

## Citation for Professor Ronald Urwick Cooke

Induction of Honorary Fellows and Associates

Friday 23rd July 1993

Visitor to the College, it is my pleasure to present to you Professor Ronald Cooke.

It is fitting that today Royal Holloway should seek to honour a past Professor of Geography, Dean of Science and Vice Principal of Bedford College who will, on 1st October 1993 take up the position of Vice Chancellor of the University of York.

Ronald Urwick Cooke was educated at Ashford Grammar School, Kent which at that time nurtured a now-distinguished group of British Earth Scientists - Ron being the only one to take the 'great' challenge and become a Geographer. After a minor 'hiccup' (which the Geography Staff at University College are delighted to relate) he was accepted by the Geography Department at University College London, where he was awarded successively: a distinguished first, an MSc by thesis with a mark of distinction and in 1968 a PhD on aspects of desert geomorphology

Ronald Cooke continued at University College as Lecturer and Reader until 1975 when he was appointed Professor of

Geography, and Head of Department at Bedford College. At this time the Geography Department was in some disarray and morale was at a very low ebb. Until 1981, when he returned to the challenges of the largest Geography department in the UK at University College he worked to restore the morale and self respect of the geographers at Bedford, and past students and academic and technical staff alike will tell you that he worked with great skill and sensitivity to carry out this task and achieved the utmost success. In a quiet, but persistent and perceptive manner for which he is renowned, he also served the College as Dean of Science and Vice Principal.

In the scientific field he is a 'world figure' in desert geomorphology and weathering processes, and the range of his research areas - from Death Valley, USA to the building stones of St Paul's Cathedral, London, illustrate his wide range of interests and activities. At the same time as carrying out the more 'conventional' academic investigations he developed his interests in applied Geomorphology and set up, with colleagues from other British Universities the company 'Geomorphological Services Ltd' which until being taken over recently by a larger competitor, has served the community well. Indeed, one of the present staff of the Geography and Geology Departments 'cut his teeth' with this firm. He has maintained his belief in the links between the academic and the commercial world by sponsoring the establishment of companies associated with UCL.

Ronald Cooke also set a mark on the subject of Geography by his example of working with overseas governments and major commercial concerns on issues of critical environmental importance. Over the period 1974 to 1988 his research has been sponsored by the governments of Bahrain, Dubai, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and linked with companies such as Sir William Halcrow and Partners.

Throughout his career, Ronald Cooke has consistently informed the world of his important discoveries by major publications in international journals, consultancy reports, or as major books, of which the most recent: 'Desert Geomorphology' was published earlier this year. Recognition for his scientific achievements is demonstrated by visiting professorships at the Universities of California at Los Angeles, Arizona at Tuscon and Wisconsin at Madison, and appointment to every major UK Geography organisation, including the council of the Royal Geographical Society and the Chairman of the Heads of Geography Departments in the UK. He has also been elected to many of the appropriate important national committees on bodies such as NERC and international organisations such as the International Geographical Union.

Despite this high level of scientific activity, and the maintenance of a teaching role in the Geography Department at UCL he continued to carry out the management skills that characterised his time at Bedford College and he was targeted in 1990 at Dean of Arts and then in 1991 as Vice-Provost at University College. Around this time there was also much talk

about appointments to Vice Chancellors and certain individuals in the Geographical field were known to be 'showing interest,' let us say, on more than one occasion. In this 'hyped-up' environment Ron Cooke is known to have said that 'he will not be applying whatever anyone else is doing'. And clearly there was no need. The firm of 'head hunters' representing the University of York did what was required of them and in 1992 it was announced the Professor Ronald Cooke would be the next Vice Chancellor of the University of York, as from October 1993. Throughout the country, heads nodded and there was universal acclaim for the wisdom of that Yorkshire university.

In recognition of his contribution to this College at a critical time in the history of its Geography department, and to the cause of geomorphological research and the professionalism of Geography generally, may I invite you, Visitor to the College, to induct as Honorary Fellow, Professor Ronald Cooke.

J. Rose,

20th July 1993.