



# Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,  
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the ceremony to award the insignia  
of *Chevalier de l'Ordre national de la Légion d'Honneur*  
to Mr Jeremy Burton

London, 24 September 2013

*Cher* Jeremy Burton, Honorary Consul in Leeds,

Consul General,

*Chère* Martine,

Dear friends,

It's a pleasure for me to welcome you to the French Residence this evening, to present my compatriot Jeremy Burton with the insignia of *Chevalier de l'Ordre national de la Légion d'Honneur* for the services he has rendered to France. Awarding the insignia of the most prestigious French order, created by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802 to reward the outstanding merit of its recipient, is always a moving and important moment.

But before I present you with your insignia, *cher* Jeremy Burton, allow me to retrace your career.

You were born in 1951 in the city of Leeds – in the heart of that beautiful region of Yorkshire – and today you hold the post of Honorary Consul in the city. Perhaps in an early sign of your taste for French, you carried out your business studies in Neuchâtel – in a Francophone country, Switzerland. You then completed your course by studying management in the fine London borough of Ealing.

After finishing your studies in 1976, you joined the group that bears your family name, Burton, to work in the clothing factory. You then diversified your professional activities in the group, developing the family business, particularly in the field of asset management.

But your work extends well beyond the professional sphere. You see your life as a daily commitment to others, and are therefore active in several voluntary organizations. As a lover

of your city, you're on the governing body of a local organization, the Leeds Civic Trust, which aims to preserve and develop Leeds's heritage.

In the charity field, you're a director and trustee respectively of two voluntary organizations, the Learning Partnership and the Foundation for Credit Counselling, which seek, through education or access to credit, to give everyone the means to integrate into society and develop a stable economic activity. You're also Chairman of the High Sheriffs' Association Council, a long-standing organization which, among other things, works to reduce crime in Britain. And you're involved in many other charity organizations.

It's testimony to your influence in this country that you were appointed Deputy Lieutenant of West Yorkshire: beyond the ceremonial aspect of the appointment, the post is especially important because the person who has the honour of receiving it represents Her Majesty The Queen in local events.

But it is of course your commitment to France that has earned you this decoration today. Indeed, since 1985 – for nearly 20 years – you've held the post of French Honorary Consul in Leeds, and you constantly help spread France's influence in Yorkshire in every field. The French Consul in London told me that by the volume of its activity, the agency for which you're responsible is one of the four largest in the United Kingdom, in a network of some 20 throughout the country. That figure speaks for itself.

As a voluntary Honorary Consul, you're very keen to serve the French community. Through your work, you make essential public services accessible to our many fellow expatriates in this country who live far from London.

Your work on France's behalf doesn't end there. You're a key intermediary for our diplomacy in the dynamic region of northern England where you live.

You're the embodiment of our "outreach diplomacy", and you help us in every field.

Personally, I'm thinking of the fine and moving commemorative tribute in October 2011 to the French air force squadrons in RAF Bomber Command in the Second World War, in the presence of our respective air force chiefs of staff, and the inauguration – no doubt for the first time in the UK – of a memorial to them, inside York Minster itself. Rarely in my career as an ambassador have I witnessed such a poignant ceremony, bringing together so many leading figures but also veterans, for many of whom it would be their last commemoration on this scale.

I'm also thinking of economic diplomacy and how in March 2012, *cher* Jeremy, you organized a joint visit to Leeds by the Embassy and the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain, with a joint delegation led by me and also including a dozen leading businessmen. The visit was very much appreciated by the region's authorities, who had never experienced such a deployment from a foreign embassy! It also enabled us to play a role in ensuring the city of Leeds could host the start of the Tour de France – the world-famous race our British friends are so enthusiastic about – on 5 July 2014. Business diplomacy, too: during the visit we were able to explore business opportunities for French companies to establish themselves in a major shopping centre being built in Leeds.

But I'm also thinking of our cultural diplomacy and the permanent support you give the French language in that part of the United Kingdom, with the very dynamic University of Leeds, whose French department is one of the most outstanding in the whole of the UK.

Finally, regional diplomacy, because you've played a full role in forging closer ties between the cities of Leeds and Lille. I could give many more examples of your activities over the years. I'd like to tell you how deeply France appreciates the fullness and diversity of your

work as Honorary Consul in that strategic region, where you act as an intermediary for the Embassy on so many levels.

*Mon cher* Jeremy, you're a man who is deeply committed to our country. You love the French language, which you now speak fluently: you are impressively bilingual. No doubt much of that love, that fluency and your Francophile nature is down to the woman sitting beside you, who supports you tirelessly in all your activities. This evening I'd like to pay special tribute to you, *ma chère Martine*: this decoration is also a little – indeed a great deal – yours too.

This love of France led you, *cher* Jeremy, to seek French nationality, and so it was that in 1998 Her Majesty's subject became a French citizen. For all these reasons, the French Republic wishes to pay tribute to the living bridge you are between our two countries, and to an engaging personality who has constantly and voluntarily served the French community in northern England.

Jeremy Burton, *au nom du Président de la République et en vertu des pouvoirs qui nous sont conférés, nous vous faisons Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur.*