

James Wood KC



Call: 1975

Silk: 1999

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Profile

What the directories say

James has been nominated for "Crime and Extradition Silk of the Year" in the Legal 500 awards for 2024. He is also ranked in Band I of Crime silks in both **Legal 500** and **Chambers and Partners**.

The 2025 edition of **Chambers & Partners** describes James as *"one of the titans of criminal defence and appeals work. He is intellectually formidable and gets full attention in court from the judges. One of the easiest silks to work with."* and *"A very good advocate who is very determined, James is a great fighter on behalf of his clients"*.

The 2024 edition of **Legal 500** says *'James is an authoritative barrister who brings years of experience to the job. He is a fearless and forthright cross-examiner and a determined advocate.'* and the 2024 edition of **Chambers and Partners** describes him as *"Formidable: he's all over the detail and spots where the weaknesses on the other side are and then goes for them"*.

The 2023 edition of Chambers and Partners says *"he has an innate ability to orchestrate his junior legal team members with charming modesty and interested encouragement ensuring that, under his tutelage, no evidential stone remains unturned nor legal argument discarded without assessment, investigation and development"*. James *"continues to tower above colleagues as a heavy criminal silk, always delivering that extra pivotal trial ingredient for his defence instructing solicitor"*.

In earlier editions he is described as being *"A skilled practitioner who is highly sought after for terrorism cases. Committed to both private and publicly funded work, his practice also consists of challenging and complex cases relating to murder and drug offences. He further has experience of handling complex gang-related matters."* and as *"tenacious and thorough"* (2021). *"Fearless, committed and has a ferocious appetite for cases."* (2019) as an *"unstoppable appellate advocate"*. *"His intellect is intimidating, his advocacy is fearless and tactically he is incredibly astute. The most anxious and demanding clients feel safe in his hands and juries listen to what he has to say even when it is unpalatable."* (2018) as *"One of the all-time greats. At his best, he is a force of nature."* *"Has intellect and gravitas. He's very good with clients and taken seriously by judge"* (2017); as *"A very able lawyer with a bright legal mind."* *"When he is in court he is like an unstoppable force"* (2016), a *"Heavyweight criminal barrister acclaimed for his courtroom presence, work ethic and experience."*

In the 2023 edition of **Legal 500** he is described as *'One of the finest silks in the UK. Real courtroom presence, excellent to work with, knows the case inside-out and excellent client care skills. One of the old-school legends still at the Bar.'* *'Tactically very good and has an excellent manner with clients. He will always stand his ground on issues and will take difficult points with relish. Incredibly bright and formidable in court. Fearless as an advocate and brilliant at tactics. Very approachable, works incredibly hard and keeps in close contact. Turns work around immediately and totally reliable.'* *Descriptions in earlier editions have included 'A fantastic man to go into battle with and one of the most respected silks in crime.'* (2021)

Overview

James's extensive trial and appellate experience means he is fully aware of and has litigated issues involving many of the investigative techniques likely deployed in the course of complex police, SFA and SOCO investigations. This always informs his detailed and careful pre-trial preparation on issues of disclosure and abuse of process, and his approach to pre-charge advice. He is inclusive when leading a team and will always encourage, and be open to, lay and professional client involvement and participation in core pre-trial decision making. As an advocate he is forceful, incisive and strong. The bulk of his work concerns allegations of grave crime, be it homicides, corporate fraud, money laundering, serious drugs, terrorism, or

organised crime. Recent instructions include murders, grave terrorism, complex fraud and large-scale money laundering.

Other areas of practice include Public Inquiries, Extradition, International crime, civil actions against the police, Inquests and Regulatory and Disciplinary work. He is on the list of approved counsel for the International Criminal Court and welcomes instruction abroad. He is authorised for **direct access** work.

Recent cases include:

- Currently instructed in Encrochat work
- Defending terrorist in fitness to plead
- Defending in Gangland assassination case
- Representing youth charged with gangland murder by stabbing;
- Successfully defending murder stabbing allegation where defendant was subject to apparent racist attack;
- Successfully defending Liverpool gangland murder case
- Appearing for Tommy Adams in extensive money laundering litigation.
- Representing a police informant in a major civil trial for damages against a constabulary (A v ACC [2017] EWHC 301)
- Appearing for Diana Lank in her eventual acquittal on grounds of justification for interfering with police computers to expose a miscarriage of justice relating to her son.
- He appeared in the celebrated forgery appeal for Chan Chun Chuen in the Court of Appeal in Hong Kong (the “Feng Shui” will forgery case).
- Tarik Hassane in a major terrorist trial
- Ketan Somaia, the Chief Executive of Delphis Bank Mauritius, in a \$23m fraud trial
- The Sun’s defence editor in Operation Elveden
- Dwayne George in a historic gangland murder appeal involving “Innocence project” work.

