

Master's at home

12th October 2022

Good evening everyone and welcome to the last formal event of my year as Master.

I have chosen HMS President for my At Home as I am an Honorary Captain in the Royal Naval Reserve and this is my Reserve Unit – although I have only been here in uniform once and that was for last year's Trafalgar Night dinner! Thanks to Commander Greg Young for allowing us to be here.

We realised after I had booked this that seven years ago Mark had his Master's at Home on HQS Wellington – total coincidence but we've covered the east and west ends of the City on the Thames between us. And last year Sue Algeo had her At Home on HMS Belfast so no surprise that we are the only Livery Company to have an overseas military affiliation and that that should be with a ship – HMNZS Canterbury.

I want to use this occasion to briefly review my year and importantly distribute my Master's discretionary fund from the Charitable Trust.

The slogan at my Installation Dinner last year, printed on your bookmarks was 'welcome back' and the year certainly began well as we emerged from the pandemic and associated lockdowns and restrictions. While covid has definitely not gone away in many ways it seems like a rather distant memory and has certainly not disrupted my year in the way it did Sue's and Peter's.

But the rest of the year was not going to go quietly. Putin invaded Ukraine, we celebrated the Platinum Jubilee, then came the energy crisis, a new Prime Minister, the death of Her Majesty the Queen, the accession of King Charles III, rising inflation, the cost of living crisis and strikes across a multitude of public services. Definitely not a quiet year and every one of those events has consequences for us as World Traders.

But within that context we, and the wider Livery, have concentrated on getting back to 'normal' – whatever that is. All of us in the City have noticed a drop in the numbers attending events and while we can all speculate as to why that is the ongoing events survey should give us some clearer data with which to plan going forward. In the meantime, a loyal core of members, which includes most of the people in this room, has continued to attend business lunches, City Walks, dinners, Thanksgiving and Carol services, Wiltons Music Hall and the Master's trip to Yorkshire. Thank you.

I have been asked often in the last few weeks what my favourite memory is, but there are so many that I think I need to wait a few months for the dust to settle and even then may not be able to choose.

Not everyone is aware that the Master is allocated £5,000 by the Trust as a discretionary fund to disperse as they wish (within reason!) and it is my pleasure to do this this evening. I have divided the fund between three organisations two of which are represented here so I shall start with the absentee.

Earlier in the year we were debating what we should do to mark the Platinum Jubilee as we wanted something more permanent than making a contribution to the celebration in the Mall. We decided on planting trees but by that time had missed the spring planting season so decided to wait until autumn. Sadly, the Queen passed away in the meantime so the trees will now be in memoriam as well as to mark the Jubilee. I will be giving £2,000 of my fund to the Woodland Trust which will provide an acre of woodland in Balmacaan, Lewiston, Scotland – the nearest site they have to Balmoral. There will be a commemorative plaque at the site to say it was donated by the Worshipful Company of World Traders.

I have never had a problem with numbers and qualified as a chartered accountant but even I find myself standing in front of the dishwashing tablets in Waitrose trying to work out whether the discounted large packet really is cheaper than two full priced small ones so how on earth is someone who struggles with numbers supposed to manage their money in the current cost of living crisis?

National Numeracy is an independent charity with a vision for everyone in the UK to get on with numbers so they can get on in life. They especially focus on helping people with low confidence or competence with numbers in disadvantaged communities, where the need is greatest. And you would struggle to be a world trader in any business if you weren't comfortable with the numbers. I would like to ask Tori Monks and Sian Devine to come forward to accept a cheque for £1,500 towards the invaluable work they are doing.

Oliver Hare was Mark's apprentice and joined us at many World Trader and other events – always with a different girlfriend as I recall – and I even persuaded him to sing with the World Traders' choir on a couple of occasions even though that was definitely not his style of music. He also went to Shanghai with the World Traders when we accompanied the Lord Mayor David Wootton on his visit. He genuinely was a charming and very bright young man.

Sadly Olly took his own life in February 2017. It was World Mental Health Day on Monday this week so you will have heard a lot of statistics such as suicide being the largest cause of death amongst men under the age of 50 and on average 5,000 people a year taking their own lives. None of these individuals are a statistic but they individually add up to make a tragic whole.

Olly's Mum, Ann, started Olly's Future to do all she could to save young men, and others, from taking the route Olly did after being diagnosed anti-depressants that made him worse.

The charity focuses on encouraging people to talk and has developed a number of tools to help. Dr SAMS, suicide awareness in medical students, is being rolled out in medical schools; Practise Hope is providing holistic training to GPs and staff in GP practices to improve mental health provision for children and young people and Talking about Suicide – ten tools is a 90 minute online training tool to enable people to start a conversation with someone they might be concerned about. They have achieved a lot in a short space of time and I am delighted to invite Ann Feloy and Emma Baars to come forward and accept a cheque for £1,500 as a contribution to the work they are doing.

Tori, Sian, Ann and Emma are with us for the rest of the evening and will be delighted to tell you more about the work they are doing.

As my very last World Trader event we have a City Walk tomorrow evening and I do have a few other events to attend in the coming days. But in exactly two weeks I will be handing over this badge to Michael Shapiro when he is installed as Master at Mansion House. He has a wonderful year planned which he will share with you that evening – so do book up to go if you haven't already - and I wish him, and Jill, all the very best for the year ahead.

And I can't close a review of my year without thanking two very special people – our Learned Clerk Gaye whose pragmatic advice and years of experience as Clerk to a number of Companies is truly invaluable to every Master who is after all only temporary – and my husband Mark who refused to be called Consort so I've had to call him Past Master all year. Whilst he doesn't do ironing he does do getting dinner and doing the washing up on all those evenings when I've found myself working late keeping up with paperwork, thank you letters, speech writing and doing the non-World Traders things that also have to fit into the diary. They are a formidable double act which has been in the background for the whole year.

Past Master Eric Tracy passed on to me some words of wisdom from Past Master William King – if you enjoy your year, so will everyone else. I've thoroughly enjoyed my year so I hope you have too. Thank you for your support and I believe supper is served.