

Lord Hughes of Ombersley
Doctor of Civil Law
Durham Cathedral, 5 July 2019

Anthony Philip Gilson Hughes, Lord Hughes of Ombersley, is one of Durham University's most accomplished law graduates. His road to success is a story about making the most of the opportunities before us with an appetite for constant challenge.

Originally from the Midlands, Lord Hughes came to Durham for the first time after being invited to interview for a place on its then Law and Economics joint degree. The Department of Law, as it was then, was newly established after King's College, Durham became what is now Newcastle University leaving Durham without a single honours law programme. So this joint honours course was the only one Lord Hughes had applied for and he felt lucky to get a place joining Van Mildert College.

Lord Hughes was lucky once more when the university decided to launch a single honours law programme after all. He leaped at the chance to join Durham's first cohort of eleven students taught by six academic staff. He recalls their being a small knit group who knew each other well forging connections continuing long after their studies had ended with several enjoying highly successful legal careers.

Since school, Lord Hughes had had ambitions to join the Bar. At the time, there were Bar exams but no compulsory course or advocacy training. That meant finding employment whilst undertaking further training part time to qualify. Lord Hughes applied for a job at the newly created Law Commission but by the time it was his turn to be considered for a place there were effectively none to be had. As luck would have it, the head of what was then Queen Mary College, now Queen Mary, University of London, Professor Roger Crane, was phoned right then and asked if he was still looking for a new junior lecturer. Lord Hughes came home that day with a new job – not at the Law Commission he had first visited, but at Queen Mary – which he enjoyed thoroughly. His teaching covered a diverse range of subjects including legal system, family law and contract law. He enjoyed educating non-lawyers about general legal principles sharing his passion for the law as well.

Durham was never far from his mind either. While teaching in London, Lord Hughes also returned to Durham to teach Public International Law on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. The university timetable has changed since, but Lord Hughes's dedication to legal education has not.

While he was enjoying his early lecturing days, an offer of a much awaited pupillage came at a set of chambers in Birmingham as luck would have it returning him to the Midlands which he found too good not to take. He has remained in the area ever since and later became head of the same chambers.

This was the start of a new chapter in his celebrated career at the Bar from 1971 until 1997 becoming a Queen's Counsel in 1990. During the mid-1980s, Lord Hughes became a Recorder giving him a first taste of what would become his next chapter on the bench. That happened quite quickly after taking silk when the Lord Chancellor invited him to become a judge in the Family Division from 1997. He further served as the Presiding Judge of the Midlands Circuit from 2000 to 2003 before transferring to the Queen's Bench Division and his particular forte in Criminal Law from 2004 to 2006. Lord Hughes next sat on the Court of Appeal including as the Vice President of its Criminal Division, and served on the Sentencing Council, until fortune would strike him once more.

In 2013, Lord Hughes took up the first job he had actually applied for since the visit to the Law Commission, which was a seat on the relatively newly established UK Supreme Court providing it with a much needed authority on criminal law. He has also had a passion for law and science, working closely with the Royal Society and Royal Society of Edinburgh, and has overseen a project to exchange ideas between judges and scientists and to help the judiciary deal with scientific evidence in the courtroom - an issue of increasing importance which has brought together Nobel Prize winner Professor Sir Paul Nurse and DNA expert Professor Sir Alec Jeffreys alongside the lawyers.

Only recently retired from the Supreme Court, Lord Hughes is keeping himself busy with new challenges. Lord Hughes is today the Master Treasurer and head of the

Honourable Society of Inner Temple, one of the oldest Inns of Court. His year in office sees long-planned significant redevelopment through Project Pegasus creating an attractive, flexible space with state-of-the-art facilities for delivering legal education for students, pupils and practitioners and securing the long-term future of the Inn. His passion for promoting legal education remains as strong now as ever.

Lord Hughes's story is about opportunities and an appetite for challenge. He may have felt lucky to come to Durham but we know how lucky we are to count him as one of our own. A graduate of our first single honours class, Lord Hughes became the first to join the Supreme Court and only head of an Inn of Court. Durham has been a part of his life since graduating in this cathedral fifty years ago. He has regularly supported our students in law and at his college sharing his experiences over a cup of tea and a sticky bun (or more often a pint) that has been invaluable for all who have followed him to the Bar. His most recent event this past January drew two hundred students eager to learn more about becoming a barrister. They could have no finer exemplar.

Today we return to the place of his graduation half a century ago to honour one of our most distinguished graduates and one of this country's best legal minds.

Chancellor, I present Lord Hughes of Ombersley to receive the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

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