

The Worshipful Company Of Basketmakers



Dear fellow Basketmakers,

This is a bumper Christmas Newsletter, to be perused at leisure when there is the odd free moment amidst the festivities.

It has been another busy season in the Basketmakers' calendar; we report on, among other things, the Installation Day, the Company Basketmaking Day, the Lord Mayor's Show and the Carol Service, as well as some of the work of the Charitable Trust and things going on in the world of basketry.

One of the very best things about basketmakers is that they do like to take part, so that there are very few City events that are not graced by the Basketmakers' presence. It has been a great pleasure to meet and get to know fellow members at some of these smaller events. Indeed, attending these peripheral events is one of the best ways to get acquainted with other Basketmakers in a relaxed setting.

Looking ahead to next year, I'd particularly like to draw your attention to the **Basketry Showcase** on the 12th of March at The Dutch Church. This is our most prestigious event which happens every two years. It is a chance for our Yeoman members to show off their workmanship, and there is also an opportunity for you to buy these amazing pieces. We invite guests including Masters, Consorts and Clerks from all 111 Livery Companies. Also, please note in your diaries the **Prime Warden's Weekend Away**, on 16th – 19th May, which will be on her home ground of Aberdeenshire; more about that in the Interview with the Prime Warden below.

This is *your* Newsletter, and we are always willing to receive comments and requests, so that it reflects what you would like to read about. Just reply to the email.

We wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Vicky Nugée, Editor.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday 31st January
Livery Dinner

Tuesday 13th February
Inter-Livery Pancake Race

Tuesday 12th March
Basketry Showcase 2024

Friday 15th March
United Guilds Service

Saturday 13th – 16th April
Letzi Guild – *Annual visit*

Sunday 28th April
East of England Lunch

Tuesday 7th May
The Clergy Support Trust
Festival

Thursday 16th – 19th May
The Prime Warden's
Weekend Away

Monday 24th June
Election of Sheriffs

A Christmas message from the Prime Warden

Dear fellow Basketmakers,

Christmas is a time for giving, and I give you my heartfelt thanks for all your support since I took office two months ago.

Our Basketmakers' theme for this year is *Among Friends*, and our Christmas card depicts one of our newest friends - Otto the Yorkshire Terrier, assistant to Ellie Morgan, our Trade Adviser. I took the photo at a recent basketmaking day, when Otto was exploring Ellie's willow backpack!

Merry Christmas



At our Christmas Supper at Watermen's Hall, I expressed my gratitude to all of you for making our wonderful Company everything that it is today. In these pages I repeat my thanks to our Editor, Vicky Nugée, who does a magnificent job of producing this newsletter.

In pride of place among my Christmas decorations this year is the big-antlered rush deer that Yeoman John Page showed us how to make on our Family Christmas Basketmaking Day – it was great fun. And Clerk Richard's willow Christmas tree is exemplary!

I look forward to seeing you in the new year. I hope you will come along to our Scottish-themed Livery Dinner in January. Dress code is black tie with a touch of tartan – and we have a few nice surprises in store.

William and I wish you a Merry Christmas and all the best for 2024.



Warmest wishes,
Dorothy

Lady Lauriston, Prime Warden

Interview with our Prime Warden

Vicky Nugée caught up with Lady Lauriston to talk about her background and plans for this year

What's your Basketmaker history?

Ten years ago, William and I met Past Prime Warden John Robinson at a dinner at Guildhall. The Basketmakers were holding a new members' evening the following week and John suggested I come along. I did – and immediately I felt I was among friends. I knew there and then that I'd be proud to become a Basketmaker.

What do you do outside of the Basketmakers?

I have enjoyed several careers, and I hope I haven't finished yet! My degree was in archaeology and my early career was in financial systems in the City. I moved into marketing and PR, setting up my own business, and then I followed my husband into journalism, writing about technology for the national newspapers and being voted Technology Journalist of the Year. In my first article, for The Independent, I set out to build a computer from scratch in the space of an hour, and – miracle of miracles – it worked!

