

PROFESSOR ANDREW HAMNETT

Mr Chancellor

“Gi'e me a spark o' Nature's fire; that's a' the learning I desire”. Thus wrote the poet Burns. Understandable sentiments from a 17th Century ploughboy turned literary genius. Mind, you wouldn't get away with that these days, of course: apart from the genuine difficulty in obtaining “a spark o' Nature's fire” in the first place, you must then contend with an entire army of people who are intent on ensuring you don't blow your chances of formal learning: parents, teachers, lecturers, tutors – and just in case they're not enough, there's OFSTED and the transient police forces of university teaching quality. No, the nearest we can come to Burns' carefree aspiration is to hope that we might still retain some “spark o' Nature's fire” after we've completed many years of formal learning. Someone who has managed to achieve this is Professor Andrew Hamnett.

For the Andrew Hamnett who stands before you today, Mr Chancellor, has very much in common with the Andrew Hamnett who wore short trousers on the streets of Stockport in the 1950s. This young Andrew repeatedly caused his parents endless embarrassment by dismantling display items in shops to see how they worked. Eventually, someone had the bright idea of buying the lad a Meccano set for Christmas, and he responded as hoped: he was soon enthusiastically designing mechanical devices from scratch, rather than deconstructing those owned by others. Fast forward fifty-five years, and we find the recently-

retired Andrew obtaining a vintage Meccano set on e-bay so that he can take up where he left off. Not that he'll be able to give the Meccano set his undivided attention. Ten years ago he revived his youthful interest in stamp collecting, which, given his enviable CV, gives the lie to the claim that "philately gets you nowhere". He has also begun taking master classes on the organ at St Nicholas' Cathedral – despite already being, in the words of his many adoring friends, the finest organist and pianist you are ever likely to hear. Oh, and he's signed up for an Open University degree in maths, just to keep him on his toes.

In between the earliest and latest bouts of Meccano mania and philatelic frenzy, Andrew had his career to attend to. Talking with his scientific co-workers soon becomes an exercise in *déjà-vu* – or rather *déjà-entendu*: unprompted, every one of them says: "Andrew is the cleverest guy I've ever met". "He's just brilliant at everything", a colleague of twenty years told me. Andrew is renowned for his photographic memory; yet he's too gracious to recognise that the rest of us are not equally gifted! So it is that his co-workers experience involuntary fits of fidgeting whenever Andrew starts a sentence with "Do you remember ...?"

Andrew has always used his natural gifts to the full. He is the author of truly seminal works in the photo-electrochemistry of semi conductors; in ellipsometry and electro-reflectance. Together with John Goodenough, Andrew laid the foundations for electro-catalysis in direct methanol fuel cells, which represent one of the most promising technologies in the pursuit of the low-carbon future the world craves.

At the heart of the scientific endeavour lies the practice of peer-review. All research scientists have a love-hate relationship with this essential process. The poet Burns could have been speaking for many an aspiring researcher when he expostulated as follows: “Critics! Those cut-throat bandits in the paths of fame”. It is to Andrew’s great credit that he will always find something good to say about any proposal or paper he reviews, and will always bring that to the fore in his reports. He is absolutely free of that academic vice of inflating one’s own ego by criticising others. Of course he will not flinch from confronting the shortcomings of a paper, but he always couches this in constructive suggestions.

After stellar work at Oxford University, Andrew took up the Chair in Physical Chemistry here in 1989. Four years later he was appointed Pro-Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for research, in which capacity he successfully led the University into two Research Assessment Exercises, establishing a steadily rising trajectory of success which has since been maintained. From 1997 Andrew served as Deputy Vice-Chancellor. He pioneered much of the industrial and regional liaison on which our University’s present vision of being a world-class civic university is firmly founded.

At the turn of the Millennium, Andrew took up the post of Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Strathclyde, in the heart of Glasgow. It turns out that Andrew had always been a passionate Caledonia-phile. His mother was a Stewart, and he cherishes memories of family links in southern Scotland, whence he acquired an uncanny ability to talk in a Scottish accent!

Andrew is, in fact, a superb linguist, being highly fluent in German, fluent in Italian, and adept at Latin and Mandarin.

Amongst the many accomplishments of his highly successful years at Strathclyde, Andrew established an Institute of Advanced Studies to promote inter-disciplinary research, and launched a major renovation of the campus. The building programme associated with this was still in full swing at the time of his retirement. A new wing of the Biological Sciences Building was eventually named after him. However, before this decision was reached someone suggested naming the new sports centre after him. Immediately spotting the irony, Andrew remarked “I tried exercising once, but it made the ice fall out of my gin-and-tonic glass, so I gave it up”.

This brings me to another aspect of Andrew’s reputation. An old Scots song, the *Barnyards of Delgaty* includes the boast “Oh, I can drink an’ no’ get drunk!” Andrew could sing this verse without any fear of contradiction. His legendary capacity for alcohol consumption without loss of performance far exceeds that of the most efficient methanol fuel cell. Amongst his many legacies to Strathclyde is one of the best-stocked wine cellars in the country – though the bottles will in future have a longer residence time than they did over the last decade.

Throughout his demanding career, Andrew remained a dedicated family man. He now supports his wife Suzanne in her role as an ordained Minister of the United Reformed Church, also supplying organist duties when needed. Their three daughters enjoyed a wonderful upbringing, and have continued

his traditions of excellence, in the cognate fields of university management, academic publishing and applied science.

Mr Chancellor, the poet Burns challenges us to “Dare to be honest and fear no labour”. No one has lived up to this maxim with more grace and charm than Professor Andrew Hamnett. In recognition of his excellence in science and university leadership, I now ask you to bestow upon him the Degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Citation by Professor Paul Younger