

Newsletter #3 from the Master

Kathy and I were so pleased to welcome about forty Plumbers and friends at the Royal Albert Hall on 5th February for a 'Plumbers Social'. The event was excellently organised by Steward Gary Lester.

We were given two tours of the Hall, one before lunch and one after. The first was a front of house view of this magnificent, unique entertainment venue, including the Royal suite; some of our number even stood on the main stage! The second was a rare opportunity, with technical staff as our guides, to visit the inner workings of RAH and inspect the vital behind-the-scenes services including the boilers and the plumbing - fascinating stuff.

Between our two tours we had a first class lunch in RAH's Italian kitchen and were very well looked after by the staff. I said a few words to the gathering at lunch, primarily to thank Gary for his diligent work, supported ably by Sharon Sibthorpe at the Plumbers' office. It was also a chance to thank all our guests for coming, despite train strikes and winter chills, resulting in an excellent turnout!

There was much bonhomie and good humour throughout the day, and much classic Plumbers' inquisitiveness too - the guides had to field many questions!

A lovely day all round!



I was very pleased to join the glittering Gardeners' Company Banquet on 9th February, at Mansion House.

A very well attended event saw me seated at the top table next to the Master Plaisterer. We were entertained by speeches from the Upper Warden Cindy Peck, the Lord Mayor Michael Mainelli, the Master Gardener Nicholas Woolf OBE (accompanied for a few minutes by Dame Fiona Woolf, Past Master Plumber) and by former Prime Minister The Rt Hon Theresa May.

Mrs May said that business and environmental (net zero) goals need not compete and can both be met. She talked about how gardening helps improve mental health, and about the need to use land with great care to ensure biodiversity. She challenged us to consider what we are leaving for future generations, but ended by speaking hopefully about the power of education for people to better understand and preserve the natural environment.

I was pleased to meet up with many fellow Masters and Consorts at this splendid event, and enjoyed a sociable and educational evening.



Kathy and I very much enjoyed the fun and friendship of the Plumbers Table on 12-2-24. Liverymen and friends, a very healthy forty in total, relished one of our most popular events, hosted by our friends at Ironmongers' Hall. The afternoon started with a lively reception that was followed by a hearty lunch. There was much conversation and comradeship on show in an excellent atmosphere, shared with other diners.

I said a few words towards the end of the meal to thank the kind Ironmongers' staff, to celebrate this ever popular lunchtime gathering, and above all to thank the planner and organiser Senior Steward (and Webmaster) Philippa Stary who put in much work to make the day a success. She was assisted on the day by Steward David Pearson.

Two welcome friends at the lunch, as guests of PM Erica Stary, were the Master and Consort of the Security Professionals, Russell and Helen Penny. The two photos below show Russell Penny and I in a surprising storyboard scenario, as created by Russell!



The Plumbers Company was very well represented at the Shrove Tuesday Guildhall Pancake Racing, on 13th Feb, by Kathy and I, UW Charles Brooks, Lvy Jason Clark, and The Clerk Adrian Mumford.

Although the outdoor racing in the Guildhall Yard was cancelled at the last minute due to rain, much fun was had down in the Crypt!

All the Masters present, almost fifty, took part in 5 heats of a 'static' Pancake Tossing competition. I managed a very creditable 74 tosses in the 30 seconds allowed, yet still only came third in my heat and so did not progress to the Grand Final. The winner came from our construction industry friends at the Tylers and Bricklayers. Nonetheless I was complemented, from many quarters, for my pancake tossing technique!

Copious amounts of pancake eating took place during this underground affair, and a tasty buffet lunch, plus a glass of something, was welcomed by all.

The Plumbers Team were proud to valiantly represent our Livery Company and enjoyed much fun and laughter on this very sociable day.



I was fortunate to join the Company of Educators' Franklin Lecture at Fishmongers' Hall on 15th February 2024, introduced and hosted with skill by the Master Mrs Janet Reynolds.

Entitled "How will the Treasury handle a change in government" the discussion was led by three faculty members of The Strand Group at King's College London, which specialised in the institutions and workings of government - Prof John Davis, Lord Nicholas Macpherson, and Ed Balls the former MP.

KCL has been training Treasury civil servants for 9 years and 250 have passed through its special programme. A key focus is institutional and economic history - they argue that to achieve effective policy development Treasury civil servants need to have a true understanding of key events in their ministry's contemporary history, such as the banking crisis of 2008. Ed Balls suggested that politicians as well as civil servants should strive to understand the past to inform their decision making to address the present and future. Furthermore, to understand an individual you need to understand their history and how their perspectives have been formed.