Today, I run a bid-writing practice helping engineering companies to win major infrastructure projects. Outside work, William and I have spent many years - decades, in fact - restoring our mediaeval Lauriston Castle in Aberdeenshire, once a royal fortress and a strategic stronghold in Scotland's history. This labour of love has involved everything from designing a garden and researching heraldry to keeping rare breed sheep!

Are you a member of any other Livery Companies or similar?

I am a Director and Under Warden Elect of the Guild of Freeman of the City of London, and for six years I have chaired the Guild's Membership Committee. I served as Deacon of the Incorporation of Wrights, the Glasgow charity for all woodworkers, from shipbuilders to makers of violins. I have recently been welcomed into the Incorporation of Bonnetmakers and Dyers of Edinburgh.

What do you think is the most important thing for the Basketmakers right now?

The Basketmakers have a well-deserved reputation as a friendly, approachable Company, and our fascinating craft of basketry is very much of our time. I am taking delight in discovering just how much goodwill and enthusiasm people have for us, in and beyond the City. This year we will begin to explore how we can make the most of that enthusiasm to continue to prosper in the future.

Tell us about your plans for the Prime Warden's visit to Aberdeenshire

In May, William and I will be welcoming the Basketmakers to Aberdeenshire and Angus – Scotland's Castle Country. We'll be among friends, some of whom will be coming to meet us beforehand as my guests at our January Livery Dinner. As well as visiting Lauriston Castle we will be paying private visits to other castles. We'll be sampling local produce, including award-winning local spirits, and exploring my homeland and heritage.

Events News

Our **Installation Day**, service, lunch, Ceremonial Court and Common Hall took place on 18th October. The annual service at St Margaret Pattens Church was charming, with well-chosen hymns and readings focussing on our motto, *Let us love one another*, which is actually a quote from 1 John IV v7. Reverend Andrew Keep, who is also our Honorary Chaplain, led us in praise and thanksgiving for another successful year. This was followed by a reception and fine lunch at Bakers' Hall, relaxed, friendly and convivial.

At Common Hall, following reports on the Company's finances by Under Warden Julian Adams, and the Charitable Trust by Graham Aslet, Prime Warden Judy Tayler-Smith gave her final speech, of thanks to all those who have supported her during her year of office. Judy had been a popular and effective Prime Warden, as well as a very hard-working one, and people were glad to have worked with her during her time of office. Judy installed our new Prime Warden, Lady Lauriston, who then installed Julian Adams as Upper Warden, and Mark Cooper as the new Under Warden.



Prime Warden Judy Tayler-Smith
at St Margaret Pattens



Prime Warden Lady Lauriston

Lady Lauriston then gave her first speech as Prime Warden. Her theme for the year is *Among Friends*, which sounds very encouraging in these uncertain times. She spoke of the willow bed that she has planted, and hopes that some of the willow can be incorporated into basketry projects during the coming year, and mentioned the Basketry Showcase set for next Spring. She said that, unsurprisingly, there would be a Scottish influence during her year of office, and that her Prime Warden's Weekend in May will be in Aberdeenshire. She will also be encouraging us all to get involved in a variety of other events closer to home. Finally, she reminded us of the importance of introducing potential new members to the Company.

The Prime Warden installed our new Stewards: Dido Grattan, Stella Angelescu-Bicknell and Richard Burn; John Cavanagh, the fourth steward, was unfortunately not able to be there, and was installed at a later date.

The pictures of this lovely day taken by professional photographer Phil McCarthy, can be viewed here:

<https://philmccarthyphotography.smugmug.com/The-Worshipful-Company-of-Basket-Makers>

Our new Prime Warden, Lady Lauriston, attended the **Autumn Meeting and AGM of the Basketmakers Association** on 21st October. Accompanied by the Chair of the Trade Committee, Sasha Keir, and by our new Trade Liaison Officer, Ann Clark, she enjoyed two talks on exhibition presentation and gave an excellent and rousing speech about our Livery Company's support for our Trade.

Several of the speakers, including Sue Papworth, the outgoing Co-chair and Louise Brown, the new Chair, spoke warmly about the support the Charitable Trust gives to various basketry projects, particularly in teaching, publication of books and exhibitions this past year.

The Prime Warden, Sasha and Ann were invited to help judge the basketry competition and were treated to a magnificent selection of home-made cakes to finish the afternoon.



