

HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY

L A U R E A T I O N

TONY STRACHAN

BY DAME FRANCES CAIRNCROSS • THURSDAY 20 JUNE 2019

Chancellor, I have the honour to present for the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University, Tony Strachan

I suspect that few of you have heard of the Court of Heriot-Watt. It's the University's Board of Trustees, a bit like a Board of Directors. This University is a £220 million business, although it rarely thinks of itself that way, with campuses in three countries and 30,000 students around the world. The Court, whose members include staff and students as well as outsiders or lay people, is ultimately responsible for the University's good governance.

Tony Strachan has been at the heart of that institution for the past nine years. Like many of the lay people on Court, he came from a different world. He's not a Scot - he grew up in Buckinghamshire - although his father's family originated from Aberdeenshire. And his working life was in the Bank of England, which he joined soon after leaving school. He has always regretted not having had a conventional University education, but he took an online MBA with the Open University, an experience he shares with the thousands of our students who take online MBAs with our Edinburgh Business School.

At the Bank, he worked first on Exchange Controls, with which the government managed currency flows into and out of the UK. He then joined the Bank's International Division, and worked on the Canadian economy, before joining the Banking Supervision Division, where he had responsibility first for smaller UK institutions and later for American banks in the UK. From there, he was seconded to the Panel on Takeovers and Mergers at the height of the takeover boom of that period.

In 1995 he was posted to Manchester. His job as one of the Bank's small group of Agents was to be its eyes and ears in the Northwest, developing links with businesses and keeping a sensitive finger on the pulse of the local economy. He also became involved in public life in the city. Within a year of his arrival in Manchester, the IRA exploded a bomb in the city centre and Tony was appointed to the Board of the Company set up to co-ordinate its rebuilding. He also became Deputy Chair of Manchester's Museum of Science and Industry, sat on the Board of Manchester Metropolitan University, and became the Lord Chancellor's Representative on the Court of the University of Salford.

In 2003, he became the Bank's representative in Scotland and moved his family to Glasgow, where he soon became equally involved in the community. Since he retired in 2010, he has had three main interests. One is music: he plays the oboe, and was the inaugural Chair of Merchant Sinfonia, Glasgow's community orchestra. Another is his family: he is joined here today by his wonderful wife Sarah, his daughter Caroline and his son David. I should also say that he is totally devoted to his three grandsons.

But our debt to him is for the immense amount of work he has done for Heriot-Watt. He joined the Court in 2011, attracted by this University's values and global reach, its mission to change lives for the better by offering excellent teaching and research into practical solutions to modern problems. This, he says, is in the best spirit of the old Institutes of Mechanics, of which Heriot-Watt University was the first.

While on Court, Tony has contributed much to the quality of higher education in Scotland. He helped to draft the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance; and he has been a member both of the Committee of Scottish University Chairs and of the Scottish Committee of the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association.

But it is on our Court that his contribution has been greatest. He has either chaired or served on every Court Committee at some point, and he led the work to appoint a new Principal in 2014. For me, he has been a selfless source of unvarying support. He has been a sensitive listener, an ingenious problem-solver and a fount of common sense. I have been immensely lucky to have had his unstinting help, and the University has been lucky too.

Heriot-Watt has benefited greatly from Tony's generosity of time, from his exceptional understanding of governance and from his skills and expertise, established during a long and successful career. He has demonstrated excellence in his financial career with the Bank of England; in his contributions to arts and community organisations; and in the field of education through his contributions to the governance of higher education in Scotland and in particular to Heriot-Watt. He perfectly embodies our four key values: inspire, collaborate, belong and celebrate.

Chancellor, in the name of the University and by the authority of the Senate, in recognition of his exceptional contributions to financial, educational, cultural and community life in the UK, I call upon you to celebrate this remarkable friend of the University, and to confer the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University on Tony Strachan.