The Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths

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When writing my article for the previous edition of the Newsletter I was four months into my year as Prime Warden. Now, early June and six months later, I have barely two months left and have already attended over 100 events representing the Company.

There have been so many special and memorable occasions that numerous superlatives could be applied. There is, however, one word – privilege – which seems to sum up the pleasure of representing such an active and historic Company at numerous functions as the Prime Warden, meeting many eminent and interesting people.

So what have been the highlights of the past six months? We have revitalised the links with our affiliated military units, as a result of which parties of Blacksmiths have visited both REME’s School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering at Bordon and HMS Sultan at Gosport, (described in more detail elsewhere in this issue). We are now exploring what further support the Company can provide to these affiliated units.

We have also provided a morning’s forging for sixteen cadets who had previously taken part in the Elworthy Trophy Competition; all seemed justifiably proud of the forged leaves they made and some asked whether they could go back in their own time.

The Blacksmiths’ Company has contributed both financial support and expert advice, given by Assistant Steve Rook FWCB, to the restoration of an historic village forge in Much Haddam, Hertfordshire. In March Third Warden John McCuin, Steve Rook and I attended the opening by the Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire of the new Heritage Lottery funded education room attached to the forge and the refurbished museum. These facilities will enable school parties and others to learn how the blacksmith was an essential part of village life whilst also being able to see the forge in use. It is well worth a visit and I hope the Much Haddam forge will become a model for other counties to follow.

The Company’s first ever Masters and Clerks Dinner was held in February, to reciprocate the increasing number of invitations which I and my predecessors had received. The Court entertained 11 Masters and 9 Clerks by candlelight in our former ‘home’, Innholders Hall, and by keeping the numbers relatively small achieved a convivial atmosphere which many of the guests commented on most favourably.

During my Prime Warden’s Weekend we visited the Blacksmithing School within Herefordshire College of Technology (HCT) at Holme Lacy. Ian Coleman and Henry Pommfret had laid on a splendid programme. The students turned out in force, enthused about the courses and the skills they were learning and then gave up their afternoon to supervise the 17 members of the party who stayed for the hands-on forging session. All present were full of praise for the students’ attitude and capabilities – a real credit to the college and its tutors. From a personal perspective, having been warned last year that I was taking a bit of a gamble in locating my Weekend so far from London, it was great to see everyone so obviously enjoying the visit to HCT and the opportunity to learn some simple forging skills. The icing on the proverbial cake for me was that several senior Liverymen indicated afterwards that we should do more to support the blacksmithing colleges; I could not have wished for a more positive outcome.

The Show season is now in full swing. The Shows provide a great day out for all ages and the fraternity amongst the smiths attending and competing at the shows is very evident. Additional funding for the National Blacksmithing Competition (NBC) was agreed at the Michaelmas Court last year, including a five-fold increase in prize money for the National Champions and Reserve Champions (to £500 and £250 each respectively) which has been welcomed universally. We are also providing new funding to increase prizes at each Show on the
have a live forging display on London Bridge on Saturday 11th July when the 800th Anniversary of the first stone bridge is celebrated. The first Gabriel Masterclass will be given by Stephen Lunn FWCB on the subject of fire welding, and eight of the County Shows supported by the WCB occur within this period (see back page for details). I look forward to seeing many of you there!
I will sign off with a heart-felt thank you to everyone on the Court, on our hard-working Committees, in the Livery and all our professional Smiths for the support given me during my year. Serving as your Prime Warden is indeed a delightful privilege.

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**List of events at which the Prime Warden has represented the Company**

*December 2008 to June 2009*

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Visit to the School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering

Assistant Chris Childs and Liveryman Maurice Greenberg

The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers is our affiliated Regiment and we were blessed with a bright, warm Spring day for our visit to the School of Electro-Mechanical Engineering (SEME) at the REME depot at Bordon, Hampshire.

With military efficiency we were greeted warmly by Lieutenant Colonel Williams and his staff and immediately immersed in military acronyms. Bordon receives young soldiers, some only seventeen, who have done their basic military training and are there to learn their REME trades. After gaining experience in the field the soldiers will return to Bordon for further training.

We were then taken to the Blacksmiths’ shop where we were welcomed by Chezz Chescoe FWCB, LWCB. Trainees spend their first two weeks here under mainly civilian instruction, learning basic hot metal working techniques. This will be the first occasion on which many of them will have handled tools, having spent most of their formative years on computers. Despite the lack of experience the trainees, under skilled instruction and with a degree of self-motivation, are soon producing work of excellent quality.

After this the trainees spend time in the sheet metal and fabrication workshops, where again high standards are achieved in a remarkably short time. In the welding shop up to twenty-four students at a time spend a month learning the disciplines of gas, arc, tig and mig welding. The high standards achieved at welding are maintained by those responsible for repairing tank armour, who are re-tested every six months.

After lunch in the Officers’ Mess we were taken to the vehicle workshops where trainees were working on engines, transmissions, hydraulics, brakes and electrics. The training here is hands-on with six of everything enabling each pair of trainees to have a component or vehicle to themselves. They begin by learning to strip down individual components at the workbench. They then move to stripped-down vehicles and electrical training rigs with deliberately introduced faults which the trainees have to locate. After this they apply their newly acquired skills to work on complete vehicles. As the training progresses, so the vehicles get larger and more complex. The latest vehicles used by the military have computerised systems making a laptop computer as essential as a spanner.

Our next stop was the armaments’ department where the instructor apologised for having only four different sizes of gun to show. However, as one was the size of a small house, it was still a very impressive display.