From left to right: Ann Clark, Clare Revera (also out going Co-chair), Sasha Keir, the Prime Warden, Louise Brown and Sue Papworth.

The Lord Mayor's Show, which took place on 11th November, is the largest unrehearsed parade in the world and has taken place annually in London for the past 800 years to mark the beginning of the year in office for the Lord Mayor of London.

The Basketmakers contingent, ably supported by the Guild of Young Freemen, shepherd the two basketry giants, Gog and Magog, through the parade. These mythical characters were traditionally the guardians of the City of London, and were created in 2006 under the aegis of Olivia Elton Barratt, the first lady Prime Warden of the Basketmakers Company, by voluntary time and effort of members of the Basketmakers Association.



Here we are assembling outside the Museum of London. Gog and Magog are looking particularly smart in new costumes made for them last year.

We made our way past Guildhall and waited beside the Bank of England for the show to begin. As it was Armistice Day, we heard the Last Post followed by the traditional two minutes silence. Finally, the Irish Guards struck up a tune and we set off. There were, of course, several military bands and



The new Lord Mayor of London, Michael Mainelli.

representatives of many branches of the armed services; they have been present in one form or another since the beginnings of the parade, originally for security. Armed police provide that security nowadays. It was good to see that military cadets were also very well represented, many supported by Livery interest.

We hip-hip-hoorayed as we passed the Lord Mayor's party in the stand in front of Mansion House and proceeded down Cheapside, to the joyful peal of Bow Bells. Passing St Paul's, we went on up Ludgate

Hill and Fleet Street towards The Strand. In the early days of the Mayoralty this journey was made by barge as that was the usual way to get around London. The pageantry grew up around that journey, and the river transport gave rise to the term 'float' when used in the context of parades.

At last we came to the Royal Courts of Justice, where the Lord Mayor would swear loyalty to the King. However, as we were number three in the parade, the Lord Mayor still had many more floats to watch marching past Mansion House before he could climb into his magnificent state coach and join the back of the parade.

There are, in fact, three miles of dancers, tractors, horses, vehicles, soldiers, bands, bicycles, tanks, open fires, ancient carriages and giant pigs and penguins to be assembled early in the morning, marched to Aldwych, hidden away, lunched, reassembled in the right order, marched back to the City and eventually dispersed.

After lunch we set off along Victoria Embankment and back towards Guildhall via Queen Victoria Street. The lunchtime stop at Temple Place, looking out across the Thames and HQS Wellington, had felt a little as though were out in the wilds.



Members of the Guild of Young Freemen wear red robes

However, marching back into the City, we saw again the waving crowds, the happy people, the smiling faces. It was marvellously uplifting.

Friends of St Margaret Pattens church laid on a special **Sung Evensong** on 23rd November, which was attended by over 60 people including Alderman & Sheriff Bronek Masojada from the local Billingsgate Ward, the Prime Warden and Under Wardens of the Basketmakers, and the Master Pattenmaker, accompanied by members of both Companies, plus people from local businesses enjoying the evening. This was the second of two events marking the 300th anniversary of the death of Sir Christopher Wren, who rebuilt the church in 1687. The choir were as usual amazing under the direction of Rupert Perkins. Wine and nibbles were served after the service and there was a wonderful convivial atmosphere.

Friends of St Margaret Pattens Church is a registered charity which raises income to support the church and fund the administrator. It is the intention of the Friends of STMP to run several events a year, and not only in the church, to create a real community spirit around our fabulous Guild Church. If you are interested in helping with the preservation of the church for future generations, please visit <http://www.friendsofstmargaretpattens.org.uk/> . Group tours can be arranged by emailing the church at info@stmargaretpattens.org.



Visitors to the church were delighted to see that the Prime Warden's name has been added to the illustrious record on the panelling behind the choir.

