

## President David's Speech to The Rotary Club of Paray, May 2019

(in french of course, this text is merely a translation)

Fellow Rotarians and dear friends, on behalf of our members in Royston may I say what a pleasure it is to among you once again in Paray as guests of your club.

This is only my second visit to this part of Burgundy, although I have been coming to the most beautiful country in Europe ever since I was a child. Oh no, let me correct myself, I mean to say visiting one of the two most beautiful countries in Europe!

When I first learnt that one of my responsibilities as President this year was going to be making a speech in French, I have to confess I was a little nervous. I just about scraped a pass in my examination in your language when I was at grammar school, though I did get a little more proficient over the years. More recently, however, I have let my French slip, so please do forgive any errors in grammar and pronunciation.

Then I realised that there was absolutely no need for nervousness – after all, about one-third of all English words are derived directly or indirectly from Latin and French, and it's estimated that English speakers who have never studied French already know thousands of French words.

And perhaps at this point you will permit a little story from history.

Let us step back almost 1,000 years to the Seignory of De Landelles - that is a little village in Picardy in what is now the department of De l'Oise. There was then living a young landowner and forester, not poor, but not rich either and eager to make his mark on the world. He had, according to the records, a head of fine blond hair. Please note that hair, it's important.

And so, our young man was recruited as a follower of a chap well known in Normandy at the time as William the Bastard. William was Duke of Normandy and he had it in mind to invade and occupy an island not 30 miles from his coast. This island was the home of a troublesome lot who didn't get on with their neighbours and never really thought of themselves as Europeans in any case. You might think that nothing much has changed in the intervening centuries.

Our Picardian joined the Normans in their adventure over La Manche and, according to contemporary accounts, behaved so creditably as a squire that his master decided to award him part of the spoils. And so he was given the lordship of lands in the North West of England and the title lord of the manor.

Now, remember that distinctive hair? In Norman patois one of the names for a blond was blondel. Have we guessed it yet? My name is Blundell and I'm a direct descendant of our fair-haired adventurer. So, in fact I'm really a Frenchman! Why was I feeling nervous?

To come a little more up to date. We have now had a link between our two clubs for more than 40 years. I believe the arrangement was originally instigated by Paray and over the years it has developed and strengthened. As a result of the annual visits between the clubs a number of friendships have grown up and I know that some of our members will be staying on in your beautiful region when the official visit is over.

To be serious for a moment, there cannot have been a time in our recent histories when it was more important that we in Britain and our closest neighbour understood and

sympathised with one another. I believe it is true to say that whichever side we in Britain might have voted on the Brexit referendum the resulting ill-feeling and confusion in our country has been an embarrassment to us all. Organisations such Rotary foster fellow feeling and co-operation and long may they continue to do so. So, may I just say. Vive la France. And in the same spirit, Vive les Brits.

A number of traditions have grown up between our two clubs to foster this spirit of friendship. For example, we are taken to see places of beauty and interest in our localities. We treat each other to lovely meals and I hope we in Royston have over the years managed to convince you Burgundians that English cuisine is something to be reckoned with. No, despite the stories, we don't live exclusively on fish and chips and Big Macs. And then there is the Battle of the Ashes. This can, of course, take many forms. It's not too serious, but make no mistake, both sides are always out to win. Of course, as you very well know, on those rare occasions that Royston loses the Ashes, it does so only to allow our French friends not to lose face.

A further fine old tradition is the bringing of gifts. Royston is, as you know, situated close to Cambridge. In fact, I believe we have had guided visits with you to that fine old city and last year we dined at one of the colleges. So, in the spirit of our nearby centre of learning, I thought I might take this opportunity to make President Gerald Gordat an honorary member of college by the gift of a university scarf. Please step over here?? (*Then I put the scarf round his neck*). And that's not all. Please accept an honorary doctorate in Rotarian good fellowship represented by this mortar board! (*which I then place on his head*). And finally, just another small memento. Please accept this book of paintings of that lovely city.

And so, finally, thank you all once again for your warmth and hospitality. Our visit has been a delight and we look forward to welcoming you to next year to Royston. Once again: Vive la France et vive les Brits, mes cheres amies!