



COMPANY COMMENT

Honourable Company of Freemen of the
City of London of North America
www.freemenlondon.org

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From the Master

Fellow Freemen, I am very honoured to be selected as Master of this fine Company for the ensuing year. I recognize I have some exemplary predecessors, not least Michael Charles, who I will be relying on heavily. All have set a very high standard, for which I thank them profoundly, and I look forward to their support in maintaining this tradition.

I am joined by a very distinguished Court: Michael Charles as Immediate Past Master and Acting Honorary Treasurer; John Smith as Acting Deputy Master and Chair of the Events Committee; Paul Wilson as Honorary Clerk; Neil Purcell as Chair of the Membership Committee; Martin Walmsley as Chair of the Charity Trust and responsible for our relationship with the University of Western Ontario; Karim Kanji and Nigel Napier-Andrews as returning Court members; and welcoming new members, Michael Green and Hugh Pauwels. David Moorcroft has stepped down from the Court and I want to thank him for his dedicated service and recent role as Editor of the "Company Comment".

I would particularly like to thank Michael for his excellent leadership during the past year and I would also like to recognise both Michael and John Smith for so generously offering to support me in their "Acting" roles. The Nominating Committee will be working with members of the Court to appoint an Honorary Treasurer and Deputy Master to take us through to the next AGM.

On the subject of AGMs, I must express my thanks to all those who helped arrange an excellent event, particularly Nigel Napier-Andrews for his detailed planning and execution. I thought it was an enjoyable evening with an excellent speaker.

I would also like to thank Tim Sheeres, a Past Master and member of the Worshipful Company of Bakers, who for many years has stored and looked after the Company treasures. In future, these will be securely stored and maintained by silversmith Stephen Harper and will be displayed at our

next Annual Dinner, which has been set for Friday May 8th, 2009 at The National Club.

My wife Gillian and I and our two daughters moved to Canada in 1982 to set up home in Toronto. Having worked in London for the 18 or so years prior to moving to Canada, I feel a great connection with the City. I became a Freeman on August 8th, 2005 and became a member of the Guild of Freemen last year. Gillian and I are in the UK at least once a year and family and London is always our base.

Now to my year in office, my aim is to continue the work started by previous Masters, so I have established some key criteria for the next twelve months:

1. Complete and launch the new Company website.
2. Continue to improve attendance to the seven or so events the Company holds each year.
3. Improve communications to all our members.
4. Ensure the events we propose continue to contribute to our Charitable Fund to support our ongoing relationship with the University of Western Ontario.
5. Ensure our membership continues to grow, and that we groom members to assist on the Court in due course.

With regard to the new website, I am pleased to announce it has been launched at <http://www.freemenlondon.org>. Please take a few moments to review it.

With regard to communications, we will be using an electronic format more and more. So if you are not currently receiving our notices, please send an email to: membership@freemenlondon.org and we will update our records. Rest assured, if you do not have email, we will continue to send you mail if your dues are up to date.

(continued on page 2)

And finally, I am looking forward to a great year at the helm of the Honourable Company, and with your support, a profitable year for our charity. If you have suggestions or comments, please email: master@freemenlondon.org
-John Bishop, Master

From the Past Master

With the Annual Dinner and Meeting held in early May, this is my first column as Past Master of the Honourable Company. It has been a privilege and pleasure to serve as Master during 2007-08.

Throughout the year, we had a series of notable events. These include the recent reception hosted by the British Consul General Nicholas Armour at his residence, and our Annual Dinner and Meeting at the National club where Randy Barber (President of the International Churchill Society, Canada) was the guest speaker.

At the Reception attended by some sixty members and guests, Mr. Armour spoke of the importance of London as a trade and financial centre within Europe and congratulated the Honourable Company on its charitable support of student scholarships at the University of Western Ontario. In turn, I thanked the Consul General for his generosity in hosting the event and providing a meeting place for our membership which is drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds, but all with an interest in matters British. The reception also gave an opportunity to welcome a number of new members.

