

# Builders Merchant



Worshipful Company  
of Builders Merchants

NEWSLETTER OF THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF BUILDERS MERCHANTS

OCTOBER 2011 - ISSUE 14

## Looking forward to 2012



Master Gary Hopkins

The last 12 months have flashed by, but I believe we have continued to make a success in raising the Company's profile in the City and the industry.

It has been a good year to build on connections in the City. Both the City and Construction have found it necessary to make clear the significant net value each adds to the economy and general well being of the country.

Our message is perhaps the more difficult to get over. Despite the knee-jerk banker bashing in the media, pretty well everyone acknowledges the importance of banks and financial services. It is hard to imagine modern life without them. But in

all the scrambling to rebalance the economy after the financial shocks of the last three years it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Government has forgotten the pivotal role Construction plays in our lives and it has been sidelined in their short to medium term plans. Building is a strong motor and net contributor to the economy, and that message needs telling and retelling.

To have been Master in this 50th anniversary year has been a great privilege. It has been a unique and interesting year, meeting new people, experiencing new opportunities and getting to see people and places I would not otherwise have seen. It has been educational, involving me in events and listening to speeches from key people, and I have gained a better understanding of what is going on in the wider world.

One of my key aims was to raise the profile of the Company and what it represents for the builders' merchants industry. I believe Graham Ballinger, my successor, will continue to build on this.

Training and education are key Company objectives. So building relations with the Builders Merchants Federation and the Institute of Builders Merchants and giving more support – not just money - to training and education for the industry has been and is an area where we should have a greater focus and involvement. Charitable donations are also one of the Company's key objectives, and raising funds for a number of charities will remain a top priority.

I would also like the Company to become more of a network platform for the industry so that members can really see the benefits of being part of it. I would like to see our members become more active and proud to be Liverymen and Freemen. Perhaps the Company could arrange a number of networking luncheons for members and guests – events that members will find useful from a personal and business view and put them in their diary?

The Company is very focused around the Master, which is important, but I believe it also needs to be more involved around its members, so they can see the tangible benefits of being part of our Livery.

Overall, I hope the Company will continue to move forward with the times and reflect the industry of today.

The next Master, Graham Ballinger, will be installed on 27th October and will have a big year in 2012. It is the year of the Olympics, the Royal Jubilee, and for the Company, with good fortune, to succeed in obtaining its Royal Charter. I leave the Company in good hands.

Gary Hopkins  
Master

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### Special Thanks

Welcome to the second edition of The Builders Merchant, packed with news on recent events, interviews and other interesting articles. A thank you to all those who took part – your time and contribution is appreciated. I would also like to give a special thanks to Mike Shannon, editor of the previous newsletter, for his hard work and dedication over the years in producing The Messenger, and apologise for not acknowledging his efforts in the first issue of The Builders Merchant.

Mike Rigby, Editor



Graham Ballinger

# Election of the Sheriff

Liverymen were summoned to appear at the Guildhall, London, on Friday 24th June to elect two new Sheriffs, and more than twenty WCoBM members turned up to vote in this historic role. It was historic because it is a long standing City tradition that Liverymen are required to vote in new Sheriffs.

More interestingly it was historic because it was the first time there was a contested election with four candidates competing for two positions of Sheriff. The four were Alderman Alan Yarrow, Nicholas Bonham (of the Fine Art Auctioneers), Wendy Mead CC, and Andrew Whitton, who spoke at one of our meetings during his campaign. Officials for each of the four candidates handed out leaflets and button holed liverymen as they walked in to take their seats in the Old Library and the Livery Hall.



Andy Williamson arrives early to vote.



City officials gather for the Election.

There was quite a buzz as each candidate appealed to the electorate and votes for each were taken by show of hands with tellers counting hands. There was even more of a buzz when the count revealed a very close result.

This triggered a recount. New rules had to be made up to cope with this unexpected outcome. In a surprisingly slick exercise of marketing Nicholas Bonham had clearly anticipated this outcome and his followers handed out leaflets at the exit for the rerun.

In theory an unresolved election should have been a disappointment but you wouldn't have known it by the chatter as we made our way out. The eighteen Worshipful Company of Builders Merchants (WCoBM) liverymen who rewarded their hard work with a fine lunch at Painters Hall afterwards certainly showed no disappointment in the outcome!

Polling which eventually took place at the Great Hall Guildhall on 8th July produced a clear result for the two new Sheriffs, Alan Yarrow and Wendy Mead.



Master Gary Hopkins (R) enjoying champagne before dinner with Liveryman Andy Williamson of IKO (centre).  
Left - the Livery's Beadle Mr A Parker.

## Builders' Merchants in the Tower

The WCoBM held its Annual Divine Service on Monday 18th April 2011. The Service took place at the Tower of London in the historic Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula. The Reverend Roger Hall, Chaplain of the Chapel Royal and Honorary Chaplain to the Company, conducted the Service. The Chapel's Choir, one of the country's best small choirs, raised the roof with their outstanding voices.

The Master Gary Hopkins, Past Masters, Wardens, Members, the Clerk and guests attended the Service, followed by a very lively supper and conversation at Trinity House nearby, one of the best City buildings.

The Annual Divine Service is one of the key events in the Company's calendar.

Members attend the Election Court General meeting prior to the service for elections of the Master, Wardens and other Officers for the year ensuing and for an update on the Company's activities, including our petition for a Royal Charter. We hope this will be granted in 2012.

Members unable to attend in April are able to catch up at the Installation Court General on 27th October followed by Dinner with guests at Fishmongers' Hall, London Bridge.

