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Gazette supplement

Admission and Installation of the Chancellor

Convocation 19 February

The Public Orator delivered the following commendation of the Chancellor-elect for admission to the Doctorate of Civil Law by Diploma.

CANCELLARIVS MAGISTRI SCHOLARES
VNIVERSITATIS OXONIENSIS
OMNIBVS AD QVOS PRAESENTES LITTERAE
PERVENERINT
SALVTEM IN DOMINO SEMPITERNAM

CVM diu ex more nobis fuerit homines illustrissimos et eos præsertim qui nobiscum intimis et societatis et studiorum vinculis coniuncti sunt præcipuo aliquo honore quantum possumus insignire:

CVMque Vir Admodum Honorabilis GULIELMUS JEFFERSON HAGUE, BARO HAGUE DE RICHMOND, Regiæ Maiestatis ex Intimo Consilio, in Re Publica et onerum et honorum cursum peregerit praeclarissimum:

CVMque iam ab ineunte iuventute animo et audaci et certo de sententiis suis necnon de partium suarum principiis consiliisque suaserit:

CVMque se discipulum huius Vniversitatis, Collegii videlicet Beatæ Mariæ Magdalenæ, sollertem, eruditum praebuerit:

CVMque semper leporem cum urbanitate suaviter coniunctum exprompserit:

CVMque in historiis scribendis vim ingenii, sedulitatis, rationis exhibuerit:

CVMque nobis persuaserit se mores nostros investigationum disciplinaeque liberos et securos respectatos conservaturum:

CVMque Dominus Cancellarius rite electus dignitatem apud nos amplissimam, locum excelsissimum, potestatem possideat supremam:

NOS ERGO, tantum Virum admirati, in orationibus eloquentissimum, in rebus gerendis assiduum, erga hanc Academiam pientissimum, in frequenti Congregationis Domo prædictum GULIELMUM JEFFERSON HAGUE, BARONEM HAGUE DE RICHMOND, DOCTOREM in Iure Civili renuntiamus eumque vi ac virtute huius Diplomatis omnibus iuribus et privilegiis adficimus quæ ad hunc gradum spectant.

IN CVIVS REI TESTIMONIUM sigillum VNIVERSITATIS quo hac in parte utimur adponendam curavimus.

Datum in Domo Congregationis die xixo mensis Februarii A.S. MMXXV.

Admission by the Vice-Chancellor

Cancellarie excellentissime, qui post egregium vitæ publicæ cursum apud nos summum magistratum, summam auctoritatem, summam honoris amplitudinem adeptus es, ego auctoritate mea et totius Vniversitatis, necnon vi ac virtute huius Diplomatis, admitto te ad gradum Doctoris in Iure Civili.

Paraphrase

THE CHANCELLOR, MASTERS, AND SCHOLARS OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
TO WHOMSOEVER THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME,
MAY THE LORD EVER PRESERVE AND KEEP YOU

WHEREAS it has long been our custom to honour people of distinction, and in especial those who are linked to us by sharing our studies and our life, with the most particular marks of respect which are in our power:

AND WHEREAS the Rt Hon WILLIAM JEFFERSON HAGUE, BARON HAGUE OF RICHMOND, PC, has had a most distinguished career amid the honours and burdens of high office:

AND WHEREAS from his early years he has been a bold and confident advocate of his beliefs and his party's principles and policies:

AND WHEREAS he has been an able and accomplished student of this University, and more particularly of Magdalen College:

AND WHEREAS he has at all times displayed the combined felicity of humour and urbanity:

AND WHEREAS he has shown the power of intellect, study, and judgment in his historical writings:

AND WHEREAS he has convinced us that he will honour and protect our traditions of free and fearless research and teaching:

AND WHEREAS he has been duly elected to our highest dignity, most exalted place, and supreme power, as our Chancellor:

THEREFORE WE, in recognition and admiration of this man, eloquent in speech, tireless in action, and devoted to the University, so in this house of Convocation declare the aforesaid WILLIAM JEFFERSON HAGUE, BARON HAGUE OF RICHMOND a DOCTOR of Civil Law; and by the power and virtue of this Diploma we confer upon him all rights and privileges to that degree pertaining,

IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have caused to be affixed to this instrument the Seal of the University which we use on such occasions.

Given in our House of Convocation on the 19th day of February in the year of Salvation 2025.

