

**Royal Charter Banquet
Guildhall, 19th February 2014**

**Speech by the Master
His Honour Judge Tudor Owen FRAeS**

Your Royal Highness, Lord Mayor Locum Tenens, Masters, Prime Wardens, Upper Bailiff, Sheriff, Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen -

I welcome you to Guildhall, a historic building which embodies the heritage of the City of London, on what for us is a historic occasion.

I shall try to keep my speech as short as is feasible given the very special occasion - mindful of His Royal Highness' astute observation some years ago that *"the mind cannot absorb what the backside cannot endure"*.

The connection between the Royal Family and flying stretches back almost to the dawn of aviation:

Their Majesties Kings Edward VIII, George V, and George VI were all pilots. Our Patron was an active pilot for 44 years. Our Grand Master, His Royal Highness the Duke of York, served 22 years in the Royal Navy as a helicopter pilot. Prince William and Prince Harry recently served as helicopter pilots in the Royal Air Force and Army Air Corps respectively. Time doesn't permit me to mention all the many members of the Royal family who are or were pilots.

The Royal family's connection with our Company goes back almost as long:

The then Duke of Kent was our first Grand Master from 1938 until 1942. Her Majesty the Queen, then the Princess Elizabeth, became our Grand Master in 1946 and, on her accession to the throne, graciously assented to become Patron with the Duke of Edinburgh succeeding her as Grand Master – an office he held for 50 years.

Although our Company and the pilots' profession are well aware of your considerable skill and huge experience as a pilot, Sir, it is little appreciated outside those circles.

His Royal Highness learned to fly at what was then RAF White Waltham – as all the best pilots did -- not that I'm biased!

Our Patron qualified to fly aeroplanes with the Royal Air Force, and then helicopters with the Royal Navy, in 1953 and by the time he gave up flying in 1997 had made some remarkable flights and accumulated almost 6000 hours in 59 types of aircraft.

We welcome you, Sir, not as a guest but as our much respected Patron and, if I may respectfully say so, as one of us.

It is particularly appropriate that you should present our Royal Charter, Sir because it was you who, in 1956, received from the then Lord Mayor, Letters Patent granting Livery to the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators.

Our Patron's knowledge of aviation matters and his close interest in our activities has been demonstrated on many occasions including, on one occasion, writing to the Master of the day to explain why he disagreed with a stance we had taken on a flight safety issue.

I know you'll all find it hard to believe that the Duke of Edinburgh would speak his mind!

Perhaps it was His Royal Highness who best summed up his relationship with us, many years ago, when he said: *'I have quite a collection of decorative titles, but this is no problem where I have no particular knowledge of the subject involved. In the case of the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators, it is rather different as I am actively involved in aviation with fixed as well as rotating wings. The problem here is to keep a balance between absenteeism and interference.'*

You have always been successful at treading that fine line, Sir.

Our relationship is formal and informal, serious and jocular.

We naturally consulted our Patron and Grand Master when we were minded to take up the name to which we had been entitled since 1956. Our Patron thought about it for a moment and said: *'I don't think I've ever met a worshipful pilot.'* He then added: *'But I have met many honourable pilots.'*

We were naturally delighted when, a short time later, we learnt that Her Majesty had graciously bestowed upon us the title Honourable Company. We are very grateful to you, Sir, and to HRH the Duke of York for your advisory and active roles in our progress towards a Royal Charter.

Our Grand Master attended both our Livery Dinner and our Trophies & Awards Banquet this year. He is prevented from joining us this evening by a longstanding engagement, but I shall read the letter he has written to us. (The letter was published in the February issue of *Air Pilot*.)

Sir David, we welcome you this evening, conscious of the great office you represent, and thank you for your very kind comments about our Company. I had the pleasure of sitting next to the Lord Mayor at a splendid Fletchers' banquet recently and know she is sorry she is unable to join us. We ask you to convey our Company's warmest wishes to the Lord Mayor and assure her of our loyalty and support.

How appropriate it is that you are our Guest of Honour this evening because our petition for Letters Patent was first read to a Court of Aldermen presided over by your grandfather in 1956. And, given that he was a member of the war-time Cabinet Committee for aircraft supply, I like to think he would have been pleased that we have now been granted a Royal Charter.

I thank you on behalf of our Company for recommending that the Court of Aldermen support our petition to the Privy Council.

I wholly endorse Sir David's acknowledgement of our Clerk's pivotal role in every part of the process towards our Royal Charter. I know Paul joins me in thanking barrister Keith Lawrey for his enormous help with the detailed work involved in preparing our Petition. A fellow member of The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, he willingly responded to my request for assistance. Thank you, Keith.

I also wish to publicly thank our friends The Honourable Company of Master Mariners, of which our Patron is Admiral.

I am aware that a few of their Past Masters were initially less than enthusiastic about our change of title. However, we have had nothing but support and encouragement from the Master Mariners during the past year. Important family reasons prevent the Master, Captain John Hughes, from joining us this evening but I quote from a letter he has written to me:

'My sincere apologies to you and to your Wardens for not being able to attend your Royal Charter Banquet. I am really sorry that I not able to join you for this very special evening; I'm sure you will be very proud to hold the Royal Charter and know that you are now a member of a very exclusive Honourable club. Our warmest congratulations to your Livery Company and I'm sure that this great honour will do nothing other than to strengthen the ties that already exist between us.'

We, the **Air Pilots**, are a modern company - the art and skill that we profess is modern. We are also a working company. We play an active and influential role

in aviation, promoting and rewarding excellence in the pilots' profession, contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of flight safety, We actively continue the long Livery tradition of philanthropy, awarding many substantial scholarships and bursaries every year.

We are the inheritors of a legacy which, although not as old as those of the ancient companies, is nonetheless rich, diverse and full of the fellowship that is an integral part of belonging to a livery company.

The pilots' profession is international and, as you have said, Sir David, so are we. We welcome members here this evening from our Regional Committees in North America, New Zealand, Australia and Hong Kong.

In common with many other livery companies, we support the armed services and are delighted to welcome very senior representatives from each this evening. We enjoy close and active relationships with our many Affiliated Units in all three armed services, including Reserve and Cadet units. I hope their representatives will forgive me for mentioning just one by name: the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team.

The Red Arrows celebrate their 50th display season this year. We congratulate them upon their anniversary and hope that, for many years to come, they will continue to enthral millions of people all over the world with their magnificent displays.

We are proud of all our many spheres of activity and, naturally, immensely proud of the great honour that has been bestowed upon us.

It is, therefore, an enormous privilege and a very great pleasure for me to invite you all to rise and join me in the very first toast to:

THE HONOURABLE COMPANY OF AIR PILOTS

May it flourish root, and branch, for ever.