Driving is part of the training and light tanks and armoured personnel carriers, driven by trainees, were trundling around the camp making the most of the good weather.

Our most instructive tour ended with a presentation, by the Prime Warden to Lieutenant Colonel Williams, of a WCB plaque to mark our visit.

HMS Sultan – Visit to the Royal Naval School of Marine Engineering

Assistant Chris Childs

The Royal Navy is very proud of the names used for its ships and re-uses some of them on a continuous basis. The first HMS SULTAN was a 74 gun warship dating back to 1775 and there were three other ships before the name was given to a shore base at Singapore in 1940-47, albeit one that was shut down during the occupation. The HMS SULTAN of today was commissioned in 1956 and over the years has grown by acquiring the functions of many other training establishments falling out from Royal Navy rationalisation programmes. HMS SULTAN sits on a huge piece of real estate and houses a disparate number of faculties, but the visit of the Prime Warden and five Company members concentrated on the Royal Navy School of Marine Engineering (RNSME).

Captain Graham Watts, as Head of the RNSME welcomed every one warmly but our visit coincided with a major electrical power cut. True to form the Navy found a room which was unaffected and our liaison officer, Lieutenant Guy Handoll, apologised in advance that lunch would demonstrate the flexibility of the Royal Navy. The Captain explained the modern methods used to prepare the men and women to operate and maintain the extensive and highly advanced machinery found in submarines, ships and aircraft. Captain Watts RNSME explained his quest to improve learning retention rates and, by using research work from the National Training Laboratories Institute of Behavioural Science in Virginia, his team has been able to cut course lengths dramatically. Information retention using ‘practice by doing’ techniques is twenty five times more effective than traditional Dickensian teaching at desks; ‘teaching others’ is even more powerful. The new way is true to the HMS SULTAN motto ‘Pedetentim’ or ‘step by step’ and the results have been hugely successful with the feedback from sea very supportive.

The spare capacity generated has been sold on to foreign Navies and British Industry in the form of bespoke courses and during our walk around the training facilities we saw apprentices from gas companies under instruction. The hands-on training facilities are second to none and ranged from the cutting edge Vanguard class submarine nuclear power plant and machinery trainer to allied trade and machine shop facilities.

Captain Watts hosted lunch and made it clear that he wished to maintain the special relationship with the Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths. To this end, Lieutenant Caila Barnett was introduced as the ongoing liaison contact for future events. During post lunch coffee and discussion, the Prime Warden presented a WCB shield and cemented our affiliation.
Carpenters School Olympic Garden

“Where the wild things are”

Some years ago the Lord Mayor encouraged Livery Companies to approach their Liverymen to become school governors. This challenge was taken up by Past Prime Warden John Barber and he was appointed a Governor of Carpenters Primary School in Stratford E15. This was close to his office where he is the Executive Director of a Charity.

When he was appointed the idea of London hosting the Olympic Games was a remote prospect but, when London was granted the status of host to the Games, Carpenters School realised that it was closest to the Olympic Park.

Once the initial visits of grandees had abated the school had to decide how to mark its very special position. Under the direction of Head Teacher Cheryl Alexander, assisted by her dedicated staff, the idea of an Olympic Garden took shape. On Thursday 21st May John Barber formally opened it in his role of Chairman of the Governors.

There are three areas: a pond, a growing area for vegetables and flowers and a seating space with benches representing the five continents. Those who know John will understand how his contacts, both personal and corporate, enabled many generous contributions to be made to ensure the success of the project. The garden is approached through a magnificent gate made by Bex Simon, an outstanding young blacksmith who had previously benefited from a bursary from the Company while she was at the National School of Blacksmithing. (See the report on the Prime Warden’s weekend). Somehow, John had convinced the Wardens that the gate should be this Company’s contribution.

Before the formal opening the assembled guests were given a video presentation of the garden, a description of the Gardening Club that has been set up to look after the plants, a display of dancing, a piece of music from the recorder club and a specially adapted song. This was based on the song ‘Wimoweh’ from the Lion King, with the words amended to: “In the garden, The Olympic Garden, Where the wild things are” - wonderfully presented with part-harmony and the children wearing the animal masks they made themselves.

After the opening there was a release of butterflies while Year 6 pupils launched their balloons, which soared high into a blue sky. I hope people finding the addressed labels will return them to the school so that the children discover how far they travelled. (The boy who told me his was going to Australia might have been a bit optimistic!)

Despite, or possibly because of, the cultural diversity and the difficulties faced by some families, the commitment from pupils, staff and families was obvious. We hope that proximity to the Olympic Park means that the school will gain a legacy (what an over-used word) and that the students and their families will truly benefit.

Back with the Company after 100 Years

Christopher Jeal

I was aware of e-bay as an electronic market and had frequently heard people say they had either sold or bought items through that medium. I had never tried it! One day I had to confront it when two different Livery Companies contacted me to say that there was one of the Company’s Past Prime Warden’s badges being offered.

I immediately contacted the Webmaster, Richard Sage, and he secured all the information. It was indeed a Past Prime Warden Badge that was presented to Arthur William Brackett who was Prime Warden in 1909-1910. It is 18ct gold (something not available now) and still in its original box.

I suggested that Mr Brackett’s jewel should become the Company badge for the Third Warden who would wear it during his year in that office and then revert to his personal Past Prime Warden jewel. I am pleased to report that this proposal has been accepted and that John McCuin, as Third Warden, has already worn it representing that office.
Annual Banquet 2009

With the kind permission of The Lord Mayor of the City of London, the gathering group of Blacksmiths and we, their guests, were welcomed into the Mansion House by a line up of Senior Officers of The Worshipful Company. The scene was set for a magical evening in the presence of The Lady Mayoress and other special guests, a total of 248 people.

