

Obituary: Lord Murray of Newhaven, KCB (1903–1993)

By RICHARD PERREN

KETH Anderson Hope Murray, President of the British Agricultural History Society from 1959 to 1961, was one of the leading figures in British higher education in the three decades following the war. He was chairman of the University Grants Committee from 1952 to 1963. During that time he laid the foundations for the rapid growth that followed the publication of the Robbins report in 1963. On his retirement from the chairmanship he was described by Lord Hailsham as 'the right man in the right place at the same time'.

He was the third son of Lord Murray, a Scottish judge, and Nancy Nicholson. He went to Edinburgh University and took a BSc in agriculture with the intention of becoming a farmer. He entered the Board of Agriculture in 1925, but in 1926 was elected to a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship at Cornell University. During his three years at Cornell he built up a reputation as a young scholar who was taking a leading part in the developments in agricultural economics. After completing his PhD at Cornell he returned to Britain in 1929 and became a graduate student at Oriel College, Oxford. He presented a successful BLitt and entered the Agricultural Economics Research Institute there.

It was during the pre-war years, and before the many other aspects of his career made increasing demands on his time, that Murray produced most of the work that is best known by agricultural historians. In 1931 his *Factors Affecting the Prices of Livestock in Great Britain* was published, based on the work for his PhD. This slim volume of 180 pages was well ahead of its time; its author used statistical techniques well before the age of the computer to isolate the separate effects of various demand and supply factors from the 1870s onwards. In the deep depression of the 1930s he published two books with Lord Astor. These revealed his interest in and command of the general question

of agriculture as well as the particular matters of agricultural microeconomics. *Land and Life* (1932) outlined a national policy for agriculture, showing that money would be better spent on supporting livestock, milk, vegetable, and fruit production than subsidising wheat and sugar beet. The other, *The Planning of Agriculture* (1933) searched for a balanced policy and discussed to what extent central planning was desirable, and how far measures that had already been introduced — such as marketing schemes — were likely to succeed. In addition, in these years he published frequent articles in the Research Institute's series *The Farm Economist*, as well as other institute studies on the effects of the agricultural legislation of the later 1930s.

At the start of the war he requested active service and spent two years as a RAFVR radar controller. The rest of the time he was in the Ministry of Food, where it had been planned to send him in 1939. Here he filled a post that matched his abilities, as the director of the Food and Agriculture, Middle East Supply Centre. His job was not merely one of supplying allied troops, for he controlled an area greater than the size of Europe with over 80 million civilians to feed, and where he had to deal with problems ranging from grain hoarding to plagues of locusts. After the war he made one return to writing on British agriculture with his important volume on *Agriculture* (1955) in the History of the Second World War series.

Following his years on the UGC he received honorary degrees from several universities, a KCB and a life peerage, as well as becoming Chancellor of the University of Southampton. He was also associated with the Leverhulme Trust and the Wellcome Trust, and accepted positions on the boards of Metal Box and Bristol Aero companies. A devout Presbyterian who never married, he is survived by his younger brother and several nephews and nieces.