

In memory of *Kenneth Ernest Robinson*

Kenneth Ernest Robinson

CBE, FRHistS, MA (Oxon), Hon LLD (CUHK), Hon D Litt (HKU)

Ellie Alleyne 王衛 (BA 1952), Registrar 1980-85

Dr Kenneth Robinson, Vice-Chancellor of the University from 1965 to 1972, died in London on January 18, 2005, aged ninety.

Dr Robinson came to the University from the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, where he had been Director since 1957 as well as Professor of Commonwealth Affairs. He joined the Colonial Office in 1936 after obtaining a double first at Oxford and remained there until 1948 when he was appointed to a Fellowship at the newly founded Nuffield College at Oxford where subsequently he also became Reader in Colonial Government.

Sir Lindsay Ride had retired as Vice-Chancellor in 1964 after fifteen years in office. During his time his priority was to oversee the revival and then the essential expansion of a university ravaged by the Second World War. After he left the office was held for a short time by Dr W C G Knowles (who had been Treasurer of the University while Taipan of Swire's in Hong Kong) and Professor A J S MacFadzean, Professor of Medicine, an arrangement to enable the University to be run effectively both academically and administratively.

Dr Robinson's arrival in 1965 ensured that the University's greatest needs at that time could be met. He was a leading academic authority on colonial administration as well as a practising administrator. In his seven years at the helm the student population rose by some sixty percent. A new Faculty of Social Sciences including the Department of Law (first started under the aegis of the Department of Extra-Mural

Studies) was established and the first generation of Law students graduated in 1972, the year of his departure.

He updated procedures and institutions related to academic governance and made possible the inclusion of younger teachers in memberships of various committees and bodies. In more mundane and practical matters he overhauled the somewhat personal and arcane administrative systems in existence (many probably since the University's foundation) and even updated the elementary filing system then in use! The minutes in files in his neat hand in green ink were often detailed lessons in logical discourse. He could be brusque and impatient with what he felt to be unnecessary delays and imprecise statements but was always kind and helpful to those whose needs and aspirations he understood, especially younger colleagues and the students who were fortunate to come into contact with him. In this he was greatly supported by his wife Stephanie, an experienced administrator in her own right: first in the civil service, then as Treasurer of St Hilda's College, Oxford, and lastly as Secretary of the Royal Free Hospital in London. When she died in 1994 he was devastated.

After retirement from Hong Kong Dr Robinson continued to be very active in Commonwealth affairs, principally as a Council member of the Royal Commonwealth Society and President of the Royal African Society. His house in the Cotswold village of Church Westcote was open to Hong Kong friends and colleagues.

After Mrs Robinson's death and his move to a flat in central Oxford he continued to keep in touch and attended many of the functions organised in London by the HKU Association in the United Kingdom. He and his wife last visited Hong Kong in 1982 for the opening of the Robinson Hall at Robert Black College, an occasion which they much enjoyed.

Dr Robinson will be remembered as the Vice-Chancellor who extended and invigorated the University and laid the foundation for the modern institution that it is today.



Dr Kenneth Robinson received the degree of Honorary Doctor of Letters at the 81st Congregation. From left: Dame Eileen Louise Younghusband, Dr Kenneth Robinson, Dr Daphne Chun Wai-chan, the then Chancellor Lord MacLehose of Beoch, Dr George Williams Keeton, the then Pro-Chancellor Sir Albert Rodrigues and The Rt Rev Francis Hsu Chen-ping

Professor Kenneth E Robinson as I knew Him

Professor Vincent W S Leung
Master of Robert Black College

Several months after Professor Robinson took up the Vice-Chancellorship of the University in 1965, Robert Black College began its operation as a guesthouse of the University. The then warden of May Hall, Mr George Endacott, left May Hall to become the first master of the College. As the wardens were directly responsible to the Vice-Chancellor at the time, my interview for the wardenship of May Hall brought me face to face with Professor Robinson for the first time. I learned afterwards that I won the wardenship not because I made a good impression on him at the interview but rather it was because no one else applied for the job at a time when everyone was scared of student power which was at its peak in this part of the world.

Within six months I had my second opportunity to speak to Professor Robinson in person. I complained to him that, after five months into my wardenship of May Hall, I was still unable to live in the warden's quarters. The quarters were still occupied by my predecessor, Mr Endacott who, apparently, could not move into his new quarters in the Robert Black College which were still under construction. I asked Professor Robinson if he could authorise an increase of my warden's responsibility allowance somewhat to supplement the rent which I had to pay while continuing my residence outside the University. To my surprise, he explained to me that the warden's quarters went with the job of the warden. In other words, without my quarters I had less responsibility on the Hall at night and with the reduced workload I should get a cut in my warden's allowance rather than an increase. I was really impressed by him for his defence of the interests of the University. Two weeks later, I was again surprised to receive a letter from the Finance Office informing me that I would



Dr and Mrs Kenneth Robinson at the opening of the Robinson Hall at the Robert Black College



Professor Kenneth Robinson, speaking in response to the establishment of the Kenneth Robinson Fellowship sponsored by the Robert Black College of the University.



The 2001 Robinson Fellowship Lecturer, Professor Ronald P Dore and the Robert Black College Master, Professor Vincent Leung (2nd right) with Professor Katherine Cheah (1st left) and Dr Amy Leung.

receive an additional \$500 a month on my warden's allowance. I was again impressed by Professor Robinson for his heartfelt concern for University staff and for his grace in reversing a decision that he had second thoughts about.

As one of the first non-professional staff members elected on to the Senate, I had the pleasure of experiencing Professor Robinson's chairmanship of the Senate first hand. He loved discussions and always welcomed opinions expressed from the floor. He often encouraged junior members of the Senate to voice their opinions by signalling them to speak with a grin. It was my first experience of a democratic chairman. Professor Robinson took the Council meetings much more seriously. I was told that on the days when there were Council meetings, he would concentrate his thoughts on the business of the approaching meeting and declined to receive any visitor or staff member in his office.

Professor Robinson had a clear vision for the long-term development of the University. He initiated the famous Cusdin Plan, a good part of which subsequently materialised after his time, albeit in a modified form. When the third phase of the Robert Black College was built on the balance of a donation for our engineering building, the University decided to honour Professor Robinson by naming the third building of the Robert Black College after him. In 1992, as part of the celebration of its Silver Jubilee, the Robert Black College set up the Kenneth Robinson Fellowship and invited Professor and Mrs Robinson to come to Hong Kong to officiate the inauguration of the fellowship whose latest holder is Professor Michael Freeman of the University College London who visited the University last month. It is my sincere hope that the University will continue to cherish the memory of Professor Kenneth Robinson through the building and the fellowship in the University under his name for many years to come.