

Oration for Steve Hollis
To be held at 11am on Friday 19 July 2019
Delivered by Professor Nigel Driffield

Chancellor...

STEVE HOLLIS, our honorary graduand this morning, is one of the West Midlands' most influential businessmen, who has worked tirelessly on behalf of our local region. I am delighted to introduce him to this Congregation.

In writing this oration I asked Steve what he thought his success was based on, and he said “getting people who are cleverer than me to work together”. Having worked with Steve (I’m unsure as to whether I qualify as one of those clever people) all I can say is that he must, in his time, have worked with some seriously clever people if that is indeed the case.

Steve Hollis joined Peat Marwick Mitchell, 1983 (merged to become KPMG), and became a partner in KPMG in 1992 – which seems a staggeringly short time to me, and having had a global career, returned to the Midlands in 2011, with the desire to make a difference in a city that had a rather tarnished reputation.

It was around this time (with apologies for sounding too parochial) that the government abolished the main agents for regional development, and put this back onto the private sector in the form of local enterprise partnerships. This required people to put their hands up, and do stuff. Many sought to chair things, or to “sit on boards” but few wanted to do the heavy lifting. Steve Hollis was an exception. With the force of his personality (and his ability to coordinate others) he galvanised the greater Birmingham LEP, persuaded (and sometime shamed) others into stepping up, to the point where Birmingham became seen as an exemplar in local economic development and strategy, rather than a basket case.

By 2019, our region is a stand-out economic success story, leading the way in job creation, business start-ups, exports and inward investment. Household names have and are making the region their homes.

I also remember a meeting some 4 days after the referendum, where Steve called a meeting of the great and the good, and basically said “ok, there is going to be a lot of politics in the next three years, with government doing nothing, but we have it to do, we owe to the people of this region, to just get on, creating jobs, seeking to enhance productivity, and translating that into jobs and earnings. No time for moping- we just have it to do.” This philosophy is reflected in his work for the West Midlands as a whole. Since retiring from KPMG, has had a number of important roles in the city and the wider region...

There is however one, [cough], fly in this ointment. While we can forgive him chairing the advisory board of the business school at Birmingham University, at a time when someone had to step in, Steve took over as chairman of Aston Villa. This was, it has to be said, not a season of triumph for Villa.... But we won't go into that now.

At Warwick, we too have committed ourselves to playing an even greater leadership role in the economic, social and cultural growth of our region, leading and supporting regional economic development in partnership with local regional institutions and business. We see this therefore as a meeting of minds, but also recognise how hard this is. It is on this basis that

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