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| **FEATURE ARTICLE** | | | |
| *Wendy Graham teaches law at Blackpool and the Fylde College, Lancashire, UK. She also edits the online science and science fiction magazine FTLmagazine.co*m.                **"**  He is a Wordsworth-quoting **eccentric** at a time when eccentricity is becoming feared by many, an individual who does not mind walking alone and a man who is **not frightened** of standing up and being counted for what he believes is right and what is wrong.  **"** |  |  | **England's Finest: Rumpole and His Real Life Role Models**  by Wendy Graham     Horace Rumpole - Rumpole of the Bailey - remains the unsurpassed fictitious epitome of the English Barrister. While other lawyers come and go through the television courts of the world, Rumpole, perhaps because he was created and written by practicing English barrister John Mortimer QC, is still the character lawyers love in their hearts and who they happily watch - because all of the legal content is right.     Barristers are the specialized trial lawyers in England and Wales (a separate jurisdiction from Scotland and Northern Ireland). Operating one-step removed from the client, Barristers act as consultants and advocates, while solicitors deal with the client and prepare the brief which tells the barrister about the case. Usually, each barrister (and all are independent) will specialize further in one or two specific legal areas.     Rumpole is a junior member of the bar. That means he has not been appointed QC -Queen's Counsel, one of the select few who may sometime be called upon to advise the monarch and betimes are the seniors of the profession. There are surprisingly few barristers in practice - about 2,000 - and most are juniors, regardless of their age. Rumpole specializes in defending in criminal cases, although he will take all cases offered. Although he knows very little black letter law, Runpole triumphs as a superb advocate. While his belief in the golden thread of English justice - the presumption of innocence - might be accounted a sign of naivety, his skills, plus the pen of Mortimer, usually ensure that Rumpole triumphs in and out of court.     English trial procedure may appear much more restrained to an American lawyer who is used to the histrionics of a Perry Mason, perhaps Rumpole's transatlantic non-identical twin. Nevertheless, opportunities for swaying the jury abound, and Horace Rumpole employs them to the full ( by noisily blowing his nose to distract the jury during the opposition's closing statement, speeches about the horrors of prison, the wooing of the jury and such). Rumpole can also offer a masterclass direct from a QC (Mortimer himself) who, while practicing, was himself a passionate civil libertarian.     While still a practicing barrister, Mortimer's most famous case was defending the seminal classic Lady Chatterley's Lover against a charge of obscenity. Mortimer led for the defense and won, changing the law on what is and is not considered legally obscene in the UK. He re-cycles some of his arguments in this case in Chapter 11 of Rumpole's Return.     Away from court, Rumpole's home life hardly ever affects the love of his life - the court (not the law, about which he frequently and cheerfully admits he knows very little). The rest of Rumpole's screen time is taken up with life in Chambers. Barristers are independent of everyone and are obliged to take any case which they are offered, so long as they are available (this is known as the cab-rank rule and is there to ensure that even the most heinous criminal can have their case properly put before a court). Thus barristers are self-employed and band together in chambers to share office space, administration and library facilities. In all other respects they are competing colleagues. This competition amongst disparate characters fuels other aspects of Rumpole, but is again a very accurate reflection of chambers life.     To some, Rumpole is a bit of a failure. During the life of the series, he reaches  retirement age (without retiring) still as a junior counsel; reduced to defending recidivistic members of the Timpson family again and again. This is quite a contrast to his long-past golden time of promise when he did the Penge Bungalow Murders alone, without a leader (a QC or more senior barrister), where he learned all about bloodstains, or the Great Brighton Benefit Club Forgery trial in which he became an expert in typewriters.     During the time spanned by the series, Rumpole is still very much in love with his life at the Bar. Many of his colleagues, however, probably find him to be a reactionary old fossil, passed over in spite of his years as Head of Chambers (elected by the other barristers in a group) and often no longer receiving the great cases, even though, with Mortimer's help, he usually wins those he does get through a combination of skill and deviousness. He is a Wordsworth-quoting eccentric at a time when eccentricity is becoming feared by many, an individual who does not mind walking alone and a man who is not frightened of standing up and being counted for what he believes is right and what is wrong.     Throughout the TV series, Rumpole was played by the superb actor Leo McKern, to whom one of the novelisations was later dedicated (The Trials of Rumpole). It is interesting that McKern quickly and effortlessly 'became' Rumpole to everyone. The artwork for all of the Rumpole book covers show him as the character. McKern's actor-daughter Abigail later 'joined chambers' as a pupil barrister. Trainee barristers spend one year doing a specialized and very intense vocational academic course and then a year in chambers in an apprenticeship - for six months they shadow barristers and then for the next six are allowed to start taking minor cases of their own, still under supervision.     As an Australian, Leo McKern's portrayal of Rumpole throws up another parallel with a real-life barrister who might well be Rumpole in the real world (albeit more successful). That Australian is Geoffrey Robertson QC, who is the author of just published Crimes against Humanity: the Struggle for Global Justice, (Allan Lane, price �20). In an interview at the time of publication, this very successful barrister said, "It was only when I was representing the Princess of Wales that the Times described me as radical, republican and anti-Establishment. I feel that I probably lead a very conservative life and have views on law and order, which are simply that it ought to convict the guilty and acquit the innocent."     Rumpole would agree wholeheartedly.      **Would you like to comment on this article? Please submit your comments** [**here.**](http://docs.google.com/newsnviews.htm#Submit%20your%20own%20comments)         |  | | --- | | **Related Web Sites** |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | - | [Rumpole](http://www.csee.umbc.edu/~schott/rumpole/) - page devoted to a series of books by John Mortimer made into a British TV series and later shown in the U.S. in the PBS series, "Mystery." | |  | [FAQ - The Rumpolean FAQ](http://www.cs.umbc.edu/~schott/rumpole/faq/faq.html) | |  |  | |

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