

Thomas Acworth

Year of Call: 2014

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Overview

Thomas Acworth is a criminal specialist. His practice encompasses general crime, regulatory crime and police law.

Recommendations

Thomas Acworth is a sought-after junior with notable expertise in criminal defence work. His caseload includes murders, fraud and sexual abuse matters.

Strengths:

- "He approaches cases forensically and achieves very good results."
- "He is very diligent."

Chambers UK 2025/Crime/Western Bar

Strengths:

- "He possesses skills way beyond his call."
- "Thomas is very hard-working and always in command of his brief."
- "Thomas is a fearless and determined advocate."

Chambers UK 2024/Crime/Western Bar

Strengths: "Thomas is a fearless advocate."

Chambers UK 2023/Crime/Western Bar

'Thomas is driven, focused and talented. He has precise attention to detail and a robust approach to advocacy.'

Legal 500 2025/ Crime (General and Fraud)/Leading Juniors/ Western Circuit

'Thomas is an extremely diligent practitioner with an extraordinary eye for detail and his knowledge is genuinely astounding. No stone is left unturned in his preparation and his advocacy is equally impressive.'

Legal 500 2024/ Crime (General and Fraud)/Leading Juniors/ Western Circuit

'He has an excellent court manner, very calm and controlled and his witness handling is absolutely superb. He isn't fazed by judges.'

Legal 500 2023/Crime (General and Fraud)/Leading Juniors/Western Circuit

'A barrister of great tenacity, very hard working and with an eye for detail. He shows a high level of dedication to his clients and is fearless and straight talking in his approach.'

Legal 500 2022/Crime (General and Fraud)/Leading Juniors/Western Circuit

"Words cannot explain how elated I am with the outcome today. I am ever so grateful. Wanted to express my deepest appreciation"

Client's email to instructing solicitor

"I am extremely grateful for the excellent work you have done on this case"

Email from instructing solicitor

"I've just had a chat with young Mr. F and he's asked me to pass on his sincere thanks for yesterday. In his words you were top dollar and really cool. Thank you for all your efforts in securing a great result for us"

Email from instructing solicitor

"I must say he is absolutely amazing at what he does, firm when he needs to be (and he needed to be with me) and so incredibly quick thinking when he is in court"

Client's email to instructing solicitor

Academic qualifications

- BPTC (Kaplan)
- LLB (Newcastle University)

Scholarships

- Academic Scholar (Canford School)
- The Luboshez Award (Middle Temple)
- Arnold and Porter Prize for Competition Law (N'cle)
- Pinsent Masons Prize for Public Law (N'cle)
- Cartmell Shepherd Mooting Prize

Professional bodies

- Criminal Bar Association
- Western Circuit

Expertise

Crime and Regulatory Crime

Thomas Acworth's practice is centred on heavyweight crime. He appears in cases involving homicide, sexual abuse and serious organised crime. Thomas's fearless advocacy and meticulous case preparation have been recognised in both Chambers & Partners and the Legal 500.

Appellate Work

R v The Queen (Jamaica): Murder. Advising on appeal to Privy Council on issues of identification, character evidence and incompetency of counsel. Case concerned a gangland contract killing.

R v C & D: Armed Robbery: Resisting appeal against terminating ruling following successful submission of no case to answer. Case concerned joint-enterprise and circumstantial evidence.

R v JJ: Making indecent images of children. Appeal against indefinite sexual harm prevention order.

Drugs

R v Y & Others (Operation Whale): Conspiracy to Import Class A. NCA investigation into international cocaine smuggling ring based overseas. Case concerned crew of a super yacht smuggling cocaine into the UK, case linked to another importation of £160 million worth of cocaine into UK. Evidence included encrypted messaging services and GPS locators.

R v Q & Two Others (Operation Pacgal): Possession of Class A with Intent. Albanian nationals accused of involvement in substantial cocaine distribution network (multiple kilos) in London. Encrochat evidence.

R v L & Six Others (Operation Warbler): Conspiracy to Supply Class A. Led by David Richards. County lines conspiracy. Substantial telephone evidence. Issues of human trafficking, forced criminality and extended abuse of process arguments.

R v G & Five Others (Operation Hector): Conspiracy to Supply Class A and Human Trafficking. Led by Simon Jones. County lines conspiracy. Substantial telephone evidence.

R v L & Nine Others (Operation Plaudit): Conspiracy to Supply Class A. Large county-lines drug-dealing operation, based in Liverpool.

