Andrew McFarlane

Doctor of Civil Law

Durham Cathedral, 29 June 2018

Sir Andrew McFarlane is one of Durham University's most accomplished law graduates. His road to success is not a straight line, but a story of opportunities with Durham playing a key role in it and important lessons for our students graduating today.

Sir Andrew's early ambition was not for the courtroom, but the stage and he has long held a passion for the theatre. As a young student, he recalls his acting and interest in debating helped pave the way to becoming a barrister. A courtroom trial can be kind of theatre, too.

Two things led him to Durham. The first is he was from the Midlands and he wanted to move far away from it with Durham fitting this bill nicely. The second is Sir Andrew recalls he did not choose Durham so much as Durham chose him, as the only one of the universities he applied to that had the good sense and foresight to recognise his talents and offer him a place.

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says he learned a lot about running a large organisation and responsibilities in running an office as a young man that came so useful in his later years.

Of course, there was his main interest as a law student in the early 1970s ï not for the library, but the stage. Sir Andrew regularly took part in various student productions. After an early trip with fellow students to perform at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival with his group DUST (Durham University Sensible Thespians), they saw that Durham lacked a review group like at Bristol or Oxford. So they started one at Durham ï and no doubt better.

Sir Andrew took interest in his law studies as well and found inspiration in key members of the Durham University's then much smaller Department of Law. One former teacher was Leo Blair, a former barrister at the Bar in Newcastle who became a part-time criminal law lecturer after his wife died so he could look after his children.

Sir Andrew recalls the 9am Friday lecture in 1974 following a General Election when Blair stopped talking about *mens rea* and instead said ñoh heck, what an awful resultò dismayed that Labour's Harold Wilson had defeated Edward Heath. No one could have guessed that the next Labour Prime Minister would be Blair's son Tony two decades later.

A second memorable figure was Professor Bernie Smythe, described a plain speaking Londoner and former Met police officer who specialised in property law with a particular gift at making the difficult concepts accessible.

While also having an opportunity to study Family Law while at University, Sir Andrew recalls Durham then as a much smaller place where you able to get to know everyone and they got to know you. One fellow graduate he got to know from his year was Jill Black, who joined the UK Supreme Court this past October.

Leaving with a talent in Property Law and Trusts Law, he began his 1st pupillage at a Chancery set at Lincoln's Inn. He then soon returned to the midlands at a common law set specialising in about everything and happily so for another five or six years.

But something happened that soon changed the course of his career. A solicitor that had often worked with his set came to him with adoption cases from Birmingham City Council. While he had been exposed to some Family Law during his Durham studies,