Formula of Admission by the Vice-Chancellor

Most learned and diligent Sir, after a fine career in public life you have earned among us the highest office, the greatest authority, and the supreme eminence. Acting on my own authority and that of the whole University, and in addition by the force and virtue of this Diploma, I admit you to the degree of Doctor of Civil Law.

The Public Orator then addressed a version of the following oration in felicitation of the new Chancellor on the occasion of the Admission and Installation of the Chancellor held in the Sheldonian Theatre on Wednesday 19 February.

Illustrissime et honoratissime Domine Cancellarie, licetne Anglice loqui?

On the occasion of your predecessor's admission in this house nearly 22 years ago, my own predecessor of that time spoke movingly in eloquent English both on the passing of time and on the vital continuities that we treasure. Many Chancellors, and many Public Orators, have come and gone since our early days. As for Chancellors, as of this day we have had 160, counting only once each of those who served more than once. Already by the 15th century there had been the best part of 100; it seems that long service has become the norm more recently, and it is a happy thought that you too will be with us now for many years.

That joyful accession of Lord Patten, or Chris, as we quickly came to know him, was tinged with sadness as we mourned the death of his predecessor Roy Jenkins. This time round, Sir, your predecessor is alive and well and very much with us still, and lest what I say should in any way resemble an obituary summation of his excellent qualities and achievements – let us rather call it an abituary – I shall be briefer than justice might demand. Let us remember that Chris is practical enough to have preferred to sign off through a farewell lunch rather than a memorial service. His Chancellorship followed or, to put it more accurately, continued, a long career in public service. In a slightly cheeky Horatian ode addressed to him this last summer I described him as having been *imperii capax*. There were those who understood this to mean that he was the best prime minister we never had. I have never wished to question my colleagues' understanding of Latin.

A gifted former student of history at Balliol, Chris is inclined to say that yes, he has remained immensely fond of his college and indebted to it, but it was not only Balliol, but this university as a whole, that 'made' him. And in him it made much, for over the years much good came of his steady succession of national and international duties and high offices. But most of all we acknowledge his stewardship – far beyond the merely ceremonial – of what we here have aimed to be and to do. In his own estimation, which I suspect may be a modest underestimation, over his more than 20 years of holding office, he regularly visited us on important business at least 60 times a year. His fundraising and other support for us took him to many countries and continents, and he was, and yet will remain, a powerful advocate for the best functions of this and other universities, of our educational endeavours, and of our research. He remembers his undergraduate days, he says, as a golden age for historians. Have these two last

decades been a golden age for the University? Well, I will merely say that during his years many, including him, have done their utmost to make it so, and you, My Lord Chancellor, may rest assured that with you we aim to extend that age, if golden it be.

A witty and engaging writer and speaker Chris Patten was and is, but there is also substance and nourishment in what he has said and written. For immediate interest I would point particularly to his Newman Lecture, a judicious updating of Cardinal Newman's 'Idea of a University' by considering what that idea might, or should, be in the 21st century. The lecture was published in that faithfully trenchant critical organ, the *Oxford Magazine*, which continues – yes, admittedly from its more ethereal platform – to provide comment and commentary from members of our community on academic and other matters. Echoing Wilhelm von Humboldt, Chris defended, as a foremost principle on which a university's objectives should rest, the unity of teaching and research. The two support and feed each other, and that nourishment is wholesome so long as both remain as free as we can responsibly make them from economic, political and ideological restraints and interferences.

Chris showed a keen eye for those of us who love and understand our institution and for when that love may have been more nuanced. To me he appeared to share with his fellow churchman G K Chesterton at least an appreciation of fences in their many forms, histories, and styles of construction. There is much evidence that we applaud such judgment, for both Chris and you, his successor, may, I think, understand Roy Jenkins' observation that Chancellors have been better treated by our electoral process than that of a wider but somewhat less focused one.

