

The Master's Letter



Nigel Luson 2023-24

It is a huge honour to be elected Master of the Worshipful Company of Turners, the 353rd in a very long line going back to the year of our Charter in 1604. In case anyone is tempted to query the number, in the early days there were 67 Masters who served for 2 years, although since the mid-18th century good sense has mostly prevailed and the norm has been just a 1 year term.

When I first joined the Turners Company in 2012 it was to find out more about the City of London that I had been a part of as a banker for the best part of 30 years. Most of those were spent overseas in Europe and South America, making me sometimes feel like a foreigner in my own country. A particular trigger for me was being on the receiving end of various Lord Mayoral visits to some of those countries, and feeling how special it was to represent such unparalleled tradition as the City brings with it. It has been a real pleasure since then to have the opportunity to visit magnificent livery halls and make some contribution towards maintaining that tradition in the present day.

But a little research into my own family history revealed more of a connection to the City and the livery than I could ever have suspected. My surname Luson derives from the older version spelled Leveson, and some helpful research by a cousin revealed that a traceable ancestor Sir Thomas Leveson was a Sheriff of the City in 1535, only an early death the following year depriving him of the opportunity to rise higher. However, his youngest son Thomas, from whom I am descended, was son-in-law to Sir John Gresham of Titsey, Kent, who was himself Lord Mayor in 1547 and who of course left us a rather familiar street and college in his name.

Fast-forward a few centuries and I find a second cousin who became a Lady liveryman Grocer in 1964, but I can firmly say that I am the first Turner among the Leveson/Lusons, and very proud to become Master of such a wonderful Company. My introduction came through the late Roger George, a charming man and golfing friend who discerned in me a taste for everything that our livery holds dear - ceremony, charity, craft, and above all good company. I will always be grateful to him and miss him very much.

Our livery has had its ups and downs over the years. 200 years ago the Company was already over 200 years old, yet had diminished to just 24 members; today we are over 240, the craft

is in good shape and our charity is busy and generous. Only recently we were flooded by Covid and lockdown, and today inflation has come back to make the cost of living a misery; yet we survive. Indeed we do much more than survive, we busily run competitions and exhibitions, we support the craft at all levels, and we continue to enjoy each other's company at a wide range of formal and informal events.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is entirely due to the phenomenal work and commitment of many past and present liverymen Turners, who represent the embodiment of what a members' organisation should be. To each as they find the time to juggle family and work commitments, but the joy for me of being a Turner is to have had the pleasure to meet and know many of you, and alongside you to do my bit for the Company. I encourage all readers of this article to reflect on what they too might be able to do.

As I take the Chair, it is impossible not to reflect also on the contribution made by so many Past Masters, and in this light I must thank the outgoing Master, Matthew Gaved, for leading the Company so effectively over the past year. Not only has he been able to bring to fruition the Yeoman programme that he has personally developed over recent years, but he continued to design, edit and produce The Turner magazine for a 10th year, showing the professionalism in both endeavours that is his hallmark. I trust that we can continue to count on his support for many years to come.

The Turners Company is of course just one among 110 livery companies that exist in the City today; ancient but forward-looking, perhaps not 'Great' in the livery sense of the word, but proud of what we are, what we do, and what we mean to each other. I very much look forward to serving the Company to the best of my ability over the coming year.

Nigel A J H Luson
Master 2023-24