

Master, Visiting Masters, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great privilege to dine in this magnificent guildhall and in the company of fellow aviators. I realise that I may be a disappointment to some of you. Especially those of you who were looking forward to hearing from the Chief of the Defence Service, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach. He sends his most sincere apologies for not being here you this evening, and whilst it may be disappointing for you, it is most certainly not for me and I am delighted to yet again act as his stunt double. I am not sure why CDS asked me to represent him but we do have some common attributes. We are both aviators (although he is a back seater I note that in the small print you do add incorporating Air Navigators); we also share the same Service, name, hairstyle and stature. Now whilst the list of common attributes may end at this point, both CDS and I do also share a great respect and admiration for the Honourable Company of Air Pilots (incorporating Air Navigators), both for who you are and for what you do.

In preparing my remarks, I am delighted to see that despite the change of name, your underpinning principals have not changed from the GAPAN I remember from the occasions I hosted you both as a Harrier Sqn Cdr and then as the Station Commander of RAF Coningsby. I congratulate you on first your royal charter, and secondly, to quote a previous Master, that you continue *'to thrive as a living institution and not a picturesque historic leftover'*.

I can report that your RAF also continues to thrive as an institution; as we approach our centennial celebrations next year I believe we remain respected, valued and used. Whether on operations overseas, notably in Iraq, Syria and most recently the Caribbean, or much closer to home as we police the skies of over the UK and of our NATO allies, the RAF is busier today, in terms of the scale, duration and intensity of our operations, than we have been for many decades. In common with the other Services, we face many challenges not least in delivering an affordable and relevant Air Force. We very much look forward to celebrating our 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by saluting those who have served with distinction in the past, celebrating those who serve today and by inspiring the next generation to take an interest not just in the RAF but in aviation more generally.

In this ambition and many others, it is clear that the Company and the RAF have common cause. We both seek to exploit the opportunities offered by the third dimension whilst promoting the highest standards of safety, training and practices in the air. On many issues your voice is much louder in the national debate than ours, given that your fellowship embraces a wider community of aviators, private and professional, civil and military.

I note that in your list of current issues, many that are of mutual interest. I note that you too are debating the merits of True North v Magnetic North and wonder if you also have endless debates about the merit of QFE versus QNH. But perhaps one of the most significant concerns we share is the proliferation of drones and the risks of unregulated activity. One cannot fail to be concerned by the growth in the number of reported airprox incidents involving drones. In 2014 there were 6 such incidents, and yet in this year so far there have been over 100 incidents. I believe all of us, whether from the commercial, private or military sectors, aviators and drone

operators, need to continue to work together to better understand and to reduce the risks we face.

Whilst I have focused on drones, please rest assured that we in the RAF continue to work to reduce the risk of midair collision with all airspace users. As an example of this, we are introducing an enhanced collision warning system on our Typhoon aircraft, which is likely to be the first such system to be introduced by any Air Force on its combat aircraft.

But tonight is a night to celebrate; to celebrate in the company of fellow aviators and to celebrate and recognise notable contributions. I salute the Honourable Company for the diversity of tonight's award winners, which ranges from rocket scientists to autogyro pilots and from air chief marshal to aircraftsman. I congratulate everyone who has been recognised this evening. Your contributions are geographically, functionally and temporally diverse but they all share the same distinction of being well above and beyond that of the norm. If it is true that people fall into one of 3 categories: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who wonder what happened. You are most certainly in the first group, whether you make things happen through your impressive skills in the air or through your exceptional contribution to aviation, each and every one of you is to be applauded for acting in the finest traditions of this Honourable Company.

It now falls to me to propose a toast to the Company. So please charge your glasses, rise and join me in a toast '*to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, may it flourish root and branch forever.*