

*This is the first of a series of articles written by Lorraine Sencicle covering the lives of Dovorians of international renown.*

# Francis Arthur Cockfield

by Lorraine Sencicle

However much it angered the people of Dover, the creation of a Single European Market, in 1992, is considered as the greatest achievement of the first half-century of the unification of Europe. This would probably have never been achieved if it had not been for an ex-pupil of Dover Boys' Grammar School, Francis Arthur Cockfield (pronounced "Co'field").

Known by his middle name of Arthur, according to his birth certificate, Arthur was born on 26 September 1916, in Horsham, West Sussex. It has been reported in some local papers that he was born on the Clarendon Estate. His father, Lieutenant Charles Francis Cockfield, had been killed the month before at the Battle of the Somme.

Arthur's mother, Louisa - maiden name James - possibly lived in army accommodation on the Clarendon Estate before or after Arthur's birth. By 1923, a local trade directory lists the widow and her small son living in Beaconsfield Avenue. At the age of 11, Arthur gained a scholarship to attend the Dover County Grammar School for Boys, (now Dover Boys' Grammar School). A star pupil, he went on to win a place at the London School of Economics, where he read law and economics and on graduation entered the Civil Service.

This was 1938 and working for the Inland Revenue at Whitehall, he did not expect to rise through the ranks for some time. Therefore, in his own time, he read for the bar and was called to the Inner Temple in 1942. A year later he married his first wife, Ruth Helen Simonis. They had two children. In the meantime, at the outbreak of WWII most of his department was evacuated to Wales but a handful of staff stayed in London, of which Arthur was one. This put him in the spotlight, and Arthur's precise and incisive mind was quickly recognised. His promotion was meteoric serving as Director of Statistics from 1945 to 1952 and as a Commissioner from 1951 to 1952.

A year later Arthur left the Civil Service as he had been appointed finance director of Boots the Chemist, where he went on to become the Company's managing director and then Chairman from 1961 to 1967. During this time, Arthur served on the Council of the CBI and as a stalwart Conservative was appointed a member of the National Economic Development Council (known as Neddy) from 1962 to 1964.

Why Arthur suddenly left Boots is unclear, but in 1967, he started work for the Conservative party as an advisor to Iain Macleod on taxation and economic affairs. He was also appointed President

of the Royal Statistics Society for the year 1968-9. The following year, he and Ruth having divorced, Arthur married choreographer Monica Mudie. That same year the Conservatives were elected to office, but shortly afterwards Iain Macleod died. On the appointment of Tony Barber as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Arthur was appointed adviser on taxation policy and was knighted in 1973.

In March that year the Prime Minister Edward Heath appointed Arthur Chairman of the new Price Commission and Pay Board. Inflation, at the time, was gaining momentum and the emphasis was on controlling pay. By the autumn, Arthur claimed that he had saved shoppers £320 million! The following February Heath called a General Election and Labour was returned to power. Inflation was running at 16% and Harold Wilson, the new Prime Minister, saw the need for controls so retained the Price Commission and jettisoned the Pay Board. Arthur remained in control.

Inflation was to continue to rise peaking at 28% in 1975. Arthur was particularly heavy on companies in both the public and private sector and was earning a reputation for being an authoritarian. However, he met his nemesis with the Post Office and resigned in July 1977. By that time inflation was falling and by the following April, when he was created a life peer, it stood at 8%.

As Baron Cockfield of Dover, Arthur returned as a key member of the Conservative's Economic Reconstruction

Group and following the successful election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 was appointed Minister of State at the Treasury. Working closely with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, the tax reforming budgets that followed were due to Arthur's influence. In 1982, Arthur was appointed to the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade until 1983, when it merged with the Department of Industry.

Following the 1983 election, Arthur was made Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a junior Cabinet role with no specific departmental responsibilities. He therefore became a one-man think-tank to the Prime Minister. At the time, Mrs Thatcher, who knew Arthur to be strongly Euro-sceptic, described him as "a natural technocrat of great ability and problem-solving outlook."

