

Archbold the Bearister Goes to Washington D.C.

In which the KBG Chambers' bear tours the federal capital, meets Senior Attorneys and a Magistrate Judge, and sits in on a hearing at the US District Court.

I am a bear of modest stature and I have never before been asked to travel so far for work. But when Charlotte Davies, our Head of Civil, told me she had meetings arranged with the people who run the United States federal courts, and that I would be needed for the photographs, I packed my bow tie and my chambers t-shirt, and did not complain about the leg room.

The Hill

We began at the Capitol, which is where the Supreme Court of the United States lived for its first hundred and thirty-four years. It met first in a committee room, then from 1810 in a vaulted chamber on the ground floor of the Senate wing, and from 1860 in the old Senate Chamber upstairs. Only in 1935 did the Justices get a building of their own. I sat on the front steps and reflected that our own highest court did not leave the House of Lords until 2009, so I was in no position to look smug.



In front of the Capitol, where the Supreme Court sat until 1935.



Inside the Capitol with Justice, Law and Order.

Inside, I found the restored Old Supreme Court Chamber and a very serious marble lady holding a tablet marked Justice, Law and Order. I attempted to strike the same expression. Charlotte says I looked like a bear who had eaten a very large breakfast, which I had (more on this later).

Courts, and many DEPARTMENTS

A walking tour of legal Washington takes in a great many stone buildings with very large letters on them. They seem to like large capital letters in the USA. I posed outside a United States Court of Appeals, the Department of Justice, and the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building, where nobody asked me any questions, and was lifted up to the old sandstone arch of the Georgetown University Law Department.



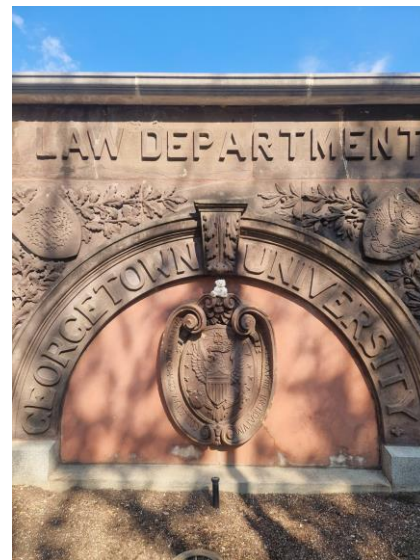
A United States Court of Appeals.



Outside the Department of Justice.



Outside the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building. Archie was not detained. Deliberately blurred to hide his identity.



The Georgetown University Law Department arch.

A Bearister on Business

The reason for the trip sits on Columbus Circle beside Union Station. The Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building was completed in 1992 as the plain Federal Judiciary Building, and was renamed within weeks of Justice Marshall's death in January 1993 in honour of the first African-American member of the Supreme Court. It is faced in white granite, has no columns and no grand staircase, and holds a five-storey bamboo forest in its atrium. It is also where the federal court system is administered.

Charlotte spent the afternoon there with Senior Attorneys of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts. The Administrative Office was created in 1939 and sits under the Judicial Conference, so the federal judiciary runs its own administration, budget and policy rather than relying on an executive agency to do so. That distinction alone generated a good deal of comparison with our own arrangements

at home. Gifts of KBG Chambers merchandise were handed over and, I am told, warmly received. I awaited Charlotte in a nearby coffee shop whilst trying not to fall into my enormous venti cold brew.



Charlotte at the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building, KBG tote bag in hand.

From there we went across to the E. Barrett Prettyman United States Courthouse on Constitution Avenue, which has housed the US District Court for the District of Columbia since 1952. Charlotte was the guest of Magistrate Judge Zia Faruqi, who has sat there since 2020 after twelve years as a federal prosecutor and who, as it happens, took both his degrees at Georgetown. He kindly allowed her to observe a hearing, which I understand was extremely interesting.

The conversations that followed were the best part of the visit. Much of it turned on the particular position of a court that sits a few blocks from the Capitol and the White House and so receives a steady share of the country's most politically charged litigation alongside its ordinary criminal and civil work. That led naturally to the pressures on the court system more generally, which will sound familiar to anyone practising in England and Wales, and to a comparison of the two careers that had brought a former federal prosecutor and a Cornish barrister together. Both were appointed judges in the same year. I was in the tote bag for most of it, and I am not at liberty to report what was said, but both sides came away thinking the other had some things right. The court staff seemed to like Charlotte's accent. She pointed out that she did not have one, they did. Chutzpah.

One further discovery outside the courthouse. The nine-foot bronze of Sir William Blackstone at the corner of Third Street and Constitution Avenue, beside the courthouse entrance, was commissioned by the American Bar Association in the 1920s as a gift to the English Bar. It was too big for the Great Hall of the Royal Courts of Justice, so London was sent a smaller copy and Washington kept the original. I measured the RCJ on my return and can confirm they were right.

The Supreme Court, and Liberty

The Supreme Court Building was designed by Cass Gilbert at the request of Chief Justice Taft and opened in 1935. It faces the Capitol across First Street and has Equal Justice Under Law carved above sixteen Corinthian columns. We were able to go inside, which I highly recommend to any visiting bearister, and afterwards I sat on the front plaza, in blazing hot sun, for the obligatory photograph.



On the plaza of the Supreme Court of the United States.



On the steps, shortly before meeting Libby.



Archie and Libby, formerly of the Supreme Court of the United States, now of KBG Chambers.

It was there that I met Liberty, who prefers Libby. She was working in the gift shop, wears a pink Supreme Court t-shirt, and has excellent judgement. I explained the appeal of Devon & Cornwall and she agreed to come home with me. She asked to meet the Beast of Bodmin, whom I described as a distant cousin. She has been offered a bow tie of her own and I understand she is considering it.

A bearister off duty



The Washington Monument, 845 Archies high.*



As close to the White House as anyone is now allowed. Even bears.

Between professional appointments we did the things tourists do. The Washington Monument, and the reflecting pool below it, which had been drained and fenced off again after a presidential repainting in American Flag Blue that went less well than hoped. The closest point one can now get to the White House, which is a gap in a black fence. The Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. More memorials than I could count. Ford's Theatre, where Lincoln was assassinated, was quite the experience. The International Spy Museum, where I was not recruited. Several Smithsonian museums (all free, so ideal for a bear on a budget). What I saw at the Pentagon is restricted but the 9/11 memorial there was very moving. George Washington's tomb at Mount Vernon. Arlington National Cemetery, where we paid our respects at the grave of the great Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Notorious, just like me, ATB.

A bear cannot visit the USA and not mention food. We ate at Gordon Ramsay's Hell's Kitchen, where, despite fitting precisely between two pieces of bread, I was not called an idiot sandwich. Dinner at Vue was a high point. Breakfast at Du Jour involved a piece of French toast roughly my own size, buried in cream and pecans. I regret nothing.



Breakfast at Du Jour. The French toast is in the foreground.

I am now back in our Cornwall chambers, slightly sunburnt under the fur, carrying a little more stuffing than I left with, and available for instructions in paw-sonal injury. Libby sends her regards to the Bar of England and Wales.

Archbold T. Bearister, KBG Chambers.

September 2026.

**ATB's own approximation.*