

## **Master's Address to Common Hall**

**28 April 2014**

This evening is a wonderful opportunity for you, the members, to express your views about our Company. It is also an opportunity for me to make some suggestions as to how you can help to make our Company stronger, and more able to achieve its objectives, as set out in the Royal Charter.

There are just three topics I should like to touch on by way of introduction to our Open Forum. These are Recruitment, our Support for Company Events, and our Charitable Giving.

For organisations such as ours to survive and prosper, we need a steady stream of recruits to join the Company. Our income is derived almost entirely from ourselves, the members, and the more of us there are, the more we can do, and the less expensive our membership will be. Thus in our own self interest, each of us ought as a matter of course to be encouraging those of our friends and colleagues, who meet the Criteria, to join the Company, and this is what I ask each of you to start doing.

The Criteria are very simple. The Principal Criterion is an interest in private dispute resolution.. Simple as that. We no longer seek any particular level of expertise in disputes resolution to become a Freeman. Members' expertise is now only considered when Freemen apply to become Liverymen.

New entrants must still however pledge

- Support for the Company's Objectives;
- Loyalty to Her Majesty; and
- Obedience to the Rules of the Company;

and also pledge an intention to

- Participate in the Company's functions and events; and
- Contribute to the Company's Charitable Trust

as all of us have already done. Indeed, to be admitted to the Livery these days, Freeman need to have established a track record in these latter two - Support for

Events and Contributions to the Charitable Trust - which is why they are points two and three of this address.

Point one however is Recruitment, and my first request to each of you, is to be on the lookout for like-minded people, and when you find them, encourage them to join us. A concerted effort by each of us in this direction would have a tremendously beneficial effect on the Company's financial strength and stability, not to mention its vitality.

My second request relates to attendance at Company events. By your presence here at Common Hall, you are showing your support, so I feel I may be preaching to the converted. Nevertheless, large and enthusiastic attendances at Company functions is the hallmark of a thriving Company and a committed membership, which is what I would like us to be. This is why we are having an Open Forum in a few minutes time, to enable you to express your views about what we can do to make our Company more relevant to you. Please tell us about the events you find attractive, and those that have less appeal.

I couple this invitation with a plea to each of you to attend the Mansion House Banquet, in a little over three weeks time, if you possibly can. The Banquet is the high point of the Company's social calendar, and the health of the Company will be judged by the number of attendees we can attract.

So please come along with your spouses and partners, and as many friends and colleagues as you can muster. It provides a wonderful opportunity for your firms to entertain guests, but don't for a moment think you need to offer to pay for everyone you invite personally, as I think you will find that many personal friends will be willing to pay for themselves, just for the opportunity to attend this prestigious event.

And please don't be put off by the dress code either. White tie and tails is preferred, but black tie and dinner jacket is a perfectly acceptable alternative, provided the jacket and bow tie are black. Speaking frankly, I would much prefer to see you and your guests there in black tie, than not there at all.

Another reason I am asking for a good attendance at Mansion House this year is that the Lord Mayor is a Liveryman of this, our Company, and she has agreed to attend, accompanied by the Sheriffs. This is a rare privilege for the Company. It has been 5 years since we have had a Lord Mayor at one of our Banquets. So this year, I think, the least we can do is make a very special effort to have a bumper attendance, to show our support and appreciation to the Lord Mayor, who is one of our own.

My third point is our Charitable Giving. Our Company exists for Social, Professional and Charitable purposes, and to my mind, to borrow a biblical phrase, the greatest of these is Charity. Our Charitable Trust gives us the means to give back to the community, and to those less fortunate than ourselves, some of the riches we ourselves have acquired during our professional lives.

Many of us will not regard ourselves as rich, because there are always those who are so much richer. However, if we are honest with ourselves, our ability to be members of a City Livery Company means there are vastly more people who are poorer, than richer, than us, particularly the young from deprived backgrounds. This is why there is an expectation, that all of us, will contribute financially, to the Company's Charitable Trust, via regular standing order donations. Currently not all of us do.

To make charitable giving easier, the Chairman of Trustees, Philip Fidler, has placed a donate button in the members' area of the website, and I would urge each of you to make use of it. Now, by means of a few simple key strokes, members can set up either one off donations, or regular standing order donations in favour of the Trust. The default setting for regular donations is twenty five pounds per month, but that is only a suggestion, and can of course be altered up or down, to suit individual members' means. To my mind, the amount you contribute is less important than the fact that you do contribute, whatever you comfortably can, as the more of us who contribute, the greater will be our capacity to provide relief within the City.

Because of our special relationship with the Lord Mayor this year, the Trustees have very generously decided to donate ten thousand pounds to her Charities this time. This is a massive increase in the amount we usually donate, and means there is

added urgency to replenish, and expand, the Charitable Trust's coffers, if we are to maintain, and or extend our other Charitable projects as well.

Thus my third and final request to each of you, is to take a long hard look at your regular giving to our Charitable Trust, and then go to the website, or contact Philip Fidler, to make whatever improvements you feel able to make. What you contribute is confidential between you and the Trustees, and what matters most is that each of us contributes regularly.

Thus to summarise, to strengthen and energise our Company, it would be immensely helpful if each of us could

- start to recruit new members;
- make every effort to attend Company functions, and bring guests, especially to the Mansion House Banquet in three weeks time; and
- contribute whatever we can, on a regular basis, to our Charitable Trust.

Thus with these three thoughts in mind, I should like to invite the Chairmen of the Company's various Committees to join us at the front, and to open our Open Forum by inviting your questions, comments, and suggestions for making this, our Company, more effective, and more relevant to each of us. Thank you all for your attention.

**Derek Ross**

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Words: 1,306 (@ 120 / minute = 10.88/ minutes)