

## JOHN HOPKINS – 4<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2019 @ 1400

- 1 When John Hopkins retired, the college's Cranworth Law Society held its annual dinner. Mr John Collier, the senior law fellow at Trinity Hall, got up and spoke. I repeat what he said verbatim (as one junior barrister said in court)

*"John Hopkins has made Downing the best college for law in Cambridge."*

Applause – beyond “whelming”, perhaps “overwhelming”.

It remains a possibility that a small number here today might not wholly agree with John Collier.

But this reputation was known in schools - and before I mentioned that I was a Downing man.

When John arrived at Downing there were few if any QCs and judges amongst members. When he was 80, there were 80 Judges and QCs invited to a private birthday party at his club, The Athenaeum.

And this reputation is not affected by John's commitment to public service as a school governor.

Over the decades he was a governor at Eastbourne, Harrow, Sherborne and Wellington College. None is near Cambridge. He went regularly to Governors meetings, leaving early and getting home late. And he made significant, valued, contributions to their work.

- 2 One does not come up to Cambridge to do job training, whatever you read. You come up to learn an academic discipline.
- 3 John Hopkins taught each of us how to learn law, how to understand it and how to put it into practice. What I have just said is a sound illustration of just how good his teaching was – we learned to love law, and to understand different systems of law. For example, three Downing graduates are Diocesan Chancellors, knowledgeable in Canon Law. This is more than any other Oxbridge College. John once said, after four, repeated, hours of “commixtio and confusio” (Roman Law), that he felt the need for a glass of college sherry.
- 4 Each of us knows of John's kindnesses: they were different in each year.

One man was so ill that he should have gone home to be nursed and to recover there. But he would not have been “in residence” to complete that year. So John and Cherry looked after him in their home. He was “in residence” in Cambridge, completed the year and got his degree with his friends.

- 5 A disabled man, a member of an ethnic minority, could not get articles as a solicitor. John wrote to all those whose minds might be changed. One changed. The man got articles. He ended his career as the most senior solicitor in a major Government Department.
- 6 If I can speak of two major cases, over fifty years ago; how many more must there have been? People at Downing are happy. Not surprisingly, this helps academic achievement, as the Class Lists have shown. (So it’s not all grade inflation).

### Interviews

John excelled at interviews. He could identify a future Court of Appeal judge, a future senior partner, a captain of industry or senior member of the Civil Service – at the age of seventeen.

He was prepared to take risks on the people who, he thought, were likely to be good.

And to reject those who were not going to make it.

He told me once how he had to write to a Housemaster to say “You should not have sent this man – you should have known he was not up to our standards”. It was a school not far from Windsor.

Or the girl whom he asked

“Who is your favourite author?”

“Jane Austen”

“Which is your favourite of her books?”

“Pride and Prejudice”

“And what other books of hers have you read?”

“Er..um..er..”

“And is Pride and Prejudice your A level book?”

“Yes” she said brightly, but disastrously.

## Tripes

The Tripes results showed how good he was at interviewing seventeen year olds.

Once he got it wrong. He thought the boy was good enough for CU but not quite for Downing.

Girton offered him a place.

He got a first. So Cherry's teaching was of the same standard.

## Lectures

- 1 He dressed properly – dark suit, tie and gown. Black shoes. A small but clear example of what was appropriate.
- 2 The lectures were clear and interesting. They were delightfully delivered – probably a good story or joke in each one. All lectures were full. He was that good.
- 3 He taught also at the Inns of Court School of Law and the same quality was plain there.

One senior judge, then a Bar student, told me that, at the end of the course, all of his year spontaneously stood enthusiastically to applaud him.

When the applause died down, John declared that he was “whelmed, but not overwhelmed”.

John did not give up lecturing for the vacations. He lectured to significant numbers of U.S. lawyers who came to Cambridge for his popular courses.

A little known but significant consequence is this. Large numbers of U.S. practitioners learned the courtesies and practices of the English Courts. (What we call a “runner” they call a “fender bender”). John's lectures did not instantly end some of the unattractive courtroom manners there: but they go a long way to helping this change.

And Middle Temple's historical links with USA, from the Declaration of Independence onwards, are helpful.

Some of us remember Re Vandervell no2, a Chancery appeal to the Court of Appeal presided over by Lord Denning MR.

Lord Denning had delivered a masterly judgment. It distinguished, disregarded or declined to follow all the old authorities – all to what might be called “the great surprise of the Chancery Bar and the Chancery Division Bench”.

John was at a party, as was Lord Denning. John went up to him and asked why he had decided the case in this novel way – imagine how hard we might have found that!

“Lord Denning”, said John, answered:

“There was no way that woman was going to get any money.” “

What I didn’t realise - until years later - was that John was teaching us all a good lesson.

It is sometimes expressed, rather coarsely, (and indeed I said this to my pupils): “Shits lose”.

John taught with skill.

The less able of us resort to blunt ordinariness.

### Careers

John maintained contact with his undergraduates. Friendships between Tutor and the taught were cherished and fostered.

Every now and then Downing people returned to tell the current generation what practice was really like.

Two days before a dinner he asked me to get there early.

At 5.30, 5.45, 6pm and 6.15 an undergraduate arrived. I would talk to each about the Bar. When the quarter hour was up John would gently end our discussion. And a new young person would be welcomed.

John didn’t overdo it; many wanted to give this practical help.

He made sure you did “mini pupillages” (Bar) and “work experience” (solicitors). And he knew where you should apply. Only the best; and places where you had a chance of tenancy at the end.

The gratitude of those involved was reflected in the generosity which the “Hopkins Parry” Fellowship appeal generated. The appeal raised £1 million in about three years.

I was chairman of the appeal. A few years later I said to John

“I came to that college party at the Vintners Hall where the Master (then Stephen Fleet) invited people to “put their names forward to help.” The next thing I knew was that Stephen wrote to thank me for agreeing to “chair the appeal”. It wasn’t quite what I’d offered.”

“Yes George” said John, “it was all planned rather well, wasn’t it.”

### Middle Temple

Lord Ackner, Master Treasurer of Middle Temple, nominated John Hopkins as Honorary Bencher, thus adding fifty per cent to the number of Middle Temple Benchers in Cambridge (the other two were Prof. Kurt Lipstein and Prof. Glanville Williams).

John became a very popular Bencher. He came to the Inn for its great occasions and he helped undergraduates with advice and with references. John’s advice left no doubt that there were four Inns, that they might join any one; and that they would in fact join Middle Temple. Most did.

John’s references are delightful. Very often there was a last sentence: “He is the best rugby playing violinist from Scunthorpe I’ve ever met.”

And he could and did meet the senior judiciary at Middle Temple as well as others whom he had taught – whether they were Benchers, member of Hall or students. All were delighted to see him.

Not all agreed with his politics. All respected his wide knowledge of law – and he knew every reported case in which one was involved.

### Family

John had the great joy of being able to be justifiably proud of his children.

He saw Philippa become a QC as well as being a mother.

It was with a quiet paternal pride that he spoke of his son Richard as a Priest.

To have both of your children sharing your faith, albeit in different churchmanship, is a joy not given to all.

Those for whom John was tutor range from world famous names, whether in law or sport (Mike Atherton) or entertainment (John Cleese), to barristers and solicitors, priests, businessmen and public servants – all at the height of their professions, or aspiring to this.

All of us know why, in different ways, we are grateful to him.

He set an example to which many aspire – of integrity, faith, intellectual rigour, duty, kindness, public service, humour and generosity.

Merely to aspire to this example is the best evidence of his bequest to those who follow.