

Convocation presentation of Staves to the University

**Dr Stuart Goldsmith (BA 1966, Hon LLD 2007), Chairman of Convocation
Wills Memorial Building Saturday 4 July 2009**

Almost 50 years ago to the day, on the occasion of the University's Golden Jubilee, the then Chairman of Convocation George Hinton stood in Colston Hall before his Vice-Chancellor, Sir Philip Morris – who, Madam Chancellor, was deputising for your illustrious predecessor Sir Winston Churchill.

He recalled the granting of the University's Royal Charter by Edward VII in 1909, conferring upon it the power to award its own degrees after almost 33 years of preparing students for University of London Examinations, and celebrated the central part that its graduates had played in the life and continuing development of the University.

It is through the act of graduation that former students become full members of Convocation and have an opportunity to continue to play a part in the life of the University, and on the conclusion of his address, Mr Hinton presented the Vice-Chancellor with two ceremonial staves for use by the officers of the University during degree ceremonies.

The staves were first used during the two days of degree ceremonies in 1959. Today they are carried at degree congregations which fill six full days in the summer and, in addition, take place on several further occasions in the academic year, reflecting the expansion in the size and in the standing of the University.

It was with this earlier gift and this association in mind that the Convocation Committee felt it would be appropriate to commission a further staff to mark the University's Centenary. Its design, capped with a mitre resting on four books including the Bible and the works of Galen and Euclid, which represent the basis of learning in the first Universities, celebrates the life and work of a man of outstanding vision and energy, to whom more than any other the University owes its beginning. This man was Dr John Percival, Headmaster of Clifton College and later Bishop of Hereford. He was tireless in his efforts to establish a University

College in Bristol, enrolling his friends in the cause, raising funds and, even before the battle was won, supporting and taking the lead in the pioneering decision by the College to admit women to study on the same terms as men, thus making Bristol the first institution of Higher Education in the country to do so. We celebrate his vision, his commitment to scholarship and his willingness to work outside of established custom and convention while honouring the traditions of public service.

Madam Chancellor, on behalf of Convocation I present you with this stave to mark the University of Bristol's first Centenary, and as a token of thanks for our University's distinguished past. May it symbolise our commitment to working together to attain an even greater future for the University, building upon the achievements of the past, and continuing its contribution to the city and to the vision of a world-wide community of scholarship.

Madam Chancellor, this afternoon we also celebrate the life and work of a distinguished alumnus and my predecessor in this office, Dr. Derek Wyndham Zutshi. As a student resident in Wills Hall, an officer of the Students' Union and a member of the University's Council and Court and most of its Medical Appointment Boards for 20 years, he gave half a century of service to the University while fulfilling a demanding career as a consultant rheumatologist.

The six years he spent as a student in Wills Hall were hugely influential in shaping his adult life and provided him with a large and committed circle of friends world-wide. In later life, Derek and his wife, Marguerite, who fully supported him in his endeavours, devoted much of their time and energy to fostering the University's connection with its overseas alumni. With the help of his friends and through his drive, vision and tenacity, branches of Convocation were formed in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. These not only help alumni to renew old friendships and to forge new ones, but host visiting academics and act as sources of information and support to overseas students who are considering studying in Bristol.

Even in death, Derek and Marguerite re-affirmed their commitment to the University by bequeathing the substantial part of their combined estate to further its work. Areas in which Derek and Marguerite expressed particular interest were in improving multi-racial and inter-faith understanding and dialogue by means of lectures by distinguished scholars in the field; generous scholarships enabling talented students of Indian origin to study at the University and to enjoy the benefits of living in Wills Hall in the way that he had done; and furthering the work of the Wills Hall Association and the Alumni Foundation.

One aspect of Derek's work as Chairman of Convocation which gave him particular pleasure was his attendance at graduation ceremonies. As a tribute and a memorial to Derek, his friends and former colleagues therefore decided to mark his life by the presentation to the University of a further stave for use on ceremonial occasions. Capped by a caduceus or Staff of Mercury, which has been used to denote the medical profession from the days of the ancient Greeks, it is entwined by two coiled serpents, whose venom was traditionally said to contain healing properties.

We hope that its use in the University's degree ceremonies in the future will serve as a memorial to the life of a man whose appreciation of what he gained at his time at Bristol prompted him to strive to make a better University for the benefit of future generations of students.

Madam Chancellor, it is with great pleasure that I present you with this stave to be carried by the ceremonial officers of the University involved with the work of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry in the degree ceremonies of the future.