

GRADUATION 2009

Presentation speech for Admiral Sir John Brigstocke KCB for the honorary degree of Doctor of the University *honoris causa*

Chancellor, while it is always a great privilege to present new honorands, it is an especial pleasure when he or she is already well known to most of us and has made a substantial and direct contribution to the work of this University. Today we celebrate the contribution of Sir John Brigstocke, Chairman of Council from 2005 to 2008.

Sir John is best known as a sailor – commander of H M S *Ark Royal*, 2nd Sea Lord and member of the Admiralty Board. The association between Buckingham and the Navy may seem unlikely – after all by some calculations here we are further from the sea than anywhere else in England - but the number of naval men who have lived in this area is remarkable: they include Lord Howard of Effingham, Admiral Freemantle and Lord Keyes.

The role of Chairman of Council - under the terms of our Royal Charter, our Governing Body – is of crucial importance. Over the years, we have been exceptionally well served in this respect. But all Chairmen have brought their own distinctive style to the role. In Sir John's case there was certainly a wiff of 'Naval briskness' – and academics can sometimes do with a little of that. The thing that struck me most about Sir John was, however, his ability to combine two qualities that rarely come together in one person: an appreciation of the need 'to do things by the book' (vital in these days of the QAA) with an understanding of changing circumstances. Much changed in the years Sir John presided over Council – in retrospect perhaps more than we understood at the time. As numbers began to rise once more and new initiatives were launched, the University recovered that sense of self-confidence and purpose characteristic of its first phase. I think that Sir John appreciated that, while always operating within certain parameters, the relationship between the University and Council would change over time. He certainly showed remarkable skill in managing the tensions that such changes inevitably bring in their wake. In all of this, Sir John proved a good judge of people. He knew the value of listening to those who had been members of Council for many years but was also devoted much care to the selection of well-qualified new members with appropriate areas of knowledge and expertise. Chancellor: the biggest test of a Chairman is the quality of the Council he leaves to his successor inherits. On this measure Sir John must rank very highly indeed. If I were to sum up Sir John's style as Chairman I would have to say that it reminded me of Bagehot's summary of the duties of the Sovereign: 'to advise, to encourage and to warn'.

Sir John has made many important contributions to public life in this country - as a naval man and more recently as Chairman of NHS East Midlands and as the first Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman. It is pleasing that these different facets of Sir John's eminent career are all reflected in the work of this

university – his days in the Navy in our new MA in Security Studies, his work in healthcare in our new Postgraduate Medical School and his role Judicial Ombudsman in our Law School.

Chancellor, I call upon you to confer on Admiral Sir John Brigstocke KCB, former Chairman of Council, the degree of Doctor of the University, *honoris causa*.

Professor John Clarke, MA, DPhil
28 February 2009