

## January 2023 Eye-to-Eye Report: Something in the City

The first Eye-to-Eye session of 2023 saw a bumper attendance of around 40 screens?; perhaps it was the subject matter: four speakers with most interesting roles in different aspects of City of London life.

The first speaker was Tiphaine Le Bian, the Deputy Clerk to the Chamberlain's Court. She runs many Freedom of the City ceremonies, so she may be familiar to some of our Freemen. Tiphaine explained that the Freedom certificates are still written on parchment, then recounted the various ways one may qualify for the Freedom: namely by servitude (the traditional mode of someone completing their apprenticeship), patrimony (if a parent was a Freeman at the time you were born); nomination (anyone, of any nationality, can apply if sponsored by two Aldermen, Common Councillors or long-standing Liverymen); and being a Freeman of a Livery company. Being French, Tiphaine did mention that she sometimes got a bit of stick from Fletchers and Bowyers and was only just getting used to working everyday under the gaze of statues of Wellington and Admiral Lord Nelson! She was looking forward to the forthcoming ceremony for Tottenham Hotspur and England striker, Harry Kane, but promised not to mention the World Cup...

Next was Christine Rigden, a past Sheriff and past Master of both the Constructors' and the Masons' companies, who spoke about her present role as one of the City's four Ale-Conners. This role dates to Roman times, the Ale-Conners' task being to test the quality of ale being sold. She gave a very interesting potted history of ale and beer and the difference between them (no hops and hops respectively). The ceremonial side of Ale-Conning may have changed over the years – as illustrated by some newsreel footage from the ceremony in 1949 - (which can be seen via this link from the BBC Archive © BBC: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=693075372327933>) – but it still involves sampling the ale. The other test of quality is carried out by pouring some ale on a wooden chair on which the Ale-Conner, wearing special leather trousers, sits; if the chair sticks to the trousers when the Ale-Conner stands up again, the ale contains too much sugar and is deemed to be not of high enough quality for sale in the City. Christine assured us that this had not yet occurred on her watch.

The third speaker was Jesmin Chowdhury, Diary Officer to the Lord Mayor. She first heard about the Lord Mayor as a child in a primary school just inside the City walls and never imagined that one day she would be working in the private office. She pointed out that the Lord Mayor was usually on overseas visits for around 100 days of the year, and even in London he can undertake 11 or more different engagements every day so the pressure on his diary is intense. His appointments could run from early morning through to the evening when he would then have to change into the relevant outfit and have a brief moment to rehearse his speech for his evening engagement. Even comfort breaks had to be scheduled during the day and lunch was not always an option. Jesmin is based at Mansion House and gave her talk from the magnificent Long Parlour.

Finally, our very own Beadle, Peter Thompson, spoke. Except he's not just our own, being Beadle to several other Livery Companies and a professional toastmaster. He gave a fascinating account of his previous career as a police officer with Kent Police which nearly finished before it began with a serious injury during his training at Hendon Police College. Nevertheless, after progressing from uniformed duties, he went on to supervise several specialist teams during a 30-year career, including close support work, leading a team of divers and investigation of cases of child abuse. Peter even shared a photo of himself in action which appeared on the front page of a newspaper at the end of a very hush-hush operation – the only way of explaining to his family where he had been for the last 2 days. Many members had no idea that our Beadle was such an Action Man. So next time you are at a WCSM event and you spy the Beadle – behave!

Our speakers demonstrated how the City appeals to people of many different backgrounds. There was just time for a short Q&A session and for the Master to voice our thoughts that it had been a most interesting and instructive evening.

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