As a visitor I was acutely aware of the atmosphere and my excitement rose as I paused to listen to the String Quartet in the entrance hall. As I stood there they began to play “Making Whoopee” by Walter Donaldson, and this confirmed for me the likely style of the evening ahead of us.

Although the Banquet is a “serious meeting of minds”, it is also a glamorous event with elegantly clothed Blacksmiths, their visitors and beautifully dressed ladies. This, in the setting of the magnificent Egyptian Hall, generally referred to as the “Lord Mayor’s Dining Room”, is something unique to the City of London. The candelabras and the chandeliers enhance the beauty of this Palladian style building with its glittering collection of gold and silver plate.

The Programme of Music under the direction of Mr Steven Fletcher, the Leader of The London Banqueting Ensembles, was lovely; Sir Henry Wood, Strauss, Rossini, Cole Porter, who could ask for anything more?

The Bill of Fare was exceptional and a great credit to the chefs, whilst the sommelier’s choice of wine complemented each course to perfection.

This must have been a memorable night for the Prime Warden, Mr Keith Gabriel, and his wife Diana, who undoubtedly played their part in the preparations for the Banquet assisted, as always, by the learned Clerk, Mr Christopher Jeal. Together they created a very special experience for all their guests.

After the “ceremony of the Loving Cup”, a famous City tradition, The Blacksmiths’ Song was sung by Mr Dominic Barrand with all of us joining in to sing the chorus with gusto.

The “duelling” of the trumpets from the balconies at opposite ends of the Egyptian Hall was hugely impressive, my personal favourite being the “Blacksmiths’ Fanfare” and the “Post Horn Gallop”. What a privilege to be in the company of such wonderfully accomplished musicians.

The formal toasts were announced by the Toastmaster, Mr B Greenan, and were proposed by the Prime Warden. A cheque was presented on behalf of the Worshipful Company to the Lord Mayor’s Appeal, the recipients of which this year are the Lords Taverners and the St John’s Ambulance. It was accepted by The Lady Mayoress on behalf of The Lord Mayor who, as we were dining, was returning from Sweden where he had been furthering the work of the City. The Prime Warden also presented The Lady Mayoress with a Ram’s Head Toasting Fork, which he had personally crafted. Sheriff Gillon, on behalf of The Lord Mayor, presented the Prime Warden with a silver plated picture frame which was decorated with a motif of The Lord Mayor’s gilded coach.

The Prime Warden continued with a reference to some of the interesting and important work in which The Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths has been involved during his year in office. In line with the Lord Mayor’s theme for the year of Education and Training, the Blacksmiths are endeavouring to support the initiative of providing education to families who have a poor understanding of finance. In addition to other work, the Company gives ongoing support to the cadets of all three Services, providing sponsorship and attendance at their competitions, in particular the Elworthy Trophy. The Prime Warden told us that the Blacksmith’s Company can make “a real difference” to this important craft.

In proposing the toast to the visitors, Mr Richard Chellew, the Fourth Warden, welcomed distinguished guests from the Corporation of London, including Sheriff Gillon and Mr Paul Double, the City Remembrancer. He also welcomed Masters from the Worshipful Companies of Upholders, Ironmongers, Clockmakers, Gunmakers and Cutlers of Hallamshire, representatives of the Armed Forces and, of course, the personal guests of all Blacksmiths.

The response to this toast came from Sheriff George Gillon. He reminded the audience, somewhat playfully, that the Blacksmith’s Livery was originally a Tooth Pullers’ Company, the description of this causing the guests to shudder visibly at the thought of removing teeth without anaesthetics!

The Master of The Worshipful Company of Ironmongers, Mr R Poulton, raised the final Enthusiastic toast to – “THE BLACKSMITHS’ COMPANY ROOT AND BRANCH, MAY IT FLOURISH FOR EVER”.

As the Banquet finally came to a close I was left feeling that we had experienced a wonderful evening in beautiful surroundings, and had enjoyed excellent companionship. Many of the guests probably dine in fine restaurants around the world, but on this occasion the combination of the glittering City venue and the superb hospitality of The Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths must rank as one of the most memorable experiences.

My final thought was an old family saying – “till we meet again”.

The Prime Warden and his wife, Diana

Photography by M. O’Sullivan
Suddenly it is Summer again and time for the Prime Warden’s Weekend which this year found us at Hereford College National School of Blacksmithing.

Members of the Court, Liverymen and their wives gathered at the delightful Chase Hotel, situated on the outskirts of the picturesque town of Ross-on Wye, where an early gathering in the bar of the hotel saw fellow liverymen and their partners greeting each other and relaxing in convivial surroundings. To everyone’s delight a wrought iron ammonite key-ring had been left in each room as a gift from the Prime Warden – a token reflecting his interest in blacksmithing and geology.

The evening began with a champagne reception hosted by the Prime Warden and his wife, Diana. An excellent dinner followed.

On the following day after a traditional breakfast we were taken by coach to Holme Lacy, the home of the National School of Blacksmithing. We were greeted by the Course Director Ian Coleman and Senior Lecturer Henry Pomfret who first described the courses available to blacksmiths. Our visit included a tour beginning with the Farrier’s Centre, through the academic and practical training areas culminating at the twenty traditional forges. Over a dozen students had foregone one of their four traditional forges. Over a dozen students had foregone one of their four traditional forges.

