



The Worshipful Company of Farmers Newsletter

Spring 2007

Master Sir Graham Wilkinson sees Education as key function

SIR GRAHAM WILKINSON BT - the 55th Master of the Worshipful Company of Farmers - was, one may say, destined for a life combining City, finance and farming interests.

Sixty in May, Graham was born in a house bordering Upper and Lower Birtley Farms, at Brook, near Godalming, Surrey, where he spent his childhood and has been Managing Partner of the family farming and forestry interests since 1974. He lives at Upper Birtley with his wife, Hilary.

Today, the farms total 427 acres, including 155 acres of commercial and ancient woodland. Tillable land is run on a three-year rotation of winter wheat, oats and rape, planted, ideally, by the end of the first week in October on this heavy loam soil. Contractors are brought in to do all the work.

Sir George Wilkinson Bt. KCVO, Graham's grandfather, was Blitz Lord Mayor in 1940-41... although Graham denies that this had any influence on his decision to read Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Christ Church, Oxford, from which he graduated in 1969. "The City was always my target," he says.

Sir Graham worked from 1971 to 1985 as an investment banker, followed by four years as the Managing Director of an investment and management services company.

"Now, I'm a bit of a jack-of-all-trades," he says. "In the modern vernacular, I live a plural life, with a number of activities making up my working day... farming, and the management of property which goes with that; a certain amount of management support for companies facing a problem or an opportunity; and a lot of charitable work, which I much enjoy and which includes the Worshipful Company of Farmers."

Sir Graham was clothed in 1980 and attended

the 40th Wye Advanced Farm Business Management Course in 1990. He was elected to Court in that same year, served as Chairman of the Finance Committee from 1994-97, was Junior Warden in 2004-05 and Senior Warden in 2005-06.

Needless to say, as befits a man of such wide experience, Sir Graham has a host of other agricultural interests, including being a Nominated Member of the RASE Council and Chairman of Trustees of the RASE Pension Fund. He is a Council Member for The Surrey County Agricultural Society and was elected President in December 2006.

Of his year ahead, he says: "Henry Plumb's quote, when interviewed for the Newsletter on becoming Master, that he would focus on three things - 'education, education and education' - hit the nail on the head.

"Education is the Company's primary charitable function. We have an important role to ensure that there are opportunities for those coming into farming to acquire the necessary skills at different stages of their career to ensure their future success. With the shrinkage of agricultural education and food production across the country, there is a considerable risk of skill shortages in the future.

"The biggest single topic of discussion within Court, and within Company Committees, is the opportunity to introduce a third course. It would



SIR GRAHAM WILKINSON BT

need to be a different course from those we currently run at Wye and Duchy College, so that we can develop a variety of courses for people at various stages of their career - that's got to be good for them and good for the Company.

"The key is to find the right combination of content, location, finance and committed leadership to make it happen."

Beyond education, the Master has arranged a scintillating programme of Company visits and functions throughout 2007, as shown on the back page of this Newsletter. It promises to be a year jam-packed with interest and enjoyment...



Lord Plumb reviews his year as Master

EVER-POPULAR Lord Plumb of Coleshill - 'Henry' to his multitude of friends - used the Installation Lunch at the Farmers and Fletchers Hall in October to review his previous 12 months as Master of the Worshipful Company of Farmers.

In a talk delivered with his usual mix of thought-provoking fact and humour, he described what a remarkable year it had been, spent among so many friends in the Livery. It was, he added, an additional honour to now >

join the ranks of Past Master.

"When I became Master, a year ago," he said, "I made it clear that I am a team leader. As Marjorie would say, I'm only good at one thing, and that's delegation... which is exactly what I've been doing over the past 12 months.

"I retire happy in the knowledge that there is a great team to follow and that the Company is in very good hands."

Of the year itself, he said: "We've been very fortunate with our speakers. Black Rod, Lt Gen Sir Michael Willcocks, was very good, as of course were Lord Rix on his theatrical and charity work, and Sir John Major with his tales of political spin.

"And then, of course, there was our marvellous and most interesting visit to Highgrove, where we were honoured by the presence of Honorary Liveryman HRH The Prince of Wales."

When interviewed a year previously by the Newsletter Editor, he had said that he saw his three most important tasks for the year ahead as "Education, Education and Education"... education of the public, education of children, and education of those seeking a successful livelihood from farming.

"We are, as a Worshipful Company, achieving this through our support of such worthwhile projects as the City Surrey Docks Farm, the Henman Fund, the Jubilee Fund and our college courses, as well as encouraging young people to become apprentices to Liverymen," Lord Plumb said.

