
THE 100TH LIVERY COMPANY: HOW IT CAME ABOUT

Read by Alderman Sir Brian Jenkins, G.B.E.
29 June 1998

Introduction: the year of anniversaries

Mr President, Fellow Historians, it is a happy coincidence that you have asked me to speak about IT and the Livery in June 1998. On 21 June 1948, in Manchester University, Professor Tom Kilburn switched on successfully the Baby, the first stored-program computer in the world. Last weekend, as the current President of the British Computer Society, I handed over the rebuild of the Baby and it was switched on precisely 50 years to the minute after the original by - Tom Kilburn.

The coincidences do not end there

- Maurice Wilkes was leading the team which at Cambridge successfully launched EDSAC one month later. EDSAC was the world's first stored-program computer with serious computational ability - but still only maths. Professor Wilkes founded the British Computer Society and was its first President, and I welcomed him as guest of honour at our 40th anniversary dinner in Guildhall last October.
- John Pinkerton, who sadly died in January, designed and built, almost single-handed, the world's first business computer for J. Lyons & Co - hence LEO (Lyons Electronic Office). It started serious processing in 1951 and was the introduction to computers for many of us. John, a brilliant and gentle man, was a founder Court member of the Information Technologists' Company (ITCo) and designed and ran our modern apprenticeship scheme.

These pioneers, many still active, remind us that this vast IT industry which underpins the City barely existed 40 years ago. 50 years ago it was unheard of. What a fascinating **new** candidate for the 700 year **old** livery structure!

IT 82: the catalyst

We must move on 30 years. By 1980, with mainframe computing and remote terminals commonplace, and stand-alone micros growing, concern was spreading that the UK industry, with many successes, was being overshadowed by American and Japanese competition and public perception was low.

Alan Benjamin, Communications Director of ICL, had an idea. He wrote, in October 1980, to a number of senior colleagues in industry and parliament. "Why don't we make 1982 'Computer Year' in Britain, and build a public awareness, educational, technical, commercial, public debate, exhibition and demonstration **explosion** of a year!" It was the start of IT Year 82.

Kenneth Baker, the Minister responsible for IT, welcomed the idea with characteristic enthusiasm. A major programme of initiatives in such sectors as manufacturing, education, health and local government was started. A City Liaison Committee, comprising 17 associations, undertook a major programme for the finance stream. There were over 2,000 events, public recognition of IT rose from 17% to 62% and the year finished with a major conference in the Barbican Centre, including Margaret Thatcher confirming British achievements and developments.

The committee of IT 82 was chaired by Alan Benjamin. A member of the committee, representing the local government sector, was Bernard Harty. The friendship formed between these two was the catalyst for ITCo.

Translating the vision into practice: the road to livery

Following IT 82 Alan and Bernard kept in touch and both gravitated to the City - Bernard on his appointment as Chamberlain and Alan working on the flotation of CAP. They discussed how the growing information needs of the City might be aligned better with developments in the associated technologies. It was important the City stayed ahead, with deregulation and Big Bang impending.

Bernard hosted a lunch in the Chamberlain's Court early in 1985. I recall a lively occasion with friends present. The idea of aiming to form a new Livery

Company was greeted with enthusiasm by those present and swiftly taken up by a number of industry colleagues.

The essence of our thinking was summed up in the letter of support we received from the Parliamentary Information Technology Committee. The Chairman, Sir Ian Lloyd, wrote "I greatly welcome these discussions as such a move would give recognition to the importance of the City of London in Britain's Information Technology interests".

Between 1985 and 1987, under Barney Gibbens' leadership, we worked hard to prepare for City company status. 100 founder members were individually invited to join from among the leaders of the industry. A suitable charitable trust was funded, primarily by 20 benefactor companies. Charitable and community work developed in various ways - direct giving, fund raising events, brokering corporate gifts (usually products) and, increasingly, individual members' time and expertise. A major research project was arranged with the City University Business School. Recognising also our close association with our professional body, the British Computer Society, the Court of Aldermen granted City company status without livery in June 1987.