The student received an impromptu Master Class in forging, including using the power hammer to produce a realistic representation of a leaf for a Memorial Gum Tree in Australia. With the help of our student supervisors the rest of us did our best to emulate Don! Lara Shepherd was delighted to be presented with the Celtic brooch her student supervisor had just made.

It was with great pleasure we observed the enthusiasm and dedication of the students working towards making the craft their profession, and we saw that Bursaries are being put to very good use. It was also an opportunity for students to meet members of the Company face to face and to learn about the charitable work of the City Livery Companies.

With little time to spare grimy Liverymen returned to the hotel to change into formal dress for the evening, which began with a private viewing of the Mappa Mundi at Hereford Cathedral – an extraordinary document about which many differing views are held by experts – and a visit to the Chained Library where, in the days before printing, books were hand copied at great expense so a bible could be worth as much as £20,000. These valuable tomes were routinely chained to the shelves to prevent their theft but, with the advent of printing, books became less expensive to produce and libraries dispersed with chains. By good fortune the chained library at Hereford survived and along with the Mappa Mundi is preserved in a purpose built building.

The party then moved to the neighbouring Bishops Palace for a champagne reception before an excellent dinner during which we were entertained by a gifted young pianist whose musicianship belied his age. On returning to the hotel, those in the party not yet exhausted by the day’s events congregated once more at the hotel bar.

After breakfast on Sunday we travelled to Eastnor Castle for a private viewing. Here in 1810 Baron Summers decided to replace the family manor house with a replica of a mediaeval castle which was apparently completed not only on schedule but also within budget. The interior of the Castle contains a collection of works of art, furniture and armour from Europe and the Middle East. The Castle, which is still in the ownership of the same family, is now operated as a business venture and includes a restaurant where we enjoyed an excellent lunch before congratulating Keith and Diana for such an entertaining weekend and thanking them and Christopher Jeal who, this year, included in his usual impeccable organisation excellent weather.

Eleven Masters and nine Clerks attended a Dinner hosted by the Company at Innholders Hall in February. The Company was represented by The Prime Warden, Renter Warden, Third Warden, Fourth Warden, the Father, Past Prime Wardens, Assistants and the Clerk.

The Livery Companies represented included Basketmakers, Butchers, Chartered Accountants, Constructors, Fletchers, Glovers, Security Professionals, Solicitors, and Turners.

The Prime Warden proposed The Loyal Toast, a Toast to the Lord Mayor and the City of London Corporation, and a Toast to the Guests. Mr Graham Lewinstein, Prime Warden of the Worshipful Company of Basketmakers, proposed the Toast of the Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths.
Kevin Boys hosts London Cadets at Surrey Docks Farm Forge

On Saturday 21 March, by way of a continuation of the Elworthy Trophy sponsorship awarded by the Company to the London Cadet organisation, 16 Cadets were given a day learning to hammer hot metal on an anvil. Kevin Boys brought three other blacksmiths, Thomas Metula, Josh Swellin and Toby Lynch, to assist at his forge on the Surrey Docks Farm and by the end of the day each Cadet had produced a leaf to take home. Nine Army cadets from the SE & NE Sector ACF and 7 RAF cadets from 398 Squadron (Staines) and 1374 Squadron (Barnet) started the day cautiously but by lunchtime the Prime Warden, the Clerk and I noticed that each Cadet’s ability to judge by the colour of the iron bar that the metal was suitably malleable and how then to use the hammer, had moved ahead by leaps and bounds. When Kevin gave the cadets their metal leaves, he said how impressed he had been by their energy, application and enthusiasm. During his speech about the Craft the Prime Warden mentioned the iron sculpture Kevin had been asked to produce in remembrance of IK Brunel and hoped there would be more events of this kind promoting the Blacksmith’s craft.

Liveryman Maurice Scales the Heights

Having previously supported the Jubilee Sailing Trust, a registered charity whose mission is to promote the social inclusion and integration of people of all physical abilities and ages (16-80+) through the shared challenge and adventure of sailing a tall ship, the Company was invited for a conducted tour of one of the Trust’s two tall ships, SV Lord Nelson, moored at Canary Wharf.

The aim of the tour was to show the progress being made in updating and carrying out maintenance of the ship’s structure. SV Lord Nelson is now over 22 years old and the work is essential to enable the ship to continue to offer tall ships’ voyages for another 20 years and change the lives of a further 24,000 people!

Liveryman Maurice Greenberg and the Editor, Assistant Nigel Whitehead, representing the Company, had a thoroughly enjoyable and interesting time being shown over the ship and seeing for themselves completed Phase I improvements to catering and toilet facilities, and the re-roofing of the deck house. Engineer Maurice then persuaded the Ship’s Engineer to allow him into the bowels of the ship to “talk mechanics and electrics” leaving your Editor to discover more about the work of the Trust from our charming host, Naomi Scott.

During the tour we were told that the Trust, which has to raise around £400,000 to complete the work on SV Lord Nelson, would be holding a sponsored mast climb on SV Tenacious and as the height to the top of the mast, known as the Button, was only 125 feet, volunteers were being sought. Maurice volunteered!!!

So on a fine, dry day in May, after donning a safety harness, our intrepid 77 year old liveryman began his climb, having first secured the promise of sponsorship from friends and acquaintances.

In Maurice’s words “From the deck, the first stage up the rigging was easy, the “rungs” being wooden slats and the safety line only being needed when leaning back to climb through the hole onto the first stage platform. From the first to the second stage platform the “rungs” were rope which gave under my weight. Again, the safety line was only used while easing through the hole onto the second stage platform. From here to the Button, the taper of the rigging meant that, at the top, I could only place one foot above the other – but I had reached the top”. Descending presented no problems and having since spoken to Maurice I can vouch for him being alive and well.

