

General Secretary's Report

In lieu of Annual General Meeting 2020

At the time of our last Annual General Meeting on 1 November 2019, none of us had any idea of how 2020, the last formal year of the Old Mercers' Club, was to pan out due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Early on in lockdown your General Committee agreed that the chances of being able to hold any event under anything like normal conditions in 2020 were going to be extremely unlikely. We therefore agreed that the 2020 programme should be rolled over to 2021 in the hope that we would then be back to 'normal' circumstances. A letter to this effect was sent out to all Members on 14 April 2020, and other interested bodies and individuals were also informed at the same time. Since then we have agreed a full provisional programme for 2021 which is also distributed as an attachment with this report. It must be emphasised that, at this time, it can only be a provisional programme. We have also agreed, subject to Members endorsement, that Officers and Committee Members shall be rolled over to 2021, see a further attachment. All Officers and Committee Members have agreed to stand for one further year, with one change. Peter Stevens had expressed a wish to stand down as Magazine Editor, before the pandemic, but has agreed to remain as a committee member. Tony Williams, Neville Watson and I have volunteered to edit one more edition of the magazine which will probably be in 2021. It remains for me to thank Peter personally, and on your behalf, for the enormous job he has done as magazine editor for the last twelve years. He has set an exceptionally high standard which will be a challenge for the three of us to maintain.

I have been informed that the Mercers' Company also intends to roll over the Master and Wardens, as does the Corporation of the City of London with its annually appointed officers. This means that, if we are able to hold our luncheon on 21 September 2021, Christopher Vermont should be the Master Mercer and Michael Mainelli will still be a Sheriff of the City of London. Consequently the following will remain in office until the Election Court in July 2021:

Master	Mr Mark Aspinall
Upper Warden	Mr Christopher Vermont
House Warden	Mr Adam Fenwick
Renter Warden	Mr Peter Lane

Given the current uncertainties, and the extension of the life of the Club, it seemed appropriate to cover the main officers' posts in case one or more of us became incapacitated. This has been done by members of the General Committee who have 'volunteered' to act in this capacity.

I now regret that I have to report the following deaths since the last Annual General Meeting:

John Locke (46-54)
Robert A Webb Bowen (32-43)
Brother Reginald G Box (30-38) Honorary OM
Ronald J P Thearle (42-48)
Graham C Ives (37-45)
Norman S Fosh (40-45)
John Werner (45-53)
Peter G Boulton (44-49)

Unfortunately, because of lockdown, it was not possible for OMs to attend either Graham's or Norman's funeral, but Graham's niece hopes it will be possible to hold a Thanksgiving Service for Graham's life when restrictions are lifted and so OMs will be able to attend.

As some Old Mercers will know, Reginald Box was a member of the Society of Saint Francis and as such took the vow of poverty which is why he was made an Honorary Member. When he died I wrote to the Friary in Alnmouth where he lived, and was told by the Guardian that he was just short of his 99th birthday when he died. I think he must have been the oldest Old Mercer.

You will be pleased to know that we were able to present Peter Wookey with a card and a personalised bottle of sparkling Blanc de Blanc on his 100th birthday on 4 May 2020.

I have been in conversation with Professor Tim Connell, Chairman of the Gresham Society. The Gresham Society is perhaps best described as a body of friends of Gresham College. It holds an annual dinner and social functions during the year, usually visiting places of interest in or around the City. Not dissimilar in that respect to the Guild of Mercers' Scholars. Given the forthcoming demise of the Old Mercers' Club, and our close connection through Barnard's Inn, Tim and I thought there might Old Mercers who would wish to continue their connection with the City through the Gresham Society. I should be pleased to hear from any Old Mercers who may wish to pursue this further.

We have also had an invitation from the Honorary Secretary of the Old Collyerians' Association to participate in their social functions. Again, if any member is interested and lets me know, I shall be pleased to pass this on to the Secretary.

HGJW 1/10 /20