

Wardens, Liverymen, Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome everyone to our Reunion dinner. It's so great to be back in person after such a long and difficult period of separation. Thank you all so much for supporting this event in such terrific numbers and making the possibility of reuniting such a reality. For many of you here tonight, it may well be the first livery dinner that you have attended. So let me welcome you as guests tonight and I truly hope you enjoy the experience so much that you will come back for more.

The Fruiterers Company is one of 110 livery companies in the City of London, the oldest of which can trace their roots back to the 12th century. Our origins are also from before 1300. We were then called a "Mystery" or "Guild" and to this day the Livery movement is still a bit of a mystery to most people. In fact, in a recent survey, carried out by the Pan-Livery movement, a question was asked as to the impression that livery companies gave to the outside world. Three words emerged, namely Elitist, Secret and Exclusive. I hope, and intend, to dispel these perceptions because they certainly don't apply to the Fruiterers. In fact, tonight you have already witnessed three of our Company main objectives.

Firstly, we promote excellence by supporting and sponsoring, scientific research and education across all sectors of the fruit industry. The prizes I awarded tonight are but a few of the many annual and triennial awards that recognise exceptional people working throughout our industry. We also support horticultural research projects that are focussed on the myriad of issues facing farmers and growers in our country. Each year we sponsor a Nuffield scholar to spend time both here and abroad expanding their knowledge in their specific field of investigation.

Secondly, we are active in the raising of monies to support charities both in the City of London and nationally. On your tables you will have seen the leaflets detailing our latest initiative. This is the “Treebilee Project”, which both supports the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Green Canopy and enables donors to plant fruit orchards in places of their own choice. So far, we have received requests for over 35 orchards and I invite you all here tonight, both liverymen and guests, to join us in this exciting project. We aim to plant at least 1000 trees, raising £5000 for charity and in the process improve the environment. We are indebted to the generosity of PM Will Sibley who has donated 500 trees, and Liveryman Nick Dunn whose company is managing the logistics. Our campaign was launched by the planting of the Fruiterers Orchard at Elvetham Hotel owned by the Matharu family, who are our guests here tonight. Through their enthusiasm a new 100 tree orchard is in the process of being established and we have received a generous donation to our charities. We thank them most sincerely.

As a matter of interest, the whole Pan-Livery movement raises in excess of £70mln per year for charity, and is now the 6th biggest charitable donor in the country. So let us play our small part in this national success story.

Finally, we aim to foster a spirit of friendship and fellowship both within the fruit industry and without. Tonight, you are certainly witnessing this fellowship!

This evening's success would not have been possible without the generosity of our four sponsors. I would like to thank John Shropshire of G's, Mark Culley of The Orchard Fruit Company, Chris and Jan Hutchinson and the team at Spitalfields Market and Michael Velasco of Rodanto for helping me when I coyly asked them for their support for this event. In addition, I would also like to thank Richard Harnden and Berry Gardens for their very generous gift of berries for the Fruiterers Dessert and for Peter Thomas and PM Peter Cooper for arranging the presentation and delivery of this fruit. To all those I have mentioned, a big and wholehearted thank you.

Our Company has had a difficult and challenging year due to Covid, and I for one was certainly not expecting to be here as your Master for a second time. However, with the help of many of my Past Master colleagues, we are now firmly back on an upward path.

We Fruiterers have inherited a Company that has been passed to us by generations of previous liverymen from century to century. Today WE are the custodians of the Worshipful Company of Fruiterers and it is OUR duty and responsibility to pass it on in a strong and healthy state to the next and future generations of Fruiterers. To do this we must work hard to ensure that the Company remains relevant, diverse and creates a strong feeling of belonging. I therefore ask all liverymen here tonight, and those unable to join us, to apply their immense skills and expertise to guarantee our legacy for the next generation of Fruiterers. Join me over the next 15 months to make the Fruiterers an outstanding example of a Livery Company in the City of London.

Thank you so much for coming tonight and I wish you all a continued very enjoyable evening.

Thank you.