



Installation Lunch, 3 Jul 2013

Address by Mr Ivor Richards OBE, 25th Master of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators

Wardens, my Lord, Mr Alderman, visiting Masters, Liverymen, ladies and gentlemen.

Becoming the Master of a Livery Company is a rare privilege; as your 25th Master I trust that I will serve you well, and challenge and disturb you, just a little!

I want too to congratulate Peter Matthews on his year as Master and thank him for all of the work that he has accomplished and projects initiated that we will happily take to completion.

Dafydd (Lord Elis-Thomas) has indicated how we now view and manage our environments in Wales. It's a brave new world and Peter is leading the response to quite a challenge.

Due to its diversity and complexity Wales is one of the most intensively studied bits of the earth's surface. We were richly blessed with all kinds of minerals and then had to face the consequences of their exploitation. Hugh Myddelton of New River fame had a hand in some of this. Economic growth along with environmental damage and human tragedy was the norm until 1960s; then we had the disaster at Aberfan. The disaster changed everything involved in handling mineral waste and eventually a lot more besides.

Marjorie and I were heavily involved at Aberfan on that foggy, October morning in 1966 and, for quite some time afterwards, as emergency repair and recovery got underway. That event shaped the rest of our lives in every respect.

Post-Aberfan, public safety and the stability of waste heaps were the immediate problems; solutions were based on experience; water is the enemy in so many instabilities on slopes; but what did we learn from the disaster? Everyone learned that the management of these heaps left a lot to be desired; this became the new experience and the basis for guidelines - a proper reaction to events.

Marj and I experienced and saw things very differently. We entered an emerging world, a world that was driven by two factors: emotion and trust – first, a passionate vision for improving lives in severely degraded societies – and, secondly, trust from

technical and political managers that we would deliver that vision; their trust was essential if we were to make progress. There were no guidelines or guidance. We discovered that we had to lead and learn as well as unfold the future, step by step. Experience was valued but not allowed to hinder. As engineers we bent other disciplines to our will, life was totally fulfilling. On reflection; leading from behind would have been less exciting, ask Mr Gilbert's Gondoliers. In 2009 Otto Scharmer called this 'leading from the future', it is quite a common experience, and in his words involves seeing an opportunity to make a difference, connecting personally with what wants to emerge, and then acting quickly to gain momentum.

We had the benefit of hwyl; hwyl is a surging emotion, an inner spirit; a source of great strength; some say - it is a marker for what being Welsh is all about.

Following Aberfan my emotions ran deeply and purposefully. After visiting Snowdon and the adjacent slate quarries for example I reported 'These tips are not a danger to the public, but it is obscene that such dereliction exists in this most beautiful place'. Some projects progressed on this heart-centred analysis. Hwyl and trust had penetrated to the very top of the administration: hwyl was pure emotion, trust was the catalyst for progress. I fret that today innovation and imagination are incompatible with regulation and regulators, and that young professionals will suffer as a consequence.

Inspiration came from various sources. In his 'Essay on human understanding' John Locke wrote that 'Nature never makes excellent things for mean or no usage'. As a response to the trust placed in us, we worked with the 'excellent things' in nature. Teasingly the client said I was doing high cost research into low cost techniques. We put it to good use; the work was delivered at a low cost, and involved many aspects we would now recognise as sustainable features.

The unfolding future extended well beyond land reclamation. Moving on from Aberfan produced a significant shift in emphasis across civil engineering in the UK. One simple example; earthworks specifications were re-written. We broke a few moulds. Mould-breaking is exhilarating - I commend it to you.

For our Company to become globally useful, and increase its impact in the Livery, we too should lead and learn from the future. I suggest that this approach is too fulfilling professionally, socially and personally, to be ignored by individuals or organisations. As a Company, we have emerging futures involving the Livery to consider.

The Trustees have experienced this approach at Gogarth and Ruislip. Our efforts at Ysgol y Gogarth and Ruislip School illustrate the scale of the energy released and the potential created when acorns become young oaks. The eco-project at Gogarth has international links extending as far as India. The success at Ruislip School has led to us working with Thames Water staff; we intend to install facilities at more schools in the Thames valley. Surely we can identify a few more acorns.

Wherever one looks there seems to be more repair work to do, but if we take time to stand and stare as advised by W H Davies, the tramp poet, we can see and now understand how nature continues with recovery at her own pace. The Water Conservators should consider helping nature along. This is a job for the Wardens.

In the next academic year the Trust will be distributing £82,000 as Water Conservator Bursaries in UK universities. In this area I want to see the Company develop its impact as well as coverage. Liaison with the universities is a vital element for both parties so I would like members to get involved. The wardens will be working on this too. Under the watchful eye of Lord Macdonald, Warden of Wadham College, 5 recipients of bursaries will be talking to us this evening about their work.

So what should we be thinking about and doing in the next 12 months?

Nurturing the young oaks at Gogarth and Ruislip, identifying more acorns and preparing to plant them as part of that programme.

Just three suggestions for the year ahead;

- Putting more of ourselves into the universities,
- Working with nature,
- Fostering emerging futures.

I am very pleased to confirm that Roger North has been installed as Thames Warden, Peter Hall as Fleet Warden and Keith Tozzi as Walbrook Warden. For the first time today we admitted a Liveryman by way of Patrimonial Redemption. So I would be pleased if David Gifford Richards would stand up for a moment. David will be my bailiff and he will be joined by Nigel Mattravers as bailiff for the Thames Warden. In addition 2 Members joined the Court, they are Robert Casey and David Lloyd-Owen.

Our collection today will support the Hackney Carriage Drivers' Magical Taxi Tour from London to Disney-land Paris for 200 very special children. For some it may well be the trip of their life. Your support will be much appreciated

We will be pleased to welcome people to Ruthin on 6 and 7 September 2013, to celebrate the achievements of Hugh Myddelton and to enjoy the Vale of Clwyd. On 17 September we will be visiting the Globe and on 5 November our Annual Banquet will be held at Vintners Hall.

Thank you.