

# THE CITY OF LONDON SOLICITORS' COMPANY



Dear Freeman and Liverymen,

Please find below the statements made by the Out-Going and In-Coming Masters during the 2022 AGM.

## **Statement from the Out-Going Master, Robert Bell:**

Fellow Solicitors

It has been an honour and privilege to serve as the Master of the Company for an unprecedented term of two years.

It was also a particular honour to be Master and to support Past Master Alderman Vincent Keaveny in his year as Lord Mayor as well our Liveryman, Alison Gowman as Sheriff. When I look back on the last two years it has been a bit of a rollercoaster to say the least. However, I am pleased to have led the company successfully through Covid pandemic. The Court and the Company's Committees kept meeting albeit online, we fielded a wide array of online events, wine tasting, drinks' evenings, guided tours..... **all virtual** to keep members in touch with each other.

Admissions of Freeman and Liverymen also continued online. In fact, we were widely acknowledged to have had one of the most active online programmes among the Livery. While coping with a difficult situation we learned a lot about the flexibility, efficiency, and inclusiveness of online events. This allowed people who had mobility issues or unable to come in person to events in London to join. I am sure the new Master will want to continue incorporating online events in the Company programme in the year ahead.

## **Post Covid & Events**

For the Company learning to adapt and succeed in the immediate post Covid period has been in many ways **more difficult** than successfully navigating the challenges of lockdown. Difficulties have stemmed from organising events against a background of increased working from home, reluctance at least in the early days for members to travel up to London and the hokey- cokey system of Government regulations about what type of events you can hold, where and when!

However, this year we have managed a return to a near normal programme of events. I will mention a few.

We held a marvellous Livery Dinner on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 in Goldsmith Hall- with its amazing glittering candle lit chandeliers and enormous Christmas tree- at which we were fortunate enough to welcome His Honour Judge Mark Lucraft QC, Recorder of London who gave a most amusing and entertaining speech. I received many congratulations from other Masters saying how much they enjoyed the evening. This was our first major social event after the relaxation of Covid restrictions and it was very well supported.

We held our Banquet at Mansion House on 30th March in the presence of the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress. We were also fortunate enough to have as our guest speaker, Allison Kellett, the new President of the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal who despite the potentially dry topic of solicitors' disciplinary proceedings gave a really interesting and engaging speech about how the Tribunal was grappling with key issues affecting the profession today such as the wider social conduct of solicitors. Needless to say we were all on our best behaviour!

It was really nice to hold again our Company Annual Service at St Peter Ad Vincula in the Tower of London followed by our usual supper at Trinity House. This is always a pleasant and relaxed event.

We also held a number of other events including a successful wine tasting. However, I would like to single out the Food for Thought Events organised by Tony King and Sarah de Gay. In February we had a seminar style event and drinks at Salters Hall looking at key issues facing the legal profession. Recently on 14<sup>th</sup> June we held a sustainability dinner at the Old Bailey with the Insurers Company looking at challenges law firms and insurers face on sustainability and the environment. These events talking about cutting edge issues for the profession and Society are highly popular and widen the appeal of the Company within the profession outside our traditional members and I am sure Tony as Master will be planning more of these types of event

### **Membership**

The Company remains as popular within the profession although there is a lot more to be done to increase our appeal further. Many still don't know about the Company.

Many Livery companies suffered a downturn in membership over Covid. We escaped relatively unscathed. We are now in a situation of boosting our membership. We currently now have 328 Liverymen and 1230 Freemen. Today we held one of the largest admission ceremonies in recent years. We admitted a further 14 Freeman and a further 3 Liverymen.

But we need to do more to bring home the relevance of the Company to the modern day profession and to connect more widely within senior partner community of the larger city firms.

### **Charity**

I made an appeal to both Freeman and Liveryman at Christmas for an increase in charitable giving from Members. I am glad to say that that resulted in an increase in the level of giving including one large donation. But a lot more needs to be done as our Charitable fund is relatively modest compared to most modern Livery Companies.

The magazine of the CLLS and the Company "City Solicitor" has recently made a podcast which showcases the work of the Charities Committee. I would urge you to listen to it I would like to mention the Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund. This initiative was devised by Patrick McCann of Linklaters and Chair of CLLS Training Committee and Legal training provider BARBRI and supported by the CLLS. Patrick has managed to raise over £200k from City law firms -an amazing achievement.

It is there to provide financial assistance to paralegals active in advising on social welfare law principally through law centres to support them meet the expenses of the new solicitor qualification exam.

