

GRADUATION 2012

Presentation speech for Tom Merrick for the honorary degree of Master of Arts of the University *honoris causa*

Chancellor, I have on previous occasions remarked on the close connections between this University and the glorious principality of Wales, from whence, I believe, our honorand's family also springs. Perhaps that theme has been explored enough – so I have looked for a rather different association. My researches have taken me to Scotland, to the border country, not far from your own barony of Tanlaw. In the Galloway Forest Park, there is a mountain called Merrick, lying to the North of Glen Trool. The area is sometimes known as 'The Awful Hand' because the ridges and valleys that make up this vast area of upland look like a big hand. The ridges form the fingers and Merrick the thumb. We face the old question of what's in a name? I have always thought there was something. When I think of Tom Merrick, I associate him with the rocklike dependability and integrity of a mountain and with the ingenuity of the engineer's and craftsman's hands.

We can see this clearly in Tom's career. He read engineering at Oxford where he was an undergraduate at Keble College – an early acquaintance with Victorian buildings and their vagaries later to be renewed at Buckingham. He then qualified as a Chartered Civil Engineer, working on land reclamation and motorway projects before becoming project manager on the Littlebrook power station site.

Tom came to Buckingham in 1982 as the first Estates Bursar. Although money was often tight, he achieved great things – and usually underspent his budget. He was in charge of a capital development programme, which involved the acquisition of land and property, the sale of the Page hill houses, building new residential blocks, the Clore Laboratory and AdeR building as well as the refurbishment of the Franciscan Building, many of the Hunter Street properties and Chandos Road buildings. Over the years one came to get a feel for his distinctive aesthetic tastes – not least the Merrick shades of blue and fawn. His

'legacy' is still very visible and will continue to influence – perhaps even dominate – our spirit of place for many years to come.

But like so many of us in the 'heroic' days, Tom had a vast number of additional responsibilities. At various times he was in charge of maintenance, accommodation, domestic services, office services, catering, non-academic personnel, health and safety, security and the University Club. He did not even confine his attention to the University alone. He played a major role in developing 'town-gown' links and joint projects – especially in connection with the Junior Football Club. It is a measure of Tom's contribution that, when he retired, the Town Council appointed him 'A Friend of Buckingham.'

Chancellor, there is another aspect of Tom's work to which I must refer. When Tony Hayter retired in the early 1990s, Tom took over the organisation of our graduation ceremonies. Even after he retired from his other duties he continued with this vital work. I have always said that a truly memorable graduation day is the best leaving present the University can give to its Alumni and offers the best prospect of an enduring relationship thereafter. In a very real sense Tom was Graduation Day. We shall miss him; he will be a very hard act to follow.

Chancellor: It is with great pleasure and a special sense of appropriateness that I call upon you to confer on Mr Tom Merrick the degree of Master of Arts, *honoris causa*.

Professor John Clarke, MA, DPhil

17 March 2012