

## **The Ministry of Health and Raymond Gedling**

I cannot remember how I came to work in the Minister of Health's Private Office. I had returned to the Board of Control after being demobilised from the Army at the end of the war (WW2). Dorothy, John and I were living in a 4<sup>th</sup> floor flat at Leigh Heath Court, Leigh-on-Sea, and I was travelling daily by train to the Board of Control's building at Rutland Gate, Knightsbridge. Someone at the Board must have noticed me and I became Private Secretary to Sir Percy Barter and when Barter retired I transferred my allegiance to the new Chairman of the Board, Sir Frederick Armer. It must have been Sir Frederick who recommended me to the Minister, for I suddenly found myself Assistant to Raymond Gedling, who was Private Secretary to the Minister, Mr Iain MacLeod.

Raymond was by rank a Principal; I was Higher Executive Officer. I liked Raymond – most people did – he was a man who prompted loyalty and in return he gave loyalty, to those below him and to those above him. Our friendship lasted to the day he died in 2011 aged 93. I was a mere 90.

I like to think that I influenced a number of things in Raymond's personal life. Soon after I joined him in the Private Office he confided to me that his mother (a widow since WW1) had recently died, leaving him – her sole child – a reasonable inheritance. Should he buy with the money a grand piano; he was a passable pianist. I suggested not and that a far more practical way to use the money would be to buy a car, buy driving lessons, buy dancing lessons and take out the attractive young Assistant Principal whom I knew he was keen to know better. I would look after his office work if he and the Minister agreed. We were helped in this by Sir John Hawton, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health. He looked in frequently to see that the Minister was content with the work of the Department. Sir John was certainly happy to join this romantic intrigue and everything went to plan. Hence our long friendship has lasted even to the next generation of Gedlings and Coopers.