

Lock, Stock & Barrel



The Newsletter of the Worshipful Company of Gunmakers

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The New Master: Richard Purdey

On Tuesday 4 November 2008, Mr Richard Purdey became the three hundred and sixtieth Master of the Worshipful Company of Gunmakers when he took the keys of the Proof House from outgoing master Stewart Urry at the Company's Nomination Dinner. He gave the following speech.

Firstly I want to say how indebted we are to Stewart for all he has done on behalf of the Gunmakers' Company during his year as Master, as well as in the preceding years on the Court in his capacity as Finance Member. The Company is exceptionally fortunate in having someone of Stewart's calibre, with his legal and financial qualifications, and wide business experience, so actively involved in its management.

Stewart has worked unstintingly in his year to improve the quality and efficiency of the administration of the Livery, and of the Proof House, and in moving us toward our next major, and vitally important, goal, accreditation of the Proof House to internationally recognised quality standards. He can be justly proud of these achievements.

It was thanks to our strong financial position that Stewart could enter into the negotiations last year to buy

back Gunmakers' Hall, with its exciting options for the future. Stewart also established a Social Committee, its remit being to develop a more active events programme for Liverymen. Two such events, both well subscribed, were the dinner on board HMS *Victory*, and the lecture by our Honorary Chaplain David Cooper on his experiences in Iraq, a fascinating insight into a world of which we know little. This was also the first time since 1927 that Liverymen had been able to attend a function in their own Hall. Last but by no means least Stewart was able to arrange for some of the finest antique weapons from the late William Keith Neal's collection to go on display in the Proof House. This exhibition was officially opened by Sir Michael Gambon in October.

So to Stewart, and to his wife Patricia, who supported him at so many different events throughout his year, may I propose a sincere vote of thanks from the Court and the Livery for an outstanding year in office. I look forward to Stewart's ongoing support as Deputy Master, and also that of Brigadier Paul Cort and Lord Sharman, following their election as Upper and Renter Wardens.

Next I should like to thank the Court for the great honour they have bestowed upon me by nominating me as Master for this coming year, this being the 371st year

since the Company was granted its Royal Charter by King Charles I on 14th March 1637.

My personal background in gun making, apart from my family's long connection with the trade and with the Gunmakers' Company, goes back to 1960 when my late father, Jock Purdey, Master in 1966, persuaded Richard Beaumont to take me on, a very green and useless 18 year old, as a general trainee at Purdey's. After nearly a year I was fired, quite rightly, not so much for telling the shop manager what I thought of him, but for doing so too loudly and rather too succinctly! As well as the sack, it also produced a monumental paternal bollocking, when I was told I would now have to make my own way in the world – and not in gun making.

As things turned out, after 33 years in the congenial world of cider making, I must have been forgiven, for in 1995 I was invited by the new owners of Purdey's to rejoin the firm as chairman, succeeding Richard Beaumont who fired me all those years before. So started a new chapter in my life where I have been fortunate to make many new friends, both through the gun trade and through the fellowship of this great Livery Company, and of which I now have the honour to be Master. Learning about the great craft and history of English gun making from a more mature perspective has been all the more interesting, and I've certainly enjoyed a lot more shooting than if I'd still been pressing apples.

At a time when we seem only to hear bad news, I am delighted to report that the affairs of the Gunmakers' Company are bucking the gloomy trend.

The Proof House has undergone extensive refurbishment and redecoration, both inside and out, and is looking pristine, in spite of the early efforts of a graffiti vandal who thought he could improve our newly gleaming façade with squirts of purple spray paint.

The Proof House has had another record year in its proofing activities, both for turnover and operating surplus. Managing this increased level of activity has required sterling efforts from our Proof House staff, who, without exception, rose to the occasion magnificently.

The extra revenue is coming not from the proofing of sporting guns and rifles or certifying the deactivation of antique weapons, though that trade has held up well, but from the ongoing demand for a variety of specialist weapons for the armed forces, mainly .50 calibre guns for use in Afghanistan by both special and general forces.



Nomination Dinner, Ironmakers' Hall, 4 November 2008

In the Gunmakers' Company we consider it both an honour and a privilege to be playing this small but vital role in the supply of weaponry to our armed forces, who are reliant on the safety as well as the performance of this equipment for their effectiveness. We recognise the benefit of this work to Proof House finances, and the Court, having agreed to give £5,000 to the charity Combat Stress last year, has approved a similar contribution this year to Help for Heroes, a charity set up to support convalescing service men and women.

