



IN THE SUPREME COURT OF GIBRALTAR

TRIBUTE CEREMONY IN HONOUR OF THE LATE
JUDGE FELIX PIZZARELLO CBE GMH

Held on 20 May 2026

Tribute held by the Court in memory of the late Judge Felix Pizzarello before Mr Justice Dudley Chief Justice, Mr Justice Yeats, Mr Justice Restano and Mr Justice Happold

Dudley, CJ:

We are here today to pay tribute to Judge Pizzarello, a deeply respected judge, a devoted public servant and one of the finest Gibraltarians of his generation.

Having studied law at the University of Oxford, and after being called to the Bar of England and Wales by the Inner Temple and completing his pupillage at a common law and chancery set of chambers, Judge Pizzarello returned home and was called to the Bar in Gibraltar on the 26th of September 1954, when he was 23 years old.

After ten years in private practice, he followed in his father's footsteps and was appointed Registrar in 1964, holding that office until 1978 when he was appointed Senior Crown Counsel in the Attorney General's Chambers. That was a relatively short stint and he returned to the judiciary in 1981 when appointed Stipendiary Magistrate and Coroner.

Much later than those of us in practice at the time thought that it should have happened, in 1995 he was made a judge of the Supreme Court, in those days with the rather unattractive title of "Additional Judge". That appointment came about at the same time as Mr Justice Schofield was appointed Chief Justice, and I cannot help reflecting on how differently matters might have unfolded had those appointments been reversed. He held that office until 2004 when he retired

at the age of 73. It was a singular privilege for me to follow in his footsteps and to be appointed as “Additional Judge” in his place.

His 40 years of service to the administration of justice in Gibraltar is impressive in itself, but it scarcely does justice to his contribution or to the man himself. Curiously, in very direct ways, I find myself linked to both his first and his last reported Supreme Court judgments. In the first, an appeal arising out of the dismissal of my wife on grounds of pregnancy, he upheld a finding by the then Industrial Tribunal of sex discrimination. In his final reported judgment, sitting as Acting Chief Justice, he overturned, quite rightly in my view, a conviction I had imposed in proceedings involving two Greenpeace activists seeking to approach a moored oil tanker.

The obituary which was published in The Times on the 5th May 2026, recalled in some detail his role as Coroner in the IRA inquest and how he presided over the proceedings with integrity and fairness. Those of us that knew him would recognise that as entirely characteristic, it was not merely a professional approach, but a reflection of the man himself, a man who was steady, principled, and, above all, a man of the greatest integrity. And humble almost to a fault.

While going through old files to prepare for today, I came across a letter addressed to a senior civil servant, weeks before his retirement, which concluded, by saying:

“It is a bit late now for me to remark that the judge is properly addressed as “Judge X” or “Mr Justice X” and not plain Mr as has been the case since I was appointed Additional Judge but I do so for the following reason. I have never been bothered about that protocol, and do not mind in the least being addressed as Mr but my successor, who should not be long in coming, may not be so inclined.”

It is therefore with that permission as it were, that I refer to him now by his first name. After 37 years at the Bar and on the Bench, I do not think I have come across a lawyer or judge more decent than Felix.

The judiciary, the legal profession and Gibraltar at large owe him a huge debt of gratitude, not only for his many years of service but for how he carried out that service.

Finally, let me thank Felix's family for joining us today in this tribute, in which, in some small measure we celebrate and honour his life. He enjoyed a long life and was deeply devoted to his family and it is a privilege to have his widow Marie, his daughters Anne and Claire and his grandchildren here with us today. It is my pleasure to invite Ms Pizzarello to address us, but before she does so, I will first ask Mr Rocca.

Address by Mr Christian Rocca KC, Director of Public Prosecutions

May it please your Lordship.

It's a privilege to address the court today on behalf of the Gibraltar Bar.

