

# legal aid through the decades

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## 1949 – 1958



1953 Testing at Porton Down



**1949** The Legal Aid Advice Bill received Royal Assent on 30 July at 11.47am. Legal aid in England, Wales and Scotland was born. **1950** The Law Society started to run the new legal aid scheme through a network of local committees. **1953** Ronald Maddison died after taking part in tests for the nerve agent sarin at Porton Down. He was told he was testing a cure for the common cold. Legal aid funded an inquest into Ronald Maddison's death. **1956** Legal aid extended to county court cases. **1957** There were critics among the judges – one thought owning a TV set should disqualify anyone from legal aid!

## 1959 – 1968

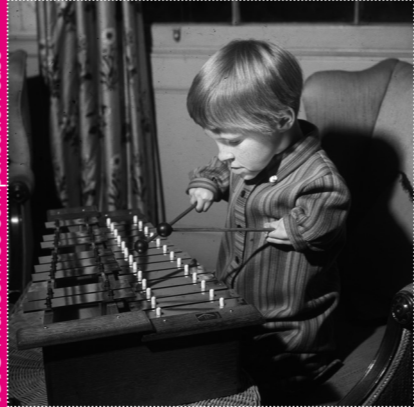


1968 Roman Point tower block



**1960** Civil legal aid was extended to House of Lords cases. **1961** Legal aid was extended to magistrates' courts for domestic proceedings. **1965** Legal aid was introduced in Northern Ireland. **1966** The Widgery Committee recommended that anyone of low income should receive legal aid, whatever their plea. **1968** Four people were killed at a gas explosion in Ronan Point tower block. Legal aid funded an inquest which led to major changes in building regulations.

## 1969 – 1978



1973 Thalidomide compensation case



**1970** The first Law Centre was set up in west London in a butcher's shop. Local authorities and charities funded the centres and they carried out legal aid. **1972** The Crown Court system was changed and the new Family Courts emerged. On the crime side, the first duty solicitor scheme was set up in Bristol. **1973** Following legal aid funding an out-of-court settlement was made to families whose children were affected by Thalidomide.

## 1979 – 1988



1988 Clapham Junction rail crash



**1984** The national duty solicitor scheme began for magistrates' courts. Anyone charged with an offence could consult and be represented by a solicitor on their first appearance. **1986** The duty solicitor scheme began in police stations as a result of the ground-breaking Police and Criminal Evidence Act of 1984. **1988** 35 people died and 500 people were injured at the Clapham Junction rail crash. Legal aid funded families at the inquiry.

## 1989 – 1998



1989 The Marchioness disaster



**1989** The Law Society handed over management of legal aid to the new Legal Aid Board. **1989** 51 people died at a party on the Marchioness pleasure boat on the River Thames. Legal aid funded the inquest which found the victims were unlawfully killed. **1994** The Legal Aid Board offered 'franchises' to providers – private practitioners and advice agencies – who met a quality standard. But it was voluntary.

## 1999 – 2009



2008 The Gurkhas' immigration case



**2000** The Legal Services Commission replaced the Legal Aid Board. **2001** The Public Defender Service, the first salaried criminal provider was launched. **2004** Community Legal Service Direct helpline and website was launched, providing specialist legal advice. It is now called Community Legal Advice. **2007** The first Community Legal Advice centre was opened in Gateshead. **2008** Legal aid funded six members of the Gurkha community at a judicial review over their right to live in the UK. **2009** Virtual courts are piloted where defendants attend court via video link.