I must now bring you up to speed on the Gunmakers' Company Charitable Trust, which, for almost a year, has been providing a bursary for a new trainee at Watson Brothers. He has settled down well and is making excellent progress. Discussions are now under way with a leading Birmingham gunmaker for the Trust to provide a similar bursary for a new trainee there. I think this demonstrates very well the main purpose of our own Charitable Trust, how it is working in practice, and why it needs and deserves the support of our Livery, and of the trade, and dare I say, of people who enjoy and appreciate using the products of fine British gun making craftsmanship.

Whilst on the subject of training, during my forthcoming year as Master I shall try to re-establish a formal process of certification open to all new gun makers when they have completed formal training by their employer. This would involve, as once used to happen, a trainee presenting a piece of his or her work to a committee of suitably qualified members of the Court, and, if approved, being presented with a suitably impressive and appropriately worded Certificate. This would serve not only as an additional goal for the trainee, but would also provide him or her with recognition within the gun trade. I think this is the least we can do for those who spend years learning their craft, who have reached the required standard of proficiency, and who will perpetuate the skills and traditions of British gun making. It would also introduce them to the Company and provide us with an opportunity to encourage new Freemen and Liverymen from the ranks of gunmaking.

During the course of my year I shall also do my utmost to represent the Livery well, and this will include maintaining our policy of raising the Company's profile in the City through getting to know other Companies. I should like to thank our gallant Clerk, Colonel Bill Chesshyre, for all his efforts on behalf of the Gunmakers' Company, and, not least, for the valuable part he plays in opening new doors for us through his extensive contacts and knowledge of other Liveries.

The Gunmakers' Company is almost, but not quite, unique in still carrying out the objects of its original and ancient Royal Charter, and in its own historic buildings. We hold regular lunches and tours of the Proof House for Liverymen and their guests, and these occasions are invariably a real eye opener for anyone visiting for the first time. Do please come along to one if you can – you will be very welcome, as indeed you will be at any of the Social Committee's forthcoming events, which we hope will include an afternoon clay shoot at the West London Shooting Ground and supper afterwards, and a wine tasting at a major London wine merchant.

The Master's Lot

At the end of a successful year as Master, Stewart Urry reports back.

The role of Master of a Livery Company is commonly perceived to be a year-long junket of fine dining and wining. Having arrived at the end of a busy year as Master, I can only report that this is not entirely true.

The Master Gunmaker has two principal roles. One is to promote



Another job for the Master: wearing silly hats

the good reputation of the Company, both within the City and elsewhere; the other is to ensure the furtherance of the objects of the Company's Charter, as they still apply to the Company. In these two parallel roles, the Master Gunmaker is in a fundamentally different position to almost all other Livery Company Masters. Probably only the Goldsmiths amongst the ancient Companies still maintains its traditional craft activity with its assay responsibilities, though a few others – such as the Vintners or Farriers – have professional but not craft connections with their trades.

The Gunmakers' Charter, as supplemented by subsequent Gun Barrel Proof Acts, provides for the Company to continue to be responsible for the proving of small guns. This ongoing activity, coupled with the removal of the Proof House to outside the City walls in the early 17th century, has meant that the Company has not his-

torically been overly involved in City activities. In recent years the Court decided to change this. The Master's brief now includes attending functions at Mansion House, such as the new Lord Mayor's opening address and his annual Banquet, and hosting the annual visit of the Lord Mayor to the Proof House. Also involved is hospitality to and from other Livery Companies, at the rate of two or three functions per week.

For its own hospitality, the Gunmakers has the special advantage of being able to offer lunches for up to a couple of dozen Livery Masters and Clerks in the Court Room at Commercial Road, preceded by a tour of the working Proof House, and there is no other comparable experience in the City for visiting Masters.

In common with all Livery Companies, the Master Gunmaker has to look to his role as the head of the Company with responsibility for organizing it efficiently during his year in office. Six Court meetings have to be effectively run, two major banquets have to be organised, and Livery lunches hosted.

