

GLEN CAMPBELL WILSON

Mr Chancellor,

The Oxford English Dictionary of Biography describes Dr Samuel Johnson as being “arguably the most distinguished man of letters in English history”. This is a claim few would contest. Despite humble origins as a Grub Street journalist, he made lasting contributions to English literature as a poet, essayist, moralist, novelist, literary critic, biographer, editor and lexicographer.

One of his most influential texts was written towards the end of his career: “A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland”. This book is a travel narrative about an eighty-three day journey through Scotland, and particularly around the Hebridean islands, which he undertook in the late summer and autumn of 1773. Now at this time Scotland was still a relatively wild place. The clan system was in decay. Marauding privateers and slave-ships worked the coasts, and Scotch whisky was distilled illegally and profusely – being consumed on a regular basis, even (as Dr Johnson noted) before breakfast. I am sure you will agree that Scotland has moved on leaps and bounds in the last two centuries.

Whilst travelling in the Western Isles, Dr Johnson made several astute statements about the indigenous Scot, including his oft-quoted commentary on angling: “A fishing rod is a stick with a hook at one end and a fool at the other”. How wrong could he be, Mr

Chancellor? This certainly does not describe Mr Glen Wilson, and ex-pat Scot who spends at least one week a year fly fishing on the Isle of Lewis, whilst not in the service of Newcastle University.

For nearly 30 years, Mr Glen Wilson has tirelessly served on University Council and several key sub-committees, using his professional skills as a Chartered Accountant on the Finance and Audit committees, and more recently the Retirement Benefits Plan. His peers single him out for, quite literally, his “dedication and brilliance” in handling the University Pension Fund during turbulent times, and also as a “safe pair of hands” acting as Trustee of the University Development Trust. His quiet, thoughtful style conceals a sharp wit, and his hunger to absorb and assimilate the relevant facts has ensured that he has made the wisest of decisions on our behalf.

The outcome, as described by one senior colleague, is “an extremely beneficial evolution of arrangements” for the University. Now, as a dye cast Yorkshire man, I suspect that I share certain cultural attributes with a Greenock born Accountant, especially when it comes to “brass”. I therefore realise that the University and its employees owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Mr Glen Wilson for ensuring its long-lasting financial solvency when lesser organisations have gone to ground.

Glen Wilson spent much of his professional life working for Proctor and Gamble, largely based in Newcastle, but also taking up posts throughout Europe and culminating in his promotion to Vice

President. It is with Proctor and Gamble that Glen learnt his trade, focusing on financial analysis, forecasting, and strategic planning. His professional colleagues assure me that he carried out these tasks with good humour and a strong sense of ethics.

Now the ethical aspect of investment management has always intrigued me – how to balance cash with kindness in the cut-throat world of investment banking. However, I suspect Glen Wilson has some help and guidance along the way, particularly whilst serving our University.

For many years, both he and his wife travelled to Newcastle together – he embroiled in matters financial, whilst she studied philosophy for a Humanities degree close by on the same campus. I wonder what was discussed at breakfast – Socrates or the stock market? Wittgenstein or Wall Street? Descartes or Dow Jones? Balance of Payments or (over the breakfast table) Francis Bacon? It is tempting to speculate that some of his most astute decisions were influenced by some deeper thought on a higher plane – something of which Dr Johnson would surely have approved.

However, I do believe that he frequently strays from the true path of moral righteousness, being prone to a little treason in supporting the English Lions. This must be a major faux-pas for one baptised on the banks of the Clyde. Moreover, his passion for fly fishing has presented a particular challenge for some of his professional colleagues, whose idea of “corporate entertainment” does

not extend to a knee-deep wade in the Tweed at three o'clock in the morning.

Mr Chancellor, these attributes have not impeded the selfless way Glen Wilson has served our University for over 20 years. His professional rigour has led to outstanding financial management for our Institution, keeping us secure, and giving us confidence for sustained growth in decades to come. I therefore ask you to bestow upon him an Honorary Fellowship of Newcastle University.

Citation by Professor Patrick Chinnery