

Oration for Ms Heidi Meyer, Hon LLD,

To be Delivered on Wednesday 25 July 2018, 11am by Professor
Nick Vaughan Williams

Chancellor

One of the most characterful buildings in the county town of Warwick is the Lord Leycester Hospital. Founded in 1571 by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, the Lord Leycester Hospital still retains its ancient function as a retirement home for ex-soldiers. Recently, however, it has broken with tradition in the appointment of its present Master. This afternoon, I am delighted to introduce as our honorary graduand, the first female Master of the Lord Leycester Hospital, Heidi Meyer.

The Masters of the Lord Leycester Hospital have always had a church or military background. Heidi, the 33rd Master, began her career in 1975 in the British army, serving in Germany, Cyprus, and the UK. She went on to work for the US Department of Defense on their Medical Assistance Program as a logistical manager for high visibility, short notice disaster relief missions.

In 1995 she became the founder, director, and CEO of Joint Relief International, a start-up humanitarian non-profit operation that delivered donated emergency aid using US defense donated air transport. From 1999 to 2001, Heidi was civilian military desk officer for NATO during the Kosovo crisis. Later, the focus of her work moved to Afghanistan, and the US Embassy in Kabul: she set up the Kabul Support Element for the US forces deployed with NATO in Afghanistan, was Senior Adviser to the Afghan National Security Council and was the Secretary of Defense's representative on the Afghan Presidential Election Monitoring Team.

In 2010, her work on governance in Afghanistan earned her the prestigious Department of State Superior Honor Award. Her most recent post before coming to Warwick was that of Political Advisor to the Commander of NATO Land Forces in Turkey.

Heidi Meyer thus brings to her new position a wealth of diplomatic and administrative experience, gained in some of the world's most dangerous places. This experience provides common ground with the retired military men (known as 'brethren') who live in the Lord Leycester Hospital.

She is matter-of-fact about being the first female Master, commenting: ‘In previous roles, I have regularly been the only female in a work environment’. She hopes, however, that she has set an example for other women to follow. She explains that her objective is to work towards a sustainable future for the Lord Leycester – ‘to put in place an innovative and creative plan with local organisations to help it thrive’.

The Lord Leycester Hospital is one of the jewels in the crown not only of Warwick, but also of the whole county of Warwickshire with which the University has always had a special relationship. Some 50 years ago, together with the city of Coventry, Warwickshire donated the land on which the University is built; many of our students and staff live in its neighbouring towns; the University makes an important contribution to its cultural and economic life, and the Bear and Ragged Staff emblem, which features widely in the Lord Leycester Hospital, is part of our University crest.

So we are particularly pleased to welcome today to our University community the new guardian of one of the most important historic buildings in our neighbouring county: Heidi Meyer.

Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, Heidi Meyer.