It is in the effective running of the Company's Charter activities that the Master Gunmaker has a particular role to play. The Company's Proof activities are under the control of the Proof House Committee, but that Committee reports to the Court, so the Master is ultimately in a position of oversight. He is also now *ex officio* a member of the Proof House Committee. It is therefore part of the Master's role to maintain a watchful eye on the activities of the Proof House. In the past year this has included review of the redecoration process, involvement in a (specious) legal action, the application of the European Service Directive to the Proof activity, the relationship with the Birmingham Proof House, and so on. Overall, this has amounted to far more time and effort than City entertainment.

That said, among my engagements was an invitation from AgustaWestland, for whom the Company prove small arms used on their helicopters. Thus the photograph above shows the Master familiarising himself with the controls of an Apache helicopter – despite which, on a visit to the helicopter simulator the Master still

Victory Was Ours

In June, a group of Gunmakers visited HMS Victory, Nelson's flagship, harboured in Portsmouth. Derek Stimpson recounts their adventure.

Rain seems to accompany the Gunmakers on their travels. But the deluge at Portsmouth on our visit to HMS *Victory* dampened neither our spirits nor our powder.

In the morning, we visited the Vokes collection at Havant Museum. A small group enjoyed the relatively small but excellent display of largely sporting guns. Cecil Gordon Vokes (1891-1961) was an Engineer and a shooting man. His collection reflects his interest in ignition systems and firearms of technical interest, and many types

are represented: matchlocks, wheel locks, flint and percussion locks, breech-loading, multi-shot and repeating systems, air mechanisms and even some early automatic firearms. Of particular note was a five-lock, super-imposed charge flintlock, which we felt had to be a display piece since it would seem somewhat optimistic for the firer to rely on the charges igniting separately!

Those visiting Havant moved on to link up with the main group, and had a most agreeable lunch at the "Churchillian" which is on the ridge above, and overlooking, Portsmouth. Sadly the vigorously English summer, to which we referred above, prevented the stunning views from being seen, other than very briefly.

After lunch we moved a short distance to Fort Nelson. This is an intact Victorian Royal Commission Fort ordered by Lord Palmerston in 1860. Fort Nelson houses an impressive collection of artillery, all thanks to the efforts of Nick Hall the curator. On display at the main gate is a Crimean War mortar some two or three yards high, which fired a bomb fully three feet in diameter.



We were met and escorted by Nick Hall, who imparted detailed information about the displays and items in the collection to our group.

We watched a short film showing the construction of a replica of one of the two guns found on the *Mary Rose* and which were used in firing tests. The construction method used was to shrink hot metal rings onto the barrel, which was made of long straight planks or staves. Apart from the shape, this is the same process used to manufacture a beer or wine barrel, and is how the term 'gun barrel' was born (how many of us knew that!). The highlight of the visit was the Master firing the "3 o'clock gun" (sadly without a ball). The gun is a Blomefield pattern 12-pounder cast by the Carron Co of Falkirk in 1805. There were many aboard Royal Navy ships and they were also used in forts, or as part of siege artillery.

We then attended a short theatrical presentation by Tim Low, who, dressed as a gunner's mate from Trafalgar, gave us a lively and vivid rendering, based upon an actual eye witness account by a member of a gun crew, later written down for posterity.

During the late afternoon those attending the Victory dinner changed into black tie and re-convened aboard HMS *Victory*, Nelson's flagship, which remains in dry dock for preservation purposes. It is the oldest warship in the world still in commission.

After a champagne reception, dinner was served on the lower gun deck, which carried huge 32-pounder cannon. It is also the deck where Nelson was brought after being shot.

There is a display of clothing, slung hammocks, etc which give a picture of some aspects of life aboard.

Our Honorary Chaplain, Rev. David Cooper, read Nelson's Prayer before the battle as Grace.

May the Great God whom I worship grant to my Country and for the benefit of Europe in general, a great and glorious Victory; and may no misconduct, in any one, tarnish it; and may humanity after Victory be the predominant feature in the British Fleet.

For myself individually, I commit my life to Him who made me and may His blessing light upon my endeavours for serving my Country faithfully.

*To Him I resign myself and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend
Ahmen. Ahmen. Ahmen.*

After a splendid, and indeed remarkable meal, given the logistics, we were addressed by Lt. Commander John Scivier RN, Commanding Officer HMS *Victory*, and then by Dr Colin White, the Director of the Royal Naval Museum.

