

Rector's speech at Lord Brian Flower's Memorial, Thursday 11 November

It is a great honour to welcome you all to Imperial today to celebrate the life and work of Lord Brian Flowers. This is not a religious service – which is as Brian would have wanted. Instead we will hear from friends and colleagues who knew Brian well, and the Imperial College choir will perform some of Brian's favourite pieces, selected by his wife Mary.

Mary, I'd like to thank you for proposing that this memorial be held here at Imperial – we are immensely proud to play host. Brian often said that he shared his job with Mary. Many here today will remember the warm and welcoming atmosphere they brought to Imperial College Life. Many will also remember the great kindness, humility and hospitality you both showed in your dealings with staff and students – and we will hear more of this later.

Thank you to your family, Mary – to Peter, Michael, Marcus and Naomi Büneman, for allowing us to share this afternoon with you all.

We are joined by friends from all walks of British and overseas life to remember Brian today – this is a great tribute to Brian's enormous contribution.

This afternoon we will hear from John Smith – Former College Secretary of Imperial, who will speak about Brian's efforts to modernise the institution and what he was like to work for.

We will also hear from Lord Robert May, a former Professor at Imperial, Chief Scientific Advisor and President of the Royal Society, who will share stories of their time at the Nuffield Foundation and the indelible mark Brian left on the Physics community.

And we will hear from Sir Gordon Conway on initiatives that changed the College, such as the creation of the Centre for Environmental Technology, as well as the highly sociable atmosphere that Brian and Mary created for visitors, staff and students, during their time here.

There are two former Rectors of Imperial here today - Sir Eric Ash and Sir Richard Sykes. Those of us that have followed Brian have benefited hugely from the modernisation and reforms he undertook – Brian brought a more inclusive approach to governance, consulting widely with staff at all levels. He was an early-adopter of new technology, and asked all departments to teach computing skills, recognising the importance of preparing students for their future careers.

Brian was politically astute. He once said he had “concerns about the influence of politics on universities” - how topical this remains today - and so encouraged those in Westminster to visit regularly, and to view Imperial as *their* institution. The College's engagement in the political process is as important today as it was then.

Brian had an international outlook. As the first president of the European Science Foundation, he helped place Imperial at the heart of European science and research. He did much to extend and enhance the College's reputation overseas, with visits to South East Asia and Japan.

Brian was first and foremost an academic visionary. As Rector, he nurtured the strengths of staff to build a better college - these strengths remain core to Imperial's teaching and research today. Brian recognised that success for the College was in the hands of its staff and students, whom he described as "a very likeable bunch of people, a very clever bunch of people too."

I would now like to welcome John Smith to the stage to offer more personal memories of his time working alongside Brian.

Closing remarks

It is clear from what we have heard this afternoon that Brian was greatly respected as Rector and a Vice-Chancellor, and as a scientist, statesman, colleague and friend. As Imperial's tenth Rector he invigorated the College and introduced new approaches to academic activities for which future generations of staff and students will be grateful.

Thank you to Lady Flowers and the family members for being here.

Thank you to all speakers for their tributes, to the Imperial College choir and their conductor Dr Colin Durrant, and to all who have joined us this afternoon to remember what a great man Brian Flowers truly was.

I hope as you have been listening that it has stirred your own memories of both the great role that Brian played in public life, and the small actions that defined him as an individual that touched and changed our lives.

I hope you will take the chance to leave your name in the visitors signing book in the Queen Tower Rooms on the ground floor, and may I now invite you to please join us there for afternoon tea.