

LORD CAMERON
KT, DSC, QC, DL, LLD(Aberd, Edin, Glas), DLitt(H-W), *Dhc*(Edin), FBA
(Born 8 February 1900 in London; died 30 May 1996 in Edinburgh)

Lord Emslie writes:

Lord (John) Cameron was, I believe, one of the most distinguished Scotsmen of this century. His contribution to the nation and to the Law of Scotland was immense.

His history before he began his legal career in 1924 when he was admitted to the Faculty of Advocates was both colourful and outstanding. In 1917 he was *dux* of the Edinburgh Academy and, proceeding to Edinburgh University, he took 1st Class Honours in Classics and History and thereafter graduated LLB with distinction. As a midshipman RNVR he saw service in the Baltic with his beloved Navy in 1918-1919 and was present when the German High Seas Fleet surrendered in the Forth at the end of the first world war.

With his impressive intellectual equipment, his courage, his love of language, his boundless energy and a commanding physical presence it was not surprising that he rapidly made his mark in both civil and criminal practice at the Bar. His style was unflurried elegance. From 1929 to 1936, when he took silk, he was an impressive Advocate-depute and in his civil practice his eminence was widely recognised.

When the second world war began he found himself at once in service again in the Royal Navy and in a notable career as an officer in the RNVR he was mentioned in despatches in the evacuation of the Army at Dunkirk and in 1944 he won the DSC for his part in the Allied Landings in Normandy. At the end of the war he resumed his practice at the Bar and in 1945 became Sheriff of Inverness (in those days a part-time appointment held by a leading Silk). When I became an advocate in 1948 the Dean of Faculty was J S C Reid who very shortly thereafter began his remarkable career as a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary. The choice of his successor seemed obvious and inevitable and in the same year Jock Cameron was duly elected to the office of Dean which he held for seven years. He was a model Dean and, predictably, a powerful figure in Parliament House and beyond. So long was his tenure of that demanding office that for a year or two after he went on the Bench in 1955 I and many of my contemporaries found ourselves still addressing him as Dean when we met on the floor. The post-war years until 1955 will perhaps rank as vintage years in the history of the Bar and Jock was one of three superb leading Counsel who seemed to dominate the scene. The other two were Hamish Clyde who became Lord President, and R P Morison. To appear as Jock's junior was always a demanding privilege, and to appear against him was invariably challenging and instructive. Advocacy in his hands was the art it ought to be and his skill as a fair, courteous and effective cross-examiner set a standard which most of us hoped to emulate.

It is, of course, well known that as a judge Lord Cameron presided over many famous criminal trials, including the trial of the monster Peter Manuel, and that in the Outer House he disposed of a wide range of heavy cases with patient good humour, wit, and ability. For him a judgement had to combine clarity with elegance and in the First Division in which he sat for so many years until 1985 he played a notable part in the development of the Law. Typical of the opinions of Lord Cameron is a single example which I would like to offer. The case was *Wills' Trustees v Cairngorm Canoeing and Sailing School Ltd*, 1976 SC(HL)30. The critical question was whether the River Spey was a navigable river which gave the right to canoeists to use it in the face of the objections of the riparian proprietors. One of the many important authorities considered was *Grant v The Duke of Gordon* 1781 Mor Dict 12822 2 Pat Appeals 582 and in his opinion Lord Cameron set this and a later judgement in proper context in these words: 'Finally in 1781 the times were grave. The American Colonies were in revolt, Britain was at war with France, a war mainly fought at sea, and in the same year the Empress Catherine II formed the 'Armed Neutrality' thus effectively cutting Britain off from any timber supplies from the Baltic. Timber at that time - especially shipbuilding timber - was an important war material and there was an obvious public interest, national as well as regional, in securing all available supplies of this valuable commodity. It was in this context, social economic and political that the case of the Duke of Gordon was decided - and it is plain enough from the report in Morison's Dictionary as well as from the notes of the judges' opinions that these matters bulked very largely in their consideration of the case before them. The same comment may properly be made in the later case of *Forbes v Munro* which concerned the River Ness and was decided at a time of greater national need and crisis when the Grand Army lay at Boulogne under the eyes of Nelson's cruisers and the invasion beacons were ready for the torch'.

When I succeeded Lord Clyde as Lord President in 1972 Lord Cameron was the senior judge in the First Division and was a tower of strength. I could not have found greater support from anyone than I enjoyed from him. To sit with him was one of the great pleasures of my professional life. He loved the work. His sense of humour relieved the tension and occasional tedium in so many cases. He was the master of the apt quotation, English or classical, and we who sat with him were always grateful for his retentive memory and his gift of instant recall. Most of us could remember in the course of a hearing that there was a case, probably X v Y about 10 years ago that might be helpful, but Jock could not only produce at once and precisely the name of the case but more often than not the year and the page of the decision in the law reports.

