

## **The Master's Annual Banquet Speech**

**The Mansion House:**

**Wednesday 21 March 2018**

### **WELCOME**

**Renter Warden, My Lord Mayor Locum Tenens, my Lords, Mr Alderman,  
Visiting Masters, Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this year's Plumbers' Company Annual Banquet in this magnificent setting of Mansion House. It is good to see so many Liverymen, guests, family and friends at this special event in the Plumbers' calendar.

### **QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS**

When I was asked to become Master of this ancient and respected institution, I didn't realise that Livery Masters are expected to be the fount of all knowledge. Over the last six months, I have been asked many different questions by people that I have met- and, of course, I am always expected to know the answers! It is almost like being a contestant on a TV quiz show without prizes.

### **THE WORD "PLUMBING"**

One of the questions which I have been asked fairly often when I tell people that our Company can trace its history back to 1365 is what we were called at that time. Indeed, just last week after responding to the Toast to the Guests at a Livery lunch during which I had mentioned this date, I was accosted afterwards by a lady who was quite insistent that we could not possibly have been called plumbers 652 years ago. You see, there is an assumption that the word "plumber" and the work which we do is relatively modern, possibly dating back to the development of effective plumbing and sanitation as a lifesaver in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Well of course, in a room full of classical scholars, YOU ALL know the significance of the word "plumber"- "worker in lead". At Installation, my chaplain reminded us from the Monty Python sketch that plumbing was indeed one of the things which the Romans did for us. However, the Romans didn't invent plumbing as there is historical evidence of plumbing in the Indus Valley in about 3000BC. So, plumbing, and the Worshipful Company have been around for a while and while many people outside of this room probably do not understand the sheer variety of complex activities which people in our industry now undertake, we represent an industry which is essential to public health, comfort and safety and one which I predict will continue to be as relevant in years to come as it has ever been.

### **EXPLAINING THE PLUMBERS' COMPANY**

I have never believed that I have a distinctive Scottish accent but it seems that I do! When people hear me speaking, I am asked what I am doing in London. That question gives me the opportunity to explain the role of the Plumbers' Company and indeed Livery Companies generally. It is quite difficult to do that in a few sentences

without leaving the impression that we are simply a group of people who like dressing up and observing ancient customs. Even worse **for me** is the reaction that I am either able to fix the enquirer's plumbing problems or know someone who can! It is essential that the City of London Livery companies both individually and collectively find a more effective way of demonstrating that we are a powerful force for good in our City, in our trades and beyond.

## **RAISING AWARENESS**

Part of the challenge we face in the Plumbers' Company is to raise awareness of the critical role which plumbing plays in our everyday lives. Ten days ago, World Plumbing Day was celebrated across the world. This is Water Saving Week and tonight is the eve of World Water Day which is recognised by the United Nations. I launched World Plumbing Day in 2010 during my term as Chairman of the World Plumbing Council, partly because we found it difficult for plumbing to receive any recognition on World Water Day. Each year we have seen a growth in the promotion of plumbing on and around 11 March. I would love to see World Plumbing Day receiving UN recognition at some stage in the future. The Plumbers' Company celebrated World Plumbing Day by presenting bursaries to students beside our Plumber's Apprentice Statue in Cannon Street Station. The students who attended that event were all excellent examples of why we should have high hopes for the future of the plumbing industry. Following a suggestion by Past Master Sneath, we have just added a Quick Response code to the statue which enables those with smart phones to listen to the Plumbers' latest gold medallist Dan Martins tell a brief story about the Company and plumbing. If you are passing Cannon Street Station, please pop in and say "hello" to our statue and listen to the message.

I suggest that each one of us has a moral responsibility to share the news that plumbing is essential. Although we enjoy generally good standards of plumbing in the UK, one doesn't need to look too far- and even in Europe- to find examples where the lack of plumbing still causes illness and death on a massive scale. Don't even wait for the question to be asked! Be eager to volunteer the news that plumbing is important and lifesaving!

## **MY JOURNEY AS MASTER**

I am pleased to report that my journey as Master of this magnificent Company so far has been both fascinating and indeed enjoyable. As well as having to answer many questions, the Mistress Plumber and I have met some lovely people on the Livery and City circuit- several of whom are with us tonight- and we have learned much both about the City's excellent charitable activities and indeed about many of the industries served by other Livery companies. On the lighter side, we have tossed pancakes and I was allowed to play a Wurlitzer organ. We have also enjoyed meeting many of our own Liverymen and their partners and look forward to continuing to do so during the next 6 months.

## **LORD O'NEILL OF CLACKMANNAN**

The plumbing industry and the wider building engineering services industry is fortunate to have Lord Martin O'Neill as one of its strongest advocates in the House

of Lords. I used to serve on an industry Committee with Martin and I am delighted that he has been able to join us this evening. I look forward to hearing what he has to say a little later about the challenges facing the building engineering services industry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **INTRODUCTION TO LMLT**

As is often the case at this time of year, our Lord Mayor is unable to be with us this evening but we are delighted that he is represented by the Right Worshipful Lord Mayor Locum Tenens, Alderman Dame Fiona Woolf and her husband Nicholas. You are both most welcome. As many of you will know, the Plumbers' Company is fortunate in having Fiona as our Upper Warden and (apologies for making you nervous, Fiona), if elected, you will succeed me as Master in October. As Lord Mayor Locum Tenens and Upper Warden, Fiona has kindly agreed to do a double shift this evening by both responding to the Civic Toast and then proposing the Toast to our Guests. Fiona, I know that you only arrived back this morning from a business engagement in western Canada and it is so good of you to attend in a dual role this evening.

On behalf of the Company, I would like to present you with a cheque for the Lord Mayor's Appeal. I also have a small personal gift for you. My plumbing industry colleagues in Germany have adopted the term "Wasser ist Leben"- "Water is Life" to promote the role of plumbing in relation to public health. As a Scotsman, I am used to hearing a slight variation of this phrase. The word "whisky" in Gaelic means "water of life" and I would therefore like to present you with a bottle of the Plumbers' Company's "water of life".

I would now like to ask you all to stand and join me in the Toast to the Lord Mayor and the City of London Corporation.

## **THE LORD MAYOR AND THE CITY OF LONDON CORPORATION**