Sir Jeremy Lever
KCMG KC

Fellow of All Souls College, 1957–2017
Honorary Fellow, 2017-2025

Tributes delivered in
All Souls College Chapel
on 29 November 2025 by:

Sir David Edward
Katherine Rundell
Sir John Vickers

Tribute by Sir David Edward

Jeremy and I came up to Univ[1] on the same day in 1953. We sat opposite each other on the Scholars' table until I went off in 1955 to do National Service after Mods[2]. I was a callow Scot, fresh from a bleak northern public school. Jeremy already had a life crowded with incident.

In 1940, his father sent him with his mother and his younger brother Timothy to stay with relations in New York. Timothy remembers that one day as they were walking down a street, they heard a lady remark "Gee, did you hear those little boys with their strange accent?". Jeremy, aged about 9: "Madam, excuse me. It is you who have the strange accent".

In 1942 at the height of the Battle of the Atlantic, their mother decided that it was time to come home. She secured a passage on a former Amazon River steamboat sailing in convoy. The voyage lasted 17 days going as far north as Iceland and as far south as the Azores. The ship was torpedoed twice but the charges failed.

Jeremy won a scholarship to Lancing but they suggested that - being Jewish - he would find it more comfortable elsewhere. He won a scholarship to Bradfield where he was very happy and, amongst other activities, took part in the Greek play in Greek. His fag was John Drury, former Dean of Christ Church and Chaplain of this College. He reassured Jeremy that he had treated him well.

From school, Jeremy went for National Service to the Royal Artillery. His training included work with big guns without - in those days - ear protectors. In his case, this caused gun deafness with permanent hearing loss, exacerbated by an attack of malaria in the next stage of his adventures.

Soon after he was commissioned, a call was received for an officer to join an ack ack battery in Kenya - ideally one who could ride a horse. Jeremy volunteered and it later transpired that the real reason was that they were short of officers to play polo. History relates that Jeremy did indeed play polo, and moreover that he hitch-hiked from Kenya to Cape Town to see his grandmother.

That was the time of the Mau Mau emergency in Kenya and there were rumours that the British army was involved in violent ill-treatment - including torture - of the Kikuyu people. Jeremy, who had great respect and affection for his Kenyan troops, asked his CO whether this rumour was true. He was proud that his CO replied that

[1] University College – on the other side of the High Street from All Souls College
[2] Honour Classical Moderations (first part of the degree in Classics, taken after five terms)

such conduct would be un-British and inconsistent with the purpose for which they were there. Sadly, as we now know, torture was not only practised but officially sanctioned.

You can well imagine that, with such a life behind him and restricted by his deafness, Jeremy didn't have much time for the festive frivolities of freshers' life. He was serious, ascetic, abstemious and not one for carousal. But he was kind, thoughtful, gently humorous and, for me, as for so many others, the very best of friends.

We all recognised that Jeremy was someone special. As well as other sparks of genius, he had the infinite capacity for taking pains and he prepared meticulously for everything he did. And so, by the time I returned in 1957, he had been President of the Union, with a First in Schools[3] and a half-Blue in Fencing, and he was in his last term as President of the Univ JCR.

He had read PPE for Prelims[4] and developed a particular interest in economics. But the Master of Univ – Professor Arthur Goodhart -encouraged him to change to law. Jeremy's deafness would have made it difficult for him to engage fully in the combative life of the Common Law Bar, and he wasn't made to be a Chancery lawyer - that being the basic choice in those days.

Master Goodhart – who saw further - urged him to focus on what was then a subject lying on the boundary of law and economics, known in America as anti-trust and in Germany as cartel law. Britain was then the home of the cosy deal, shared markets and fixed prices. The rather bureaucratic Restrictive Trade Practices Act had only just been passed. Here was a new subject – competition law - made for Jeremy.

He moved briefly to Nuffield to study it in greater detail but - soon after - sat the Fellowship Examination at All Souls. On the other side of the High, we waited breathlessly for the white smoke. The rumour came back that, although Jeremy was well in the running, the Fellows weren't sure that he was clever enough. But they were able to overcome their dubieties and the Warden will take up the story from there.

[3] The final examination for the degree of BA.

[4] The first examination taken after two terms.

Tribute by Katherine Rundell

I was twenty-one when I was elected to the college. On my first day as a Fellow, one of the first people I was welcomed by was Sir Jeremy Lever, and that welcome never dimmed or diminished in all the years I knew him. I was over-awed by my surroundings, and he treated me and my college twin Elizabeth Chatterjee with the same serious grace as he did Justices of the Supreme Court.

To the youth of the college, when I arrived, Jeremy Lever was universally beloved. We admired his beauty – memorialised in the bust in the Common Room. We admired his extraordinary knowledge of beautiful things. During a discussion about the new coffee service in Domestic Committee, he bought in the Bonham's catalogue of his porcelain collection – the Jeremy Lever porcelain collection, numbering more than 200 exceptional pieces, was sold in 2007 – and passed it round so that the College could consider a particular shade of azure blue. We admired, too, his unexpected enthusiasms – he would apologise for not staying for dessert, but he could not miss the start of *Downton Abbey*.