Publications

Over the years James has contributed to numerous publications for Liberty and other civil liberties organisations. He was consulted on new terrorism provisions by Justice, has

contributed to the response of the CBA and the Bar Council on the new Terrorism Act, and more recently on the consultation on Quality Assured Advocacy.

He was Head of Doughty Street Crime Team, was chair of the chambers management board, and a past member of the Criminal Bar Association Executive Committee. He regularly contributes to committees submitting representations and evidence, and lectures for White Paper on aspects of the Regulation of Investigative Crimes Act. He was a member of Justice's working party on "Preventing Digital Exclusion from Online Justice" .

Languages

French

Related practice areas

Criminal Law

Inquests and Public Inquiries

Actions Against the Police and Public Authorities

Criminal Appeals

Artificial Intelligence

Criminal Appeals

Throughout his career James has appeared in major criminal appeals from the **Birmingham Six**, through the **Bridgewater 4** and in silk remains extremely experienced in appellate work. He is currently instructed in appeals involving alleged misconduct involving undercover police officers. He handles the most complex and difficult appeals for the most demanding of professional and lay clients. He accepts works on miscarriages of justice in their pre-appeal stages, advising on representations to the CCRC. Currently instructed for Lee Firkins in his his murder appeal referred to the CA by the CCRC. In the Privy Council in the Bermudan murder appeal of Devon Hewey, and in *Saunders v R* [2020] mUKPC 4.. He appeared in the murder appeal for Demario Williams [2020] EWCA Crim 193. He was instructed in joint enterprise murder appeals arising from the Supreme Court decision in **R v Jogee** [2016] UKSC 8, and appeared in the joint listing of major historic joint enterprise cases where the Court of Appeal gave guidance in **R v Johnson and Others** [2016] EWCA Crim 1613. He secured the overturning of the historic murder conviction of **Dwayne George** [2014] EWCA Crim 2507 on the grounds of the inadequacy of the gunshot residue evidence.

In terrorism he has appeared in many of the leading appeals, raising many issues. In the recent past cases include **Iqbal** [2014] EWCA Crim 2158 (the Luton Bomber), **Latif** [2013]

EWCA Crim 468 (the stock exchange bombing case), **Rajib Karim** [2011] EWCA Crim 2577, (the BA bomber) under section 5 of the Terrorism Act; **R v Waheed Zaman** (and others) [2011] EWCA Crim 1260, the airline bomb plot appeal on autrefois acquit, conspiracies and second re-trials and **R v Habib Ahmed** [2011] EWCA Crim 184 concerning issues of complicity in torture by the UK, the admissibility of expert evidence on terrorism, and the meaning of membership under the Terrorism Acts. He also previously appeared in **R v Girma** [2009] EWCA Crim 912, the accomplices to the 21/7 bombers, reported on the wrongful admission of the conviction of co-accused, and on issues of sentence, and the appeal in the Fertilizer bomb plot case **R v Khyam** [2008] EWCA Crim 1612, where issues of complicity in torture were again raised.

In protest work, he appeared in **R v Avery** [2010] EWCA Crim 622 for all appellants in the appeal against the sentences and ASBO's imposed on the leaders of SHAC for an alleged blackmail campaign against employees and contractors with the animal experimentation company, Huntingdon Life Science.

In grave general crime he appeared in **R v T** [2010] EWCA Crim 2439. A successful murder appeal involving a seminal judgment on the use of statistical evidence in footwear cases. The court ruled against the current practice of applying Bayesian techniques in the assessment of the strength of support for the prosecution case derived from underlying statistical material. The case has been the subject of widespread criticism and speculation within the science community (Read more [here](#)). Other recent general criminal appellate work includes **R v Manochehr Bahmanzadeh** [2012] EWCA Crim 2954, the owner of the Dance Academy nightclub in Plymouth on a conviction and sentence CCRC reference for permitting the supply of class A drugs. **R v Andrew Reeves** [2010] EWCA Crim 2664, a successful murder appeal involving expert evidence on the reliability of voluntary confessions and the impact of childhood ADHD, and **R v Evans** [2009] EWCA Crim 2243, a CCRC reference in murder concerning expert psychiatric evidence. A selection of more ancient cases includes **R v Firkins** [2008] EWCA Crim 2981, the Pool Farm murder case concerning fresh evidence and legal professional privilege; **R v Yilmaz** [2007] EWHC 2620 (Admin) on custody time limits, and [2007] EWCA Crim 308 on the substantive PII appeal concerning non disclosure at the original trial in Turkish heroin, conspiracy; and **R v Choudhery** [2005] EWCA Crim 1788. Representing the lead appellant in the "Controlled Importation" heroin cases involving corrupt Customs Officials, non-disclosure and abuse of process, and in which mammoth costs were awarded against HMCR [2005] EWCA Crim 2598.