Between 1987 and 1992 the tempo quickened. Under the Mastership of Sir Robert Reid, Alan Rousell and Robin Laidlaw the membership grew each year to over 300. (Now the membership stands at 563 - 255 liverymen and 306 freemen. 58 are women. 32% are under 50. There are 5 women on the Court. At the first Court and partners dinner in 1988 there were more women present than men.) The charitable, community and education work grew and diversified to the point where some rationalisation and structure were needed - this resulted in the panels initiative and a modern apprenticeship scheme, designed and approved for introduction when livery was granted - more on these two later. Business lunches and technical visits were introduced and affiliations developed with King's School, Grantham, and the Royal Corps of Signals. *Monitor*, our six monthly newsletter, was launched in June 1987. It attracted considerable media interest and we have had a PR representative, recently advised professionally, ever since.

The 100th Livery Company

This progress, and consultation with the Court of Aldermen, gave us confidence that an application for livery in 1992 would be sympathetically received. Accordingly we submitted our humble petition in October 1991, emphasising 'The very special circumstances of information technology in the City' and

‘Bearing in mind the speed of development of IT around the world, your petitioners believe that it would be strongly in the interests of the City and those who participate in its activities that their petition be presented earlier rather than later’. The Court of Aldermen, with your reader having the honour to preside as Lord Mayor, approved the petition on 7 January 1992.

The Court met the following day under the Master, Alan Benjamin, and the Senior Warden, Steve Shirley, and, after congratulations, settled down to business. The Master set up a long range planning group. The Finance Committee was asked to address the cost of running the company for one and three years. The Court agreed that Toshio Hiraguri, Chairman of Fujitsu, should be elected an honorary liveryman - the first Japanese to be so honoured by a livery company.

The news of livery was widely reported. *The Times* carried it on page 2 alongside British Steel’s decision to close Ravenscraig, page 1 being occupied by President Bush collapsing at a banquet in Tokyo. They commented “As luck would have it, the Company ranks No. 100, a happy chance for those accustomed to think in binary computer language, which recognises only 0’s and 1’s”. Little did they know we had planned it several years before, recognising ourselves the irony of the connection.

The Standard carried the headline “Liverymen score a century after 700 years” alongside freeman Sir Anthony Cleaver’s announcement of IBM’s first loss ever. The City Recorder settled for the most upbeat headline “Ton-up as hi-tech gets a new status. Computer-ace Lord Mayor’s joy over boost to City links”.

The Company arranged a celebration banquet in Guildhall attended by 600 liverymen, freemen and guests. Confirming our success in obtaining references, the menu contained a letter from the Prime Minister “I am pleased to offer my congratulations on the occasion of your recognition as a livery company..... (this) recognises the immensely important role that IT plays in industry and commerce and IT’s central role in the finance and banking activities of the City of London”. The menu also contained an earlier letter from Margaret Thatcher “I recognise the value of a new Livery Company to look after the interests of Information Technology..... you combine the traditions of the past with the innovation and enterprise of today”.

The final ceremony of this momentous year was the presentation of letters patent on 28 May 1992. It was no coincidence that this took place in Mercers’ Hall. It had been an enormous encouragement to us that, right from the beginning, the Mercers as No. 1 had felt a special relationship with ITCo No.

100 - the **old** and the **new** at work again, and their Master, Adrian Watney, was much involved in developing the use of computers in the legal profession.

Realising the potential: the work of ITCo

I'm not convinced that the title 'How it came about' properly extends to the period after grant of livery. But as our work is a continuum it may be of interest to report progress on three of ITCo's major initiatives - promotion of IT in the City, the apprenticeship scheme and the Panels.

