



Obituary

John Anthony Hardinge Giffard, 3rd Earl of Halsbury

4 June 1908–14 January 2000

John Anthony Hardinge Giffard, third Earl of Halsbury, and President of the Operational Research Society in 1960–1961, died on 14 January 2000 at the age of 91. He was third in a line of illustrious Earls of Halsbury. The first, his grandfather, was the Halsbury of Halsbury's Laws of England. The second worked during the First World War on the efficacy of bombing, one of the earliest examples of what is recognisably military Operational Research. (Halsbury himself would, not altogether flippantly, claim that his father was the 'father of military OR'.) He himself, the third, was an accomplished scientist and engineer, a public servant of unflagging energy, a skilful administrator, and a catalyst of similar accomplishment in others.

Halsbury was a polymath, as much at home in classical mythology as in most branches of science, and was possessed of an acute mind, capable of piercing to the heart of an issue and of applying powerful general principles in novel but, following his explanation, obviously relevant contexts. He was a stimulating companion, with an easy engaging manner, who commanded respect and friendship through his agreeable demeanour as much as by his intellectual prowess. A pleasing sense of humour and engaging modesty were other notable characteristics.

Halsbury's curriculum vitae, necessarily quoted selectively, bears out his distinction. Following a first class honours degree in Chemistry and Mathematics, he worked successively for Lever Brothers, Brown Firth and Decca, in the latter case as research director. At Decca he oversaw the development of the long-playing record. In addition to his duties as research director, he undertook the role of production manager to good effect. Still a comparatively young man, his next appointment was as managing director of the National Research Development Corporation, a post he held from 1949 to 1959. (This body, set up by the post-war Labour government, had vested in it, all patentable government inventions, and was charged to help with the development of these.) Subsequently, Halsbury became a consultant, and undertook a range of advisory work, including directorships as well as consultancy to Joseph Lucas Industries, Distillers and Head-Wrightson. He was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1969. He was also a fellow of other institutions, including honorary fellowships of the Institution of Civil Engineers, of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and of the Institute of Biology,

as well as the holder of a number of honorary degrees and fellowships.

These bare bones of a working career do scant justice to Halsbury's contribution to public affairs, however. He was in demand as an active member of numerous committees, councils and advisory boards. He sat on several bodies concerned with pay in the National Health Service, on several broadly scientific committees and on a number of high level committees dealing with academic matters, including the Science Research Council. He chaired many of these. He was president of several professional and learned societies, including bodies as diverse as the Institute of Production Engineers, the Royal Institute of Philosophy, the National Institute of Industrial Psychologists and the College of Speech Therapists. Moreover, he was an active Chancellor of Brunel University for no less a period than 31 years, from its foundation until 1997. Perhaps the most conspicuous of his involvements, in that it brought his work most into the public eye, was that on the Decimal Currency Board.

Though a familiar of many of the Operational Research pioneers, Halsbury was never an OR worker in a narrow sense, but he was a user of OR in, for example, his work on the Decimal Currency Board. Rather he was a man whose entire career was informed by thinking of a kind that those of us who do work in OR would like to think characterises the activity. He was not a scientist or engineer who contented himself with the orthodoxies of the subject so much as a man who saw science and engineering as means of informing the practical life, the generation of well-founded action and of sensible policy development. He encouraged a similar outlook in others, who almost always responded enthusiastically to his lead.

The Operational Research Society was fortunate to have enjoyed its share of such a man's time. He became the Society's fourth President at the suggestion of a similarly talented person, though one more actively engaged directly in OR, Sir Charles Goodeve, who felt that Halsbury was the right man to consolidate what was still an infant society. Halsbury's presidency was thus at a time when the society was finding its feet and his guidance at that formative time was highly valued by those who most closely observed him at work. He was one of the last Presidents who was not of the society, so to say, and many of the relevant generation still

feel something was lost when the Society's practice changed to looking inside itself to fill its most senior office. Those advancing the argument for the 'outsider' would find Halsbury's presidency a powerful argument for their case.

Such men as Halsbury come along rarely. He will be missed by many, but leaves achievements that make a

celebration of his life as appropriate as commiseration at his death.

George Mitchell and Pat Rivett