R v P & Six Others (Operation Geology): Converting Criminal Property. Defendant accused of storing cash for a leading-member of an organised crime group, which was involved in the supply of cocaine and methamphetamine.

R v W (Operation Orochi): Concerned in the Supply of Class A. Defendant from Essex orchestrated supply of Class A drugs in Sussex. Case turned entirely on circumstantial observations of D together with extensive cell-site evidence.

R v F (Operation Crosslands): Conspiracy to Supply Class A. Conspiracy to supply crack cocaine and heroin. Undercover police officers.

R v U & Six Others (Operation Scowl): Production of Cannabis. Defendant of previous good character accused of producing cannabis for commercial supply. Case linked to large Encrochat operation involving supply of cocaine.

Homicide (Murder and Manslaughter)

Thomas Acworth's busy homicide and serious crime caseload has included:

Homicide

R v H (Operation Telstar): Murder. Led by Nick Cotter. Multiple stab wounds inflicted on former partner of defendant's girlfriend. Incident in public with several eyewitnesses. Defence of loss of control.

R v B (Operation Crux): Attempted Murder. Led by Charles Row KC. Accountant of previous good character accused of attempting to kill his wife by drowning her. Complex psychiatric issues. Defence of insanity.

R v G: Attempted murder. Junior alone. Attempted murder by strangulation. Defendant expressed interest in the occult and black magic prior to attacking victim. 30-year delay in bringing proceedings due to defendant absconding.

R v W & Six Others (Operation Beckon): Assisting an Offender (Murder). Leading Laura Hollingbery. Young defendant accused of hiding a murder weapon shortly after the killing in question took place.

R v Q and Another (Operation Powerboat): Assisting an Offender (Murder). Led by Tom Evans. Vulnerable defendant accused of assisting his co-accused (tried for murder and attempted murder) to escape from the police.

Serious Violence & Serious Crime

R v L and Two Youths (Operation Swallowtail): Causing GBH with Intent. Led by Gemma White. Three teenage boys accused of beating a care-worker to near death with a log. Case attracted national media attention.

R v G and Two Others (Operation Hurricane 1): Conspiracy to Supply Ammunition and Prohibited Firearms (handguns). Professional organised crime group operating nationally.

R v X and Another (Operation Hurricane 2): Manufacturing Prohibited Firearms; Manufacturing Ammunition, Conspiracy to Supply Ammunition and Prohibited Firearms. Linked to Operation Hurricane 1. Defence of armourer in the conspiracy.

R v A Youth: Wounding with Intent. 13-year-old boy stabbed a fellow teenager after following her into a housing estate on Halloween. Defendant asked victim how dead she wanted to be before inflicting wound. Tried in the Crown Court.

R v J (A Youth): Wounding with Intent, Robbery, Arson: 16-year-old boy stabbed male in street following altercation, robbed elderly female of handbag and set fire to his care home. Complex mental health issues and issues of Crown Court jurisdiction.

R v X: Wounding with Intent. Accused stabbed injured party six times. Wounds inflicted to the neck, abdomen and internal organs. Complex mental health issues.

R v K & Others: Wounding with Intent, False Imprisonment, Robbery, Threats to Kill and Possession of Firearm with Intent. Allegations of detention and torture following a drug deal gone awry.

R v M: Aggravated Burglary, False Imprisonment and ABH. Defendant accused of taking his ex-partner hostage at their former home.

R v K: Possession of Prohibited Firearms, Concerned in the Supply of Cannabis and Possession of Various Offensive Weapons. Defendant of effective good character, linked to discovery of sawn-off shotguns and pistols in woodland on outskirts of city.

R v T & H: Armed Robbery. Knife-point joint enterprise robbery of commercial premises. Both defendants ran cutthroat defences.

R v F & X: Aggravated Burglary and Dwelling Robbery. Allegations of armed home invasions in which defendants demanded drugs and drug money.

R v J: Aggravated Burglary. Allegation of home invasion during which victim assaulted with incapacitant spray and hammer.

R v V & Others: Dwelling Robbery. Home invasion, during which victims attacked with hammers, knuckledusters and incapacitant spray. Gangland context.

R v D, E & F: Robbery and Dwelling Robbery. Joint-enterprise ventures. Elderly and vulnerable victims.

R v Q: Ill-Treatment of Child. Historical allegations (ranging from late 1970s to mid 1980s) of severe child abuse involving infliction of injuries with weapons, attempted drowning and sexual abuse.

Sexual offences

Tom Acworth has built a strong practice in sexual offences, mainly defending those alleged to be rapists and abusers.