To crown this remarkable achievement, and to refute those who doubted Maurice’s sanity, our heroic liveryman has so far raised £911.50 for the Trust and wishes to express his gratitude to all those who provided sponsorship. Why not show your admiration of Maurice by sending a donation to him payable to the Jubilee Sailing Trust?
David C Harman FWCB – Eminent Master Blacksmith

David Harman was born in Godstone, Surrey, the middle son of the late Don and Margaret Harman. While still at school he spent Saturday mornings at the forge of the late Tim Reddick, a highly respected ex-Naval blacksmith and hard taskmaster but with a great sense of humour. David recalls the occasion when a piece of coke flew from the forge sticking to his eyelid (no Health & Safety in those days) causing him to hop around the forge in pain. “Did you catch one in the eye then, boy” - said Tim with a chuckle – “just hold the broom while you’re dancing around and get the floor swept”.

David left school in 1978 having been awarded the Sir John Burrow’s Award for metalwork, presented to him by the late Marjorie Proops. He then began a four year apprenticeship with the prestigious building firm of R Durtnell & Sons, a family business established in 1591. Each trade within the firm offered apprenticeships and with twenty to thirty applicants for each place competition was fierce. David won an apprenticeship in the blacksmith’s shop.

During the first two years his tutor was the late John Probert. When John Probert moved from the area David completed his apprenticeship under Len Hutton FWCB. Both tutors were hard taskmasters but highly respected in the trade. David felt privileged not only being taught by John Probert and Len Hutton but by being part of such a well renowned Firm which had some amazing decorative ironwork contracts. Wages in those days were minimal but the value of the experience gained and the wealth of knowledge acquired was priceless.

Towards the end of his apprenticeship David recalls a particular contract awarded to Durtnells to make decorative balustrades for the Ritz Casino in London. His job was to cut out acanthus leaves by hand – no lasers in those days, just a bandsaw, hammer, chisel and file. Upon questioning the fact that he seemed to be cutting out far more than Len Hutton and the others he was told – “you want to learn the trade don’t you – so get your head down and keep cutting”.

Having completed his apprenticeship David then worked for two years with a fabrication firm to broaden his knowledge. By 1985 he felt ready to start his own business. All was going well until the hurricane of 1987 completely destroyed his workshop. At that point he headed for Australia returning a year later to set up Brasted Forge.

David has been awarded many civic commissions over the years and carried out work for several celebrities. Among the commissions of which he is most proud was the making of a stylised golden eagle placed above the throne for the wedding ceremony of the present King of Jordan. These days his work takes him far and wide and he has recently returned from France where he made decorative gates and railings for a chateau in Limoges. One of his gates is to be found as far away as Australia.

He won the title National Champion Blacksmith in 1999 and again in 2008. He joined the Company in 2000 with much encouragement from his late father-in-law Mick Orgill, a liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Farriers. David is a founder member of the blacksmiths’ competitions at the Edenbridge & Oxted Show which he helped set up seventeen years ago.

David was awarded the Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths’ Bronze Medal in 1999 and the Silver Medal in 2005. He is fiercely proud of his trade and of being a liveryman of the Company.

Many liverymen have visited his forge in Brasted among them the late Tommy Tucker who was a regular – “just popping in to see you Dave” and, some three hours later “must go, time is the enemy”. David holds these memories of Tommy with great affection.
When I was nine years old, Nepal and Tibet were two countries on my list to visit before I died, but my memory of why eludes me. I waited until I retired before making my first visit in 2002, trekking to the Annapurna and Ghurka villages before reaching Annapurna Base Camp (known as ABC).

The following year I went back and then into Mustang, the ancient kingdom formerly in Tibet and with a very Tibetan culture and landscape. By now I had befriended a Nepalese family with two small children, the father acting as my guide. I continued to make visits twice a year and became “a full family member”, supporting the education of the two children and providing finance for their living and accommodation. The support also extended to the family back in the village and others related to them.

In 2004 I met the principal of the Pegasus English School located in Jorpati on the east side of Kathmandu. He was in the UK to honour the Rotary Clubs which had provided finance and links with the Kathmandu North Club to build a school. I was then in Kathmandu in the September and spent time helping them establish a science laboratory and extend their computer facilities. I also built a water treatment plant and helped with the planning of the first of two major extensions. My “emergency” money made this possible and during the two months I was there some major work to the school was completed. During this time I was able to trek to the EBC – Everest Base Camp – and also visit the health centres and hospitals in the Khumbu. I was now a qualified high altitude paramedic – something I achieved in the months I was back in the UK – and was able to give some help.

For most of the time I trekked and travelled around the country alone, but sometimes with a guide and a porter. I visited a village north of Kathmandu to meet my adopted family’s parents and relatives and escorted teachers from Pegasus School on training visits before helping with the students.

At the same time as the school was growing and flourishing with additional help, a hostel for destitute and abandoned children was also growing. Two teachers had the opportunity to take degree courses and two others took science courses to support the school’s science stream. The two sons of a destitute family, the father having died and the mother having to look after her two granddaughters, gained places at the school and have been supported with food and clothing as well as the fees for their education by Raymond and me; the boys have thus been able to concentrate their efforts on their studies rather than begging in the street to survive.

I returned each year for two periods of two months each until Raymond needed me at home whilst he had two hip operations. I have now booked my flight for November. There are many western visitors helping to support the people of Nepal and their children’s education, hoping that the Government will eventually settle and provide an infrastructure that allows sustainability. Meanwhile, the Nepal School Fund along with others provides finance for the school and the hostel. I shall continue to provide for my adopted family in the belief that it is better to do something rather than nothing.
The relationship between Nepal and Britain began when the British Indian Army attempted to extend its sphere of influence north from India towards the Himalayas. As part of a peace agreement drawn up between them it was agreed that in future the British Army would accept the national boundary between India and Nepal and in return the British would be allowed to recruit their peasants for military service. This permission was granted on condition that although the men were to be allowed to swear allegiance to the British Crown for the duration of their service they must be discharged in Nepal, in the same religion that they had inherited from their forefathers namely Hinduism or Buddhism. When they retired from the army they were expected to change their savings into gold and take this back to their original village where they bought land and settled down, becoming a respected member of the local community. Both they and their family were entitled to free medical treatment at any Army Welfare Centre.

This system worked well for nearly 200 years but it is now subject to review. Since the monarchy was ousted in 2008 and the extreme Communist Maoists have taken a leading role in running the country, it is by no means certain that the previous arrangements will continue for much longer.

During peace time we have been able to select one out of over a hundred candidates offering themselves for selection for each recruit place. They can then be expected to serve on average for 15 years. New recruits are given long leaves so that they can return to their village in order to find a bride. A Gurkha battalion must therefore be large enough to cater for a substantial number being away on a six month long leave at any time. Consequently 800 personnel are normally required to fill 600 places.

A total of over 250,000 Gurkhas served in forty five battalions during World War II earning 2,700 bravery awards and suffering about 32,000 service casualties.

If Gurkhas are given the automatic right to settle in the UK after their service this will remove one substantial advantage to the Nepalese people, namely that of acquiring the incoming pension funds and the savings which in the past have benefited their economy as a whole. Tourism is their largest form of overseas income with Gurkha pensions second. However, even those who retire to Nepal now with more substantial pensions can also be the cause of problems locally. At today’s rates a retired Gurkha Corporal is likely to receive a larger pension than a retired Nepalese Cabinet Minister. This is not always popular. The Nepalese would prefer to receive more aid and trade as this is of benefit to their economy as a whole rather than just those who have served in the British Army. The children of Gurkhas allowed to settle here generally do not seek to serve in the Army. Whether the Nepalese will allow recruitment in their country in future is likely to depend on what other incentives we give them to replace the lost pension.

Editor’s Note: Sir Neil Thorne is the holder of a Nepalese Knighthood, the Order of Gorkha Oakshina Bahu. This was for his help with their 1991 constitution. In it he incorporated Freedom of the press, Freedom of religious belief, Freedom to join a political party and retention of the Monarchy for stability.
Monumental Commission for York Craftsman

The York based forges of one of the UK’s foremost blacksmiths have provided the crowning glory for a new monument in the Mall dedicated to King George VI and the late Queen Mother.

Don Barker, whose forges at Elvington and Wigginton have provided decorative ironwork for many well known UK landmarks, received the commission to create four bronze lanterns and attractive bronze handrailing to surround the monument.

The lamps which are five feet high and sit atop tall stone pillars, weigh over 250 kilos each and are fitted with gas burners to give a soft light. Work began with the making of a full size template to establish correct proportions and production started from that point. All four lamps carry the WCB Trade Mark stamp.

The new monument was unveiled by Her Majesty the Queen in the presence of members of the Royal Family.

Lincolnshire Forge Awarded RAFA Commission

Anwick Forge has been commissioned by the Royal Air Force Association to produce the centre-piece of the Association’s remembrance garden at the National Memorial Arboretum near Burton-on-Trent. This will take the form of a magnificent stainless steel eagle consisting of over 1,000 hand-forged feathers, perched, with its wings aloft, on top of the globe. The garden, which is due to be unveiled in September, will serve as a permanent memorial to all those who have served in the RAF and Commonwealth Air Forces.

Forging Down Under – Notes from Ferrocity

Ian Parmenter AWCB – former Blacksmith Tutor at Warwickshire College

A recent change in Ferrocity was the arrival of Dan Parker from the UK to join the team. Dan is a former Warwickshire College student who received a bursary from the Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths in 2002/3. In his first year here Dan’s contribution has been significant in helping push the Company towards becoming renowned in South East Queensland for the design and forging of high quality ironwork to exacting specifications.

We began in 2007 by constructing the Ferrocity School of Blacksmithing alongside our working forge in the Brisbane northern suburbs. Our mission was simple – to introduce our wonderful craft to wannabe blacksmiths and hobbyists. In addition we have run development and refresher courses for professionals, which have proved very popular.

The forge has now completed some very large commissions from residents of Brisbane, taking the form of entrance gates, pool fences, railings and stairs, all designed and forged in the traditional manner. One particularly satisfying job was the making of a set of highly polished, stainless steel railings in a contemporary design.

Among the jobs we have had were two unusual commissions. The first was to assist in the making of a suit of armour for Yannis, a young man whose life-long ambition had been to make armour from metal, who was sponsored by the Starlight Foundation – an organisation which makes wishes come true for children and young adults with terminal or life threatening conditions. Yannis has since undergone some life-saving surgery with more to come but regardless, has set up his own forge in Mossman.

The second is a sad tale. A mother from New Zealand but living in Brisbane is unable to visit her son’s grave which is in Taruheru, NZ because of the distance, so she commissioned us to design and forge a set of flowers that would withstand the test of time and which could be fixed either side of the headstone. We made two bunches of Stargazer lilies forged from highly polished 316 stainless steel. Her son was just twenty-one when he died.