In recent generations retirement from the Chancellorship of this university has tended to be a necessary step in transmigration. But elsewhere we often hear of other persuasive reasons for decisions to step down, or step aside. Prince Philip, the late Duke of Edinburgh and one-time Chancellor of Cambridge University, said that he stood down because he could no longer stand up. Were Lord Patten of Barnes to say this, I would vigorously beg to differ. Spend more time with the family? No, he was consistently able to treat us as his extended family, even if, or especially if, we may at times have shown some symptoms of dysfunctionality. Not wishing to be a distraction to the important business, processes, decisions, etc etc.? No, if there were 'distractions' here, they were more diagnosed and identified than caused by him. Repose for a while? Ah, here we may have it. After all, there are precedents. If I may use academic terminology, the greatest creator of all himself took a sabbatical – the first, indeed, after a busy week 1 of his term. (Our cosmologists are still, I think, uncertain about how he spent 0th week.) As a waggish Oxford colleague of mine once put it more poetically, 'O well, said God, I think I've done my best, and now it's Saturday, I'll take a rest.' I know, yes, I do know, that I should be less extravagant in my analogies. Our former Chancellor may in one or two respects be compared with the late Pope Benedict XVI: a shared interest, of course, if admittedly from different viewpoints, in religious faith, but also the ability to stand down and remain standing while still having much in life to contribute. While I suspect that neither the Papacy nor, fixed terms notwithstanding, the Oxford Chancellorship can accurately be said to be subject to an 'Employer-Justified Retirement Age', before me you sit, Sir, as youthful evidence of intergenerational fairness. Meanwhile we fondly salute our former Chancellor, and I, never being one for overstrict exactitude, say to him a heartfelt, if improperly midweek, 'Shabbat Shalom!' and a happy move to his next phase in life.

A last word before we entirely depart from church. I have from time to time taken a furtive peek at how the Vatican – I mean merely the Vatican Latinists – cope with the many important modern concepts that figure in our everyday lives. For example, what might be the Latin not just for such concepts as 'skyscraper'and 'women's ordination', but such things as 'renewable energy', 'divestment', 'gene editing' or 'gender identity', the kinds of things that I expect may increasingly crop up, both in Papal encyclicals and the like, and in our local discourse. It can hardly be denied, though, that Latin, which I would like to think was once in the DNA, as it were, of any good Catholic schoolboy as it has been of Chris Patten, has become something of a twilight extracurricular in the Roman church as a whole. Once again let us rejoice, *gaudeamus*, that the language is alive and well here, and part of our real, or occasionally surreal, world. Accordingly I now ask you, *Domine Cancellarie: licetne Latine loqui?*

Doctor illustrissime, te salutantes prospicimus diu laeteque apud nos, iam tuos, velut patremfamilias commoraturum. Teque una cum coniuge tua corrigente ego recte haec verba enuntiare velim: *Rydym yn eich croesawu i hwn eich teulu estynedig*. Orator idem aestimatus olim observavit, Roy Jenkins insigniter excepto, permultos talibus officiis confectis ad cessationem cursus honorum infeliciter adductos esse. Quod tamen vix de ductoribus partium tuarum vere possem dicere. Iste enim inter gradus multos ac varios per munera etiam celsiora progressos videtur fuisse quibus ad hunc locum, ad hanc sedem allatus es. Neque ulla ex parte, ut opinor, huius rei nostrae disciplinarum publicae popularisque cessationes sane propriae videntur. Atenim qualisnam haec res sit, quam multi facimus, nonnunquam nos rogamus. Utrum decernendi congregationi nostrae mos est, an potius delegandi? Minime tamen hic eum civitatis statum agnoscamus quem Baro quidam de St Marylebone, Aedes Christi alumnus, Collegii Omnium Animarum olim socius,

partiumque suarum et ipse olim dux, dictaturam delectam vocavit.

Isti ductui audivimus 'calicis venenati' appellationem adhiberi, nam, ut fieri solet, eos qui iamdiu nos rexerunt multo saepius propter vitia visa reprehendimus quam de rebus secundis laudamus. Licet hic in Cancellariatu gradale sacrum vix prospicere possimus, niholominus certe scimus pocula iucundiora quaedam, rite circumlatos, tibi cenanti traditum iri.

Qui liberaliores vocari solent, quique iuxta scriptores generum omnimodorum nobis ad legendum adsunt otio pie fruentibus, voce aliquando ambigua modo monent tempora valde mutata, modo deplorant paulum, immo parum, mutata esse, ex quo alumnus felix Collegii B.S.M. Magdalenae gradum dignissimum suscepisti. Tuo ipsius iudicio sit utendum; sed vix facile, ut putamus, 'nihil mutatum' esse affirmabis. Speramus fieri ut nos semper impigre ad meliora, altiora docentes atque investigantes videamur niti, dummodo sine detrimento quam aequissime discipulos admittemus, quam apertissime cum academia quasi universa, necnon cum civitate vel huius nationis vel alicuius ita sincere recteque congrediamur ut auras populares suspiciamus, dissensionibus impavide obeamus. Nos non fugit te eo tempore concilio nostro disputantium praesedisse, ubi – hoc pro certo habemus – omnes fere candide controversiis fructi uti solebant, ubi ingenue, accurate audiebatur, apte denique causae agebantur.

