

Master's Speech – Mansion House Banquet 2017

Wardens, My Lord Mayor, My Lords, Ladies, Mr Sheriff, Ladies and Gentlemen.

A very warm welcome to you all this evening to this, our Charter Commemoration Banquet. It is a great privilege to be holding this occasion, once again, at the Mansion House, the home of our Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress, who we are honoured to have with us tonight.

You will be relieved to hear that this will not be a long speech. The power of speech is a marvellous gift, given only to mankind and lasting from our birth up to the moment we stand up to make a speech at the Mansion House.

This is the fifth anniversary of the granting of our Royal Charter. The charter contains two key objects for us – first to foster the profession of arbitration and other forms of private dispute resolution – and, second, to participate in the governance of the City of London and to support the Lord Mayor, The Sheriffs and Aldermen.

Disputes have been settled by arbitration in this country since the middle ages. But we are a modern livery company, formed in 1981. I, for one, am very proud to be a member of a modern livery company. Can you imagine the Livery, today, without the modern companies? With the greatest respect to the ancient companies, and all that they do, I believe that it is we, the modern companies, who have kept the Livery movement alive and relevant in the 21st century.

We are one of twelve members of the Financial Services Group of Livery Companies – which acts as the Liaison Group between the Lord Mayor's office and the professions. Between us we provide the Lord Mayor with a vast resource of skills and knowledge on which to draw.

These are challenging times for the City of London, and it is easy to overlook the fact that the City is a legal centre, not just a financial one. The coexistence of legal and financial centres in the city is no coincidence.

Nor is it a coincidence that more than half the world's leading law firms have chosen the capital as their headquarters, which means that London has the largest concentration of legal expertise anywhere in the world.

Despite increasing competition, London remains the destination of choice for international dispute resolution and the preferred seat of international arbitration. Long may that continue.

As a modern livery company we obviously don't have the financial resources of the old companies but we do make a worthwhile contribution. I say this not to blow our own trumpet, although I am immensely proud of what we do, but to illustrate what it means to be a modern livery company.

Our Charitable Trust supports many worthwhile causes, including the Lord Mayor's appeal. But we are, first and foremost, committed to projects concerned with education.

We are affiliated with Clara Grant Primary School, through the Livery Schools Link, which organises voluntary work in improving numeracy and literacy for primary school children in deprived areas.

Clara Grant is one of 13 schools who have been working with 16 livery companies on a creative arts project of the First World War. The exhibition of the art work of 240 London schoolchildren – Echoes Across the Century – is currently at the Guildhall Art Gallery and is open until 16th July. It is an amazing project and I urge you to go and see it if you have not already done so.

We are also, at the instigation of Sue the Mistress, funding a reading and literacy project, with Authors Aloud, for disadvantaged children in London, providing authors, illustrators, poets and storytellers to visit schools and inspire students.

And this year, for the second time, we have awarded travelling scholarships to two deserving students who, in March and April, have each spent a month in Dubai, studying how dispute resolution operates in that jurisdiction.

But we do not only give financially. Our members also give their time in many different ways to further our object of fostering the profession of arbitration and dispute resolution. I will give you a few examples of the many ways in which our members give their time.

The organising and running of our travelling scholarships in Dubai takes up an enormous amount of our members' time, both in this country and in Dubai.

Our pupillage scheme, run by our Education and Pupillage Committee, is we believe the only pupillage scheme available for trainee dispute resolvers in this country. Our members freely give their time as Mentors to these trainees. We are continuing to expand this scheme and, in fact, it has just gone global – we have found a Mentor for a pupil in Australia.

Our arbitration competition, in January, also organised by our Education Committee, saw 46 contestants in thirteen teams drawn from leading London law firms, Chambers and Universities. Added to this our cast of players: four arbitrators, four witnesses of fact and two experts – all played by members of the Company.

We also hold many other educational events during the year, such as our annual symposium at Keating Chambers, giving advice to aspiring arbitrators, and the Master's Lecture - this year given by Peter Rees QC.

And now a few other things I hope you will support. First, the Ladies' Lunch, hosted by the Mistress, at Innholders' Hall on Friday 30th June. Ladies, please put that date in your diary.

And my Master's weekend which, this year, is over the weekend of 15th – 17th September. Regrettably, this clashes with the Sheriff's Ball, as it did last year. Now, I deliberately moved my weekend forward a week from last year's Master's weekend. Unfortunately the Sheriff's did the same.

However, I can guarantee a fantastic weekend to all of you who come. We are going to Dartmouth in Devon, staying at the Dart Marina Hotel where every bedroom looks out over the River Dart.

We have organised a private tour of The Britannia Naval College, a visit by boat and steam train to Greenway, the Devon house and gardens of Agatha Christie, and a tour of Sharpham's vineyard – also on the River Dart. Plus we have some fine dining – fish and chips and champagne at Devon's best fish and chip restaurant.

Finally, I am going to update you on our sponsored walk of the Ridgeway. Sue, the Mistress, and I are raising money for the Charitable Trust by walking the ancient Ridgeway trail which is 86 miles in length, from Silbury Hill, near Avebury in Wiltshire, to Ivinghoe Beacon, near Tring in Hertfordshire.

I am pleased to report it is going well. We are currently approaching the 60 mile mark and are hoping to raise £1,000.00. We still have a little way to go, on both counts, so if you have not yet given I urge you to do so.

I am sure that the Lord Mayor will be relieved to hear that the Company's contribution to his charities is not dependent upon our ongoing trek. My Lord Mayor, to show our support for you and your chosen charities, it gives me great pleasure to present you with this cheque on behalf of the Arbitrator's Company and our Charitable Trust.

Closing

Sir Peter Coulson. Thank you for your speech, and for the vote of thanks to the Company. It is perhaps a bit of a cliché to say that we have been both entertained and informed but I think it is true to say that tonight you have more than succeeded in doing both.

I very much appreciate you being here tonight, not least because I was uncertain whether I should ask you, the Chief Judge of the TCC and author of the authoritative work on construction adjudication, for which you have received royalties from many on this room, including me, for each of its three editions. However, my doubts were dispelled by an old friend of yours, Paul Darling, who encouraged me to ask you – and I am very pleased he did.

In fact, we have the entire spectrum of the TCC judiciary with us tonight, from the Chief Judge to our very own Finola' OFarrell, now a Dame, and the newest Judge of the TCC. I can't help noticing that even Judges are looking younger these days.

We have all enjoyed the wonderful music provided by The Thames Fanfare Brass, including the post horn gallop. I must also thank Tim Rolf and the Mansion House for the seamless organisation of this evening and for the excellent food and drink we have consumed tonight.

I must also thank our Immediate Past Master Michael Goodridge who agreed to take on the unenviable task of saying grace in the absence of our Chaplain, the Revd George Bush, who is a master of the art. All I can say, Mike, is that you did well. It was an excellent grace, as we knew it would be.

Finally, I must thank three people without whom this evening would not have happened. Our Clerk, Biagio Fraulo, ably assisted by John White, who have organised every aspect of this evening, down to the last detail. And of course our Beadle, Jimmy, who has kept us all in order.

So, we reach the end of what has been a wonderful evening and it only remains for me to wish you all a safe journey home. Goodnight.