Over eighty members and guests attended the Annual Dinner and Meeting at which John Bishop served as Master of Ceremonies, backed up by Nigel Napier-Andrews who carefully orchestrated the evening. The National Club provided a fine meal, new members and guests were introduced, the Ceremony of the Loving Cup proceeded without a mishap, and Randy Barber gave a splendid talk on Sir Winston Churchill by reminding us of the great man's achievements and his many personal attributes. The evening closed with the appointment of the new Court and officers.

In mid-March, we learned of the unfortunate and untimely death of our Deputy Master and Treasurer, Robin Braithwaite. His passing was unexpected and sudden, and shocked us all, given that we were in touch with him on a variety of matters during the preceding days. I will remember Robin for his fine intellect, friendly disposition, great sense of humour, and enthusiasm for the Honourable Company, of which he would have become Master. Our condolences are with his wife Fiona and his family. Robin was a Freeman and a member of the Company of Watermen and Lightermen. He had recently attended the Company's annual dinner in London.

I was also saddened in December to learn of the passing of Gerry Wooll, a former Master of this company in 1989 and a member of the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators. Tributes will appear in this newsletter for both gentlemen.

The Court had five well-attended meetings during the year. The overriding priorities continue to be an attractive program of events, building the membership base, and

supporting the Charity. An additional priority was the website redesign so that it could become more useful to members, and this initiative has moved ahead under John Bishop. Furthermore, the building of alliances with similar societies has become another priority so that we can facilitate shared programming and expand the effective membership; John Smith is leading this initiative.

I want to close by thanking members of the Court for their dedication to the affairs of the Honourable Company over the past year – Neil Purcell, John Smith, David Moorcroft, Paul Wilson, John Bishop, Karim Kanji, Nigel Napier-Andrews, and posthumously Robin Braithwaite. I also thank those members, including Sean Pollock and Jim Mitchell, who have offered advice during the year. We are also grateful to the Trustees of our Charity – Martin Walmsley, John Smith, and David Moorcroft. Thank you all. It has been a pleasure serving as Master with the support of so many fine individuals.

I wish John Bishop and the new Court every success.

-Past Master, Michael Charles

The Worshipful Company Of Leathersellers

Leather was a mainstay of life in the City of London for many centuries both from its use and its manufacture and there were a substantial number of companies that participated in the control of leather tanning, leather items production and selling. Today, there remain five leather related Livery Companies. In order of precedence, these are: the Skinners (6/7), the Leathersellers (15), the Saddlers (25), the Cordwainers (27 – fine and white leather makers), and the Curriers (29 – Dressers and Preparers of Leather). In addition, the Coachmakers and Coach-Harness Makers, Dyers, and Glovers were, or are, still involved in the leather industry, but their activities were not exclusively focused on leather.

The Whittawyers, Botteliers, Malemakers, Pursers, Pouchmakers and Shoewrights no longer survive as Livery Companies, having either merged with the Leathersellers or ceased to exist. The Whittawyers (or Whitetawyers) were the Livery Company that controlled the tawyers that treated the skins of furs while the Botteliers, Malemakers, Pursers, Pouchmakers, and Shoewrights controlled the manufacture and sale of leather bottles, leather trunks, purses, pouches and leather shoes respectively.

With such a plethora of Livery Companies involved in the leather trade, it is not surprising that there were frequent jurisdictional issues, mergers and separations.



It was common for liverymen and freemen in these companies to be members of more than one company so that they could work in more than one area of the industry.

Early History

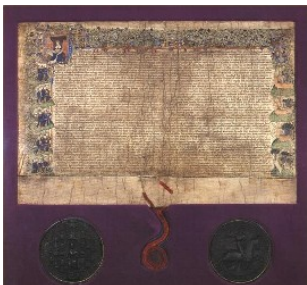
The leather industry in London almost certainly goes back to pre-Roman times but there are no surviving records to indicate its importance or size. The leather industry was substantial and generated significant wealth by the middle of the 13th century, as demonstrated in the document seen here.