# Interview with Paul Bence

## Managing Director of Bence Builders Merchants

**Q. Fairly or not, Builders' Merchants have acquired a reputation for being conservative and resistant to change. How do you see them coping with the threats and opportunities of the Green Deal?**

A. In most quarters I believe this reputation or stereotype to be fair.

However, the Green Deal represents an opportunity for Merchants to expand their business in many ways. Firstly, a new market is born, whereby merchants can develop a new brand of consumers who are looking to eco-refurbish their properties. With careful planning, merchants can add value to their companies by preparing business models to cater for this future focus in the industry. The eco/sustainable credentials of the Green Deal will also provide a great marketing backbone with consumers and must not be overlooked.

The threats will come from energy companies and large retail chains that have large advertising pockets and direct access to the consumer. However at a local level, merchants will be able to provide a greater flexibility in service levels and have the technical knowledge and close supplier network to hand.

**Q. The City, IT and the Internet are often portrayed as places where able young managers can make their name and build great businesses. In contrast the average age of senior managers in the Builders' Merchant industry seems very high, and for years the best opportunity for independent merchants appeared to be to sell out to one of the nationals. Have you come in to the industry at the wrong time?**

A. Every industry is different but I agree that the average age of senior managers and directors in the Builders' Merchant industry is relatively high. However I disagree that I entered at the wrong time! I have worked in the industry since 2001 with Aggregate Industries as one of a few graduate management trainees. I quickly learnt that there were a great number of people willing to help or mentor me through my early days, and it was a great industry to be in. People work very hard, but there is also a great social side, which is not apparent in other industries.

Ten years on I find myself as MD in the family business in the worst recession to hit the UK! However as a company we have both survived, and since, grown our business over the past few years. I believe there are many areas where I can develop both personally and to the company's future success.



Paul Bence standing with generations!

**Q. Many people in the industry might be surprised to know you are a Liveryman. What relevance has the Company to you and your business?**

A. I see it as an honour that I entered the WCoBM at such a young age. The livery halls in the City are a joy to behold. It also provides me with a great network of friends and contacts in the industry, and the association with a livery company which does sterling work for charity.

**Q. As the 6th generation Bence how does it feel to run the business, and do you think the founder would be surprised at how the business has evolved?**

A. I am sure the founder would be very surprised at seeing the offloading of materials, as mechanical crane lifting equipment is a little different to the traditional methods of horse and cart back in 1854!

With such a family history, I certainly feel privileged to run the company into the 21st century. My involvement as a director over the past seven years has taught me to look after the staff first and foremost. They are the guys who effectively run the business. I certainly like to get my hands dirty in the day-to-day running of the business and get both positive and negative feedback from staff and clientele. As an independent regional business it is absolutely key that we are both proactive and reactive to change.

**Q. What do you see are the greatest threats to Builders' Merchants in the next 10 years?**

A. The 'sheds' are looking to be more of a menace over the coming years as they look to enter the trade building material market, especially the likes of Wickes who is now of course backed by Travis Perkins. There is also the constant threat of suppliers going direct to larger clients on products.

**Q. And the biggest opportunities?**

A. Opportunities include the Green Deal and subsequent new market entry, and diversification into new sectors as in supply and fit kitchens, bathrooms and bedrooms where a higher level of service and a personal touch is required.

**I see it as an honour that I entered the WCoBM at such a young age.**

**The livery halls in the City are a joy to behold.**

# Happy days!

With some of the marksmen from the Company's previous winning teams unavailable, the Master selected an eager but untested team to represent the Company at the Shooting event in Canterbury on 25th June. The Worshipful Company of Paviers and the Knightly Order Valiant of St. George were also present. **The team:**

<b>Gary Hopkins</b>	<b>Master</b>	<b>On his day capable of anything. But which day?</b>
<b>Chris Nunn</b>	<b>Liveryman</b>	<b>All round good egg. If he can see the target it will be a bonus.</b>
<b>Mike Rigby</b>	<b>Liveryman</b>	<b>Last shot in the Boer War where he maimed a goat.</b>
<b>David Moore</b>	<b>Liveryman</b>	<b>Unknown quantity (that's usually beer consumed).</b>
<b>Joe Sowton</b>	<b>Liveryman</b>	<b>Expected to be our one dead-eyed dick, so no pressure.</b>
<b>Adrian Hopkins</b>	<b>Son of Master</b>	<b>Better do well or will be walking back to Lincolnshire.</b>
<b>Robert Hopkins</b>	<b>Son of Master</b>	<b>Better do well or will be walking back to Lincolnshire.</b>
<b>Tom Sowton</b>	<b>Son of Joe</b>	<b>Hoping that having just got back from University will be sober enough to hold a rifle.</b>
<b>Gill Moore</b>	<b>Court Assistant</b>	<b>Persuaded (successfully) to shoot (successfully) in the Ladies Team.</b>

The team assembled at the Barracks in Canterbury at 7.15am for tea and instructions from our hosts the 3rd Battalion, The Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment and we were driven to Hythe Range for a Skill at Arms Meeting. There on a slightly chilly misty grey morning we were given weapons handling training. Rifles – particularly the telescopic sights - had changed since the Boer War! The two main weapons we used were the SA80 A2 Rifle, which is the standard weapon used in the British Army, and the Light Support Weapon (LSW), which is used at section (8 men) level to provide accurate fire.

