

Master, Wardens, Liverymen, Freemen, my Lords, Ladies and gentlemen

It is my very great pleasure to welcome all our guests to this evening's dinner and to introduce the Company's particular guests who are here tonight.

As is traditional I will ask you not to applaud each guest as they are introduced but to save your enthusiasm until the end to assist me in sticking to my five-minute allocation. And as is tradition, you will mostly ignore that request!

Those of you who know me as a singer might be expecting me to sing the list, but you're spared that as Liveryman Adele Thorpe beat me to it a few years ago.

Those of you who know me as the Company's Choirmaster might be worried that I'm going to make you sing the list. I know the Choir is famous for minimal rehearsal, but my nerves couldn't stand doing something like that on no rehearsal at all, so you're spared again. Although, we only did minimal rehearsal for our successful Guinness World Record attempt – did anyone mention we are the only Livery Company to hold a Guinness World Record?

So as singing is ruled out, you'll have to endure a spoken, slightly Yorkshire accent.

Our World Record was sung at Goodenough College, an educational charity that provides award winning residential accommodation for talented British and international postgraduates and their families studying in London. We are delighted that Hannah Du Gray, Director of Fundraising and External Relations and Madeleine Avery, Development and Relations Manager, are able to join us this evening. Ladies, you are both very welcome.

We are honoured to be joined by several Masters this year.

As a fellow Chartered Accountant, it gives me particular pleasure to introduce John Cardnell, Master Chartered Accountant. John is very much a man of the South East of England and is currently trustee of the Mick Jagger Centre in Dartford. He says he enjoys watching England play rugby at Twickenham – though possibly not so much in the recent Six Nations Championship which was, of course, won by Wales.

There's no point having a business with neat and tidy books and records if no-one knows about it so we are fortunate to have Master Marketer Andrew Cross and his Clerk John Hammond with us this evening. Andrew grew up in New Zealand and has travelled extensively in his career in advertising.

But no business these days can manage without technology, so welcome Master Information Technologists Lady Parmley, better known to us as Wendy, and her Clerk, Susan Hoefling. A champion of the value of technology and the internet to create networks among schools in England and around the world to develop school and student leadership, Wendy's career started in languages and education.

But when the business goes horribly wrong, as sometimes happens, we may have to bring in the consultants so welcome Master Management Consultant John Corneille, guest of Past Master Robert Alston.

When you do have a business problem, you are often advised to stand back or get a "helicopter view", so we are very fortunate to have Wing Commander Mark Pickford, Officer Commanding of our affiliate 28 Squadron, and his wife Amy, here as guests of Past Master Baroness Garden of Frogal (better known to us as Sue Garden). And as a chartered accountant and tax specialist, Amy is yet another recruit to our business!

Corporate life is very hectic and another current trend to de-stress is "mindfulness", so to assist us with some moments of calm reflection, we are delighted to welcome the new Vicar of All Hallows by the

Tower, the Reverend Katherine Hedderly and her husband, Loren Mrkusic. Katherine has come to All Hallows from St Martin in the Fields, but started her career as a producer and director in film and television. Katherine is also Area Dean for the City and our Master was delighted to attend her licensing service at All Hallows on April 3rd.

I would also like to welcome Professor Judith Freedman. Judith is Professor of Taxation Law and a Fellow of Worcester College at Oxford University so another useful addition to our business team. She also happens to be the wife of our Speaker this evening, Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman.

Educated in Whitley Bay and at the Universities of Manchester, York and Oxford, Lawrence is Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King's College, London. He was appointed the Official Historian of the Falklands Campaign and served as a member of the official inquiry into Britain and the 2003 Iraq War, at which point he was appointed a member of the Privy Council. He is a well-known researcher, author and speaker on strategic defence matters and has been described as 'the Dean of British Strategic Studies'.

In the context of our guests helping us run our business, he may have a role in business recovery planning based on his article 'Ukraine and the Art of Crisis Management'. Though business recovery may not be necessary depending on the answer to the question he's posing this evening - 'Should we still worry about nuclear weapons?'

Sir Lawrence, we are greatly looking forward to your speech, but first can I ask Master, Wardens and my fellow liverymen and freemen to be upstanding and toast 'our guests'.