

Derek Edward Thomas Nicholson

Mr Chancellor,

Registrar Emeritus Derek Nicholson hails from Birmingham, and he received his entire formal education in that great city. Always a natural athlete, Derek was an early recruit to his school rugby team. Legend has it that he was instrumental in ensuring the defeat of a rival school team, amongst whose front row was numbered one of the current Pro-Vice Chancellors of this University. It was thus from a solid position in the second row of the scrum that Derek first began to hone the skill of grappling with pressures from academic heavyweights, which would later stand him in such good stead!

Derek graduated from Birmingham with a BA Honours in French in 1962. His talent caught the eye of his tutors, who persuaded him to stay on and undertake full-time research in Medieval French for two years. Even after he had decided in favour of a career in administration, Derek continued to pursue his research interests part-time, gaining an MA in 1969, and crowning his success with the publication of an impressive scholarly monograph on the role of troubadours in medieval France. After seven successful years in administrative work at his *alma mater*, Derek was appointed Assistant Registrar in the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies and the Faculty of Law in this

University in January 1971, subsequently transferring to the Faculty of Education in the same capacity in August 1973. Five years later, Derek was appointed Senior Assistant Registrar (Faculty of Medicine), and on 1st October 1983 he took up the post of Registrar. During his nineteen years as Registrar, Derek commanded the respect and admiration of his colleagues.

When a public orator solicits background information on an illustrious victim, Mr Chancellor, it usually takes little prompting before friends and colleagues of the person in question lapse into the provision of anecdotes which would be more suitable for a best man's speech than a dignified citation. It is testament to the esteem in which Derek Nicholson is held by all of his former colleagues that not one negative comment was offered: the unanimous view which emerged is that Derek is one of life's few thorough-going nice guys: calm, efficient, courteous, considerate and empathetic. He brought these same qualities to his role as Chair of Governors at Cramlington High School, the present high-ranking of which owes much to his leadership.

It is not difficult to identify at least two factors which explain how Derek managed to sustain such an amiable demeanour within the sometimes turbulent workplace environment of Kensington Terrace. The first is his Christian faith, which he shares in profundity with his wife Margaret, and with the parishioners of Holy Trinity, Jesmond. The second is his sport. Whether it be the fruits of

solitude during long hours of running, or the venting of excess energy in the orchestrated violence of the rugby pitch, Derek has always drawn both corporal and spiritual health from physical exertion and team games. He played in the number 8 shirt for Gosforth into his 40s, on one occasion helping his side to hold their ground against a team including three former England captains. He is also remembered by work colleagues as a deceptive bowler on the cricket pitch.

When not playing sport, Derek is often to be found spectating. Even on the sidelines, he cannot resist partaking in some form of sport. Thus it was that, on a trip to Murrayfield to witness a clash between Scotland and France, Derek found himself in the midst of a social circle in which he knew not a soul. Just for the fun of it, Derek took advantage of his University education and the identity of the visiting team to introduce himself as a stray Frenchman. For the entire day, he regaled his new-found Scots friends in a mixture of fluent French and a few words of suitably tortured English. The Scots fans tried their best to maintain a dialogue in badly broken French that might in any other circumstance have strained the '*auld alliance*' beyond breaking point! Derek's pretence was reportedly maintained flawlessly, all the way to the final farewells at Waverley Station.

This amusing tale still circulates in Derek's old workplace now, three years after he took early retirement and was awarded the title of Registrar Emeritus. In recognition of the immense contribution which he made to the life of this University, Mr Chancellor, and in gratitude for the gentility with which he discharged his duties, and many more tasks beside, I now ask you to bestow upon Derek Edward Thomas Nicholson an Honorary Fellowship of this University.

Citation by Professor Paul Younger