He secured the acquittal, in a direct access appeal out of time, in case defining trial procedure in connection with indecent photographs (**R v Dodd** [2013] EWCA Crim 660). In International work, he appeared in the Privy Council in the Trinidad and Tobago death

sentence case of **Benjamin and Ganga** [2012] UKPC 8, dealing with confession evidence, and the constitutionality of the mandatory death sentence in cases of the mentally impaired.

Terrorism

James was first instructed in major terrorist trials in the days when they primarily involved IRA active service units. Since the rise of ISIS, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and the passage of the Terrorism Acts of 2000 and 2006 James has been instructed in many of the recent terrorist trials. He is familiar with the philosophy, politics, writings and texts which often form a part of these prosecutions. He lists below a selection of the terrorist cases in which he has appeared at trial in recent years:

He held the brief for the Manchester Arena bomber. He appeared in 2020 for Fatah Abdullah on fitness to plead. In 2016 he appeared for **Mohammed Hassan** in Manchester, and successfully secured acquittals on medical grounds for terrorism offences. In the same year he appeared for **Tarik Hassane**, in an alleged major UK terrorist plot to murder soldiers, police or civilians. Other experience includes the international Jihadi kidnap case of British journalists in Syria, for **Jubayer Chowdhury** (Kingston CC, Nov 2013); for **Mohammed Rizwan** (Woolwich CC March 2013), and **Zahid Iqbal** (Woolwich CC May 2013) the Luton TA barracks bomber case. In late 2012 he appeared for **Omar Latif** in Chowdhery and others [Woolwich CC Feb 2012], known as the stock exchange bomb plot. In 2011 for **R v Rajib Karim** [Woolwich Crown Court Feb-Mar 2011]. British Airways employee charged with communication with Anwar Al Awlaki in Yemen, and with committing acts preparatory to terrorism in the UK and abroad. **R v Zaman** [Woolwich Crown Court 2008 original trial, 2009 re-trial and 2010 2nd retrial]. This major terrorist plot was described as the most serious attempt at an attack on transatlantic airliners in peacetime. **R v Haji and others** [2008 Manchester CC] - The Manchester Al Qaeda directing and membership case. Defendant acquitted of funding terrorism. Appeared for convicted co-accused in the court of appeal. **R v Khyam and others** [2007 CCC] - The fertiliser bomb plot trial (the UK's longest jury deliberation). **R v Barot and others** [2007 Woolwich CC] - the dirty bomb terrorist case, involving grave allegations of terrorists plotting to create a dirty bomb (for Barot's alleged assistant, Feroze).

National Security

As part of his practice in terrorism James receives instructions in SIAC hearings for those the subject of state requests for restrictions of liberty.

Homicide and Related Grave Offences

James has appeared in many major criminal trials over many years. A number have attracted significant publicity. Mostly homicides, major frauds and serious drug cases, and illustration of his recent cases are listed below in reverse chronological order:-

Recent trials at the CCC include gangland murders and targeted assassinations); In Birmingham securing the acquittal for murder of **Tyrone Andrew** when attacked by an allegedly racist mob in Walsall, and again securing the acquittal for murder of **Daren Colecozy** for a gangland murder in Liverpool. He appears for the **Tommy Adams**, the alleged north London gangland boss, for money laundering. He secured the acquittal of **Sedat Meric** for the attempted murder of a National Crime Squad Officer, in a gangland shooting captured on CCTV. A similar outcome was secured in 2013 for **Chris Nathaniel**, a celebrated football agent and entrepreneur, for murder after a 5 month trial at the Old Bailey. He appeared also at the Old Bailey for **Wendell Baker** in a historic rape case, retried after a campaign by BBC's Panorama programme on grounds of fresh DNA evidence. In 2012 he led for the defence in the renowned murder of Colonel Riley Workman at St Albans Crown Court (**R v Docherty Puncheon**). In autumn 2011, he represented **Shabia Linton** at the Old Bailey for complicity in a gangland shooting. Other cases include **R v Nicolaou** [Old Bailey: Mar-May 2011]; Acquittal of defendant alleged to be middleman in Turkish gangland assassination. **R v Saint** [Old Bailey: Nov 2010-Jan 2011] joint enterprise shooting by South London Gang. **R v Griffiths** [Birmingham CC: 2010]. Successful defence in gyrocopter killing case, when a hunt monitor was charged with murder of a hunt supporter with rotor blades of his own Gyrocopter. **R v McCartney** (Southwark CC 2009-2010). Successful defence in IRA blackmail plot, for longest ever serving UK IRA life sentence prisoner and active service unit member. **R v Carty** [2009 Central CC]. Murder allegation involving death from repeated stabbing on public highway by defendant acquitted after claiming self defence. **R v Yilmaz** [2008 CCC and 2004 Woolwich CC] - Major heroin importation for the leader of Turkish drug gang, allegedly involved in the importation of many tons of heroin. **R v Lee Firkins** [2006 Exeter CC] - The celebrated Bodmin Moors double murder, at the Perch Garage, near Wadebridge. **R v Stevenson** [2005 Winchester CC] - The Poole Masseur murder. **R v Moran** (2005) - The Nottingham Jeweller's wife murder. Finally he has appeared in a number of drug related shootings **R v Bennett** (London 2004); **R v Powell** (Sheffield 2004); **R v Edwards** (London 2003), and the body on the DLR case (**R v Islam** 2003) and the body in

