

Master, thank you for your kind invitation to address your Livery Company and give out the Trophies and Awards here at the Guildhall. What a privilege to do so in the very year when you have gained your Royal Charter!

I am doubly pleased to join you this evening in view of the long and continuous Royal Patronage that you have had since 1953, and with the Grand Masters back even further to 1938 when my father, the Duke of Kent, was installed during the Marquess of Londonderry's time. The (then) Princess Elizabeth took on the role of Grand Master in 1947 and on her accession to the Throne, the role of Patron was created. I think my father would have been tickled to discover that I am a Liveryman today. Since then three other members of my family have been Grand Masters, and this has provided a practical demonstration of the interest my wider Family has taken in the field of aviation. I note that your Patron's own Helicopter Rescue Award recognises the unsung heroes of extraordinary deeds in the line of duty.

This evening is the centrepiece of your Company's year, with the presentation of more than twenty trophies and awards to those who have exhibited extraordinary skills and other achievements in the field of flying. As a pilot of any aircraft I can lay hands on, I look on with admiration at what it takes to win one of these trophies and would like to take this opportunity to add my own congratulations to all the winners. Looking at the array of awards this evening, it is exciting to see the range of their criteria, and the vision of those who have generously donated or lent their name to each trophy, and elevated their own area of interest into an aspiration for those following after them.

Man's endeavour to travel faster than a horse could carry him led to the development of the internal combustion engine. It unlocked distance and for the first time allowed man to make the dream of flight a reality. Here in the United Kingdom, both flight and road vehicle development took hold at a new facility – Brooklands Motor Course at Weybridge, Surrey, where, in October, 1909, a Farman Biplane became the first powered aircraft to fly in Britain. The combined test track, race track and airfield, the first of its kind in the world, became the home of UK aircraft manufacture. Legendary designs such as the Sopwith Camel, the Vickers Vimy, the Hawker Hurricane, the Wellington, Valiant, Vanguard and VC10 were each spawned and developed at Brooklands. Indeed over 50 iconic Vickers designs were created there. More aircraft were built at Brooklands during the First World War than at all the other aircraft factories put together. Of course, its most illustrious aircraft was Concorde, offering for the first time passenger flight at supersonic speed. I am Patron of the Brooklands Museum Trust, and I am glad to say we are the proud owner of a Concorde, as many of you will know. It is salutary to think that the very same men who helped develop the 9hp Roe Glider, the Sopwith Camel and the Wellington, were the same engineers who later in life helped create Concorde. In other words, in just a single generation, we have come from gliding to supersonic flight. We should remember that, when next we are twenty minutes late landing in New York! As Antoine de St-Exupery said back in 1939, "The airplane has unveiled for us the true face of the earth." Which remark sits somewhat at odds with an observation made in a letter written by my great grandfather King Edward VII from Biarritz in 1909 to the Prince of Wales, later King George V:

"...I was much interested in seeing Wright's two "flights" of his Aeroplane at Pau last week. It is a very graceful & at the same time delicate machine - & looks like a huge Dragonfly when up in the air. I enclose a photograph but I look upon it as an expensive toy - & do not see how it can be of any use for military or scientific purposes!..."

The history of aviation is a continuing dynamic of a short period of our recent history. Just one example is perhaps the development of Unmanned Aviation. The headlines of UAVs may often be grabbed by the military arena, but the civil UAV sector is now growing very fast, in particular with multicopters for television, filming and surveying. As we know, Amazon, Google and even Facebook are now investing in UAVs for package delivery. There is also a very big market potential for them generally in, for example, unmanned cargo aircraft, but the challenges will include integration into existing airspace.

At the moment, UAVs still need a pilot, which is, of course, of most interest to those of us here this evening. The only difference is that the pilot is on the ground. Is that still a pilot in your mind? Should an UAV be able to see as well as a pilot or better through radar or infrared? Can you teach a computer onboard an UAV the skills of "airmanship"? Perhaps UAVs could also make manned aviation safer, through cheap "sense and avoid" systems for GA pilots, or even a "land-me" button so that aircraft could automatically land if a pilot gets into difficulties.

I suspect that many of you will know a lot more than I do about this already, but it is clearly a stimulating and exciting time, when it could be argued that the UAV sector is roughly at the same stage as manned aviation was in say 1919, when the Vimy was king. It has been proven in war, but what happens next? One day these unmanned devices may come to replace completely the need for the skill, courage and initiative of the human spirit, coupled with hand and eye directing aircraft of any type. But, until that time arrives, I sincerely hope that your extraordinary achievements will continue to be honoured at this annual dinner.

And I give you the toast:

"The Honourable Company of Air Pilots. May it flourish, root and branch, forever"