As Smiths we always strive to achieve the best and to produce work that will last well into the future but in cases like those mentioned we give that little bit more in terms of effort and emotion.
Hoare’s Bank – its Ironwork

Founded in 1672 by Richard Hoare, the son of a successful horse dealer, C Hoare & Co remains the United Kingdom’s leading independent private bank, wholly owned by the Hoare family. The bank moved to Fleet Street from Cheapside in 1690 and into its present building, constructed to the plans of the Bank’s architect, Charles Parker, in 1830. Completed in a year, the new building, costing in excess of £20,000 excluding fittings, achieved the delicate balance between giving the impression of a successful business but also a prudent one.

An invoice from one Samuel Parker, brother of the Bank’s architect and self-styled “Bronzist to his Late Majesty” (George III), reads:

9 false-cored Ballusters in fine iron – curved to form of rail – with turned and ground circular and square caps and bases – fluted all over – fixing with iron rods with washers and plugs – Models and Patterns made to design

25 – 4 – 0
22 levels do - do - do 49 –10 – 0
63 raked do - do - do 151 – 4 - 0

Within the heart of the Banking Hall stands a cast iron, columnar stove made specifically for the Bank. It is decorated with Grecian-style friezes and surmounted by a three branch candelabrum. An underground flue connected the stove to the fireplace in the entrance hallway.

Other items of note are the Bank’s sign, the first floor balcony railings added in 1935 and the iron railings at street level.

The Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths wishes to thank the Board of C Hoare & Co for the opportunity to liaise with their Archivist, Pamela Hunter, and for giving their permission to take the photographs reproduced in this article. The Company also wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Clive Cornwell of the City of London Planning Department.

Staircase balusters

Bronze candelabrum adorning newel post

Columnar Stove in Banking Hall
Views of Younger Liverymen

Ed: We have only thirteen Liverymen below thirty years of age

The editor, Nigel Whitehead asked me to write a piece on young Liverymen after a discussion at a luncheon but first, allow me to introduce myself.

My name is Edward Minchinton. I was apprenticed to my grandfather, Geoffrey Berry in 2003 and granted the Freedom of the Company and Freedom of the City in January 2008 and admitted to the Livery in April 2008. I am the fifth member of my family within the Livery. I read International Politics and Military History at the University of Wales and now live and work in Bristol as an Equipment Support Manager for the Ministry of Defence.

Nigel asked me some questions to consider in writing this piece;

Does the age disparity within the Company concern me? I see the age disparity as a great opportunity, but a potential future problem. It gives a young person access to a great deal of knowledge and experience but without recruitment, there is the possibility of a significant fall in numbers of Liverymen in the future.

How can others like me be encouraged to take an interest in the Company and its work and also Livery Companies in general?

This is tricky as people’s interests are so diverse. A key thing in encouraging younger prospective Liverymen is explaining the opportunities and benefits of being a Liveryman such as becoming involved with the Craft and participating in the social aspects of the Company.

How do you think existing younger Liverymen might be encouraged to engage with the activities of the Livery and to what extent might cost influence their decisions?

Here are a few thoughts on this subject:

Encourage attendance at Shows where they can meet the working Smiths and possibly try their hand themselves, or arrange visits to the colleges where the craft is taught.

Consider having a rotating position on the Court (purely observational – perhaps for a term of a year) – giving the Liveryman an understanding of the Court functions and how the Company is run.

Consider appointing a representative to speak on behalf of the younger Liverymen.

Consider offering attachments to positions such as the Learned Clerk and the Honorary Archivist – these would give the Liveryman a greater understanding of the history and running of the Company.

In terms of cost I know I am unable to attend as many Company functions as I would like due in part to the cost. This is not a veiled request for a discount, just an explanation.

I recently attended the City Livery Yacht Club event at Cowes where Hugh Gabriel (the Prime Warden’s son) was crewing. He kindly contributed the following:

Does the age disparity within the Company concern you and how can others like you be encouraged to take an interest in the Company and the work undertaken by it and other Livery Companies?

“It does not concern me – at present the attraction of livery events is the conversation with guests with vast life and business experience. Events aimed specifically at the young would be very different, though not to say better or worse.

Hosting events aimed at young professionals who are already Freemen or Liverymen does not in itself raise awareness. In the majority of cases when discussing these events with my contemporaries, the first questions asked are “What are the Blacksmiths?”, “What is a Livery Company?”. Therefore, to increase the number of younger people joining the Livery might be better addressed by encouraging schools, colleges and universities to run seminars and presentations about the City and the Liveries, emphasising the opportunities for young professionals.”

New Liverymen

We were pleased to welcome Raymond Charles Reid to the Livery at the Epiphany Court meeting. Nominated by Ricky Toomey, Raymond explained to the Court that he is the Managing Director of his own lighting business. He is a Court Assistant of the Lightmongers’ Company (96) and we hope he enjoys a long association with an older Livery Company.

A further link with the electrical industry occurred when Derek John Lawrence was also admitted at the Epiphany Court meeting. Another entrepreneur with his own company Derek is an electrical controls engineer. He was nominated by Jash Joshi.

It seems as if the Blacksmith Company is changing craft as another representative of the electrical industry, Ian Duncan Ross, was admitted to the Livery at the Ladyday Court meeting. Ian has worked in the City of London, as had his father and grandfather, since he was aged 18. He is the director of an electrical contracting company and a Freeman of the City before his nomination to the Livery by Past Prime Warden Rodney Bole.

We welcome all three new Liverymen and hope that they will enjoy being Members of the Company and fully participate in our events.