We admired his inclusivity. Fred Wilmot Smith, on first joining the college, was enjoined by Jeremy to come to chapel. "I hope that you will come. It is a broad church." Fred replied, "I'm an atheist." To which Jeremy, after a brief pause: "It is a very broad church."

In Chapel, I was Junior Dean to his Senior Dean for several years. His generosity to me was enormous. He would enquire after my work – about the precise logistics of my children's fiction – with exactly the same gravity and focus with which he enquired after the workings of competition law. It is a great thing to be given, when you are young, a model of how to ask the opinion of everyone around you, and to treat their most faltering thoughts with earnest and thoughtful respect. He brought dignity into the room with him, and bestowed it on the uncertain.

In 2012, Jeremy preached a sermon in this Chapel. He said, "Despite my lack of faith, I believe that the Universe is a creation of a superior intelligence to whom I shall refer as God." The focus of his sermon was, in part, the miraculous nature of the engines of existence. He said, "The laws and processes which, starting from nothing – though there probably is no such state as really nothing – or starting with something that I cannot comprehend, the so-called naked singularity, produce some thirteen billion years later our amazing Universe are, to my mind, miraculous –

miraculous, in the sense of God-given miracles. At even the trivial level, it turns out that the number of petals and the arrangement of seeds of at least some flowers conform to a structure based on so-called Fibonacci numbers." It is a gift, to be able to perceive miracles.

The sermon ended with simplicity. "I have to come back to the fact that, the Universe having been designed as it has been, we have evolved as moral creatures who can recognise the difference between right and wrong. At the end of it all, we have to get on with living our lives as best we can until we depart this earth."

The first night that one of my contemporaries was elected to the Prize Fellowship, he sat between Sir Jeremy and another equally august fellow. He asked them, if they remembered how they had felt the day they were elected. His first neighbour said, he remembered feeling very clever. Jeremy said, he remembered feeling very stupid. I think, historically, there are always some Examination Fellows who take election as proof of their genius, and others who are humbled by their company. He was the latter. Sir Jeremy Lever did not allow his brilliance to stand in the way of his generosity. For that, I will never cease to be grateful.

Tribute by Sir John Vickers

The white smoke on that day in 1957 signalled the election to Fellowship of two Jeremys. The life of Jeremy Wolfenden – son of the author of the Wolfenden Report, journalist, and spy – ended at the age of 31. Our Jeremy lived to 92, and for sixty of those years was a Fellow here, and then an Honorary Fellow. He was thus a unique bridge from the Old College of the 1950s – a glorious decade for the Prize Fellowship – to us today.

At the time of his election, Jeremy was a student at Nuffield, writing a thesis on anti-monopoly legislation. His proposed career on the All Souls application form, in his distinctive manuscript, was "Either Bar or Industry". The Bar was the right choice. Industry was however to feature later, not only in respect of his clients, but also as a company director of Dunlop and of Wellcome.

So began decades of term-time weekending in College. As Jeremy's seven years of Prize Fellowship neared its end, Warden Sparrow wrote to say that "unless you marry … you will surely be elected to a £50 Fellowship". No doubt that happened by acclamation, but the Warden could not resist teasing afterwards that: "It was a very

close thing, but I just managed to get it through, using my personal authority". Jeremy replied: "It is impossible for me adequately to express my gratitude to the College for its past and present kindness to me". This was deeper than courtesy. A heartfelt sense of devotion and obligation to All Souls always stayed with Jeremy.

In the 1970s, Brussels became the centre of Jeremy's professional life, and he even contemplated a position at the European Commission. But apart from a period away for fiscal reasons, the Oxford weekending continued largely unabated.

I met Jeremy in Paris just after my Finals in the summer of 1979. My tutorial partner and I had been invited by Derek Morris, who taught us Economics at Oriel, to work on the IBM case. Jeremy, who was IBM's lead Counsel, cleverly persuaded me to sit the All Souls exam by predicting that I would enjoy doing it but would not be elected. I owe my career to that summer, and therefore to Derek and Jeremy.

The European Commission's case was that IBM was abusing market power in the computer industry by way of various anti-competitive practices. It was by far the most important competition law case that Europe had seen, and it bears comparison with cases years later against Microsoft, Google and others.

IBM, which had a lot at stake, naturally wished to be represented by the best competition lawyers in Europe, and that meant Jeremy. These were still the early days of European competition law, and in addition to the technical complexity of the subject matter, the law itself was uncharted in important respects. Article 86 of the Treaty of Rome prohibited the abuse of a dominant market position, but what exactly did that mean in practical terms? This made the intellectual effort required of Jeremy, as lead Counsel, all the greater. Likewise for all his rigorous contributions to development of the law, both in his practice and in his various academic writings.

