

Jonathan Ruffer

Doctor of Letters

Durham Cathedral, 12 January 2018

'Oh how sweet life was when we sat quietly . . . midst all these books.'

This is a quote from Alcuin of York – the 8th century pioneer of combinatorics and later advisor to Charlemagne. As a student, Alcuin was a beneficiary of Bede's Northumbrian golden age – Bede, who lies here with us still, whose legacy is this Cathedral, and this University.

The sweet life, midst these books – could be your time at university. Instead of books, it could be art, or these columns. Whether in a library, a museum, or a Church, the sweet life is when we learn, reflect, and prepare for action. Alcuin's greatest political act was to persuade Charlemagne to bestow religious tolerance on his subjects, by abolishing the death penalty for pagans. What we learn from his example is to study everything, take the long view, think, and then act.

Today, we honour the achievements of Jonathan Ruffer, whose success is also built on the ability to take the long view, to reflect and then to act. Jonathan leads by example. His actions are changing this region, and this university, for the better. Like Alcuin, Jonathan is a Northumbrian. He has familial links with Durham University – his grandfather was an eminent surgeon and President of the Medical Society. Jonathan studied at Cambridge but felt he did not have the right skills to pursue a career in academia, and instead he went to London, where as a long-view investor, he established the investment firm Ruffer LLP.

He has always been a man of faith, and has become a Fellow of St. John's College, Durham. From faith, came a desire to do good works. He imagined himself, one day, serving the minestrone soup in a Church Hall in Sunderland. His friends – who may know something of his practical skills – told him he would be useless as a volunteer, and he realised he needed to find another way. An opportunity arose in 2001, when

the Church Commissions decided to sell a set of seventeenth-century paintings by the Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán. The paintings of Jacob and his twelve sons were purchased by Bishop Trevor of Durham in 1756, and became a symbol of religious tolerance: Gods chosen people, painted by a Catholic, purchased by a protestant Bishop. A symbol that Alcuin would have understood and applauded. The paintings hung, mostly unseen for 260 years, in the private collection of the Bishop of Durham at Auckland Castle, until in 2011 Jonathan made a donation that kept them in the region and opened Auckland Castle to the public.

Oh sweet life, as we sit quietly amongst these great works.

For Jonathan this was just the beginning. The paintings became foundation stones on which to regenerate and reinvigorate the North East both culturally and intellectually. Since 2011, he has worked together with the university on the Zurbarán Centre for Spanish and Latin American Art, and with the Prado to bring Spanish art to Bishop Auckland. He has opened a Museum of Mining Art and is planning a Museum of Faith. He has established the Eleven Arches charity which produces an annual open-air theatre production – Kynren – telling the story of the Northumbrian people using thousands of local volunteers. And he is bringing back pineapples! In both Auckland and Durham Castles you will find pineapples everywhere, carved in oak. The Prince Bishops liked to grow this exotic fruit in their walled garden at Auckland Castle. Together with Durham archaeologists, the Auckland Trust has uncovered Bishop Trevor's original pinery and plans to restore it with a modern twist. Heat will be provided by geothermal energy from subterranean Weardale granite that could one day provide sustainable energy to a significant part of the region. Within a very short time, via the Auckland Project, Jonathan Ruffer has become a powerful driver of both cultural and economic regeneration in the North East region.

I want to finish by picking one thing that Jonathan told me when we first met. A piece of UK history that parallels the message of Jonathan's beliefs and actions. During that first conversation, out-of-the-blue, he mentioned the Beveridge report. The date was 1942, the darkest days of the Second World War. As people lost their lives, cities were destroyed, financial debts were astronomical and rising, William Henry

Beveridge – MP for Berwick – sat quietly, to reflect and write the founding principles of the welfare state, a blueprint for a better future. Beveridge wrote that now is a not time `for patching', it is a time for acting. His vision was the long game, and many of us here today have reaped the rewards. The message I take from Jonathan achievement is similar. It is a message by example, of good works, the importance of taking the long view, to build something solid and enduring, that helps others to lead more fulfilling lives.

So, in this sweet life, amongst your books, or amidst great paintings, or between these columns, think of Jonathan's message, and the message of Alcuin and Beveridge. Take your to time to reflect on the long game, and then to act, to build a better tomorrow. And, if you need to ask, when it the time to reflect? When is it time to act? The message is always, that time is now.

Vice Chancellor, I present to you Jonathan Garnier Ruffer to receive the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa.