

Masters Blog November

October 31st, the Clerk and I attended the Trinity House Civic Lunch hosted by Princess Royal, who is Prime Warden.

The safety of shipping and the wellbeing of seafarers has been the prime concerns of Trinity House since being incorporated by Royal Charter in 1514 (the same year the Watermen's Company) by King Henry VIII.

November began in earnest with Sally and I attending the All Souls' Day service for the Rochester Bridge Trust in Rochester Cathedral.

Since Roman times a bridge has crossed the River Medway, in Rochester. The Rochester Bridge Trust continues to maintain this strategic river crossing.



Monday 6th November proved busy, beginning with a wonderfully moving service at Saint Paul's for the opening of the Garden of Remembrance. This saw all livery companies laying a wreath in the garden.

Following the service we invited, in conjunction with our caterer The Cook and Butler, all livery companies without a hall to lunch at Watermen's Hall. A great opportunity to showcase the Hall and its caterer to potential hirers.

Do remember that Freeman receive a discount on the hire of the Hall, Courtroom and the Parlor.

The day ended with a service at my favorite church, St Stephen Walbrook for a thanks-giving service hosted by the Lord Mayor.

St Stephen Walbrook was designed by Wren in 1672 and was his prototype for the dome of St Paul's Cathedral. It was the first classical dome to be built in England at the time.

At the heart of the church is the large altar by Henry Moore commissioned by Lord Palumbo.



Wednesday 8th November - Annual Doggett's Presentation at Fishmongers Hall. After 34 years of attending this event as a Doggett's winner, it was a privilege to be attending as Master of the Company to witness Jack Keetch, the 303rd winner, receive his uniform and cup from HRH Princess Royal. Jack paraded into the Grand Hall, led by past winners, to the sound of Hail the Conquering Hero played by the Queen's trumpeters.

On Saturday 11th November, Armistice Day, we had an early start departing from Westminster Boating basin at 8am to escort the incoming Lord Mayor of London down river aboard the Gloriana to begin his Parade.

The Lord Mayor's Parade dates back to 1215 when Bad King John was persuaded to issue a Royal Charter that allowed the City of London to elect its own Mayor. We presume that he gave his blessing to the commune in order to keep the City on his side, but there was an important condition. Every year the newly elected Mayor must leave the safety of the City, travel upriver to the small town of Westminster and swear loyalty to the Crown. The Lord Mayor has now made that journey for 800 years, despite plagues and fires and countless wars, and pledged his (and her) loyalty to 34 kings and queens of England.



After safely delivering the Lord Mayor to HMS President, we hotfooted it to board the Havengoreat St Katherine's Dock (the boat that in 1965 took Sir Winston Churchill to his funeral) for the Armistice Day Service and to lay a wreath upon the Thames, in memory of watermen and seafarers, alongside the Houses of Parliament.

On Sunday 12th November, I attended Tower Hill for the Merchant Navy Memorial Service for Remembrance. The Company was one of 150 nautical institutions laying wreaths that day.

On 23rd November, I attended the annual dinner of the Barber and Surgeons, one of the oldest livery companies in the city. The Barbers' Company have had a Hall on the edge of the City, in the area of the north-west corner of the Roman Fort of London, since the 1440s. The dining hall is dominated by a magnificent Holbein painting of Henry VIII uniting the Barbers' and Surgeons.

On Friday 24th November, I left the City of London for the City of Westminster, to attend the newly named John Henry Lighterage Committee Lunch.

John setup the committee 15 years ago with the idea of senior journeymen helping apprentices with their training. The company is grateful for the committee and its members' participation in experiential days on the Thames, sail training, and Barge driving events.

Thursday 30th November. Sally and I together with the Clerk and his wife were delighted to attend the Worshipful Company of Vintner's Swan Fest at Vintner's Hall. One of the most ancient Livery Companies, its motto, translated from Latin, is 'Wine cheers the spirit'. This certainly proved to be the case on what was an evening marked by tradition and spectacle.

Simon J McCarthy HMW
Master of the Watermen and Lightermen of the River Thames