Valedictory 25th June 2019.

This is my third valedictory address and probably the most important. Partly because there will never be another for me, I promise, and partly because it marks for me, the end of a particular journey. A particularly long and eventful journey. I can't actually remember why I said I would take the chair again. I do remember a conversation at lunch, about three years ago, with Derek Morgan when we couldn't get members to go through to the chair. Derek and I decided that we needed to groom a new cohort of members who eventually could take the chair. Our plan was to create a gap in order to properly prepare a prospect for the job. We put ourselves forward and for only the second time in the clubs 90 plus year's history we recycled Presidents. Of course it didn't quite work out as we planned. However Derek and I were acutely aware that the club was in need of a radical rethink and that the club needed new members to survive.

I expressed my fears to my peers in October 2017 and after a little toy throwing on my part I secured the commitment of the club to address our problems. Specifically, they were that the club was dying and at that time unlikely to make its centenary. We had not inducted a new member for some time and our numbers were steadily depleting. We were not alone. This blight affects almost every long established club in RIBI indeed even further afield, in most developed western countries. I was shocked to hear a couple of weeks ago that our mother club, Birmingham, was down to 40 members and that they seemed reconciled to that decline and had no plans to address it. Not for us however. For us the first and necessary step was to ensure continuity of the presidency. No President...no club. My first thanks, therefore go to Richard Horrell, Brian Bailey and Richard Green who between them will take the reins from my hands next week and push the club through to at least it's Centenary. That change was essential to our survival was obvious. But how to achieve it.

To identify what those changes should be required many hours of discussion and preparation and I want to thank the Members of the Presidents Review Group for their commitment. Richard Horrell, Brian Bailey, Richard Green, Mike Boyce and Geoff Lowndes. This group took a hard and uncompromising look at the club and set about facing up to the problems and seeking a solution. As we now know many changes have been implemented and I am sure that more will follow as the club evolves. I have been delighted to welcome into the club four new members amongst whom are our first lady members. I am assured that there are several other prospective members in the pipeline. No president can operate effectively without his Governing Council and officers. I have been very fortunate to have a full GC who not only served the club brilliantly this year but have signed up for next year as well. I worked out yesterday that I have served 13 years on GC and attended about 140 meetings and driven 4500 miles. It would have been cheaper to move house.

The Hon. Secretary is vital to a smooth running club. Gerry Peters has done an admirable job in difficult circumstances and to him I express my thanks. He had to learn on the job so to speak but he was ably assisted by Geoff Lowndes and I thank him for being able to help when Gerry was dealing with personal issues. The Treasurer, of course, looks after the cash and keeps us financially sound. Our Treasurer has been doing this quietly in the background, no fuss, no drama although getting him to reply to e mails has been a challenge. Not least I suspect because it is difficult to reply when you have a particularly difficult put to execute on the 18th green. In fact he has been doing this job ably and without fuss for 11 years and I think that we all owe him a debt of gratitude. It is with the greatest of pleasure therefore that to thank him for his service, to me and the club, that I ask Stewart to accept a sapphire to his PHF award.

Thanks are also due to Robin Tyler Morris, as assistant treasurer, for being the back up to Stewart in his absences, usually the AGM or some other minor event. Of course Robin also wears other hats, including Public Relations and Club Liaison officer and for whichever hat, I thank him. He is not the only multiple hat wearer, indeed this member probably has the club record for this. Equipment officer, Menu secretary, Club duties secretary and speaker's secretary. It is of course Roy Sutcliffe. It is for wearing the last hat that I want to thank him especially. One of the points that came out of the club questionnaire was that the club meetings should be more interesting. I think that during the last 12 months we have had some of the best speakers we have ever had and the proof of the pudding is that attendance numbers have improved. Thank you Roy. I want to thank our Club Almoner, P.P. Brian Oates, for keeping in touch with members not able to attend. Sadly Brian has asked me to accept his resignation from the club after 35 years' service. I have appealed to him to change his mind but he had thought about it carefully and believed that it was time to retire.

I didn't want to turn this into a sort of Oscars acceptance speech but we are all grateful to the holder of a job which he has been trying to get rid of for years. The wise amongst us always avoid eye contact at this time of the year when he approaches, just in case he tries to get us to take on the job. I speak of our Sports Office, Peter Hand, who has on many occasions had to smooth over relations with Jean because of his many absences from the marital home whilst organising District matches in far flung parts of Staffordshire and Shropshire. Thank you Peter, and yes, I have noticed that you couldn't find a sucker and you've got the job for another year. Of course this is only one of the jobs that Peter does. He is secretary of Sports and Entertainment committee and secretary of the Dragon Boats committee. Finally thanks are due to our Hub editor Stuart Williams who having had no experience prior to taking on the job has nevertheless managed to continue the fine tradition of keeping members and partners up to date on club activities. All of the above serve on the Club Administration Committee which continues to make the club run smoothly, so thank you to PE Richard Horell for guiding them so ably.

