

## **The Plumber's Apprentice Day and Charter Commemoration**

### **Master's Speech**

Aldermen, Wardens, Members of the Court and Liverymen of the Worshipful Company of Plumbers, Master of the Worshipful Company of Skinners and Chairman of Monument Tools, I bid you all a warm welcome. We are gathered in front of the statue of the Plumber's Apprentice and close to the historic site of Plumbers' Hall in Chequer Yard to commemorate the grant of our Company's Royal Charter upon the twelfth day of April in the year of our Lord 1611, in the reign of His Majesty King James 1.

Another publication of that same year – the Authorised Version of the Bible – is, I confess, more widely known. But our Charter is a significant milestone in the history of our Company and its substance remains relevant to our Liverymen four centuries on.

It was granted by King James to “the Freemen of the Company of the Plummers of London for ever, for the better ordering, rule and government of the Mystery and Company and of all those who now exercise or shall hereafter exercise and use the art or mystery of Plumbing or the materials, works, merchandises or things whatsoever to the said Mystery relating, and for the utility, advantage and relief of the good and honest and for the terror and correction of the evil, deceitful and dishonest, to be one body corporate and politic ... by the name of the Master, Wardens and Commonalty of the Freemen of the Mystery of Plumbing in the City of London, that they .... may have succession for ever.” They didn't lack confidence in 1611.

For ever is a long, long time. But here we are, four centuries and six years later, a body corporate some 350 strong and flourishing in root and branch. Dating back to our Charter, we still have one Master and two Wardens, appointed to serve for one year. The first holder of my present office was Abraham Green, Citizen and Plumber of London and Serjeant Plumber to His Majesty the King. Our first Wardens, appointed to serve with him until the 21<sup>st</sup> day of September 1611, were John Randoll and William Trebicke. The Charter grimly adds the qualification “if the same John Randoll and William Trebicke so long shall live”. In the event I think they did see out the next five months and ten days.

For effective policing of the plumbers' trade, the Master and Wardens were empowered to “make and exercise at all convenient times the supervision, scrutiny, correction and government of all and singular persons whomsoever, for the time being Freemen of the Art or Mystery of Plumbing of the City....”

The Master and Wardens were also made responsible for the “supervision, scrutiny, correction, reformation, emendation, government, the assaye, the touch and the trial of all and singular workings, works, weights, beams and scales, lead, solder, materials, wares, matters, merchandises and of all things whatsoever the said Art or Mystery in any manner touching or concerning ....”. The Charter stipulates that every weight....found to be true and lawful by the aforesaid Master and Wardens of the Mystery...shall be marked, noted or impressed with the image, impression or sign of St Michael the Archangel, before they be worked, used or employed....”.

Last but most importantly of all, our Charter decreed that “for the good of us and all our Subjects, because the Art or Mystery of Plumbing aforesaid is a manual art, that henceforth it be not nor shall be lawful for any person or persons whomsoever to set up, use or exercise the Art or Mystery unless he or they shall have been previously educated in the same Art or Mystery as Apprentice or Apprentices for the space of seven years at least, under pain of the displeasure of us, our heirs and successors....”.

So it is very fitting that this statue of a Plumber’s Apprentice should stand as a monument to our Company’s role in the life, history and fabric of this great City; especially as a symbol of our commitment to the continuation, development and proper regulation of the profession of plumbing, upon which we all depend, every day of our modern lives. We are grateful to all those who helped to create this enduring symbol of our ancient trade, including Geoffrey and Daphne Barber, whom we are delighted to welcome to our ceremony today, Past Master Chris Sneath, in whose year the statue was unveiled, and Past Master Charles Yuill, who played a key role in bringing the project to successful realisation.

I should now like to call forward Tom Collins, Assistant Principal for Employability and Apprenticeships at Croydon College, Liveryman Peter Cheesman, Lecturer at Croydon College and our four Bursary winners, Megan Brown, George Hurworth, Gavin Levy and Zain Mohammed. All are currently studying at the College for the qualifications which will enable them to practice the Art and Mystery of plumbing and to begin their careers in our industry.

Past Master Peter Brunner, as Chairman of our Charitable and Educational Trust, and John Collier, Chairman of Monument Tools, would you please step forward to congratulate and present our Bursaries to each of these very deserving students, who have shown special diligence and achievement in their studies. The Bursaries, each with a value of £1,000, are co-funded by our Charitable Trust and City and Guilds, with additional sponsorship kindly contributed by Monument Tools. Thank you very much John, from us all.

**Megan**, please receive your award and our warmest congratulations. May I introduce you to our Wardens, Robert Burgon and Dame Fiona Woolf, a former Lord Mayor of London, and to Alderman Alison Gowman, who represents the City of London Ward of Dowgate, within whose bounds we are standing.

