

JOHN ANDREW SIMPSON

CITATION FOR AN HONORARY DEGREE

Mr Chancellor, it is my privilege to present for a degree of the University, John Andrew Simpson.

John Simpson took his first degree at the University of York, graduating from a school of English studies which had a particular strength in medieval studies and which was distinguished for its interdisciplinary work in the humanities. He first found employment in the Dictionaries Department of Oxford University Press in 1976, and in 1981 was appointed as a Senior Editor working on the 4-volume Supplement to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Here, under the chalciferous New Zealander, Robert Burchfield, he served his apprenticeship as a long-distance lexicographer: the Supplements took 14 years in all, but they brought up-to-date a dictionary - the 10 volume *Oxford English Dictionary* - which had taken some 44 years to complete.

In 1986, on the completion of the Supplements, he and his colleague, Edmund Weiner, became Co-Editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, publishing the second, integrated, edition of the dictionary in 20 volumes in 1989, and on CDROM in 1992. In 1993, at the age of 40, John Simpson was appointed Chief Editor of the Dictionary, with a new edition, requiring a complete revision of the present content, as well as the integration of new material collected between now and then, scheduled for the Year 2010. He became the central, and most influential, figure in contemporary English lexicography.

Also in 1986, John Simpson was nominated as the 'minder' of the *Australian National Dictionary*, to be published in 1988. Thus began an association with The Australian National University and the Australian National Dictionary Centre which was of benefit to both parties: to Oxford in that it gained the experience of having small lexicographical 'outposts' and to the Centre in that it gained access to Oxford expertise and materials. For both, the conduit was John Simpson.

But John Simpson is not simply a lexicographer. He is as familiar with the powers of a computer as previous generations were in the practice of a pen, and knows that it is only with the aid of the computer that Oxford will be able to keep pace with the rapidity of the change and growth that

occurs in a language which now serves many parts of the world of Britain alone. In John Simpson we see a man with the training of a chalcantous lexicographer, who is also something of a visionary - but a very practical visionary for whom Australian English is as much a part of 'world English' as is that of his native Gloucestershire.

His publications include the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, contributions to many other works, including *Oxford English* and *Words*, and articles in *Medium Ævum* and *English Today*, and to other lexicographical and linguistic periodicals.

With the award of this degree, the University is recognising John Simpson for all that he has done for *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Australian National Dictionary* and the Centre which continues its work and its name, but it is also anticipating the publication of a *New Oxford English Dictionary* in the tenth year of the next millennium. It is acknowledging one of the great and generous acts of international scholarship at the same time as it associates itself with one of the visionary desiderata of the next century, an on-line resource encompassing all branches of English.

Mr Chancellor, it is with great pleasure that I present to you John Andrew Simpson, that you may confer on him the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, on the ground of his distinguished creative achievement as a scholar in lexicography.

Professor Frank Jackson
Director, Institute of Advanced Studies and
Chairperson, Board of the Institute of Advanced Studies
The Australian National University

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