

## Graduation 2007

### Oration for Lord Justice Sedley

**Vice-Chancellor, the Senate has resolved that the degree of Doctor of the University be conferred upon the Right Honourable Lord Justice Sedley.**

Stephen Sedley is a Lord Justice of Appeal and as such is a senior member of the judiciary in England & Wales. He is an outstanding judge. But he is no ordinary judge. In many respects Stephen Sedley personifies what some have called the 'new' judiciary. Over the past decade or so judges have done much to shed the traditional image of being out of touch with society, overwhelmingly conservative with a small 'c' and executive minded. Certainly, Sir Stephen Sedley is none of these things. He is a brilliant lawyer who writes wonderfully clear and intellectually strong judgments: judgments that are often concerned with developing the law in order to achieve outcomes that truly accord with principles of justice and human rights: even when on occasion this leads to the enunciation of principle that some of his fellow judges might consider 'heretical'.

Stephen Sedley's interests and contributions, however, extend well beyond the law to literature, music, and philosophy. He is a prolific writer on legal and non-legal matters and is engaged in what appears to be an exhaustingly broad and diverse spectrum of activities. In Who's Who he lists amongst his interests 'changing the world': a somewhat unexpected pastime for a senior member of the English judiciary. But there is much that is unexpected about Stephen Sedley's range of achievements and interests.

To take but one example. In preparing this oration I discovered that in 2006 Sir Stephen was invited to present an award at the annual BBC 2 Folk music Awards. We, of course, expect our senior judges to be called upon to perform ceremonial roles of various forms and to chair inquiries into matters of public importance (and Sir Stephen Sedley has certainly done more than his fair share of these), but how did a Lord Justice of Appeal find himself presenting awards for musical achievement in a low brow field such as folk music?

The answer is that this Lord Justice, alongside his other talents, is also a highly respected authority on folk music. In 1967, for instance, he compiled the seminal anthology of British folk song, *The Seeds of Love*. Its fortieth anniversary was marked this April by a concert presented by Sir Stephen with Martin Carthy, Emily Porter and Michael Watersen. In 1962 he lent his guitar to and jammed with Bob Dylan at the legendary Troubadour Club. He still has that guitar. He may be white, male, middle-aged, public school and Oxbridge educated but he is probably the only judge that has done that even in the modern judicial era.

Stephen Sedley was born in October 1939. He went to Queens' College Cambridge on an open scholarship and graduated in 1961. Before being called to the Bar in 1964 he was a freelance writer, interpreter, musician and translator. At the Bar he established himself as a leading public law and civil liberties barrister invariably representing David against Goliath. He became a QC in 1983.

Two things seemed absolutely clear to many observers of the system during this period. The first was that Stephen Sedley was a brilliant barrister. He was widely admired by all, including those he regularly opposed, for his intellectual ability, the strength and clarity of his arguments and his unflinching courtesy, modesty and down to earth humanity. The second thing that seemed absolutely clear to many was that, despite his obvious talents, his counter-establishment practice would almost certainly act as a barrier to further elevation to the Bench. In the event, to the great credit of the authorities,

this proved not to be case. He was made a Bencher at Inner Temple in 1989 and became a High Court judge in 1992. He was further promoted to his current position in 1999.

Stephen Sedley has always maintained close links with the academic world and supported organisations concerned to promote human rights and access to justice. He has held visiting positions at the universities of Warwick, Hong Kong, Wales at Cardiff, University College London, as well as at Osgoode Hall Law School Ontario and Victoria University in New Zealand. His many lectures include the 1995 Paul Sieghart Memorial Lecture, the 1996 Radcliffe Lectures (with the late Lord Nolan), and the 1998 Hamlyn Lectures. He chaired the Judicial Studies Board's working party on the Human Rights Act 1998 and has, since 1999, been President of the British Institute of Human Rights. He also helped to establish the Public Law Project, a national charity concerned with access to justice and social exclusion. Throughout his career he has somehow found the time also to support organisations such as the Nuffield Foundation and is regularly invited to chair and participate in Seminars and conferences. I know from personal experience how generous he has been in this regard. He is certainly a good friend of academia.

For all the above reasons I am delighted that the Senate has resolved to confer upon Sir Stephen Sedley the degree of Doctor of the University.

**Chancellor, I present to you the RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR STEPHEN SEDLEY.**

**Orator: Maurice Sunkin**