

# **VALEDICTORY CEREMONY ON THE RETIREMENT OF GORDON LEECE**

**Held in Court 1 on 27 June 2019**

**Address by His Honour Deemster Corlett  
First Deemster and Clerk of the Rolls:**

Welcome everybody. Thank you all for coming along.

This is a short ceremony to mark an important event: the forthcoming retirement from the Office of Coroner for the Sheadings of Glenfaba and Michael, Gordon Leece. It will be Gordon's final Tynwald day as Coroner a week tomorrow. Deemster Montgomerie will shortly speak at greater length than I will, but I would just like to say a few words of my own.

For 17 years Gordon Leece has conducted the various duties of Coroner in an exemplary manner. His has been a trusted presence in the courts and on Tynwald Day. I shall certainly miss his good humour and banter during adjournments and his stentorian voice as he fences Tynwald Hill, and also his familiar instruction to "All rise" as it echoes along the judicial corridor as the jury enters courts 2 or 3.

A Coroner's duties are of course many and varied and the history of the office is very long indeed. I will refer mercifully briefly, as I am sure you will be relieved to hear, to *Manx Coroners*, the excellent treatise produced by Deemster Kneale, and he wrote this:

*"There is no record of the origin of the office of Coroner. It has existed in the Isle of Man from time immemorial. The first reference to Coroners is contained in the 1<sup>st</sup> Ordinance, A.D. 1417 describing the formalities to be observed on Tynwald Day. At page 4 it is stated "And your Deemsters shall make call in the Coroner of Glenfaba; and he shall call in all the Coroners of Man, and their yards in their hands, with their weapons upon them either sword or axe ... then the Chief Coroner that is the Coroner of Glenfaba shall make affence upon paine of life and lyme that noe man make any disturbance or stirr in the time of Tynwald or any murmur or rising in the King's presence upon paine of hanging and drawing"."*

Stirring stuff! And of course, as Deemster Kneale makes clear, *"The Coroner of Glenfaba exercises jurisdiction throughout the Island but the other Coroners and also the lockmen can only exercise their powers within their respective sheadings or parishes"*.

I could not help but notice that this treatise was published in 1958 at a time when there was a Coroner for every sheading. Much has changed in the law and practice of Coroners in the years since 1958. A new edition is well overdue and it occurs to me that Gordon may wish profitably to spend some of his lengthy leisure time in retirement in producing a new edition of this excellent book, maybe called 'Leece on Coroners'. No-one else surely could be better qualified.

That's all I have to say in substance. I simply wish to say, on behalf of all those who work in the Courts and Tribunals of this Island, I thank you for your years of excellent service Gordon, and I wish you a long and very happy retirement

**Gordon Leece:**

Thank you very much Sir

**Address by His Honour Deemster Montgomerie:**

Yes, I'm delighted to have been asked by the First Deemster to say a few words about Gordon Leece on his forthcoming retirement.

He's someone that I've known for the last 30 or so years. As you've heard from the First Deemster, and perhaps I can add that the First Deemster has used most of my speech, no change there then, the fencing of the Court of Tynwald at next week's Tynwald ceremony will be Gordon's final act of service after working for over 50 years in public service. Firstly, for over 30 years with the Isle of Man Constabulary and then for the last 17 years as Coroner of Glenfaba and Michael. It'll give him, apart from working on the treatise of 'Leece on Coroners', more time to indulge in cooking, because I know Gordon is a keen cook, to spend more time at Vagabonds Rugby Club, of which he's been the Chairman for the past five years and about which he is passionate, and indeed to make more trips to his home in France which is in a beautiful hilltop hamlet called Lordat, about 45 minutes from the Andorran border. I can tell you Gordon, we're all very envious. Is it true though what I've heard, that you've issued an open invitation to all General Registry staff to stay at that property at any time?

**Gordon Leece:**

We've just moved!!

**Deemster Montgomerie:**

Anyone interested in the details, contact me, I can supply them.

Now, I have used my various sources in an attempt to find out anything particularly funny or embarrassing about Gordon, but I have to say, without any success. To quote one of my sources, 'Gordon, you're just too squeaky clean'.

Perhaps I can say a little bit more now about Gordon's career in public service because I consider it merits your attention. Gordon joined the Isle of Man Constabulary as a cadet in 1969 and, indeed, didn't retire from the Constabulary until 2002. Notable mentions include, in 1973 as a very young constable carrying a significant number of bodies from a burning Summerland. There was no counselling then, was there Gordon?

**Gordon Leece:**

No.

**Deemster Montgomerie:**

And also as a scenes of crime officer being involved in numerous high profile cases, including the infamous Golden Egg murder in Strand Street. It will come as no surprise to you that Gordon has also been decorated for bravery.

I got to know Gordon better in 2000 when he became a police prosecutor, and I can tell you he soon established a reputation as a fair but formidable prosecutor. As the First Deemster has indicated, Gordon has run a very efficient and tight ship as Coroner for Glenfaba and Michael, and it's therefore no surprise that each of his permanent lockmen have gone on, or are going on, to be Coroners in their own right.

However, it's Gordon the man that we shall all miss, your company and your unfailing good humour. It's been a pleasure to deal with you Gordon, and it's a testament to you the number of persons here this morning to hear about your retirement.

I would perhaps conclude by saying that after more than 50 years in service to this community of ours, you're more than entitled to your retirement, which we hope will be a long and happy one and we wish you well. We hope that it's not so much of an adieu to the General Registry, but more au revoir.

**Gordon Leece:**

I'd like to thank the Deemsters for their kind words. Thank you very much. There are some things you didn't find out but I've silenced all the witnesses. And with regards to Tynwald, I've bought a sword and I've been hoping to use but nobody's spoken up, so there's always next Friday.

Thank you all very much, and thank you all for coming.