to brewery premises;
- a claim against architects alleging the negligent design/supervision of the construction of a block of flats;
- the defence by architects of a claim alleging negligent supervision of a major office refurbishment;
- the defence by a firm of architects of a claim alleging negligent supervision of a domestic building contract.

Financial Services Professionals

Claims against financial services professionals require not only a firm grasp of common law principles, but also close attention to the regulatory context (which may itself require a quasi-archaeological exploration of the relevant legislative history). Charles is numerate and seeks always to turn his familiarity with technical detail to his clients' advantage. Cases in which he has recently been instructed include:

- claims by private investors in respect of the mis-selling of derivative instruments;
- the defence of a claim by individuals alleging negligent pensions advice (*Williams v Lishman Sidwell Campbell & Price* [2010] PNLR 25);
- the defence of a claim alleging negligent advice in relation to a collective investment scheme;

- the defence by a Channel Islands company administrator of a claim by liquidators alleging negligent and/or improper conduct resulting in the loss of several million pounds;
- a claim by investors against fund managers alleging negligent investment advice;
- the defence by a life assurance company of multi-party litigation brought by numerous overseas investors.

Insurance Brokers & Agents

Claims against insurance intermediaries require not only an understanding of the role of insurance professionals, but also familiarity with the large underlying body of discrete case-law relating to insurance contracts. Charles enjoys applying principles of insurance law in the professional negligence context and has acted both for and against insurance brokers and agents.

Claims in which he has been instructed include:

- the defence by a firm of placing brokers of a contribution claim brought by producing brokers in the context of the alleged mis-selling of PPI;
- the defence by insurance intermediaries of a third party claim by insurance brokers arising from inadequate reinsurance cover;
- a claim against insurance brokers alleging negligence resulting in the avoidance of cover against fire;
- the defence by a financial services company of an action alleging the negligent recommendation of inappropriate loan protection policies;
- the defence by insurance brokers of an action alleging negligence resulting in the under-insurance of residential property.

Lawyers

Charles has very extensive experience of all kinds of claims against lawyers, in cases involving a wide range of legal activities. As the co-author, with Sir Roger Toulson, of *Confidentiality* (Sweet & Maxwell, 3rd edition, 2012), he has a particular interest in the issues of privilege and confidentiality which frequently crop up in the course of a lawyer's practice. Apart from claims arising in the commercial sphere, he also relishes lost litigation claims and is familiar with the technicalities of land law which underlie many conveyancing negligence claims. He is regularly instructed by major insurers of solicitors.

Cases in which he has recently been instructed include:

- a successful claim for breach of fiduciary duty and negligence by solicitors retained in the sale of a construction company (*Turpin v Brabners Chaffe Street LLP* (25/9/2014; Ch; Bristol District Registry);
- the defence by a firm of solicitors of a claim alleging negligent drafting of a property development agreement (*Mallon v Halliwell's* [2012] EWCA Civ 1212)
- claims for delivery up of privileged and/or confidential documentation from a solicitor's file (*Mortgage Express v Sawali* [2010] EWHC 3054 (Ch) and [2010] EWHC 90181 (Costs));
- the defence by a firm of solicitors of claims for breach of undertakings given in the course of conveyancing transactions (*Clark v Lucas Solicitors LLP* [2010] PNL R 2);
- the defence by a firm of solicitors of an application for a wasted costs order based on the alleged breach of obligations of disclosure (*CMCS Common Market Commercial Services AVV v Taylor* [2011] PNL R 17);
- the defence by a firm of solicitors of an application for a wasted costs order in proceedings in the Court of Protection (*Sharma v Hunters* [2012] PNL R 6)
- litigation relating to unsuccessful litigation funding schemes (including "the TAG Litigation", "the CLE Litigation" and "the Impact Litigation")

Surveyors & Valuers

Charles acquired a close familiarity with claims against surveyors in the last round of lenders' litigation at the turn of the century. He has been struck by the faithfulness with which history has repeated itself, but is also interested in the various ways in which the claims which are presently being made (and the accompanying allegations of contributory negligence against lenders) differ from those which were advanced in the past. He has acted both for and against surveyors and valuers in both commercial and domestic contexts, including:

- a multi-million pound claim by a lending bank in relation to the alleged over-valuation of hotel premises which were subject to a management agreement;
- the defence by a firm of surveyors of a multi-million pound claim brought by property investors in respect of an allegedly over-valued office building;
- the defence by a firm of surveyors of a claim brought by a residential property owner (claim dismissed summarily on the basis that no relevant duty owed to the claimant – *National Westminster Bank plc v Lloyd* (QBD) LTL 10/2/2009);
- the defence by a firm of surveyors of a claim by a bank in respect of the alleged over-valuation of specialist industrial premises;
- the defence by a firm of surveyors of a claim by non-status lenders alleging negligent overvaluation of mixed

- commercial and residential property;
 - the defence by a firm of surveyors of a claim by property owners alleging negligent advice in relation to damage caused by tree roots;
 - a claim against a firm of surveyors and land agents alleging negligent advice in relation to a scheme of commercial development.
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Chancery

Charles is regularly instructed to appear in the Chancery Division, in cases which may or may not involve allegations of professional fault. As the co-author, with Sir Roger Toulson, of *Confidentiality* (Sweet & Maxwell, 3rd edition, 2012), he takes a particular interest in the equitable principle of confidentiality. Cases in which he has been instructed have included:

- disputes over the subrogation rights of secured lenders (eg, *Menelaou v Bank of Cyprus* [2012] EWHC 1991 Ch)
 - advice on confidentiality issues arising in the context of corporate acquisitions;
 - partnership disputes;
 - applications for minority shareholders' relief;
 - trustees' liability claims;
 - claims against directors under the Insolvency Act 1986
 - contested insolvency proceedings;
 - disputes over the validity of deeds;
 - an application by a firm of solicitors to restrain the further use of accidentally disclosed privileged information relating to the firm's clients;
 - advice as to obligations of confidentiality arising in the context of disciplinary hearings before the General Medical Council;
 - advice as to the confidentiality and data protection obligations arising on the creation of a national database for combating fraud.
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Commercial Dispute Resolution

Charles is regularly retained in disputes of a general contractual nature, leading to mediation, arbitration or litigation. He is familiar with freezing injunctions and other forms of urgent interim relief. He is the co-author, with Sir Roger Toulson, of *Confidentiality* (Sweet & Maxwell, 3rd edition, 2012) and takes a particular interest in claims for breach of confidence. Claims in which he has been instructed include:

- sale of goods disputes;
 - advice in respect of statutory, contractual and equitable confidentiality obligations arising in the context of litigation relating to companies engaged in the nuclear industry;
 - advice to a local council as to the confidentiality obligations imposed by a settlement agreement entered into with building contractors;
 - advice as to jurisdictional and other issues in respect of the cross-border transfer of confidential information;
 - arbitration/litigation over the proper construction of oil exploration contracts.
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