

The Mystery of Bakers

Tony Cavan

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for inviting me to receive your bountiful hospitality on my first visit to the British Society of Baking.

Each new freeman or liveryman declares allegiance to the Company 'to keep unto himself all matters and ordinances of the Mystery of the Bakers of London'. Mystery is a medieval English word for a Trade Guild, which is what the Worshipful Company of Bakers is by successive Royal Charters of 1307 (now lost), 1486, 1509 (white bakers) 1569, 1622 (brown bakers) and 1687. At one time there were two guilds: White Bakers, who could make any kind of wheaten bread and Brown Bakers, who were restricted to imboulded or wholemeal bread, and dark bread of mixed corn containing rye or barley. Brown Bakers were also allowed to bake bread made from customers' own dough and horse bread, which included ground beans and peas.

In London there are 7 food guilds: the Fishmongers, Bakers, Cooks, Poulterers, Butchers, Fruiterers and Farmers. The Master Farmer earlier this year was the Princess Royal and she invited the Masters of these Companies to lunch in their hall and I found myself next to her with the Master Fruiterer on her other side. She showed much interest in my family business and thought that English wheat was not much good for bread making. I assured her they were much improved since we joined the European Community in 1973. I then made the mistake of telling her that, after the demise of the pig swill industry last year, due to foot and mouth disease, we found a farmer who took our stale bread for

feeding horses and cattle. 'Oh,' said the Master Farmer 'I never give bread to my horses, only bran'. Realising I had fallen into a pit of my own creation I attempted to climb out by telling her that in the middle ages and later the Brown Bakers of London produced special bread for feeding to horses.

The earliest record of the Bakers Company is in 1155 when the Bakers Guild paid 1 mark (about £6 per annum) to the exchequer of Henry 2nd. In the medieval London members of a trade formed Guilds to protect their trade and were attached to one City Church. They cared for those too feeble to work and finally the guild flag was flown at members' funerals. Until the Reformation we were known as the Fraternity or Guild of Our Lady and St Clement. Clement was a charismatic priest who became the 3rd Bishop of Rome, but in AD 99 he was martyred by the Romans by being cast into the sea with an anchor around his neck, hence the appearance of anchors in our coat of arms. By Royal Charter the Company has its Election Court on the Monday nearest the Feast of St. Clement, November 23rd. This year it will be 25th November and is followed by a Service in our Parish Church of All Hallows by the Tower and then the Election Banquet in the Mansion House in the presence of the Lord Mayor of London. The Court of the Livery Company consists now of the Master and four Wardens and 12 past masters and 14 assistants below the Wardens' Bench. The Court originally supervised the Bakers of the City of London through the Assize Laws passed in 1266 which regulated the life of bakers. Sale of corn was banned before

9.0 am. Bakers bought their own corn and had it ground by their mealman or miller. Bread was inspected at least once a month and weighed. The weight of bread went down as the price of wheat went up and the price was periodically fixed to account for journeymen and apprentices' wages and ingredient and fuel costs. As in ancient Rome each baker's loaf had to be indented with his own seal so any inferior loaf could be traced to its source. Transgressors were brought before the Court and fined or punished for breaking the rules. They were allowed 3 hits and then they were out. For the first two offences of short weight or adulteration, they were dragged through the City on a hurdle, later replaced by being put in the stocks or fined. For the third offence their ovens were pulled down, or after two transgressions a liveryman might be bailed to a city where the rules were less onerous, Coventry being the nearest, hence the saying being 'sent to Coventry'. The regulation continued with lighter punishments until the repeal of the Assize Laws in 1815.

The Bakers of London are never allowed to forget that the Great Fire of 1666 started in the bakehouse of one of its members, Thomas Faryner, the King's baker, in Pudding Lane. He said his oven fire was out and denied responsibility. A Frenchman, Robert Hubert, confessed to throwing a fireball into the bakehouse. He was hanged 6 weeks later as a scapegoat. Afterwards it was proved that he was not even in London at the time. There was a public enquiry and one of Mr Faryner's employees gave evidence that his boss had hams hanging in the oven's chimney and the fat from them was dribbling down on to the kindling below. So it is possible a chance spark from another source set the store of fuel, straw and wood ablaze so started a fire fanned by a strong wind that destroyed 13,200 dwellings and 87 churches, 44 Livery halls making 100,000 people homeless.

In 1506 the Bakers' Company bought the site of its present hall for £20. That hall burned down in 1666, but not before the resident Beadle Mr Roger saved many of the contents including the Tudor scales and weights. The Bakers Company is the second oldest in the City. The newest, number 103, is the Firefighters, who were incorporated at the Mansion

House earlier in 2002 when I told their Master that I wished they had been around in 1666. By 1675 a new hall was built. On 13th January 1715 a house of an oilman in neighbouring Thames Street blew up and a second fire burnt down 100 houses, an inn and Bakers Hall. We were insured for £750, and a total of £2000 was spent on building the third hall in Harp Lane which opened in 1722. Unfortunately it was destroyed by enemy action in December 1940 and was finally rebuilt and opened 11th October 1963. That is enough of History - 1666 and all that.

What of the Worshipful Company of Bakers today in 2002?

