

Where water and waste meet

Colin Drummond, is master of The Worshipful Company of Water Conservators. Emily Ross talks to him about the livery company's activities and history

Colin Drummond, chief executive of Viridor, is currently the master of The Worshipful Company of Water Conservators – a modern city livery which was set up in the 1980s and gained livery status in 2000.

The origins of city liveries date back to before 1066 when they were set up as charitable and trade organisations. Over the last 30 years there has been a big increase in the number of new liveries set up for modern industries, such as the Water Conservators.

Despite the livery company's name, Mr Drummond describes it as an organisation for both the water and the environmental waste management sectors. He says: "This livery would be the natural choice for members of the waste industry and there are a lot of senior people from the waste industry in it."

The organisation has 220 members and, unlike older livery companies where membership may have little to do with the trade involved, everyone in the water conservators is either currently active in the water or waste industry, or recently retired.

ESA's Dirk Hazell, Barry Dennis and chairman Richard Skehens are all participating members of the livery and Dr Marion Carter, who is the managing director of M J Carter Associates has also been a master in the past. Indeed it was during her year in office, 2004/5, that the company received its Royal Charter.

The livery has three main functions: charity, business and social. One of the company's main charitable activities is to support university students on water and environmental science degrees. The company offers funding to students at Oxford, Exeter, Sheffield, and Brunel universities to help subsidise degrees and field trips abroad to conduct environmental research.

Mr Drummond says: "In addition to the grants we provide, we always offer to come and speak to University students about what it means to be in the waste management and water industry and to give them concrete advice."

The company also supports a couple of charities (Ysgol Y Gogarth in Wales and the Calvert Trust in Exmoor) working with people with disabilities and giving them environmental and educational holidays.



Colin Drummond, master of the Water Conservators

The second function of the livery is to look at long term water and environmental issues. The company holds special events with a business focus, where high profile people in the waste and water sectors are brought in to talk to small groups of members.

For example, former environment secretary John Gummer and Philip Fletcher, chairman of the water services regulation authority, have been guest speakers at recent events and the livery has organised to have a private dinner discussion in March with the Environment Agency's Barbara Young on risk management in the environment.

In terms of whether all the debates are relevant to the waste sector, Mr Drummond says: "On the waste front, so many issues have a water aspect to them and debates often overlap which is why the two industries tie together well."

Recently the water conservators attended a reception at the House of Commons where Phil Woolas, minister

for the environment, spoke to members. Mr Drummond says: "One of the issues he is interested in is renewable energy, in particular using anaerobic digestion to treat farm slurries combined with food waste. Taking the opportunity of having people from both waste and water industries at one table, he has asked if this was something the water and waste industry could work together on in the future."

While being in the livery gives members the opportunity to meet a number of high profile government figures, Mr Drummond is keen to emphasise that the livery is not a trade association. He says: "The livery is not there to do the job that ESA does so well. It is very different. Our debates don't lead to changes in government policy; rather, it is good to be able to talk to members of the government in a suitable environment and try and build mutual understanding of where we are each coming from."

Another aspect of the livery's business activities is to promote the water and waste industry. Mr Drummond explains that one of the ways he does this is through his talks with the Lord Mayor of London who heads up all the livery companies in the city of London.

He says: "I meet the Mayor three or four times a year, and a couple more times, one-to-one. I went to see the Lord Mayor earlier this year and after consulting with other members and preparing a presentation, I gave him a briefing for his overseas trade work. I told him that the UK is a world leader in environmental the environment sector in terms of what we have achieved over the last 20 years, education, regulation and finance. He has now taken my presentation overseas and will use it to show dignitaries what the water and waste industry in the UK is capable of."

The final function of the water conservators is to provide a number of socialising opportunities for its members. The water conservators have four formal lunches a year and one banquet as well as a series of other special events.

● For more information on the Water Conservators contact Ralph Riley, clerk on 01638 510 626, clerk@waterconservators.org