



Worshipful Company
of Builders Merchants

50th Anniversary Memoire

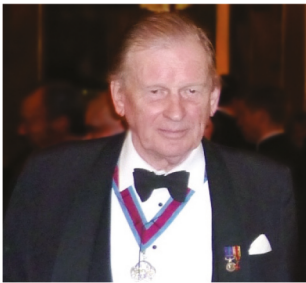
by
John S Faulder, Past Master

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF BUILDERS MERCHANTS

A Fiftieth Anniversary Memoire

The inaugural meeting of the Company was held on 29th March 1961 under the chairmanship of Charles Golton. It was recorded that the Company had 66 members.

It is the Fiftieth Anniversary of that event that we celebrated in 2011.



Past Master John Faulder

Membership was to be confined to merchants supplying the City of London but it was agreed in December that up to 10% of “Country Members”, i.e. those serving elsewhere, would be accepted. The Company was the brainchild of a small group who obviously knew exactly what they wanted – City Company without Livery, Livery Company, and then Royal Charter – and immediately set about doing all that was necessary to those ends. Fate seems to have smiled upon them – the annual quarterage was only £7 and the first banquet made a loss of only 8 shillings and 7 pence. The National Federation of Plumbers and Builders Merchants (N.F.P.B.M.) was offered an essay prize.

Since that time there have been 47 Masters, the Founder Master, Charles Golton, having served for three years, 1961-2, 1962-3 and later 1973-4, whilst his successor, George Reed (later Chairman of Wimbledon Football Club) served twice, in 1963-4 and 1964-5. It was always very useful to be able to produce a Founder Master – something quite beyond the capability of Livery Companies founded in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The Company founded in 1961 was not incorporated, but an Association of its members. Fifty years later it is still not incorporated but expects to become so on receipt of its Royal Charter. Ten years later it applied to become a City Company without Livery, the application being signed by one of its Honorary Members, Sir Ralph Perring (later founder of the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers) who had been Lord Mayor in 1962-3. The application was successful and in 1973 the Company accordingly became a “City Company without Livery”, and its Freemen could apply for the Freedom of the City.

On 7th November 1977 it received the Grant of Livery from the Lord Mayor, Sir Robin Gillett, at Mansion House and thus became City Livery Company No. 88, the ninth of the 29 Companies that have received this honour since the Second World War.

It celebrated the 25 Year Jubilee of its inauguration in 1986, when all Masters of Livery Companies in the Construction Industry were invited to its Jubilee Banquet. There was a Beating of the Retreat by the Band of the 5th Battalion of the Queen's Regiment at Armoury House (with the City Marshal as Guest), and the "Blue Book" was produced to commemorate the occasion. The 25th Anniversary of the Grant of Livery was marked in 2002 by a banquet at Carpenters Hall where the Company's Treasures, which are kept there, were on display.



The Grant of Livery

Two basic non-City developments were that the Company became a Charitable Trust on 19th June 1964 and it received its Grant of Arms, which was dated 31st October 1975 (two years after application) and presented at a dinner at Plaisterers Hall by Richmond Herald. This had been signed by no less than three Kings of Arms (Garter, Clarenceux and Norroy and Ulster).

As already mentioned, the total Membership at the time of inauguration was 66. By the time of the Jubilee there were 123 Liverymen (29 of whom were Founder

Members) and 33 Freemen (of whom 9 were Founder Members) and there had been 52 recorded deaths. At the most recent count there were 186 Liverymen and 12 Freemen.

Of the former only one, Past Master David Gandy, appears to have been a Founder Member (he also happens to be the only second generation Master and the only one to have been Master of another Livery Company, the Painter Stainers). The Roll of Members has run to 484, thus suggesting, after the initial 66, an annual average intake of 8 new members. The Grant of Livery permits a total of 250 Freemen at any one time.