This year our Charity Committee awarded a grant of £10k to the Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund. We hope to be able to award comparable sums over the next couple of years.

In addition, we are pleased to be able to use our Educational Trust to administer the SWSQF. This is another example of how the Company can work closely with the CLLS, which does not have a charitable fund, to benefit both organisations.

### **New Committees**

We reformed our committee structure during my term as Master.

We re-purposed the existing Livery Committee under the chairmanship of Full Assistant Mary Ann Wright. This committee is now charged with boosting our profile within the Livery, ensuring we take a full part in pan-Livery initiatives such as those in relation to philanthropy, the environment and sustainability. It is also tasked with liaising with external organisations like Army & RAF Legal Services Branches and strengthening our relationships with our cadets.

I believe that this Committee is going to become one of the most important committees of the Company in the years ahead as the role of the Livery evolves and the need for greater coordination on topics of social or political importance increases.

We have formed a new Social & Events Committee under the chairmanship of Full Assistant Lee McLernon which is there to coordinate the Company's social programme in association with the other Committees of the Company. The idea is to ensure we plan more effectively a full calendar of events for the forthcoming year.

### **Staff**

I would like to say a special thank you to the Clerk, Linzi James, Liz Thomas our Administrator and Denise Llewellyn our secretary for their help and support over my time as Master. In particular they responded magnificently to the challenge that Covid presented. Carrying on quietly and efficiently working from home providing an efficient and seamless service to members over the months of lockdown.

As many of you know Denise retired at the end of March after 27 years of loyal and dedicated service to the Company. She also agreed to come back to help us out a part time basis for a couple of months after her retirement until we had recruited a successor. I would like to say how immensely grateful I am for her willingness to help us out. I would like to wish her a happy and well-deserved retirement.

I am pleased to say we now have a replacement for Denise, and I would like to welcome Haris Aktar who joined College Hill a couple of weeks ago to assist on a temporary contract.

We need to equip our Company with appropriate resources to allow the Company to deliver more and more varied events to members. To this end we are starting a recruitment exercise to recruit a Deputy Clerk. We hope this exercise will identify an appropriate candidate in the 6 months.

### **College Hill**

As many of you know College Hill has been the Company's office for many years. It is also shared by the CLLS. However, this 18<sup>th</sup> century listed building is in urgent need of refurbishment. I formed a Working Group at the beginning of my time as Master under the able chairmanship of our Treasurer Past Master Rupert Jones to investigate the costs of refurbishing and the costs of running the office. The Working Group's deliberations were delayed by Covid but are now complete. Its conclusions will be reported to the GPC and Court in the Autumn. It is estimated that the likely cost of refurbishing the premises could be in the region of £350k.

The Working Group's job has been further complicated by far reaching proposals by the CLLS to adjust their contribution to staff and premises costs at College Hill. Naturally we need to ensure any changes don't undermine the financial viability of the Company staying in College

Hill. I do hope we can find a compromise solution in the months ahead so that both the Company and the CLLS can remain in College Hill.

There is no doubt in my mind that the close working relationship between the CLLS and the Company, which we currently enjoy, provides immense benefits to the members of both the CLLS and the Company and I hope this will continue. Present differences should not cloud the benefit our close relationship brings.

### **Thank You**

Finally, I would like to thank

**Edward Sparrow**, Chair of the CLLS, who I have worked closely with on a range of issues in my role as Master and President of the CLLS including judging entrants for multiple Company and CLLS prizes.

It has been a pleasure working with you and also David Hobart former CLLS CEO and now Mathew Rous.

**To Tony King, Senior Warden, and Sarah De Gay, Junior Warden** I would like to say a special thank you for putting up with me for the last two years and their unfailing loyalty, support, and advice. It has been a privilege to work with you both.

I have no doubt that Tony will be an excellent Master and has the right combination of skills and experience to meet the challenges the Company now faces. *Tony, May I wish you all the best for your forthcoming year as Master.*

I would also like to thank Stewards **Ed Parker and Ginny Cannon** *for their support through the year.*

Finally, I would like to say a big thank you to **Rebecca** my Wife, Mistress Solicitor, and consort for all her help and encouragement over the last two years in helping me perform my role as Master. I am deeply grateful for all that she has done to support me  
May I close by wishing the Company the very best for the future and I look forward to supporting the new Master and Wardens in the year ahead.  
Thank You.

### **Statement from the In-Coming Master, Tony King:**

Fellow solicitors

It is a great honour to have been elected by the Court to serve as Master of the Livery Company for the coming year.