Lord Cameron adorned the Bench as he had adorned the Bar and it must be remembered that he adorned public and private life outside the courts as well. Although I may be thought to stray beyond my remit I feel bound to mention briefly his public service beyond Parliament House. Most of this service was inspired by recognition of his skill as an advocate and a judge. He inquired into a threatened rail strike, the London Docks, and disturbances in Northern Ireland, and was the principal author of the clear and positive reports which followed. He was a member of many important committees and one Royal Commission (Contempt of Court), and he deployed his characteristic diligence in the affairs of the Gateway Theatre, The Edinburgh Festival and the Highlands and Islands Development Consultative Council. I say nothing of his role as Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and in the Carnegie Trust which is described by others but I might perhaps mention that in the Court of the University of Edinburgh he gave the benefit of his wisdom as the Chancellor's Assessor, and that in everything he touched he brought to his task clear thinking, vigour and an unlimited appetite for hard work.

His rewards were well deserved. He was awarded honorary degrees of LLD by the Universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh, the degree of DLitt by Heriot-Watt and a doctorate *honoris causa* by Edinburgh. It will, I think, be generally agreed that his appointment by Her Majesty as a Knight of The Thistle was a fitting tribute to a well-rounded, entertaining and able polymath who could genuinely be described as a great man. His friendship enriched all who enjoyed it.

Sir Lewis Robertson contributes:

Lord Cameron made a unique contribution to the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland. He became Chairman of the Trust in 1953 and served until 1990, spanning a full generation of development and change in the Universities in Scotland and a number of important advances in the work of the Trust.

Like many other charitable foundations the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland had in the 'forties and 'fifties sustained a serious decline in the real value of its invested capital and in its income available for distribution because of restrictive legislation as to powers of investment. At the same time the university population had greatly increased. Lord Cameron led a reorganisation of the Trust's investment arrangements which arrested the erosion of real value and enabled the Trust to continue to deliver support and assistance to the Universities at a worth-while level. He presided likewise over the readjustment of the Trust to relate to the doubling in the late 'sixties of the number of Universities, with the addition of Dundee, Heriot-Watt, Stirling and Strathclyde. And he saw the Trust through many other changes of statutory framework, of personnel and of social environment.

Service with him in the Trust was a continuing education in the application of steadfast common sense to a wide range of problems, to which he brought a most impressive breadth of understanding and a quick penetration - which sometimes swiftly disposed of humbug and current 'political correctness'. It was an education, too, in the prudent framing of grant applications to enable them to navigate among the shoals and reefs of strongly-held opinion.

By reason both of his generation-long continuity of informed attention and of an unswerving understanding of the important issues Lord Cameron can rightly be seen as virtually the second founder of the Trust and the Universities of Scotland both old and new, and their staff and students, have great reason to join in paying tribute to his unequalled contribution to Scottish society and to its positive intellectual life.

Dr Anthony Ritchie writes:

John Cameron was elected to the Fellowship of the RSE in 1949, served on its Council as Vice-President from 1970 to 1973 and as President from 1973 to 1976. He served on Council for the extra years 1977-80 in furtherance of changes and advances which he had been concerned with during his spell as President. He was elected an Honorary Fellow in 1983.

His appointment as President was to break the chain of holders of that office who had been career scientists of one or other discipline for nearly a century after Lord Moncrieff (1879-84).

He described himself as an 'incorrigible amateur', yet his contribution to the cultural and artistic life of Edinburgh is difficult to exaggerate. This over and above his busy professional life which has been described by Lord Emslie. I was General Secretary during Lord Cameron's office as Vice-President and President, and knew better than most how much he gave to the Society. His contributions to the well-being and advancement of the RSE were in some degree revolutionary in a quiet way. Prior to his taking office, it had become evident to Council that changes in the activities of the Society had to come about. There was no longer room in the Society's House in George Street to keep, let alone service, the increasing bulk of library material resulting from scientific expansion worldwide.

The solution to this problem took years to work out, but one vital issue was resolved in 1973 when the possibility of establishing a Scottish Science Library was conceived, at first internally, at discussions between representatives of the RSE, the Scottish Education Department and the National Library of Scotland.

In November 1975, under the joint Chairmanship of Lord Cameron and Mr Michael Strachan, Chairman of the NLS, there was a meeting involving the Principals of the Scottish Universities, the Director of Government Research Institutes in Scotland and others concerned with library provision.

The meeting was in favour of merging the scientific collections of the RSE with those of the NLS, and it was hoped that in due course a purpose-built library might be established in Edinburgh. Lord Cameron played a major part in the discussions and proposals: a Working Party was set up to work out details. Negotiations involving large sums of money and complex arrangements were necessarily prolonged, but the first part of the success story ends in 1981 with the announcement in Parliament that a Scottish Science Library was to be established in a new building in Causewayside. Lord Cameron was well pleased with this outcome which had arisen from his early efforts.

This was just one of the changes which he supervised. For some time there had been some dissatisfaction with the traditional lecture programme of the Society which had become to some extent a series of specialized lectures appealing to experts rather than to the body of Fellows. During Lord Cameron's Presidency, and with his forceful approval, increasing emphasis was placed on the organisation of symposia on topics of wide and contemporary interest. These involved interested parties outwith the Fellowship, and the publications which resulted (and replaced the older type of *Proceedings B*), served as the definitive account of a subject for some years to come. Two examples out of many, *The Natural Environment of the Outer Hebrides* (1979), and *Scottish Food and Drink* (1986), have been of interest and value to a wide audience as important sources of reference. It was in fact the guidance and experience of one who was not himself an involved scientist that established symposia of general interest as a major feature of the Society's published output.

