

John Stuart Archer

John Archer was Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Heriot-Watt University from January 1997 until his retirement in July 2006. During Principal Archer's tenure the University grew substantially with overall student numbers increasing by a third including a doubling of the number of postgraduate students. At the same time Heriot-Watt made considerable advances in research, became recognised as Scotland's most international university with around thirty per cent of on-campus students from outside the UK, and achieved unparalleled numbers of off-campus students studying Heriot-Watt programmes in well over 100 countries.

John Archer was brought up in London, attending Chiswick Grammar School and gaining a BSc degree in Industrial Chemistry from City University in 1965. He went on to obtain a PhD at Imperial College in London before commencing his career as a Petroleum Engineer, spending four years in Canada with Esso, and then, back in the UK, working as a consultant and founding his own company in 1977. He took up a Readership in Petroleum Engineering at Imperial College in 1980, was appointed Professor in 1986 and Head of the Department of Mineral Resources Engineering. He went on to play an increasingly senior role in the management of Imperial College, first as Dean, then Pro Rector and finally Deputy Rector.

As Principal of Heriot-Watt from 1997, Professor Archer emphasised the importance of growth in terms of research and in the numbers of international and postgraduate students. He encouraged investment by the University in the appointment of leading research staff in anticipation of the UK's Research Assessment Exercise of 2001. The outcome was significant growth both in research standing and income to the University. Nevertheless the University, like many others, faced severe budgetary pressures around the beginning of the present decade and financial deficits were incurred for several years. Principal Archer oversaw a major and successful restructuring of the University from a number of independent, single discipline departments to a smaller number of larger, multi-disciplinary schools. The result was a stronger academic structure and a return to financial health from 2002 onwards.

Principal Archer oversaw merger in 1997 with the Scottish College of Textiles to create the University's Scottish Borders Campus in Galashiels; the transfer of the School of Planning and Housing from Edinburgh College of Art to Heriot-Watt in 2002; and the formation of the University's new campus in Dubai in 2005. Towards the end of his time as Principal, he took a leading part in promoting Heriot-Watt's participation in a series of multi-university research collaborative partnerships across Scotland to create what has become known as 'Research Pooling', a uniquely Scottish approach to university research within the UK.

John Archer was a man of considerable personal charm and good humour. Together with his wife Lesley, he was tireless in his promotion of Heriot-Watt University within Scotland often attending events of one sort and another every night of week. They made many visits to the University's learning partners in different parts of the world. John's own interests included the growing of fruit and vegetables: he was particularly proud of his plot in the walled garden of the Principal's residence, Hermiston House. He was also a great enthusiast for and supporter of the performing arts. One of his most enduring contributions at Heriot-Watt was the appointment, initially with generous industrial support, of a Musician in Residence who created a University orchestra and choir. Now, the orchestra and choir regularly perform to sell out audiences in an activity that brings together all members of the University from the newest undergraduates to its most senior officers and covering virtually every academic and support function. It was fitting that on the occasion of John's retirement dinner in 2006, the University Choir should perform the première of a setting of the poem, 'Teach me to learn' by George Mackay Brown specially commissioned for the occasion.

John Archer made a major contribution to life in Scotland and the UK not only through his leadership of Heriot-Watt University but also through his many external appointments including as a member of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, as Chairman of Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian, as Convenor of the Research and Commercialisation Committee of the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals, as Chair of the Research Policy Committee of Universities UK, as Convenor of Universities Scotland and as President of the Institution of Chemical Engineers. He was a considerable enthusiast for academic links within Europe and active within the European Universities Association. John Archer received many honours including honorary degrees from the University of Edinburgh, Imperial College, City University and Heriot-Watt University. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and of the Royal Academy Engineering, and was appointed CBE for services to Higher Education in 2002.

John Archer died in December 2007 after a long and courageous battle against cancer. He is survived by his wife, Lesley, and their son and daughter, Adam and Louise.

J.E.L. Simmons

John Stuart Archer CBE. BSc, DSc (City University, London), PhD, DIC (Imperial College London), HonDSc (Edinburgh, Imperial, City), HonDUniv (Heriot-Watt). FREng, FChemE, FCGI, FIC, FInstE. Born 15 June 1943, elected FRSE 2 March 1998; Died 9 December 2007.