Christopher Smith QC
We congratulate Liveryman Christopher Smith on taking silk. Christopher, the son of Past Prime Warden John Smith, became a Liveryman in 1997.
Obituaries

Ralph Gabriel 1922 – 2009 (Past Prime Warden) by Keith Gabriel

My father was born a Londoner in 1922, the youngest of three brothers, and died peacefully in February. He had been a successful engineer and entrepreneur, though never desk-bound, being happiest solving practical problems. Whilst still a young boy his father had encouraged him to set up a small business growing plants, including tomatoes, in the garden. He sold the produce to neighbours who had also been sold shares in the business, and were paid dividends. He thus developed his business acumen at an early age.

After graduating from Cambridge, where his degree course was shortened to two years because of the War, he joined an officer training unit before being attached to the newly formed Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. His unit landed in Normandy three days after D-Day and then made its way through Belgium into Germany. After being de-mobbed he spent three years in America broadening his knowledge of the machine tool industry and while he returned to Britain to become a special consultant to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation. He much enjoyed travelling under a diplomatic passport and having the UN laurel wreath on the bonnet of his car.

After successfully lobbying the Guernsey Board of Administration which agreed to convert St Peter Port’s old harbour into a marina, my father joined the Board and the Harbour Committee. He also achieved another lifetime ambition when in 1973 he obtained his pilots’ licence which ultimately led to him joining the Island’s Airport Committee.

On completion of his UN work he looked for a role in Guernsey and decided upon growing tomatoes. He was in his element equipping nine acres of new glasshouses with automated climate control systems. He became Chairman of the Guernsey Tomato Marketing Board. More recently he was Chairman of the Guernsey Energy Efficiency Group and enjoyed his memberships of Probus and the Professional Engineers Association of the Channel Islands.

My father was especially proud of his role with the Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths, serving as Prime Warden from 1988 to 1989, and remaining an active member of the Court.

I will remember him as a highly energetic professional engineer with a lively and enquiring mind. He was also a caring supporter and mentor, especially to new members of our Court whom he would ensure were made to feel welcome. Above all, he will be remembered as a loving family man.


Edward Martin, Farrier and Blacksmith, died after a period of illness at his home in Closeburn, Dumfries and Galloway in February. He had been a successful practitioner of the art of blacksmithing the Company prides itself on the diversity of its Liverymen. We are sorry to record the death of Gregory John Inwood (1989), Reginald William Johnson (1996) and David John Wright (1961) who all contributed to the life and strength of the Livery following their admission.

Edward Martin, Farrier and Blacksmith, died after a period of illness at his home in Closeburn, Dumfries and Galloway in February. Within his craft, no-one was more respected and the long list of awards from home and across the world bear testimony to his skill and standing.

Born in 1925, Edward came from a family of blacksmiths being the fourth in line to operate from the Forge at Closeburn established in 1854 and in 1955 married Betty Sulman and built their first house.

On his return my father joined the family firm, Charles Churchill. He became Managing Director and was appointed Chairman of the Machine Tool Trades Association. In 1966 the Company was taken over by Tube Investments and in 1969 he resigned to become a special consultant to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation. He much enjoyed travelling under a diplomatic passport and having the UN laurel wreath on the bonnet of his car.

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Harold William Charles Jordan 1922 – 2009

Tributes from Master Blacksmiths from around the country have been received by the family of Harry Jordan who died peacefully on 12th March.

Harry developed a love of “smithing” after a spell in the Navy during the Second World War. His Firm, Davey & Jordan in Penryn, served the local Cornish community but examples of his work, which include the gates of Royal Ascot, will be found in St Paul’s and Truro Cathedrals. During his lifetime he became a nationally recognised figure, winning many awards for work on commissions from churches, stately homes and the Crown Estate.

Having being proposed by the late Ronald Earey (uncle of Past Prime Warden John Barber) Harry became a Liveryman of the Company. One of his proudest moments was at a Company Dinner at which Lord Topham paid tribute to his skill as a Master Blacksmith.

Harry was musical director of both Falmouth and Truro Operatic Societies and formed his own Palm Court Orchestra playing at many venues and raising thousands of pounds over the years for charity.

While both Edward Martin and Harold Jordan were distinguished practitioners of the art of blacksmithing the Company
Diary of Events 2009

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Show Dates 2009

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SHOES IN ITALICS ARE SUPPORTED BY THE WBC BUT ARE NOT ON THE NBCC CIRCUIT

Previous issues of the Newsletter

Past issues of the Newsletter can be accessed through the Company website:
www.blacksmithscompany.org.uk
- click on Livery
- click on Newsletters

Copies of photographs

Copies of the excellent photographs taken by Michael O’Sullivan of the Awards Luncheon and other formal events and reproduced in the Newsletter can be obtained directly from:
www.michaelosullivanphotography.co.uk
or
michaelphotography@tiscali.co.uk
Telephone: 020 8363 8350

Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths’ Shop

Prices:
- Livery Tie £10 (Liverymen only)
- ‘Social Tie’ £22
- Umbrella £15
- Cuff Links £66.50
- Brooches £45

All items available from the Clerk, Christopher Jeal. A limited supply might be available at Court luncheons.

Andrew Rowe – Silver Medallist – Erratum

In the previous issue of the Newsletter Blacksmith Andrew Rowe was omitted from the list of Silver Medal Award Winners for which we apologise.

Andrew set up DAR Design Limited in 2005 and manufactures unique pieces of art metalwork. Collaborative projects with glass artists and other designers have led to commissions across the UK, the Channel Islands and in the Far East and Barbados.

Christopher Blythman who was awarded with the Diploma of Merit was incorrectly attributed with the award of a Silver Medal.

Photography by M. O’Sullivan

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