"The facilities that we provide with our leadership and management courses at Imperial and Plymouth have got to be seen to be believed. One of the things I've enjoyed most during my year is to have been at the beginning and end of these courses, to have witnessed the bonding that takes place between these young

people, how much they learn from one another, during the few weeks they are together.

"The message I've learned from them, on both courses, is very clear: yes, you can work harder... but working smarter, rather than harder, is how to maximise your opportunities."

But the thing that really made his year, Lord Plumb said, was when a number of other Livery companies were lunching in Hall. "As I was speaking to them, the Clerk told me afterwards, one of them turned to him and asked: 'Is that chap up there, your Master, the son of that Henry Plumb who used to be President of the Farmers Union?'

"It not only made my day, it made my year!"

Ending on a serious note, Lord Plumb said he was "privileged to have been able to contribute a little to such a great Livery Company". Members were almost as many as the Company could take, and there were about 40 on the waiting list, "which is most encouraging".



Fantastic Annual Banquet at magnificent Mansion House

Left: Liveryman and Company Steward Richard Halhead (centre) receives the Livery Salver from HRH The Countess of Wessex, watched by Master Sir Graham Wilkinson.

WHAT a fantastic evening was enjoyed by the 300-plus Liveryman and their guests who attended the Company Annual Banquet at the magnificent Mansion House - official home of the Lord Mayor - in the City of London in late January.

A sumptuous meal of seared Galloway beef salad, west coast halibut and Kentish apple tart, washed down with the best of wines, was accompanied by music and drumming from the Royal British Legion Band, Romford.

As is tradition, the Ceremony of the Loving Cup took place along with all assembled singing, most heartily, the song that, surely, depicts the British countryside better than any other... The Farmer's Boy.

To cap it all, the Company had, as its very

Right: Master Sir Graham and Lady Wilkinson with HRH The Countess of Wessex, Lord Mayor Locum Tenens, Sir Michael Savory, Canon Nigel Nicholson, Senior Warden Tom and Brenda Copas, Junior Warden John and Susan Thorpe, Clerk David King and Sheriffs prior to the Banquet.



HRH joins Company members on privileged visit to Highgrove

ON 20 July a party of 150 was invited by HRH The Prince of Wales to visit Highgrove. The numbers allowed, the degree of access, and the presence of the Prince of Wales himself were a great privilege for the Company and a testimony to Master Lord Henry Plumb's ability to 'open doors'.

We gathered at 10am at Home Farm (a number from further afield having had a dinner together locally the evening before, organised by Assistant Jeremy Courtney with his usual enthusiasm). Farm Manager David Wilson (who is a regular lecturer about organic farming on the Company's

Challenge of Rural Leadership Course) greeted us, briefed us on the operation, and took us to a number of stands to see for ourselves.

We learned about the challenges faced and overcome, and were impressed that the farm is (narrowly) in profit. We were not surprised to learn later that HRH considers himself very lucky to have David as Manager.

Following the Farm Tour, we moved to Highgrove for lunch in the Orchard Room. In its attractive garden the Prince of Wales circulated and spoke to the majority present. Groups were



gathered informally but efficiently by Assistant Rosie Carne and Steward Richard Halhead.

In the Master's vote of thanks he commented on the Prince's bravery in hosting so many experts on his farm, and he spoke for all when he paid tribute to the courage of his convictions. He thanked HRH for all he does for British agriculture and rural society.

Finally, we enjoyed the full guided tour of the garden, tea, and some speciality shopping. So ended a great social event that attracted Liverymen from all around the country.

David King



Facing the challenges of a future in farming

IT WAS back in May when a small article in *Farmers Weekly* caught my eye. It was twelve lines long and about a course in rural leadership run by the Worshipful Company of Farmers and Duchy College in Cornwall. Intrigued, I emailed the college to find out more and was contacted by course director (and Liveryman) Richard Soffe, who persuaded me to apply.

An interview at The Farmers Club was followed by a letter inviting me to join the eleventh Challenge of Rural Leadership Course.

Having been given a list of the other delegates, I noticed that one was travelling from South Australia. I emailed him and suggested that we meet at Paddington Station and travel down to Newton Abbot together, which we did and hit it off immediately, learning all about each other's farms and families on the three and a half hour journey.

After checking in to the hotel, it was straight

onto verbal CVs and ice-breaking activities. These involved everybody standing in a circle on chairs, and getting into height order without touching the ground. Needless to say we soon got to know each other and began to gel as a group.

Our first major assignment was to do

a case study on a major south-west chicken producer. Our task was to analyse the £75million business and recommend strategy and direction for the next five years.