Dr White first invited the assembled company to sit in silence for a short while and appreciate the historic – and atmospheric – surroundings in which they found themselves. He then asked the guests, most of whom were sitting at mess tables slung between the *Victory's* massive 32-pounders, to imagine themselves as a young seaman gunner on board the ship on the morning of the Battle of Trafalgar, 21 October 1805. He conjured up the bustle of clearing for action and preparing the guns – guns round which the men had lived for

months on end. He then described the long slow approach to battle.

Dr White recounted to us how Nelson, at just the right psychological moment, came down to visit his men, visiting each gun in turn, chatting to the gunners and uplifting them. He then went on to describe the carnage of battle and the hell that was a gun deck of a warship in battle, with the noise, the choking smoke, and the blood and mangled limbs. Finally, he talked of Nelson's death and of how the tradition arose in the Royal Navy of drinking a special toast to his memory every Trafalgar day. However, he pointed out the original wording of the toast, which included all those who died and not just Nelson, had been lost over the passage of time. He explained how, in 2005 (when he was Director Trafalgar 200), he had dared to restore the old words – and had then found that Her Majesty the Queen had done exactly the same when she proposed the toast on board the *Victory* on Trafalgar Night, 2005!

So, with royal sanction, he invited the assembled company to drink (in silence, as is the custom) to: "The Immortal Memory of Lord Nelson and those who fell with him".

After dinner we were invited to view the new marble plaque of Lord Nelson, which is currently being sculpted, and will be positioned where Nelson died. The actual spot, after recent research, has been established to be some yards from where it was previously believed to be.

A memorable day and remarkable evening and dinner for those of the Company who attended.



The Gunmakers' dinner on *Victory's* gun deck

The Keith Neal Collection

In October, Sir Michael Gambon and Diana Keith Neal opened a loan exhibition in the Proof House of antique guns collected by her father, Past Master William Keith Neal. She originally wrote the following for the catalogue of a sale at Bonham's in 2005; we have adapted it for the wonderful portrait it gives of the man and his collection.

“Today, a marvellous long shot at a snipe flying at 50 yards, I was using 7 ½ drams and 3 ozs. of no. 5 and the gun had been loaded for a week. I have been trying to get a snipe in the Mye for years and at last I have succeeded with a flint gun!”

The date was January 1933 and the gun was a Saxon flintlock 4-bore, by Nicolaus Schneider of Zella of circa 1775. The Mye was a favourite meadow that ran beside Midford Mill where my father recorded many an exciting shot at pigeon and rabbit while experimenting with antique sporting guns, but until then a snipe had evaded him. It was rather a hefty weapon for such a small bird, but as he wrote, his hero Colonel Peter Hawker “thought nothing” of going after a wild duck or partridge with “Big Joe” an immense shoulder gun weighing 19 pounds.

Keith Neal shot with a great many of the pieces in his collection. His game books list anything from eighteenth-century French, Italian and Spanish sporting guns,



Diana Keith Neal and Sir Michael Gambon open the Keith Neal display

a Nock seven-barrel flint carbine (at running rabbits), a 1750 Bosler of Darmstadt airgun (at a railway sleeper, very tricky with the valves), to a circa 1590 Elector of Saxony wheel-lock arquebus (killed the rabbit but singed the eyebrows), not to mention many Mantons, Purdeys, Eggs, Twiggs, Griffin and Tows, and of course his beloved flint gun by Probin from Packington Hall, now in the care of his grandson, Erskine.

Although he was passionate about shooting, (‘All my life my first thought on finding a gun has been does it fit me? Can I shoot with it?’), my father was not a man for the big bag day. Although he appreciated and felt privileged to be invited to many great shoots, in truth he preferred to go out on foot, either alone or with one or two friends, observing nature and stalking his prey quietly, preferably with an early gun, and of course with a dog at his side. When I was young I often went with him.

Preparation of the chosen gun was meticulous: first the



The cabinet of Keith Neal guns at the Proof House

gun was stripped and cleaned in the workshop, then a perfectly knapped Cornish flint was selected from a butterfly-collector's cabinet, its “washer” of red morocco snipped from bindery fragments, the shot funnelled from a leather canister, powder poured from an orange-painted tin into a priming flask and the first charge rammed home, followed by much putting of the gun to the shoulder. This all took place to the background music of an over-excited dog.