As a case study the faculty team looked at how the Treasury dealt with the potential change of government in 1997 after eighteen years of Conservative rule. There was expected to be a major shift of culture if Gordon Brown were to replace Ken Clarke as Chancellor.

Civil servants needed to have insights into Brown's style before a Labour administration commenced.

Ed Balls therefore started a series of meetings with the senior Treasury civil servant from 1996. They met once a week for twelve months to prepare the way for the Treasury's first dealings with Gordon Brown if Labour came to power. This included talks about how key Treasury and Budgetary processes work, so that inexperienced Labour politicians would be better able to contribute, and do so sooner. The meetings were not about the minutiae but concerned the big manifesto themes that Labour would wish to address if it were in government. Ed Balls commented that the team at the Treasury did successfully become attuned to Labour's thinking, in anticipation of administration change.

The speakers concluded that there are lessons in government transition from 1996-1997 that might apply in 2024-2025. The photographs attached show the lecture hall and Ed Balls



Kathy and I attended a fascinating lecture, "The Legacy of George Ravenscroft" on 19th February as guests of the Glass Sellers' Company, at Glaziers' Hall.

The speaker, Colin Brain, discussed the revolution in British glass manufacturing led by George Ravenscroft in the decade from 1674, and the commercial contracts he agreed with the most important glass sellers in London specifying production locations and volumes of supply. The new techniques produced crystalline or lead glass vessels of much greater refinement and transparency. This step-change took Britain from the third tier of European glass making to the top of the tree in just a decade. It remained there for over two hundred years - a good, early example of the Industrial Revolution in action.

Afterwards we were entertained with drinks and a lovely supper in the beautifully restored London Bridge Arches that are, in part, underneath the Thames at Glaziers' Hall. There was a warm atmosphere amongst the fifty guests thanks to the kind hospitality of the Master & Mistress Glass Seller, David & Mandy Wilkinson, and their colleagues.

The photos show the eight Masters present that night.



Adrian Mumford and I were very pleased to visit the Cutlers' beautiful Victorian Hall on the evening of 21st February in Warwick Lane. This was a charming affair with just two visiting Masters, and their Clerks, joining Cutlers' Court members for dinner following their working day. Our hosts, led by the Master Michael Pocock, were friendly and informal. After drinks we ate an excellent meal in the lovely surroundings of the Court Room. I was seated to one side of Mike Pocock, and David Liming, Master Ironmonger, the other. Adrian sat beside Consort Claire Pocock - they are good friends through their joint membership of a choir. A memorable evening all round, with much good conversation. Our sincere thanks go to the Cutlers.

The photo shows left to right : David Liming Master Ironmonger, myself, and Michael Pocock Master Cutler



Adrian, the Clerk and I were honoured to attend a memorable evening at Vintners' Hall for the Vintners' Livery Dinner on 22nd Feb 2024, attended by over 150 people, as the guests of the Master Anthony Fairbank.

We were welcomed at the start by Past Master David Butler-Adams who was the perfect host; we much value his kindness. Whilst full of the ceremony of a major Livery event, this gathering had a very sociable atmosphere, particularly characterised by a high proportion of the attendees being young Vintners' Liverymen. The Company is clearly doing some excellent work in recruitment and engaging members from the younger generations. I met many of them over the evening and was struck by their generosity and openness.

Amongst the guests were six Masters, the Swiss Ambassador, and the Guildmeister, Zunft Zur Meisen, Switzerland. Founded in 1336, this Zurich based guild represents crafts such as vintners, tavern owners, saddlers, and painters.

I enjoyed excellent conversations over dinner with, among others, Consort Harriet Fairbank and Ian Harris MBE, Swan Warden, a mine of information including the fascinating story of swan upping.

The excellent meal was accompanied by the very best of wines, as one might expect of the Vintners, which were introduced to us by a Master of Wine. We sang the unique "Song to the Vintners" with its rousing chorus, and were entertained by members of the Master's choral society from Oxfordshire - he even joined them to sing one of the numbers! We heard fine speeches from the Master and from Helen McGinn author, wine writer, and TV presenter.

This was an event I will remember with great pleasure when I look back on my year as Master of the Plumbers.

The photos show David Butler-Adams and David Adams before dinner and the guests at dinner.

