

John Charles Sholto Douglas, 21st Earl of Morton

19 March 1927 - 5 March 2016



Not many 22nd Earls, or highly regarded Lord Lieutenants, have finished their formal education at 17 and been the owner of five lorries at 20. From 1985 until 2001, John Sholto Douglas, Earl of Morton, was the Queen's representative in West Lothian, gaining the respect of all political factions. In my first-hand knowledge as the local MP, he rarely missed a 100th birthday visit on behalf of the Queen.

He had a fund of stories. Having visited one of my lady constituents on her 100th, 101st and 102nd birthdays, Morton received the complaint, "Tell the Queen not to send the same card next year. For my 103rd birthday I want a different card for a change."

John Charles Sholto Douglas was the second of the Hon Charles William Sholto Douglas and Florence Timson, and was brought up in Didmarton House, Badminton. He was sent to a prep school in Swanage, which he described as a happy period of his life. Some of his fellow pupils there had come to Britain as part of the Kindertransport – the school's headmaster, Trevor Chadwick, was one of those who had helped Nicholas Winton and others bring over Jewish children from Nazi Germany. Transferred to Canford public school, he ran away, was caught, ran

away again, and was expelled. He was then accepted by Bryanston, but even this liberally minded public school did not agree with him – “They did not like me there,” he recalled to me.

So it was to Malmesbury secondary school in Wiltshire, where he remembers the kindly and caring headmaster saying, when the boy left at the first opportunity, “Douglas, we are sure that you will do well in life!” And he did.

Having established his lorry business, Douglas studied veterinary science in Edinburgh and set up as a Wiltshire farmer with his own livestock company, trading in particular with Ireland. After a 15-year legal wrangle, three judges of the Court of Session in Edinburgh found in favour of Douglas being allowed to buy out his cousin and take over the farms of Dalmahoy in 1968.

On the death of the 21st Earl of Morton in 1976 Douglas became a crossbench peer and was taken under the wing of a man who was to become a great friend, Lord Weatherill, former Speaker of the House of Commons, then chairman of the independent peers.

Weatherill suggested that he should interest himself in prison reform, which he did. As Lord Lieutenant he would go to enormous lengths to help those who had got into trouble – perhaps recalling his own turbulent youth.

TAM DALYELL

John Charles Sholto Douglas, Earl of Morton, businessman, farmer and politician: born 19 March 1927; married 1949 Sheila Mary Gibbs (one daughter, two sons); Lord Lieutenant of West Lothian 1985-2001; died 5 March 2016.