

## Oration for Ken Follett

To be delivered on Wednesday, 16 January 2019, 11 am by  
Vice Chancellor Stuart Croft

**I am delighted to introduce as our honorary graduand this morning one of the world's most successful novelists: KEN FOLLETT.**

**Ken Follett writes thrillers and historical novels. He has written over 31 books, with more than 165 million copies sold in over 80 countries, in 33 languages; eight have reached Number 1 on the *New York Times* Best Seller List, and many have been made into television mini-series.**

**Ken was born in Cardiff and, after graduating from University College London, embarked on a career in journalism and publishing. His literary 'breakthrough' came with *The Eye of the Needle*, published in 1978. This World War 11 thriller – a classic of its genre – won the 1979 Edgar Award for Best Novel from the Mystery Writers of America and was made into a successful film starring Donald Sutherland. Other best-selling thrillers followed before Ken changed tack completely and, pursuing his interest in architecture, in 1989 published**

***The Pillars of the Earth*, centred round the building of a great cathedral in 12<sup>th</sup> century England. It became Number 1 on Best Seller lists everywhere, and was made into a major TV series produced by Ridley Scott. Its sequel, *World Without End*, came out in 2007 and Ken completed the trilogy in 2017 with *A Column of Fire*, taking the descendants of his original characters into the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1. Equally ambitious – and successful – has been his recent *Century* trilogy, telling the story of the twentieth century through five interrelated families – American, English, Russian, German and Welsh.**

**Ken writes about topics that intrigue and engage us: the murky world of espionage – secret agents, dark deeds, dangerous missions; the process of building a cathedral without any of our modern equipment; the ordinary person caught up in the tumultuous events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His fast-moving narrative and intricate plots keep us turning the pages (or pressing the kindle button), impatient to find out what happens next. We are instantly transported to another time or place, be it Tudor England or London during the Blitz. This is the result of Ken's intensive research for each book: he takes immense pains to**

**'get it right', even taking flying lessons when he wrote *Hornet's Flight*. So his period details are spot-on: in a medieval monastery, a boy feeds an abandoned baby with a towel dipped in milk; wartime travellers in a cold, dark British train console themselves with dried-egg sandwiches. And it was Ken**

**Follett who, in *The Eye of the Needle*, introduced for the first time a female hero into a thriller, heralding an important change in the genre's gender balance.**

**Ken is a Fellow of UCL, the Royal Society of Literature, the Royal Society of Arts and the Welsh Academy. He holds honorary degrees from universities in Great Britain and America. He has won prestigious literary prizes, and in 2008 was awarded the Spanish Olaguibel Prize for contributing to the promotion and awareness of architecture. At home, he has worked to support literacy and love of literature – as president of Dyslexia Action, chair of the National Year of Reading, a trustee of the National Literacy Trust and a board director of the National Academy of Writing. In 2018, he was made a CBE for services to**

**literature and charity.**

**Ken Follett is a master story-teller, whose books have entertained and informed millions across the world – including many in our congregation today.**

**It is a great pleasure to welcome him to Warwick.**

**Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, KENNETH MARTIN FOLLET**