It has been seen that initially 10% of "Country Members" were ruled as being acceptable. The Ordinances promulgated with the Grant of Livery then limited membership to "persons who in the opinion of the Court are or have been closely connected with the trade of builders' merchants". In 1987 the newly formed Development Committee proposed that whereas most members should have to be builders merchants, it should be permissible for up to 15% of the total membership not to have builders merchanting as their source of income but should nevertheless be associated with the industry, e.g. as a supplier.

It is a matter of special record that the first lady to become a Freeman of the Company did so in 1982. The Election Committee to supervise and stimulate the recruitment of new members was founded in 1992.

As is customary with emerging Livery Companies, Honorary Members have been drawn from the ranks of Aldermen of The City, mainly to guide the Company in its formative years. This Company has been very fortunate in its Honorary Members who have been Sir Ralph Perring (Lord Mayor in 1962), Colonel Sir Ronald Gardner-Thorpe (Lord Mayor 1980), Sir Christopher Walford (Lord Mayor 1994) and Alderman Fiona Wolf (currently Aldermanic Sheriff). The only mayor to have served whilst a member and subsequently to have died was Sir Ronald, in honour of whom the Company trained a guide dog for the blind and named it Colonel.

One of the most important aspects of a Livery Company is its Charitable Fund and the donations it makes from it. Starting from scratch in 1961 it was reporting that funds were "mounting" in 1964 and were around £5,000. By 2007 those funds amounted to £1 million, but sadly the world financial crisis caused this sum to fall somewhat. The 1990 recommendation of the Development Committee that an Almoner should be appointed who would chair the Charities Committee had clearly borne fruit. One of the things that had helped along the way was that Peat Marwick & Mitchell had charged in 1964 the interesting sum of £115 for three years work! From 1976 the

Charities Fund was charged an annual management fee by the Company which started as £1500 p.a. It is interesting to note that in 1978 it was decided to distribute charitable donations as to one third to the Institute of Builders Merchants (of which more anon), one third to the Royal Metal Trades Benevolent Fund (which celebrated its 150th Anniversary in 1993 and is now known as “The Rainy Day Fund”) and one third to “others”.

In 2010 £4,533 (17.5%) was donated to Builders Merchant Beneficiaries, £7,675 (29.7%) to “City” causes (always including the Lord Mayor’s chosen charity), £6,245 (24.2%) to “company” beneficiaries (mainly nominations by officers of the year), and £7,400 (28.6%) to “other” causes, making some £25,853 in all.

The Financial Year originally ended on 30th June but in 1991 that was changed to 30th September to have a quarterly date that was almost co-extensive with a Master’s term of office for which he could thus be held responsible. An Audit Committee was instituted in 2006.

The administration of the Company (as with all Livery Companies) has always been entrusted to the Clerk, re-elected annually and usually described as the “Learned Clerk”, not a reference to Chaucer but to the fact that clerks are frequently also lawyers, although only three of the nine Clerks so far were lawyers (but those three have covered nearly half the company’s life). The Clerks have been Richard Crowther (also Past Master) 1961-3, Ronald Chapman (also Past Master) 1963-4, K.P.Robertson 1965-8, Vernon Fanstone OBE, BCom, FCIS, 1969-80, Aubrey G.P.Lincoln MC, TD (also Past Master) 1980-9, Sheila Robinson TD 1989-2006 and Tim Statham, the current incumbent. The two long-serving Clerks who are no longer with us had their service marked by, in the case of Vernon Fanstone, a silver mace/wand (inspired by that borne by the Yeoman Warder in the Tower Chapel and subscribed for by the Livery), and by a musket engraved “Lincoln” presented in his name to the Company of Pikemen and Musketeers of the Honourable Artillery Company (Aubrey had commanded the Infantry Battalion of the H.A.C. and been Master Gunner in the Tower).