Per probationem dicis te modo 'sero inculcando' ad gradum provectum esse. Pudicitiam laudandam! Sed non omnibus ita nixis praemium cessit. Etiam nuperrime per errorem credebam te studiis historicis hic incubuisse. Nonne veniam merui? Nam de rebus gestis scribendo approbationem insignem impetrasti, quamvis adeo facilia lectu haec scripta sint ut appareat te tui feliciter potentem fuisse, a nemine incommode infectum. Immo per viam illam triplicem saepe a tironibus lustratam inde in harenam, ut ita dicam, te dedisti magistratuum, et pugilationibus senatoriis te obtulisti.

Animo capaci et iucunde iuvenili es erisque, ut nobis quoque iam prosis. Iuxta lectum mihi libellus quidam iacet, cum lectus tum relegendus; ibi sub titulo Anglico facetiae, lepores, obiter dicta multa inveniuntur, quae omnia annis tuis apud nos volventibus admodum multiplicata lepide edenda videantur.

Si et hos annos cum auro nobis aestimantibus consociare licet, hanc aetatem, dico, qua praesides potentes ad altissima tendunt, caelum sollicitant, ipsius Martis pectus tremefaciunt ut se ad stellas virgasque accipiendas accingat, in spem magnam adducimur, quam tuo Cancellariatus officio respecto fidenti animo concepimus. Ut verba canora referam ab oratore illo Cancellario illi oblata, tibi quoque magistratum amplissimum ineunti omnia bona, fausta, felicia precamur.

[We welcome you, Sir, and look forward to your long and happy senior membership of your now extended family. Dame Ffion and you will correct my grammar and pronunciation if I add: *Rydym yn eich croesawu i hwn eich teulu estynedig*. It was said by my esteemed earlier predecessor that Roy Jenkins had been an exception to a sad commonplace, namely that the office of Home Secretary had often been the graveyard of so many promising careers. I will not go so far in thinking of the leadership of the Conservative Party. It has, after all, been one of the many steps and even more distinguished positions on the way to the place you now occupy with us. Nor in my opinion is this, our democratic republic of letters, yet any kind of graveyard. To be sure, we have wondered at times exactly what kind of democracy it is that prevails here, direct or representative, but I would hope to dismiss the Westminster parliamentary model that Baron Hailsham of St Marylebone (Christ Church, All Souls and some time would-be leader of the Conservative Party) identified as 'elective dictatorship'. We have heard the party leadership of your earlier days described as a 'poisoned chalice', in the sense that 'when a party has been in power for many years they get the blame for what is seen as wrong but do not get the credit for successes.' *Plus ça change?* But as for chalices, while I would hesitate to present this your new office as the holy grail, I predict more confidently that many will be those here who wish to offer you the best of what they have, correcly passed in the right direction round the table.

The liberal press, available alongside much other reading in all good common rooms, tells us in sometimes conflicted tones that you will find much has changed in Oxford, and also that little has changed, indeed too little, since those happy Magdalen days at the end of which you achieved your first-class degree. You will be the best judge, but we do not expect to hear you assert that 'NOTHING HAS CHANGED.' We hope you will find us energetically striving for ever-higher standards in research and teaching, combined with, and not compromised by, increased access and an engagement, both with the wider academy and with the national and international outside world, that is frank, productive, and untrammelled by fashionable orthodoxies or by fear of controversy. We note that you were in your time President of the Oxford Union, and we feel sure that those were good days of open debate for all, when we listened to each other courteously, critically and constructively.

You modestly credit that success in Finals to 'last minute cramming'. Well, it should be said in your favour that last-minute cramming has not always been so rewarded. Indeed I thought until very recently that it was in History that you were schooled here. This was, I plead, an understandable misapprehension; you have, after all,

written highly commended history books, though their very readability should have sufficed to suggest that you were not adversely influenced by the profession. No, it was in PPE, that now time-honoured training arena for public office, that you cut your teeth, if so I may put it, for the cut and thrust of government and the boxing ring of parliamentary business. Your youthful spirit and your expertise remain unimpaired, and these are now our gift. I have on my bedside table, fully read and ready to be reread, a collection of *bons mots* and *obiter dicta* entitled 'The Wit and Humour of William Hague'. Your many years with us may, we trust, lead to a welcome expanded edition.

