



Speech by Robert Lineker, our Chairman, at the Association of Old Worcesters' Dinner at Middle Temple Hall on Friday 8th June 2018



Mr President, My Lord, Ladies, gentlemen and fellow Old Worcesters. Good evening. Welcome.

My Lord, thank you for those words. Apart from anything else, they indicate your abiding interest and dedication to all things involved with the Merchant Navy and its people. I am aware that you are an Old Pangbournian, and it therefore makes it even more of a pleasure to let all here know that you have agreed to becoming an honorary member of the Association of Old Worcesters, and I would therefore like to present you with this OW tie. I should point out that you are joining a very elite team in doing so, there is only one other Honorary member of the Association, and he is sitting just over there – welcome Michael! Perhaps I should also put your mind at rest by assuring you that unlike me, you are very unlikely to be co-opted onto council and to find yourself standing here as Chairman in around twelve months from now.

I think before I say anything else, I hope all will join me in expressing our deep gratitude for all that the staff here, the servers and the front of house team have done for us tonight, and in particular can we show our appreciation for the chef and his kitchen staff in the normal way.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Subcommittee who are responsible for putting together the 2018 celebratory package. The success of the many different events surrounding the celebrations taking place over these three days are entirely due to the amount of dedication and sheer hard work carried out by them over the last two years.

In particular, whilst normally I would not like to single out individuals, as all the team have worked equally hard, there are two people who I think deserve special recognition. The first is Sarah Bradbury. When I think of what she has had to put up with over the many years that Clive has been deeply involved in Council business, I can only complement her on her forbearing and the constant support she has shown – I think she must be as dedicated to the Association as Clive. Sarah – on behalf of all here, thank you very much, and I hope you will accept this small token of our gratitude which you can use when you get home to get some Flowers of your choice.

The second person, is of course, Clive himself. As the Chairman of the subcommittee set up to plan and run the 2018 celebrations, he has worked tirelessly and dedicated much time and effort to ensure its success. For those who attended and remember the fantastic success of the 2012 celebrations, it should come as no surprise that Clive acted as the Chairman of that subcommittee as well. In addition, for the many years he has been deeply involved with the Association council, he has provided much support to all council members and in particular to the Chairman and secretary.

Clive, we recognise your hard work and dedication and so on behalf of the Association of Old Worcesters' I wish to express our truly heartfelt thanks for all you have done and to present this small gift which we hope will grace your dining table for many years to come. For those who are unaware, this is a Ship's Port decanter which we have had suitably inscribed.

I would also like to express our gratitude to David Glennie for all he has done as our Honorary Secretary over the last five and a half years. He has provided much support to Council and in particular to the Chairman. Without his support and hard work, the task would have been so

much harder, the new secretary has a great role model to follow. So David – we got one for you too!

But what of the Association itself? When I look around the hall and see the number of our members who have made the effort to be with us tonight, I can see that the Association is at present still as strong as it has ever been. Tonight, we have managed to assemble some 195 Old Worcesters from all over the world. We have members who have had to make long and sometimes arduous journeys from Canada, The USA, Australia, France, Singapore, Eire, Italy, Montenegro, Hong Kong and even Wales. (If I have left any travellers out, I apologise.) Not only are we supported tonight by Old Worcester's themselves, but we are privileged in that we have some Widows of OWs here representing their husbands. Ladies, welcome and thank you for your support.

I must in particular single out Anne Pither, whose husband left the ship in 1946, was long serving member of Council, and a former Chairman of the Association. Anne I must also express our gratitude for your very generous donation towards the cost of these celebrations.

Whilst on the subject of support, perhaps now is the time to say how grateful we all should be for the forbearance of all our wives who have had to put up with listening to what they must see as the boring subject of life aboard Worcester whenever two or more of us are together. Ladies, tonight must be a case in point - thank you. I should mention one wife who has put up with the subject for many years. Mike Tolman left the ship in 1955, and tonight he and Christine celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary. (Mike – where are you?). Christine – very many congratulations, and our thanks that you decided to give up what should have been a pleasant celebratory evening with Mike in order to come here with him and hear yet more of his "Hello Sailor days".

