

## STEWART SUTHERLAND : DCL

Mr Chancellor,

Pity the poor orator. It's hard enough to stick to time when discussing achievements made in a single sphere. But here we have a Man o' Parts *par excellence*. It is a measure of the extraordinary breadth and depth of Lord Sutherland's achievements that he fits only partly under the societal challenge theme of Ageing that we celebrate in this ceremony. We could just as easily mark his educational contributions to our theme of Social Renewal. And then there are the many accomplishments of his day job too. So, I must attempt to capture the essence of the man and his work in this brief pen portrait. But I know my subject is an aficionado of portrait miniatures, particularly those on medallions crafted by the Scot, James Tassie. I must try to do something similar in words.

Stewart Ross Sutherland started his long journey in education when he entered Woodside Primary School in Aberdeen in 1946. He and his classmates came from ordinary families recovering from the hardships of war. They were taught well by inspiring teachers who managed enormous classes. The 'class of 46' was a class of 48. They had only the most basic facilities and resources. Young Stewart went from Woodside on to Robert Gordon College, and then to the University of Aberdeen to read philosophy, and to Corpus Christi College Cambridge for an MA in the Philosophy of Religion. He then held teaching posts at Bangor and at the University of Stirling before getting a Chair in the History and Philosophy of Religion at King's College London in 1977. But, as he told the House of Lords, his was not the only success story from that single class of children in 1946. There were other academics, teachers and successful industrialists too. Scotland has always been rather good at social mobility. There is a pervasive value

## STEWART SUTHERLAND : DCL

placed on education, and respect for teachers and educational institutions across all walks of life.

Happily for us, Lord Sutherland's contributions to national educational institutions have helped spread these values. He was Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools from 1992-94 and a member of the Higher Education Funding Council for England from 1995 to 2001. In both these roles he will have underlined the importance of the inspirational teacher in the delivery of education at all levels. And he is quick to acknowledge and praise the teachers who helped shape his own intellectual development.

His own academic work draws from a wide range of arts, literature and continental philosophy. For example in his 1977 book *'Atheism and the rejection of God: Contemporary Philosophy and The Brothers Karamazov'* he analysed the philosophical underpinnings of Dostoevsky's last and some argue, greatest, book. His broad-ranging scholarly works have continued despite other pressures of his major duties. For example, he delivered a lecture to Gresham College in 2008 titled 'Two paintings and a sceptic' in which he analysed the *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, by El Greco, and *Guernica*, by Picasso, in terms of what these tell us about faith and the human condition. And his Gifford lecture to the University of Edinburgh in 2011 analysed the life and works of David Hume in the context of the notion of a Civil Society.

Somehow during his most productive scholarly years in the 1980s at King's College, Professor Sutherland's talent and liking for wider aspects of academic leadership were noticed and allowed to flourish. He became Vice-Principal of the College, and then was its Principal from 1985 to 1990. Under his watch, The Institute of Gerontology was established in 1986 as a

## STEWART SUTHERLAND : DCL

collaboration between the charity, Age Concern, and King's College London, with the aim of engagement in multidisciplinary study of ageing and old age. And here were sown the seeds of his later major contributions to the national ageing agenda.

After King's, Professor Sutherland held the post of Vice-Chancellor of the University of London for four years. He then moved back up to Scotland to become Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh in 1994, a post he held until 2002. His many achievements at national level were marked with a knighthood near the start of his tenure at Edinburgh and a life peerage the year before he left. But he made an enormous difference to Edinburgh too. He was the only post-war Principal not to have had a science or medical background – how would he manage the STEM-dominated Edinburgh agenda? Very well indeed, as he demonstrated very quickly, and characteristically clearly and calmly. And these were challenging times at Edinburgh. The university discovered a hole in its finances and also struggled with academic structures and systems that made change difficult to implement. By 2002, when he retired from Edinburgh, the finances were healthy and a brand new and, at that time, radical three College structure was introduced. It was so radical, and Edinburgh at that time so conservative, it is really quite amazing that he pulled it off. In Humanities and Social Sciences a structure of 33 departments in 6 faculties was overnight transformed into a single College with 10 academic Schools. Senior colleagues from that time commented 'Unlike many leaders he did not demonstrate power very overtly: smooth running and soft (like a Rolls Royce) but (also like a Rolls Royce) you were somehow gently aware that the soft running engine was actually very powerful indeed.' And the 'Edinburgh model' was not only successful for Edinburgh – it has since been mirrored in several other universities, including this one.

## STEWART SUTHERLAND : DCL

Of course, Lord Sutherland didn't retire when he left Edinburgh. He became Provost of Gresham College in London – an ancient institution whose contemporary activities are to engage professors to give public lectures. He entered the Lords, and has contributed to a number of important committees and debates including several to do with education at all levels.

He is a director of an innovative educational software company. He has continued to contribute as an active Fellow of the British Academy, where he was described as 'a voice of bracing realism' by Fellows in his section. But he didn't desert Scotland – he assumed the position of President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh which he held from 2002-2005. He has been President of Alzheimer Scotland for more than a dozen years and has successfully worked there, and in the Lords, to increase the funding available for research in Alzheimer's disease.

Lord Sutherland has claimed publicly that the challenge of caring for an ageing population is as great as that posed by global warming. In 1997, he was appointed to chair a Royal Commission into Long Term Care – a Labour party manifesto commitment. The report - *With Respect to Old Age: Long Term Care - Rights and Responsibilities* was published in 1999. This distilled conclusions from evidence from over 1,000 individuals and a hundred different organisations, involving meetings and debates all over the country. Its most controversial recommendation was that social as well as health care costs for the elderly should be paid by the state rather than individuals in receipt of this care. This idea fell on stony ground – at least south of the border. Scotland, however, went ahead and implemented a version of this. In 2011, Lord Sutherland addressed the Holyrood parliament and commended Scotland for being years ahead of the rest of the UK in addressing elderly care issues.

## STEWART SUTHERLAND : DCL

He said “Yes, there has been money involved. But actually, you in Scotland, and you as a Parliament and an Executive, now have ten years experience of trying to deal with an issue that south of the border is hardly defined.”

In addition to his civic honours, Stewart Sutherland has been awarded honorary degrees from a wide range of universities, including all those where he studied and worked – a mark of the respect and warmth felt by former colleagues.

He also holds honorary degrees from universities in America, Canada, Sweden and Hong Kong. We feel honoured to join this company.

Mr Chancellor, in recognition of his many services to education from school - through to life-long public learning, and to addressing the welfare of the ageing population, I invite you to confer the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *Honoris Causa*, on Lord Sutherland of Houndwood.

*Citation by Professor Vicki Bruce, 10 July 2014*