

OCHJS NEWS BULLETIN No. 27 : DECEMBER 2005

One of our regular bulletins will follow early in the new year. At this moment we have some sad news which we thought we should share with you at once – if, indeed, you have not already seen it in the Press.

David Patterson, our Founder President, died peacefully on the morning of Saturday 10th December at the age of 83. Despite having been retired since 1992 David never ceased until the very last weeks of his life to devote himself in equal measure to his own scholarly endeavours and to the interests and requirements of the Centre which he created. Many of his Oxford friends and colleagues will recall his swansong (as he himself dubbed it) on 27 April, a masterly survey lecture delivered without a note in the Long Gallery at Yarnton Manor on the emergence of modern Hebrew literature.

Of course the best commemoration of David, and the one that he himself wanted above all others, will be to consolidate and develop the work of the Centre, carrying it (in one of his own favourite phrases) from strength to strength. As an immediate recollection we reproduce here the tribute paid to him by Isaiah Berlin in the Introduction to a volume of essays published in celebration of his 70th birthday and indeed retirement. Some sentences from it were quoted by Raymond Dwek in his address at David's funeral on 14 December.

"I have known Dr Patterson since he came to Oxford many years ago, and I know of no man who combines his kindness, professional and personal integrity, common sense and administrative skills to such a degree. His success, amazing only to those who do not fully appreciate his qualities, is in itself evidence of his gifts.

He is a man with exceptional sincerity and purity of heart. All that he has done—the administration of the Oxford Centre, his relationships with the trustees and the staff, the pastoral care of the students and the judgement he has shown in selecting distinguished scholars from Israel and elsewhere to become fellows of the Centre—seems to be successful. The security of the Centre owes everything to his approach, which is at once clear, intelligent, modest and morally moving, and has helped gain the financial support of various individuals who, I believe, might have resisted a more "dynamic", more insistent or less truthful and dedicated applicant. His remarkable success in obtaining funds—at times very large ones—on which all academic institutions depend, is directly due to Dr Patterson's personality: he is anything but a professional fundraiser. It is his head and his heart which have done it all.

In addition to this work for the Centre, he has done truly original work on nineteenth-century Hebrew literature in Russia—a comparatively neglected field which provided the base without which the modern Jewish renaissance, particularly of the Hebrew language and the culture of contemporary Israel, could scarcely have developed.

In short, his combination of moral, academic and administrative qualities should be the envy of any Head of a college or institution in any country. He is a learned, charming, decent and wholly admirable human being, and so, indeed, is his wife, José, whose devoted activities in the Centre deserve great gratitude and praise.”¹

With seasonal greetings and sincere good wishes,

Peter Oppenheimer
President

¹ *Jewish Education and Learning* (Published in honour of Dr David Patterson on the occasion of his seventieth birthday)