

Worshipful Society of Arbitrators' Dinner

The Mansion House
Wednesday, 25 January 2006
The Lord Mayor Locum Tenens of London
Sir Robert Finch

Master, Wardens, My Lords, Sheriffs Ladies & Gentleman

It is always very good to be back in the Mansion House for an evening with the Arbitrators, with a team of Sheriffs at my side, our lucky ladies as honoured guests alongside us and Brigadier Neill O'Connor dancing in attendance. My only regret is that tonight I come not as Lord Mayor but in his stead due to the Lord Mayor's absence in Algeria and Egypt on official business. It falls to me therefore, happily, to thank you, Master, for your very kind proposal of the Civic Toast and for your equally generous hospitality here in this great Hall.

Fate always seems to draw me to the Arbitrator – for recently having resigned my Partnership as a Solicitor and the constant strain of seeking to agree one form of contract or other on behalf of, sometimes unreasonable clients, I now face the reality that the Company I now lead has as its staple diet 1800 income producing leases; all with arbitration clauses; all providing the solution to any inability on our part to agree any new level of rent; all providing a hugely rich livelihood for a burgeoning population of arbitrators. And numerous building contracts clutter ours drawers.

So in a sense I have stepped from the proverbial frying pan into the fire; in consequence the growth of our income may depend on 3rd parties!! Perish the thought – but we are delighted nevertheless to dine with Arbitrators – to sleep with Arbitrators – to die for Arbitrators!

Now the Lord Mayor and, sometimes if he is lucky the Lord Mayor Locum Tenens, depends in part for his speeches on an able body of men and women who, surrounded by books and computers and squatting in the upper reaches of this House, spend their life crafting words and wisdom.

In the case of this evening speech they impishly suggested that perhaps my speech should put two untenable propositions together which could be brought together by compromise and reasoned logic.

They even argued for instance, that the result of Ken Livingstone's idea for a triple decker bus was compromised by arbitration and resulted in the bus that bends in the middle. And then they told the story of an aging Dean – a purely arbitrary story in their view: for one day the Dean received a telephone call from one of the serious Tabloids to apologise for the publication of his obituary. They had got the wrong Dean dying and were profusely apologetic.

Well the Dean sat and thought and decided to ring his Bishop

“Have you read my obituary in the paper?” asks the Dean

“Yes I have” the Bishop replied and then added – after a long silence – *“Tell me Mr Dean where might you be phoning from?”*

Master, seriously all of us can celebrate the work carried on in London by the lawyers and arbitrators whose wealth creation and revenue production for the Country is often forgotten by those in government or parodied as too cumbersome or ill fitting in this media frenzy society. So I want to celebrate with you not only your own 25th birthday but your vibrant support for the City Financial and the continuation of your efforts to allow London to claim pride of place as the World's favourite city.

Of course London has changed dramatically in the quarter century you have been a Livery Company. This year we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of Big Bang. It revolutionised the City and, many would argue, the nation's fortunes. Now the UK is reckoned to the fourth largest economy in the world and in many aspects of financial services, we lead the way.

We certainly lead on many aspects of financial services, not least arbitration, and in the City we pride ourselves too on clean and safe streets, policed by a force which is rated second to none. And the Lord Mayor continues that leadership role by his travels today to Egypt and Algeria – and later to other near Middle Eastern neighbours who are spread across the Region – work vital to encourage stability and safety and their and our economic well being.

Sometimes sadly the City's high standards are not echoed across the capital. As you may know, we recently lost a brilliant young Linklaters associate by a mindless, brutal attack. Those responsible for governing the rest of London need to understand that international businesses will not come to London or stay in London if the streets outside the City are not as safe as those within the City. And allied to that, I suggest that the Metropolitan Police Service needs to address that problem instead of trying to take over our Force.

But it is not just governments or police forces that force change or protect fortunes. Like the Arbitrators, it is people who in their societies need to bring reason to the unreasonable, to stand up and fight for human decency and the control, at whatever price, of those who commit foul crimes against the young men and women that form our hope for the future and Tom ap Rhys Price was one on them.

And at the same time all of us must try and control governments who reject our legal systems, our respect for the rule of law for ideas written on the back of envelopes. And that is why I come so willingly to your dinner tonight, to wish you well in your next 25 years, to encourage your maintenance of your standards, to encourage still further your fight for the construction of a new Commercial Court and to congratulate this company on its excellent awards programme. And I know that you have other plans afoot to make this Jubilee a memorable one!

The Civic party have enjoyed themselves thoroughly and join me in wishing you a very happy next quarter century. Thank you.

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