

CONVOCATION JUNE 2013

Presentation speech for Sir Ronald Grierson for the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters of the University *honoris causa*

Vice-Chancellor, It was once said by Marx – and I mean Groucho, not Karl – that ‘Every time I try to retire, my agent comes up with another script’. Sir Ronald Grierson clearly shares the same agent. In a career of public service that is now entering its eighth decade, Sir Ronald has never wanted for another script. Whether as soldier, banker, arts administrator, company chairman, industrialist, philanthropist, or international adviser *extraordinaire*, Sir Ronald has been a figure permanently in demand – a demand, moreover, that shows no signs of letting up, even as he enters his tenth decade. Indeed, there are few men or women who have served our national life at the highest levels in so many or so varied capacities, for so long, or with such a spirit of selfless generosity.

His first career was as a soldier; and although Sir Ronald was born in Bavaria, it was in the forces of His Britannic Majesty that he served in the 1939-45 War (and beyond), first as an officer in the Black Watch and, later, seconded to that daring and mysterious new unit, the SAS.

Then came the City, and a series of major positions: in banking, as Managing Director of S. G. Warburg; in industry, as Chairman of GEC International; in consultancy, as Chairman of Bain & Co. International; and in private equity, as Co-Chairman of the International Advisory Board of the Blackstone Group – to name but a few.

Somehow, while reaching these pinnacles of eminence in the commercial world, Sir Ronald managed to take time out to serve, with equal distinction, in the public sphere as well. At various times, he has worked to promote the long-overdue rationalisation of British industry; served as Director-General of the European Commission; re-energised the South Bank Centre, the country's premier venue for the performing arts, as its Executive Chairman; and brought the wisest of counsel to international affairs as adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Few careers exemplify more clearly that first principle of management: if you want something done well, ask a busy man. And, in Sir Ronald's case, the word has got out: literally scores of philanthropic organizations have sought out, and benefited from, his wisdom, experience and seemingly superhuman supplies of energy. He continues to serve as the Trustee of the London Symphony Orchestra; as a Trustee of the Royal Academy of Arts; of the Prince of Liechtenstein's Foundation; and as chairman of an astonishingly broad range of charitable organizations, ranging from bodies engaged in cancer research, the provision of scholarships to outstanding students from the Developing World, and the eradication of world hunger and malnutrition. Little wonder that Sir

Ronald's late wife once remarked: 'Had Ronnie been born a woman, he would have been continually pregnant; he simply doesn't know how to say "No".'

We all have cause to be thankful that Sir Ronald can't say 'No'; for, in a multitude of ways, that heroic generosity has touched thousands of lives: in Britain, in Europe, and in the Developing World.

The Psalmist urges us to 'declare his glorious deeds among the nations'. Well, in Sir Ronald's case, the nations have got in first. Germany and Italy have appointed him to their respective Orders of Merit. Austria has awarded him its Decoration of Honour; France has acknowledged him a Commander of the *Legion d'honneur*.

Today is the University of Buckingham's turn. We honour Sir Ronald Grierson by this doctoral degree, our highest acknowledgement of public distinction, and in so honouring are honoured ourselves.

Vice-Chancellor, I present Sir Ronald Grierson for the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.

Professor John Clarke, MA, DPhil

6 June 2013