



University of London Foundation Day 2017

Oration given by Professor David Latchman for Sir Deian Rhys Hopkin

Chancellor,

In accordance with the Charter, Statutes and Ordinances of the University, I present to you this person on whom we wish you to confer the ***Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature***.

Sir Deian Rhys Hopkin

The surname Hopkin is not a common one. A Google search reveals in addition to our Honoree, Fred Hopkin a relatively unknown football player of the early 20th Century and Glyn Hopkin, a large second-hand car dealership in the south of England.

Perhaps the most famous Hopkin however, apart of course, from our Honoree is the Welsh folk singer Mary Hopkin whose most famous song had the catchy chorus that I am sure many of you will know "***Those were the days my friend***".

Interestingly, although we honour Deian primarily for his role in public life and particularly in Higher Education, he is also a semi-professional musician who has performed at Jazz Festivals with the Deian Hopkin Quartet, although I don't know if he has ever sung along with Mary Hopkin

Nonetheless, let us look at the days of Deian Hopkin. He was born in Wales on St David's Day in 1944. His mother led the campaign to establish the first State-funded Welsh Language School which Deian attended on his third birthday and as its youngest pupil when it opened in 1947. His mother was particularly active in the Labour Party and the young Deian knew both Hugh Gaitskell and Nye Bevan. Indeed, it might have been possible for us to say that Deian knew Lloyd George, the most famous Welsh politician of the 20th Century were it not for a slight difficulty in political party, Lloyd George being a Liberal and chronology, since he died when Deian was just one-year old.

Nonetheless, his family background appears to have played a key role in his choice of academic specialty namely, the History of the Labour and Trade Union Movement in Wales. Following a degree and PhD at Aberystwyth University, he spent a brief period as a graduate assistant in History at our own Queen Mary College before returning to Aberystwyth as a lecturer, where he spent the next 24 years eventually becoming Head of History, Welsh History and Philosophy.

Clearly, as with so many successful academics, University Management was calling Deian away from the pure study of Labour History. In 1991, he was appointed Dean of Human Sciences at what became London Guildhall University and in 1996 was appointed Vice-Provost there. Soon after he arrived, the institution fell into serious financial crisis. Years later, Deian commented that this was a cathartic experience making him reflect on what you might do in an institution that needed change.

Clearly, this experience prepared him well for the role of Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of South Bank University, where he served from 2001 until 2009. The advertisement for the post invited candidates to "***lead the revolution***" and Deian as the successful candidate certainly did that. He reorganised the University, rebranded it, and constructed major new teaching and research buildings on its consolidated campus at the Elephant and Castle. The Universities international programme was extended with the opening of dedicated offices in Beijing and the establishment of the first Confucius Centre for Traditional Chinese Medicine in the world.

It was during this period that I worked closely with Deian in my role as Chairman of London Higher, where he was the Vice-Chair. Those indeed were the days my friend when we worked together to try and get London's Universities to co-operate to ensure that the wide variety of Higher Education institutions in



London both within and without the University of London were recognised for their excellence by Government and others.

Towards the end of his time at London South Bank, I was negotiating with a distinguished Professor of Education at that University and eventually persuaded her to move to Birkbeck. As she was a high profile individual, I was rather concerned about Deian's reaction and its effect on our friendship. I nervously broached the subject to him over a lunch. I need not have worried. He simply said "**My Dear boy, everyone knows I am retiring soon from South Bank, so all the good people are leaving**". In an interview in 2004, Deian indicated that when he retired from South Bank moving to Spain and playing golf, were unlikely to be on his agenda. Rather he said "**I will return to full-time academic writing**".

Had he done so, he could have looked back on a long and distinguished career in the upper echelons of Higher Education for which he was knighted in 2009. He could perhaps have quoted the second line of Mary Hopkin's song which comes after "**Those were the days my friend**", and continues "**we thought they'd never end**". However his days in his Higher Education roles did not end because Deian continued beyond retirement to fulfil a number of other roles. These were not the sinecures often given to distinguished individuals post-retirement. For example, from 2011-2015 he was President of the National Library of Wales. Hardly a sinecure since in this period, the library suffered a major fire, the resignation of its Chief Executive, following a highly critical report and was pronounced financially fragile. Similarly, following failures at the Student-Loan Company, Deian was invited to conduct an enquiry and subsequently appointed Interim-Chairman to oversee the implementation of its recommendations. Given that the SLC sacked its Chief Executive last week, perhaps it is time for Deian to return once again!

Indeed, I am sure he would be willing to do so for even eight years after retirement from London South Bank, the golf course and the study of Welsh Labour History are still waiting for his return. He continues to serve, for example, as an Expert Adviser to the First Minister of Wales and Chair of the First World War Commemoration Board as well as a Member of the Higher Education Commission.

These are indeed still the days my friend, they have not ended and long may you continue your record of service to Higher Education and beyond.

Your Royal Highness, and Chancellor,

It is with great pleasure that I ask you to confer the **Degree of Doctor of Literature Honoris Causa on Sir Deian Rhys Hopkin.**