

Human Rights. In 2007 he was awarded the O.B.E. for services to the criminal justice system. *The Daily Telegraph* described him as “one of the great forensic psychiatrists of his generation; he pioneered the development of new secure services for mentally disordered offenders, worked to uphold the human rights of people in detention, and helped to remedy wrongful convictions.” A final example of Jim McKeith’s determination to act, no matter what, in accordance with his beliefs and convictions: he was horrified by the scandal at Guantanamo Bay *vis-à-vis* British nationals held there. He was invited to visit the prison but sadly, at that time, his final illness was well advanced, leaving him in considerable pain. Nevertheless, he agreed to go without hesitation. It is a cruel irony that death cheated him of the successful news that the US had agreed to finally repatriate the five UK suspects.

JAMES ALEXANDER CULPIN McKEITH (1938-2007). O.B.E., M.A., M.B., B.Ch., B.A.O. (Dublin), D.P.M. (Eng.), F.R.C.Psych. -

Pioneer of forensic Psychiatry.

"He was responsible for having changed the landscape in criminal justice and human rights."

Jack Straw, Minister of Justice (2007).

James Alexander Culpin McKeith (1938-2007) [Epsom College 1952-1956] came from a long family line of distinguished medical practitioners. His father, Dr Stephen A. McKeith was an eminent psychiatrist who was physician superintendent of Warlingham Mental Hospital, Surrey. In 1952 Jim McKeith entered Trinity College, Dublin to complete an M.A. in literature, psychology and social and political institutions. He then studied medicine, graduating M.B., B.Ch., B.A.O. (Dublin) in 1965. Following in his father's footsteps he decided to make psychiatry his métier. He began his training as a Senior House Officer in the Academic Department of Psychiatry at the Middlesex Hospital before moving to the Maudsley Hospital where he decided to concentrate on forensic psychiatry, which specialty was at that time in a somewhat embryonic state. Between 1972 and 1974 he worked as a medical officer at Brixton Prison, before an appointment as Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist at Broadmoor Hospital where he worked with convicted offenders with mental health problems. He remained there until 1977, when he took up a similar appointment at the Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospital. In this appointment he had responsibility for developing new medium-secure



facilities in the South-East Thames Region for the treatment of offenders with mental disorder. In 1985, the Denis Hill Unit was opened at Bethlem Royal Hospital and Jim McKeith was then responsible for treating both in-patient and out-patient offenders. This was an important appointment, for McKeith's personality clearly matched the niceties of the work that he felt obliged to do. He had remarkable empathy with the underdog, coupled with abhorrence for injustice which he felt compelled to eradicate even if it meant stamping on the toes of the establishment and, by so doing, endangering his own career.

It was while working as an undergraduate in Dublin that Jim McKeith became interested in Irish affairs, leading him later to take a personal and professional interest in those wrongly convicted of IRA murders. In the 1970s he became deeply concerned with the cases of convictions arising, he strongly suspected, from false confessions under police interrogation. To investigate this matter, he joined forces with Professor Gisli Gudjonsson of the Institute of Psychiatry in London, and together they discovered that in certain cases this was patently so. Their alarming results were published and created a considerable stir at home and abroad. This discovery led to a series of remarkable high profile cases. With the aid of sympathetic solicitors they were able to overturn the cases of the Guilford Four (1989), the Birmingham Six (1991) and Judith Ward (1992). In all these cases the sentences were quashed and the successful appeals were based substantially on the findings of Jim McKeith and co-workers exhaustive and patient work. In the aftermath of these momentous events, the Criminal Cases Review Commission was set up in 1997 to investigate claims of miscarriage of justice. Jim McKeith was appointed as founder member – the only medical member in fact. He was then appointed as a specialist adviser for the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture, and to serve as the first chairman of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Committee on