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# Register

## Obituaries

# Sir John Burgh

Child refugee from Nazism who became one of Britain's most senior civil servants and a leading figure in the country's cultural life

Sir John Burgh's life was a remarkable one. Arriving in Britain as a penniless refugee from Nazism in the 1930s, he rose to become one of the country's most senior civil servants and a leading figure in public life. After serving at the head of the Department of Economic Affairs and the Department of Employment, he was for seven years Director-General of the British Council, promoting to the world the culture of his adopted land. His final post was as president of Trinity College, Oxford.

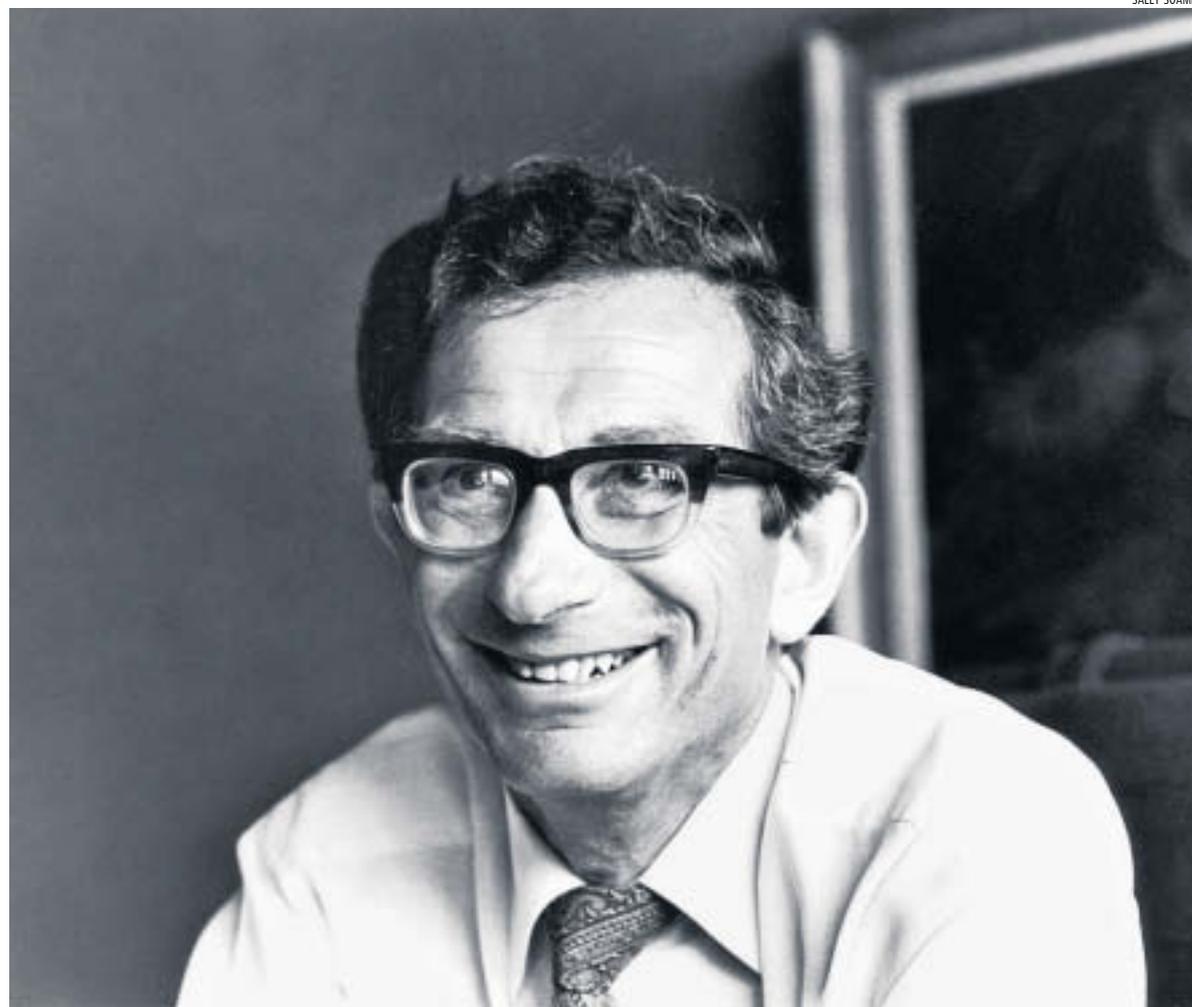
John Charles Burgh was born in Vienna in 1925 to parents who were secular Jews. The family were baptised in an attempt to escape rising anti-Semitism in Austria. Burgh's father died in 1937, but his mother had a Quaker connection who helped John, then aged 12, and his sister Lucy to emigrate to England in 1938. She was able to follow them before war broke out.

## He found George Brown so difficult to work with that he asked to move

Burgh attended the Friends School in Sibford, Oxfordshire, one of the Quaker schools that was taking in refugee children. There was no money for him to continue his schooling beyond the age of 15 and he left Sibford in 1940 to work in munitions factories.

He took correspondence courses in a variety of subjects for six years, and then went to the London School of Economics, initially as an evening student. In 1947 he won a bursary to become a full-time student and two years later was elected president of its student union.

That year, not long naturalised, he was one of the British representatives on an international student commission which the United States military government in Germany had set up to visit and report on the conditions and atmosphere in postwar German



**Burgh: a passionate, knowledgeable music lover, he chaired the trustees of the definitive edition of the works of Berlioz**

student unions. He left the LSE in 1950 but from 1985 to 1987, he became chairman of its Court of Governors.

