

Professor Sir Graham John Hills

9 April 1926 - 9 February 2014

Professor Sir Graham Hills wanted to be remembered for three things. These were, establishing an international graduate school of electrochemistry at Southampton University in the 1970s, presiding over the emergence of Strathclyde University as the premier university of technology in Scotland in the 1980s, and playing a major role in the creation of the new University of the Highlands and Islands in the 1990s. Indeed he will be remembered for these and much more.

Graham Hills was born in the fishing village of Leigh-on-Sea at the time of the General Strike. His formative years in the Great Depression left him indelibly marked by the injustices of unemployment and poverty. This and his Methodist upbringing ensured a Protestant work ethic to last a lifetime.

Educated at the local Grammar School, Westcliff High School for Boys, his schooling and family life was fractured by evacuation to Derbyshire due to the onset of war. He started his career as a laboratory assistant in the chemical works of May & Baker. Some colleague chemists there encouraged him to enroll part-time at Birkbeck College, London where he graduated in 1946. A few years later in 1950 with his PhD he moved to Imperial College as a lecturer in analytical chemistry and then later, physical chemistry. In 1962, during the Robbins expansion, he was appointed as Professor of Physical Chemistry at Southampton University where he was to serve for 18 years. Under his leadership the Chemistry Department grew to become one of the most distinguished in Britain concentrating on electrochemistry, chemical physics, organic chemistry and inorganic spectroscopy. Cold fusion was born there. During this period he held Visiting Professorships in the USA, Canada and Argentina. Notably he was President of *International Society of Electrochemistry*, 1983-1985. He eventually became Dean of Science and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Southampton.

In 1980 Graham Hills was appointed Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. The 1980s were interesting and difficult days for Higher Education in general and for the City of Glasgow in particular. The Universities Grants Committee (UGC) embarked on a period of severe cuts to university budgets at a time when Glasgow was seeking to re-orientate itself from the demise of the heavy industries of mining, steel, ship building, railways, and motor cars. Given strong leadership, Strathclyde, which had always had a reputation for working with industry, was poised to contribute to the regeneration of the community and strengthen its own base. Strong bridges were built to the City's own ambitions. Town and gown were nearly one. The internal university structure was streamlined from nine schools to four faculties, various departments were amalgamated and a semester system was introduced bringing a tighter and more responsible management arrangement. He persuaded departments to include free electives in all degree structures to allow students to experiment with subjects other than their specialism. Gradually parts of the campus were rebuilt including new student residences, sporting facilities were improved and an orchestra, a theatre and a technology transfer unit were put in place all of which gave new momentum. Three churches were bought and restored, one of which was to become the jewel in the crown as a magnificent ceremonial Hall. Not all of these changes proceeded smoothly. The new Principal was a man in a hurry and Senate meetings could be stormy. He said he believed in "change for change sake" which evoked much disagreement, albeit some grudgingly came to admit he was sometimes right in that respect. At times he was a controversial figure not only within the university but also among his fellow Vice Chancellors and in the community but he certainly put Strathclyde on the map in a new way. He chaired meetings in his own inimicable style, dismissing interruptions that were not carefully articulated and did not suffer fools gladly. He was an accomplished after dinner speaker whose delivery of punch lines was unsurpassed. His self confessed weakness in public was an early bed time so that he was known to vacate top tables at 10.00pm regardless.

Graham Hills and his wife Mary lived on campus in the Penthouse on the top of Livingston Tower where they frequently entertained senior staff and visitors as they sought to create a welcoming university. In 1988 Graham Hills was knighted for services to education in Scotland and in the following year he was appointed Scottish Governor of the BBC (1989-1994). He was a board member of the Scottish Development Agency (1988-1990) and then Scottish Enterprise (1990-

1993), the Scottish Post Office (1986-1999), a member of the Prime Ministers' Advisory Council on Science & Technology and Chairman of the Glasgow Regeneration Fund. He also became Chairman of Quarriers Homes for Children (1992-1997).

Graham Hills received many honorary doctorates from universities in Britain and overseas including Lisbon, Lodz, Waterloo and Pavia as well as the Polish Order of Merit and the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry and elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1982.

Sir Graham was never a friend of the establishment. From his earlier Liberal origins, he continued to argue for reform of the universities to make them more open and less excluding. He railed against early specialisation, especially in the form of A-levels and single honours degrees, and all other attempts to grade students on some numerical basis. He was a strong advocate of student fees, student rights and of university independence. Always prepared to speak up, he was a perpetual provocateur.

When Sir Graham retired from Strathclyde in 1991 he championed the concept of a new University of the Highlands and Islands and he even moved to live in Inverness. He suggested that a federal system based on existing Further Education Colleges might be a way forward and the UHI Millennium Project was started in 1992. Such matters grind slowly but in 1996 Millennium funding was granted, the UHI Millennium Institute was established in 2001 and full University status was awarded in 2011. Sir Graham and his wife Mary remained in their adopted Scotland and spent their last years in the capital, Edinburgh.

Sir Graham was predeceased by his first wife, Brenda (died 1974) and Mary his second wife (died 2013). He is survived by his son Johnathan, his daughters, Susan, Linda and Debbie and four grandchildren

John Spence, FRSE

Sir Graham John Hills. BSc, PhD, DSc(Lond), HonLLD, Fellow(Strath), HonLLD(Glas), HonDSc(Soton,Waterloo,Lisbon), HonFellow(Birkbeck). HonFRSAMD, HonFCSD, HonFRCSPG. Born 9 April 1926. Elected FRSE 1982. Died 9 February 2014