Bishopstrow, the house where I grew up, displayed guns beautifully. Long rows stood in upright racks stretched along the walls of the big Dining Room, their barrels rising to a point in the centre: silver, gold, damascening and niello sparkling on breeches and muzzles. On the front door steps and in the hall cannon poked noses out between pillars and a tightly graduated line of service pistols hung above. In the Library, pistols in their cases were stuffed between books, or swung from trigger-guards on curtain hooks, or lay massed on tables or stuck in holsters on high-backed armchairs. The gem was an exquisite German sixteenth-century carbine from the armoury of the Grand Duke of Baden (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) which stood proudly in a bookshelf, its ebony stock and silver and gilt arabesque decoration more jewellery than firearm. The weaponry continued upstairs. Most of the guest bedrooms were commandeered as gun rooms; the Arch Room, the Yellow Gun Room, the End Gun Room, but between these was my Day Nursery. From there I could hear my father whistling happily as he took a pistol apart or wiped down a row of guns with a special smelling oil on a duster – nothing was allowed to tarnish.

Testing and target practice took place on the lawn, an old grass tennis court dominated at one end by a gigantic spreading cedar. The vast girth of its trunk provided a secure backdrop for Peter Hawker's black iron painted target, which my father acquired from Hawker's family. In the days before firearms regulations, everything was tried out here, from fragile wheel-lock tschinkes to elephant rifles, (even a duck's foot pistol once) while the dogs scrambled to pick up smouldering wadding.

The final embellishment was the arrival of ‘La Tremenda’ a large Spanish field gun of 1754, made for King Fer-

dinand VI of Spain and brought back by Wellington from the Peninsular campaign. Sold through Sotheby's by Lord Cawdor, she was rolled round the house to sit in front of the bow windows. In 1976 my father decided he could not manage the property any more. Sash windows could no longer be left open to the garden, shooting on the lawn had to be curtailed, and the cannon were no longer safe out of doors. He and my mother moved to Guernsey, and there created an extraordinary private museum.

After my father died in 1990, the collection was dispersed. The first sale, in 1995, very much followed his

wishes that after his death collectors and friends should have "a chance to share his delight in acquisition and ownership". After five years of efforts to keep the rest of the collection together in a museum had failed, there were two more major dispersals, in 2000 and 2001, and a smaller sale of accoutrements in 2002.

My father would have loved to see a museum created. What he would not have approved of was pieces unseen in store. With that in mind, my family decided to loan some of our remaining guns to the Gunmakers' Company for display in the Proof House. Please enjoy them.



A Day in the Life in Baghdad

Reverend David Cooper, Honorary Chaplain of the Gunmakers' Company (and centre in the above photograph), has recently returned from a tour of duty a Director of Civil Affairs for the US Corps of Engineers in Iraq. He describes a day on the job.

Thursday afternoon, Baghdad, October. Still hot, though I had the benefit of looking out onto it from my office, air conditioned. I was briefing my deputy prior to going on a month's round trip to visit the Kurdish region, and then to Basra and the south. We sat across the desk from each other, by the armoured windows.

A shot sounded and the bullet cracked by my window and on into Baghdad. I looked out to see the sentries changing at the unloading bay beneath my window. Across the Freedom Compound, where I lived and worked, the three towers of the Freedom Building shimmered in the heat and the group of builders and engineers around the Finance Ministry strong room seemed unmoved by the shot. They had every reason to be pre-occupied. \$18,000 had just been spent on a secure door to the vault, when it was discovered that the building itself was breeze blocks.

I left them to their problem and noticed the outgoing sentry being marched off to the guardroom. It was a common problem really. The sentries, recently trained Iraqis,

knew that to unload their rifle they needed to remove the magazine, cycle the action and pull the trigger. Unfortunately, they were sometimes unsure of the order in which these actions had to take place.

I returned to my deputy and work. A loud explosion thundered across the Tigris and shook the office and windows. A plume of smoke rose from between the Sheraton Hotel and the Palestine Hotel, which I could see across the river, about three hundred yards away. A car bomb, aimed at these two hotels, used by such members of



David Cooper's office in the Freedom Compound

the press as could now be found in Iraq, had been detonated. That should catch the attention of the journalists, I thought, who, it seemed, had been negligent in keeping the insurgency on the front pages of the world's papers.