"Grant of land and houses by London Wall, circa 1250" is the oldest original document in the Company's archives. This records the acquisition by Richard Long, tanner, of a piece of land with houses in All Hallows' parish, by London Wall. Hard to imagine today, this land was at that time bounded to the south by "Peter FitzAlan's meadow". The Company had premises at London Wall until 1543 when property at St. Helen's was purchased where the Leathersellers still reside today.

The Leathersellers' Company perhaps has its origins amongst the whittawyers who congregated along London Wall in the early thirteenth century. The English word 'leatherseller' does not appear in documentary history until 1372, when members of the mistery or craft of leathersellers and pursers petitioned the mayor and aldermen against the counterfeiting of sheep leather to resemble the more durable roe leather.

Hostile investigations by Parliament at the end of the 14th century into the origins and rights of London's misteries, and a raft of legislation which seemed to sideline the leathersellers' involvement in the trade prompted the fledgling craft to look more closely at its position. In a series of ordinances, the leathersellers laid claim to the right to inspect all leather goods and hides sold in the City of London, and by 1444 the mistery was sufficiently powerful to apply to Henry VI for a charter of incorporation.



The first Royal Charter granted to the Leathersellers in 1444. The illuminated Charter is in Latin and the original seal is missing - shown here are casts of King Henry VI's Great Seal.

The charter established the government of the Company by four Wardens, confirmed and extended the Company's right to inspect leather, and granted the right to meet, to wear a livery and to hold land. Shortly after incorporation, a group of trustees acting for the Company purchased five tenements on the south side of London Wall near Moorgate, and from around 1476 the Leathersellers used the upper floor of one

of the houses as a Hall. Contemporary descriptions show that it was well furnished, with tapestries depicting the life of the Virgin Mary lining the walls and a large window overlooking the garden to the rear. The other properties were let out, and part of the revenue distributed amongst poor prisoners for debt in accordance with the will of Robert Ferbras, an early benefactor.

Leathersellers in Tudor times

The Company entered the sixteenth century on a firm footing. A series of amalgamations with the whittawyers, glovers-pursers and pouchmakers had eliminated potential rivals, and members were generous with bequests of plate, money and property. This improved standing was naturally accompanied by a desire for more prestigious surroundings, and in 1543 the Leathersellers purchased the former priory of St Helen's, Bishopsgate, and converted it into a Hall.

A community of Benedictine nuns had been established at St Helen's in the thirteenth century. The foundation was wealthy, owning most of the parish of St Helen's, but attempts to evade the Dissolution by bribing Thomas Cromwell were not successful, and the priory was surrendered to Henry VIII in 1538. The Leathersellers purchased the site five years later from Sir Richard Williams, Cromwell's nephew. Most of the purchase money was donated by a wealthy leatherseller, John Hasilwood.

Work began to convert the priory into a Hall, but almost at once the Company came close to losing everything. The purchase had been affected through an elderly bachelor trustee, Thomas Kendall, with the intent that the estate should be bequeathed to the Company in his will. Kendall unexpectedly married and produced heirs, who subsequently pressed their claim to this lucrative property. The legal wrangling which ensued was eventually settled in 1677 with a payment of £25 to Kendall's descendants.

In common with other Livery Companies in the Tudor age, the Leathersellers found that their wealth made them a target for bruising financial demands from Crown and City. The Company had to sell its treasured collection of plate to contribute to Henry VIII's Scottish wars, and regular demands from the City authorities for money to purchase corn gave rise to unpopular levies on Livery Companies.

Troubled times - Stuarts, Civil War, Plague and Fire

With the succession of James I, the Leathersellers' Company decided to strengthen, update and renew its charter. This was granted in 1604 confirming the existing rights of search but it is notably more concerned with the constitution of the Company itself.

The 17th century became difficult for the Company, Livery Companies generally, London, and the country at large. The Leathersellers very reluctantly met royal demands

to fund pet projects such as the colonisation of Ulster, and a series of extortionate 'loans' to Charles I.

