Gordon Pollock, who died on Thursday 11 April, was a man of the greatest humanity warmth and good humour. He was also the finest advocate of his generation, a barrister of astonishing brilliance. But there was much more to him than that. He was immensely widely read, and a very reliable source of recommended boxed sets ranging from legal and other comedies to scandi noir. He was a fine cricketer at Cambridge, and a powerful and often accurate hitter on the golf course. He followed the lives of his friends with interest and compassion.

He became head of chambers in 1992, at a time when he was still interested in going to the bench, and promised chambers (then at 4 Essex Court) that he would be around for 2-3 years. He in fact led chambers for 21 years, transforming it to Essex Court Chambers and its current address in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. It is difficult now to believe that this was a transformation which was difficult and at times painful. It would not have been achieved but for Gordon’s determination, powers of persuasion and leadership. But he transformed not just its address. Gordon became the pre-eminent silk at the bar, and as his reputation grew so did the prosperity and reputation of chambers as a whole, as well as the breadth of areas of practice within chambers. Gordon was a giant on whose shoulders have stood my generation, and all subsequent generations, of members of chambers.

I had the good fortune to work with Gordon on a large number of cases in the 1980’s and 1990’s, and I had a room next door to him for many years too. We became friends, as did many of the juniors with whom Gordon worked. This period might be thought to have been Gordon’s heyday, when he regularly instructed in the most demanding and often high profile cases of that time. But in truth Gordon’s heyday started in 1970s and continued long into the present century.

Anyone who worked closely with Gordon was fortunate and privileged indeed. Of course there was the opportunity to watch and learn and discuss the fine detail. But, more importantly, Gordon was immensely companionable and he loved friendship. In the speech which he gave to chambers in 2014 at the dinner marking his retirement as head of chambers, he identified by name every single member of chambers with whom he had worked, and the principal cases on which they had collaborated. Although we had all thought that it was our privilege to work with him, he clearly thought that it was his privilege to work with us and to establish bonds of friendship.

Gordon was, of course, immensely hard-working and absolutely dedicated to the cause. Legend has it that in his early days as a junior, he kept a camp bed in chambers and would often sleep there. The story also goes that on the afternoon before his wedding day to Karen (whom he met when she was a pupil in chambers), he had to ask one of his colleagues (John Thomas) whether he would mind taking over an application before a Queen’s Bench master that Gordon had been working on, forgetting that he was getting married on the day of the hearing.

In the 1980’s, there was major litigation arising out of the collapse of an international organisation, the International Tin Council, which had been established by a large number of states, and there were attempts by creditors of the Council to make states liable. I have a few memories from that case which I can use to illustrate some aspects of Gordon and his brilliance.

Many well-known QCs were instructed for the different countries involved, but it was Gordon who directed the strategy and led the argument in various lengthy hearings up to the House of Lords. Huge teams were assembled on each side, and many days set aside for argument. Much of the argument revolved around whether the Council had separate legal personality. Gordon cut through the complexity by summarising his essential and winning argument in just three words, which he adapted from Descartes: “Debeo ergo sum” (“I owe therefore I am”).

Gordon knew how make judges listen to him. In one of those lengthy Tin Council hearings, the appellants’ argument finished at about 3.45 on a Friday afternoon. Gordon was keen to make a start so as to stop the Court of Appeal thinking that there was any substance to what they had just heard over many days. Gordon’s former colleague, Sir Michael Kerr (Kerr LJ) was less keen to make a start at 3.45 that afternoon. “We promise not to work on the case over the weekend”, he said. To which Gordon said: “But you will be thinking about the case”. Kerr LJ replied: “All right, we promise not to think about the case over the weekend”. Gordon’s memorable response was: “But in my experience, there is a process of judicial solidification which usually takes place without the intervention of thought”. This naturally made everyone laugh, but it also persuaded the Court to listen to him for the next 45 minutes.

As Gordon’s reputation spread, he was instructed in many different areas of the law, well outside the usual diet of the commercial work on which he had started his career. He was instructed in for example: a murder appeal; a high profile libel appeal; a lengthy trademark dispute between Apple records (the Beatles’ record label) and Apple computers; music industry disputes involving Elton John and George Michael; competition law disputes and many others. In the Tin litigation, he gave the House of Lords an exposition of the early development of English company law: an exposition which had the company law QCs, also instructed in that case, lost in admiration.

Advocates are often described as “fearless”. But how many of them would have had the courage to advise and then make a submission to the House of Lords that its judicial committee should recuse itself because of apparent bias (see *Re Lonrho* [1990] 2 AC 154)? Gordon did, successfully.

Over the years, I have often thought about Gordon’s qualities and the many things that I learned from him about professional life. The most important thing that I learned was: always listen to and evaluate the argument, irrespective of the person who is making it. When Gordon was in a meeting, he would listen as carefully to a point made by the most junior member of the team, or member of chambers, as he would to the points made by another QC or senior solicitor. He might disagree with the point made, and explain why in no uncertain terms. The latter was certainly his response to some judicial interventions: I understand that on one occasion, Lord Justice Megaw, a somewhat bad-tempered judge, actually threw pencils at Gordon who was disagreeing with his Lordship’s point. But whatever the circumstance, Gordon would always listen to the point and treat it on its merits.

I last spoke to him two weeks ago when he was in hospital and very unwell, although at that stage hopeful of coming home soon. Even as he described the effects of his illness, he finished each sentence or two with his customary chuckle or a laugh. We discussed our families, and South-West France where he had a house for many years. He told me a few stories from his seemingly endless supply of anecdotes about the bar and bench. He added to the list of recommended DVDs and boxed sets that he had given me over the years. I shall watch one and think about the remarkable and wonderful person that was Gordon.