If we may still measure in gold these years to come, this age in which great powers reach for the firmament, harrow the heavens and set aflutter the heart of Mars himself as he prepares to welcome stars and stripes, we set our own hopes high, hopes we have confidently formed for your tenure of the office of Chancellor. I can do no better than echo the resounding words of my predecessor for your predecessor: we wish you, in the traditional phrase, all that is good, fortunate, and auspicious.]

The Chancellor made the following speech in reply.

Orator Publice, ita exordiri velim ut gratias tibi ex animo agam, ut qui tali benignitate sis locutus, adeoque familiariter salutationibus, adeo curate officiis decoris operam dederis, quae laudem quandam pepererunt huic Universitati. Vice-Cancellariae quoque gratias habeo, necnon Bedellis, et eis omnibus qui haec officia perficienda curarunt, praecipueque choro cantantium mei ipsius Collegii dilecti, qui ita venuste cantaverint, et vobis denique hic convocatis, qui me Cancellarium creatum nuper summo studio exceperitis.

Expedit nunc, ut opinor, me libertatem lingua vernacula utendi mihi adrogare.

Public Orator, I begin by expressing my heartfelt thanks to you for such generous remarks, and for your dedication to the fine ceremonies and warm welcomes for which Oxford is known. I thank the Vice-Chancellor, the Bedels and everyone who has made today's proceedings possible, in particular the magnificent choir of my own dear college for their beautiful singing. And I thank all of you, the Convocation, for electing me as your chancellor and for your enthusiastic welcome in recent weeks. Every visit I have made so far and every conversation has intensified my excitement about the years to come. I happily dedicate myself today to working with you and for you.

It is a wonderful event that we have a Chancellor Emeritus here. The last chancellor to relinquish the role in their lifetime, the 2nd Duke of Ormonde in 1715, fled the country immediately. I am very pleased that Chris has seen no need to do so. It means I am the first occupant of this office in centuries who can benefit from the advice of a hugely respected predecessor. 28 years ago, I was part of the UK delegation at the handover of Hong Kong, waving off Chris on the Royal Yacht as he ceased to be Governor. I saw then that he left admired by all and loved by many: such is his dedication to public service that, here, in an entirely different place, the same is true again.

Lavender has so often added to that service with her own presence and enthusiasm, and Ffion is, like me, beyond delighted to be able to return to Oxford for the many hundreds of occasions we hope to share with you over the coming years.

I am fortunate in having known not just my immediate predecessor, but 2 more before him. Harold Macmillan was 90 when I, in my 20s, eagerly told him of my plans to enter parliament and ambitiously asked for his advice on running the country once I got there. There was a long pause as he took me in, with the penetrating gaze of those hooded eyes. 'Young man,' he said, 'don't do too much, too soon.' That was it – useless, I thought. But 10 years later when I had rashly allowed myself to be

elected leader of my party, I realised how very shrewd that advice had been.

Roy Jenkins gave me more detailed advice, and this time I acted on it. Hearing that I intended to write a book on Pitt the Younger, he took me out to lunch. If you are picturing claret flowing in a smart London club, you are correct. He asked me what word limit my publisher had given me. '150,000 words,' I said. 'Well, the first thing you need to know', he said, 'is to take no notice of that whatsoever. If you are enjoying writing, the readers will enjoy reading it – you can add another 100,000 words and they'll publish it anyway.' I did. And they did, which is why both of my books are much longer than anybody intended.

'The next thing to know', he said, 'is to start tomorrow. Far too many people waste time mapping what they are going to do. Just get going and work it out as you go along.' This might not be good advice for every DPhil. But Roy saw writing a book as a thrilling exploration, a mystery journey to be enjoyed to the full, and he thought the same of being Chancellor of Oxford. Having adopted entirely his approach to writing, I see no reason not to adopt it as Chancellor – my own thrilling exploration starts today.