These drove the Company and the City into the arms of Parliament for the duration of the Civil War. Despite the provisions of the new charter, the Company found its grip on the trade slipping, as craftsmen simply moved into London's burgeoning suburbs. Adding to the general gloom were the twin horrors of "Black Death" and Great Fire: Court meetings were suspended while the plague raged.

The Hall escaped the Great Fire, but there was much loss of Company property elsewhere in the City. There was also a constitutional shock, when, in 1684, Charles II revoked all existing charters and issued restrictive new ones in their place. The Court of Assistants resigned en masse but the Company was able to do little about the unsatisfactory state of affairs until the more liberal reign of William and Mary.

Despite all the upheavals, the Company continued to spend lavishly on improvements to the Hall. The former nuns' dormitory became the banqueting Hall, while the chapter house was re-invented as the Court meeting room, both decorated with oak paneling and fine plaster ceilings. Outside, Liverymen with time on their hands could spend an hour or two in the bowling alley, or stroll through the pleasure gardens which lay to the east of the Hall.

A frequent visitor to the Hall at this time was Abraham Colfe, vicar of Lewisham. Colfe invited the Leathersellers' Company to be Trustee of his extensive charitable trust, which included the management of a boys' grammar school in Lewisham. Originally established in Elizabethan times, Abraham Colfe had re-founded the school in 1652, and it came into the Company's care after his death five years later.



The Company in the 18th and 19th centuries

The turbulence of the Tudor and Stuart era had a devastating effect on the fortunes of all City Livery Companies, and the eighteenth century saw the Leathersellers' Company at its lowest ebb. The increasingly elderly fabric of the Hall and the St Helen's estate was a constant drain on already depleted resources, and membership levels were alarmingly low. Although the Company had obtained an Act of Common Council obliging all trading leathersellers in the City to be members of the Leathersellers' Company, it met with great resistance and efforts to enforce it were soon abandoned.

In the last few decades of the century, the Company was nearly crippled by taxation, including the newly introduced income tax. There were desperate attempts to retrench by cutting back on social events and even closing the Hall, but the Company was forced to admit that radical action was required to offer any hope of survival. In the meantime, the Company transferred operations to a former merchant's house in the north-east corner of the estate. An elegant building embellished with pilasters, the third Hall's history was dramatically brief.



Leathersellers' Hall and St Helen's Church in 1799.

It was destroyed by fire in 1819, but not before the Clerk and Beadle had risked their lives to salvage many of the Company's most valuable possessions. A fourth Hall, built on the same site to plans by William Fuller Pocock and opened in 1822, was sufficient for the Company's needs but was uncharitably described by one observer as incomparably the ugliest of civic edifices'.

When rents from the new street began to flow in 1807, it marked the beginning of the Company's recovery, and indeed the Company's wealth in the nineteenth century was underwritten by property. Social functions not only resumed but became so lavish that the Company outgrew its modest Hall and decided to build another spacious enough to accommodate the entire Court and Livery at dinner. The fifth Hall was designed in a late Victorian Jacobean style by the Company's surveyor, G. Andrew Wilson, and opened in 1879. The centrepiece was a richly decorated banqueting hall, approached up a grand staircase lit by stained glass windows. Electric light was supplied by a Siemens dynamic machine which required three men to operate and blew half a dozen bulbs every time it was switched on.

The Company was also able to channel its new prosperity into large-scale charitable works, such as the construction of new almshouses. A site on the Company's Barnet estate was chosen, and the foundation stone was laid in July 1837 by the Master, Richard Thornton, who offered to pay the contract price of the six new almshouses. Further blocks were added in 1849 and 1866 to house the inhabitants of Hasilwood's almshouses in St Helen's Place.

In the 1880s, the Company became involved with Prendergast School for Girls in Lewisham. The school was founded under the will of the Reverend Joseph Prendergast, a former headmaster of Colfe's School, and although not a trustee, the Leathersellers' Company funded the purchase of a site for the school, which opened in Rushey Green in 1890.