On leaving university, Burgh joined the Civil Service. He had a long spell at the Board of Trade from 1950 to 1964, interrupted by three years — 1959 to 1962 — at the Colonial Office, where

he had the Hong Kong desk. He was also for a time private secretary to Sir Derick Heathcot-Amory, the President of the Board of Trade.

In 1964 Burgh moved to the Department of Economic Affairs as PPS to the mercurial George Brown, who was so difficult to work for that he asked for a

transfer. However, the head of the Cabinet Office urged him to persevere, promising "it would be remembered". In 1968 Burgh was transferred to the Department of Employment to become PPS, first to Barbara Castle and then to Robert Carr (obituary, February 20, 2012).

From 1971 to 1972 he was seconded to the Community Relations Commission. The Civil Service called him back to become, from 1972 to 1974, deputy chair, under Lord Rothschild, of the Central Policy Review Staff, popularly known as the government think tank. He was then PPS to Shirley Williams at the Department of Prices and Consumer Protection. He impressed all these ministers with his thought, attention to detail, imperturbability, tact and charm.

After leaving the Civil Service in 1980, his official career was crowned by his two most important and satisfying appointments, for he would now be his own boss. From 1980 to 1987, Burgh served as Director-General of the British Council, whose main purpose is to promote an interest in British culture abroad. Then, from 1987 to his retirement in 1996, he was president of Trinity College, Oxford.

Burgh was a passionate, knowledgeable lover of music. He was secretary of the Opera Committee at Covent Garden, chairman of the National Opera Co-ordinating Committee, chairman of the Board of the Royal School of Music and vice-chairman of the Yehudi Menuhin School. At the British Council and at Oxford he was an indefatigable encourager of young musicians. After retirement he was chairman of the trustees supervising the definitive edition of the music of Berlioz.

In *Who's Who* he listed "Friends" as his main recreation. Among their number was Bernard Levin, the distinguished journalist, in whose memory he and other friends instituted in 2007 the Bernard Levin Award for aspiring journalists from the LSE, and Lord Joffe, whose campaign for assisted dying Burgh strongly supported. He was a patron of Dignity in Dying.

In 1957 he married Ann Sturge. She survives him, as do his two daughters.

**Sir John Burgh, KCMG, CB, civil servant, was born on December 9, 1925. He died on April 12, 2013, aged 87**

# Adrian Higham

Educational publisher who excelled at developing far-flung markets and who wrote a biography of the Emperor Diocletian in blank verse

Adrian Higham was a publisher of an international bent who made his mark in four continents. He worked for Longmans in Britain for many years and for two more in Malaysia, leading its drive to expand the sales of its higher education lists in Asian and African markets. Then in 1976 he moved to John Wiley, first to run its British business and then to take overall charge of its international division in New York. For both companies he travelled indefatigably, his lanky figure, easy smile and conscientious, principled approach to business becoming well known in remote markets as well as easier ones.

John Adrian Evans Higham was born in Wimbledon in 1928 into a bookish household. His mother was a much-published writer on the early modern period of British history, his father was a leading figure in Longmans, whom he remembered flying around the world making book deals.

Evacuation with his prep school and then a move to Blundell's School in Devon took him away from wartime London, but in the school holidays he found an active role as a volunteer fire-watcher in Longmans' stockrooms.

National Service came next and after winning the Belt of Honour at officer training school he was posted to Palestine as a Royal Engineers subaltern. There he defused mines and unexploded bombs and, according to family legend, in the course of the evacuation of British forces from Palestine to Egypt he mislaid an entire Bailey bridge in the Sinai desert.

Higham went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1949 to read English and geography. Graduating in 1952, it was natural for him to follow in his father's footsteps at Longmans. Here he specialised in overseas educational publishing. He became a member of the board in 1963 and in 1965 moved with his

young family to Malaysia to represent the company there. He came home to become in turn Longmans' distribution director in 1966 and managing director of the further education department in the following year.

A merger of the company with Pearson left him with limited prospects for further advancement and after 24 years with Longmans he was tempted by an offer from John Wiley, the New York publisher, to run its British company. It was based in Chichester, and Higham became as familiar a figure around that small city as he already was around the book trade markets of the world.

Higham stayed in the Chichester office for six years. Then in 1982, aged 54, Wiley invited him to move to New York to take charge of its international business. Higham himself was already the chairman of the Society of Scholarly Publishers division of the Publishers

Association in Britain. Now he achieved the same distinction in the American Association; he was the only man ever to lead both.

The Highams stayed in New York for six fulfilling years. They came home to Chichester in 1988, she to continue the psychotherapeutic work she had begun in New York, he to pursue with an American colleague publishing consultancy projects for the World Bank in far-flung places. The couple soon rebuilt the position in Chichester life which they had left six years earlier.

By now their sons had started families of their own. Among the new members of the family was a much-loved but profoundly handicapped grandson with cerebral palsy. Higham threw himself as a governor and trustee into the work of two local organisations devoted to helping children and young people like his grandson. He became a governor of what is now the University

of Chichester. And at the suggestion of the Duke of Richmond he took on the management of a local business association.

But Higham had always lived in the world of books and now he turned his attention to writing them. He produced a sophisticated work of family history, *Of Myth and Ancestor Worship*. Even more ambitiously, he wrote and published between hard covers a 250-page biography of the Emperor Diocletian in blank verse, *The Tale of a Singular Man*, which now retails in the second-hand market at twice its original price.

In 1974 Higham was appointed MBE for services to publishing. He is survived by his wife, Jean, and by four sons.

**Adrian Higham, MBE, publisher, was born on October 21, 1928. He died on March 22, 2013, aged 84**