

Professor Eric Charles Ryder

Few of the law students whom Charles Ryder taught, at Newcastle and for 22 years at UCL, would challenge the statement that he was the greatest teacher of English Law of his generation. He was certainly the finest teacher in the Faculty of Laws at UCL in all that time. He was educated at Hanley Grammar School. It is typical of his intellectual ability and concentration that, with the aid of two classics masters at that school, where Greek was not formally taught, he taught himself. In a year he had brought himself to the point of writing Greek poetry, although he said in later life that this was not as good as he would have wished. He took first class honours in parts I and II of the Cambridge Law Tripos from Gonville and Caius College in 1936 and followed it with a 1st Class in the LL.B. His great strength was a rational mind such as few are blessed with, and an unbelievable memory. Naturally these achievements took him to the Chancery Bar, at which he practiced in Newcastle from his call to the Bar by Gray's Inn in 1937 until 1959. He would have made a superb judge of the Chancery Division. But Charles was always, in heart and mind, an academic and in 1944, after a period with the Ministry of Food, he was appointed a lecturer at Kings College in his beloved Newcastle. Within three years he was Dean of the Faculty of Laws in the University of Durham. Because the number of full-time staff in the Faculty at Newcastle was small the almost single-handed burden of administration, involving the organisation of part-time teachers typical of such a department at that time, coupled with the maintenance of his chancery practice, drove him to the point of collapse. George Keeton, who with Owen Hood Phillips at Birmingham, largely manipulated the appointment of University law staff at the time, was aware of his excellence and invited him, when he decided he had to give up practice, to UCL. Charles great love was English Property Law, and especially the Law of Real Property. The almost pure rational beauty of English Land Law has no parallel. It was this rational foundation that Charles instilled into his students. Despite it, few students would imagine enjoying the task of learning this subject, but Charles Ryder's did. As they said, he even managed to fit into the rational system apparently irrational aspects such as adverse possession. Charles statement as he closed his file of notes five minutes from the end of time in his final lecture of each year, "well, that is English Land Law" was usually greeted with applause for his performance.

George Keeton nominated him as Chairman of the Board of Studies in Law of the University of London (and myself as secretary). Working with him was a delight. He was too good an administrator for Lord Lloyd of Hampstead, who became Head of Department at UCL, to waste and Charles took over postgraduate admission and supervision for the large numbers of LL.M and Ph.D students who came to the Faculty. There was never a hitch or a mistake in all that work.

Most of Charles' publication was in the form of journal articles, almost always in the Cambridge Law Journal. They were avidly read, not only by his colleagues but by many students, and by no means only those whom Charles Ryder had referred to the articles. The finer points of English Land Law are often complex but it is a truism that a law teacher who knows his subject can explain it. Charles' explanations were always of exceptional clarity. I edited a series of law books for Longmans and endeavoured to persuade him to write what I knew would be the finest Land Law text book ever, despite the high quality of a number of existing books on that subject. He politely considered

the matter but the truth was that he had done that in his lecture notes and published articles and saw no point in writing them up for further publication. Behind this, and unknown to most of his students, there was another side to Charles. He was the most erudite man I have ever met. English literature and Modern English History were his particular interest, although he had read all the ancient Greek historians, often in Greek, and remembered almost everything they had written. He was a mine of information and anecdote from eighteenth and nineteenth century English history. Mention of any of the English land-owning classes or their residences would produce a brief account of their family connections and fortunes. It seemed that he had personally known them. He was, of course, particularly knowledgeable on virtually every English judge from the beginning of the eighteenth century, and his knowledge extended to assessment of their personalities. This, when he was past 90, for his prodigious memory remained undimmed to the last time I spoke to him two days before his death. He had yet another, and unexpected, side to his interests; children's books. I realised that he had read all of Tolkien with delight; some of it more than once. So I took a chance and sent him all seven volumes of Harry Potter. He read them all in the space of four weeks and we engaged in detailed discussion of them as seriously as we would discuss Hague on William Pitt. Subsequently I sent him the first two in Latin and the Greek version of the first. He assiduously compared them, considering with approval the Latin for such novel concepts as 'Hogwarts Express' and 'frying pan'. Charles was lucky. His wife, who had been a terrifying secretary of the local war Agricultural Board, adored him, rightly thinking him exceptional. Charles used to laugh to himself about the effect her astringent comments had on those she met, but he, in turn, adored her. He cared for her in her last few years as assiduously as she had cared for him previously. They leave no children and no surviving direct relatives. There is, therefore, no sound basis for hope that we shall ever meet Charles Ryder's like again.

Professor (Eric) Charles Ryder. M.A., LL.B. Barrister, Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of Durham 1947 to 1960. Professor of Law, University of Durham 1953 to 1960. Professor of English Law in the University of London (UCL) 1960 to 1982. Author of Hawkins and Ryder on the Construction of Wills, 1965. Born 28th July 1915 eldest son of Charles Henry Ryder, solicitor, Hanley, Staffs. Educated Hanley Grammar School and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (scholar). B.A. Law Tripos parts I and II, first class 1936. LL.B, first class 1937. M.A. 1940. Called to the Bar, Gray's Inn 1937. Conveyancing Counsel, Newcastle 1944 to 1953. Married, Nancy Winifred Roberts, 1941. Died, Gosforth 5th July 2008.

Professor Roger W Rideout

