

Appointments: District Court

Judge Thomas Jones

Luke Brasch

Samuel Griffith Chambers



On Remembrance Day 2025, Thomas Jones was sworn in as a judge of the District Court of New South Wales. His Honour had the good fortune of being sworn in alongside David Scully SC. The combined popularity of these two well-respected practitioners in criminal law ensured a well-attended ceremony followed by the customary cup of tea and a biscuit.

His Honour grew up in the rough-and-tumble of the streets of Paddington, the son of Paddy and Claudia. His father enjoyed a distinguished career in the law as a partner at Allen Allen & Hemsley and then, later, at the Bar. His Honour paid tribute to the influence that his parents had on him, which was without the faintest hint of pressure.

His Honour attended Sydney Grammar School where he was taken by the sporting side of school life: rugby and rowing in particular. His Honour spoke of the apparently legendary 1978 Grammar rowing crew and the contribution made to it by his Honour Judge Newlinds SC, a fact no doubt best known to Sydney Grammar alumni and enthusiasts of the Head of the River.

His Honour's academic career commenced at Charles Sturt University where he studied journalism. His Honour spoke of his mother's continuing disappointment that she has yet to see him on CNN as a foreign correspondent. At Charles Sturt, his Honour's interest in a career in the law was ignited.

His Honour commenced his legal studies at the SAB and completed them at Bond University after convincing his parents that his academic career would be enhanced by the sun and surf of the Gold Coast – early signs of his persuasiveness as an advocate.

His Honour spoke of the greatest achievement of his legal career, which was – while a law clerk with Taylor & Scott – courting his future wife, Julie O'Brien, who captivated him at the level nine registry of the Compensation Court.

In 2000, his Honour became a solicitor, working at Vandervords and later in Hong Kong and London, where he worked with the Crown Prosecution Services. In London, his Honour rekindled his relationship with Julie, leading to an early return to Australia, a decision he has never regretted.

Arriving back in Sydney in 2004, his Honour worked as a legal officer with the Commonwealth DPP before being called to the Bar in 2006. His Honour commenced at 11th Floor Garfield Barwick Chambers and, in 2010, joined Samuel Griffith Chambers, where he remained for 14 years (apart from a short sojourn in 2018 to Jack Shand Chambers). His Honour read with Dominic Toomey SC and Greg Jones, both of whose contributions to his career at the Bar he spoke warmly about.

His Honour spoke affectionately about his time at Samuel Griffith Chambers and the camaraderie of the floor, as well as the friendships he had formed and maintained with members of the floor.

All the speakers spoke of his Honour's decency, his incredibly good humour and his skills as an advocate – all qualities that will ensure a long and successful career on the Bench.

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Judge Michael Smith

Todd Pickering

Samuel Griffith Chambers



Michael Smith was sworn in as a judge of the District Court of New South Wales on 16 December 2024, becoming the court's fourth Judge Smith.

Judge Smith's appointment follows 22 years at the Bar practising primarily in criminal law, during which he appeared in countless trials (both on behalf of the accused and the Crown) and appeals to the Court of Criminal Appeal and the High Court. A keen rugby league follower, he was also a board member of the National Rugby League Player Agent Accreditation Committee.

Speaking at the swearing-in ceremony, Attorney General Michael Daley described Judge Smith's journey to the law as unorthodox. Raised in Maroubra, he had, by his own admission, an unremarkable academic record. After school he worked in pubs and hotels as a publican and licensee. He later joined the army and trained at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Following his time in the military, Judge Smith returned to working in pubs and befriended a couple of barristers who were regular patrons. His interest in the law was sparked, and the barristers offered him some work as a research assistant. He later commenced legal studies at the University of New South Wales and ultimately graduated with degrees in law and political science. Knowing that advocacy was his calling, Judge Smith went straight to the Bar.

Renowned for his thorough preparation and professionalism, Judge Smith enjoyed a successful practice at the Bar, spending most of his time at Edmund Barton Chambers. In recent years he took up a room at Samuel Griffith Chambers. As a barrister, Judge Smith emphasised temperance and civility in the courtroom, firmly of the view that an adversarial system should not be a combative one. As he noted, 'I never lost a trial because I had a good working relationship with my opponent'. Outside of the courtroom, Judge Smith has applied the discipline instilled in him during his time in the military to fitness pursuits, including representing Australia in triathlons and completing ultramarathons.

Judge Smith brings a wealth of professional and life experience to his appointment that will serve him well during his judicial career.

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