



Chris Hilton is an extraordinarily successful shipping lawyer who has made outstanding contributions to legal practice, to the boards of several key local businesses, to the governance of this university, and to sport. He has deployed his considerable intellect and interpersonal skills to interpret, master and transform rules – in golf as well as in commerce and corporate governance.

Chris Hilton grew up in Gosforth and attended Fettes Academy before going to Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge to read Law. He completed his initial qualifications as a solicitor in London and then set off for Adelaide to follow up his interest in public international law with a scholarship to study the Law of the Sea. Which, he tells me, has not much to do with public international law at all. But Adelaide sowed the seeds of his distinguished career and, with that, his passion for The Rules. He completed his professional training at Richards Butler in London, specialising quickly in shipping law. And soon after that, he and his wife – another Geordie, a brilliant mathematician – returned to the North East for a combination of professional and family reasons. Ship-building and shipping was big on the Tyne then, as we may recall with sadness.

Chris joined Botterell, Roche and Temperley and in that role was manager of the British Ship Owners Association. His firm later merged with Ingledew, and all eventually merged into Eversheds in 1988 where he remained a managing partner until earlier this year. Ship-owners band together to form mutual insurance funds through P&I associations, and as a shipping lawyer, Chris has been involved in both

writing and interpreting the rules that govern these mutual bodies. Chris has been an influential adviser of the Newcastle and later North of England P&I association, and in typically even-handed style, also a non-executive director of the Sunderland Marine Mutual Insurance Company, south of our river. This is one of the largest specialist marine insurers in the world, established 1882. He also serves on the board at Cardiff-based shipping company Graig Shipping PLC. These activities, one might say, formed his day job. Quite a big one.

He has also had an evening job, a night job and at least a couple of holiday jobs too.

His talents have been exercised in another, huge, local business, as chair of the board of Newcastle Business Society. He has served on the board there for 30 years, as did his father and grandfather before him. Chris took over as chairman of the mutual in June 2001 and has spent an interesting 9 years in this role. One of the many challenges he has faced has been the rush for building societies to demutualise and become banks, answerable to their share holders. Newcastle Building Society took a cautious approach, maintaining its mutual status during a period of time when our other big local bank, Northern Rock, was aggressively building a different kind of business. Sadly, none of the demutualised Societies have survived as independent banks. But Newcastle Building Society has emerged strong, confident and still mutual, after this turbulent period. He steps down as Chairman soon.

Somehow while he was conducting his financial and legal careers he also found time to work very hard for us here at Newcastle University. Chris was appointed to the Council in 1996 and served till 2009. During that time he chaired two reviews of the governance of the university in 2001 and 2005, and also chaired the remuneration committee. The first review of governance in 2001 was particularly tricky as this was the first time that the university reviewed its structures against national guidelines about the size of governing bodies and the roles played by them. This review managed to dispense with some of the complexity of the structures without giving offense. He has been even-handed and tactful in all his dealings – “if

he hadn't been a lawyer he would have been a diplomat" says one member of our senior team here.

2010 is a significant year for Chris. Stepping down from the board of Newcastle Building Society and having just retired from Eversheds, like his father and grandfather he has recently become Captain at the Northumberland Golf Club at Gosforth Park where he has played since his mid-20s. Pretty well, too – with a best handicap of 5. This is rather surprising. He was almost blinded in one eye when attempting to play golf at the age of 4, and later wrecked one of his knees playing rugby as a junior county player yet throughout his adult life he has played a game in which eyesight and legs play fairly key roles.

It should not surprise us, though, that playing golf has not been quite enough for him. As a member of the Royal and Ancient at St Andrews, he serves on the Rules of Golf Committee. This is not a small thing like our university council. The Rules of Golf Committee looks after golf for 139 affiliated organisations everywhere in the world apart from the US and Mexico. Its most recent affiliate is Afghanistan. In his role on the committee as well as writing the rules, he referees internationally, and teaches – he has taught all over South America and Africa and next year takes in Asia too.

So, as in mutual insurance, he has a love of rules, and an expertise in their interpretation. Golf refereeing seems often to involve issues to do with TIOs – Temporary Immoveable Obstacles, and how to deal with them. Perhaps not so very different from university governance after all.

Chris, we are honoured that you have given so generously of your time to work for the university, and we look forward to a continuing long association with you. Given the family traditions that have guided some of your activities, we will watch with interest the legal careers of your children, and keep an eye out for your little granddaughter too. Ladies and gentlemen, please be upstanding for Honorary Fellow of the university, Chris Hilton.