In the nineteenth century, the Royal Commission into the City Livery Companies indirectly spurred the Leathersellers to greater involvement in the field of technical education. This began with a donation which helped to found the City and Guilds of London Institute, and culminated with the establishment of the Leathersellers' Technical College in Bermondsey in 1909.

The last 100 years

As the 20th century opened, the Company first turned to domestic affairs, and began rebuilding St Helen's Place, but work was halted by the outbreak of the First World War. Leathersellers' Hall was offered for use as a hospital, and the Company funded a motor ambulance and field kitchen for the Red Cross. In the inter-war years, work resumed on St Helen's Place, and Leathersellers' Hall was extensively remodelled, but the Company did not have long to enjoy its new surroundings. On the night of 10/11 May 1941, incendiary bombs fell on 16 St Helen's Place, and neighbouring Leathersellers' Hall soon caught fire. A low tide on the Thames meant that there was not sufficient water to extinguish the blaze until morning, by which time the Hall had been almost entirely gutted, with great loss of furniture, artworks and treasures.



After another spate of bombing in 1944, it was reported that over 400 properties belonging to the Company had been damaged, the most significant loss being Colfe's School. The pupils were evacuated to schools in Tunbridge Wells and Somerset and spent many years in temporary accommodation before the School re-opened in 1964 on a new site in Lee, south-east London. Colfe's School, now co-educational, has over 1000 pupils on the roll.

At Prendergast School, the generosity of the Company enabled it to move to spacious new premises in Hilly Fields and build new facilities such as a sports hall, an examination block and a modern languages centre. The School now has about 650 pupils between the ages of 11 and 18. Moreover, three leathersellers' scholarships have been established recently for girls going on to University.

In 1948 the long process of rebuilding Leathersellers' Hall began with the appointment of the Louis de Soissons Partnership as consulting architects. Work was hampered by post-war bureaucracy and shortages of men and materials, but was finally completed in 1960. Smaller and more intimate than its predecessor, the new Hall's traditional architecture and superb craftsmanship attracted the attention of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, who paid an informal visit to inspect Louis de Soissons' work.

London's leather industry was another casualty of the war. Most of Bermondsey's tanneries had been destroyed, and demand for the heavy leather they produced was falling, as was enrollment at the Technical College. In 1976 the decision was taken to amalgamate the College with the leather department at University College Northampton.

Soon after, the Company funded the construction of a new National Leathersellers' Centre, which was re-named the British School of Leather Technology to reflect its international reputation. The Leather Conservation Centre, where skilled staff restore Britain's heritage in leather, was built nearby.

In 1992, almost fifty years of peace in St Helen's Place was shattered when a terrorist bomb exploded in St Mary Axe. Buildings in the vicinity, including St Helen's church and the Company's Exchequer Court development were damaged, some irreparably. Repairs were still in hand a year later when a massive device exploded in Bishopsgate. St Ethelburga's Church was destroyed and every window in St Helen's Place was broken. Inside Leathersellers' Hall, the doors were blown in and pictures were cut by flying glass. Reinstatement works began, and the Company improved the appearance of St Helen's Place by using cobbles, York stone, flower tubs and Victorian-style lighting. To celebrate the Millennium, the Company commissioned two bronze sculptures to flank the entrance to Leathersellers' Hall. Made by Mark Coreth, the sculptures represent the ram and roebuck which feature on the Company's coat of arms.

Military Affiliations

The Company has developed links with the Royal Navy and the British Army. Affiliations have been made with the frigate *HMS Cornwall*, the submarine *HMS Tireless*, and the *1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards*.

Armorial bearings

Arms: Argents, three Roebucks passant regardant Gules, attired and unglued Sable.

Crest: A demi Roebuck Gules attired and unglued Sable, standing on a wreath of colours, Mantled gules doubled Ermine.

