

MASTER'S REVIEW OF 2007/08

Being Master of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators for the past year has been both a great honour and an unalloyed pleasure. I would like to thank the large number of members of the Company who have supported me with their efforts and friendship. I hope I have repaid in some measure at least the honour and support given to me. What follows is my formal review of the year. The full calendar of events is attached and detailed reports on a number of them have been posted on the website during the year.

Objectives for Year

When asked for a one sentence description of the Company I would say "The Water Conservators are an influence for the good in water and the environment". My specific objectives for the year included:

- raising the profile of the company
- enhancing our charitable activities
- keeping the company outward looking
- enhancing recruitment
- balancing the books.

Company Events

Our Lunches and Annual Banquet have been very well attended. The speakers have been high profile and varied (John Gummer, Philip Fletcher, Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield and the Earl of Arran from politics or the public sector, and Ken Harvey, Chairman of Pennon Group our sponsors this year, from the private sector). Overall the events have made a surplus versus budget, the Lunches all showing a significant surplus versus budget which enabled the Banquet to be run at a loss. The policy of increasing prices has been financially successful and has demonstrably not reduced overall numbers but we must recognise that prices are now high especially for retired members. (The questions of the expense of events and of a possible retired member rebate are being addressed as part of our new strategy about which I wrote in May). Guests are very impressed with the style and friendliness of our Lunches and Banquet and a number of new members have been recruited as a direct result of attending one of these events.

Our other business related events have also been very successful. The private discussion dinner with Baroness Barbara Young, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, and Andy Torrance Chief Executive of Allianz on risk management in the environment was a great success, hugely enjoyed by all and profitable; it is a format I suggest be repeated. Our House of Commons reception, where we were addressed by Phil Woolas, Minister for the Environment with special responsibility for water, was also a success. It is interesting that we can attract such top quality speakers and good attendance from our members on such events. It is always difficult to see ourselves as others see us. However the evidence suggests we are indeed seen as a body of influence in the water and environment sector.

On the social front the visit to the Globe, the two ladies events, the City Walk plus visit to the Bank of England, the visit to Chelsea Physic Garden and the St Christopher Inauguration Service and picnic were much enjoyed by all. My thanks to Georgina, Gerald Noone, Jeff Rasbash and Rev Dr Peter Mullen respectively. The charity evening, featuring the Oxford Alternotives, an a capella singing group, was also greatly enjoyed and raised several thousand pounds for the Water Conservation Trust though attendance could have been higher. Sadly the Master's weekend had to be cancelled because of poor numbers. Conversely my Master's Dinner at Lords Cricket Ground was much enjoyed – I would like to thank Barry Dennis for facilitating this.

The Water Conservation Trust

Our charity, the Water Conservation Trust goes from strength to strength and we are supporting students at four leading universities and two special needs institutions. Our activities are something I feel we can be proud of and stand comparison with the best of the modern Livery companies. We consulted with members and the strong message was that education should be the prime focus of our giving and that is precisely what we are doing. Education particularly on water related issues is an area of fundamental importance to the future of the UK and indeed the whole world. Members will have seen various articles on our website describing the impact even relatively small amounts of money are having on our students. In a number of cases our bursaries or dissertation support grants make the difference between a student doing or not doing a course or dissertation.

Giving by members has increased as a result of the recent Master's appeal, though we are still a long way from the full participation rate to which we as a Company aspired when the "Giving Company" appeal was launched. I understand from the Chairman of the Water Conservation Trust that overall participation rate is 25% to 30%.

Communications

We are constantly trying to improve communications with members and I would like to thank our web master and bailiff, Bill Halson for the excellent job he has done in creating a lively and topical website. It serves to emphasize the number and variety of the Company's activities and demonstrates how we are indeed striving to be an influence for the good.

City Events

In total I represented the Company at around 50 external events (see calendar attached) in addition to more than 30 Company events/meetings. All in all I believe we are fulfilling our role in the City and I feel our standing in the City is high.

In addition to our annual Jug presentation I have had a private meeting with the Lord Mayor to brief him on water and environmental sector as background to his overseas trade responsibilities; this I followed up with briefing documents. It is intended that our briefing become an annual event. I have attended two Lord Mayor's briefings to the Masters of all the Livery Companies. In the first the Lord Mayor referred twice to the Company of Water Conservators which was noted by other Masters present!

I also of course attended the Lord Mayor's dinner for Masters and Prime Wardens and the United Guilds Service. Other Services I attended included Evensong for St Cecilia, the Guild of Freeman Service and Reception, Evensong for the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy and Evensong at St Bartholomew's.

Later in the year I had the pleasure of participating in two splendid events involving our cutter, the Water Forget Me Not, on the River Thames. Canaletto's pictures of the barges and gondolas in Venice are well known. The events on the Thames were every bit as stylish and colourful. In the first, the Tudor Pull, I presented a piece of an old conduit at Hampton Court Palace which was rowed in convoy to the Tower of London for safe keeping, the Queen's cutter leading. This ceremony is specifically designed to celebrate the conservancy of the Thames. The second, the Admiral's Challenge, is a race for the cutters of various Livery Companies starting outside the Palace of Westminster. Yet again the Water Conservators won this race by a considerable margin. My thanks to our Bargemaster Johnny Dwan for training our crew to the same high standard as he has used when training the Oxford University Boat Race crew.

I attended more than 20 lunches, dinners or other events with other Livery Companies or related institutions. I had the pleasure and honour of describing our Company to a number of important personages including HRH The Princess Royal, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Joanna Lumley.

I hosted an informal meeting of Masters of certain water related livery companies with a view to assessing interest in setting up a grouping such as the Wet 10 which has often been mooted but never acted on. There was considerable interest among the 5 other companies who attended and support for our company taking a lead. The Master has asked me to try to progress this further in the current year.

Strategic Planning System

We now have in place an excellent strategic plan and planning system. This addresses formally the need for continuity of approach between successive Masters who individually serve for one year only, a classic issue facing Livery Companies. The enthusiasm and hard work of Peter Matthews, Richard Cherry and Nick Reeves deserve great thanks. I have written to all members summarising the plan as approved by Court.

The single most important item is recruitment. Numbers are growing based on our successful events noted above. Bob Mark, Thames Warden, is chairing the recruitment sub committee.

Finances

The accounts have not been audited at the time of writing. However we are forecasting a surplus of over £10,000 for the year. Partly this is thanks to £5,000 sponsorship from Pennon Group PLC for which the Company is most grateful; however it does suggest that even without this our house is in order from a financial viewpoint. I would like to thank Barry Dennis for his excellent work as Treasurer. I think he will make an excellent Walbrook Warden and subsequently Master. I would also thank our Clerk, Ralph Riley for his careful control of costs.

Conclusion

It has been a great privilege and a huge enjoyment being Master. I hope that I have upheld the tradition and constitution of the Company and that I leave it in good heart. Our focus on water conservation and related environmental areas puts us right at the centre of the key issues facing the world today. I feel we are respected in the City and more generally, and believe we are well placed to prosper and grow. I would like to thank my Wardens, the Clerk, members of Court and Committees, Past Masters and the whole membership for your support. I would also like particularly to thank my wife Georgina for her understanding support and all the enthusiasm she put into her role as Master's Lady; it has been a joy to share this year with her. I offer Lorna, Bob, Ian, Barry and Ralph, who have been such a support to me, every good wish for the coming year.

Colin Drummond
Master 2007/08