Our aims include:-

· To maintain and uphold the traditions and principles of the City of London.

For over 800 years the Liverymen have had the right to elect the 2 Sheriffs on Midsummer Day and the new Lord Mayor on Michaelmas Day. One Sheriff is on duty at the Old Bailey each day. The Sheriffs also attend and support the Lord Mayor at his duties in the City and one accompanies him on his trips promoting the City as a

financial centre abroad. All candidates must be Liverymen who are, as of right, Freemen of the City of London, the Sheriff, who is an Alderman usually becomes Lord Mayor 3 or 4 years later.

I attended another traditional event, the Beating of the Bounds of our Parish Church of All Hallows by the Tower. We embarked from Tower Pier on Ascension Day on 9th May to the Southern Boundary in the middle of the Thames where a pupil from St Dunstan's College was held over the side of the PLA motor launch Nore, and beat the water with a long bamboo cane, watched from the cabin by the Lord Mayor and the Ward Alderman, who were escorted by the Queen's Bargemaster and Watermen from the Watermens' Company. We then returned to dry land and about 20 pupils with their bamboo canes beat the pavements at 4 more boundary points. After a Service of festal evensong. We processed to the Tower of London for the Battle held every three years to reclaim the Parish boundary, moved by successive sovereigns in past centuries. At 7 pm a fearsome procession from the Tower headed by the Chief Yeomen Warder carrying his silver axe, then the Cross and the choir and clergy of the Chapel Royal and the Resident Governor of the Tower a retired Army Major General. All these were hissed and booed by our party - clergy, choir, wardens and congregation of All Hallows. A peaceful dialogue took place between our Ward Alderman ex Lord Mayor Sir Roger Cork and the Resident Governor. After which the Tower party retreated. The pupils then rushed across the road to the fence by the moat to reclaim the ancient boundary of All Hallows. To support the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs and Corporation in the promotion of the City as a financial centre and the well being of the community and less well-off the neighbouring boroughs. Some Livery Companies adopt schools in places such as Tower Hamlets, Camden and Southwark.

- To encourage and support the craft baking industry and baking education.

Each year the Master is invited to the Master Bakers' and Students' conferences. Ten years ago we hosted the launch of Doughnut Week, initiated by Christopher Freeman, in Bakers Hall in the presence of HRH Princess Royal as President of the Save the Children Fund. We give four-figure bursaries to the National Bakery School in London and have given the Freedom of our Company to the top Student of the NBS of the year since 1902. I have been trying to trace many prize-winners. We have the winner for 1947 and others include David Powell, Stephen Hallam of the Old Pork Pie Shop in Melton Mowbray, Carl Levenu of Kluman and Balter, William Flint son of Roy, Martin Mullally, some of whom are BSB members. We are trying to find more of them for a centenary celebration on 13th November, just 50 years since I enrolled at the National Bakery School. We give similar bursaries to Thomas Danby College, Birmingham Food and Bakery College, Clarendon College in Nottingham, each of which have liverymen nearby such as David Bentley for Leeds, Barrie Judge and Charles Geary for Nottingham, Stephen Hallam for

Birmingham, Tony Greenwood and others in London who meet the students and monitor their progress. We also give grants to the NFBSS conference and weekend school. We have started the Joseph Travelling Scholarship in memory of the late PM Hugh Joseph and his father Victor, once the President of the NAMB. The winner this year has gone on a study tour to Sweden supported by British Bakels, of whom Paul Morrow is a liveryman. Pierro Scacco is an honorary Freeman of the Company and

his benefactions have helped many young people study abroad. Last week we sent 2 young trainees from

AWBC on the NAMB study tour to Odense Marzipan Factory in Denmark stopping off at a German Bakery.

· The next aim is to invest in the citizens and leaders of tomorrow, through student and officer cadet sponsorship.

Here we give Stanley Wise Music scholarships once a year in turn to students of City of London Girls and Boys schools or the Guildhall School of Music. We also sponsor the University of London Officer Training Corps Army Cadets, e.g. last year with skiing equipment and clothing. One of that unit is training now for the womens national championship. The Royal naval section entertains us on an annual excursion to IOW on their naval patrol ship HMS Puncher. Our latest contribution to them was a rowing machine.

· Our last objective is to achieve these aims through the provision of a social programme in cooperation with our fellow City Liveries in keeping with the traditions of the City. Every year the Lord Mayor has his/her own charity, which for this coming year will be the Save the Children Fund.

I have tried to unravel what is still a mystery to many in our Trade and I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have either now or in the Coffee break.

Question – George Weston, Buckinghamshire

This is a London based society, are there equivalents in other cities in the UK?

Answer - Yes, there is a Bristol Master Bakers, and 10 years ago they were celebrating 800th anniversary of the Bristol Guild but they don't have the records and property that we have. There would have been guilds in every city. We have heard of Coventry, several in Scotland where they are called 'Incorporations of Bakers'. Bristol and Exeter have a trades hall. Overseas – in Lucerne and also in Vienna.

Q. John White, London

I've heard several explanations about a bakers dozen what is the official version?

A. The baker's dozen is a result of the fact that everyone was so scared of being hauled up before the court of the baker's company that they gave 13 pieces when 12 were ordered