

SPEECH AT COMMON HALL
24th April 2018

by the Master – Eur Ing David M Wilson

It is my privilege to serve you as Master and as it happens today marks the mid-point of my year.

I will give a brief summary of the year since we last met at Common Hall, which was here on Tuesday 25th April 2017 presided over by Immediate Past Master Matt Bastone. Much has happened since then.

It was with particular sadness for us to hear that we lost Past Master Karl Davies last summer. He passed away in July 2017 after an unexpected illness over several short months. Many Company members attended his funeral in Nottinghamshire and a Thanksgiving Service was later held on 9th October 2017 at our Company church, St Mary le Bow. Karl was a stalwart of the Company in so many ways. He was keenly involved in all aspects of the Company activity and he was a prime proponent in obtaining the grant of our Royal Charter. He is very much missed.

Highlights of the past 12 months include:

The Charter Commemorative Banquet was held at the Mansion House on 15th May 2017, closely followed by a stay in Hereford and a visit the Hay Literary Festival arranged by Past Master Matt and his wife Sue. It proved to be a really interesting occasion for our party with attendance at a number of Festival events.

In June we held a reception for new members at the Information Technologists' Hall. Though access to the Hall at that time was via a building site it proved a very worthwhile occasion. Also in June the then Mistress Arbitrator Sue Bastone hosted a Ladies and Consorts' Lunch here in Cutlers Hall and that was most successful.

In July there was both the Company's Dispute Resolution Lunch at Bakers Hall and the Company's Annual Service at St Mary le Bow with a supper at Don's restaurant.

The Master's Weekend was held in Dartmouth on 15th to 17th September. All who attended were greatly impressed with visits to Dartmouth Naval College, and travel by ferry, steam train and bus to Agatha Christie's house and grounds at Greenway Estate. It was a really fine weekend in most convivial company.

The Company's Installation Ceremony and Installation Dinner were held at Skinners' Hall on 24th October and that marked the commencement of my year as Master. This event was closely followed by our Symposium at Keating Chambers for which we had a greater attendance than in previous years and a group of very experienced and influential practitioners delivering some very wise advice and information to those assembled. Our grateful thanks to Keating Chambers and to the speakers attending.

Saturday 11th November 2017 brought the Lord Mayor's Show in which I, the Senior Warden and Junior Warden proudly trudged the streets of London representing the Company. It is worth me saying that we had twenty spectators in the grandstand at St Pauls and lunch at Plaisterers' Hall afterwards. On this particular occasion the weather was kind to us.

On 14th December the Company's Carol service was held at St Mary le Bow and we were very pleased to have the Solicitors' Company join us for that. A rather rowdy supper rounded the evening off at Cafe Rouge.

Our Mediation Competition was held on the weekend of 20th and 21st January 2018 at the premises of the International Dispute Resolution Centre on Fleet Street. This proved to be a really fine venue and I thank IRDC for making it available for us. Twelve teams of recently qualified professionals drawn from universities, barristers' chambers and firms of solicitors competed through several rounds before the final on Sunday afternoon when the winning team from 39 Essex Chambers was triumphant. I was very impressed by the number who gave up their weekend to act as administrators, mediators and judges. Our thanks to Chris McArdle, Joy Davies, Nicola Cohen and Phillippa Rowe for the fine organisation of the event both at the weekend and in the preparation beforehand.

On 30th January a party from the Company attended the theatre at the old County Hall to see a fine production of 'Witness for the Prosecution' by Agatha Christie. This was preceded by a hasty pre-theatre meal nearby.

Our Spring Luncheon was held this year on 8th February at Apothecaries Hall where the Guest Speaker was our very own Past Master Victoria Russell. She is also a past master of the Constructors' Company and is Deputy Chairman of the City Livery Committee. We were favoured with the attendance of twenty Masters and their Clerks from other livery companies.

The Master's Lecture this year was delivered on 13th March by Lord Dyson on the subject: "What are the proper limits to the immunity of arbitrators?" He had the use of the impressive lecture theatre at Simmons & Simmons solicitors and although we had bookings to capacity - and beyond - it was disappointing to have a significant number of "no-shows".

On Friday 16th March the United Guilds Service was held at St Pauls. This is a splendid City event entailing the attendance of very many City dignitaries, including the Lord Mayor, and officials of all the livery companies. I, the Wardens and the Clerk were there suitably gowned. It is a great spectacle and I would encourage members with their partners to apply to the Clerk for tickets next year. There is no charge for attending.

I will also note that both Matt and I have attended many functions in the City as Master throughout the last twelve months representing the Company and so have our respective mistresses.

As regards our military affiliations, I am pleased to report that our new affiliation with 622 Squadron of the RAF in this their centenary year has started very well. Our Company liaison officer is Court Assistant Professor Graham Chase and he made his first visit for discussion with his opposite number last week.

There are changes at both ends regarding our affiliation with the Royal Navy. Our Company liaison officer Ken McLean has resigned from the Company and so also from his liaison role. Lt Cdr George Storton has transferred to HMS Clyde and the Falkland Islands. His replacement as commanding officer as of 11th April is Lt Cdr Benjamin Power and this very morning I received a letter from him by way of introduction.

Our affiliation with the Army Cadet Force continues in good order. Our Company liaison officer Court Assistant Judge King and I attended Winter Camp last December on a particularly cold Saturday to see cadets in training action.

Now in terms of events in prospect I just want to mention:

Firstly the Charter Commemorative Banquet on 17th May 2018. The Egyptian Hall at the Mansion House is a vast dining area and I would urge you to attend if you can. You are very welcome to bring family and friends if you wish. It is a venue that is not available to the general public and it provides such an opportunity for you to entertain those who might otherwise not have the chance to see it and dine there.

I'm sorry to report that we have no tickets left for the Beating Retreat event at Horse Guards parade on 31st May. We started with 20 tickets and then increased the booking as interest emerged. We shall have 42 Company members and guests attending and I think this may be something of a record for us.

Don't forget the Annual Service and Supper on 11th July 2018.

Looking even further ahead the Master's Weekend will be held on 21st to 23rd September in County Durham. We shall stay at a family owned country hotel with many amenities. Visits will include the 350 acres site that is Beamish Museum and to Durham Cathedral, a UNESCO Heritage site within the fascinating city of Durham.

I want to finish by encouraging you to think about the subject of membership of our Company. There is currently a working group reporting to the Court on a wide variety of matters including membership matters. We currently number some 240 members in total. That's in keeping with the size of many City livery companies but we would like to be larger and there are at least two reasons for this. One is to be able to draw on more activity from members. I don't mean by this simply to seek more participation on the Court and the committees, though that would be very welcome. But there are many opportunities to contribute in areas such as education, charitable activities and social activities.

Another reason for increasing membership is to try and extend our coverage into ever wider aspects of private dispute resolution. We should try and attract more members active in areas such as maritime, commodities, sports, tourism, family mediation, ombudsmen. By extending our remit in this way we hope to become a more familiar voice in dispute resolution both in London itself and beyond. If you can help in this regard please say so.

.....and what of the other untapped field that we barely touch. Dispute Avoidance.

I would be prepared to argue that dispute avoidance is in effect just another facet of dispute resolution. What could be better than resolving a potential conflict before it has become a full blown dispute. And who better to head off those disputes than those who know and understand dispute resolution.