R v Y (Operation Coastal): Rape, Indecent Assault and Gross Indecency. Defendant accused of systematic sexual abuse (including rape) of his step-sons and their teenage friends.

R v K: Rape and Indecent Assault. Defendant accused of historical anal, vaginal and oral rape of ex-wife during their marriage. Also accused of systematic sexual abuse of step-daughter within that relationship.

R v Z: Rape of Child under 13. Defendant accused of historic anal and oral rape of step-sibling.

R v U: Rape. Student of previous good character accused of raping fellow student following night out in town.

R v I: Rape. Defendant accused of raping his wife pending the instigation of divorce proceedings.

R v H: Rape. Defendant accused of raping young woman at an afterparty following a night out clubbing.

R v P: Rape of child under 13, sexual assault of a child under 13, sexual activity with children: 77-year-old defendant accused of grooming, sexually abusing and raping biological granddaughters.

R v A: Rape, Attempted Rape, Sexual Activity with Children: Step-father accused of serious sexual abuse of child under the age of 10.

R v Q: Attempted Rape, Indecent Assault, Assault by Penetration of Child under 13, Sexual Assault, Inciting Child to Engage in Sexual Activity: Historical allegations of serious sexual abuse following aborted previous investigation in 2009.

R v P (Operation Millburn): Indecent Assault, Gross Indecency with Children. Catholic priest accused of molesting child parishioner during the mid-1980s.

R v K: Assault by Penetration of Child under 13 and Sexual Assault of Child under 13. Defendant alleged to have molested his youngest biological sister in her sleep.

R v K: Assault by Penetration of Child under 13 and Sexual Assault of Child under 13. Defendant with borderline IQ accused of historical sexual assaults on very young child.

R v L: Causing Children to Engage in Sexual Activity and Sexual Assaults of Children under 13. Defendant with significant learning difficulties accused of sexually touching his two great-nieces, aged four and seven.

R v P: Sexual Assault of Child under 13, Causing Child under 13 to Engage in Sexual Activity. Allegations of grooming and serious sexual abuse on four-year-old complainant. Defendant was C's biological grandfather.

R v J: Sexual Assault of Child under 13, Voyeurism and Making Indecent Images of Children. Defendant accused of planting hidden cameras around the house to observe his step-daughter in a state of undress, sexually assaulting her during the night and taking indecent photographs of her whilst she slept.

R v H: Attempting to Incite Child to Engage in Penetrative Sexual Activity and Making Indecent Images of Children. Computer professional accused of inciting a fictitious 15-year-old to engage in serious sexual activity and creating numerous indecent images. Case involved complex computer evidence.

R v K: Disclosing Private Sexual Images. Defendant put indecent images of her best friend on Facebook. Defence of consent.

Regulatory crime

Thomas Acworth's public and regulatory practice focuses on regulatory crime and police law. With experience of prosecuting and defending 'traditional' criminal cases, an eye for detail and an aptitude for technical law, Thomas represents his clients with skill beyond his year of call.

Police Law

Thomas is regarded as a "go-to" barrister in the field of firearms licensing. He has acted for police forces across England as well as individuals seeking the restoration of their certificates. Thomas is highly regarded for his ability to deal with cases sensitively, pragmatically and robustly. He appears in the Crown Court, conducting licensing appeals at first instance and has conducted appeals by way of case stated in the Administrative Court.

Chief Constable of Surrey v Smith: Appeal by way of Case Stated. Whether Crown Court's decision at first instance rational. Arguments on extension of time.

Chief Constable v U: Firearms Licence Appeal: Appeared against a QC. City executive's shotgun certificate revoked on basis of post-acquittal restraining order and mental health concerns. Case required detailed analysis of psychiatric reports.

Chief Constable v F: Firearms Licence Appeal. Hundreds of guns found at residence of a registered firearms dealer together with prohibited weapons and prohibited ammunition. PII and evidential issues resultant from concurrent criminal proceedings.

Chief Constable v Q: Firearms Licence Appeal. Revocation of firearms certificate on basis of intelligence reports. Appeal concerned PII and public safety considerations.

Chief Constable v Z: Firearms Licence Appeal. Refusal to grant shotgun certificate on basis of minor, historic, offences of violence and ongoing tendency to obsessive and aggressive behaviour.

Chief Constable v H: Firearms Licence Appeal. Lengthy appeal brought by practising solicitor. Issues of mental health and domestic abuse, both historic and contemporary. Sensitive handling of vulnerable parties.