In September 1984 his unquestioned loyalty was rewarded by being sent to Brussels to serve a four-year term as Vice-President of the European Commission (EC). His special responsibility was for Internal Market Tax Law and Customs.

Mrs Thatcher had, at the Fontainebleau European Council, the previous June, waved her handbag and "got her money back". With Arthur's appointment, as Vice-President, the Prime Minister was sure that she was going to get something more than budget rebates - and she did!

This, Mrs Thatcher saw as a coup for she knew Arthur as a dour, uncompromising, elderly Euro-sceptic whom she was sending to Brussels to clip the wings of Jacques Delors.

Jacques Delors was the eighth president of the EC and had one aim in mind, to carry the Treaty of Rome to its logical conclusion - a Single European Market (SEM). Arthur was expected to veto this - a weapon that Mrs Thatcher had used successfully thus far. Delors, in order to stop the use of veto, introduced Qualified Majority Voting; he also took the gamble of making Arthur his Internal Market Commissioner. Delors guessed that Arthur, although 70 years old, was nobody's 'lap-dog' and that given the chance he would use his remarkable talents.

Arthur tackled the task given him with his usual thoroughness and intellectual rigour, recognising that previous attempts had failed, as they were bitty and piecemeal. In response, he produced a White Paper listing 283 barriers, which needed to be abolished to create a "frontier-free Europe". Against every barrier, he listed what needed to be done and a timetable for them all to be abolished - all by December 1992. This was in June 1985, only six months after taking office. To ensure the passage of his proposal, it was published two weeks before the European Council met, in order to "give heads of government sufficient time to read the document and appreciate the immense importance of the opportunity being opened up but not to give their officials enough time to pick it to pieces." The paper was agreed.

For the next 3½ years Arthur, used all his energy monitoring, presenting, arguing and negotiating his programme of SEM in 1992. This was to the annoyance of the British, with Mrs

Thatcher accusing him of "going native!" What the other state leaders said about Arthur is not so well recorded, but he did force the French educational establishment to accept foreign teachers working in their schools; the West Germans to accept competition in road haulage and Belgium and Italy to open up their insurance markets.

By 1988 Arthur was well on the way to achieving his objectives in Brussels and with the expectation of a second term when his goal of SEM would be a reality. In June 1988, he announced that Britain would eventually have to drop its veto on a single currency and jokingly said that Mrs Thatcher was, in reality, pro-European, that a statue of her was to be erected on the White Cliffs of Dover with an arm outstretched toward the Continent and an inscription stating, "There lies our future!"

Mrs Thatcher was not amused, and retaliated by asking Arthur to come and see her at number 10 to discuss his second term. That morning an announcement was sent to the media that Leon Brittan was to succeed Arthur in Brussels! Arthur read about his dismissal in the papers, before the discussion took place.

Arthur was deeply hurt by this but the accountants Peat, Marwick, McLintock, asked him to join them as a consultant and adviser on European affairs. He also actively used his position in the House of Lords to speak on Europe. In 1990, Arthur was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Leopold II of Belgium and was also the guest speaker at the Dover Boys' Grammar School.

That year also saw the death of his wife Monica.

In December 1991, the Maastricht Treaty was signed, taking Jacques Delors vision of a european economic, monetary and political union to the next stage. Slightly over a year later, the first part of that dream came into force - the Single European Market - thanks to a Dovorian. At the time, there were 5,025 people out of work in the Dover/Deal district and it was expected

that a further 1,000 would be made redundant because of the SEM.

Francis Arthur Cockfield, Baron of Dover, died, aged 90, on 8th January 2007. There is no memorial to Arthur in the town not even a road has been named after him.

*This article first appeared in the Dover Mercury and the Dover Society would like to thank them for the use of this story.*  
Editor

## Remembrance Day