- **Promotion of IT in the City - The PORT initiative**

In the early 1990's, with the prospect of increasing competition with the single market and EMU, the City recognised the need to understand better its strengths and weaknesses - to promote the former and correct the latter. ITCo decided, using its membership, to survey the state of IT in the City across the main sectors such as banking, insurance and fund management. The resulting report "Focus on IT in the City" launched at the Bank of England to 150 senior businessmen in June 1995 showed that individual sectors compared well with competitors. But the report highlighted the disparate and fragmented nature of the City's overall information infrastructure. The Report concluded there was a strong case for a new approach, and the Company was encouraged to see if any industry consensus could be created to find a solution.

Andersen Consulting agreed to work with us on a pro-bono basis and in November 1996 we published our proposals under the title of "the PORT" setting out a technical solution, how it might be achieved and organised and recommending a feasibility study. We discussed the hypothesis with senior executives from some 50 leading City businesses, service providers, telcos, markets, regulators and associations. At a meeting at the Bank of England in May 1997 it was agreed to move forward to scoping and feasibility with 25 sponsoring organisations.

The PORT vision is simple

- To reduce the number of proprietary networks

- To offer a common platform - the PORT

- To enable vigorous competition on content and service rather than hardware

The technology exists, the technical solution is feasible. All that is needed is sufficient industry consensus to build the PORT and to agree an entity to set the standards and maintain the PORT. If we can achieve this, we go a long way to creating the market place of the 21st century. That is why we consider it important the entity is London based.

Progress has been excellent with some 50 people contributing to the subsequent development led by Tricia Drakes, our current Senior Warden. The scoping group reached a consensus on how the PORT might be structured and implemented, and recommended three pilot applications. Their proposals were approved at a sponsor's meeting last September in the Stock Exchange. Since then the global investment banking community are pursuing their pilot project in a way that may well deliver the PORT for general application.

The first stage of ITCo's main work is now done and our prime objective of offering an infrastructure solution achieved. Probably only an organisation such as ours could have assembled an international group and facilitated the pan-industry consensus and solution that has emerged. Now it is up to industry with its resource and influence to realise the PORT in practice. We still have much to contribute - encouraging the process, facilitating where helpful and, over all, promoting the vision of the market place of the 21st century - global, increasingly virtual, but with its standards and quality set and managed in London.

- **Apprenticeship scheme**

We recognised the significance of apprenticeship early on. Not only is there an almost limitless need for skilled people in IT, the newness of the industry creates difficulty in fitting IT people into corporate structures and providing good career development for young people. Once again the framework of the **old** seemed to fit the needs of the **new**.

So in 1992 we introduced a modest scheme to resurrect apprenticeship. We wanted to open entry to those school-leavers, aged 16 to 18, who traditionally formed the backbone of programming effort.

Apprentices are provided with a route to a nationally recognised vocational qualification combined with training and experience under careful monitoring by both the employer and ITCo. Entrants are carefully chosen and we seek enthusiasm and a will to make progress.

We take boys and girls. Indeed, one senior engineer at ICL came home one day and said to his daughter of 16 who was leaving school, "What a pity, there's an apprenticeship going at the Company - if you were only a boy!". She shocked him by applying, winning the job and now is in her third year, doing well and has just been invited to Buckingham Palace for the annual reception given by the Queen for young achievers.

We are very proud of our apprentices and so are their families. In the year 2000 we are organising a conference of all apprentices past and present, to evaluate the scheme, report on it and evaluate new ideas - all to be done by the apprentices themselves and presented to the Company.

As a voluntary body we can only manage modest numbers. We enrol 5 new apprentices each year which gives 20 in the system at any time. But our scheme illustrates once again the facilitating nature of our work. The government has now introduced a major scheme, which has drawn heavily on our experience and ideas.

Recognising our pioneer role, we are looking ahead at possible development. We are examining the feasibility of a journeyman scheme, whereby newly qualified IT professionals in their twenties could be mentored over, say, three years by a journey master, and be introduced to the City and the livery.

We expect within 2 years to be testing the development of tele-apprenticeship where learning assessment will be internet-based and where on-line interactive mentors will work with apprentices for many aspects of their work. This would open opportunities for international relationships reflecting industry developments.

