

Honorary Graduate

Francis Harry Hinsley

Mr Chancellor, by a happy circumstance our honorary graduand this evening received a knighthood in the recent Birthday Honours List. He now bears the style of Professor Sir Harry Hinsley.

This eminent scholar, whom the University has invited to deliver the eighth Chancellor's Lecture and whom we simultaneously seek to honour this evening through the award of an honorary degree, is at present the Master of St John's College, Cambridge. He is also a former Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University. Recently he retired as a professor of that university, relinquishing his personal chair in the History of International Relations.

Francis Harry Hinsley (always known as Harry Hinsley) was born just-over two weeks after Armistice Day, 1918, at Walsall in Staffordshire. His school education was completed at Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall, and from there he proceeded in 1937 to St John's College, Cambridge. He obtained a first class in Part I of the Historical Tripos in 1939. His academic career was then interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War and his own recruitment to the Foreign Office as a member of the British Intelligence Service. In 1944, before his war service ended and while he was still an undergraduate, he was elected as a Research Fellow of St John's College. In this same year, without having completed his third year of study, he obtained his BA degree under the university's special regulations applicable to those called away on war service.

The year 1946 marked the opening of four decades of continuous service on Hinsley's part to St John's College and Cambridge University. His election to a permanent fellowship at St John's was followed some years later, in 1956, by his appointment as a university lecturer in history. In 1965 he was appointed Reader in the History of International Relations and in 1969 to a personal chair in the same field. He extended his service to his discipline as Chairman of the Faculty Board of History at Cambridge from 1970 to 1972 and as Editor of the *Historical Journal* (published by Cambridge University Press) from 1960 to 1971. The fellows of St John's College elected him as their President in 1975 and then in 1979 as the Master of the College. Since his nomination as Vice-Chancellor had taken place before his assumption of duties as Master, Hinsley became the first Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University in modern times to have been nominated before having actually entered office as the Head of a College. He took up his formal appointment as Vice-Chancellor in 1981 and held the office until 1983.

It has been said of Sir Harry Hinsley that everything he does he does well. In seeking to honour him we have chiefly in mind his achievements in three distinct capacities: as a scholar and an academic, as a university administrator and as a creative participant in the domain of public affairs.

There can be no doubt concerning the immensity of Sir Harry's contribution to the history of international relations. The titles of his books convey something of the range and development of his interests: *Command of the Sea* (1950), *Hitler's Strategy* (1951), *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (1963), *Sovereignty* (1966) and *Nationalism and the International System* (1973). In addition to writing these works, Hinsley was the editor of Volume XI of the *New Cambridge Modern History*, entitled *Material Progress and World-wide Problems 1870-1898*, which was published in 1962. More recently he became one of the joint editors of the official history of British Intelligence in the Second World War, three of the projected four

volumes of which have already appeared. As well as these books, Sir Harry is the author of a number of published lectures and learned articles.

The high quality of these scholarly contributions has been widely recognized, as evidenced in Hinsley's election as a Fellow of the British Academy in 1981. *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, a rigorous analysis of the role of the balance of power in international relations since the sixteenth century, has become a standard work the world over. The volumes on British Intelligence have recently been described in an authoritative review in *The Times Literary Supplement* as 'magnificent ... unique ... one of the most important documents in the history of the Second World War and ... a triumph of official historiography'.

Sir Harry's writings are characterized by a consistency of approach. He adopts a sceptical attitude towards efforts to apply principles of moral idealism when managing international affairs. It is the implications of *Realpolitik* that must be attended to. Not surprisingly, in today's world he is a firm supporter of the maintenance on the part of the Western powers of the nuclear deterrent.

A stimulating teacher and an excellent lecturer, Sir Harry attracted his own research students at an early stage in his career. As a Cambridge supervisor his own reputation is unrivalled. He had the capacity to inspire students with flashes of illumination relating more to the wider implications of their findings than to the technical and methodological aspects of their research. In the 1960s his research students grew in number to a point well beyond that which most of his colleagues would be willing to regard as a tolerable load. Hinsley, a man of enviable stamina, accepted them gladly and gave of his best, neglecting no one. Eventually the stage was reached when he could establish his own seminar in international history. Contributing to the process by which the Cambridge of this time came to generate a new and more favourable climate for graduate students in the humanities, Hinsley's seminar achieved fame, attracting visitors from abroad as well as British historians beyond Cambridge.

Hinsley's editorship of the *Historical Journal* extended the range of his academic influence still further. He greatly increased the size and scholarly weight of the journal, his first volume running to fewer than 250 pages and his last to over 800. In his hands its reputation as a leading international journal in the field of modern history was assured.

The confidence of his colleagues in Hinsley's personal and academic qualities had an important bearing on his career as a university administrator. As Master of his college he presided (with what degree of enthusiasm is not known) over the policy switch to co-residence, consequent on the college's decision to admit women undergraduates. As Vice-Chancellor he had to cope with the financial cuts in the government's grants to universities that have become a feature of British academic life under the rule of Margaret Thatcher. It owes much to Hinsley that the cuts were distributed fairly and evenly over all sections and subjects. In the matter of forced (or much-encouraged) early retirement Hinsley's proceedings were tactful and aroused little animosity. His decision to take early retirement as a professor himself was made not because he wanted to but characteristically because he felt he ought to, having to persuade others to do so.

As Vice-Chancellor Hinsley also took initiatives designed to improve the university's relationship to industry by encouraging applied research of the kind that could increase the university's income. Towards the end of his term as Vice-Chancellor, Hinsley was appointed by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals as a member of a special committee under the chairmanship of Sir Alex Jarratt, the chairman of Reed International and the Chancellor of Birmingham University, which was set up to enquire into the efficiency of universities in the United Kingdom. The Jarratt Committee undertook a study of six universities

in depth. Its final report, which on the criterion of efficiency makes strictures on the present management methods of British universities, has recently been published.

In public life outside the academic domain Sir Harry's main contribution lies in his war service, for which he was awarded an OBE in 1946. He served at Bletchley Park, where the Government Code and Cypher School was based, in close liaison with the Special Intelligence Service and Special Operations Executive. Hinsley and his colleagues were concerned with the decrypting and analysis of enemy intelligence, in particular the transmissions of the *Geheimschreiber* (Fish), the computer-like encrypting machine through which many of Germany's crucial strategic communications were processed. In keeping not only with the clandestine nature of the activity but also with his own reservations about the place of biography in historical study, Sir Harry's history of British Intelligence reveals little about the personalities involved. Nevertheless it is well known that despite his young age he was an exceptionally important member of the Bletchley team, and that the part he himself played in Naval Intelligence made a major and direct contribution to the sinking of the *Bismarck* on 26 May 1941.

The act of honouring a former Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University and the present head of one of its major colleges underlines the association our university enjoys with one of the greatest institutions of learning in the United Kingdom. Many members of our academic staff are Cambridge graduates and Cambridge continues to attract some of our best graduate students. On a more personal level Sir Harry himself was a visitor to the University exactly twenty years ago, and while here wrote some of the chapters of his book on *Sovereignty*. More recently a further link was forged through the appointment of one of his former students as a lecturer in our Department of History. Finally, as part of a possible tradition in the making, Sir Harry Hinsley is the third head of a Cambridge college to honour the University by accepting an invitation to deliver the Chancellor's lecture.

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour to request you to confer the degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*, on Francis Harry Hinsley.