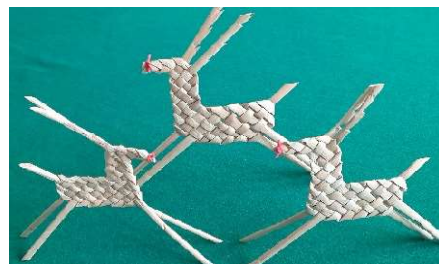
Liveryman and recently appointed steward, Richard Burn and his wife, Gill, enjoyed a ride in a wicker toboggan in Madeira. The toboggans have been used on the island since the 1850's as a means of inhabitants getting both themselves and their goods downhill quickly (it's steep!) into Funchal from the village of Monte. Nowadays a tourist attraction, the toboggan ride lasts for several minutes and reaches speeds of up to 25 mph, with the toboggan being steered by two Carreiros, smartly dressed sledge drivers. The basket sledges, which have until recently been made on the island, are attached to a sturdy wooden frame with runners. Sadly, the factory making them and other basketry products closed following the impact of the pandemic.



Just for a bit of fun, we are delighted to publish your pictures of strange and unusual basketry.

The **Company Basketmaking Day** on 25th November was well-attended and much enjoyed by all.

The day was distinctly Christmas-themed; Trade Advisor Eleanor Morgan showed us how to make willow stars, and Yeoman Basketmaker John Page demonstrated that reed reindeer were not so hard after all! In fact, there was something very organic about the way they took shape that was hugely satisfying. The teaching from both was very clear, so that even absolute beginners were able to complete something to be proud of.



The Prime Warden was present to host the event, but, discovering a spare apron, threw caution to the winds and joined in the making with the rest of us. She seemed to enjoy herself.

It was a lovely day, with much concentration and quiet chatter, punctuated by occasional exclamations of

frustration. Our Clerk, Richard Turner, was there to provide encouragement and endless cups of very welcome tea, and a delicious buffet lunch.



Basketmakers, basketmaking. The Prime Warden is flanked by John Page and Ellie Morgan, with Otto.

Stars at Christmas – Red Cross Market, 27th & 28th November

By Sasha Keir

This year saw the first Red Cross Christmas Market since before the Pandemic as last year's event was cancelled after the death of our late Queen. Our Prime Warden was keen to get involved so a stall was booked and I started to attend the meetings at the Guildhall.

At the Company Basketmaking Day last year, we made willow stars for Christmas which looked very pretty when decorated with fairy lights. I also have lots of beautiful scraps and offcuts of the many West End, ballet and opera costumes made in my studio which normally get thrown away. So, it was a good fit to offer willow stars for sale as a kit with twinkling fairy lights and a unique theatre fabric bow to decorate. Sustainable stars and upcycled bows seemed to make for the greenest possible item to buy. We didn't forget the batteries for the lights either.



Rae Gillott and Sasha Keir setting out the stall

The Prime Warden with
HRH the Duchess of Gloucester

We were delighted that Honorary Liveryman HRH the Duchess of Gloucester was able to visit the stall, where she showed much interest in the Christmas Stars kits. The Prime Warden, Lady Lauriston, presented the Duchess with a beautiful willow shoulder bag made by our Trade Advisor, Eleanor Morgan, who was assisting at the stall. Liveryman Rae Gillott, who is also the President of the Basketmakers' Association, was introduced to the Duchess. Stephen Gee also came along to help and kindly kept us all supplied with tea and sandwiches.



We produced 98 of the kits which proved very popular: the stall was very busy and we sold out. Rae contributed keyrings, bracelets and stars and we sold most of these too. Altogether our sales were around £1000 for the Red Cross charity. It was great fun with a lovely atmosphere and lots of friends from other Livery Companies dropping by for a chat. If you have never been to this Christmas Market before, it is well worth a visit, as the range of goods being sold was second to none.

The next market will be in 2025.

Our Prime Warden, Lady Lauriston, and Clerk, Richard Turner, were honoured to be invited to **the Rifles Awards Dinner** at Guildhall, on 30th November, in the presence of Colonel-in-Chief, Her Majesty The Queen, and Royal Colonels Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. The Duchess of Gloucester is an Honorary Liveryman of the Basketmakers' Company. It was a wonderful opportunity to catch up with our friends in 8 Rifles, with whom the Basketmakers are affiliated, and to plan some exciting joint activities for the coming year!



