

Keith Brading, CB, MBE - An appreciation (1917-1996)

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Keith Brading was a gentleman. Gentlemen are a rare breed these days. He will be remembered for the many achievements in his professional life, but I am sure that for most, if not all of us, the fondest and most clear personal memories of Keith, will be of that gentle man who always saw the best in people, was able to get the best out of people and who could relate to one and all, young and old.

Although Keith was a gentleman who displayed all the qualities of old-world charm and courtesy, he was a man totally in touch with the realities and the challenges of life today and in the 21st century. Keith was an unusual man. He was, in a sense, a man with two careers. He was a successful career Civil Servant ending his career in 1981 as The Chief Registrar of the Friendly Societies. However, the start of his retirement was the start of another more public life in which he did more than almost any other person in recent times to encourage the ideals and principles of mutuality, particularly within the Co-operative movement. This second career lasted from the date of his retirement until his untimely death.

Keith was born in 1917 at Portsmouth, within sight of the Isle of Wight and the village of Brading, whence all Bradings are believed to have come. He was educated at Portsmouth Grammar School, a school for which he retained an abiding affection. He became a generous benefactor and was a founder member of the London Society of the Old Portsmouthians. On leaving school he went into the Estate Duty Office of the Inland Revenue. The war soon interrupted his flourishing career. Though at first prevented from enlisting in the marines he was eventually called up into the Navy. He served on Atlantic convoys and in the Mediterranean. The highlight of his War service was on Russian convoys. He was also landed secretly in Norway to contact their freedom fighters, in order to arrange the means by which they could transfer vital information on German naval movements to

the British Navy. For this work he was awarded the MBE, an award of which he was very proud.

I am told that whilst in the Navy Keith met an ebullient Welshman, Bill Mars-Jones, (now Mr. Justice Mar-Jones) who persuaded Keith not only to become a barrister but also to become a member of Grays Inn. After the war was over Keith had the great good fortune to meet Mary whilst both were working in Llandudno. They were married in 1949. Keith was called to the bar in 1950, the same year in which he joined the Legal Department of the Inland Revenue. After various senior appointments within the Inland Revenue he was in 1969 transferred to the Registry of Friendly Societies, where he became the Assistant Registrar. This appointment was to be a turning point in his life. He was from that time enthusiastic about the concept of mutuality.

As Chief Registrar from 1972 his reputation was formidable. he had considerable powers of regulation over the Building Societies and Co-operatives as well as Friendly Societies. As a regulator he was held in high esteem because he exercised his powers with fairness as well as firmness. He is well remembered and held in great affection by all those who worked with him at that time. It is perhaps significant that despite his role as the regulator he has been described by those in the Industry at the time as a friend and confidant. His knowledge of the law relating to Friendly Societies and Industrial and Provident Societies was second to none. For this reason, he was invited to write the Titles on Friendly Societies, Industrial and Provident Societies in the most prestigious legal practitioner's reference book namely, Halsbury's Laws.

Keith officially retired at the end of 1981 but in reality this was the start of his second career. On retirement he was able to throw himself with vigour and enthusiasm into a multitude of activities. In retirement he gave most of the energy to the development of the ideals of mutuality. Having become an expert in the subject he was in great demand both with the Building Society sector, the Housing Associations, and in particular the Co-operative movement. His achievements in retirement are impressive indeed and perhaps, because of his unassuming nature, not recognised by many of those who knew him.

It would take too long to list all his achievements since his

retirement. However, it is worthy of note that he was the chairman of the Review Body which in 1985 was responsible for completely redesigning the structure of the Building Societies Association. A structure which is still in place. He was influential in the working parties which led to the revision of the law relating to Building Societies and the passing of the Building Societies Act of 1986. Keith was saddened at the recent changes in the status of Building Societies and with others was actively discussing the problems of demutualisation. He worked with a number of Housing Trusts, but he was most closely associated with the Kensington Housing Trust of which he was Chairman from 1987 to 1991. He will be remembered fondly by all there, particularly the tenants, because he was instrumental in creating real tenant participation in the Trust. (Thanks to him there are two tenants on the committee controlling the Trust). His work with the Trust laid the foundation for significant growth later. But it was mainly with the Co-operative movement that he became identified after retirement. It was his brain child and dream to create a national "umbrella" Co-operative organisation, which could bring together the various disparate Co-operative institutions. With dedication and charm, and despite innumerable odds, he ultimately achieved that ambition, and the United Kingdom Co-operative Council was born in 1991. He was the first chairman and at the conclusion of his first term in 1993 he was appointed Life President. He lived just long enough to see the historic moment last November when an agreement was reached on the desired changes in Co-operative law. It has been said that any Act that results should be known as the "Brading Act", such is the esteem with which Keith was held by the Co-operative Movement. It is not surprising that Keith has been described as one of the modern leaders of the Co-operative movement, all this since he retired!

In addition to his work on the UKCC he was also actively involved with the Co-operative College at Loughborough and had been since 1980. He spent many weekends there, helping in the assessments of the students. On the day of his death, he was due to give a talk at the college, such was his commitment to the Co-operative cause. Though not a sportsman, Keith loved swimming and sailing. He even learned to ski in Murmansk. He loved opera and ballet and the theatre, particularly performances of The

Cherry Orchard. He even sat through a performance in Russian (he did not speak Russian although he did speak Serbo-Croat, which he studied for many years). He had no time for TV and never owned a set.

Keith's remarkably full and active life in retirement was also, unfortunately, marked by frequent bouts of ill health, though often disguised from friends. He never complained and always made light of his ailments. He attended meetings and functions and delivered lectures, often when feeling unwell. He never allowed his ill health to interfere with his desire to fulfil his obligations. However ill he became he always seemed to make a good recovery. He seemed indestructible. One year ago, the last struggle began. He fought bravely what was a losing battle. He never gave in and though frequently in hospital he endeavoured to live his normal life, still travelling around the country to his professional commitments and even to please himself in order to savour a new experience by travelling on the Eurotrain to Brussels for lunch.

In the New Year Keith returned to hospital for the last time. Twice he had heart failures that the doctors never expected him to survive, but he did, before he finally passed away. Keith was a very great man, often self deprecating, always displaying humility and consideration of others. His achievements in public life were manifold but the warmth and pleasure from simply having known and loved Keith Brading stand as a tribute to him. We offer our deepest sympathy to Mary. But in the spirit of the Co-operative Movement to which he devoted a large part of his last years we give joyous thanks for his life and for his work and we celebrate the achievements of one of those whose destiny was, in the words of Robert Owen, to "promote the happiness and the welfare of the whole community".

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