



**IR GLOBAL**  
MEMBER OF THE YEAR  
**WINNER 2022**

## Howard Colman

IR Global's exclusive member for Commercial Arbitration & Commercial Litigation in England since 2013.

# Serious Lawyer with a sense of fun: Howard Colman is proud to have been part of the development of a successful commercial law practice

**Howard Colman set up Colman Coyle with his partner Robert Coyle in the mid 1980s.** They decided to base themselves in Islington, an area of London which is close to the financial district of the City of London and also to the High Court but one which, even to this day, still retains a local feel.

Howard and Robert identified this as an area with huge potential that would be an enjoyable place to work. Even at that time, it had a significant number of quirky restaurants and bars and many of the residents were celebrities from the entertainment and fashion world.

A few years later, Islington really shot to fame partly as a result of Tony Blair having his home there. It was in a restaurant very close to Howard's office that Tony Blair and Gordon Brown met to conclude what is known as the "Granita Pact" which ultimately led to Tony Blair becoming Prime Minister.

"Although there have been many changes to Islington over the years, it has always been a great place to work. During the day I regularly bump into local people many of whom I have known for years. In the evening, and at weekends, the whole area is very lively with packed bars and restaurants" Howard says.

### Small beginnings

At the outset, the firm consisted of just Howard and Robert. "We did everything from answering the telephone to typing our own documents" says Howard. "On the day we opened, a client asked us to act in the purchase of a property at auction and, 4 weeks later we received our first cheque for fees. It was a great feeling knowing that half the fee was for me

and half for Robert".

Howard's sense of fun helped develop business for the firm in an unusual way at an early stage. They were in small premises in Islington and the lease had only one year left to run but the rent was due for review. There was not a large difference between what Howard and Robert were willing to pay and what the landlord was seeking. "I met the landlord and suggested to him that rather than waste money arguing the matter we should simply toss a coin and agree to accept the winner's figure. He agreed. Fortunately I won but, even better was the fact that he was so impressed with this commercial approach that both he and several of his colleagues instructed us to deal with a substantial amount of property development work on their behalf over the next few years".

### How times have changed

Colman Coyle has developed significantly from those early days. It now employs around 25 lawyers and a similar number of administrative and support staff.

"Initially Robert and I focused on property transactions however we wanted to diversify and so I headed up the dispute resolution team". Over the years Robert has successfully built a well respected team of lawyers handling all types of real estate transactions and Howard has developed a highly regarded team of dispute resolution lawyers handling litigation and arbitration both nationally and internationally. In addition, the firm has developed a strong corporate and commercial team and a wills, trusts and probate department.

### Career highlights

In the early 2000's there was a significant change in litigation in England with the introduction of Conditional Fee Agreements (a form of contingency arrangement) and After The Event insurance (to insure against costs if litigation was unsuccessful). This brought about a large number of important Test Cases and other novel issues which were referred to in a succession of cases often to the higher appellate Courts to determine. Howard was instructed in the majority of these cases and was recognised as a leading authority in this field.

Later following the collapse of a major funding scheme, the funders brought claims against over 700 firms of solicitors in the UK claiming hundreds of millions of pounds. Howard represented a group of the largest solicitor defendants and the case eventually settled after a mediation lasting 5 days and involving two joint mediators.

"I particularly enjoyed this work as it was at the cutting edge. I remember particularly succeeding in the Court of Appeal for one insurer where I had been made aware that, if we lost the case, the whole of the department dealing with this area of work would be closed down and the staff made redundant. Fortunately, as we won, I had some very happy clients!"

Internationally, Howard successfully represented a Colombian artist in suing a high profile London art gallery. This resulted in the return to the artist of a large number of valuable works of art.

Howard has also acted in many group actions. For example, on several occasions, Howard has represented groups of investors, many of whom were based in various different jurisdictions, successfully recovering lost investments in failed property schemes.

"I have been very fortunate to have been involved in some interesting and high profile cases over the years and I enjoy the variety of work and its intellectual challenges" says Howard. "I particularly like taking a "hands on" approach to settling disputes either through mediation or negotiation. This is very important as less than 5% of cases in England reach trial".

### International work and IR Global

From early on Colman Coyle recognised that there was a gap in the market for a firm to provide high quality legal services to smaller and medium clients involved in international work. The major multi nationals were well served by the very large city law firms but for smaller to medium corporate clients it was, and remains, difficult to find good quality international legal advice from a firm of suitable size.

Having previously tried working with some international organisations, Colman Coyle decided that they would be better off to develop their own contacts and so employed a number of international lawyers setting up Spanish, Turkish and Ukrainian desks.

When IR Global started, Howard was quick to recognise its potential

and his firm attended the inaugural meeting and have been very active members of the organisation ever since. Howard is very proud to have recently won the 2022 Member of the Year.

"Membership of IR Global has been a real benefit to us" says Howard "we have been involved in a significant number of referrals both inbound and outbound". In addition, and in keeping with the sense of fun, Howard has been very much at the forefront of the social side of IR Global and through this has made a large number of friends globally within the organisation.

### Culture and inclusivity

It has always been important to Howard and Robert that not only should their practice be successful but that people should enjoy working there. "Our philosophy has always been that everyone in the firm, from the most junior up to the partners is important and deserves to be treated equally and with respect" says Howard.

The firm aims to foster long term relationships and this is clearly working as several of the members of the staff have been with the firm since the very early days and also a number of the current directors began life with the firm as trainees.

The firm has a strong social side. There is a social committee of employees which arranges events for the staff every couple of months for which the firm foots the bill. Howard says that these events are a very important feature in the firm, helping to foster a great team spirit amongst the staff.

"It is also satisfying to know that large numbers of people who have worked for us over the years but have moved on, still keep in touch with each other and also with the firm" says Howard.

### Out of the office

Howard enjoys playing golf and he is a director of Chigwell Golf Club, a leading private members club in Essex. Howard is currently arranging the inaugural IR golf event which will be held in Valencia in May 2023. "I am very pleased that this event has been well supported and we are now fully subscribed" says Howard. "I am particularly pleased to note that Thom Curran from the USA (who recently featured in a Member Spotlight) will be joining us as I am keen to relieve him of a few dollars!"

Apart from golf, Howard enjoys playing bridge and poker. He has competed nationally and internationally in both games. "It is interesting that I have found that some of the techniques I deploy in these games come in handy in my professional life when negotiating settlements".

Howard also enjoys travel and has a strong affinity with Spain, particularly Mallorca, where until recently he had a second home. He and his wife Kerree were married in Mallorca and Howard is delighted that his daughter Jessica has chosen to have her wedding there next September.

## Howard Colman

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have all the legal departments you would expect from a commercial firm including litigation, employment, corporate and commercial, and insolvency.

Our solicitors represent a mixed bag of clients from large corporate organisations to independent businesses and sole traders. Whatever the size of your business operation, we pride ourselves on being extremely client focused and believe in building long lasting relationships with you.