The Company so formed had to decide whether to have a Hall (as do 35 of the 108 Livery Companies). The explicit advantage of having a Hall is that if a Liveryman is found dead drunk in the City the Constabulary do not provide accommodation for him at Her Majesty’s expense, but dump him on the steps of his Livery Hall. The basic decision was put before the Company in 1977 when the opportunity arose of being a participating holder of what is now Glaziers Hall at the south end of London Bridge. It was decided in 1978 that do so would virtually wipe out the Company’s accumulated funds. The shares would have cost £50,000. Instead in 1979 an agreement was

reached with the Carpenter's Company to share the amenities of their re-built hall, and there the Company's treasures are still kept. The Company also has a special relationship with the Painter Stainers with regard to the use of their meeting rooms and, among other things, attendance at the luncheons after the annual elections of the Sheriffs and the Lord Mayors.

In practice many members consider it an advantage not to be burdened by the responsibilities attaching to the ownership of a Hall, and welcome the variety that moving events from one Hall to another affords to the Company and especially those members coming from the provinces.

Training is the most significant concern of a Livery Company as the direction in which much of its charitable donations point. Even in its inaugural year the Company was offering essay prizes to be competed for by those within the N.F.P.B.M. In January 1968 six members of the Livery were nominated as Founder Members and Governors of the Institute of Builders Merchants which the Company had just founded in collaboration with the N.F.P.B.M. In 1973 it sponsored, again jointly with the N.F.P.B.M., an appeal for funds wherewith to build a training centre to house the Institute (later built at Harlow). Ever since it has nominated a liaison officer with the Institute by Membership of its Board of Governors (and indeed it provided it in 2005-7 with a President in the person of Past Master John Hauxwell).

Over the years it has made a considerable contribution to the Institute. In its Jubilee year it founded a scholarship to fund a builders merchant to travel abroad to study "how they do it over there". This was very successful as long as scholarship winners went to North America where candidates believed the native tongue to be English but enthusiasm faded as the organisers encouraged candidates to go to Europe which was then emerging as a free trade zone; finally the problem of language killed this project off. The City and Guilds of London Institute was the apogee of Livery participation in vocational training and was founded in 1878. In 1991 the Company



The Grant of Arms

was accorded the status of Founder Member of the Institute. It is probably true to say that the Golton Medal (named after our Founder Master) is the highest personal honour in the industry.

The solemn declarations made by candidates for the Freedom and repeated when they take the Livery includes the words “I will be faithful unto God and The Queen’s Majesty”. It is a matter of record that there has been only one non-resident new member but as he was a Gibraltarian he was in any case a subject of the Queen. However an alternative wording has had to be adopted to provide for European candidates who do not have the good fortune to be British subjects – a modification adopted by all Livery Companies.

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The fundamental Christianity of the organisation, however, is re-affirmed annually at the Divine Service which takes place in the Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula in H.M. Tower of London, usually following the Election Court General in the Spring. There seems to have been a close connection with this Chapel since the earliest days and the First Annual Divine Service was held there in 1963 when the Chaplain of the Tower, the Rev. E.S. Michael, was appointed Honorary Chaplain

to the Company – a position subsequently held by all of his four successors. In our Jubilee Year the Company presented to the Chapel Royal an embossed prayer book for use on its altar.

Close relations have been maintained throughout the Company’s life and it was moving to hear the current Chaplain explain to the 2011 congregation how welcome we were and how valued this relationship was by the authorities at the Tower. The only problem associated with this relationship was recorded in 1964 when concern was expressed about obtaining refreshment after the service as the cost was felt to be too high – fifteen shillings (75p). Fortunately this problem was overcome first by use of the Royal Fusiliers Mess and then by a lasting relationship with Trinity House. The former contact led ultimately to the loan by the Royal Fusiliers of four challenge cups (the Regiment had expanded during the war to some 64 battalions and their trustees did not know what to do with the accumulated regimental silver).

The Company had special lids embodying its Greek temple symbol made and the cups are now used as loving cups at our banquets. In 2008 Past Master Roddy Taylor took this whole matter of the Company’s spiritual welfare forward by a great step by inaugurating the annual Carol Service in the Chapel Royal which has been followed

by supper first at Bakers' Hall and then at Watermen's Hall (sadly at a slightly higher cost than fifteen shillings!).

