

It is my profound honour to present to you Ross Forbes, a man whose life has been shaped by an abiding love for this region, its people, its history, and its hard-won dignity.

Ross's story begins here in Durham, where he grew up in the shadow of a great university. His first experience of the university was on a primary school visit to see Babbage's difference engine. He attended Durham Johnston Grammar School, but without what he calls a 'culture of learning', he left with one Grade E A-level in geography. As a teenager, Ross was definitely Town, not Gown, but tells us he read the dictionary to be able to hold his own.

After school, Ross went straight into journalism, following his father who was a press photographer. He worked on various North of England Newspapers, but after a few years, he decided he needed an education, going to Sussex university to study Politics. He graduated in September 1984, getting a job as a press officer, and landing right into one of this country's most intense industrial disputes. As Press Officer for the Durham Miners Association at the height of the miners' strike, Ross found himself fighting not just for fair coverage in a hostile media, but for the communities he had grown up alongside. It was a formative crucible. He tells us that he met some of the finest, most interesting and most decent people he would ever know.

As it became obvious where things were going, Ross moved first to be a communications manager in local government and then to Siemens semiconductor manufacturing at Wilds End, at that time the biggest ever inward investment in the UK. When it closed, he moved to Siemens's HQ in Munich as global press manager, before returning to Siemens UK. Across all of these roles, as well as working for the NHS in Cumbria, and directing a campaign for regional self-government, Ross brought the same instinct wherever he went: build it from scratch, take people with you, don't get isolated.

Ross's connection to Redhills, the Durham Miners Hall, the Pitman's Parliament, has been a constant throughout his career. From 2016 he directed a £10 million project to renew and revive that extraordinary building and everything it embodies: common endeavour, mutual support, the enduring culture of the Durham coalfield.

He has fundraised, campaigned, built academic partnerships, organised the world's largest celebration of trade union values, and pursued a UNESCO bid to give the building the international recognition it deserves. It is, he would insist, not his achievement alone. It belongs to the communities whose story it tells.

Ross came back to Durham University in 2004 to earn a master's degree from the Business School. Now, fifty years almost to the day since he left Johnston with that solitary geography grade, the University honours Ross's extraordinary contribution to the life of Durham, city and county, and offers sincere recognition for something that cannot be taught in any classroom: the tenacity, vision, and profound love of place that has made Redhills possible.

In honouring Ross today, this University also honours the coalfield communities whose resilience he has championed, and the conviction that our shared heritage is worth fighting for.

Chancellor/Vice-Chancellor, I present Ross Forbes to receive the degree of Doctor of Arts *honoris causa*.