

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR

SIR
CHRISTOPHER
BULLOCK

K.C.B., C.B.E.

AT THE CENTRAL CHURCH OF
THE ROYAL AIR FORCE
ST CLEMENT DANES
AT 3.00 PM, 15 JUNE 1972

ADDRESS BY THE
RT. HON. GEOFFREY LLOYD, M.P.

BECAUSE of the passage of time, perhaps most of those who are here today were associated with the later stages of Christopher Bullock's career. They will know that he showed qualities of fearless intellectual integrity, sturdy independence, great determination and humane care for those who worked with him – just the same qualities that he had shown in his earlier life in the Armed Forces and the Civil Service.

It is about his official career that I am qualified to speak, for I am now one of the few who knew Whitehall from the inside in those far off days.

Christopher Bullock and I were friends for nearly fifty

years. I first met him when he was Principal Private Secretary to Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for Air.

In those days it was the custom for young men who were preparing themselves for a Parliamentary career to try to get some practical experience of Government administration and so I was allowed to join the Private Office as an honorary assistant Private Secretary.

I soon realized that I had the opportunity of learning from one of the most brilliant administrators in Whitehall. He was at the height of his powers. He was really a second Permanent Secretary and in effect ran the Air Ministry from the Secretary of State's Private Office, and this, if you please, with general consent.

How did he reach this extraordinary position in a first class Department of State at the age of thirty-four?

Of course he was a brilliant boy at Rugby, a fine classical scholar, a fine athlete and won all the important prizes. Then he won a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge, where again he had a remarkable career.

He won the most famous scholarships in Classics, International Law and Shakespearean studies and for good measure the Latin essay and three gold medals for Latin odes and Greek epigrams. He got top honours in the Classical Tripos and was offered a Fellowship of Trinity.

Instead he entered the Civil Service examination and came out top. Most people would have chosen to go into the Treasury but, characteristically, he chose to serve in India. But then the first world war broke out. At once he threw up the Civil Service and joined the Rifle Brigade. He fought gallantly in France, was mentioned in despatches and was so seriously wounded that he became unfit for infantry service. So he joined the fledgling Royal Flying

Corps and won his wings as an observer and then as a pilot. When, in 1917, he became unfit for flying duties he joined the Air Staff, and thus began his work for the Air Ministry.

In 1919 the Government decided to establish a permanent Royal Air Force as an independent fighting service. Lord Trenchard was given the job of creating this new service and Christopher Bullock became his right hand man on the civilian side.

It needs a great effort of the imagination for us today to realize what then happened. Not only is it a very long time ago, but the circumstances were so completely different. Today, above all in this Church, no one can even think of the Royal Air Force without thinking also of its imperishable glory in the last war. But in the first world war the role of the Royal Flying Corps, although gallant, was quite subordinate. The old fighting services had borne the heat and burden of the day and only a few daring pioneers could foresee the mighty role of air power in the future.

So, to be frank, the young Service and the new Ministry faced powerful hostile forces in Whitehall. Repeated attacks had to be repelled and sometimes it seemed touch and go whether the Royal Air Force would survive at all. In 1929 Lord Trenchard, the Father of the Royal Air Force, when retiring after eleven years as Chief of the Air Staff formally recorded his deep gratitude for Christopher Bullock's great contribution during what he called 'the hardest years that I think any Department could pass through'. He described him as 'the man with the finest brain I have ever met with' and said he had 'always regarded him as one of his chief advisers'.

The fact is that Christopher Bullock's administrative temperament was forged in the struggle for the survival of

the Royal Air Force. Indeed his work ranged far beyond the call of duty and he had to take on his own shoulders tasks which would normally have fallen to the Air Staff or to Ministers. Inevitably in the rough inter-departmental battles of those days he made powerful enemies.

But not in the Air Ministry! When Sir Walter Nicholson, the Permanent Secretary, decided to retire in 1930 he formally recommended Christopher as his successor saying 'there is no doubt that he is absolutely in the first rank of Civil Servants' and Lord Trenchard also said 'Bullock is the man for the job'.

Thus Christopher was chosen at the age of thirty-eight to be the Civil Head of a Service Department in which, during the following years, decisions were to be taken that, as we now know, were crucial to our very survival as a free nation.

In those days the temper of public opinion was profoundly pacific, but the inner circles of Government, especially the Service Departments, were dominated by the agony of facing up to the Nazi danger. Now began the struggle for the expansion of the Royal Air Force, with Christopher drafting nearly all the vital Air Staff papers for the Cabinet. No one strove harder in all those difficult years to awaken the public and Parliament to the need for strengthening the Royal Air Force and to secure, in the face of great difficulties, the money necessary for its expansion. It can be truly said that for ten peacetime years he worked as hard as if we were already at war.

Just think of only three of the vital decisions that were taken in his time:

first the changeover to the four-engined bombers, which provided the strategic striking power of the Royal Air Force.

second the daring decision to go for the eight-gun mono-plane fighters, the Hurricane and the Spitfire, which gave our pilots the vital edge over the Germans in the Battle of Britain.

third the establishment of the shadow factories which alone made possible the vast expansion of aeroplane production during the war.

Now the pilots, whose glory will last as long as our nation, would be the first to say that they could never have done their job without the planes and the organization behind them. Of course this was a mighty team effort but we all know that there were a few men who made an absolutely outstanding contribution – several famous Air Marshals, two brilliant scientists, two exceedingly able Ministers. There can be no doubt that history will place Christopher Bullock also in that small band of outstanding men to whom we owe so much.

I knew Lord Hankey very well. He was of course one of our greatest Civil Servants and probably the greatest Defence Official in our history. As Secretary of the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence he saw Christopher's work at first hand. He told me that of all the Civil Servants he knew Christopher had made by far the greatest creative contribution to the Defence effort.

I will make only one comment on the strange tragedy of 1936. It fell to Mr Baldwin, as Prime Minister, to act on official advice. He has said that he acted 'with considerable misgivings'. I deeply regret that he was not able to probe below the surface at the time. Many years afterwards he did so and being one of the fairest and most honourable of men he then wrote formally to one of his successors as follows:

'I feel it only right to say that, if I had had the full evidence before me which has now been made available, I should not have taken the decision I reluctantly did.'

Now I must read to you part of a unique tribute from three Marshals of the Royal Air Force, all former Chiefs of the Air Staff, Lord Trenchard, Lord Portal and Lord Tedder, all commemorated with special honours in this Church. They wrote:

'We wish to place on record our personal testimony to Sir Christopher's assiduous care at all times for the well-being of this Department, his arduous labours on its behalf and his unfailing devotion to duty and also to his outstanding services which he rendered to the Royal Air Force over so many years.'

It is a comfort to many of us that with us today we have Mr Victor Goodhew, representing the Prime Minister, Lord Lambton and members of the Air Force Board and Sir James Dunnett, Permanent Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Defence.

Christopher Bullock was an official by profession but he was by temperament a soldier. He was severely wounded physically in the first world war and from this he suffered all his life. In 1936 he was wounded spiritually and from this also he always suffered. I like to think that today in this Church our nation, through the Royal Air Force which he loved and for which he fought so hard, casts rays of healing gratitude and glory upon his name.

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