

The Fifth in our “Talking Heads” Series took place on the 21st of January 2021



Senior Warden, Dr. Kathy Seddon, introduced the conversationalists for the evening: Liveryman Dyfrig Morgan James, Welsh Livery Guild Charitable Trustee, BSc, FGS, CGeol, FIG, FIWA, Geologist, and Global Business Leader and Court Assistant Keith Shankland CEng, FIMMM Chartered Engineer, Management Consultant and business start-up specialist.

Keith began by saying *“What a pleasure and indeed a privilege it is to interview a true captain of industry and especially, as you Dyfrig, are a Captain of the Construction Materials Industry ... a sector very close to my heart.”* He added *“Your CV is similar in size to War and Peace; I’m surprised you can find time to support the Scarlets let alone enjoy fishing and rambling!”*

Keith’s first question was about Dyfrig’s early life. Dyfrig described growing up on a farm in West Wales and then sitting the entrance exam for Llandoverly College. This was testing as there were questions about Latin and Scripture - not a major part of the curriculum at his primary school. He gained a scholarship however and very much enjoyed his time there. Dyfrig praised the great Carwyn James, the former Llanelli and Lions coach, He set up the Welsh Department at the college and coached the rugby team. Dyfrig recalled his advice to students before taking the pitch. *“Think! Think! Think! This is a thinking game”* Llandoverly confirmed his love of Geology and he moved to Queen Mary College London to study with Professor Kirkcaldy *“The God of Geology”*. QMC was in the East End which was very much under the influence of the Krays. Dyfrig commented that his time there gave him a rounded education! He received further business training at London Business School and at IMD in Lausanne. Dyfrig described his first job, in Pollution Control, as idyllic. Walking his Labrador to look at the crystal-clear water of the Brecon Beacons was wonderful. In contrast he used the famous Dylan Thomas phrase to describe the river Taff which ran *“bible black”*. Keith was working for the Coal Board at the time and admitted that the belief was that *‘someone else will clear up’*.



The second question was about Dyfrig's early experience of privatisation. Dyfrig described the key aims of the privatisation process: improved efficiency, increased productivity, proper regulations and increased share ownership. In 1982, he joined the National Freight Corporation (NFC), later becoming part of the management and employee buy-out from the government. He described the merger of three parcel companies and the need to make fellow owners redundant. Dyfrig thought the excellent pension scheme helped as retirement was therefore easier, with less dissension. His experience of share distribution to employees led him to believe that this is good, as everyone then goes the extra mile and rewards can be considerable.

Keith then asked about working at a senior level in large companies. Dyfrig had held a number of senior management positions in distribution, waste management and minerals businesses, with assignments in Chicago, Hong Kong and Prague. After a successful floatation of NFC, he joined Redland PLC in 1994. They were later acquired by Lafarge SA, a global building-materials company. Dyfrig was 'head hunted' and was Managing Director of Lafarge Aggregates in UK for six years, before becoming responsible for Lafarge's Northern and Central European business, with operations from Russia to Ireland. In 2011, he became President and Chairman of Lafarge UK, before it merged with Tarmac, when he became a Non-Executive Director. Dyfrig told us about working for Lafarge where at his first meeting they spoke only French. He held his own and was sent to learn more French. One year later, when he was well prepared, they held the meeting in English!

Dyfrig also talked about the French way of selecting leaders. They are identified early and specially trained.

As CEO for UK, he was involved in acquiring Blue Circle Cement, and received further training from IMD in Switzerland and Harvard. He then became responsible for acquisitions in Russia. Keith asked if he had met Putin when in Russia. Dyfrig explained how the 'Oligarch' system worked when acquiring quarries. He felt there was little respect for law and that protection from the Kremlin was important. Refusal of a deal made a fast car and a rapid return by air essential!

The discussion then turned to Dyfrig's Livery experiences. He was Master of the Worshipful Company of Paviments 2018/19 and he described his outstanding banquet in the Mansion House with the 112 strong London Welsh Choir singing on the balcony. The Company dates back to 1280, receiving a modern grant of Livery in 1900. Their principal objective is '*to further the craft of paving; that is the planning,*

*design, construction, maintenance and management of all paved surfaces.* The Company has provided six Lord Mayors of London in the 20th century. The focus makes sponsorship easier and they give £130,000 to charity each year. They have an Academy and train NEATs in the industry. Although they have no Livery Hall a close association with Charterhouse allows use of their premises and church. Dyfrig expressed his pleasure in joining the Worshipful Company of Wales and in using his talents and experience for the Company.

Following on from this Keith asked how being a Trustee of WLCOW was different from being a trustee of a Pension Fund. Dyfrig explained the difference in governance with the smaller WLCOW Charitable Trust being answerable to the Charity Commission, whereas the 3.5 billion pensions trusts are overseen by the Pensions Commissioner. Dyfrig noted that both require trustees who are well trained and risk averse!

As a final question Keith asked 'what one thing would you do to help the environment. Dyfrig responded that he would ban non-recyclable products. He feels that we are doing less well now in recycling and that a new drive was required.

The Master, Peter Coleman, gave a warm vote of thanks and asked us to raise our



glasses to “Liverymen everywhere” This concluded an excellent evening.