We gravitated from lying prone and shooting to achieve the closest groupings, at 100, 200 and 300 metres, to a falling man (the enemy!) shoot where the silhouetted soldier popped up for 5 seconds at 100, 200 and 300 metres and disappeared if you didn't shoot him down. At each step we were coached by patient experts to improve our aim, and encouraged by Regimental Sergeant Major Tony Benton asking "Happy Days?" to confirm we had understood his instructions and "Happy Days!" when we confirmed we had.

By early afternoon the grey skies had cleared and the sun beat down with a surprising intensity.

Finally, for the very fit (i.e. excluding those who'd shot goats with a Lee Enfield in the Boer War), there was a competition which involved racing around the block, then shooting to knock all the targets down.



**Ready for action!**



**(L to R) Tom Sowton, Adrian Hopkins, The Master Gary Hopkins, Chris Nunn, Robert Hopkins, David Moore, Joe Sowton.**

Although we didn't win the team prize, there were some respectable scores and no one walked home to Lincolnshire! As a member of The Wives Team, Court Assistant Gill Moore received a team medal for endeavour. Tom Sowton, our dark horse, won the award for the highest individual score of the day. See you next year Tom!

A stunning display of drumming by four bandsmen in red coats and white helmets in the hot sun back at the barracks was followed by prizes for the winners. The Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Geoff Minton MBE thanked us for the Livery Company's ongoing support and the Master responded. A fine curry concluded a memorable day. Happy Days!

# A bit of City magic



(L-R) Senior Warden Graham Ballinger, Master Gary Hopkins and Clerk Tim Statham

The Worshipful Company of Builders Merchants (WCoBM) was among the many Livery Companies to attend the 69th Service of the United Guilds of the City of London. The Service took place on the 1st April at St Paul's Cathedral with The Very Reverend John Hall, Dean of Westminster giving the Sermon. Over 1,000 people representing the 108 City Livery Companies were present. Masters and Wardens were seen wearing their robes. Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal and Vice-Admiral Timothy Laurence attended, representing their Companies as Masters – the Butchers' Company and the Company of Coachmakers & Coach Harness Makers.

WCoBM Master Gary Hopkins, Senior Warden Graham Ballinger and The Clerk Tim Statham walked in their robes from the Company's office in College Hill to attend the Service. Others who attended included Past Masters and Liverymen of the WCoBM. The Master was privileged this year to be part of the procession, along with 23 other Masters, who walked down the aisle preceded by a fanfare of trumpeters.

Master Gary Hopkins explains the history: "The United Guilds Service at St Paul's Cathedral dates back to 1943 and is held for Livery Companies and Guilds of the City of London. The idea behind the service was to help lift the spirit of the City following the Blitz in the Second World War. Since then, it has become an annual event and remains one of the few occasions in the calendar at which Livery Companies and Guilds of the City can gather together as a whole."



Each year the Master and Wardens are allocated a sum to donate to the charity of their choice. This year, Senior Warden Graham Ballinger chose Myton Hospice in Warwick. Graham presented a cheque for £500 on behalf of the Company to Nigel Adams, a senior fundraiser for the Hospice.

## WCoBM sponsors Practical Skills Event for merchants

Earlier this year the Worshipful Company of Builders Merchants sponsored the Institute of Builders Merchant's second 'Practical Building Skills Event'.

The Company donated £500 to the event, which took place at The Johnson Building at Derby College.

Teams from Travis Perkins, Wickes, Keyline, MKM, Buildbase, Ridgeons, EH Smith and J.A. Stephens took part. The challenge for each team was:

- Lay bricks including features
- Fix plasterboard & apply plaster
- Bend & install copper pipes, taps and radiator
- Painting & decorating using innovative techniques within a set timescale.



A member of one of the teams practicing skills

Attendees confirmed that they had an excellent day, practicing some skills not previous experienced as well as learning a lot about the products they sell.

The Master presented prizes to the winning team Ridgeons and runners up MKM.



The Master presenting a cheque to Rebecca Mason, Past President of the Institute of Builders Merchants



Chris Hayward

## Editor Mike Rigby interviews...

# Chris Hayward

## Managing Director of NMBS

### Q. When and how did you get into the industry?

A. I was recruited as an accounts trainee by NMBS in 1977.

### Q. How long have you been at the helm of the NMBS?

A. I have been Managing Director of NMBS since 2001 and was previously Marketing Director for the organisation.

### Q. What do you see as the three biggest opportunities for NMBS members in the next three years?

A. There will clearly be opportunities for independents in respect of the Green Deal which is being implemented in 2012 and NMBS is currently preparing a strategy to help members engage and offer a real alternative to the large Energy companies who are positioning themselves to dominate the market.

The other main opportunities for sales growth will come from merchants looking to expand their range of products, to enable them to sell more to existing customers or indeed get new ones and wherever possible add new branches.

Finally selling on the internet will become more widely accepted and those merchants who offer an on-line account and ordering facility for their customers will definitely reap the rewards.

**There will clearly be opportunities for independents in respect of the Green Deal which is being implemented in 2012...**

### Q. And the three biggest threats?

A. The three biggest threats are most likely to be the flipside of the main opportunities, in respect that those who do not engage with the Green Deal or seek to sell more proactively to their customers will probably suffer as a consequence.

### Q. What is the single most important change you'd like to see in the industry?

A. Reduced VAT on Home Improvements.

### Q. The industry has seen enormous concentration in the last 10 years and a big (~30%) fall in volume in the last three years. How is that affecting NMBS?

A. Prior to the recession over three independents a week were being bought by the Nationals and now such purchasers are more strategic and far less prevalent, so our membership is showing real growth.