Some of the speakers gave us a roller coaster

special guests, HRH The Countess of Wessex, President of the RASE, and, standing in for the Lord Mayor, Alderman Sir Michael Savory, Lord Mayor Locum Tenens.

Our host for the evening, Company Master Sir Graham Wilkinson, in proposing the Toast to The Guests, gave a most interesting and amusing account of the time his grandfather, Sir George Wilkinson, spent in the Mansion House as Blitz Lord Mayor in 1940-41.

In more sombre mood he went to warn that people planning their future must never forget their history.

"Food Security is a most serious issue because food, as farmers well know, has such a long production cycle," he said. "It cannot be increased at the flick of a switch or by working a double shift.

"Indigenous-food statistics for 2004 indicate that the UK is now less than 75% self-sufficient. Yet, this year, world maize and wheat production is below demand. Crops for energy-use are in the

news despite current world corn stocks falling to 56 days in hand.

"Further crop failures or extreme weather could put world supplies at risk.

"If real shortages develop, price movements will be extreme and likely to be exacerbated by financial speculation.

"In such an event, my guess is that governments will rapidly return to a managed price mechanism to ensure that food is on our shelves at reasonable prices."

Much food for thought, indeed, to take home and contemplate, but not to let mar a most marvellous evening, culminating in the presentation by HRH of the Livery Salver to Richard Halhead, as the Liveryman who has contributed most significantly to the progress of the Company in the past year.

As all agreed... a fitting end to a fantastic occasion.



ride on the future of British agriculture. Prince Charles' estate manager, David Wilson, told us the way forward was organic, with low inputs and low yields, while Professor Mick Fuller said gene technology was the only way to feed the expanding population.

We were also given an insight into the working of a regional newspaper, at the Western Daily News in Plymouth. Seeing a print run is certainly a sight to behold.

Over the middle weekend we were given a strategic simulation, where in groups of three or four we had to set up a multinational computer business, opening offices, factories and hiring staff, etc. Valuable lessons were learnt in strategy and business management.

Colonel Bryan Watters gave a lecture on military leadership which left many of the group drying their eyes as he showed a video of the peace-keeping role of the Army in Bosnia. This was one part of the course no one will forget.

On the final Thursday we travelled to a TV studio in Plymouth, to get a feel of what it's like to be in the media spotlight. This improved our media skills immeasurably.

Jane King, Editor of *Farmers Weekly*, was our final guest speaker and gave a talk on how she had modernised the publication and how she planned to take it forward. She went away with some good ideas for future features, gleaned while spending time in the bar with us.

After an evaluation of the course, where we all made suggestions on the way forward for our own businesses, it was time for the Gala Dinner, in the presence of the Master, Sir Graham Wilkinson, and Senior Warden, Tom Copas, of the Worshipful Company of Farmers, without whom the course would not exist.

I would like to extend the gratitude of all the delegates to the Worshipful Company, and to the University of Plymouth for putting on this course. It has given me an insight into business management, strategy and marketing, relating to the rural economy, which no one else could have supplied.

Overall, I would say the course is demanding, rewarding and, above all, great fun. I would recommend it to anyone who wants to be at the forefront of British agriculture. The friendships I made over those two weeks will last a lifetime.

Andrew Brown

Combine joins Liverymen at the Lord Mayor's Show

SATURDAY 11 November 2006, at 11am, saw the start from the Mansion House of the 783rd Lord Mayor's Procession through the streets of London.

Over the years the Lord Mayor's journey has become so splendid that it has become known as the Lord Mayor's Show... a wonderful mixture of past, present and future, with the Livery Companies, some of today's businesses, charities, Her Majesty's Forces, the City Police and Londoners from all walks of life coming together to enjoy a spectacular celebration of the City's tradition and future.

Never before, though, in its history, has the show had a combine harvester negotiating the London streets! Accompanying our Master, Sir Graham Wilkinson, Senior Warden Tom Copas, Junior Warden John Thorpe and banner-carrying Liveryman Lindsay Hargreaves, the Farmcare-owned Class combine harvester was specially

decorated with the Farmers Company Coat of Arms and the announcement: "This combine harvests enough wheat every day to produce 1 million loaves of bread".

The Worshipful Company of Farmers, with accompanying combine and tractor towing the header trailer, joined the Modern Livery Companies - of which 22 took part - at the privileged position of fifth in the Procession.

As well as causing a visual impact, the combine was given a detailed mention in the BBC TV and radio coverage of the event. It will be used to promote the positive contribution farmers make to feeding the world at future events during 2007.

