

Election Court Dinner Speech

Wardens, Alderman, Members of the Court, Ladies and Gentlemen and a warm welcome to Alderman Bronek Masojada who has joined us tonight.

A very warm welcome to Father Tim Handley who from now on will be our Honorary Chaplain and was sworn as a Freeman at the Court Meeting earlier.

We also welcome new Freeman:

Mohammed Ali

Colin Bassnet CBE

Dominic Carter

Edward Garnier

that we swore earlier at the Court Meeting and who are just embarking on their Livery journey.

Last but certainly not least, we must welcome Trevor Cooper, who was clothed, earlier and is now a full member of the Livery.

Many of you, if not most of you were at the service just now. My friend, the Director of Music and founder

of The London Choral Sinfonia is here with us, Michael Waldron. His brief was to produce something equivalent to Sir Arthur Sullivan's "Lost Chord" in a comic song he wrote. He described the lost chord as being like THE SOUND OF A GREAT AMEN. I hope you will all agree that Michael delivered the brief, and some. You'll almost certainly hear more from him this coming year. Take a bow, Michael.

A slightly shy six-year-old boy, dressed as an elephant with a horrible full length rubber trunk and standing on his head (unaided, I might add), singing Nellie the Elephant, at his annual primary school pantomime in front of Barbara Cartland, never imagined that he would ever even deserve to become the 345th Master of a greatly respected City Livery Company and maybe I don't deserve it but more of that later. This is something that I regard as a huge privilege and will do anything I can to honour that privilege even if it involves reprising my part as Nellie the Elephant, if you so insist. Peter Pan has finally grown up... a bit.

I won't bore you, too long with my life story but I had a privileged up bringing although my sister and I were never materially spoiled. The family business was housebuilding, construction machinery and industrial

compressors, founded by my grandfather. The worst year in the business's history was the year I was born when as a result of the war, land was so difficult to acquire but for the first time in its life the machinery company made a profit, so my grandfather spilt a bottle of ink over the page of the minutes where the word 'insolvent' appeared, and never looked back.

After school which in terms of academic achievement can kindly be described as "unremarkable", I went into Articles as a Chartered Accountant. I never quite qualified. Apparently, you had to pass all the papers which I did, but in the same sitting. Why? A few years in practice, then my uncle recruited me as an accounts manager on his side of the business which was machinery. I progressed, he died in a horrible accident, and I then chaired that side of the business.

My parents imbued me with a sense of duty, and I was never going to be the third generation that squanders the family fortune on sex, gambling and drink. Anyway, my father made sure I couldn't. "Just sign this document for me", he'd say. "No, don't read it, just sign it." So, I did. I knew, as did my mother and sister that it would ultimately be to our benefit. I never took my position for granted and I worked hard but I

always knew that I wouldn't be there if my name wasn't Leach.

So how did I meet the Coachmakers? Why might I not deserve to be Master? Well, there have been some incidents!

All my life, I'd been fascinated by motor cars. When I was four, riding with my grandmother in her Triumph Roadster (Bergerac's car), I can remember telling her the name of every car on the road....Austin Cambridge, Riley, Wolsey, Morris Oxford...British names that have disappeared, now. I even started to drive when I was 12. My father then fuelled my passion by having more and more exotic cars. Lots of Jaguars, Lotuses, Jensens, an Aston Martin, four Ferraris and even a Bentley which when my grandfather had them, he described as "an old man's car" but when the GT came out in the noughties, he acknowledged that they were no longer for old men, even though by then he was 81. I did try to point out the irony of that, but it didn't get me very far. His passport said to his dying day that he had black hair even though it had been white for decades.

Tony Sparks brought me into the Coachmakers. He is a close friend whose father had been an eminent Past Master. I met him a long time ago through Alexander Wrighton, who I've known all his life, and is also a Liveryman and they are both here tonight. "Would you like to come to one of our dinners?" Tony said. "How lovely," I said. Afterwards, "Did you enjoy the dinner?" "I really did," I said. "That's good," he said, "because I'm on the Membership Committee and I've put in your application to join. Have you got 900 quid?" Membership Committee take note of an interesting technique. He'd done the same to Alexander Wrighton a short time earlier. Now the truth. I had really enjoyed the dinner and found the Coachmakers a friendly lot, with cars, aeroplanes and coaches in common. I also loved the ceremonies and traditions. The pomp and circumstance. (By the way a CoVid safe version of the Loving Cup will return to our dinners). So, I didn't mind a bit. I thought it would be a few dinners a year and some other events.

Very soon, I booked myself on a tour organised by John Knightley in collaboration with Mike Davis, to Porsche in Stuttgart. I drove down with Roger and Maggie Smith, now Past Master Roger, and suddenly I was amongst the great and the good of the Livery.

Well, we had fun. By the way, all the protagonists in these stories are here tonight, except for one, sadly.

First of all, the late Sue Brownson, subsequently our first Lady Master. She had had to fly in and fly out again to Stuttgart, not able to stay for the duration, and on leaving, mistook me for a German from Porsche and thanked me for a wonderful visit. What do you do? Well, mutter in a German accent to save her blushes. Later I got to know her well. She was an inspiration.

We moved for one night to a beautiful hunting lodge and filled it. Maggie Smith and Chloë Smillie decided to tease Vivienne Davis by telling her, in my presence, that there wasn't a room for me and so I was sharing with the Smiths. Vivienne fell hook line and sinker and was devastated, fearing that her husband Mike would get the blame. What Vivienne and Maggie didn't know was that I had Chloë and James's room key in my pocket because I met her coming into the reception ahead of James who was taking a call and she couldn't get it into her ridiculously small but very pretty clutch bag that would barely take a lipstick.

Then there was another Knightley tour to the Tastevin in Beaune when, during dinner, Patricia Bunn and I got the giggles over her strawberries which then spread to the rest of our table. Neither of us can remember why it started but I do remember looking round and seeing three tables of Coachmakers glaring at us. So, I am lucky to be here.

It was after the Porsche trip that I got the ubiquitous tap on the shoulder to join Mike Davis's Livery Committee. The rest is history. I became committed, I worked hard, and I made friends. I have truly come to love this Livery and the people in it. And that is my pledge.

Like so many things in life, things just happen. My mother told me the other day that she didn't think I would do what I have done with the Livery. She told me she is proud of me, and my father would be too. What she meant and what has certainly been in my mind is that I have achieved this great office in spite of my name being Leach and I am now content.

We lost my father at the beginning of the pandemic but not of it. We weren't banned from hospital, but we weren't allowed to give him much of a funeral. I

decided a while ago that I wanted him here, so I swore my oath today on his Bible, and I'm wearing his watch and his cufflinks.

I will not end this on a sombre note, though. That is not my style. As people, not just Liverymen, we've had a hell of a couple of years. My sincerest wish is that as well as doing the important things that we do, we go back to having some fun doing it. My theme is Fellowship and Engagement but that really means fun. It's what the Coachmakers Company that I joined is all about. Please encourage others that you know and let's wish ourselves a happy fun-filled year ahead.

It says "pause for applause, here".

Those of you who were at the earlier Court Meeting will know that the Venerable Ray Pentland is retiring as our Honorary Chaplain, so I would like to ask him to come forward to receive a small gift from the Coachmakers to thank him for looking after the Spiritual side of our Company for 12 years and for becoming such a good friend.

Would Liverymen only, now stand and give a toast to our guests tonight and bid them welcome? The toast is our guests.