Our independent merchant members have and are still experiencing the effects of the recession, although they have been extremely resilient during the downturn and many are now back in profit and looking to grow sales.

Most independents supply the RMI market which has performed better than new build and therefore this has helped them weather the storm, although there has been a lot of pressure on margins and labour costs. We are still to see the full impact of public sector cuts, however independents in general can respond better to market changes by understanding the needs of their local customers and responding accordingly.

### Q. The NMBS has shown us a glimpse of a different face in 2011 with your 'I love Independents' marketing campaign. What prompted that new approach and how is the campaign going?

A. The Campaign is designed to increase awareness of independents to the end user and spell out the advantages of dealing with owner/managed businesses and how they provide good service and broad stocking ranges at competitive prices.

We have had good take up both from our supplier and merchant members and we have an active Twitter following from jobbing builders etc

The scheme continues to grow and we will be soon introducing special offers aimed at the end user to pull more sales via our Members.

**Q. Can we expect to see more of that visual impact and fresh thinking from NMBS?**

A. NMBS has always been at the forefront of new technology and we are lucky to have a very good IT team who are adding products and services such as global text messaging and mobile phone Apps all the time.

do not suffer from any downturn in the market and tightening of credit conditions.

**Q. Building regulations are due to be tightened again in 2013 and achieve zero carbon in 2016. How will the NMBS of 2016 differ from the NMBS of today?**

A. The NMBS Supplier and product portfolio will expand and change to ensure that our members have access to the right products and information that they can give to their customers so that they can comply with the building regulations and carbon targets.

**Q. When were you admitted to the WCoBM?**

A. On the 10th June 2003.

**Q. The latest CPA forecasts for construction suggest that builders' merchants are not in for an easy time. As a long term active member of the WCoBM at the core of the industry how do you envisage the Company contributing to the healthy vibrant industry we all want to see in five years?**

A. The WCoBM provides charitable support for many people and organisations and promotes builders' merchants and their suppliers as important contributors to our society, who take their responsibilities seriously. It is important that we promote ourselves to the City and that our endeavours are talked about and commented on by those with the power to influence what happens in UK Plc.

Going forward it would be good to see more new members from the next generation who can start helping us now shape a stronger future for both Merchants and Suppliers.

**Q. What do we have to do to ensure we achieve that?**

A. We must encourage existing members to promote the benefits of joining the WCoBM to a wider audience and perhaps lower our own age expectations on who we should be inviting to join. I was personally very honoured to be invited to join the company and being given the Freedom of the City of London was a very proud moment and felt like a genuine recognition that I was considered to be making a difference to our industry and its aims for the future.

**The WCoBM provides charitable support for many people and organisations and promotes Builders' Merchants and their Suppliers as important contributors to our society, who take their responsibilities seriously.**

**NMBS has always been at the forefront of new Technology and we are lucky to have a very good IT team who are adding products and services such as global text messaging and mobile phone Apps all the time.**

Marketing and Events is again another major strength of the organisation and you can expect to see many more new sales and marketing initiatives in the future.

**Q. What are the biggest opportunities for NMBS in the next three years?**

A. NMBS will continue to offer the very best invoice clearing support to all the major independent buying groups such as Cemco, CBA, NBG, H&B and Lima and we hope that this continues to increase in the future.

We do see real opportunities in dovetailing our activities in with the development strategies of the independent buying groups and for engaging more with our stand alone independents.

The Green Deal offers a unique opportunity to stimulate the market for those products which can improve energy efficiency and we aim to be at the forefront of any such initiatives.

**Q. And the biggest threats?**

A. Any double dip and a new recession is obviously a concern, although that is very much outside of our control. However NMBS has set up its own Credit Insurance Captive to ensure that we remain in control of our credit limits and our members

# The Worshipful Company celebrates



The Master and his wife Beverly.

**The Worshipful Company of Builders Merchants recently celebrated its 50th Anniversary at the Guildhall in London. Established in 1961, the Livery Company enjoyed a convivial evening in the spectacular Old Library at Guildhall on 13th May.**

Current Master, Gary Hopkins, Past Masters, Wardens, Liverymen, Freemen and Guests attended to commemorate the half centenary. A champagne reception, with music by The Salon Orchestra of the Central Band of the Royal Air Force, superb company, a delicious three course meal and great entertainment from the Singing Waiters made it a lively and memorable evening. The company's treasures, Letter Patent and the impressive Master's Chair were put on show for the occasion.



The Master, Members and Guests enjoying the celebrations.



A guest enjoying the entertainment.



Beverly Hopkins taking the loving cup with the then future Lord Mayor David Wootton.



Master Gary greeting

# Company of Builders Merchants 50 years

The Anniversary was supported by sponsors Catnic, H+H Celcon, Keystone Lintels and Lafarge Cement. The guest speaker was His Honour Judge Brian Barker Q.C. (The Common Serjeant of London). Other guests included Alderman Sir David Howard and his wife Lady Howard and Alderman David Wootton (Master of the Solicitors' Company) and his wife, Elizabeth.

Celebrations continued over the Master's weekend where members and guests were invited to join the Master and his wife Beverly the following morning for a fascinating 90 minute guided exploration of hidden places in the City. These included Old Fleet Street, Dr Johnson's House, the King's Wardrobe, the original Christ Hospital and Plague Pits. Lunch was reserved at The Paternoster Inn and an evening meal, with more good food and wine, was enjoyed at Le Pont de la Tour, Butler's Wharf Buildings.



