

The Times – 25th March 2006:

David Fingleton

September 2, 1941 - February 18, 2006

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Magistrate and music critic

AS A barrister, David Fingleton was a member of the Inner Temple chambers of Sir John Mortimer, QC, who led a double life as a writer. Fingleton worked closely with Mortimer and served as his junior in a number of cases. When Mortimer created Horace Rumpole, the cigars with which he endowed his immortal character had the shape, ash and flavour of those constantly smoked by Fingleton.

Like Mortimer, Fingleton also served two professions, music and opera journalism as well as the law, in particular the criminal Bar. Fingleton never prosecuted and was recognised as a deft defence counsel.

He followed 15 years as an advocate with another 15 as a metropolitan magistrate. He sat mostly at Highbury and Wells Street courts.

In one case that came before him, the impulsive advice he gave to a litigant created national headlines. Suzanne Puttock, a schoolteacher, came before him with a private summons against a woman who had knocked her down in front of a class of seven-year-olds, one of them the assailant's daughter. Puttock was supported by her union in bringing the case.

Fingleton, unaware of that support, was concerned about the costs Puttock was incurring. He advised her that she must expect to be hit several times during a career of teaching in modern schools, the implication being that the courts were not the best route to redress. Stripped of their charitable motive, the remarks were greeted by outrage. The Lord Chancellor called for a report, and issued a public apology to Puttock; and Fingleton was forced to do likewise. He retired from the bench in 1995.

His passion for music filled his life from childhood. He was the music correspondent of the *Contemporary Review* from 1969 until it ceased publication nearly 30 years later. He wrote for the *London Evening News* and for the *Daily* and then the *Sunday Express*.

In recent years, when he was frequently in hospital, he would rise from his bed in the early evening to attend a performance, then return to hospital and dictate his column from his bed without a note. His criticism was marked by clarity and an absence of jargon.

Fingleton also generously mentored a number of young singers and musicians, and arranged concerts for them in his beloved Garrick Club.

A schoolboy prank left him with a dislocated hip and a limp for life. His friends admired the uncomplaining courage with which he accepted his almost constant pain. Great personal kindness and an impish sense of humour softened his acerbic wit.

He married the writer Clare Colvin in 1975. She survives him.

David Melvin Fingleton, lawyer and opera critic, was born on September 2, 1941. He died on February 18, 2006, aged 64.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1511642/David-Fingleton.html>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/mar/28/pressandpublishing.law>

