



## Master's Letter to the Company - December 2020

Dear Member,

As Christmas approaches, I would like to take this opportunity to bring you up to date with what has been happening in the Company and our plans for 2021.

### **What's Been Happening During Covid**

When we went into lockdown in March few of us would have believed that we would still be living under Covid restrictions in December. Sadly, we have had to cancel a number of our usual events this year; most recently our Livery Dinner at Goldsmiths' Hall planned for 1st December.

Despite this I am pleased to report that the Company has continued to operate successfully and show real resilience. The Court and our Committees have all met via Zoom. The Company's Staff at College Hill has also risen to the challenge of keeping the affairs of the Company operating smoothly through a mixture of working from home and from the office on a part time basis, Government guidelines permitting.

Notwithstanding the pandemic I have been encouraged by the substantial number of applications the Company has continued to receive for admission to the Livery and as Freeman. I am particularly pleased that we have still been able to admit our new members as we took our Admission Ceremonies online. These have proved popular with our new members because of their more informal character.

### **Online Events**

As physical gatherings have been out of the question the Company has managed to keep members in touch through a wide range of successful online events. It has been great to see so many members support these events and demonstrate fellowship for each other.

We continued to hold regular online drinks parties which started in April this year. In October we organised an enjoyable but highly alcoholic online gin tasting and distillery tour courtesy of Six O Clock Gin of Bristol. For those who preferred something non-alcoholic or needed to sober up after the gin tasting we journeyed into the World of Tea in November presented by Teapigs. They provided a range of widely differing styles and flavours of teas from around the Globe for members to taste. Both events were greatly enjoyed by all those who attended.

You might be forgiven for thinking that if it is wet, we will drink it!

However, I can reassure you that we have also hosted more cerebral events. As part of our series of "Food for Thought" discussions we hosted our second Ethics Webinar on 28<sup>th</sup> October which saw academics, Professor Steven Vaughan and Emily Carroll, share and discuss their research into the practice of Onshoring and the cultural, managerial, and ethical issues it can pose for law firms. The event proved popular with members of the Company but also drew an audience from the wider Livery and several law firm senior partners.

We also had food for thought of a spiritual kind when we held our traditional joint Carol Service, as an online event, from the wonderful church of St Mary-le-Bow with the Worshipful Company of Arbitrators on the 9th December. The service was followed by short speeches from both Masters and a Christmas toast.

### **Normality on the Horizon in 2021?**

We now look forward to 2021 and hopefully a gradual return to something approaching normality, accepting that some of the aspects of life as we have experienced it over the last few months (notably "working from home") may continue.

I also suspect that we may continue to use some of technology we have become accustomed to using during the pandemic. Whilst meeting in person is still as important as ever some of our online activities are likely to co-exist in the post-Covid world.

However, the first few months of the year are likely to see us still operating entirely online.

With that in mind the Wine Committee have planned a virtual tour of the southern Rhone and its wines with an interactive seminar by renowned wine expert Olivier Hickman of 'Wines Uncovered' on 21st January 2021. An invitation has been circulated to members by the Clerk. Details on how to register can also be found on our website. Please come along and support what looks like a really enjoyable and interesting event. A list of "additional drinking material" to support this event will be circulated by the Clerk.

In February, in aid of our Charitable Fund, we will be running an online tour of 'Shakespeare and the Lawyers' led by City of London Guide (& Freeman of our Company) Ian Fagelson. We will go back in time 400 years to the places where William Shakespeare lived and worked and uncover some of Shakespeare's interaction with the legal profession. What exactly did he mean in Henry VI when he wrote, "Let's kill all the lawyers"?

We may have the view that women working in the City are a relatively modern advance, but in March we will be introduced online to a few City women of past centuries (including one who lived at 4 College Hill) who have shaped trades and industries in the Square Mile and helped their communities thrive.

We hope to resume our normal programme of events in May with our usual Trinity House Supper and Annual Company Service at St Peter ad Vincula in the Tower with our Chaplain, Canon Roger Hall, officiating. We understand booking for events at Mansion House will not return to normal until June/July at the earliest, so our usual Banquet will not take place next year. Nevertheless, we are planning to hold a large formal dinner at an alternative grand venue in June. More details to follow.

### **Our Company's Values**

We continue to modernise the Company and make it an attractive and inclusive organisation for solicitors of all backgrounds. To show our ongoing commitment to welcoming a diverse membership

we have adopted a Values Statement which has been published on the Company's website. We have also agreed a conduct protocol to underline our commitment to our values.

### **Charitable Giving**

In times of crisis such as the pandemic charitable giving is more important than ever. It was pleasing to hear from the Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor on several occasions, most recently at the "Carols in the City" on 8<sup>th</sup> December, that the Livery has stepped up its charitable giving to meet additional burdens placed on the voluntary sector by the pandemic.

As a Company we've continued to support a range of charitable causes from access to justice, alleviation of child poverty and justice reform as well as contributing to wider livery inspired initiatives such as the Livery Kitchen Initiative which provides lunches to NHS workers and those struggling on low incomes.

Central to our charitable giving has been our support for Haringey Law Centre. As befits the Solicitors' Company we remain committed to helping the most disadvantaged in society have access to justice through the provision of legal advice and counselling.

The Law Centre currently receives an annual grant from the Company. However, in view of the extra expense and pressures on their services because of Covid our support was increased significantly through a further grant of £5,000. Generous donations by individual members of the Company in response to an appeal by Immediate Past Master John Wotton increased this support further.

As it is Christmas I would like to again appeal to members to support Haringey Law Centre in the essential work that they do in providing vital legal counselling and support to one of the most disadvantaged boroughs in London.

If you are able to provide any additional support this Christmas to this worthy cause, I would be most grateful.

Donations can be made direct by bank transfer to "The City of London Solicitors' Company Charitable Fund": Sort code: 405240 Account: 00001062. Reference: 'Haringey' or by cheque made out to City of London Charitable Fund addressed to the Clerk at College Hill.

### **Thank You**

In closing I would like to take this opportunity to say a few thank yous.

First, I would like to thank Senior Warden, Tony King, and Junior Warden, Sarah de Gay, for all their amazing help, assistance and support to date in my role as Master.

I would also like to say a special thank you to Linzi James, our Clerk, and to the Company's staff, Liz Thomas and Denise Llewellyn for their tremendous work and commitment in keeping the Company's affairs running smoothly and efficiently through these very difficult and unpredictable times.

### **Merry Christmas**

Christmas is a time of hope. This year has been an extremely difficult for many of us in different ways, but I sense there is now an optimism that some sort of normality will gradually return in 2021 with the roll out of the vaccine.

This time of year reminds us that for all the uncertainty in these current times we still have much to be thankful for. In the context of the Livery, we value the friendship and fellowship we share with each other. But most of all we are grateful for our families and those who we hold dear and the thought of the time we will be able to spend with them this Christmas.

With that in mind I would like to wish all of you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

I look forward to catching up with you in person as well as virtually in 2021.

**ROBERT BELL**  
**MASTER**  
**CITY OF LONDON SOLICITORS' COMPANY**

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