Yesterday I re-read the obituary that appeared in the Gibraltar Chronicle penned by Mr Richard Garcia and a follow up article penned by Dominic Searle titled "the Magistrate's last sigh". Both were excellent pieces dealing with the passing of former Judge Felix Pizzarello CBE in markedly different ways – his remarkable career at the service of Gibraltar and its people on the one hand and the human gentle yet firm and principled side to the man on the other.

I could spend a long time addressing the court on the excellent career in public service of former Judge Felix Pizzarello. I am going to allow myself the privilege of calling him Felix because I considered him above all a friend, a dear friend above everything else. Your Lordship has already touched on his legal career and I just made a few brief observations and I amended my notes as you spoke, My Lord.

As Senior Crown Counsel at the then AG's Chambers, I stand to be corrected but my research has shown within Chambers that I am of the firm belief that at times he acted as Attorney General in the absence of the then Attorney General.

As your Lordship has rightly pointed out he was appointed as a Coroner for a period of his life during 1988, he became famous for conducting the inquest which we are all aware into the death of 3 IRA members. Being a private man and having spoken to him at the time on the cricket field (I was about to embark on my university studies) I know how much he hated being in the spotlight but as was always the case with Felix he conducted himself in a measured, calm

and exemplary manner. He was a man beyond reproach, a man who had time and a word for everyone who spoke to him.

As Your Lordship has pointed out, his final judiciary appointment was as Puisne Judge (then Additional judge) and again I stand to be corrected but I believe he acted as Chief Justice in the absence of the then Chief Justice Kneller. Quite some legal career you can observe.

That's the formal bit done, My Lord. If I can turn to a more personal recollection and for once be permitted to give evidence from the bar.

I first came across Felix on the cricket pitch around the age of 16 just having returned to Gibraltar from England – I daresay there were few places he was happier than dressed in white with his baggy floppy sunhat in the baking hot sun at Europa Point. He coaxed and cajoled me and convinced me to turn up every Saturday and often Sundays to represent his beloved Gibraltar Cricket Club and then he cajoled me and coaxed me into running the Gibraltar Cricket Club in his later years. He served in practically every role within the Gibraltar Cricket Association and was one of the stalwarts of cricket that kept Gibraltar going through very difficult times.

I can safely say that on the cricket pitch he was the same as he was in court and throughout his life – a calm, measured, sensible, honest and thoroughly decent human being (who played with a straight bat at all times). He was not one to tolerate sharp practices let alone cheating. I have never met a person who would speak ill of him and in that I would include defendants, many of whom he would on occasion send to prison.

People who came before him, (victims, defendants, counsel, parties in civil matters) knew that you were going to be dealt with by the man that was everything I have said and a man of wisdom and integrity and as firm or as benevolent as justice required on each occasion.

I note, My Lord, actually something that sticks in my mind was that he was a member of the Inner Temple in the United Kingdom of England and Wales, which is part of the reason I was one to join the Inner Temple. Common practice in Gibraltar for most barristers is to join the Middle Temple, but partly because Felix was in the Inner Temple, I also joined the Inner Temple.

Having some time later been called to the bar I had the privilege of appearing before him on many occasions – winning some, losing some but always leaving the court with a client that felt that justice had been properly and fairly dispensed and on my call to the Gibraltar bar in 1994 he gifted me a set of cufflinks, a set that I have worn every single occasion I have appeared in the Supreme court, they are my lucky cufflinks My Lord, so I hope I never lose them and I am wearing them today, of course.

Above all, Felix was a family man. I attended his funeral at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity and was not surprised in the least to see a full house! You don't expect someone at the age of 95 to have a full house at their funeral but that is the final measure of the esteem in which he was held by Gibraltar, its people, and the people he worked with and the lives he touched. He may not have gotten to his century but we can celebrate a great innings nonetheless.

On behalf of the Gibraltar Bar, my sincere condolences to his wife, his daughters and extended family on their loss. My Lord.

Address by Ms Claire Pizzarello

My Lord Chief Justice,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you and your brother judges, members of the judiciary and court staff as well as the many members of the bar who have attended on this occasion to celebrate and pay tribute to my father's distinguished career in the legal arena.