Supporters: Dexter a Roebuck Or, attired and unglued Sable; sinister a Ram Argent armed and unglued Or.

Motto: "Soli Deo Honor et Gloria". (Honour and Glory be to God alone.)



The Arms and Crest were first granted in 1479, the Supporters were added in 1505, and the Motto was first recorded in 1634. The above bearings are on the main gate of the Hall of the Worshipful Company of Leathersellers.

Contact with the Company

The Clerk of the Worshipful Company is Commodore Johnathan Cooke, OBE RN, and he can be contacted at Leathersellers' Hall, 15 St. Helen's Place, London EC3A 6DQ, or by email at jcooke@leathersellers.co.uk. The website of the Company is: www.leathersellers.co.uk.

(This article was developed by Peter Leach from the historical summary of the Worshipful Company of Leathersellers on their website. Peter is a Past Master of the Honourable Company of Freemen of the City of London of North America, and Past Editor of the Company Comment.)



Events Report

British Consul General's Reception

On Thursday March 27th, some 50 members and their guests gathered at the home of Mr. Nicholas Armour, British Consul General in Toronto to join him in welcoming three new members to the Company.

In his remarks, Master Michael Charles welcomed and introduced the new members and presented each with The City of London pin. Michael also paid tribute to the Company's Deputy Master and Honorary Treasurer, the late Robin Braithwaite. Michael thanked Nicholas, who in his opening remarks paid tribute to the charitable activities of the Company and the role the Company plays in preserving the relationship between the U.K. and Canada.

We were delighted with the turnout and very grateful to Nicholas for opening his home and making us feel most welcome. We are also delighted to report that the event raised approximately \$1,000 for the Company's Charity Account.

-John Bishop, Master



Upcoming Events

Buffet dinner at the Royal Canadian Yacht Club

Location: RCYC station at 263 Queens Quay E.
(at the foot of Parliament St.) Toronto
Date: Sunday, August 17, 2008
Time: 5:30 pm to catch the 5:45 pm launch
Dress: Country club casual (Jacket or Blazer)
Cost: \$60

Wine Tasting with array of hors d'oeuvres

Location: Performing Arts Lodge, 110 The Esplanade,
(between Church & Jarvis), Toronto
Date: Thursday, November 6th
Time: 6:00 to 8:30 pm
Dress: Business casual
Cost: \$60.00

Annual Meeting & Dinner

Location: The National Club, 303 Bay St., Toronto
Date: Friday, May 8, 2009
Time: 6:30 pm
Dress: Formal or Dark Suits
Cost: TBD

(The Company's website includes details of upcoming events at www.freemenlondon.org. If you are not receiving email of Company announcements, please contact Paul Wilson, at clerk@freemenlondon.org)



Guild of Freemen Events

The Guild of Freemen extends to members of the Honourable Company the opportunity to attend Guild events in London. Those who wish to attend an event should contact Neil Purcell, John Smith or John Bishop before the booking date. Payment must be made in sterling at the time of making the reservation.

Event: Centenary Reception & Beating Retreat
Location: Guildhall
Date: Wednesday, October 8, 2008
Time: 18:00 - 20:30
Price: £59.00
Dress: Suit
Booking Date: August 4, 2008

Event: Hilton in the Community Foundation Charity Ball
Location: Grand Ballroom, London Hilton Park Lane
Date: Saturday, October 18, 2008
Time: 19:00 - 22:00
Price: £170.00
Dress: Black Tie
Booking Date: Limited supply on first come basis

Event: House of Commons Reception & Dinner
Location: Churchill Room
Date: Friday, October 24, 2008
Time: 18:30 - 22:00
Price: £85.00
Dress: Black Tie
Booking Date: September 1, 2008

Event: Buffet Supper at the College of Arms
Location: College of Arms
Date: Wednesday, November 5, 2008
Time: 18:30 - 21:00
Price: £42.00
Dress: Jacket & Tie
Booking Date: September 25, 2008

