

**Speeches given at the Inauguration of the Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede
14th May 1965**

Introductory Remarks by Lord Harlech

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, Mrs Kennedy, members of the Kennedy family, Your Excellencies, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen:

As Chairman of the Kennedy Memorial Trust I would like to welcome you here to Runnymede for the inauguration of the British Memorial to the late President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. I have asked Mr Harold Macmillan to speak on behalf of the Trustees for he was as you all know Prime Minister of this country for all but a few weeks of Mr Kennedy's presidency.

Speech by Mr Harold Macmillan

None of us will ever forget that grim November day nearly two years ago when we heard the news. Sudden, unexpected, incredible, it seemed like a fantastic fiction; yet, as the remorseless story was unfolded, we were faced with the stark finality of fact.

Deep and varied were the emotions of British people – at home, and all over the world – anger at so vile a deed, so senseless, so wanton, so devastating. Grief for his stricken family. Sympathy with the citizens of the United States of America, an allied and sister nation – the men and women of America who had shared with us the joys and sorrow, the failures and triumphs of two generations of struggle for noble causes. A sense of bitterness; of emptiness; of an irreplaceable gap – for the nations of the Free World, faced with the baffling problems of the post-war era, and an equal sense of loss suffered by all humanity, all over the world, by the removal of one of those rare personalities who seemed born to bridge the gulf dividing races and creeds and help to build the unity of all mankind.

But there was something more than regret for a great statesman. Every home, every family in Britain felt a sense of personal bereavement – every household seemed in mourning, as if one of the family had been suddenly and tragically snatched away – a father, a brother, a son. It was not just a public disaster. It seemed, to each one of us, a personal, individual, private grief.

Why was it that this feeling – this sorrow – at once so universal and so individual? (*sic?*) Was it not because he seemed, in his own person, to embody all the hopes and aspirations of this new world that is struggling to emerge – to rise, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of the old? He was young; he was confident; he had vision and daring. He had fought gallantly in the war, and suffered grievously. He seemed the true representative of the armed forces of democracy with all their memories and all their hopes. Yet he was no sentimentalist, prating slick and shallow phrases; aspirations without roots, dreams without reality. If his eyes were on the horizon, his feet were on the ground. His was the strength of a man whose Faith was based on the Eternal verities, fortified by physical and moral courage of a high order. A good friend – a wonderful friend – a loyal colleague – without a trace of pedantry or intellectual arrogance, with a splendid gift of fun and humour in relaxed moments, and a rare fortitude in difficult or dangerous crises. Endowed with patience, audacity, vision, imagination – but

above all, with the supreme quality – integrity – absolute integrity – of mind and heart and soul.

To embody and perpetuate this national feeling of respect for his memory, and gratitude for his life, the Kennedy Trust has been formed. It has been widely and generously supported – by rich and poor; large and small contributions from every part of Britain. It is to be used for two purposes. First, this memorial here at Runnymede – which Your Majesty is to dedicate today on this hallowed ground, almost sacred to the whole English-speaking peoples in every part of the globe, where were laid the first foundations of that ordered freedom, broadening from precedent to precedent, for which men have fought and struggled and died through many generations and centuries. The second object, to which the bulk of the funds will be devoted, is the foundation of the Kennedy Scholarships, between Britain and America. There will thus be, through the coming years, a succession of Kennedy Scholars who will keep his memory fresh and fruitful in a field perhaps closest to him – among young men and women – young people of parts and promise, whose lives, we trust, will be devoted to the causes he had at heart; and inspired by his example, learn to play their part in the forward march of man's pilgrimage on earth.

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr Harold Wilson

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, Mrs Kennedy, Distinguished Senators, Your Excellencies, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are met this afternoon in a national act of homage, the dedication by Her Majesty, of this acre of English land here at Runnymede to remain for all the years there are to come, a memorial to President Kennedy. It is an act which is made for all of us the more moving and more memorable by the presence of Mrs Kennedy and her children, and so many distinguished members of the distinguished family the late President headed.

Eighteen months ago, as Mr Macmillan has said, this nation mourned his death. Today, we join in commemorating his life.

For here was a man who in his life brought new hope and vitality to a tired world and who since his death has become a legend. In the rich and warm and varied memories he has left to all of us, each will treasure one or other great quality. For some he will be remembered as a mirror to youth, for the vigour and freshness of the New Frontier which he brought in place of the tired clichés of thought and word and action. For others it was his firmness and undying courage, his tireless fight for peace and understanding, for human rights, and human dignity and equality against the loathsome doctrines of racialism. For yet others it was his unrivalled ability to set every unfolding event against the spatial background of a world setting and equally against the temporal background of the entire canvas of history.

But above all was the man who saw himself not only as the leader of a great nation, but as one who saw every people of every land as neighbours. As one who in his first stirring call to his congress and his people and the first State of the Union message, could say:

“The hopes of all mankind rest upon us, not simply upon those of us in this chamber, but upon the peasant in Laos, the fisherman in Nigeria, the exile from Cuba, the spirit that moves every man and nation who shares our hopes for freedom and the future.”

And it was that spirit which enabled him to make that historic and stirring appeal to youth, that call to service which sent the Peace Corps to the furthest ends of the earth. It was that same spirit which made his unending quest for peace and disarmament not an exercise in diplomacy but an adventure in human emancipation.

His dramatic election to the Presidency, still more the magic that he brought to every exercise of the art of statesmanship, called a new generation into the conduct of world affairs. And it was that new and urgent generation which stood beside him at his Inauguration, whose pulse quickened as he brought a new and ruthless decisiveness to national and world affairs. And it was that same generation, not in Washington only but in the world, which led all the others in mourning when that eager life ended in the deep purple of martyrdom.