I think I can confidently say with assurance that the current levels of support show that we have little concern over the current state of the association. We have over 800 members at present, and there are numerous Association branches who meet regularly all over the world, many of which have started to meet in company with members of our sister associations from Conway, Pangbourne, Warsash, Mercury and General Botha.

In the short term then I see no problem. Having said that it is a fact of life that the Association will in the fullness of time come to an end. But, I hasten to add, not just yet. I intend that during my tenure as your Chairman I will formulate a plan for the final demise of the association. To that end I will be forming a small sub-committee to look at what we wish to do in the future, and your input is very important and I will be contacting all the membership in the near future to gather your views on the way ahead. I would very much like to visit all the various branches in person to gather your views but whilst the branches in the UK should not prove too difficult, I have yet to raise the subject of an expenses paid round the world trip with our treasurer. I may not get to see all our groups in Canada, Australia and elsewhere! A shame.

Tonight, we have with us a number of the older members of the Association. Amongst others are Our President, Colin Steere, Alwyn Allen, presently the Master of the Yacht Club, and Ron Grimble, who has made the trip all the way from Australia to be with us. Ron, great to see you here. All three left the ship in 1947, whilst I and my contemporaries left in 1968, some 21 years later. From my point of view, all going well, that gives the Association at least another 21 years of life. While it is possible that this could be the last get together of this size, I hope that during that time we shall be able to have a number of gatherings.

On that theme, I must admit that when I heard that this event was to be called the Last Hurrah, it brought to mind my next-door neighbour. She is a very healthy 70 something year old widow with a daughter and two granddaughters who reside in Houston in Texas. Every summer for the last 5 years she has asked me to go online and book her flight tickets to the USA to let her make the last ever trip over to see them. I confidently expect that I will be booking another last ever flight when I return home from here next week.

In a similar way I hope that this Last Hurrah will be the first of many. Indeed, with some 21 years to go, whilst this may be the last gathering of such size and international representation, I see us having the Final Hurrah, the Last Final Hurrah, the Final Final Hurrah, and perhaps even the Hurrah to end all Hurrahs!

There is of course one date which must be marked, and that is Wednesday the 8 July 2028. Apart from being my 77th birthday, that will be the 50th anniversary of the day that Worcester 3 slipped her moorings and was towed away from Greenhithe to be made into razor blades. Whether you loved or hated your time aboard her or her predecessors that surely is a day we should remember as being the true end of HMS Worcester. Perhaps not a day to celebrate but surely one worth commemorating. If nothing else, I hope I will be around to raise a glass to the true end of what must be considered an important part of British Merchant Naval History.

As Lord Mountevans has already mentioned, when we look at where OWs have been, it is obvious that whether we liked it or not, the old ship most certainly instilled something in us all. Whether they went to sea or not, OWs have consistently done well in whatever career path they chose. Be it the discipline, leadership, self confidence or any of the other personal attributes we were exposed to at an early age whilst aboard, our characters were most certainly influenced by the life we led. A sense of self-worth, confidence and awareness of our own strengths brought out by the training regime made us what we are.

If nothing else, the camaraderie and the idea of belonging to a team are reflected in our presence here.

Tonight, we have had toasts to our Queen, our Ensign, Our Guests, and even to me, but I think that we have forgotten one of the most important groups here. To conclude therefore I wish to make a slight break from tradition and to propose a final toast. I intend to borrow what has long been a Royal Naval toast – and before any pedants out there say that this is not the correct night for this particular toast – so be it. Can I ask all Old Worcesters to stand. Gentlemen, given the deep and abiding bond that exists between us all, and in acknowledgement of what we have all become the toast is -- OURSELVES.