

OBITUARY

LORD COTTESLOE

John Walgrave Fremantle, 4th Baron Cottesloe, GBE, TD was born in 1900 and died on 21 April 1994. His grandfather had been Vice-President of the Society, his father was President 1937–46 and he held the office with distinction 1963–9.

One of the great public servants of his time, he was Chairman of the North West Metropolitan Hospital Board 1970–82, of the King Edward Hospital Fund 1973–83, of the Dogs Home, Battersea 1970–82, of the South Bank Theatre Board 1962–77, of the Trustees of the Tate Gallery 1953–60, of the Arts Council 1960–65, of the Advisory Council on the export of Works of Art 1954–72. He was Vice-Chairman of the Port of London Authority 1955–67, President of the National Rifle Association 1960–72 and President of the Leander Club 1957–62. In the war he commanded a Territorial Regiment.

The President was privileged to pay a tribute at a memorial service at Swanbourne; the text follows:

When I was asked to contribute a few words about John Cottesloe whose ashes are to be scattered here, in his native village, this afternoon I naturally hesitated – because I doubt whether anyone living could speak with authority on every aspect of his varied interests and achievements. The notices in the published prints – with one deplorable exception – gave full accounts of his public life.

To me he seemed to be the epitome of those great Victorian or Edwardian all-rounders that we read about in biographies and memoirs, equally successful both indoors and out; sadly, I fear he may have been one of the last of this splendid and essentially English breed. Can one conceive of any other Chairman of the Arts Council rowing in the Boat race? And, of course, in the winning crew. Or a Tate Gallery trustee becoming the uncrowned king of Bisley? I doubt it. He was a born chairman who rose effortlessly and inevitably to the top of any organisation in which he interested himself. My connection with him was as secretary of the Bucks Archaeological Society during the years he

was President; he can hardly have held a less important position in his busy life yet every year he would ask me to lunch at the Port of London Authority, go through the agenda for the annual general meeting with meticulous care, discuss future policy, offer wise advice and, later, conduct the meeting swiftly and with great good humour, remembering names from year to year; members of that Society are not naturally rebellious and he never had to deal with a 'demo' but I know that if there had been trouble he would have dealt with it calmly and effectively.

I can well understand that he could be somewhat awe-inspiring at first meeting; his height and his presence were imposing – even wearing that pink cap and ancient socks at Henley – but he had that disarming twinkle in his eye, a sign of his tolerance and understanding. One felt too that he knew instinctively what was right or wrong and had few doubts. In this way he reminds me of the first, great Duke of Wellington, who, in his old age, was asked by a lady whether, with all his problems, he must often lie awake at night. 'Madam' he said 'You should never lie awake at night. It does no good. I make a point never to lie awake at night!' I like to think that John did not do so either.

It is right that his ashes should be scattered here at Swanbourne. Because all the main strands of his life were London based we did not see so much of him in Bucks as we would have wished. But he was always conscious of his roots here and of the unique contribution his family have made to the public life of the county over the last two centuries. I need not rehearse that today but one must admire that extraordinary longevity;

John, like his father, died at 94, his grandfather at 88, his great-grandfather at 92 and if his great-great-grandfather, one of Nelson's Admirals, died younger it was after some forty years at sea. What a breed of men and how well that tradition of service is being carried on today!

We salute his memory – a great gentleman and a great Englishman.

E.V.