The **Carol Service** at St Margaret Pattens Church on 14th December was a really lovely occasion, as the church sparkled with Christmas decorations and glowed with candlelight. We shared the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols with the Pattenmakers, and the Guild Vicar, our Honorary Chaplain, Reverend Andrew Keep, spoke about hope and optimism by virtue of that first Christmas. There was a splendid set of carols; it really does us good to have a jolly good sing. There were welcome mince pies and mulled wine to follow.

Afterwards, there was a fine, relaxed **Supper at Watermen's Hall**, where all the tables were named after Santa's reindeer. The Prime Warden told us: 'I exchanged gifts with the Master-Painter Stainer, Ivor Macklin – he and I were both installed on the same day and we are both hosting our Christmas suppers tonight. Ivor gave me a giant ball of mistletoe from his apple orchard in Kent, which I presented to Watermen's Hall so that all their guests could enjoy it over the festive season. I presented Ivor with a round willow basket for collecting windfall apples. It was made by our Trade Adviser, Ellie Morgan, and tonight at Painter-Stainers' Hall it is being used to draw prize draw envelopes to raise funds for a major art exhibition that will take place next year.' She also thanked all those who have contributed to the Company, in whatever way.



It was a very warm and friendly occasion, filled with goodwill and Christmas cheer.

Charitable Trust News

"A Once in a Lifetime Trip which they will never forget" - The Charitable Trust gets into gear.



Waiting for departure

One of London's most unique charity events takes place each year when a convoy of licensed London taxis take over 200 children, suffering from a range of chronic debilitating illnesses and life limiting conditions, on a three-day trip of a lifetime to Disney® Paris. This **Magical Taxi Tour** has brought moments of great joy and happiness to sick children.

This amazing convoy can be over three miles long when running and consists of 90 plus taxis, City of London Police escorts, Gendarmerie Nationale, London Ambulance NHS Trust vehicles and AA breakdown trucks.

Organised annually by the Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers, the Magical Taxi Tour is only possible with the help of sponsors who generously give toward the £1,500 cost per taxi necessary to meet the expenses of hotel, fuel, food, admission charges etc. The taxi drivers naturally give freely of their time and use of their vehicles.

The Charitable Trust is very pleased to announce that this year it has supported the Magic Taxi tour to Paris with a grant of £4,500, which is sufficient to power three taxiloads of children across the channel on a trip of their dreams. We can all be pleased and proud of this donation.



One of our sponsored taxis

Roy McLeod was a Liveryman of the Basketmakers for over 30 years, and on his death he left a huge legacy to the Charitable Trust, as reported in the June Newsletter. It has since become clear that the legacy was not just the £175,000 that was reported in June, but a lot, lot more. This is fabulous news for the Charitable Trust, and for everyone who benefits from it. In the light of this marvellous generosity, perhaps we should know a little more about this kind man. This brief résumé of his life is taken from the eulogy, given by his brother, at his funeral.

Roy was born in 1935, within the sound of Bow Bells, so was a true Cockney. After an education much interfered with by the war and the post war years, Roy left Technical School with a single O level in woodwork, a fact that he was justly proud of, considering his later achievements.

Starting in the world of work as a humble office boy in the City, his career was interrupted at the age of 18 when he was called up for his National Service and joined the RAF. Later, through hard work and a very intelligent mind, he rose to be a Director of a large International Insurance Brokers in the City of London. Achieving recognition for his life in the City, he was made a Freeman of the City of London, and became a member of the Basketmakers Livery Company, of which he was very proud.

In his spare time, Roy was a keen dinghy sailor, a lifelong skier, an inveterate writer of letters to the Telegraph, and a Freemason, belonging to Bexley Marine Lodge, where he was twice Master.

When he wasn't busy doing all these things, Roy led a life of public service and charity. He was a Samaritan, becoming the area Director. Dedicated to this cause, he always left the family celebrations on Christmas Day to do his shift, on this most difficult of days.

Another charity that Roy became deeply involved in was Winged Fellowship, an organisation providing respite care for people with serious disablements. He was hands-on, helping regularly at weekends; he also searched to find volunteers to staff the Centres, involving him in giving talks and lectures in London and the Home Counties.

Never forgetting his own beginnings, Roy volunteered to work for the Jack Peachy Organisation, an East End fund set up to encourage young people to improve their life chances. He evaluated appeals for funds, following up with presenting cheques. Roy was a great believer that helping young people translates into a better society.