Chief Constable v Q: Firearms Licence Appeal. Revocation based on irresponsible behaviour (minor road traffic incidents) and insecure storage of weapons.

Regulatory Crime

Tom has a strong caseload in regulatory crime. Recent cases include:

R v H: Bankrupt acting as Company Director. Defendant set up two companies whilst bankrupt, one of which traded for an extensive period.

HMRC v X Ltd & Others: Trading in Breach of VAT and PAYE Security Notices. Notable regional company continually trading in breach of VAT and PAYE security notices. History of difficulties with HMRC.

Local Authority v X: Contempt of Court. Vulnerable, elderly client. Allegations of breach of ASBO.

X County Council v F: Failing to Produce Waste Transfer Notice. Prosecution of a business that was flouting the Waste Regulations and causing a neighbourhood nuisance.

X County Council v Y: Knowingly Failing to Secure Regular Attendance at School. Child in GCSE year. Non-compliance following previous conviction. Dispute over learning centre provision.

Police Force v S: Closure Order. Acting for applicant police force. Suspected crack house. Occupant threatening neighbours with violence.

Financial Crime incl Fraud POCA

Tom Acworth has acted in a number of high profile fraud and business crime cases including "sweetheart frauds" and bankrupt directors' actions.

R v Capt. Y and Others: Fraud. Officer in UK Special Forces accused of illegal disposal of ammunition and appropriation of the funds from sale. Activities alleged to have taken place whilst on exercises overseas. Considerable national security implications. Witnesses included serving UKSF officers.

R v Z: Fraud: Employee accused of defrauding family-run business of hundreds of thousands of pounds. Offences alleged to have taken place over at least 15 years.

R v J: Fraud. NCO in the Grenadier Guards alleged to have perpetrated a number 'sweetheart' frauds against vulnerable women that he met on dating apps.

R v H: Bankrupt acting as Company Director. Defendant set up two companies whilst bankrupt, one of which traded for an extensive period.

R v A: Failing to Keep Records as Required by Companies Act. Defendant was director of a business that went into CVL. He did not cooperate with the liquidator or the Insolvency Service and never delivered the company's books to either.

Military/Courts martial

Tom has acted in a number of important military and courts martial cases including:

R v Capt. Y and Others: Fraud. Officer in UK Special Forces accused of illegal disposal of ammunition and appropriation of the funds from sale. Activities alleged to have taken place whilst on exercises overseas. Considerable national security implications. Witnesses included serving UKSF officers.

R v U: Breach of Standing Orders and Assault. NCO in Royal Artillery accused of fighting with other NCOs whilst drunk and on duty.

R v H: Desertion. Private in Port and Maritime Regiment accused of desertion following a two year absence, during which he obtained a civilian job. Defence of intention to return.

R v J: Fraud: NCO in the Grenadier Guards alleged to have perpetrated a number 'sweetheart' frauds against vulnerable women that he met on dating apps. Case attracted attention in the national press.

Motoring offences

Tom has acted in a number of serious motoring cases including:

R v L (Operation Postcard): Causing Death by Careless Driving. Road traffic collision between van and commercial vehicle. Prosecution commenced following CPS request to pause inquest into death of deceased. Complex issues of causation (collision and death), medical evidence and vulnerable witnesses.

R v O (Operation Determine): Causing Serious Injury by Dangerous Driving. Defendant of previous good character. Allegation of dangerous driving by excessive speed. Complainant paralysed as a result of collision.

R v T: Causing Serious Injury by Dangerous Driving. Serious road traffic collision. Client significantly over the drink drive limit. Victim sustained serious injuries and required a skin-graft.

R v M: Causing Serious Injury by Dangerous Driving. Client drove on the wrong side of the road and caused a collision. Victim sustained significant psychiatric injuries and a broken neck.

Proceeds of crime

Tom has dealt with a number of Proceeds of Crime (POCA) cases including:

R v K: POCA following conviction for Fraud. Extensive arguments on applicability of proportionality to benefit figure, valuation of total benefit and failure to take account of statutory surcharge.

R v K (and Others): POCA following convictions for organised theft. Contested benefit figure and applicability of assumptions based on Crown's acceptance of a limited basis of plea.

Public and Administrative Law

Thomas Acworth's public and regulatory practice focuses on regulatory crime and police law.

With experience of prosecuting and defending 'traditional' criminal cases, an eye for detail and an aptitude for technical law, Thomas represents his clients with skill beyond his year of call.

Please look at the regulatory crime tab above for details of his recent cases.

Firearms

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