

My Year as Master (2023/24)

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As a liveryman of the Turners Company only since 2013, my year as Master came earlier than expected owing to unexpected changes in the Court succession plan in recent years. It is a feature of modern Court life that people step back or step down for perfectly good if unpredictable personal reasons and we have no choice but to accept the need for flexibility that imposes on others. In my case, I was honoured to reach the Chair some three years 'early' but fortunately had some inspiring mentors and predecessors to learn from.

The Turners' Company has always represented to me a wonderful combination of City tradition and craft. Of the City I knew plenty, having a banking career behind me, but of the craft little so that I have had a fast but enjoyable learning curve. I quickly came to understand the allure for everyone of working with wood and how turning across the ages connects past with present and bowls with, for example, butterflies. Fortunately, our Company has been open to all backgrounds for many years, and personally I am convinced that our particular embodiment of a livery company has an appeal we can still do much more to market.

In preparation for my year, I had applied myself quite energetically to activities on and outside Court, anxious to learn, contribute and savour the livery experience. I was quite literally entranced by our wonderful formal dinners, encouraged by others to put some of my consultancy experience towards upgrading our internal management of finance, and in creating the Livery Committee which provides a process for considered modernisation and improvement within the Company.

Like many others, I met my first lathe at the Max Carey Trust, and helped to organise our craft charity stands, competitions and Wizardry exhibitions. During the year it was a particular pleasure to see youth training in action and to present certificates to new groups of first-time turners.

My installation took place at Apothecaries' Hall on May 18th 2023 at which occasion I used an hour-glass as a prop during my first speech, both to reference a Master of 300 years earlier, and to symbolise how quickly I knew that the sand would flow and the year rush by – as indeed it did. My very first outing was to attend the annual Raleigh lecture organised by the Entrepreneurs' Company, the first of a series by many different companies which in some ways became a hallmark of the year, including Lord Mayor Michael Mainelli's wide-ranging online series of 'Knowledge Miles'

talks and ‘colloquies’; and many other fascinating opportunities to meet well-known speakers in person. I will never forget, for example, talking to Nobel prize winner Sir Paul Nurse, or Ken McCullum, the head of MI5, amongst others. And there you have already the unique character of the livery world.

But back in June 2023 it was still the mayoralty of Sir Nicholas Lyons, who continued the swing away from the old Ironbridge formula by leading the Lord Mayor’s Livery Weekend to Glasgow, where all the companies came together to celebrate livery, and on this occasion, hosted by The Trades House of Glasgow, to get to know each other and the city and sights of Glasgow. This was also of course, not long after the Coronation, which occasioned a memorable Ball at Stationers’ Hall, and later in October a Mansion House Banquet for the King and Queen, which was naturally as smart an occasion as they come.

That banquet fell by unfortunate coincidence on the same evening as our Civic Reception for Woodturning Connect at Pewterers Hall, an event which still went off extremely well, and was featured in the last issue of The Turner. We are lucky to be part of that elite group of craft-based liveries which add unparalleled artistry to the City. Since then, there have also been beautiful exhibitions by the Gold and Silver Wire Drawers, Goldsmiths and Pewterers, along with eye-catching displays by Saddlers, Painter-Stainers and others.

It was another fine year for the craft, most obviously in the shape of Woodturning Connect, but also with new bursaries awarded and the first full year of our Yeomen taking up the professional development courses that the Company makes available to them. A full report on these and other Craft activities will be found elsewhere in this edition.

One of my aims for the year was to encourage member engagement, and we got this started with a ‘Master’s at home’ day in June, featuring an escorted visit to Reigate Caves and an al fresco afternoon of lunch and entertainment in our own home and garden, much enjoyed by all who attended on a beautiful summer’s day.

With the same aim in mind, I tried to share many of my activities as Master on social media, spurred by the thought that while I was the lucky participant, I was really representing the Turners’ Company and its members, and it was heartening that as many ‘followed’ me as they did, given the low visibility of social media for many of us. Then in December we launched an online Membership

Survey, the results of which have since been publicised and are helping the Court to better serve the membership.

The roster of the Turners' own formal events are covered elsewhere in this edition, but I was so grateful for the positive feedback from attendees. If you were not there, you missed some marvellous venues, great speeches and terrific entertainment. On the livery 'circuit' I was privileged to be invited to installation and livery dinners and lunches from a wide range of sister-liveries, including the Musicians, Salters, Apothecaries, Blacksmiths, Wheelwrights, Constructors and Parish Clerks, among others. From such events we share mutual hospitality, learn about each other and keep the heritage of the City of London very much alive.

On the charity front, having taken us to the symbolic sheep-drive and craft fair in 2022, I repeated the same in 2023, kept up our support of the Guildhall Red Cross fair and added a first participation in the Livery pancake race (sadly held indoors because of slippery conditions outside). As a fundraiser Marilyn and I did a fully robed walk of all 40 current Livery Halls and I thank all Turners who supported us in raising an extra £1600 for the Turners' Charity. A visit to Treloars School for children with special needs brought home the wonderful job they do there, prompting me to donate an additional sum for a new purpose-designed bus which helps wheelchair-bound children get around. My other charities for the year were Macmillan Cancer Support and East Surrey Woodturners Club, these on top of all the headline donations supervised and awarded by the Charity committee.

In October and then again in April I visited the REME HQ in Lyneham for their Guest and Awards functions and was pleased to host Corps Colonel Jason Phillips at our Masters & Clerks Luncheon in September. In November Alderman Michael Mainelli became Lord Mayor, and I was fortunate to be among his Honour Guard at Mansion House on the day of the Parade. A few weeks later he and Sheriff Bronek Masojada were guests of honour at the Turners' Livery Dinner, which also featured, in a rather lovely first for us, the Sheriff's consort and Lady Mayoress – and all stayed around chatting over a Stirrup Cup afterwards.

There were numerous special occasions throughout the year, such as attending the Silent Ceremony at Guildhall where the Mayoralty changes hands; various opportunities to process into St Paul's Cathedral and hear wonderful choirs; a medieval opera performed at Apothecaries' Hall;

cheering the post-horn gallop at Mansion House banquets, and of course attending the Royal Garden Party in May 2024 at Buckingham Palace.

It is a unique privilege to pass a year as Master, but never forgetting that the real honour is that of representing the Turners' Company at all these memorable aspects of civic life.

In May 2024 the sands of my hourglass finally ran out, but it was with great pleasure that I passed the coveted badge on to my successor, Christopher Scott. I must reiterate the thanks I expressed at the Election Court Dinner to everyone for their support and kindness during this year, obviously to Niall, Becca and my colleagues on Court, but especially to Marilyn for being an outstanding Mistress Turner, and to all Turners – thank you for a memorable year.