Further ahead, we will keep under review the American experiments in 2+2+2, where the last 2 years at school, the next 2 at college and the first 2 years of adult learning follow a coherent vocational line to produce engineers. This might fit with our apprentice and journeyman schemes, preceded by liaison with schools, with whom so many livery companies maintain strong relations.

- **The Panels**

Looking back, one of our best ideas was the concept of Panels. The original thinking came from Ric Foot. How to encourage the direct involvement of our fast growing membership in our charitable activities? His proposals were embraced by the Court in 1991. Freemen were invited to volunteer and within months 17 panels were in existence ranging from IT industry development,

education, training and employment to community improvement, international aid and animals.

Inevitably, depending on leadership and relevance, the enthusiasm and support for individual panels has ebbed and flowed. Some have ceased, new ones have formed, but overall the picture is of an extraordinary patchwork of useful, voluntary effort by busy people. Looking back in 1996, Ric Foot estimated “In a few short years, they have raised more than half a million pounds in cash and kind, and have been of immense help to many people”.

Recent examples include:-

The Arts Panel, who assisted the Royal College of Music to produce a prototype Virtual Tour of some of its internationally renowned collection of 600 instruments. The aim was to discover ways in which digital technology could add to existing methods of supplying information. Much time went into planning the structure and into creating and assembling material - text, photographs, graphics and sound recordings. The prototype was successfully exhibited at the “Musical Instruments in the Electronic Age” conference at the Smithsonian in Washington and is now installed at the Royal College of Music.

The Recreation and Leisure Panel, who, through the use of PC’s are aiming to network long stay children in hospitals with each other, their parents and schools. Initial installations have been successfully completed at the Royal Brompton Hospital, and a model devised for use in other hospitals including Bart’s.

The Religious and Spiritual Development Panel, who have organised two colloquia on ethical and spiritual implications of the new IT and Telecoms environment. The meetings were hosted and addressed by the Bishop of London, who referred to the City as a knowledge centre based on IT in his sermon at this year’s United Guilds Service. Details of the proceedings are on the Colloquium Website. The Panel is holding an IT retreat at Alton Abbey in August.

The Medicine & Health Panel, who, with government and NHS support, are encouraging members of the company to make themselves available as directors of NHS Trusts. The need for IT knowledge and experience is recognised as most important on Trust Boards. The Panel is preparing Guidelines for Trust Boards and Health Authorities on the use of IT, with the active support of the NHS, NAO and Audit Commission.

Conclusion

I regret I have left no time to talk of

- The important work undertaken by Keith Arnold as Master in working with, in particular, the Bank of England, and the Stock Exchange on the financing of, and investment in, smaller IT companies.
- Developments towards the Virtual Hall under Professor Richard Susskind's leadership
- Steve Shirley's work in consolidating the Company after its huge initial growth - her important contribution continues to this day
- Our policy of honorary liverymen from overseas, including Bill Gates
- Peter Monson's important initiative on teleworking including establishing the company as the National Teleworking Advisory Council.
- The crucial internal issues including direct debit and the wearing of sashes. We read in *Monitor* for February 1994 from our Treasurer, Mike Warburg, "Invoices are enclosed for those of you who continue to refuse to assist the company by paying by direct debit". And in *Monitor* for March 1997 Gill Davies, our lady clerk's, admonition "Sashes should be worn from left shoulder to right hip - gentlemen, underneath your jackets - never around the neck".

Last year we realised the need to review our strategy and working methods as numbers approached 600. Armed with briefing material, the Court took an away-day under the leadership of the current Master, David Mann, at his old college, Jesus, Cambridge. Many useful ideas to develop the company and its work into the 21st century emerged, including.....

But **no**, that's for another day.

It may be safer to conclude as did our Founder Master, Barney Gibbens, in Cambridge, all those years ago in 1966, chairing a conference we spoke at on systems analysis:

“We don’t know where we’re going - but we’re going there fast”.

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