This English acre is part of our national tribute to that life, part only, for our national memorial goes beyond what is inaugurated here today, and will extend to generation after generation who will be enabled to leave these shores to study in those New England academic surroundings which were so dear to the President. For if it is fitting as it is that the President should be for ever identified with this historic meadow, it is no less fitting that scholarships should commemorate one who in seven words proclaimed his philosophy – “the human mind is our fundamental resource”.

But in a wider sense our tribute will be just this, that for all the years that bright flame continues to burn in Arlington, so the warmth and the inspiration that he gave to the world will live on, in memory, in history and the legend that was John Kennedy.

Speech by Her Majesty the Queen

Here at Runnymede 750 years ago Magna Carta was signed. Among our earliest Statutes, it has rightly been regarded as the cornerstone of those liberties which later became enshrined in our system of democratic government under the rule of law.

This is a part of the heritage which the people of the United States of America share with us. Therefore it is altogether fitting that this should be the site of Britain's memorial to the late President John F Kennedy, for, as leader of his great nation, he championed liberty in an age when its very foundations were being threatened on a universal scale.

We all recall how he welcomed this challenge and gloried in the fact that to his generation had been given the task of defending liberty in such a time of trial. His readiness to shoulder the burden and the passionate enthusiasm which he brought to his labours gave courage, inspiration, and, above all, new hope not only to Americans but to all America's friends.

Nowhere was this more true than here in these Islands. With all their hearts, my people shared his triumphs, grieved at his reverses and wept at his death.

President Kennedy, together with his family, had many ties with our country. He and they lived among us in that doom-laden period which led up to the outbreak of war. The experience of those days led him to write, when still a young man, a most perceptive analysis of the predicament in which Britain found herself. Ever after he maintained a deep and

steady interest in the affairs of this nation whose history and literature he knew and loved so well. His elder brother, flying from these shores on a hazardous mission, was killed in our common struggle against the evil forces of a cruel tyranny. A dearly-loved sister lies buried in an English churchyard. Bonds like these cannot be broken and his abiding affection for Britain engendered an equal response from this side of the Atlantic.

The unprecedented intensity of that wave of grief, mixed with something akin to despair, which swept over our people at the news of President Kennedy's assassination, was a measure of the extent to which we recognised what he had already accomplished, and of the high hopes that rode with him in a future that was not to be.

He was a man valiant in war, but no one understood better than he that, if total war were to come again, all the finest achievements of the human race would be utterly consumed in the nuclear holocaust. He therefore sought tenaciously for a peace which, as he put it, would enable "men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children – not merely peace for Americans, but peace for all men and women; not merely peace in our time but peace for all time."

Abroad, peace for a shrinking world; at home, a just and compassionate society. These were the themes of his Presidency. But it is his own example as a man that we remember today; his courage, both moral and physical; his dedication to public service; the distinction of heart and mind, the joyful enthusiasm, the wit and style which he brought to all he did; his love of liberty and of his fellow men. All these will continue to inspire us and the generations who succeed us and all those who share the noble traditions of freemen evoked by the name of Runnymede.

This acre of English soil is now bequeathed in perpetuity to the American people in memory of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy who in death my people still mourn and whom in life they loved and admired.

Speech by Secretary of State the Hon. Dean Rusk

Your presence here, Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness;

This nation, Mr Prime Minister, which has nurtured freedom for so many in so many parts of the world; the British people, Mr Macmillan, Lord Harlech, who have generously joined their affection and their resources to give life to the Kennedy Memorial Trust.

This quiet and lovely Runnymede, the field of the Great Charter, which began to lay the hand of "the law of the land" upon the exercise of power; that extraordinary, incandescent man, Mrs Kennedy, whom we honour here today. All these make this an unforgettable moment for us and for those we represent.

President Johnson has asked me to attend personally, on his and our nation's behalf, to my statutory privilege of accepting the gift of this acre of land. I do so with the joy, and the sadness, which shall forever mark those of us who served with John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

When the American people learned about this tribute to our beloved late President, we were deeply moved; not only because you decided to share with us this Runnymede which is a common and precious symbol, because also what you have done reflects so sensitive an understanding of John F Kennedy himself.

No one of us more than he searched for the best of our past as a guide to present commitment and to future action. He would have been the first to recall: that his own Massachusetts, in 1641, adopted a "Body of Liberties" in response to a need for what John Winthrop called a fundamental law "in resemblance to a Magna Carta"; that the lineage of our common liberties runs through the Petition of Right, the Habeas Corpus Act, your Bill of Rights of 1689 and our Bill of Rights in the Federal Constitution; or that there is and remains unfinished business in the endless struggle for human dignity and freedom, at home and abroad.

But no one of us more than he was concerned for the future. And so you have generously provided fellowship opportunities for young men and women to enlarge their capacity to build that decent future which was his passionate concern.

The words you have inscribed on this tablet express not only the deepest resolve of John F Kennedy, but the abiding commitment of the American people:

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend or oppose any foe in order to assure the survival and success of liberty."

And we know, because you have proved it in many a crucial occasion, that this is also the abiding commitment of the British people.

On behalf of President Johnson and the American people, I therefore thank Your Majesty, your Government and your people. We shall cherish this memorial to a President who shall be forever young. "At the going down of the sun and in the morning" we shall remember him. And we draw strength and confidence from the knowledge that all who pass this way shall be reminded of the common dedication of the British and American peoples to the cause of human liberty; a reminder which has its roots here in seven and a half centuries and its promise through all time to come.

Your Majesty, Mrs Kennedy, thank you.