

Sir Roger Cork

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Sir Roger Cork, who has died aged 55, was an expert in corporate insolvency work and an ebullient Lord Mayor of London.

In both his professional and civic careers, Roger Cork followed closely in the footsteps of his formidable father, Sir Kenneth, known as "the great liquidator", who was also Lord Mayor. Their firm, Cork Gully, in which Roger became a partner in 1970, was the pre-eminent name in insolvency for four decades, and had its finest hour in the property crash crisis of 1973 to 1975, when it backed the Bank of England to prevent a widespread collapse of "secondary" banks which had lent heavily to the property sector. A scheme to hold at bay the City creditors of the Stern group - which was Britain's biggest bankruptcy case - while its properties were sold in an orderly manner, became known as "Cork's dam".

Despite his relative youth, Roger Cork worked alongside his father on their most sensitive assignments. In 1973 he had to go to the High Court to overturn a decision that he was too young, at 25, to be appointed liquidator to one collapsed property company, Ickfield Development.

Roger's style was gentler and more approachable than Sir Kenneth's, which verged on the frightening; but he could be just as effective.

When the two were appointed joint receivers to the former Fisher Bendix factory on Merseyside, it was Roger who negotiated with Tony Benn, as industry minister, an injection of state cash to keep the plant alive

as a workers' co-operative. "We have just consented to Roger Cork's rather arrogant conditions for refinancing the company," Harold Wilson told Sir Kenneth over lunch. "Who is he, your uncle?"

Roger Cork became the 669th Lord Mayor of London in 1996 - his father having held office in 1978-79 - taking as his motto "Making Britain Even Greater" and declaring that he wanted to "restore the pride in being British". Though his wife Barbara had died of cancer only four months earlier, he was tireless in his role as spokesman for the City.

He relished the pageantry of office, but added elements of informality: his daughters acted as hostesses at Mansion House parties, at which the guest lists included names such as Sir Cliff Richard and Dame Edna Everage. Nor was he afraid of controversy, making his views very plain on the inadequacy of London's transport infrastructure.

He raised more than £1.3 million for cancer research during his mayoral year, not least by completing a sponsored cycle ride from John O'Groats to Land's End; he averaged 75 miles a day, no small achievement for one with the proportions of a City trencherman, and called the experience "the best cure for a hangover".

Roger William Cork was born on March 31 1947 and was educated at Uppingham. In 1965 he joined the firm of Moore Stephens, where he was articled to the senior partner Hobart Moore, a friend of his father, who told him that it was better to make youthful mistakes away from the family firm. Roger qualified as an accountant in 1969, and moved to Cork Gully the same year.

Roger's grandfather, W H Cork, had built up an insolvency practice largely in the provisions trade, in

which in the early part of the last century many smaller operators were driven out of business by the growth of multiple grocers. The key to success, according to W H, was the ability to dominate a creditors' meeting by force of personality: this he did in style, arriving in a large Rolls-Royce which struck fear into his competitors before the meeting had even begun.

In 1935 W H Cork formed a partnership with his newly-qualified son Kenneth and another accountant, Harry Gully. After W H's death and a period of war service, Kenneth became sole owner of the firm and built it up in the 1950s and 1960s to lead the field in City insolvency work; it handled cases such as that of the Rolls Razor washing machine company and of Emil Savundra, the insurance fraudster.

In 1980, as Sir Kenneth approached retirement, father and son decided to merge Cork Gully into the larger firm of Coopers & Lybrand. High-profile failures such as the DeLorean car project continued to come into their hands, but the merger arrangement was not an entirely happy one. After Sir Kenneth's death in 1991, Roger returned to Moore Stephens, where he built up the corporate recovery practice and was a partner from 1994 to 1999. The name of Cork Gully was expunged within Coopers, now part of PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Roger Cork followed his father as alderman for Tower ward in 1983, and was Sheriff of the City in 1992-93. An enthusiastic member of many City livery guilds, he was a past master of the Bowyers' Company and the World Traders' Company. He was president of the Institute of Credit Management. He was knighted in 1997.

Having taken early retirement from business in 1999, Cork remained active in support of the Cancer Research

Campaign and other medical charities, and in City affairs. In May this year he presided as Lord Mayor locum tenens at the unveiling at the Guildhall of a controversial statue of Margaret Thatcher, which had been commissioned for the Palace of Westminster. Roger Cork, who died on October 21, enjoyed sailing in the south of France. He married, in 1970, Barbara Harper, who had been a colleague at Moore Stephens; they had a son and two daughters.