

## NEWS

# A long career in law, from selling houses to approving Lady Chatterley's Lover

Ian Swanson

ian.swanson@edinburghnews.com

It was the end of an era for Edinburgh law firm Balfour and Manson this week as Ian Balfour, the last of his family in the business, finally retired at the age of 89.

Mr Balfour – whose grandfather William Balfour founded the firm in 1887 – began as an apprentice in 1952, the year before the Queen's coronation. The old trams ran past the office in Frederick Street and there was a stop at the door.

He qualified as a solicitor in 1955 and became a partner in 1959, working on everything from buying and selling houses to defending people in court.

Despite retiring as a partner when he reached 65 in 1997, he stayed on as a consultant with the firm and continued working as a sheriff court auditor, advising the courts when parties could not agree on expenses that had been awarded.

Now, after working for 69 years, he has decided to retire altogether. "I had Covid in August and I thought the time had come to hang up my boots, so I told the sheriff principal I wanted to finish at the end of September."

Mr Balfour enjoyed his long career, which started well before lawyers were expected to specialise in a particular field of work. "I was very much a general practitioner – you did everything in those days: conveyancing, executries, court work, anything that came along."

But he recalled one special assignment arising from the famous obscenity trial in



Ian Balfour has retired after 69 years in the law

1960 when Penguin Books was prosecuted for publishing an unexpurgated edition of DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It was a test of a liberalisation of the law the previous year, which allowed books to be exempt if they were works of "literary merit" – and Penguin won.

Mr Balfour said: "When the publishers of *Lady Chatterley* were acquitted in the English courts they decided to publish it more widely, but then somebody pointed out Scottish law is different. "I got a plain package de-



Ian Balfour's graduation in July 1955

livered by courier, with instructions to advise them the next morning whether they could publish it in Scotland or not."

He had to read the book overnight and make a decision.

"I said they could – and to my great relief, about six months later, the chairman

of the Boys' Brigade took them to court and lost, so I was right.

"I think with the enthusiasm of youth you took decisions that you would think twice about nowadays."

As specialisation became the norm, Mr Balfour concentrated on court work and later exclusively on civil court cases.

The firm had been set up by his grandfather on his own, but after 16 years he invited his nephew Peter Manson to enter into a partnership. William Balfour's son Francis – Ian Balfour's

father – became a partner in 1922 and the firm has expanded over the years.

Ian's younger brother Bill was also a partner and they retired at the same time in 1997.

And Ian's son Jeremy, now a Lothian Tory MSP, worked briefly for the firm.

But now Balfour and Manson finds itself for the first time without a Balfour.

"My brother and I both have children but I think they looked at our lifestyle and said 'Not for us', so not one of them has gone into law."