

THOMAS DIERY PATTEN
CBE, BSc, PhD (Edin), HonDEng(H-W), HonDSc(Edin)
Drhc(Univ Politecnica de Madrid), FREng, FIMechE.

The Society lost a distinguished member with the death on 10 April 1999 at the age of 73 of Professor Tom Patten, Fellow of the Society since 1967, Member of Council from 1969 to 1979 and Vice-President from 1976 to 1979.

Tom Patten planned his life methodically, setting himself objectives and driving himself unsparingly to achieve them, purposeful though not obsessive, always finding time for family and friends and mindful of the value of mental and physical relaxation.

Born 1 January 1926 in Northumberland, he was brought to Edinburgh by virtue of a change of occupation of his father, and spent his life in the city, bringing his interests to his base rather than taking his base to his interests. For this, Edinburgh and its academic and industrial institutions owe him a debt of gratitude.

Educated at Leith Academy and moving naturally to Edinburgh University during the war years, he graduated BSc in Engineering before giving his time to the then compulsory period of National Service. Commissioned in REME, he served in Palestine and, promoted to captain, in the British Military Mission in Greece. He retained an interest in things military and in later organised the University's Officers Training Corps and served as member and chairman of the Edinburgh Universities Joint Military Education Committee.

In the early 1950's, when I first came to know him, he had the appearance of being about to settle down into a conventional pattern. He had met and married Jacqueline Wright, and over the next decade three children (Colin, Diane and Gail) were born. Tom secured a post as Assistant Lecturer at Edinburgh University, developed a research interest in heat transfer, gained promotion to Lecturer and Senior Lecturer, submitted his thesis and graduated PhD, and qualified AMIMechE in his professional institution. He took a sabbatical year at McGill University in Canada during which he worked on and published notable papers in his subject. Having fully established his academic credentials, he could then have afforded to relax and to take life at a gentler pace. But that was not Tom Patten's way. He already had a vision of what he would like to achieve next.

In the early 1960's it was becoming clear that Scotland could have involvement in a North Sea oil and gas industry. Tom had followed this development with keen interest and felt that there ought to be a role for the Scottish universities in supporting and indeed leading this new industry. In 1967 he applied for and obtained the post of Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Heriot-Watt, the former College with a long tradition in mechanical engineering and then newly raised to full university status. He was now in a position with enough political clout to make real progress toward his next goal.

The University was in a state of major reorganisation, still progressively moving into its new campus, and Tom Patten was much involved in setting up new policies, new research, new facilities and new courses. This did not prevent, indeed may even have facilitated, his introducing a new attitude to industrial, as opposed to academic, work. Thus Tom was to be instrumental in setting up UNLINK, the University's industrial liaison unit, and in opening a Research Park at the new Riccarton campus. By 1972 finance had been secured for an Institute of Offshore Engineering, of which he became the Acting Director in December 1972 and was confirmed as Director in 1974 while still continuing his professorial appointment. In due course Government backing led to the establishment of the University's Department of Petroleum Engineering, giving Heriot-Watt a national centre which went on to gain international recognition.

Tom Patten was appointed Vice-Principal of Heriot-Watt in 1978 and on the sudden death of Principal George Burnett two years later, became Acting Principal. On the conclusion of the term of this appointment in 1981, he chose to retire from the University to devote time to the other interests which he had developed during the 1970's. Included in these interests was his work for the Marine Technology Task Force of the Science Research Council, which led to the establishment of the Marine Technology Directorate, later established as a company, MTD Limited, for which he served (1988) as a Director and (1992) as Chairman. During the 80's and 90's he also served as a Director of Pict Petroleum, Melville Street Investments, New Darien Oil Trust plc, Seaboard Lloyd Limited., Brown Brothers & Co. Limited and Edinburgh Petroleum Services Limited.

Recognition of his distinguished career came with the appointment to the rank of Commander of the British Empire in 1981. On the professional front, he was elected to the Fellowship of Engineering in 1986 and served as President of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in 1991-92. In 1991 he was made a Freeman of the City of London and in 1992 a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Engineers.

Fittingly, his first honorary degree came from Heriot-Watt in 1987, the first time the university had awarded an honorary DEng. Edinburgh University awarded him an honorary DSc in 1992 and Napier University an Honorary Fellowship in the same year; the following year saw an honorary Doctorate from the Universidad Politecnica de Madrid.

In 1997 the Scottish Offshore Industry honoured him with the Alick Buchanan-Smith Memorial Award "for personal life long achievement and contributions to the offshore industry", a succinct and appropriate phraseology with which to summarise his life.

He had remained physically active, even to the extent of playing squash, until a few months before his death. His friends will greatly miss the warmth of his personality, his kindly and courteous manner, his sense of humour and the depth of his knowledge. He is survived by his wife Jacqueline and their three children and four grandchildren.

I acknowledge with thanks the co-operation of the Heriot-Watt University in providing me with material facts in the compilation of the above.

J.B.SMITH