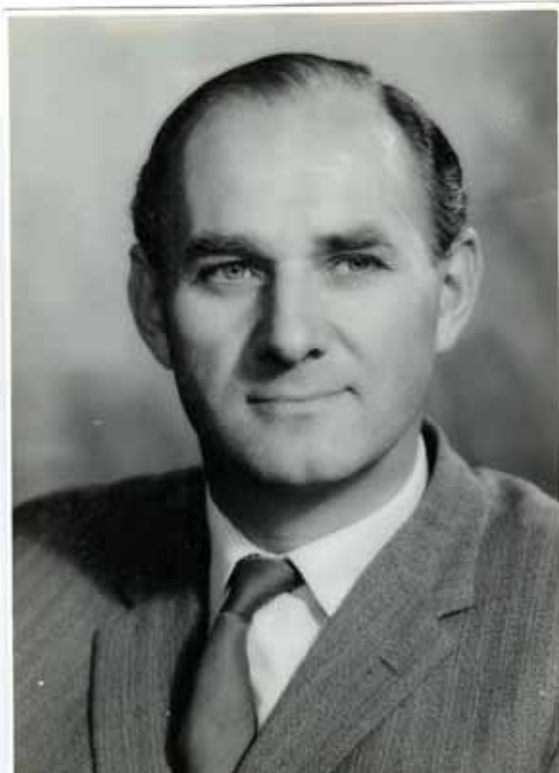


## Sir Campbell Fraser; an Appreciation



Sir Campbell Fraser FRSE, who died on 27 April, shortly before his 84<sup>th</sup> birthday, was one of the leading industrialists of his generation. As Chairman of one of the UK's largest manufacturing companies from 1977 until 1983, he helped to navigate British industry through a period when conditions were particularly hostile. As President of the Confederation of British Industry during the early years of the Thatcher Government, he provided a quality of national leadership which, although controversial, was much needed. He was also Chairman of Scottish Television, a non-executive director of several other companies, the author of numerous articles, and the founder of a professional society which now enjoys an influential role in British economic affairs. Although his work was international in scope and London-centred, he was committed to the interest of his native Scotland throughout his life.

James Campbell Fraser was born in Dunblane, in 1923. He was the son of the local postmaster, and attended the local school before proceeding to McLaren High School in Callander, and thence to Glasgow University. His studies there however were interrupted in 1941 by war service, and he flew operationally with the RAF as a navigator until 1945, an experience he always considered himself fortunate to have survived. His RAF training had been in Canada and he studied there at McMaster University before returning to Scotland, attending Dundee School of Economics, then under the wing of St Andrews University, where he graduated BCom in 1950. The same year he married Myra McLaren, whom he had first met (and been much taken with) in his teens. They were to remain together for 52 years. It was a very happy marriage, and he was devoted to his two daughters.

His career started modestly as an economist with the Raw Cotton Council in Liverpool. After two years he moved to London and a similar position with the Economist Intelligence Unit. The use of economists in business was at that time rare, and they worked in isolation. Campbell felt this keenly. He organised a meeting for the few he knew, and any that they in turn might know, so that they might establish some rapport. At that meeting it was agreed to establish a discussion forum under the title "Business Economists Group". It met formally for the first time shortly afterwards in a local pub, and elected Campbell its first Chairman. The Group grew very rapidly, was incorporated with legal status in 1960, and became the Society of Business Economists nine years later. The growth in size and stature of the Society, which is now a body of some influence and standing, became a source of much satisfaction to him. He was President from 1973 to 1985, and remained associated with its affairs until shortly before his death.

Campbell's approach to his professional life reflected the ethics and disciplines of his upbringing. He believed in hard work and a simple lifestyle, becoming known as "Ten o' Clock Fraser" for his insistence that events should not go on too late and intrude on a good night's sleep. He also believed in the creative function of companies, that they should serve all those within them and the community as well as their customers, and was a strong believer in employee involvement whenever this was legally possible. He disliked greed, and could become quite passionate in private about company directors whose priority was personal gain. On the two occasions when he was unjustly accused by the media of pursuing this himself, he was noticeably upset.

This approach became evident early in his career. Having moved from the Economist Intelligence Unit to Dunlop Rubber Company Ltd as a public relations officer in 1957, he was sent to New Zealand a few years later to close down the company's local subsidiary. He ignored his brief and turned the operation around, restoring it to viability. On his return to the UK he was made an executive director. He became a joint managing director in 1971, sole managing director the following year, and Chairman six years later, a position he held until 1983. As Chairman, he steered Dunlop through a period of exceptional difficulty for UK manufacturing. He was also responsible for one of the first attempts by a UK manufacturing company to effect a trans-European merger, with Pirelli of Italy. Such mergers are normal today, but the idea at that time was radical and broke new ground. In the event it proved too difficult to consummate effectively, and was abandoned. Nevertheless, it was an imaginative attempt to meet the extreme domestic and competitive pressures which British industry was then facing.

Towards the end of his Chairmanship he was elected President of the CBI. He was outspokenly effective, if controversial for his view (based on hard experience and in no way ideological) that continuing with the Thatcher Government's economic and labour policies was essential if the UK economy was to reverse its long term decline. During his Presidency, he led a mission to Japan which began the opening of the hitherto closed Japanese market to British imports, and the process of redressing the imbalance in trade flows between the two countries.

Outside Dunlop, he became a non-executive director of a wide spread of manufacturing and financial organisations, giving up the last (as a trustee of The Economist) only last year. Amongst these were British Petroleum, where he remained on the Scottish Advisory Board until 1997, and Wells Fargo Bank, where he was a member of the international advisory board. As an aficionado of Westerns, he found the latter involvement particularly agreeable. He was also a most successful and active Chairman of Scottish Television, a post he held for 16 years, from 1975 until 1991. He was instrumental in enabling Scottish Television to retain its franchise at an economic cost, earning much respect from the financial institutions for so doing.

Although still centred on London, the Chairmanship of Scottish Television took him back to Scotland regularly, and reintegrated him with Scottish life. He and Myar had a house built in Dunblane, incorporating stone from the old local cinema where they had once courted. He resumed his relationship with Dundee Football Club, and became (but not as a consequence) a visiting professor at Strathclyde and Stirling Universities. He was an early Chairman of Strathclyde Business School and a member of the Court of St Andrews University. He received honorary degrees from both Strathclyde and Stirling, and from Bishop's University in Canada. He was elected to Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1978, and knighted the same year.

Tall and distinguished, with an engaging personality, twinkling charm and an entertaining manner, Campbell Fraser was widely liked, not least for his complete lack of pomposity. Collecting a scratch lunch at the very modest sandwich bar opposite his London flat in a side street in Victoria, he would be welcomed by the proprietors with genuine Italianate affection. In the distinguished surroundings of London's Caledonian Club, of which he had once been Chairman and was in later years the most senior member, he was invariably greeted warmly and was as at ease with the staff as he was with his fellow members. He will be remembered by all those who encountered him, knew him or worked with him, however, not primarily for this absence of affectation, but for his depth of judgement, for his ready willingness to share his profound professionalism, for his determination and integrity, and for his deep feeling for Scotland.

**Donald Anderson**

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