

Livery Guest Speaker Dame Fiona Woolf DBE DL

Livery Company of Wales Installation Banquet – 6 April 2024

Master, Wardens, Lord Lieutenants, High Sheriffs, Alderman, [Visiting Masters,] Deputy Vice President, Liverymen and Guests [ladies and gentlemen]

Master, on behalf of all of the guests, let me start by thanking you for inviting us to this very special Installation Dinner and making us feel so welcome. It's unusual to celebrate the start of another tax year (but as my husband, a past-master of the Tax Advisers' Livery Company said – why not?). The food and wines have been delicious and the attention to detail, superb. The best bit has been the company and conversation, which I know from previous experience is always lovely - full of warmth, interest and humour, in this, the most unique Livery Company on the planet.

Now, I know that quite a lot of you (at least the Liverymen of the Solicitors' Company) are dying to pick me up for saying that this is “the most unique” Livery Company (it's either unique or it's not) but let me respond that. I can argue that each of the 111 livery Companies of the City of London is unique – in fact, each of them is really good at making the case to differentiate itself. Each one is based on a different craft, trade or profession, unlike the Worshipful Livery Company of Wales which covers, well, everything! What a delight!

I know its focus is nurturing Welsh talent and on “the arts, science and technology” - that is huge! Without being pedantic, this, to my mind, covers everything including humanities and social sciences! Let's think about it – one issue that is often spoken about is whether mathematics is an art or a science? For example:

If you are an artist you can paint over a mathematical limitation – you can make the number 7 *become even* simply by painting over the letter “S”!

Actually, there are a lot of mathematical jokes in different disciplines!

Q: From horticulture! What happens to a plant in a maths class?

A: It grows square roots!

Q: From cookery! What do you get if you divide the circumference of a pumpkin by its diameter?

A: Pumpkin pi (π)!

Of course, this Company is also unique in that it is the only *Worshipful* Livery Company officially allowed to call itself that outside London – which is the reason I referred to “the planet”!

You don’t know how lucky you are – the London livery companies are quite envious! You don’t have to worry about the dreaded Order of Precedence!

If Wikipedia is to be believed, the Court of Aldermen decided the Order of Precedence in 1515 based on their assessment of “economic power and influence” which obviously begs some questions.[We know that the Merchant Tailors and the Skinners have to go and see the Lord Mayor once a year in the Mansion House in order to figure out the famous issue of sixes and sevens! I don’t know what the Wax Chandlers did to be given number 20 and the Tallow Chandlers number 21. Bees’ wax in medieval times was terribly expensive! One monarch would give it to another is a gift! Maybe that is the reason! I can’t help feeling that tallow was economically infinitely more powerful because it was more prevalent than beeswax (even though bees provide a much brighter light – little known fact).]

I am not sure if we need an order of precedence which we mainly use for processing – there are other more

straightforward ways of deciding essentially who gets to sit at the front in the Guildhall or at St Paul's. I was compelled by an argument to adopt a simple alphabetical order but then it occurred to me that the protagonist was the Master Actuary. He would always wind up the front and heaven knows where that would leave the Master Wax Chandler. I have never been a fan of alphabetical order with the surname of Woolf and it does not work for you, Master, either!

Good thing is that the Order of Precedence does not get in the way of both ancient and modern livery companies getting together and adding value by collaborating on important social purposes. We work together on sorts of things to do with charities, education and standards (which are part of the DNA of livery companies to which they are committed). Master, there is nothing to stop us collaborating on whatever we want to. As the Lord Mayor reminded us at his Mansion House dinner last month, there is already a lot of collaboration showing that Livery companies are modern and relevant.

My three favourite examples are "No Turning Back" which helps ex-offenders back into the world of work, Pollinating London Together which began as a partnership between the Wax Chandlers (who have a passion for bees and many other pollinators) and the Gardeners who love plants (that company does what it says on the tin). This partnership is auditing what type of plants flourish in open spaces in an urban environment and the pollinators that make it happen. You could do this too – it is a model that the Incorporation of Gardeners of Glasgow are looking at.

The third is the Livery Climate Action Group, founded by the brilliant Alderman Alison Gowman (here tonight). Her impressive technical knowledge of the subject, her energy and her enthusiasm have proved so infectious that a hundred livery companies (out of the 111) have joined. Do look at the website - it is full of very eye-catching, easy to read materials. I

recommend the very entertaining “thought-provoking questions” written by Prof Averil McDonald, who lives in Wales!

Master, you and I got to know each other when we were working together on the advisory board of the Inter-Law Diversity Forum. My knowledge comes from the work I did at the Law Society. (I’m delighted that the Deputy Vice-President is with us tonight). Your **Company’s** wide social purpose of nurturing young Welsh talent, particularly through your impressive awards program and **your** passion for social mobility with your remarkable dedication to public service (DL and JP), create a perfect match for you and the Company to use your innate “energy to transform lives” which was my mayoral strapline in 2013/14.

You held me back from congratulating the Company on having an Asian lady master by telling me that there had already been 5 female Masters in its 31 years of existence. That puts a spotlight on the numbers that the 111 City of London livery companies have achieved over **a significantly longer period of time of their existence**. We have had only 250 women masters (8 of whom are called Princess Anne) – that is since the date of the first Livery Company reckoned to be in the 12th century.

It’s very complicated to do the maths to make a meaningful comparison. We have to recognise that it took the City Livery Companies a long time to admit women to the Livery on equal terms to men. Erica Stary, who is with us tonight, a serial Master, now past Master of three Livery Companies, points out in her magnificent research papers which you can find through the Lady Masters’ Association, that, much to my surprise, only 10 Companies admitted women in the 1970s, 17 more in the 1980s, 12 more in the 1990s and 32 more over this century. It was only by 2020 that she could say with any certainty that all of the City Livery Companies accept women on equal terms and had at least one woman member.

Members of the Worshipful Livery Company of Wales, you have done well right from the start. You have done particularly well to recruit Agnes and to promote her to lead the Company in the coming year. Her energy and passion for the Livery and Welsh talent coupled with her organisational and communication skills are of world cup champion's standards (not a reference to rugby)! Not only will she do a terrific job but you will have a lot of fun with her and Nigel.

Her passion for champagne and his passion for all sorts of music are a magic combination. Agnes is the only Master I have come across whose Outing has been put into the very stylish care of Cunard. I have heard on the grapevine (pardon the pun) that the champagne houses and the Musicians unions are thrilled!

Agnes, I am impressed with the amount of planning that you and Nigel have been doing. Next year, you will get to February and wonder where the time has gone. You may well ask "Does February March?" To which the answer is "No, but April May!"

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