Despite its importance, the IBM case features little in the competition law textbooks because, rather sensibly, it was settled – mainly by IBM agreeing to disclosure of information about its computer architecture – rather than litigated. A procedural point did go to the Court in Luxembourg in 1981, which I mention for its listing of Jeremy's extraordinary team of barristers – David Edward, John Swift, Christopher Bellamy and Nicholas Forwood, all of whom went on to high judicial or regulatory office.

The cultural differences between Jeremy and the IBMers were a constant source of entertainment. While they naturally tended to favour the use of computers, Jeremy's

working methods, then and for years later, involved a fountain pen, biros, scissors, tippex, gluestick and sellotape.

Another issue was drink. Whereas IBM was fiercely teetotal, fine legal minds sometimes required lubrication at 6pm. The solution was to deem that the barristers' quarters lay outside the IBM curtilage, and to refer to the Famous Grouse as cold tea.

Although lodging in Paris at the Hotel Bristol, Jeremy was otherwise parsimonious to a fault. As the rest of us pored over a restaurant menu, and wine list, after a hard day at the office, he advised that, while we had the good fortune that the client would cover the expense of our evening meal, we should make our menu selections as if we ourselves were paying. "And the *prix fixe* menu looks remarkably good value". The starter was *carottes râpées*. And which silk but Jeremy would take summer holidays, year in year out, without electricity, at the *Chalet des Anglais* in the French Alps?

Jeremy stood at the top of his profession for years and years. In the *Fine Fragrances* case of the 1990s he famously appeared before the Monopolies and Mergers Commission wearing dungarees, which you can see on the back of the service sheet. The point was that image matters – perfume is not just liquid in a little bottle. It worked. The MMC duly found that the selective distribution arrangements of the perfume houses were not against the public interest.

I once saw Jeremy the economist at work, on the MMC inquiry into the supply of beer. A question was how demand responded to price changes. "I believe that there are men in this country", he averred, "who spend the *entirety* of their disposable income upon beer. I have calculated that, for them, the price elasticity of demand equals one". Indeed.

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But let us return to those weekends in College. On the way here you have all come past Jeremy's ground floor rooms on the staircase near the Chapel entrance. In the set opposite was Charles Monteith, chairman of Fabers. For in the Old College, the key to £50 Fellowship was bachelorhood. The Fellowship was smaller then, at about sixty. All were men. Even in 1980 a majority were or had been Prize Fellows, and almost half of them had been to Eton or Winchester. A number had first been elected pre-War.

Dinner was black tie at weekends, and, unlike now, coffee was served in the Coffee Room, and in the Smoking Room there was smoking. On winter Sundays there were

crumpets at tea, with Jeremy the master of toasting, and in his memory they will be served in the Hall afterwards.

Other Fellows in Law included Lords Hailsham and Wilberforce, and the Professors were Brownlie, Honoré and Treitel, who had taught Jeremy as an undergraduate. Not bad.

In Jeremy's rooms was a TV set, which on Saturday evenings was tuned to the alluring game show *Cilla's Blind Date*. Perhaps alone among the ten million or so viewers, Jeremy had the difficulty that the programme did not always finish in time for dinner at All Souls. Recording apparatus was therefore in place, since the best bit was often at the end. Further anguish arose from the appalling choices, in Jeremy's estimation, made by some contestants. "What was she thinking?" was a typical lament.

Even Jeremy could not continue for ever as a £50 Fellow. One of the first acts of Warden Davis was to secure Jeremy's election, in 1996, to Distinguished Fellowship, in which role he served a further 21 years.

Jeremy held the office of Senior Dean, which, in addition to its Chapel duties, involved the presentation of Fellows for University degrees, and conducting the voting by urn at College meetings. Then there was the committee work, especially on the finance, investment, and property committees, the last of which involved an annual visit to the College's rural estates. In the late 1980s Jeremy had even offered to take on the Estates Bursarship, but by then the College needed a midweeker, not a weekender.

Beyond the College, it might appear puzzling that Jeremy, as someone so public-spirited, was not appointed to judicial or other public office. But there is the natural explanation that the hearing damage sustained during national service effectively deprived him, and us, of that opportunity. He was nevertheless the inaugural chairman of Oftel's advisory body on fair trading in telecommunications. And there was arbitration work, notably on the dispute between the US and UK over Heathrow airport charges, where Jeremy issued a powerful dissenting opinion, based on economic analysis of rates of return on capital.

The immensity of Jeremy's contributions to public life and the law was at last recognised by his KCMG in the 2002 Birthday Honours, for services to European Community and competition law.

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Jeremy preached a sermon in this Chapel thirteen years ago. It began: “This is in the nature of my final progress report to my dear colleagues here at All Souls after 55 years in Fellowship”. He ended with words from the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Bible. Without worrying too much about faith, Jeremy urged us to heed the conscience with which we have been endowed:

> “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”.