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THE BOURNE FAMILY – EXTRAORDINARY TALENT!

April 2017

We wrote a Cobbweb in August 2012 under the title **An Olympic Centenary** which highlighted the almost unbelievable talent of three generations of the Bournes; **Gilbert** (1861-1933) #4912 on the family tree; his son **Robert (Bob)** (1888-1938) and his son **Robert** (1918-1995). In addition to being one of only 2 families who have provided three generations of oarsmen in the same boat (Oxford) they all had careers of exceptional merit. Recent research has shown a gaping void in the story thus far. Third generation, Robert had a younger brother, **John Wilfrid** (1922-1999) who possessed a talent every bit as formidable as that of his siblings and forebears. Here is his story as entered on the family tree.

From his childhood, it was clear that Wilfrid had a remarkably powerful intellect. While only 10 or 11, he would exchange Greek iambs with his elder brother during their pillow fights, and he never lost his gift for pointed quotation from the Classics. But it is as a pillar of the Lord Chancellor's Department from 1956 to 1982 that he will be remembered.

The second son of Robert Bourne, MP for Oxford City, (#1187 on the family tree) and **Lady Hester Bourne**, eldest daughter of the fourth **Earl Cairns** and granddaughter of Lord Chancellor Cairns, he went, like his father and grandfather before him, to Eton, entering as a King's Scholar and becoming Newcastle Scholar and, in 1940, Captain of the School. He obtained the Ella Stephens Greek Scholarship to New College, Oxford, and took a First in Mods in 1941 before joining up.

Commissioned in the Rifle Brigade, he served as signal officer with the 1st Battalion from November 1942 to May 1945, being demobilised in December 1945, and returning to Oxford to read Jurisprudence, in which he obtained another First.

He was called to the Bar in 1948, obtaining the Harmsworth and Eldon scholarships; was offered a seat in Stevenson's chambers, and joined the Oxford circuit.

In 1956, after eight years in chambers he entered the Lord Chancellor's Office at the age of 34 as one of the small group of lawyers working close to the Lord Chancellor.

He served for many years as secretary to the Law Reform Committee, where his speed and clarity of thought, deep knowledge of the law, and sound grasp of practicalities contributed much to reports such as the review of the law of evidence in civil cases, on which the Civil Evidence Act 1968 was based.



Gilbert Charles Bourne

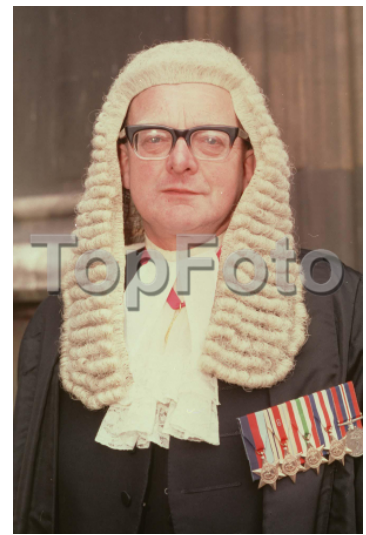


Robert (Bob) Bourne

In 1977 he was appointed to the paired offices of Clerk of the Crown in Chancery and Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor. This involved him in a good deal of administration, and brought him into contact with the Bar and the judiciary in his capacity as adviser on judicial and other appointments. He took a lot of trouble over this, but was never a popular figure with that constituency, perhaps because he was a shy man and no extrovert. Yet beneath his shyness Wilfrid Bourne was a very kind and generous person, taking great pleasure in his family and in teaching his grandchildren Pelmanism and racing demon.

John Wilfrid Bourne, barrister: called to the Bar, Middle Temple 1948; staff, Lord Chancellor's Office 1956-82; Principal Assistant Solicitor 1970-72; Deputy Secretary 1972-77; Clerk of the Crown in Chancery & Permanent Secretary 1977-82. CB 1975, KCB 1979, QC 1981.

Abridged from The Independent 15th November 1999.



John Wilfrid Bourne, courtesy (rather obviously!) Topfoto