

**Opening of the Finnish Exhibition on Trans-Atlantic Migration via the UK**  
**Speech by Pekka Huhtaniemi, Ambassador of Finland**  
**13 May 2014, Hull**

Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Lord Mayor, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Very warm welcome to you all to this inaugural event of our exhibition here at Hull History Centre.

Today marks a culmination of a long process which started some three and half years ago, during my first visit to Hull as Finland's Ambassador in London. I had never before visited Hull but I had often heard and read about it over the years. I knew that Hull had a long history as one of Finland's main export hubs in the UK. I also knew that the large amounts of Finnish migrants heading for North America in the XIX and early XX century in most cases travelled through Hull. And as a fan of sports, I knew about Hull City, your famous football club, which as we all know, will next Saturday play a historical FA Cup final at Wembley against Arsenal, and to whom we wish much success!

During the discussions we had in the autumn of 2010 here in Hull, I was particularly struck by the massive figures – hundreds of thousands – describing the volume of Finnish migrants who travelled through Hull on their trans-Atlantic journey.

As I had on earlier occasions been in touch with the Finnish Institute of Migration and was aware of their unique stocks of information, the idea of somehow highlighting that spectacular movement through the UK of our Finnish compatriots came up in the discussions quite naturally. Hull, as a gateway to hope and better life, seemed to deserve some kind of recognition on the part of us Finns. And I also sensed that here in Hull, a genuine curiosity existed regarding your city's unique role in facilitating these spectacular flows of migrants – not only from Finland but also from many other European regions.

But a good idea will not transform itself to action and concrete results automatically. Dedicated, resourceful people are needed to put together an exhibition of this nature. Luckily, such people and resources were available both in Finland and here in Hull.

So this is an occasion, before we hear more about the substance and contents of the exhibition, for me to express sincere thanks to the innovative and hard-working people who have produced and set up the material we are able to display here today. I wish to mention, in particular, our colleagues from the Finnish Institute of Migration, Mr. Jouni Korkiasaari and his assistant Tytti Laine, who at the Finnish end have put together and designed the rich material of the exhibition. My thanks also go to Mr. Ismo Söderling, Director of The Finnish Institute of Migration, without whose support and enthusiasm a project of this scale would not have materialized. I also wish to thank my own Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland for the material support for this project.

Here in the UK, this exhibition has received much inspiration and support from the Chair of The Anglo-Finnish Society, Mrs Marjatta Bell, an accomplished historian, who herself has also studied Hull's important role as a hub in Finnish-British relations. Due to family reasons, she was unfortunately unable to join us here in Hull today, but we are glad to have A-FS's Honorary Secretary Mr. Paulus Thomson with us here in Hull.

Among the many individuals, based here in Hull, who have given invaluable contributions to this project, I wish to mention, in particular, Dr. Nicholas Evans and Dr. David J. Starkey from the University of Hull as well as University Archivist Judy Burg and her team here at the History Centre. I have also valued highly the support and encouragement we have received from the leadership of the University of Hull, including Vice-Chancellor, Professor Calle Pistorius, as well as from the Hull City Council and its Chief Executive Darryl Stephenson.

And finally, I want to voice my warm appreciation for the help we have received, at the various stages of this project from our longtime Honorary Consul here in Hull, Mr. John Good, and Mr. Brian Rolfe, Managing Director here in the UK of Finlines, the company which operates most of today's maritime links between Finland and the UK.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Migration is a highly topical issue also in today's world. Reasons for large flows of people from one region to another are many: sometimes political, economic, social, religious, ethnic and so on. Both at the level of societies and individuals, they always constitute major developments, often life-changing by their nature.

The story of Finnish migration to trans-Atlantic destinations is a fascinating one. Hull played a major role in that spectacular process. I am very happy that, by means of this exhibition, we are now able to tell a part of that story also to people of Hull and to other British audiences.

Thank you!