Several Lord Mayors had sought to enhance the seriousness of the Livery Movement by discouraging activities that might give the opposite impression - even going so far as to suggest limiting the number of courses at Banquets. The Livery in general has responded by maintaining – with a vengeance – their charitable activities but being ever mindful of the old English saying “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”. There are now annual competitions of Golf, Bridge and Shooting. Golf has been honoured with a Society since 1975. whilst inter-livery bridge seems to have been organised appropriately enough by the Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards.

The first Court Ladies Lunch, at which the Ladies of Members of the Court were thanked for their support during the year and presented with a little token from the Master, was held in 1979. Perhaps uniquely, Past Master Roddy Taylor turned his offerings himself on his lathe. The Thames seems to have been associated with some of the more memorable outings. In the early eighties we were invited by the then Metropolitan Water Board to visit their installations in the Thames Valley where we witnessed the purification and storage of water consumed in the capital (a daily miracle) before returning for hospitality to their headquarters near the appropriately named Saddlers Wells.

Around the turn of the century a visit to the annual Swan Upping on the Thames was preceded by a strikingly truthful warning by the then Master John Hauxwell “Swan Upping is thirsty business”. Starting with Past Master Carter's trip to York in 1992, a most agreeable practice emerged whereby Masters living outside London organised “Master's Week-ends” when the Livery were invited to savour that Master's local delights and distinctions. With no claim to comprehensiveness, these started in York and have included Cornwall, Norfolk, and Warwickshire, to name but a few. It is unclear whether this can be classified as entertainment or training but Past Master Christopher Latham arranged four most instructional visits to parts of the timber industry in Scotland (Dumfries), Ireland (Cork), Wales (Snowdonia) and Devon (Lifton).

Finally, in common with most Livery Companies, this Company has encouraged and supported the volunteer armed forces. In most cases this means the Territorial Army, although in cases such as the Master Mariners, this is not so. During the lifetime of this Company the Territorial Army has undergone fundamental change. The Livery movement is deeply conscious of the limits to what it can do to help the units it has adopted for support but what little it can do is very deeply appreciated by the TA.

This may be one of the younger Livery Companies but it elected to support a unit that contains the oldest infantry regiment in the British Army. Our Honorary Member Colonel Sir Ronald Gardner-Thorpe and Past Master Hugh Harris had both commanded battalions of the Queens Regiment, which was composed largely of the former County regiments of Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire and Middlesex, and in 1973 it was suggested that we should adopt part of it. From then on scarlet coated commanding officers have attended the Company's banquets. Indeed on one occasion when the C.O. was joined by the Major-General, Resident Governor of the Tower, the Past Master - giving the welcome speech at Mansion House - expressed concern at the security implications of this concentration under one roof of such a high proportion of the total officer complement of the British Army.

The Company presented sundry prizes, often in the form of tankards for which the soldiers competed and in 1993 we presented a shield as the "best Territorial Trophy". In February of that same year the Queens Regiment was renamed the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (PWRR). The soldiers informed us that they were now "Di's guys". In both 2006 and 2007 the Company won the Shooting Competition. Since this involved the use of live ammunition and the newspapers were full of reports that soldiers were being inadequately trained because the Army could no longer afford to use live ammunition for training, the worry arose that our Court Member Liaison Officer with the Regiment (the current Senior Warden Andrew Day) might somehow be press-ganged into service in Afghanistan.

**The Company will
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By 2008 the PWRR had become known as "The Tigers" and had become three battalions, the first being Armoured Infantry, the second Infantry and the third Territorial Army, the part we have adopted. The PWRR is the most highly decorated part of the Army (having earned 57 VCs). Currently 46 members of the territorial battalion are under training before being posted to Afghanistan.

The Company celebrated its Fiftieth Anniversary in 2011. All its members are confident that it will continue to "flourish root and branch" (as the saying goes in the City) far into the future, with the "fortuna domus" enhanced by its Royal Charter granted in 2012.

JOHN.S.FAULDER, Past Master.
(May 2011)