Now I turn to our fundraising which is the envy of most clubs. In the past, when we had twice as many members and most of them were working, fundraising was mainly out of the members pockets. I was keen during my first presidency, in 2005/6,

that we should ask the public for money. After all the proceeds went back into society. Dragon Boats was already in its 5th year and we subsequently established The Tree and BFF. Mike Colley not only took the chair of The Tree Committee for the first time but had to forge a new relationship with a new venue. Linking the Tree to the Centenary of the end of the First World War gave it a special poignant relevancy. Thank you for all the hard work and the publicity we achieved as well of course as the money raised.

Geoff Lowndes and his small committee do big things when they bring Best Foot Forward to fruition and of course as I speak we are close to this year's event. Many thanks to them for their hard work in what can be a highly unpredictable event. Finally our major fund-raiser Dragon Boats, which has just been run, has one of our hardest working members at the helm. Mike Boyce. Mike, and I have it on record, was reluctant to take on the role of Chair again but with a little arm twisting and putting him on a guilt trip, he accepted the challenge. I was involved at the genesis of this event some 20 years ago, when P.P. Rod Jones brought the idea to the club and I know how much blood sweat and tears are involved in making this event such a success. Mike is of course heavily involved in BFF, the Presidents Review Group and other committees as well as hauling himself up mountains and hurling himself off bridges, all in the name Service above Self. Mike, every member of this club knows how much time and commitment you put into your Rotary service so in recognition, would you please accept from a grateful club and President, a Sapphire to your PHF award.

There are still a couple of fundraisers which rely upon the members' generosity, as you witnessed earlier. Thanks to Brian Woolley and the omnipresent Geoff Lowndes for the Rollover Raffle and the 200 club. Of course raising the money is one thing but spending it is another. The Richards Green and Horrell and the International and Foundation Committee and Brian Bailey and the Youth and Community Service committee have worked tirelessly throughout the year to identify suitable needy causes to which funds could be donated. Many thanks to you all.

Anyone new to this occasion would think it was all work and no play but that is far from the case. The team working with Chairman Clive Baker on the Sports and Entertainment committee deserve special praise for putting on our sports and social calendar. Thanks for the many events you put on for our mutual enjoyment. In the main they have done very well but it was disappointing that there was no cup for the winner of the croquet. Just saying... Finally I come to a committee which for years has been the Cinderella of committees. No one really wanted to be on it and the Chair had therefore struggled to make any headway. This year that situation changed. Membership became our number one priority. The reason for the changes to the club were to make it more attractive to a younger membership whose life demands were different from the traditional club. Thank you Kewal and your team for accepting the challenge of putting some of our initiatives into action. In this endeavour I especially want to mention 2 people who we all know have the welfare of our club in their hearts. Jerry Hobbs and Peter Williams. Neither of them were members of the Membership committee but they both took on the task of attracting new members. Peter has been nurturing several ex Round Tablers to consider our club as their next logical home for service to the community. This was originally to form a satellite club when we had not at that time considered, let alone implemented any changes. Now that the changes are in place the satellite club format has been superseded by our new offering. Peter's efforts, which have cost him both expense and time, have not been in vain however, as he is hoping that the club will now be attractive to those possible satelliters and moves are afoot to bring them into the club.

Jerry's story is different in so far that 12 months ago I think he was pretty fed up with the club and on the verge of leaving. He didn't believe we were going anywhere and said so. I remember challenging him not to point out the problem but to be part of the solution. He accepted and with his usual energy got to work on how to present our more relaxed club to a new audience. The result are the two recruitment showcases, the first of which was last Friday, where we are able to meet prospective members in an informal atmosphere. He is also working on an information package for working, retired and corporate members. This is all ongoing but I must thank them both for the sheer effort that they have put into ensuring a future for the club. Anyone who has done this job for a year knows that it is nigh on impossible without the support of your wife. The demands of the Presidency at times did cause one or two eruptions. I make no apologies for my irritability at times with matters Rotary as I like to get things done. There have been many, times when I have been going off on one when Barbara brings me down from wherever I was and crushingly says "it is only a club you know." To do it, in total, for three years has required a level of patience and understanding from Barbara that is beyond Service above Self. She said that on the 1st of July, which incidentally is my 76th birthday, she will get her husband back. I think that she should be careful what she wishes for. My thanks and yours go to her. When I stepped in for Derek there was no back up and I expressed my displeasure at this turn of events quite forcefully. One man stepped up. When we had no Assistant Secretary, the same man stepped up and when Gerry was having to deal with domestic pressures he stepped up again. Without doubt, he is the hardest working member of this club. I am not sure that I could have done this past nigh on 2 years without his counsel, organisation and friendship. All of us owe him a great deal for his involvement in all parts of the clubs activities. It doesn't matter what it is, he will have a form for it and a set of rules, oh ... and probably a spreadsheet. Yes of course you recognise who I mean. Geoff Lowndes. Geoff will you come and accept, from a grateful President and club, a third richly deserved sapphire for your PHF award.

At last I come to the part where I thank all the members for their forbearance while we examined ourselves and decided upon which course of action to pursue. I am content that the ball started rolling during my term of office and that it will continue to move so long as the required amount of pressure is maintained. I am certain that you will give as much support to Richard as you have given to me. In the final analysis, as I have said so often, it is your club. I believe that it is now a better club.

I also believe that this club now has a bright future and I thank you for letting me be a part of it. Paul Lockley