

Daily Telegraph, Wednesday 5th July 2023

Sir David Brewer

Garner Knight, Lord Mayor of London and insurance broker

SIR DAVID BREWER, who has died aged 83, was successively Lord Mayor of London and Lord Lieutenant of Greater London before being appointed a Knight of the Garter; he was also a leader of the London insurance market and a champion of British trade with China.

David Brewer spent his working life with Sedgwick, the City insurance broker, and latterly with its US parent, Marsh (which bought Sedgwick in 1998), specialising in developing the group's Asian businesses. Having joined as a teenager in 1959, he completed his half-century when he was Marsh UK's vice-chairman from 2007 to 2009.

In his professional career Brewer made more than 100 visits to China – and when he took office as London's 678th Lord Mayor in November 2005 he made the expansion of business relations with the emerging Asian superpower a major theme of his year in office.

His itineraries included remote Chinese provinces and even Mongolia, then celebrating the 800th anniversary of its foundation by Genghis Khan – who, he said, “would have made a good insurance broker: he went out and met people, did the business [then] came back home.”

Genial, courtly, voluble and energetic, Brewer went on to be lord-lieutenant of Greater London from 2008 to 2015 – fulfilling a vast number of public and royal engagements, including the late Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012. The high personal regard in which he was evidently held by Her Majesty was marked in 2016 by the rare honour of a Garter knighthood.

David William Brewer was born in Luton on May 28 1940 to parents both of Cornish descent. His father, Dr Hugh Francis Brewer, was a clinical pathologist at St Bartholomew's Hospital specialising in blood transfusion; his mother, Elizabeth, née Nickell-Lean, sang with the D'Oyly Carte opera company.

Brought up in Hampstead, David was educated at St Paul's School and the University of Grenoble before joining what was then Sedgwick Collins in 1959.

In the mid-1970s Brewer spent three years as Sedgwick's representative in Tokyo – observing that training in the Japanese art of bowing served him well for later royal encounters. In 1981 he began building connections with China, overseeing the creation of a Sedgwick presence there, and going on to be chairman of the GB-China Centre and China-Britain Business Council. He was also responsible for Sedgwick's first office in Mumbai.

His involvement in the life of the City and its liveries had begun early, when he was apprenticed to the Merchant Taylors' at the age of 14, his father's forebears having worked in the drapery trade. He was master of the company in 2001-02 and was also prime warden of the Blacksmiths' Company. He became alderman for the Bassishaw ward in 1996 and Sheriff of the City in 2002-03. He also chaired the council of St Paul's Cathedral.

Brewer's family life was divided between Westminster – their Cowley Street house was the former home of the actor Sir John Gielgud – and a cottage in Cornwall, when he was able to escape. He was president of the London Cornish Association and the Camel Valley and Bodmin Moor Protection Society.

He loved music and listed his recreations as “golf, mechanical gardening, chocolate and paranomasia”, the latter being a love of punning. His loyal address to the Queen at a Mansion House lunch to mark her 80th birthday in 2006 included, said one report, “an excruciating catalogue of culinary puns... His aldermen laughed dutifully; Her Majesty was obscured by flowers.”

David Brewer was appointed CMG in 1999 and CVO in 2015, and knighted in 2007. He married, in 1985, Tessa Jordá, daughter of the Spanish-American orchestral conductor Enrique Jordá, who survives him with their daughters Olivia and Gabriella.

David Brewer, born May 28 1940, died May 28 2023