I tuned back to my desk as a second explosion shook the building again. The same target. That certainly should wake even the most hardened reporter. I looked at the palm trees across the river, stripped of their branches and now overhung by a dense cloud of black smoke. As I looked an enormous flash lit the scene and a truly impressive explosion followed, that brought down most of the ceiling in my office. The two car bombs had been followed by a cement mixer loaded with high explosives.

Later I discovered that the plan had been to penetrate the barbed wire cordons around the two hotels by means of two suicide car bombs that would clear the wire, after which the suicide cement lorry would drive between the two buildings and destroy both. The plan failed when the lorry axle tangled in the wire and a vigilant machine gunner on the roof of the Palestine opened fire on the cab. I cleared the rubble off my desk to get back to work.

I was employed by the US Corps of Engineers in the post of Director of Civil Affairs and had been in Baghdad only for a week. The reconstruction of the civil infrastructure Iraq, roads, schools, hospitals, judiciary, oil, sewage, water, power, railways, everything needed by a settled modern society was in the hands of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Whilst USACE didn't actually do the construction they were the facilitators of the reconstruction and as such awarded the contracts for the various reconstruction projects across the country. They also provided oversight of the work itself.

The resistance to the presence of US, UK and other forces by a variety of groups, however, made the supervision of the reconstruction a hazardous business, and travel by engineers by road, or indeed, by air, anywhere in Iraq fraught with danger. Roadside bombs were not at all uncommon and the presence of very large stocks of ordinance from Saddam's era dotted around the country, and unguarded, made quantities of high explosives readily available. At its peak one in seven civilian vehicle journeys, made by the multinational force or government, was attacked. It was very difficult for engineers to do their job.

Extraordinary as it might seem, there was no banking system in Iraq either. All transactions were by cash. Vacuum packed "bricks" of \$1,000,000 were not an uncommon sight, not infrequently stored under someone's bed, since there was nowhere else to keep it. For obvious reasons, auditing and accounting were also very difficult.

My specific role, for which I had teams spread across the country, was to resolve any hold up in a reconstruction project when it involved the civil population. Perhaps the most common problem occurred when plant equipment was moved into a village or community without proper consultation beforehand and the daily life of that community was disrupted, as far as they could tell, with no benefit to them. The usual remedy employed by villagers was to drive the contractors away by shooting at them.

I had the asset of funds from a charity in the UK with which I could initiate any humanitarian aid project that was necessary. The danger in visiting any part of the coun-



A Marsh Arab tribal elder outside his traditional meeting house, or mudhif

try by road, other than that already mentioned, of opportunist roadside bombs, was that one could be driving into an ambush and become a hostage.

Safety dictated that I travelled in an armoured Land Cruiser, with never fewer than nine bodyguards, and usually twelve. I never made the same journey using the same route or time twice, and I never made an appointment that was more precise than a twelve hour slot. This could be difficult when meeting with politicians who expected to be able to dictate a time and place, but even appointments with senior ministers and civil servants could not be guaranteed to be kept secret.

Like so much relating to Iraq, it wasn't intended to be like that. It should have been uncomplicated; the reconstruction should have been welcomed by a grateful population, glad to be free from the constraints of Saddam Hussein's violent and oppressive regime. When you remove a totalitarian regime, though, you leave a population that has little or no social or political responsibility.

In the case of Iraq, it also left a society vulnerable to influence and interference from outside agencies that had no wish to see any western presence of any kind in the Middle East; and with no effective internal police force or army to combat it – they had been disbanded after Saddam's overthrow, having been considered an unacceptable part of Saddam's establishment. Mind you, they made a very effective, trained and organised core opposition to the new establishment. And they were very well motivated!

An hour later a shot sounded outside my window. I looked at my watch. At least the sentries were changing on time. And this time the shot went into the unloading bay, not down Haifa Street. Things were improving!

Clerk's Notes

Clerk's Assistant. There have been further changes in my office. Mark Lewczynski sadly concluded a few weeks ago that the job was no longer to his liking and left us. I was fortunate to be able to secure the services of Sue Hobbs for two days per week. She is expert in our software and is well-versed in Livery matters, having worked for the Fishmongers' Company for some years. Ruth Streeter has agreed to work three days per week. I am fortunate now to have a very good team.

