

GRADUATION 2009

Presentation speech for The Rt Hon Frank Field MP for the honorary degree of Doctor of Science of the University *honoris causa*

Chancellor, so far as I am aware, in the past, Buckingham has not enjoyed close links with Birkenhead, the constituency Frank Field has represented with such dedication since 1979. It is true, however, that F E Smith, first Lord Birkenhead, lived at nearby Charlton, and is buried in the little graveyard there. I fear that the mention of Smith may seem inappropriate – after all Smith was a Conservative and Field is a Labour member of Parliament, and in some ways undoubtedly of the Left. But no one could accuse Field of being ‘a mere party man’. What gives him such a remarkable standing in public life today is that he is perceived as essentially independent minded. Above all, he is known as the man who was asked to ‘think the unthinkable’ – and did.

Chancellor: There are still many in Field’s party – and indeed in other parties – who believe that an extension of state-provided welfare offers the best solution to the problems of society. On the basis of his own direct experience of Birkenhead, Field challenges these beliefs and shows that too often state intervention does more harm than good. Of course, others in politics have said similar things – not least our own Chancellor Emeritus. But does that mean by honouring Frank Field today, we are saying that he is really a ‘Thatcherite’? Emphatically not: ‘Similar’ does not mean ‘identical’.

So what are the differences? Margaret Thatcher achieved a great deal but she also left many things undone. Above all she never really addressed the problem

boast is that we are the Independent University. Perhaps those who believe in academic independence and those who believe in political independence are natural allies. Chancellor I call upon you to confer upon the Right Honourable Frank Field the Degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*.

Professor John Clarke, MA, DPhil
28 February 2009