

GRADUATION 2009

Presentation speech for Professor Sir Martin Evans FRS for the honorary degree of Doctor of Science of the University *honoris causa*

Chancellor, at previous convocations, I have remarked on the surprisingly close links between Buckingham and Wales. This town was an important stop on the old drovers from Wales to London and, in Tudor times, the home of the Aphowell Bell foundry, whose bells still ring out from the towers of many of our local churches. Today we add a new dimension – a scientific one – to that link when we honour Sir Martin Evans, Professor of Mammalian Genetics at Cardiff University.

There can be little doubt that the past few decades have seen remarkable advances in the field of Genetics, advances that have led to a better understanding of the relationship between genes and diseases – and how, when genes go wrong – they cause disease. In turn this has created enormous opportunities for the development of new approaches to therapeutics and treatment.

Chancellor, in all of this Sir Martin has played a crucial role, especially through his pioneering work on embryonic stem cells. In 1981, he became the first scientist to isolate stem cells from mouse embryos. This research paved the way for a technique called gene targeting, which allows the genetic code of an animal to be altered with amazing precision. In short, Evans ‘gave the world the knockout mouse’, thus giving scientists unprecedented insight into how human diseases progress – and also providing them with an invaluable tool for testing new drug therapies. In 2007, together with his colleagues Oliver Smithies and Mario Capecchi, Sir Martin was awarded a Nobel Prize in recognition of his gene targeting work.

Chancellor: on an occasion like this, I also think that it is appropriate that we should remember and celebrate the important role of Science in the history and life of this University, especially the work of our Clore Laboratory, largely founded by Lady Chain, sister of our first Principal, Max Beloff. In recent years, under the leadership of Professor Mike Cawthorne, the Clore Lab has been involved in pioneering work in the areas of diabetes and obesity. Although not a scientist myself, I am sure that what is being achieved in the Clore Lab owes much to Sir Martin’s groundbreaking research and more broadly to the inspiration he gives to the search for cures for disease and the alleviation of suffering throughout the world.

Chancellor I call upon you to confer upon Sir Martin Evans, the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.

Professor John Clarke, MA, DPhil
27 February 2009