My Lord Mayor, Vice Lord Lieutenant, Ladies and Gentleman. To be a freeman of the City of Coventry is a great honour indeed. But to be among friends is an honour beyond measure.

As you heard, to become a freeman, you must swear faithfully to maintain the customs of our city. It was a pledge I was eager to make. Because for me, the greatest custom of our city is unceasing renewal in the face of great challenges.

This tradition has shaped the spirit of Coventry. It has created a city which is industrious. Restless. Indomitable. There is no better proof of this than the Cathedral in which we gather. Almost a millennium has passed since Leofric and his Lady founded St Mary's monastery on this site. They did so in the shadow of war. Our very beginning was an act of renewal.

Even the legend passed down from those days reminds us challenges can always be accepted - and audacious answers found. Coventry has kept faith with those values ever since.

In the industrial revolution, Coventry became the home of new journeys - of bicycles, cars and aeroplanes. Coventry’s renewal was made manifest in the Old Cathedral and in the expanded horizons of even the highest in the land.

The first car owned by a King began its journey in Coventry. King Edward was among the first of millions whose lives changed due to the industry of this city. That ceaseless energy caused the dark shadow of war to pass over Coventry in the year I was born. Once more, Coventry remade herself, with this very cathedral the testament.

Again, the City was tested. I came to Coventry in 1980. It was a time many thought our decline was inevitable. Yet the spirit of renewal lived on here. I remember Jack Butterworth telling me his plans for the University of Warwick. Few believed him. He did it anyway.

I came to Coventry to help rebuild industry by founding Warwick Manufacturing Group. Elsewhere, I had been told I was living in the past. Here, we know the past inspires the future.

For thirty-five years, I have worked with Coventry’s businesses, suppliers, designers and engineers. They have constantly inspired and motivated me. Today, I want to thank all my WMG colleagues from Coventry, who have worked with me for almost four decades.

This year, thanks to their hard work -and the faith of Mr Tata - Coventry proved that manufacturing is not just our heritage, but our future. The phoenix rose, not thanks to a consortium, but thanks to the people and leaders of Coventry.

Ratan Tata saw what we had worked to build together. The Universities, the engineers, the apprentices turned freemen, the energy and passion of Ann and Phil.
The renewal of industry in Coventry came from the efforts of thousands of people. That’s why we’re seeing the huge investment in Whitley, once more making Coventry a world leader in automotive design.

That’s why we at WMG will be the home of British automotive innovation. We have seen already how this innovation attracts others, from manufacturers to entrepreneurs and scientists. I suspect this is why you have honoured me.

I am more thankful than I can say. But the honour is not mine. Instead, it is a tribute to all those I have worked with over the years who proved that after a thousand years, Coventry is the city of new beginnings. So to all of them, can I say simply this:

For your welcome, I was thankful.

For your friendship, I am grateful.

Because it is for your dedication to renewal that I am being honoured.

Thank-you.