For me, it was the perfect moment, personally and professionally, to be asked to give the Hamlyn lectures. More than once, I Googled the list of those who have given the lectures before me with unseemly pride. A sort of cup final for legal academics, I was – and remain – over the moon about it.

The lectures were both an honour and a fantastic experience. I would like to thank the Hamlyn Trust and their trustees for the invitation and support, as well as all those in the three universities – Leeds, University College London, and Exeter – who hosted and organised the evenings with aplomb.

When the invitation was made, none of us knew how big the Post Office story would become. The ITV drama *Mr Bates vs the Post Office* made for a rollercoaster year in 2024. As I had become heavily involved in work on compensation as well as research on the scandal, it was not the best time to be trying to write what I wanted to be the three best lectures I could manage, but it was the most propitious moment for them. The Post Office scandal, and the intense public and professional interest in it, helped guarantee an audience I could not have dreamed of otherwise. To everyone who came or who has watched lectures online: thank you. It means an enormous amount to me. To those who wrote to tell me what you thought, it is the sort of kindness that really does make a difference.

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I reserve some special thanks to the three chairs of the lectures: Lady Hale, Lord Arbuthnot, and Paul Gilbert. Lady Hale has always been a keen supporter of legal scholars engaging with the real world; after lecture one, she was the first to ask a question and, of course, it was a telling one; James Arbuthnot is one of the heroes of the Post Office scandal and I have been proud to work alongside him on the Horizon Compensation Advisory Board; and Paul Gilbert has for many years provided intelligent and passionate support to me and the work that we do together with the in-house community. He has nourished the thoughts in this book.

A lot of people commented on the original text, and many have offered friendship, argument, support, and some helpful disagreement along the way. The arguments I set out here have been brewing for a long time. Steven Vaughan, Crispin Passmore, Iain Miller, Patricia Robertson KC, Sarah De Gay, Stephen Mayson, Lisa Webley, Joan Loughrey, Alan Paterson, Chris Hodges, Graeme Johnston, Jenifer Swallow, Juliet Oliver, Vanessa Davies, and the entirety of the LBC Faculty: thank you. The Post Office Project team (Karen Nokes, Rebecca Helm, Paul Gilbert, and Sally Day) are now taking this work further and you will be hearing more from us soon.

I have had a great deal of help but, if faults there be, let me blame the system or the SRA (not really) or ChatGPT – or, in the manner of ex–Post Office CEO Paula Vennells, let me blame myself for being too trusting or some such excuse. Typos persist despite Grammarly's best efforts to save me.

I should acknowledge too that the work you see in this book has often built on the work of lawyers in the Post

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Office inquiry. Core participant and Inquiry lawyers have shown extraordinary diligence in sifting through mountains of (often late) disclosure. Their forensic skill in examining witnesses is something to be admired. They have, as you will see if you comb through the footnotes, offered those with an interest in legal ethics mountains of evidence. Invidious as it is, I am going to single out Julian Blake, who dealt incisively with much of the lawyer-related questioning, and of course Jason Beer KC, on whom so much ink has been spilt for being a consummate professional. Jason is a fellow graduate of Warwick Law School, which allows me to bask in glory by association, but also leads me on to two almost final thanks.

Professors Avrom Sherr and Roger Burridge were lecturers at Warwick Law when I joined as a gauche teenager. They taught a clinical course on legal practice and started me thinking about what lawyering was really about. It was a course that literally opened my eyes and brought law to life. They set me on this path and gave me some of the essential tools for it.

Finally, I have to say a few words about the subpostmasters and subpostmistresses, those employed in branches, and all the families who have suffered at the hands of the Post Office for what is no longer seen as a mere computer malfunction. I have had the privilege of meeting many now. They are the epitome of what we, perhaps patronisingly, think of as everyday folk, but they are not everyday: they are extraordinary. Whilst I naturally think what I have to say in these pages has merit, I cannot escape the concern that the interest in what I have to say is built on their pain. As a result, I feel both pride and guilt in working on this astonishing story.

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We only see the men and women who feel able to sit before a TV camera or engage with the thrust of a journalist's microphone, but there are many also who cannot. Even now there are subpostmasters coming forward who no one knew about. There is so much pain, and it has spread through so many families, that my heart still thumps and my stomach churns whenever I think about it. They have been so badly wronged, and not just by the lawyers highlighted here. Sometimes, the courts failed them. Sometimes, their own lawyers failed them. Sometimes, their communities and families deserted them. The abuse of law often divided them from their own. Now people stand up for them – but for how long, I wonder?

Their stories are the most vivid lessons in the serious flaws in our justice system. I believe they show how lawyers need to change the way they think and act. This book is designed to help stimulate that change. It is dedicated to them.

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