Celebrations continued over the Master's weekend with a guided exploration of hidden places in the city.



Hopkins and Senior Warden Graham Ballinger  
Past Master Ken Pepperrell and his wife Jenny.



Howard Grant

## Editor Mike Rigby interviews...

# Howard Grant Managing Director of Unimer

**Q. Unimer seems to be flying. You've grown this year and last, taken a stake in some new businesses and attracted new members in the worst recession since before WW2. What's the formula?**

A. Understanding our customers! As a service provider owned by our merchant members, we find ourselves in the strange position of considering both our merchant members and our suppliers as customers for our various service offers. Importantly we need to make sure that we offer and add value to both merchants and suppliers. The other key element in the merchant sector is understanding how the influence of the various buying groups is growing, and what they are trying to achieve. By working with the merchant, the supplier and the buying group we can often bring extra value to the supply chain. Keeping things simple and ensuring a transparency of understanding is also essential in demonstrating the value we create. Expanding our merchant member base is an ongoing challenge and alongside that we are also continuing to expand our supplier portfolio: more supplier choice for an increasing number of merchant buyers. However, our greatest success over the last 18 months has been doing more business with existing merchants and suppliers. We are always trying to grow the market share for the invoice clearing proposition.

**Q. How did you get into the industry and what brought you to Unimer?**

A. My first entry into the building materials sector was in 1989 when I became Finance Director for ECC Quarries, the Aggregate and Asphalt division of the English China Clay Group, however that role didn't give me any exposure to the merchant sector which came 5 years later when I became Managing Director of Camas Building Materials, leading the trading divisions for the well known brands of Bradstone, Charcon and Masterblock. Camas Plc had been formed by a de-merger from ECC Group and Camas later merged with Bardon Plc to form Aggregate Industries Plc.

Throughout all of these changes I led the building materials business and had to learn about my key customer base, the merchants. An early challenge was explaining why B&Q could sell a paving slab for 99p!

**Q. One unfortunate side effect of the stream of bad news we've been getting about the economy has been to make it harder to see the real opportunities and threats in the fog of recession.**

**What do you see are the biggest opportunities and threats for Unimer members in the next five years? What should they be focusing on?**

A. Regardless of the short term economic conditions all markets are becoming more competitive because it is harder to establish and sustain a position of competitive advantage. The current lack of growth only exacerbates the problem as more competitors chase share in a static or even maybe a shrinking market. The best merchants are very proactive in their relationships with their customers and this can be clearly demonstrated by some of the great ideas that are reviewed for the Builders' Merchant Awards. However, many smaller merchants are still waiting for their customers to walk through the door to their trade counters and hoping they are holding the right product in stock. Generally merchants will have to become more proactive in their search for and their retention of their customers. Developing any unique aspect to their service offer has to be a way forward. Management of information flows around a product and its installation requirements could be a good starting point because installers are struggling to keep up with changes in building regulations and the specific applications of certain types of product. The biggest single opportunity must be the Green Deal and the related growth in the Sustainability agenda, but again a key challenge here is being able to attract the end consumer as well as the tradesman/installer to buy through a merchant.

**Regardless of the short term economic conditions all markets are becoming more competitive because it is harder to establish and sustain a position of competitive advantage.**

**Q. What is the single most important change you'd like to see in the industry?**

A. I think the industry needs to learn that shared experience and knowledge benefits the whole sector and makes the sector stronger. We need to create opportunities for sharing know how and working together to compete against third parties who may be threatening the market position for merchants in the supply chain. The need to attract highly capable people to take the sector forward is also important and therefore the training and development of all levels of employees needs to be higher on most companies' agendas. Again the most proactive merchants are good at this but across the whole sector I would consider it to be a weakness.

**Q. Observers often say that even in turbulent times people only see great change through a rear view mirror. If, like Dr Who, you could look back from the year 2016 to this year what would you advise merchants and suppliers to do that they are not now doing?**

A. As I have said earlier the market is becoming more competitive and it is definitely faster moving, so trying to predict what it will look like in 2016 is nearly impossible! Being really good at what you are doing, whether you are a merchant or a supplier is vital. By that I mean developing an in-depth level of expertise in at least one aspect of your market sector in which you operate to an extent that other recognise your expertise and will naturally come to you for advice and guidance. In addition making sure that expertise is shared with your customers in a way that is simple for them to use for their own advantage. At Unimer, we often see suppliers with sparkling new products but they have often not thought how to present that product to a merchant in the most meaningful way, or how their service proposition may make life easier for the merchant. Key message is again "know your customer".

**Q. How will the Unimer of 2016 differ from the Unimer of today? What will have changed?**

A. The basic business model of Unimer has changed very little since its start in 1935, other than the shift some 20 years ago from a buying group to an emphasis on invoice clearing. The technology supporting the business has changed massively and we are currently developing new core trading and financial systems that will go live in 2012 and should be good for the next 10 years (the current system has survived for 20 years). We have developed some marketing opportunities in recent times which are aimed at helping our merchant members target specific markets, such as web based trading and the supply of materials to housing associations. It is early days with these initiatives, but they are clearly demonstrating another way in which Unimer can add value for its merchant shareholders. We will consider any opportunity and development to our business model that we believe will bring added value for merchant members. We handled almost £900 millions of transactions in our last financial year so I hope by 2016 we are well past the £1bn mark and that there are still lots of independent merchants challenging for market share against the continuing consolidation of the national groups.

