

## Ford & Warren

### The Facts

**Location:** Leeds

**Number of UK partners/solicitors:** 19/35

**Total number of trainees:** 8

**Seats:** 4x6 months

**Alternative seats:** None

Like the modest Yorkshire pudding, Ford & Warren is no-nonsense. It's all about loyalty, hard work, high standards and, above all, "giving a damned good service to the client."

### Heard it through the grapevine

What do YouTube, Facebook and Ford & Warren have in common? The popularity of all three has grown through word of mouth. "We believe in organic growth and rely upon personal recommendation rather than paying for expensive marketing," commented one trainee. With a "no-frills" ideology, "it's all about giving the client your best work at the best possible cost." But this isn't the Ryanair of law firms. Recently, F&W joined Primerus, a North American organisation that selects members who "subscribe to achieving an excellent client service."

With Leeds roots stretching back to 1816, this one-office firm, renamed Ford & Warren in 1878, has eschewed expansion via the merger route, instead growing organically and in response to client needs. F&W has gradually taken over all seven floors of Westgate Point – a redbrick, open-plan, "imposing and impressive" building that stands tall amid the buzzing city centre traffic. Certainly an "efficient" firm, it didn't make any redundancies during the harsh period following the credit crunch.

As well as strong real estate and litigation practices, F&W has a number of specialist departments such as transport and sport, and it also caters for private clients. "You get really small clients and really big clients here. Getting a good range keeps it interesting and ensures great exposure." The firm counts major names like National Express and Punch Taverns among its clientele.

### Pit stops

F&W trainees visit four seats, usually spending the last one in the department they wish to qualify into. Managing partner Keith Hearn sends an e-mail to trainees to ascertain their preferences, and "after that it's down to business needs." Trainees sit together in 'trainee banks' on each floor. "It's really helpful to have somebody to quickly turn to and ask for help."

Roaring ahead with a Chambers UK top-tier ranking, the transport department counts Eddie Stobart and Fastline UK among its clients. Partner Gary Hodgson has had an exciting year, acting in a gross negligence manslaughter prosecution, before several public inquiries, and successfully arguing a PSV (public service vehicle) fine from £11,000 all the way down to £1,750. Though there's no assigned seat in the department, trainees can cadge work from one of the partners and are likely to encounter transport clients elsewhere in the firm. For example, National Express instructs the employment team, where trainees enjoy having a go at "all sorts of work" from drafting claims and pleadings to attending client meetings and tribunals.

Trainees in the litigation department encounter cases of all shapes and sizes, and have court exposure from early on. "Working on small claims is a great way to pick up the process really quickly, while with the larger ones you get to deal with experts and take witness statements." There is the dull matter of court bundling to be dealt with, but our sources realised that "it comes

with the territory – you need to do it to understand how it works.” F&W’s litigation department handles general commercial, insurance and personal injury cases, IP and fraud, finance litigation and sports matters. The firm advises numerous Premiership footballers, teams and agents. It was a game of two halves for Leeds United when Melvyn Levi, a former director of the club, launched a defamation claim against chairman Ken Bates. F&W carried Mr Levi to victory, landing him £50,000 in damages and indemnity costs. Other work highlights include acting for the British Bobsleigh Association and representing Dwain Chambers in his battle to lift the lifetime ban that prevented him from competing in Grand Prix race events.

In keeping with its efficient nature and ‘full service to the client’ ideology, F&W conducts the majority of its own advocacy. “There’s a progression. They want to give you experience first by watching others – they don’t throw you in at the deep end.” But as one trainee told us: “I’m certainly not mothered. I have a good amount of responsibility and if there’s ever anything too complicated, I’ll get it checked.” Trainees are “free to go and speak to anyone.” And, as always, the client’s interests come first. “The training experience is also led by the client – they say how much they want you involved.”

In commercial property, trainees find they get “excellent hands-on experience.” Drafting leases and licences, they’re expected to “have a go at producing a final document and then pass it on to get checked.” Working with companies big and small – eg Punch Taverns and Thomas Cook – trainees experience acquisitions, disposals and leases. “You see both sides of the coin,” said one, “and it gives you a really rounded picture.” Over in the licensing department, trainees advise clients on how to comply with all relevant legislation.

A seat in F&W’s private client department mostly involves “drafting wills and some government work.” Trainees found their colleagues very friendly and even worked alongside the managing partner. “In total contrast to what I expected, there was really no intimidation at all,” said one.

This is a firm that takes pride in appearances, from its strict dress code to its tidy-desk policy. “Clients expect

us to look smart,” commented one trainee. “They pay us so many pounds and expect us to appear in a way that reflects that.” As for the tidy desks, trainees say “it teaches you to how manage your files, as well as yourself.”

### **On the side**

F&W isn’t big on marketing speak and empty jargon. On its website, it claims to offer ‘just a high quality, value for money service.’ “The firm strives for excellence in everything we do; delivering a quality service on time at the cost estimated,” we were told. “This certainly isn’t a firm where there’s any dicking about.” That’s not to say folk don’t know how to have a good time. Aside from the Christmas parties (firm-wide and departmental), the social scene is fairly informal. “There’s as much or as little as you want, and it’s not shoved down your throat.” Trainees enjoy popping out for coffee at lunchtime, or dinner and drinks after work, frequenting city-centre haunts such as Prohibition and Jupiter. The firm has a football team, and trainees also get involved with the Junior Lawyers Division.

And let’s not forget the F&W resident band, Red Light Revival. “Oh... I don’t really know how to describe them. Funky electro?” We checked them out on MySpace, where we discovered that they are actually... really quite good. Hum along to ‘Need Me Too’ when applying and rage to ‘Bad Bitch Woman’ should you get rejected. Comprised of fee earners, the band made it to the Live and Unsigned regional final this year.

“This isn’t the type of place where you do two years and then they throw you out,” our sources insisted. True enough, in 2010 three out of the four qualifiers stayed on.

### **And finally...**

The F&W ethos is plain and simple. Take pride in yourself, take pride in your work and give “a damned good service” to clients. You can’t really argue with that.

