

Ladle Dinner – Saddlers’ Hall
21st November 2018
IPM Robert Burgon & Sheila

Chairman and Stewards – our thanks to you for this splendid Ladle Dinner and for all the hard work you give to the Company.

Fellow Liverymen, I feel it is a great honour that the IPM risked the consequences and invited such an “oldie” Past Master to speak about his year and achievements. I recall I received my ladle at the Master Mariners on HQS Wellington 17 years ago and Past Master Steve Hodgkinson got the short straw in my current role.

I first met the IPM when he used to attend our Mansion House banquets as guest of another true Scot, Past Master Robert Clephane, so perhaps it was my “nearly full” Scottish blood line that tipped the balance for me to be standing here tonight.

However, it was May 2001, as Master with Judy, that I truly met our serious and responsible IPM, Robert Burgon with his now ex-Mistress Sheila - both on their home ground. The occasion was SNIPEF AGM and Dinner held at the splendid Peebles Hydro. On arrival we were greeted by the CEO our IPM, and with a slight grin, handed us a formal printed invitation for drinks with the President, but for the first and only time in my life, this was to “take a wee dram” commencing from midnight – I can’t remember when I got to my bed.

The next day we saw Sheila in action – not welly throwing but frozen haggis. Having proudly completed her throw, she turned away to hear “look out” and that was her last memory. Sadly she had been felled by a frozen haggis which resulted in a very sore head and a week off work.

In 2004 the IPM became a Liveryman and in 2010 joined the Court leading to Senior Assistant and Renter Warden, at which time I had the task of acting as his Mentor – I soon learned that I was going to have an easy run.

Robert with his two degrees from Heriot-Watt University has spent his working life of 40 years in the Plumbing Industry, primarily with SNIPEF and often associated with education.

It is worth highlighting three major advances in the Industry in which Robert was a prime mover:-

1st – The introduction of the requirement for businesses working with gas to be registered – currently the “Gas Safe Register” – together with appropriately qualified staff.

2nd – The establishment of the World Plumbing Council and creation of World Plumbing Day, 11th March, for the promotion of Plumbing with fresh water and sanitation being vital to global health.

3rd – Bringing together seven Approved Plumber Schemes under “Water Safe” in UK along the lines of “Gas Safe” but without the benefit of statutory backing to date.

These and many more activities highlight how our Company has benefited from his knowledge and experience of our industry and also, being a great communicator, has enhanced our standing during his year.

As most of you will know, the IPM is well organized, self-briefed on any task to be undertaken together with having a good memory.

Thus in planning their year Robert and Sheila decided to take up residence in London and throw themselves into all activities their year offered them.

One only has to read the IPM’s 44 Blogs and their joint schedule of events attended, to see how successful they have been. Also their detailed work in planning and arranging a most successful Master’s weekend in Edinburgh and surrounds which all the 50 attendees appreciated and thoroughly enjoyed.

A great achievement of the IPM’s year, through his communication abilities, has been the generation of increased engagement of our Liverymen in the life of the Plumber’s Company, by new attendances at events and participation on Company Committees.

Now finally I think there is still time to delve behind Robert the IPM we think we know, with a little help from his one year Mistress, Sheila:-

Robert is the eldest of 4 children - perhaps this has generated his sense of responsibility?
He is a true Scot but does not wear the kilt as he doesn't have the legs for it – rather like me!
He is very knowledgeable on the Plumbing Industry but don't ask him for help with practical issues – just call a plumber!

Hobbies include cryptic crosswords – the more difficult the better.

Reading fact and fiction, often more than one book at a time.

He has great rhythm in his hands but not so in his feet, other than Scottish Country dancing.

The great love of playing the organ and piano and enjoying a wide range of music, including Progressive Rock introduced by his son Brian.

We have enjoyed his playing of the organ at our Carol Service.

I understand that Robert has been organist at his local church in North Berwick for over 40 years and during this past year the congregation has had to put up with an electronic box which has not gone down too well and they have wanted him back. However having done a little research on organists, I think the congregation should be careful about what they wish for - I was surprised to find:-

Beware the wrath of the church organist – musical revenge is sweet, and even in Scotland, an organist who had fallen out with some of the elders in the Kirk, got his own back by inserting a thinly disguised rendition of “Send in the clowns” as they processed in for Sunday service, and elsewhere, a vicar sacked an organist after he played “Roll out the barrel” at the funeral of a man known to have been fond of drink.

I am sure none of this could possibly apply to our IPM and feel sure that he was welcomed back to his organist role and played beautifully at their recent Sunday service on 4th November, home again in North Berwick.

Now we have another organist – our new Clerk.

So in summary – a great year led by a great team.

Please rise for the toast – Our thanks to Past Master Robert and Sheila.

Past Master Alec Moir