The fact alone that so many have turned out today is a reflection of the high regard in which my father was held.

His achievements, contributions and decisions have shaped and impacted not only our judicial system but also society at large, affecting from the person on the street, to commercial entities and government.

Following in the footsteps of his father, he entered the legal world and worked his way in many roles through private practice, prosecution, Registrar, Magistrate and Coroner and finally to the Supreme Court as AJ.

He is of course widely known for his role as Coroner in the IRA inquest which took place in this very court room. I still remember the marks on the wall from the curtains providing anonymity which could be seen in that corner just over there when I started practice, and I'm probably now showing my age.

A private man, he refused to talk to the press throughout that time and indeed he continued that ethos always during his career and into retirement.

I remember at the time being stopped outside church with him by a photographer who wanted us to pose in the park which he promptly but politely refused to do although he could not prevent photographs being taken, so there am I in the Telegraph proudly holding his hand not really realising at the time at 8 years old all the implications of what was happening and the strong moral compass that he was bringing to those proceedings.

The press of course did choose to comment regardless of his private nature.

'An opening batsman does not scare easily' were the words used in the Observer to reflect him being an avid cricketer and a man who would not give in to political pressure.

And how true those words were.

Unflinching in adversity, a man of integrity, he didn't fear.

He strongly held his principles and maintained those throughout his life.

And that was both in the courtroom and outside.

And it wasn't necessarily easy for my sister and I as teenagers when we were one of the only if not the only household without Sky TV because he considered it to be illegal and just because everyone else had it did not make it right or mean we would have it.

But we took it in our stride and through his actions he taught us important values.

And that is what he always sought to do, teach, support and listen with endless patience, which again he showed both in court as he did at home, staying up late into the night to help with homework and in the later years through play and care of his grandchildren.

He will be greatly remembered as a judge, and he should be celebrated and acknowledged for that role.

But being a Judge did not define my father as a person, being the person who he was defined him as a judge.

A man of fairness, integrity and understanding, unassuming, honest, trustworthy and always willing to give his time.

Many anecdotes have been shared over the years and more so in recent weeks, from achieving uncommon rulings such as declaring void a decree absolute, to appearing before him in flips flops having been called to answer questions when at the beach, to him saying years after retirement 'I think by now you can call me Felix'.

They demonstrate his traits of fairness, diligence, commitment to justice and respect.

But the phrase that has been most used is gentleman and truly he was that, dignified and always polite.

To me he was dad, my support, my rock, the person I would play sports with, who taught me how to drive, and how to change a plug, how to bake the Christmas cake and hot cross buns.

He was truly a man of many talents.

And all the time and effort he put into work ensuring justice was served I never felt that took precedence over our family or that we lost out to his profession, he managed it all with skill and humility.

In retirement he still did enjoy keeping links to the profession, through personal chats and even returning as a Magistrate for a week to cover an empty bench, and he certainly did appreciate his yearly invitations to the opening of the legal year and the bar lunch, even if towards the end he was unable to accept.

He was at his core a family man but even that interlinks with his professional path.

The walls of this court complex are steeped with my family history.

My father, my grandfather, and also my mother who was a clerk working with him in the early days, a working relationship that turned into a lifelong partnership and team.

A relationship as strong and solid as the sense of justice which he imparted and he was no doubt helped by the unfailing support of the amazing woman he was so proud to have as his wife.

As one generation leaves who knows if in future there will be more to join these circles, and if so, hopefully with the same values having been passed down.

Being a solicitor I cannot wear his wig. That has a special place on my library shelf, with my grandfather's. But I do wear his Registrar's robe.

And I do so with great pride and honour and will continue to do so with a huge sense of respect and humility because there is no better man or role model that I could possibly seek to follow.

Thank you.

Dudley, CJ:

Thank you, Ms Pizzarello. Thank you all for attending. May I ask that we all stand and observe a minute's silence please.

Thank you.