**The Company provides an excellent opportunity to network with many of the industry's most successful and senior members and it is clearly established as the voice of the merchant sector within the City of London.**

**Q. When were you admitted to the WCoBM?**

A. I became a liveryman about three years ago, having been introduced to the Company by Past Master, John O'Carroll-Bailey. John clearly understood I have a well developed appreciation of good food and wine, and if that is shared in good company and in the fantastic surroundings of some of the City's finest buildings all the better!

**Q. As an active member of the WCoBM how do you see it contributing to the healthy vibrant industry we all want to see in five years?**

A. The Company provides an excellent opportunity to network with many of the industry's most successful and senior members and it is clearly established as the voice of the merchant sector within the City of London. Again the representatives of the company attend all sorts of amazing functions within the City and are able to spread the word on the merchant sector amongst some very influential individuals. Promoting the role and importance of builders' merchants through high level networking has got to be good for the sector as a whole. The company's role as a supporter and promoter of education and training in the sector is also important and I know the current Master Gary Hopkins is very keen to raise the profile of the Company in this respect.

**Q. What do we have to do to ensure it does?**

A. We need to increase the total membership of the Company and encourage more members to take an active role in its activities especially in areas where they may have a level of expertise – training and education may be an area where this could apply. Generally membership of the Company is only extended to those who have already demonstrated a level of achievement and success, which is right, but where possible, those people need to reflect a slightly younger profile so that the company has more members who are still very active in day-to-day business. We also want more members from the light side sector of our industry which is a little under represented at the moment. The profile of the Company needs to increase so that more people understand what it is about and I know that the early work to achieve a higher profile is underway, which is good news.

# One hundred years of Ridgeons

by Chairman Anne Ridgeon



**RIDGEONS**  
Timber & Builders Merchants

Ridgeons is one of the UK's largest independent timber and builders' merchants and one of the oldest companies within the East Anglian region. As it celebrates its centenary we decided to catch up with Ridgeons Chairman Anne Ridgeon and Managing Director Angela Rushforth to find out about the Group's history, how it started and its highlights.

"This year marks a momentous stage in our history as we celebrate one hundred years since we were founded by my great Grandfather Cyril Ridgeon in 1911," comments Anne Ridgeon.

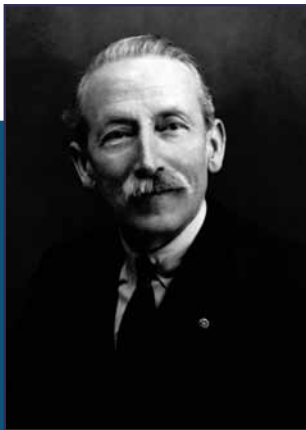
"The Ridgeons of today is very different from the company that my Grandfather founded from his home in St. Barnabas Road in Cambridge. We now have 22 branches and over 800 employees across the East of England; the Ridgeons' name is entrenched in the history of many cities and towns - providing employment for generations of families.

landscape and so too has the standardisation of architecture across both public and private developments. The range of materials and methods for use in everyday construction has also changed. The last century has seen a significant rise in conservation projects, from the rescuing and restoration of historic buildings to their former glory, to imaginative conversions, designed to suit modern day life.

"For us this has meant consistently and continually seeking to provide our clients with the goods they require across a number of diverse sectors, reaffirming our commitment to providing an extensive range of materials for the ever changing external and internal build environment."

Picking up the story, Ridgeons' Managing Director, Angela Rushforth, adds: "It is Ridgeons' rich heritage combined with our aim to provide our customers with exceptional customer

"While the size of the company has steadily grown over the last 100 years, our



Company's founder Cyril Ridgeon.



Chairman Anne Ridgeon.

mission has remained the same - to make it easier for customers to do business, with support on hand to provide them with all their building needs quickly and efficiently, with exceptional customer service and advice every step of the way.

"While our values have remained true to those of our founder, the environment in which we operate has seen a number of significant changes. For example, the second industrial revolution in the early part of the 20th century saw the invention of cranes and lifts, revolutionising the construction of high-rise buildings which became ever more popular. Developments in the use of heavy equipment and the availability of power tools for use on construction sites were also seen and had a direct impact upon workforce numbers. There was also the introduction of the prefabrication process and computer-aided design, which resulted in a variety of new building methods and technologies that were readily being used throughout the industry.

"In terms of construction the last 100 years has seen the emergence of a variety of styles from high-rise to scattered housing developments. Public buildings have dominated the



To celebrate 100 years of trading, a specially commissioned Ridgeons' liveried dray, pulled by two beautiful Suffolk Punch Horses has been touring East Anglia visiting branches and a number of schools within the region.

service and to continually improve that really sets us apart and makes it a special place to work. And this couldn't be achieved without the dedication of our employees."

Angela continues "Their combined knowledge is amazing, their expertise is second to none, and whatever the project, we have an expert who can provide the right guidance and advice. We have the first-hand knowledge and experience to talk through the whole project from preparation, to completion. That's what makes us different.

"Our unrivalled stock levels and our network of branches ensure we are well placed to meet a variety of orders and with dedicated departments specialising in heating, plumbing, kitchens, bathrooms and landscaping, we can provide everything needed for the whole project. Our extensive fleet of delivery vehicles combined with the location of our branches ensures that we are well positioned to fulfil any number of trade orders.

"In essence, the years have seen many changes, however it is our commitment to our customers, staff and the communities in which we live and work that makes all the difference."

# The Master awards prizes at Tandridge Golf Day

The Worshipful Company of Builders Merchants held its annual golf day at Tandridge Golf Club on Wednesday 12th April. The day was organised by Liveryman Edwin Ray, with Master Gary Hopkins, presenting the prizes.