the suitcase murder (**R v Mcknight** 2003-2004).

Protest Cases

James appeared for **Debbie Vincent**, on a conspiracy to Blackmail allegation concerning animal rights activities by SHAC at Winchester Crown Court. Historically, James made his name appearing for protesters, and litigating the right to protest on the streets (See *Pedro v Diss* (1981) 72 Cr. App.R.193). In the 1980's he appeared in the Orgreave riot trials, and other important cases arising from the Miner's strike. At that time he also appeared in the **Newham 7 anti racism case**, and represented many anti apartheid demonstrators. He has a long standing involvement in issues concerning animal rights, and has represented many ALF members and leaders. He appeared in the Sheffield Crown Court trial involving **Ronnie Lee**. He appeared in many of the direct action animal laboratory occupation and animal rescue trials, and has appeared for leading animal rights activists in many prosecutions. He appeared for **Greg Avery**, the principal defendant, in the SHAC Huntingdon Life Science blackmail trial at Winchester in 2008.

In late 2013 in the Court of Appeal for **Wayne Collins** who had been convicted for involvement in the Birmingham Riots of 2011.

Extradition

When available James appears in the High Court on extradition cases, leading junior members of Doughty Street's highly regarded extradition team. Example of his extradition cases can be found at **Kadre v France** [2005] EWHC 1712 (Admin), [2006] A.C.D. 26, and **Deya v Kenya** [2008] EWHC 733 (Admin) (the miracle babies case).

Other Serious Criminal Offence

He secured the acquittal of **Diana Lank**, at the Old Bailey, successfully defending allegations of conspiracy to commit misconduct in a public office on grounds that she was justified in illicitly accessing police computers to expose a grave miscarriage of justice relating to the murder conviction of her son (for whom he is currently instructed). He deals with major drug and money laundering cases, including representing members of the Adams family. In 2016 he represented **Richard Pearman** in Sheffield CC on gang robbery allegations, on his retrial,

securing an acquittal on grounds of non-disclosure. He appeared at the Old Bailey for **Andrew Collins** who was acquitted on allegations of supplying tons of cannabis. In 2013 he appeared for **Virginia Wheeler**, the Sun newspapers former defense editor, in the Operation Elveden corruption allegations. His pre trial advisory work, secured reconsideration of the charges by the Attorney General and the successful conclusion of this the first prosecution of a journalist by the DPP's team, through the entry by the by the Attorney of a Nolle.

His interest in cases raising unusual or political issues, has seen James being instructed in cases concerning the religious use of drugs. In late 2012 he helped secure the acquittal of **Adrian Freedman** when prosecuted for importing Ayahuasca for the Santo D'Aime church. The issues of religious freedom and legal uncertainty led to the dropping of the case. Always prepared to turn his hand to defending those who find their religious or political beliefs have put them in conflict with the criminal law, James invites instruction in all forms of serious crime.

He is always prepared to be instructed (if available) in cases involving lesser criminal offences which raise issues of complexity, sensitivity or issues of principal, human rights or state oppression.

International Crime

James appeared in the celebrated forgery appeal for **Chan Chun Chuen** in the Court of Appeal in Hong Kong (The \$HK 83 billion Feng Shui will forgery case). This was a lengthy criminal appeal, involving documentation extending from civil probate proceedings, which led to the defendant's arrest, and extensive trial material over many thousands of pages. He assisted **Kevin Horstwood** during his long period in custody facing a death sentence for murder in St Kitts. James was appointed to the panel of counsel to the International Criminal Court in 2010. He appears in the Privy Council on death row cases from the Caribbean, and has been instrumental in the development of the participation of Doughty Street Chambers in all aspects of International Criminal Law.