(Followed by the same words to George, Gavin and Zain)

This concludes the Charter ceremony. I invite you all to accompany me to the site of our commemorative plaque, at the Cannon Street entrance to the railway station.

### **Master’s Speech for the Plaque Ceremony**

Visiting Cannon Street railway station today is the closest we can get to the old Plumbers’ Hall. It stood in Chequer Yard, which connected Dowgate Hill on that side of the station with Bush Lane, which runs down this side, behind me.

As most of you know, Chequer Yard and Plumbers’ Hall along with it disappeared in 1863, to make way for progress in the form of the Southeastern Railway and its Cannon Street terminus. Before its abrupt demise, Plumbers’ Hall had stood in Chequer Yard since 1638. A deed in the Company’s possession dated 13<sup>th</sup> December shows that a House known as the

“Three Kings” was purchased for a sum of £550. This hall was destroyed by the Great Fire of London on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1666 and a replacement was built on the site in 1669. It was our second Hall which was trampled by the iron horse two centuries later. A fireplace removed from it survives in our Guild Church of St Magnus the Martyr.

I have brought with me an example of John Strype’s map of Dowgate Ward in the year 1720. Strype was an 18<sup>th</sup> Century successor to John Stow, whose famous Survey of London was first published in 1598. Strype’s map clearly shows Chequer Yard and half way along it Plumbers’ Hall, depicted quite well and marked as number 8 in the accompanying table of references. I fear the map is not large and having survived just under 300 years it is a little delicate. I shall bring it with me to our luncheon, where you will be very welcome to examine it more closely if you wish.

The plaque behind me which commemorates our ancient Hall was unveiled in 1983 by our Master of that year. We are delighted that Past Master John Rae is here with us today. John, thank you on behalf of us all for creating this enduring reminder of our long-lost home in Dowgate Ward. Which neatly cues me to give the floor to Alderman Alison Gowman, who has kindly offered to say a few words at our act of commemoration today.

### **Remarks Alderman Alison Gowman Speech**

Master

I am very delighted to welcome the Plumbers here in Dowgate Ward - you always have a very striking presence here with your Apprentice - 7 feet high you clearly feed your apprentices well.

Indeed in many ways the Plumbers are very much a part of the psyche of my Ward - indeed you would have been very vital there as the name Dowgate - taken from Dowgate Hill stems from an Anglo Saxon word Duue - meaning water - so mine was the original Watergate - and there was even a bit of a scandal because the City businesses used the dock at the bottom of Dowgate Hill as the place where all the rubbish was dumped. Nothing grand or hi-tech just a good heave from the hand drawn cart into the river and of course it all floated away and everyone was happy - except that it often got so clogged that ordinances were taken out against the good people of Dowgate for abusing the river and causing noxious and unhealthy odours and stench. In one of those marvellous pieces of City regeneration or recycling that dock is still used as the City's cleansing department and from there the barges with sealed and odourless containers full of waste sail down the Thames to be recycled or burned to create energy from waste.

Luckily the Plumbers were at the top not the bottom of Dowgate Hill and as in all such matters the Plumbers were not the problem but rather the solution. For which we are all grateful.

### **The Master**

Thank you very much Alison, and thank you again for joining us on this happy occasion, which I hope may be the first of many such visits in years to come.

In a moment we shall set off in search of our lunch at “The Banker”, a very appropriately situated venue within the cavernous arches of the Southeastern Railway viaduct. As we stroll down Dowgate Hill, home to no fewer than four ancient Companies, we shall pass the splendid façade of Skinners’ Hall, where in January we admitted Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall as an Honorary Liveryman. The Master Skinner, James Leahy, has

very kindly joined us today, in a spirit of fellowship with an erstwhile near neighbour. Master, thank you so much for being with us today, just ahead of your luncheon engagement.

Now Alison has spoken, very appropriately, of Dowgate Hill's distinctly watery past. Just before we set off I thought I would re-tell a cautionary tale of a local plumbing disaster. Here is John Stow's vivid story of Dowgate Hill (or as he knew it, Downegate Hill), as recounted in his revised Survey of London of 1603:

“...the high street called Downgate, at the upper end thereof is a faire conduit of Thames water, castellated, and made in the year 1568, at charges of the Citizens, and is called the Conduit upon Downgate. The descent of this streete is such that in the yeare 1574, on the fourth of September in the after noon there fel a storme of raine, wherethrough the channels suddenly arose, and ran with such a swift course towards the common shores, that a lad of 18 yeares old, minding to have leapt over the channel near unto the said Conduit, was taken with the streame, and carried from thence towards the Thames with such a violence, that no man with staves or otherwise could stay him, till he came against a cart wheele, that stood in the said watergate, before which time he was drowned, and stark deade.”

Call the plumber! one might exclaim. Fortunately someone did, so today we can repair to our riverside destination in relative safety!