Event: Lord Mayor's Show
Location: Stands on south side of St. Paul's Cathedral
Date: Saturday, November 8, 2008
Time: 10:30 to 12:00
Price: £26.00
Dress: Jacket & Tie
Booking Date: August 1, 2008

Event: Lunch after the Lord Mayor's Show
Location: City Pipe in Foster Lane
Date: Saturday, November 8, 2008
Time: 12:30 to 14:30
Price: £37.00
Dress: Jacket & Tie
Booking Date: September 25, 2008

Event: Champagne Tasting
Location: Tallow Chandlers' Hall
Date: Wednesday, November 12, 2008
Time: 18:30 to 21:00
Price: £28.00
Dress: Jacket & Tie
Booking Date: October 6, 2008

Event: Centenary Banquet
Location: The Guildhall
Date: Monday, December 8, 2008
Time: 18:15 to 22:30
Price: £140.00
Dress: White Tie
Booking Date: October 6, 2008

Event: Carol Services
Location: St. Stephen's Church, Walbrook
Date: Thursday, December 11, 2008
Time: 18:30 to 20:30
Price: £24.00
Dress: Suit
Booking Date: November 3, 2008

Event: Visit & Lunch at the Guildhall
Location: The Guildhall
Date: Wednesday, January 14, 2009
Time: 12:30 to 17:00
Price: £45.00
Dress: Jacket & Tie
Booking Date: November 24, 2008

Event: Reception & Dinner
Location: Drapers' Hall
Date: Wednesday, January 28, 2009
Time: 18:30 to 22:15
Price: £130.00
Dress: Black Tie
Booking Date: December 10, 2008

Event: Visit & Supper at the Old Bailey
Location: The Old Bailey
Date: Wednesday, February 4, 2009
Time: 17:45 to 21:30
Price: £37.00
Dress: Suit or Jacket & Tie
Booking Date: December 22, 2008

Event: Reception & Dinner at the House of Lords
Location: Peers' Dining Room
Date: Friday, February 6, 2009
Time: 18:30 to 22:00
Price: £85.00
Dress: Black Tie
Booking Date: December 22, 2008

Event: Reception & Dinner
Location: The Mansion House
Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2009
Time: 18:30 to 22:30
Price: £140.00
Dress: Black Tie
Booking Date: January 5, 2009



Member News

The Master and Court wish to recognize the contributions and lives of two significant members of the Honourable Company who passed away since our last newsletter.

Gerald Wooll

Gerry Wooll was born on September 15, 1913 and passed away on December 14, 2007. Gerry was a pilot, engineer, company president and Lord Mayor of Niagara-on-the-Lake. During WWII he served as a squadron leader with the Royal Air Force where he flew 85 missions. He was also Master of the Honourable Company of Freemen of the City of London of North America in 1989 and the founding editor of the Company Comment.

Gerry was married to Audrey, who passed away in 1995, and they had three children – Lorraine, Mary, and Susan. Over the years, the couple hosted several Company events in Niagara-on-the-Lake, including one with the visiting Lord Mayor of the City of London.

During the war Gerry was flying on an intelligence mission over Germany when his Mosquito fighter/bomber developed engine trouble. The aircraft was still on the secret list of fighters, and not wanting it to fall into enemy hands; Gerry managed to fly to Switzerland before making an emergency landing. After being repatriated to Britain, Gerry had to step down from military service as per the terms of the neutrality agreement between Switzerland and Germany and Britain.

After the war, Gerry went to work for De Havilland Aircraft in Toronto as an experimental test pilot. During one test, he had to bail out at low altitude during a fire – not your average desk job!

In the early 1950s Gerry co-founded Gen Air Ltd., today one of Canada's leading aerospace repair and overhaul companies. He remained active with the company until his death.

Gerry was a man with lots of energy. He served as Chairman of Rotary in Canada, and Director Treasurer of Rotary International. His political career began in the early 1950s when he was elected to Niagara Council. From 1961 to 1964 Gerry served as Lord Mayor of Niagara-on-the-Lake – incidentally, the last municipality in Canada to retain the "Lord Mayor" title.