Dinners. This year's Midsummer Banquet at Clothworkers' Hall in June was well supported - but at a substantial cost to the Company! 212 attended (the maximum capacity of the Hall) but only 45 of those were Liverymen. The Nomination Dinner at Ironmongers' Hall was better attended than last year with a good number of Liverymen (95). It was a most successful evening with particularly good food and service from our caterers, The Cook & The Butler. Our Providitor was glad you liked the wines he had chosen but was surprised to find none of the Châteauneuf du Pape left for the Court at their Christmas Lunch! Next year's dinners are: Midsummer Banquet at Vintners' Hall on Tuesday 9th June, Nomination Dinner at Stationers' Hall on Tuesday 3rd November. I hope that you will all make every effort to attend both.

Livery Lunches. The programme of Livery Lunches continues and is increasingly popular. They are always enjoyed by those attending, visitors and Liverymen alike. There were few that were not at maximum capacity this year. There is a hard core of loyal supporters but I would still like to see attendance spread more widely across the Livery. The lunches provide a good opportunity for Liverymen and their friends to see what goes on at the Proof House and to learn more about the Company's *raison d'être*. You will all have received the dates of forthcoming lunches for next year and a booking form. Book early to avoid disappointment. Please do not assume you are attending unless you have received confirmation from me.

Admissions to the Company

| | Freemen | Liverymen |
|---------------------|---|---|
| 28 February | | John Francis Rickett James Gerald Tagg Michael Alexander Venables Sophie Victoria Urry John Luigi Resteghini Peter Vagn Jensen |
| 17 April | Wayne Paul Hurt Mark Clouston Wallace | |
| 9 July | Stephen Augustine George Hugh Kerr Radley Roberts John Stephen Martin Rowe John Algernon Martin Rowe | |
| 11 September | Carl Steven Langton | Wayne Paul Hurt |
| 15 October | William Charles Winget | Stephen Augustine George Mark Clouston Wallace |

City of London Briefings. Attendance at City of London Briefings by Gunmakers has improved a little but should be better. I once again urge more of you to try to go on one. As Liverymen and electors, you should make the effort to learn something about your City and how it is governed. The briefings are aimed particularly at newcomers but Liverymen and Freemen of longer standing are encouraged to attend as well. They are interesting, good fun and give you the chance to meet Liverymen and Freemen from other Companies. Wives, husbands and partners are welcome too. Details are in the enclosed leaflet. Applications should be submitted direct, as advised.

Ties. Two types of tie are available for purchase from the Proof House. The new Livery tie in silk features the Company's arms and the London Proof Mark in a vertically repeating pattern in a diamond grid. It is in two colours - blue with a grid of red lines and green with a grid of white lines. It may be worn only by Liverymen of the Company. The sale price is £15. Samples will be on display at forthcoming dinners and livery lunches. Ties for general wear, in polyester, feature the London Proof Mark, also in a repeating pattern, on a background of green or blue, and cost £12. Enquiries to the Clerk's Assistant on 020 7481 2695 Option 4.

Wines. The Company's principal wine merchants, Berry Bros & Rudd, have increased the discount offered

Liverymen 12.5% on unmixed cases of wine. If you wish to take advantage of this discount, you should place an order by telephoning Lance Jefferson direct on 020 7396 9605. The discount is unlikely to be available if you try to buy wines direct from their premises in St James's Street without speaking to Lance first.

Social Committee. The Social Committee is planning three events for 2009. On 29 April, it will hold a clay pigeon shoot for the livery at the West London Shooting Ground. The competition will take place in the afternoon and evening and be shot in pairs - though if you don't have a partner to sign up with, we can match you with one. On 17 May, the social committee will hold a simulated game day at the Great Tew estate, within easy driving distance of London. In the beginning of September, the committee will hold a wine tasting at Berry Brothers on St James's St. In addition, the committee is soliciting interest in possible future events: perhaps a golf competition, a talk similar to that given on Iraq by David Cooper at the Gunmakers' Hall, or having dinner with an army regiment with a talk on the weapons used in Iraq and Afghanistan. If you would be interested in any of the planned or proposed events, please email clerk@gunmakers.org.uk. The Committee would also be interested in other ideas you might have for events that liverymen might enjoy. A flyer will follow in January to provide another chance to reserve, to suggest or to indicate interest.