

# A Conversation with Sir David Cox

Nancy Reid

*Abstract.* David Roxbee Cox was born in Birmingham on July 15, 1924. He attended Handsworth Grammar School and St. John's College, Cambridge. From 1944 to 1946 he was employed at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, and from 1946 to 1950 he was employed at the Wool Industries Research Association in Leeds. He obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Leeds in 1949. He was an assistant lecturer at the University of Cambridge from 1950 to 1955, and then visited the United States for 15 months, mainly at the University of North Carolina. From 1956 to 1966 he was Reader and then Professor of Statistics at Birkbeck College, London, and from 1966 to 1988 was Professor of Statistics at Imperial College, London. In 1988 he moved to Oxford to become the Warden of Nuffield College, a post from which he retired on July 31, 1994. He is now an Honorary Fellow of Nuffield College and a member of the Department of Statistics at the University of Oxford. In 1947 he married Joyce Drummond. They have four children and two grandchildren.

Among his many honours, Sir David has received to date 10 honorary doctorates, an honorary fellowship from St. John's College, Cambridge, and honorary membership in four international academies. He has been awarded the Guy medals in Silver (1961) and Gold (1973) by the Royal Statistical Society. He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of London in 1973 and was knighted in 1985. In 1990 he won the Kettering prize and gold medal for cancer research.

He has authored or coauthored over 200 papers and 15 books. A list of his publications through 1988 is included in Hinkley, Reid and Snell (1991). From 1966 through 1991 he was the editor of *Biometrika*. He has supervised, encouraged and collaborated with innumerable students, postdoctoral fellows and colleagues. He has served as president of the Bernoulli Society and the Royal Statistical Society, and he is president-elect of the International Statistical Institute.

This conversation took place in Sir David's office at Nuffield College on October 26 and 27, 1993.

## WIRA AND CAMBRIDGE

**Reid:** I'd like to ask you about your work early in your career at the Wool Industries Research Association. What kind of a place was it, and what kind of position had you there?

**Cox:** Well, Henry Daniels has described it a bit in a recent interview (Whittle, 1993). It was a type of organization that was very common in the U.K. at that time, funded by government and by money obtained from a levy on the industry, to do basic research on

problems to do with the industry; and it had at that time a remarkable director who simply had the idea that you get people and largely let them get on with it, with encouragement. I went there because with the previous job I had I'd worked on a problem to do with the strength of spot-welded joints and I just happened to read in the library a marvellous related paper by Henry Daniels. Then as I went out of the library there was an advertisement of a job to go and work with Henry. The war had just ended and I was free to move, so instead of going back to Cambridge to complete my BA, which I'd normally have done, I went to work with him.

In wool textiles, you see, you've got everything: from the biology and the nutrition of the sheep,

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Nancy Reid is Professor of Statistics, Statistics Department, University of Toronto, 100 St. George Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1A1.