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Lord Cooke of Thorndon, 1926 - 2006

Robin Brunskill Cooke, Lord Cooke of Thorndon, the only New Zealand judge to have sat in the House of Lords, died in Wellington on the night of 30-31 August 2006.

Considered by many to be New Zealand's greatest jurist, Lord Cooke was made a life peer in 1996 and a Privy Councillor in 1997. He was the first Commonwealth judge to sit in the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords.

"Lord Cooke was a great New Zealander," the Chief Justice, Dame Sian Elias, said at his funeral service in the Wellington Cathedral of St Paul on 4 September.



Lord Robin Cooke.

"No judge in my lifetime performed a greater role for the New Zealand judicial profession," she said. "His impact on New Zealand law has been immense. There is no area of law that his judgments did not touch." ✓

At the time Lord Cooke came to the bench in 1972, judgments in New Zealand were almost slavishly reliant on the precedents set in England - but that was something Justice Cooke had a major hand in changing.

He was, in fact, a key to the development of a unique New Zealand jurisprudence, the Chief Justice said, describing Lord Cooke as the finest judge New Zealand had produced.

The son of Supreme Court judge Justice Philip Cooke and his wife, Valmai, Lord Cooke was born in Wellington on 9 May 1926. He attended Wellesley College and Wanganui Collegiate School and graduated from Victoria University with an LLM in 1949. He also studied at Gonville and Caius College at Cambridge, gaining an MA in 1954 and a PhD a year later.

Robin Cooke was admitted in 1950 and practised as a barrister for almost 20 years.

3rd His father had been the youngest barrister in New Zealand to take silk, a record that was slashed when he was appointed a QC at the age of 38 in 1964.

In 1972 he was appointed a judge of the former Supreme Court (now the High Court) and moved to the Court of Appeal bench in 1976, serving as president from 1986 until he was granted a British life peerage 10 years later.

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He also sat (from time to time) as president in the Courts of Appeal of Samoa, the Cook Islands and Kiribati, as well as being a non-permanent judge on the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal and a judge of the Fijian Supreme Court, where he served from 1997 until this year.

In 2002, Lord Cooke was made a member of the Order of New Zealand, an honour open to only 20 living New Zealanders at any time. He was made a Knight Bachelor in 1977 and a Knight Commander of the British Empire (KBE) in 1986.

He was awarded three honorary law doctorates – an LLD from Victoria University in 1989, an LLD from Cambridge University in 1990 and a DCL (Doctor of Civil Law) from Oxford University in 1991.

In 1952 he married Annette Miller and the couple had three sons – Philip, Christopher and Francis Cooke QC.

A prolific writer, especially well known for his written (as well as oral) judgments and his contributions to law journals, Robin Cooke edited *Portrait of a Profession – the centennial book of the New Zealand Law Society*, published by AH & AW Reed in 1969.

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