Rosie Carne



A 'magic' visit to the Magic Circle

IT WAS Magic. The Livery visit to the Magic Circle was an excellent idea.

First-class performances by professional and polished artists had us gasping in astonishment at the sleight of hand, rabbits appearing from nowhere, playing cards disappearing as easily as they came... all leaving us with no time or inclination to think for a second about Single Farm Payments.

The Magic Circle is at 12 Stephenson Way, near

Euston Station, London. It's steeped in mystery, with small rooms and narrow stairs, dimmed red lights, colourful posters, photographs and paintings of Merlin with his long beard, of Houdini and his contemporaries, as well as tricks of the trade displayed in full view.

Our evening started with parties of 20-25 people in front of a magician, who showed us his magic skills. Although we were seated quite close, no one

could see how deftly the acts were executed... just the results, with no fudging. Four magicians followed one another while we remained seated, their different acts executed expertly and most entertainingly.

After an interval of wine and vicarage sandwiches, we retired to the theatre where four more conjurers followed each other onto the stage and did totally different acts, some with doves, others with rabbits or top hats filled with handkerchiefs... again, all varied and superb acts, that had us on the edge of our seats with excitement.

The last magician, by luck or misfortune, called me onto the stage, but I slightly disrupted his act with a little banter, and then played with the contents of his 'box of tricks', bringing a few laughs, when he went down to the audience to collect two gentlemen's handkerchiefs. One, incidentally, had lipstick on it, but I kept quiet about that.

Neville Hitcham

Obituaries

It is with sadness and regret we announce the death of the following:

Honorary Liveryman **Ian George Reid** of Wye, Ashford, Kent. Died 6 July 2006. Elected 9 December 1974.

Honorary Liveryman The Venerable Archdeacon **Dr Brian Andrew Campbell Kirk-Duncan** of St Mary-at-Hill, The City of London. Died 4 August 2006. Elected 13 June 1967; Clerk 1975-76.

Liveryman Miss **Merelina Mary Phyllis Macrae** of Hatchery House, Barrow, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. Died 24 August 2006. Clothed 3 December 1990.

Liveryman **Dr James Humphrey Darbyshire** of East Farm, Toller Whleme, Dorset. Died 27 August 2006. Clothed 22 September 1980.

Liveryman **Baron Denis Victor Carter** of Potterne, Devizes, Wiltshire. Died 18 December 2006. Clothed 2 March 2004.

Summer Newsletter

COPY date for the Summer Newsletter is Wednesday 19 June. Will any Liveryman with copy to supply please ensure it is delivered to Editor Don Gomery, along with any accompanying photographs, by that date, either by email to don.gomery@btinternet.com or by post to Isfield Cottage, Church Road, Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 1BN.

Liverymen and Freeman

The following were clothed as Liverymen at the Court meeting on 5 December 2006:

Hugh Murray Charles Coghill

Andrew Dyke

John Greenhalgh Stones

The following were made Freeman by Redemption at the Court meeting on 3 October 2006:

Samuel Peter Bradford
Proposed by J D Courtney
Seconded by D A Gomery

John Thorley OBE
Proposed by P M Bolam
Seconded by R T Halhead

The following were made Freeman by Servitude by the Assent of the Court

William Thomas Kipling

Guy Boyton Taylor

Samuel Anthony Crooks Taylor

Court

The following joined the Court on 3 October following election:

Jeffrey Stuart Beer OBE JP

Nigel Denis Spence Brown

Clerk's Diary to July

Tuesday 20 February
Pancake Race at Guildhall

Tuesday 20 March
Livery Luncheon in Hall

Wednesday 21 March
Visit to Surrey Docks Farm*

Tuesday 23 March
United Guilds Service at St Paul's and Luncheon in Hall

Tuesday 17 April
Agricultural Dinner

Wednesday 25 April
Southern Counties Master's Meet**

Tuesday 15 May
Sons of the Clergy Festival

Monday 4 June – Tuesday 5 June
Master's Outing

Monday 25 June
Election of Sheriffs and Luncheon in Hall

Monday 2 July
Company Lunch at the Royal Show

*The visit to Surrey Docks Farm on Wednesday 21 March will start at 11 am and be followed by lunch in the Farm Café, with wine, costing about £10 per head. Email Tim Calcutt at tim@cfm-uk.co.uk for details on how to get to the farm by road or by river.

**The Southern Counties Master's Meet is for members of the Company and for past-members of the Duchy Rural Leadership and of the Wye Advanced Farm Business Management Courses who are resident in Hampshire, Kent, Surrey and Sussex.