I have much in common with these 3 predecessors. We have all been politicians. We have all worked across parties as well as within them. We have all adored Oxford. But in one crucial respect we part company. They were all from Balliol. The last Magdalen alumnus to be elected Chancellor was Cardinal Pole in 1556. He was a divisive figure, served for 2 years, and would certainly have been one of those predecessors who fled the country when Queen Mary died, had he not promptly died himself. Perhaps it's no surprise that 469 years have had to pass for Magdalen to be given another chance.

At my matriculation as a Magdalen undergraduate here in the Sheldonian I sat with a group of friends I had just met. I am very touched that the same group of friends is sitting here now: we have kept in contact ever since. Today, it seems extraordinary that the day of our matriculation, less than 50 years ago, was the first on which the majority of colleges, including our own, admitted women. Their arrival seemed entirely normal to us state schoolboys but it was a shock to our privately educated colleagues, even though they soon judged it an entirely agreeable one. It is a reminder to those of us who remember the Oxford of half a century ago, that it has changed radically in that time, and very much for the better.

Oxford is dramatically more diverse, on every parameter of gender, ethnicity and ways of thinking, than on the day we first walked in here. It is more global, largely due to the huge increase in the number of graduate students. Walk down Broad Street and you could bump into members of this university from any of 175 countries and territories, the vast majority of nations. Pause at the Clarendon Arch and you will find etched into it another change: the huge expansion of our list of the most generous benefactors, whose philanthropy has helped transform this university. Walk on in almost any direction and you will see the results: a school of government, a business school, a centre for humanities under construction and much more. Chat to an undergraduate and you will find many who benefit from what you cannot see: scholarship schemes like Crankstart that make all the difference to the ability of thousands of students to come here. This is why we carve the names of our benefactors in stone.

The Oxford that has resulted from this, the Oxford of 2025, has renewed and reinvigorated its engagement with the world. Stroll further and you will pass Oxford Science Enterprises, the Oxford Internet Institute and Oxford University Innovation. You will see science parks and medical centres on which humanity is coming to rely. This is the Oxford whose COVID vaccine saved over 6 million lives, and whose malaria vaccine is even now being rolled out across Africa. Here we have by far the highest research income of any UK university. Recent months have seen remarkable innovations in life sciences, highly successful student-led enterprises, the deciphering of ancient scrolls and now quantum teleportation: many of the world's most important breakthroughs are being made here.

This is a very outward-looking Oxford, with brilliantly successful spinouts expanding around Oxfordshire, and major programmes on global education and modern slavery reaching across the world. In the 1830s our forebears initially resisted the construction of a railway to London for fear of the habits that students could form there; in the 2020s we are positively delighted with the idea of a railway to Cambridge. You can't get more open-minded than that.

To have moved Oxford on so successfully in the last half century is an immense achievement, by Vice-Chancellors and heads of department and many brilliant academics. So, while the body of this ceremony consists of granting honours to me, for which I am deeply grateful, I honour and thank you for ensuring that, incredibly, a university that is one of the very oldest – the first document requiring the appointment of a Chancellor is older than Magna Carta – is at its strongest today and is recognised as one of the greatest centres of teaching and research that has ever been created.

Today's modern University has been built on its enduring strengths: dozens of colleges and halls, 4 of our nation's finest museums, the oldest botanical garden in Britain and some of the foremost libraries of human civilisation. The reason we speak Latin today even though we all understand English, and hand over

keys even though we no longer know which doors they open, along with a magnificent seal even though we could perfectly well send an email, is that we recognise we are the beneficiaries of the labours of centuries, and we are acknowledging that our labours must be equal to passing on to future generations this priceless inheritance.

Our challenge in doing so will be that history is accelerating. Lawrence Brockliss, in his masterly history of the University, identified 4 major epochs, some of them lasting for centuries. But I suspect the next 4 epochs might pass in 80 years rather than 800. We are entering an age of economic, social and political upheaval, requiring of our great institutions and all of us individually both deep resilience and constant reinvention. Sir Tony Blair and I have written – you can find the fact we agree on so much these days either reassuring or alarming as you wish – that the arrival of artificial intelligence along with engineering biology and the accompanying pace of technological change is the greatest ever challenge for the modern state. It will also be the greatest ever challenge for the modern university.

We cannot know all the implications. We do not even know which forms of AI will become pre-eminent, although since we have been ranked as the number one university in the world for computer science, we have a good chance of working that out. But I offer 4 thoughts as to what this acceleration of change might mean for Oxford.