These were extensions of the Society's work which flourished during Lord Cameron's Presidency. But he was a primary influence in another change which altered the whole nature of the RSE. At its foundation, and for some years thereafter, there had been a 'Literary Class' and a 'Physical Class' separate and distinct, but both RSE. For various reasons the 'Literary Class' did not flourish and disappeared about 1830. From then on, the RSE came to be regarded as an organisation

to which Fellows were elected on the basis of achievement in some branch of science. This reputation persisted, in Britain and abroad, until 1976, when the Council decided to take active steps to include Fellows from Arts, Letters, Technology and Industry.

In the preceding century Fellows had been elected from time to time outwith the scientific community, not as a form of representation but as individuals whose Fellowship would be of benefit to the Society. Lord Cameron was elected in 1949 on just that basis.

His Presidency marked this extension of the Fellowship as a formal and proper part of the Society. The writ of the British Academy had never really run in Scotland and Cameron's vision was of a National Academy for Scotland which should include all the branches of worthwhile knowledge. It was not easily done. There was a substantial number of Fellows who saw little reason to depart from a practice which had worked well enough for over a century. There was the problem of how to select and appoint the new Fellows until they assumed a corpus which could deal with their peers. I was the General Secretary at the material time and I knew better than anyone how the President persuaded and persevered with objectors and how he put forward the vision of a Society where cultures could mix with mutual respect. This was indeed one of his life's beliefs and he saw it grow from a vision to a possibility and later to a welcome and successful outcome. I well recall him saying to me, in about 1976 when the first formal intake of non-scientists was promulgated, that what we were starting might well take a generation or two to mature and it would be long term before the new concept of the RSE was accepted. For once his judgement was wrong and he lived to see the RSE expand in wisdom as he had hoped.

On a more personal note, Lord Cameron enjoyed the Royal Society of Edinburgh. In particular he was a devotee of the Dining Club to which he was elected in 1954; as senior member he was made an Honorary member in 1993 and enjoyed attendance until the last year of his life.

He regarded the Dinners of the club as entertainment, and was wont to say that they represented a sort of companionship which had persisted in Edinburgh since the Enlightenment. His fellow diners will recall the invariable verbal duels - often somewhat contrived - between himself, a Cameron, and his fellow senior Neil Campbell. He gave a great deal to the Royal Society of Edinburgh, but he got pleasure from it in return.

Finally from Lord Cameron of Lochbroom:

As a young man he loved, and enjoyed, the making of, music: he sang and my mother would accompany him on the piano. His involvement with the Scottish Orchestra, as I think it was called pre-war, was a symptom of this. Subsequently he came to painting in lieu of making music. I have vivid recollections of his court notebooks, both as counsel and judge, with the marginal drawings, mostly it has to be said of ships. Indeed I remember being told by an elderly Parliament House clerk of a solicitors' firm which used to instruct my father, of an occasion when a case in which they were involved was going on appeal. My father asked for his notes which he had made at the first hearing. The clerk recovered and sent them. One foolscap sheet covered with drawings of ships and little else! When my father went off on holiday post-war - whether it was to Ullapool or abroad, it was always with a sketch book in his luggage. From the sketches emerged paintings of amiable land and seascapes, the latter often featuring a ship or yacht, or the occasional fiery sunset or a grim, stormy Highland day. So it was that at the age of 85, having just retired from the bench, he took himself off to painting classes at the College of Art, including life classes. He used to sketch even when out sailing, leaving others to take the helm while he did so. That love of the sea remained with him to the end - indeed he only gave up ownership of a yacht, and sailing in it, some four or so years ago.

His library reflected the catholicity of his tastes and enthusiasms - history, not least naval history (as a boy I would take down and read volumes of Mahan and of the official naval history for the Great War of 1914-18), art books, biographies and classic novels. He did at one stage have a penchant for reading detective novels borrowed from the National Library. This he was entitled to do having been a member of the Faculty of Advocates when in 1925 the Faculty gave much of its library to form the national collection. The same catholicity also set the background for his enjoyment of dinner conversation such as he would have at the Royal Society dining club or at the Scottish Arts Club. There he could range over subjects as diverse as politics in 18th century Scotland to the problems of present day Europe or the armament of the early dreadnoughts to the Scottish painters of the 1900s. I am certain that he would have been blissfully happy discoursing with David Hume (or indeed Henry his cousin) or with Henry Cockburn if opportunity had arisen - and maybe it has.

The same catholicity, and not merely a lawyer's sense of opportunity, gave rise, I am sure, to his support for the establishment at Edinburgh University of the Centre for European Studies at a time when this country was undecided about its relationship with continental Europe and more particularly with the countries of the EEC. I think that he might well have regarded that as the most important single contribution that he made to his native country, because it brought Scots lawyers, and through them Scots law, to the notice of their continental counterparts before those south of the border had woken up to the challenge of European Community law.