Apart from all this, we shall never know how many individuals were helped, by a cheque here or an interest free loan there, as he was never one to advertise his generosity. True, he did not suffer fools gladly, but he loved a tryer.

The eulogy concludes with an epitaph to which anyone would be proud to lay claim:

'He lived respected and died regretted.'

Thanks to his generosity to the Basketmakers' charities, he will be remembered every time a part of his legacy is used to improve less fortunate lives.



Basketry News

Scottish Basketry Circle's Annual Gathering

By Sasha Keir, Chair of the Trade Committee

This years' gathering was held in September, high in the Cairngorms at Glenmore Lodge where workshops by Judy Simmons, John Cowan and Caroline Dear were held over the three day event very ably organised by Catherine Stables.

Judy was teaching the very difficult willow Perigord basket which is a sieve basket popular in France. It's designed to let the dirt drop off vegetables as they are carried to market. One of our Yeomen, Lorna Singleton, was in this group of basketmakers determined to learn the challenging plaiting technique.



John Cowan was teaching underfoot, oval traditional willow baskets. Uniformity of size is one of John's disciplines and his students were learning to use marked boards to keep their baskets precise.

Caroline Dear's group, which included our own Yeoman, John Page, was exploring ways of using soft materials. I counted at least 17 different types of rush, dock, corn husk, lavender and even crocosmia about the room with students using a wide variety of techniques. Caroline is this year's Walmsley Bursary winner, as reported in the Autumn 2023 Newsletter. She sent her thanks to the Charitable Trust for helping her project to document ancient and near extinct baskets in the Orkneys.



The AGM on the Saturday evening was chaired by Janice Hall and I had the opportunity to convey greetings from our own Prime Warden, Judy Tayler-Smith, to the meeting. The SBC's membership is rising fast and you couldn't meet a friendlier group of basketmakers. Many thanks also to Helen Jackson, (stepping down now) for booking me in to this oversubscribed event and introducing me to everyone.



The Scottish Basketry Circle at their Annual Gathering in the Cairngorms.

On the Balance of Fresh Air to Cane

By Sasha Keir

My sister and I went to Highgrove Traditional Crafts at Barley Court in the grounds of Highgrove in November. Kasia Howard, who is the Senior Education Officer, kindly allowed us to observe Dr Brian Crossley MBE, Yeoman of the Company, teaching masterclasses in chair caning. The craft has been allied to basketry since the mid-17th Century when the Caners supported the Basketmakers in trying to obtain a Royal Charter in 1682. By 1698, they were formally part of the Worshipful Company.



Brian learned chair caning from his mother 60 years ago and is a chartered civil engineer by profession. He also represents all crafts on the All Party Parliamentary Group. The teaching sessions, one to a group of post graduate furniture designers and the one we observed, to a mixed group, were offered under the auspices of the King's (formerly Prince's) Foundation based

at Barley Court in the grounds of Highgrove. Brian's mixed group were working on projects of their own as well as using Brian's clever miniature chair seats, which he also uses when teaching at Company Basketmaking days.

He explained where rattan comes from in Asia and how this extraordinary tree grows like a bramble bush, covered in vicious thorns, that can achieve many metres in length. It was originally used as a packing material on long sea voyages to prevent the cargo of tea chests moving and then picked up as a free material in the London Docks. The basketmakers and chair caners only needed to split and clean the rattan ready for use. There were many chair caners in the early days in London but from the 1830's the trade moved to High Wycombe. There are very few now and mainly doing restoration work. However, Brian is seeing a



renewed interest in rattan among young furniture designers and two years ago began working with one chair maker producing new, commercially available caned chairs: the first available in the UK since the 1930's.

The many examples of different patterns both in miniature and as samplers were lying around the studio; beautiful pieces of work that the students could study for guidance and inspiration, from the standard six-way pattern to more elaborate weaves. Learning about the tools and the correct usage was equally

emphasised. Brian explained the importance of the balance of fresh air to cane. The seating must be strong but also flexible and attractive. An exception to this, he explained, was in the making of covers to commodes. The rule then was to weave more closely to allow ventilation but not a view of the contents!