First, it is in the public interest, and in the critical national interest of the United Kingdom, that we remain at the very forefront of the science and the applications of this change. What happens here is more fundamental to British prosperity than it has ever been. That means we must always maintain the highest and most rigorous standards of excellence, welcoming the most brilliant minds irrespective of background. But it also means governments, of any party, should invest in our success. The growth they are looking for can be found here, almost under their noses. It does seem they have noticed. The recent announcements by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of support for the arc of innovation between Oxford and Cambridge and an Oxford Growth Commission are very welcome indeed. I will regard it as part of my job to heap praise on ministers who make these things happen and be an unsparing critic of any who don't.

Second, the pace of change in sciences and medicine will mean we need humanities and social sciences more than ever. New technologies are changing politics and transforming the way culture is developed and communicated. They need ethics, philosophy, language and history to guide them. Universities like ours, cherishing the full range of academic disciplines, will have a vital role in showing how sciences and humanities can inform and strengthen each other.

Third, in an age in which ideas will change so rapidly, freedom of speech and of academic work and research will be of paramount importance. We cannot prepare for the turbulent decades to come by shielding ourselves from inconvenient arguments, wrapping ourselves in comfort blankets of cancellation, or suppressing minority views because they conflict with the beguiling certainty of a majority. I strongly welcome the decision by ministers to revive most of the provisions of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act.

Oxford is a home of free speech within the law, coupled with the understanding that such rights involve a duty to listen to and include others, to have an open mind, and to regard diversity of thought as a strength. A university is not an island: the controversies and conflicts of the world reverberate here. We are only yards from where martyrs were burnt in the Reformation. We are in the same room as the tragic matriculation year of 1913, 30% of whom soon lay dead on battlefields. We must hope these agonies of previous centuries never become the story of our own. Our university is a place where we can disagree vigorously while sheltering each other from the abuse and hatred that are so often a substitute for rational opinion. Here we can debate the big global issues while understanding that those can never be an excuse for antisemitism or any other kind of religious or ethnic hatred, the great evils of history.

We do not need to agree on everything, indeed we should not. I am pleased to say we do not need a foreign policy: we are not a country. Nor do we need a view on every daily occurrence: we are not a newspaper. The concern of a university is that opinions are reached on the basis of truth, reason and knowledge, which in turn requires thinking and speaking with freedom.

Fourth, we will be in the front line of fighting the darker side of the new technological age, that a world of unlimited digital connection contributes to anxiety and loneliness, especially among young people. This new age will only turn out well if it allows us more scope to enjoy being human, rather than form our relationships with machines. In Oxford we have the great strengths of personal tuition, college communities and high achievements in sports and music. It should always be a place where we seek each other's company, not stare into smartphones. Coming here should be to experience what it is like, not only to pursue excellence, but to be irrepressibly and exuberantly human. That includes understanding that we are part of nature. Encouraging and highlighting the work of botanists and biologists in and around Oxford is a task Ffion and I will particularly enjoy.

These then are 4 possible tests for great centres of learning in a time of scientific revolution – to maintain world-leading standards and research, to intensify work across disciplines, to encourage free thought and speech without hatred, and to maintain our essential humanity. I will look forward to debating them, as I understand very well that one of the great strengths of Oxford is that no individual decides what is going to happen, least of all the Chancellor. The vast variety and heterogeneity of this place is its decisive advantage. With 56 departments, 43 colleges and halls, 43 institutes and 78 committees of the Council of the University alone we will make mistakes, but we will never all make the same mistake at the same time.

The demands of this age of change will require funds, and larger endowments. I will do everything I can to support the efforts to raise them. I am looking forward to meeting thousands of our alumni at home and abroad, and to encouraging even more of them to give their time, service and resources to the University that helped release their talents.

The role of the Chancellor always evolves, and if you are the 160th it is not easy to define yourself by reference to all your predecessors. I am sure you will find me less interfering than Lord Curzon, not so dogmatic as Oliver Cromwell, a touch less strict than the Duke of Wellington, hopefully more unifying than Cardinal Pole. But I will do well to follow the example of my most recent predecessors in upholding the idea of a great, liberal university built on ancient traditions but at the cutting edge of modernity, opening brilliant minds with the power of debate, inquiry and reason. I will celebrate and articulate your achievements, urge you on when you have doubts and help protect you when your freedoms are under threat. I look forward, more than anything I have ever done, to representing and championing one of the greatest institutions in the world, the University of Oxford.