Business Crime and Investigations

James acted as lead counsel for the defence in the major private prosecution of **Ketan Somaia**, the former Chief Executive and owner of Delphis Bank, Mauritius. The case involved wholesale deceptions and theft and required detailed analysis of historic material from

multiple jurisdictions. The Delphis Bank was based in Mauritius, and was an offshoot from the BCCI banking collapse. It had businesses all over Africa, the Middle East and the Caribbean. Whilst the prosecution allegations focused upon allegedly fraudulent investment advice, the defence was that the multimillion pound investments were genuinely made and the funds not diverted. The defence thus required extensive examination of both contemporary and historical corporate documentation from many jurisdictions.

James has significant experience in dealing with international fraud in the corporate world. Additionally he has extensive experience in money laundering and dealing with all aspects of significant financial investigations, including confiscation and forfeiture proceedings. He is currently instructed in major multi million pound investigations conducted against alleged gangsters and money launderers. He has experience in corporate advice and pre charge advisory work. In 2012 he appeared in **R v Ghuree** (ILCC) a passport, immigration and financial fraud case (stayed on disclosure issues). In 2007 he appeared in **R v Peries** (Southwark CC) - Serious corporate fraud, stayed on grounds of non-disclosure. Over many years he has appeared in VAT and carousel frauds. In 2003 he appeared in **R v Ayrey**, the nursing home fraudster. His work in this area includes Professional Discipline and Regulation, he has been instructed in hearings before regulatory and disciplinary professional bodies, and has a particular interest in those raising issues of Sports Law.

Professional Discipline and Regulation

James' has experience in many forms of tribunal. His vast experience in criminal matters assist him in adapting to all forms of regulatory tribunals, and particularly those involving quasi-criminal allegations of misconduct or inappropriate behaviour.

Inquiries and Inquests

James's historical animal rights work gives rise to his involvement in issues surrounding the Undercover Police Inquiry. During the miner's strike he was involved in the Orgreave riot trial and has had involvement in advising on aspects of Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. A longstanding member of Inquest and Inquest lawyers group, in silk whilst James's practice has primarily focused upon defending major crime, he retains a strong commitment to holding public authorities and the police to account for deaths at the hands of all and any elements of the state. His experience as a criminal defence advocate makes him well suited to Inquiry and Inquest work. He has conducted inquests involving workplace

mismanagement, medical negligence, police shoot to kill allegations, deaths in police custody from misapplication of restraint techniques and deaths in prison arising from drug consumption and mistaken prescription.

Actions Against Police and Public Authorities

Recently instructed in a major trial against a constabulary for an informant under **POCA in A v ACC** [2017] EWHC 301. This was a trial held in secret with anonymised parties. It raised new and complex factual and legal issues on supervision and handling of informants, the powers to issue restraint and disclosure orders under POCA, and duties and obligations of disclosure when seeking ex-parte orders. James is brought in to advise on merits of claims already commenced by juniors. He is an experienced litigator in the most complex and serious of actions. As a junior he had an extensive actions against the police practice involving significant trial work. In silk he primarily advises on merits and strategy in the context of past or present police conduct and possible pending proceedings against public authorities. Many years of involvement in civil actions and claims, including all forms of actions against the police and the CPS, saw James instructed on behalf of many celebrated clients in their claims for assault, unlawful arrest and malicious prosecution. Clients included **Linford Christie**, the sprinter, and **Audley Harrison**, the boxer amongst others. He appeared for **Kurds** arrested for performing the celebrated Harold Pinter play "Mountain Language" in North London. He also conducted the ground breaking civil action on domestic slavery (**Godwin v Uzoigwe** [1993] Fam. Law 65).

Direct Access

James does direct access work, particularly in Criminal Appeal work, and sentences short trials not involving evidential or litigation issues, or mitigations. Victories for direct access clients include **Dodd** [2013] EWCA Crim 660, and **Christopher Brown** [2015] EWCA Crim 1791. and **James McLellan** [2017] EWCA Crim 1464. All cases were taken post trial on appeal out of time. James will consider direct access approaches in all areas of work. One happy client wrote *"it was important to find a barrister who could understand and present issues in the way that mattered to me. Mr. Wood proved an ideal choice. Throughout the process, he was engaged and proactive, allowing him to channel my perspective into forceful legal argument. At the same time, he was never shy to take a stand when he felt a line of argument would be harmful to the defence. I feel confident in recommending Mr. Wood."*