

## **Livery Dinner Speech given by the Master, Captain Chris Spurrier, May 2017**

Your Excellency, Chief Inspector, Masters, Wardens, Learned and Gallant Clerks, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this, our 59<sup>th</sup> Livery Dinner and to this magnificent Drapers' Hall.

I must begin by adding my personal welcome to that of Warden Nick Goodwyn, who has just spoken so eloquently. It's lovely to see so many of you here. I must also express my thanks to the staff here at Drapers' hall. They have given us a superb meal and looked after us with great kindness. Our Learned and Gallant Clerk, Paul Tacon, and his staff Ruth, James, Angie and Anna have all done sterling work in organising this splendid occasion and they, too are deserving of much praise and our many thanks.

We certainly live in interesting times. When I was elected, just over a year ago, I couldn't think what I should be saying this evening. Today, there is so much happening it's become a challenge to decide what should be left out.

The current elephant in most rooms is Brexit. This is probably the subject which has caused the greatest division in our nation since the Civil War. Whichever side of the argument you favour, Brexit is a fact and we must deal with it. How easy that will prove to be after the 8<sup>th</sup> June will depend on the electorate but for us it is vital that we secure agreements which will allow aviation – especially commercial aviation – to continue without hindrance or undue interference. I hope that, in the coming negotiations, we are not faced with the imposition of too many prescriptive or proscriptive regulations.

In today's world economy we need travel. And in today's world that means air travel. If our commercial aviation is to flourish we need increased capacity. Increased capacity in our aircraft, increased capacity in our crowded airspace and, most of all, increased runway capacity in our crowded island. Especially in the South East of our crowded island. This debate has simmered on for far too long. In 1968 an enquiry was set up which, in 1970, suggested a new airport in Buckinghamshire. Rejected in 1971, this was replaced by the Maplin Sands scheme, which was rejected in 1974. 1974. That was the year Paris opened a new airport called Charles de Gaulle. In 1978 another enquiry began three years of work, to conclude that a new runway at Heathrow was needed. It didn't happen. In 1995 the government rejected new runways at both Heathrow and Gatwick. In 1999 they commissioned a new enquiry which, in 2003, recommended a new runway at Heathrow. 2003. Amsterdam Schiphol opened its fifth runway. In 2007 a new runway at Heathrow was announced but the Mayor of London proposed a new airport in the Thames Estuary. But in 2009 the government backed a third runway at Heathrow. Until, with the coalition in 2010, new runways at Heathrow, Gatwick or Stansted were all ruled out. By 2011 Heathrow was operating at 99.2% capacity. 2011. Frankfurt opened its fifth runway and we announced yet another consultation. And another report in 2012. In 2013 that report called for new or extended runways at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted and in 2015 Sir Howard Davies recommended a new runway at Heathrow. Has anyone been counting? We all thought that the conundrum had been put to bed but it seems we were wrong. It's back in the long grass. We need, we urgently need, a government to grasp this nettle, ignore the gainsayers and the amateur pundits and act on the recommendations it has received. Our European competitors are accelerating away from us and our customers are, literally, passing us over.

Whilst we concentrate on our concerns over Europe there are more dangerous scenarios being played out. Both Russia and North Korea are demonstrating challenging behaviour whilst, in the Middle East we have the continuing problem of ISIL and, in Afghanistan, a resurgent Taliban. There are also little-publicised British deployments in South Sudan and the Falklands. The challenges now facing our three services are immense and in all but one of these theatres air power is vital. Whilst our aviators from all services do amazing work they cannot perform their task without up to date equipment. And that means sufficient up to date equipment. And that requires investment. It would seem to an informed observer that there has been considerable fudge in producing figures that show our commitment to spending 2% of GDP on defence whilst sending money to what some see as less worthwhile causes.

Returning to more parochial matters, we have known for several years that the world is facing a shortage of pilots and engineers. My friend the Immediate Past Master referred to this in his speech here last year and the problem has not gone away. There are many strands to this conundrum but it all begins with education. Here in the United Kingdom the promotion of science, engineering and mathematics in schools is of huge importance. Earlier this month I attended a doctoral graduation ceremony for science and engineering. It was remarkable that only about 10% of these graduates came from the UK. 10 per cent. We in this country need our own pilots and aeronautical engineers. The Lord Mayor's message this year to inspire, educate and support young people. For us, developing an interest in aviation from an early age is the first step. It then needs to be nurtured and encouraged. Budgetary constraints prevent the air cadet organisations doing as much as they once did so we are left with self-financing. First, for air experience, to get young people into the air. Then, for them to gain licences leading, hopefully, to a career. This is expensive. And it requires airfields, which an increasingly aviation-sceptical government would prefer to see turned into housing estates. There is, though, a very dim light at the end of this tunnel. Past Master Roger Gault has worked very hard to set up apprenticeship schemes for pilots and, with the new Institute for Apprenticeships, this will provide some opportunity for young people to enter the profession at lower cost.

I'm sure my concern over the shortage of UK engineers is shared by our principal guest this evening, Mr Crispin Orr, Chief Accident Inspector of the Air Accident Investigation Branch. Crispin joined the AAIB following a career in the Army, where he had commanded the Rotary Wing Test and Evaluation Squadron. He headed the Military Air Accident Investigation Branch and then established, and was the first Head of, the Defence Accident Investigation Branch. Crispin has an engineering degree from Durham and an MSc in Defence Technology from Cranfield. The AAIB itself has progressed from its small beginning in 1915 to the essential organisation of today. We all hope that we never have to use their services but accidents do, regrettably, happen. And when they do it is necessary that the accident is investigated and, where possible, the cause is ascertained. This takes much painstaking work, much careful analysis and a very great degree of engineering knowledge, both practical and theoretical. We as aviators have all benefitted from previous investigations even if we may not appreciate it. We owe the Branch a huge debt of gratitude and I'm very pleased that he can be with us this evening. Mr Orr, you are very welcome.

Now I've spent a lot of time talking of the doom and gloom surrounding us. We can make a difference. We are a flourishing, knowledgeable and influential organisation. We have a membership with enormous experience, expertise and great depth of knowledge. We can, must and will use our influence to guide and advise those in power over us, always seeking to be entirely disinterested and

dispassionate. In that manner I hope that this great and honourable company can help British aviation onwards, into the skies and towards a bright future.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you this evening's toast.

Onwards and upwards.