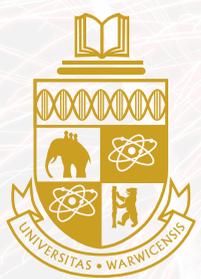




WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK



Mr David Burbidge CBE Hon DLitt

Oration by Professor Jonathan Neelands
Warwick Business School



Mr David Burbidge CBE Hon DLitt

'You're a gentleman and a scholar' is an old, not entirely politically correct, English phrase that is sometimes used in appreciation of unexpected acts of kindness or generosity.

We are used to welcoming the finest scholars in the world onto this stage to award them with honorary degrees. But on this occasion, we are welcoming a true gentleman; a gentle man of huge generosity and good spirit.

In his business dealings, his philanthropic work and civic leadership David Burbidge manages to be both gentle and resolute; to be courteous and attentive but persistent in reaching his goals; to be adaptable and flexible but anchored within in his own integrity and moral strength.

At 74 you might think that David would be happy to accept this degree and gently retire to his hobbies of painting, sailing and real tennis. But this degree is awarded both in recognition of his past achievements and in anticipation of what he will continue to achieve in the future. David is a restless spirit and will not stop I'm sure until he has realised his ambitions as a remarkable, indeed transformational, public servant and supporter of the arts for all.

David trained as a lawyer and was awarded an OBE in 1998 and a CBE in 2016 in recognition of his services to his local region and its communities and for his active contributions to the arts and culture. A former High Sheriff of the West Midlands and presently Deputy Lieutenant of the West Midlands, he is or has recently been a Master of the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers. Founding Chairman of the Coventry Cathedral Development Trust, Chairman of the Belgrade Theatre Board and Board member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, he is also most importantly Chair of the Coventry City of Culture Trust and leading the City's bid to be City of Culture 2021. Which we will return to...

In addition, David continues to be a successful businessman who transformed his family wood-turning business in Coventry into the UK's largest maker of kitchen doors and worktops. He is supported by his wife

Sandra and children Ben, Edward and Harriet in managing this complex and busy life! He also has extensive holdings and interests in his beloved Kenya which accounts for his almost perpetual tan I think. And then there is the sailing! He has twice competed in the Fastnet race which is one of the most dangerous and competitive yacht races in the world - and yes, gentle sailing off the coasts of Kenya is very pleasant, I'm told.

But the reason why a Professor from the Warwick Business School with a background in the Arts is here today, is to celebrate the works of a socially responsible businessman with a passion for the arts and for their place in our society.

David paints and draws and collects sculpture. But he is no mere spectator or connoisseur. His driving ambition is to unleash the power of the arts, culture and heritage in order to enrich people's lives and the places where they live. His vision is of a city transformed through culture - economically, socially, creatively, personally. He wants the arts for all and for the arts to be representative of all and available to all. He wants to use his skills and position in the business world and his civic roles to leverage the financial, civic and political support needed to ensure that the arts prosper as an essential, affordable and accessible part of our humanity. He wants to reclaim Coventry's pride and hope and transform how we see and experience the city and its spirit of innovation and welcome.

David is a legendary fundraiser. He led with Vikki Heywood the RSC's recent £112m campaign for the new Stratford Theatre and led a £14m campaign for Coventry's Belgrade Theatre amongst other successes. Although, I think it's rather appropriate that David should have a bar in the Belgrade named after him.

His abilities and charisma have ensured that the arts and culture in Coventry are supported by a wide range of businesses and both universities, and he has raised the necessary funding to support the City of Culture 2021 campaign in a time of austerity and restraint.



He once joked that he was surprised he had any friends left! But a fundraiser friend reminded me that people give to people. David is successful partly because of his immense charm and commitment but people also give because he is passionate, authentic, honest and righteous in his causes. And he delivers on his promises.

He is a brilliant leader, who inspires and tirelessly values and supports those who work with him. He is always good humoured and natured but ready to take decisive action when needed, to challenge and demand more when progress is slow, and to balance the needs and voices of the many stakeholders in the city.

Win or lose, David has committed himself to leading the transformation of Coventry into a proud, dynamic, diverse, young 21st century city. In his role as Chair of the City of Culture Trust he has forged a unique civic partnership between the City Council, the universities and businesses. David will as from today have honorary degrees from both the City's universities and has worked tirelessly to bring them together in support of the city's ambitions. He has led through example. Patient, gentle and flexible but determined and persistent. The city is already transforming under his stewardship and this is important for Warwick. This is our place. The University has a global reach and interest but this city is our place and David has helped us to be an effective force for change and progress in Coventry, benefiting our students, our reputation and our employees and their families.

Thank you, David, for reminding us of the riches of our place and its potential and inviting us to share in your dreams. Thank you for being both a gentleman and a scholar of how to make great things happen. On behalf of the city, the region and this University we thank you for your generosity and example.

Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, David Burbidge.