Tandridge Golf Club, based in Surrey, is rated among the Top 100 Golf Courses in England. It is set among mature woodlands with spectacular views of the Surrey North Downs and the countryside of Kent and Sussex. Players included Past Masters Martin Earle and Robert Cope, Court Assistant Brian Blanchard, Liverymen Mike Tattam, Andrew Cope, Roger Howard, Roger Thomas, Alun Roberts, John Griffiths, David Pearce and Bob Budd, and guests. The round was enjoyed with exceptionally sunny and warm weather.

Past Master Martin Earle, with Past Master Stuart Somerville as caddy, took the top prize with 48 points, a gross 76. The runner up was Liveryman David Pearce with 31 points. The Guest Prize went to Graham Addiscott on 33 points.

Our thanks goes to Liveryman and active golfer Mike Tattam, who despite having his golf clubs stolen from the boot of his car that very morning, still played and took the great photographs.



(L-R) Bob Budd, David Pearce & Alun Roberts.



Liveryman Roger Howard taking a swing.



The Master Gary Hopkins (L) presenting the Winning Prize to Past Master Martin Earle (R).

## Inter Livery walk supports Lord Mayor's charity

On the 15th September the annual Inter Livery walk took place, with 21 Masters and their associates taking part in an eight and half mile walk around the City of London, visiting 40 Livery Halls. The total number of walkers was 45, the highest attendance yet.

The walk started at 9am from the Armourers Hall and ended at the Mansion House at 4.45pm. Morning coffee was served at the Furniture Makers Hall and Tea was served at HQS Wellington, the Master Mariners 'Hall'. A well earned rest was taken for lunch at Bakers Hall.

The Inter Livery walk is organised and led each year by Past Master Stephen Wright of the Worshipful Company of Environmental Cleaners. Now in its seventh year, it has become an important event in the Livery's calendar. The event raises money for the Lord Mayor's Charity Appeal and a cheque for £2,200 was presented at the end by Peter Holt, Master of the Environmental Cleaners.



Masters and their associates arrive at Plaisterers' Hall.



The Master Gary Hopkins in the Lord Mayor's Office after the Livery walk.

# The Worshipful Company of Builders Merchants

## Charity & Education Committee

The fascinating history of livery companies reaches back many centuries, but their work is as relevant today as ever. All of these companies have similar objectives including support for a particular trade, education and training of young people, and concern for their members in sickness and financial difficulty. The older companies were responsible for founding and administering schools and colleges, building and running almshouses and craft colleges. Much of this charitable work continues to this day and is not widely publicized. To put a figure on it, the livery companies of the City of London, in total donate over £40 million annually for charitable purposes.

### Where do the funds come from?

Generous annual donations or one-off payments from our members have been carefully nurtured over 50 years since our foundation and have now built up to a substantial charitable fund. Each year we publish, in *The Builders Merchant*, previously the *Messenger*, a list of our donors.

Regrettably, only about one third of our Liverymen support the charitable fund by making voluntary donations on a regular basis, despite charitable giving being one of the principal objectives of the Company. Some other livery companies make support for their charitable fund a compulsory part of membership. It would be difficult to change our system now, although we could introduce a compulsory scheme for new liverymen. Unfortunately, the recession has affected everyone and we would not want to deter new members from joining the company.

### Who looks after our funds?

There are three parts to this answer. First, the Charitable Aid Foundation (CAF) handle all of our donations, including Bank Standing Orders. CAF operate their own bank, issuing us with cheque books and paying-in books, and send us weekly statements. Also, they reclaim tax on our behalf through the Gift Aid system.

The next part of the equation is our Charity & Education Committee. (Note the recent change of title resulting from the company's application for Royal Charter status and our increasing emphasis on support for education and training). The 9-strong committee meets twice annually under the chairmanship of the Almoner, currently Past Master Andrew Adams. Other members of the committee include the Master and Bursar, several Past Masters, the Clerk and Rev. Paul Abram (Hon. Freeman).

The committee is responsible for our investment strategy through our brokers, Quilters. Tim Maile from Quilters attends one of our meetings, giving a detailed analysis of our investments and he recommends any changes to be made. Between meetings he liaises with Past Master Michael Pares to ensure that we are always abreast of the financial markets.

The committee is responsible also for deciding on any donations to be made from the charitable fund.

Finally we have our four Trustees, all members of the committee and all are members of the Court of Assistants.

### What about our donations?

Our annual donations of £20,000 to £25,000 are made from income earned on our investments in the charitable fund. However our investment policy must always take a long-term view to ensure continual growth of the fund for future generations.

Donations received are published annually in *The Builders Merchant* and fall into several broad categories. We support a number of builders merchants industry bodies such as the Timber Trades Benevolent Society and the BMF training scheme, giving prizes for their students.

We support the Lord Mayor and the City of London.

We make donations to the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment with whom

we have built a close relationship. Associated with this we have made donations to a number of charities helping injured servicemen and their families suffering as a result of conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan etc.

We have one special system: every year the Master, Wardens and Bursar each nominate a charity of their choice to receive a donation from the charitable fund. This year this has led to support for the World Skills 2011 event to be held in London in October.

We support several charities where our own liverymen play active roles, such as Terence Broad with St Mungo's and John Poore with the Rainy Day Trust.