I have had a longer apprenticeship than is normal but I have benefited from the tutelage of an excellent Master.

### **Outgoing Master**

That leads me neatly to my first point, namely congratulating the Outgoing Master, Robert Bell, on the excellent way he has led the Company over the last two years, an unprecedented term of office. He began as a virtual Master but I am pleased he has ended his term as an “in person” one.

He has navigated the CLSC ship through the choppy waters of the pandemic, keeping us on course the whole time.

The quietly confident and efficient way he has chaired the Court meetings and the strong and wise leadership he has provided to the Company have served the Company well in these difficult times.

Robert deserves our heartfelt thanks for his “double turn at the wheel” and he can now enjoy a well earned rest from the rigours of Mastership. No doubt he'll be relieved not to have to face what I understand was the near normal menu of three dinners per week.

### **New Wardens**

Looking forward, we also today welcome new Wardens, Sarah de Gay and Ed Parker and I look forward to working with them and the whole CLSC/CLLS team at College Hill to ensure we continue to serve our members as effectively as ever.

### **Company events**

What does the year ahead have in store for the Company?

Setting aside any external issues over which we have no control (a significant return of COVID, rail strikes & hikes in the cost of living), we will hold our normal programme of Court & Committee meetings in person along with our “marquee” events – the Livery Dinner (on a date to be announced in late November/early December and our Mansion House Banquet in next Spring (again, date to be announced). As Robert has said, we will put on another “Food for Thought” event and I am looking into reviving the plan for Rebecca Bell (our Immediately Past Mistress Solicitor) to give a recital in support of our Charitable Fund.

That said, we have learned that online events are a great way of keeping in touch efficiently & enjoyably without the burden of “travel time”. Therefore, I want us to continue to use that format where appropriate whether for “management meetings” (such as the regular fortnightly meetings with the Wardens and the Clerk which Robert instituted or for members’ events.

On the latter point, I will not repeat the points Robert has made about our Committees. However, I do want to say that I feel we are very fortunate to have a strong Committee structure under talented chairs supported by engaged and enthusiastic members. I know all of them are brimming over with ideas for events and other activities in the coming months but I will not pre-empt them on that. However, one issue about which I feel strongly is that we need to build on the extensive information we gather from you via the Membership Survey we ran last year and address the issues you flagged. I know the Membership Committee with Sarah de Gay as Chair has this very firmly in their sights. Watch this space as the plans come to fruition.

### **Resources**

I want to add my thanks to Linzi, our Clerk & Liz & Denise who have done an amazing job of coping with the upheavals of the last two years, moving from WFH to hybrid working seamlessly. I'd like to take the opportunity of adding my best wishes for retirement to Denise and to welcome Haris to the team.

Picking up what Robert has said about our premises at College Hill, that obviously is going to occupy a lot of my time over the coming months.

### **My theme for the year**

Finally, as with all new Masters, I have a plan (even a vision) for my year – Planned Networked Growth.

What does this mean? Taking the words in reverse order:

GROWTH – I doubt any of you will be surprised to hear I want to grow all aspects of the Company by which I mean:

- Attracting new members of all ages and characteristics. We need to attract as broad a range of City Solicitors as we can for all the obvious reasons (representation, engagement, succession, financial health etc)
- Increasing our charitable giving. We need to build our charitable fund so we can continue to support a range of worthy causes - law centres, suitable charities, the social welfare training initiative which Robert has mentioned etc. As an aside, the last is an excellent illustration of how the CLSC & the CLLS can work together for the benefit of the wider profession and indeed the public.
- our profile across the Livery movement (through our involvement in the FSG of Companies, the LCAG etc)

NETWORKED – collectively we have an extraordinary range of skills, knowledge, talents and of course contacts. We all need to work together to use that range to support the Company.

Looking at membership, this would mean each of us taking responsibility to find ways of encouraging our professional friends and colleagues to join the Company.

Looking at events, helping to promote them and/or finding attendees even if you personally cannot attend.

PLANNED – obviously, things could get horribly out of control if there was no overarching plan for growth. That perhaps principally applies to arranging events but setting realistic targets gives everyone a focus. Naturally the Committees will take on much of the planning but individual targets could be:

- every member contributing an amount equal to the quarterage to the Charitable Fund or indeed more if that is affordable
- every member supporting the membership drive whether by introducing at least one new member, facilitating talks on membership at their firms or helping at membership events.

I welcome any and all suggestions to support my theme.

I look forward to your support in the coming year.