

# Sir Peter Gadsden

Dynamic businessman who brought fun and statesmanship to the office of Lord Mayor of London

June 28, 1929 - December 4, 2006

December 14 2006, 12:00am,

The Times

Peter Gadsden united the traditions of the Square Mile with a head for business. He loved pomp but despised pomposity, and his energy was such that numerous companies offered him directorships and advisory roles.

His tenure as Lord Mayor of London in 1979-80 was his favourite of the many positions he held, and his appointment became a benchmark by which later mayors were compared. The youngest lord mayor for many years, he was personable and down to earth, meeting all Londoners and visitors with equal charm and regard. He showed a willingness to look under the surface of London by inspecting its crumbling sewer system, and he established the now traditional fireworks display on the Thames to provide a fitting climax to the Lord Mayor's Show. Canadian born, Gadsden seemed to bring the optimism and pioneering spirit of Britain's Commonwealth back to England where he grew up from the age of five. Peter Drury Gadsden was born in Mannville, Alberta, in 1929, the eldest of three children. His father was an English priest who had ministered to the East End and had been ordained in Australia, a combination that seemed to imbue

Gadsden with a lifelong regard for all three countries, and he worked hard to knit closer ties between them.

His year as Lord Mayor of London was much celebrated in Mannville, where it coincided with Alberta's 75th anniversary as a province of the Canadian federation. It was his desire, Gadsden said, that the "Texas of Canada" should enjoy the same volume of trade with the old country as Australia did.

Before Australia celebrated its bicentenary in 1988 Gadsden was appointed chairman of the Britain-Australia Bicentennial Committee. Although grand gestures and cultural exchanges were the bread and butter of the job, PR Week, assessing the great success of the committee's campaign, noted that it was the small touches, organised with as much efficacy as the large, that had most caught the public's imagination. These included the visit of the Marching Koalas, an Australian school band, to Newcastle upon Tyne, and the recasting of Australian church bells at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry.

Gadsden's sense of fun perhaps belied the staid seriousness that attended much of his upbringing. His parents were strict teetotallers who also abhorred gambling. After moving back to Britain with them he was brought up in a country rectory in Shropshire, attending church twice each Sunday. He was sent to school at Rockport in Co Down, the Elms in Worcestershire and then to Wrekin College

in Shropshire, where his headmaster, Maxwell Gordon, had laid down a policy of stitching the boys' pockets shut to discourage slovenliness. Gadsden came to admire his disciplinarian attitude, recalling: "His great thing was 'Be a man!'. If you did that, and you stood up to him, he was all right." He became head of school and, after doing National Service in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, he went to Cambridge to read geology and mineralogy. He had intended to become a schoolteacher, but balked at the idea of another year's study. Instead, he applied through the appointments board for a job in "administration", which was the IT of its time — "A great word back then; everyone used it and nobody knew what it meant," he said. After six interviews he received a letter from Bairds & Scottish Steel, stating: "Though you are not a Scotsman, we are inclined to offer you the job." At the beginning of his career Gadsden was greatly involved in the marketing and processing of minerals, travelling across the globe many times by air. He was taken on by Fergusson Wild & Co, with whom he established particularly strong business links with Australia and attained the nickname "Trader Gadsden".

In the early 1960s he set up his own minerals consultancy in the City, at the same time becoming managing director of the Australian mining company Murphysores and conducting business for J H Little (Inchcape) and Minerals Consolidated. He became an honorary Fellow of the Institute of Marketing, a chartered engineer, a Fellow of the Institute of

Mining and Metallurgy, a member of the London Metal Exchange and an underwriting member of Lloyds.

In 1969 he became a justice of the peace and a common councilman to the ward of Cripplegate Within and Without, and in 1971 became alderman of the ward of Farringdon Without. He became a liveryman of three companies and a sheriff of London, his civic career culminating in his appointment as Lord Mayor Elect in 1979, at the age of 50. He was appointed GBE the same year. He relished his year's tenure as the 652nd — “unstuffiest ever” — mayor and took every opportunity to feast and entertain. But most importantly he moved the office away from an emphasis on ceremony to the ambassadorial status it enjoys today.

A biography of Gadsden, Thoroughly with Enthusiasm, by Ina Taylor, was published in 2004. It took for its title the motto he lived by and which appeared on his personal coat of arms.

In 1991 Gadsden became the shareholders' champion at Aberfoyle, an agriculture and security products group operating in Zimbabwe, when dissident shareholders took control of the company and eventually installed Gadsden as director.

His business reputation had by this time become well nigh universal, particularly with the success of Private Patients Plan — the second largest private medical scheme after BUPA — which in 1986 announced a 5 per cent growth in subscribers and an income of £128 million. He served the company

(later called PPP Healthcare Group) as chairman from 1984 until 1996, and as president until 1998. He was chairman of the City of London branch, Institute of Directors, from 1995 to 1999 and president of the Australia-New Zealand Chamber of Commerce, 1997-2001.

He was appointed Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in 1988.

In 1955 Gadsden married Belinda Haggerston, eldest daughter of Sir Carnaby Haggerston, 11th baronet, whose family seat was at Ellingham Hall in Northumberland. After his father-in-law's death in 1971, Gadsden took the additional name of Haggerston.

Gadsden devoted himself to the civic and charitable affairs of both Northumberland and Shropshire. He loved walking the countryside of both these bases. His wife and their four daughters survive him.

Sir Peter Gadsden, GBE, AC, Lord Mayor of London, 1979-80, was born on June 28, 1929. He died of a heart attack on December 4, 2006, aged 77