### Conclusion

I would like to make just two more points. I referred to the disappointing level of support we receive by way of donations from liverymen. If the two thirds who do not contribute were to give even £10, £20 or £50 each per annum it would make a very substantial improvement to our income. Even in these difficult times, please ask yourself whether you can help in this way. If you do not want to make a regular payment, just send your cheque with a note to the Clerk. Another approach is to make a note in your will – we receive several legacies like this every year.

Finally I would like to ask whether any of our members has an active involvement with a charity where we may be able to offer financial support? If so, please let me have details and we will discuss it at a future meeting of the Charity & Education Committee.



Andrew Adams Almoner and Past Master.

**We support several charities where our own liverymen play active roles.**

# Life after work

## by Past Master Stuart Somerville

I retired from the industry a couple of years ago and I thought I'd use The Builders Merchant as a platform to talk about my life after work – as a volunteer.



Stuart Somerville

industry. So when I returned to England and entered the family builders' merchant

First, let me tell you a little about my background. Young people, and I was no exception, have no conception of ageing and what happens at the end of your working life. When you leave school and education your life is vibrant and exciting. You work hard, play hard and live for the day hoping that you end up with a secure, rewarding job that will give you and your family a reasonable standard of living.

I went to school in Southern Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe. I didn't go to university but undertook an apprenticeship instead and had an excellent grounding in the building

business I was able to use my knowledge to good effect. I thoroughly enjoyed my working life and wouldn't have changed it for anything. I had amazing experiences and met some very memorable characters. When retirement suddenly came I missed the buzz and interaction with people and I found it very difficult to come to terms with my new status.

It's at this point I applied for voluntary work at the Chickenshed Theatre, a local theatre near where I live, which has a national reputation for excellence. I am just one of dozens of volunteers who help the theatre in any way possible. I



have been working there for a year doing various tasks to support the full time staff. Everyone is so welcoming, friendly and grateful for all the help offered. The whole experience has given me a new focus and taught me that there is still life after work.

The Chickenshed Theatre is a charitable organisation struggling in these difficult times. I hope you, like me, will feel that it is a cause well worth supporting.

Visit [www.wcobm.co.uk](http://www.wcobm.co.uk) or [www.chickenshed.org.uk](http://www.chickenshed.org.uk) for more information.

## Website Update

Earlier this year, the Company's website was given a fresh look and updated with new information. Since the new look, further work - sponsored by MRA Marketing - has been carried out in the Members area.

This now holds a more up-to-date list of members than before to facilitate networking with other members. However gaps remain, so please log in and check your entry. Members who register will receive a new log-in password which enables them to edit their own entry. Additional features have been incorporated to make it easy for members to update their own profile, adding mobile numbers and emails for example, and even uploading a photograph so other members will recognise them more easily at WCoBM functions.

The website will soon also benefit from a new Archive section, where photographs of the Company's treasures and relevant documents will be uploaded for visitors to view and learn more about the Livery. Our thanks to Lafarge Industries for their sponsorship of the photography. Members will be notified when work is completed.



# For your Diary...

## New Members

### Installation Court General and Livery Dinner - Thursday 27th October 2011

**Venue: Fishmongers' Hall**

At the Election Court General on 18th April Graham Ballinger was elected to be the next Master of the Company and will be installed at the Installation Court General on 27th October 2011 at Fishmongers' Hall. As usual, The Court General at 6.00pm (open to Liverymen and Freemen) will be followed by the Livery Dinner at 7.00pm (open to Liverymen, Freemen and guests).

This is the most important event in the year for Liverymen and Freemen so please show your support and bring along as many guests as you can for a successful and enjoyable evening.

Fishmongers' Hall is in a fantastic location on the river Thames, and is one of the most impressive of all the great Livery Halls. If you have never been before, this is a wonderful chance to be involved in a truly magnificent function alongside many of your contemporaries in the industry.

Formal invites have been sent out to members, but if you've not received one, please contact the Clerk Tim Statham at [info@wcoBM.co.uk](mailto:info@wcoBM.co.uk)

Many thanks to our sponsors:

Aggregate Industries

Hanson Building Products

Lafarge UK

NMBS

Toolbank

BIRA (Formerly British  
Hardware Federation)

Calor Gas

John Nicholls (Banbury) Ltd

### Lord Mayor's Show 2011 - Saturday 12th November 2011

### Carol Service - Friday 9th December 2011

**Venue:** St Peter ad Vincula, H.M. Tower of London, EC3 followed by Supper at Watermen's Hall.

The next newsletter will be issued in April 2012. If you have any interesting stories, photos, profiles or other information you would like to see featured please contact Mike Rigby: [mike@mra-marketing.com](mailto:mike@mra-marketing.com) or Lucia Di Stazio: [lucia@mra-marketing.com](mailto:lucia@mra-marketing.com)

We are pleased to welcome the following new Freemen to the Company:



**Lucia Di Stazio:**  
Director, MRA  
Marketing



**Fiona Russell-Horne:** Editor,  
BuildersMerchants  
Journal.net



**Mark Northway:**  
Financial Director,  
Beatsons Building  
Supplies Ltd



**John Sinfield:**  
Managing Director,  
Knauf Insulation Ltd



**Michael Beard:**  
Sales & Marketing  
Director, Superglass  
Insulation Ltd



**Graeme Miller:**  
Managing Director,  
Birtley Building  
Products Ltd



**Stewart Pierce:**  
Financial Director,  
Parker Building  
Supplies Ltd



**Jim Moorhouse:**  
Commercial Director,  
Birtley Building  
Products Ltd

We are also pleased to welcome new Freeman,  
**Steve Mascall.**