Gerry was also involved in the community, and a few of the most notable roles included: co-founder and chairman of the Niagara Foundation; Member of the Niagara Hydro Commission; Member of the Council of Regents for the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technologies; and member of the Brock University Board of Trustees.

Gerry was a highly respected pilot and a long-time freeman of the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators of the City of London. In 1984 the Guild selected him to be a Livery man of the Guild and the City of London.

The motto of the Royal Air Force is: "Per Ardua Ad Astra" (Through Adversity to the Stars). It is a fitting motto

for such a fine and accomplished gentlemen like Gerry Wooll.

(This tribute is based on a letter from one of our Founding Masters, Ray Gibson.)

Robin Braithwaite

Robin was born in London, England in 1933 and passed away in Toronto in March of 2008. His father Alfred was a Lighterman on the River Thames and was part owner of a barge company. Their 4-story family office building still stands near Rothesay on the south side of the Thames, and the Braithwaite family crest still hangs on the wall over the bar at the nearby Angel Pub. Robin was proud of his heritage and had recently joined the Company of Watermen and Lightermen, where he had actually been apprenticed as a young man.

Robin attended Felstead boarding school on an open scholarship where he excelled in math and science. After Felstead, he earned another scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge. He graduated as a structural engineer, and proceeded to work on large scale projects in various locations across the U.K. He met his first wife, Gwenda, in South Wales and they were married for 37 years until she passed away in 1998. They had one child, Timothy.

In his working life, Robin was always looking for intellectual challenges. When computers came on the scene, he was immediately intrigued and switched from structural engineering to working with this new technology. After a few years he realized, as did many in England at the time, that promotions or new projects would come very slowly; so he brought his family to Toronto and joined the University of Toronto Library computing centre, which was then breaking ground developing library management systems.

Robin then moved to Industry Canada to provide support to other fledgling technology companies, and eventually on to the Secretariat of Intelligent Manufacturing Systems. His last full time job was a long-term contract with the Government of Ontario to provide support for technology start-ups --a job he did until he retired at age 67.

Robin met Fiona Maarhuis in 1999 at a Cambridge alumni event in Toronto. They shared many interests including gardening and cryptic crossword puzzles. They loved to travel, and had put together a list of all the places they wanted to visit. Fortunately, they were able to see all the destinations on their "first choice" list before Robin passed away. Robin was a serious gardener, and planted a full vegetable and rose garden every year. He also loved good food and good wine, and was a talented cook (desserts were one of his specialties).

Robin had been active on the Court of the Honourable Company of the City of London of North America for some time, where he was admired and respected for his thoughtful contribution and hard work. Most recently Robin had served as both Treasurer and Deputy Master. Robin was also responsible for the Company's website. He participated in many Company events and helped organize a few, including a dinner at the Royal Canadian Yacht Club for the Clerk of the Company of the Watermen and Lightermen when he visited Toronto two years ago. He was a member of the

Guild of Freeman as well as the Company of Watermen and Lightermen.

In the Waterman's Hall in London, there is a wall that carries the names of the Masters over the centuries, and there are a number of Braithwaites on it. On this side of the Atlantic, Robin was in line to become the next Master of the Honourable Company for 2008/09. While his sudden passing kept him from assuming the role, we know Robin would have done his heritage proud and been a wonderful leader.

(This tribute is based upon the eulogy given at Robin's funeral by his wife, Fiona Maarhuis.)

The Master and Court extend their sincere condolences to the families of Gerald Wooll and Robin Braithwaite, and express their gratitude to Ray Gibson and Fiona Maarhuis for sharing their recollections with our Company.

New Members

Congratulations to the following on their new membership in the Company: Dr. Michael Graham, John Brian Twort, and Frances Sommerville. A short biography of each will appear in the next edition.



Communication with your Company

The Master, Deputy Master, Honorary Clerk, Honorary Treasurer and the Editor of Company Comment

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