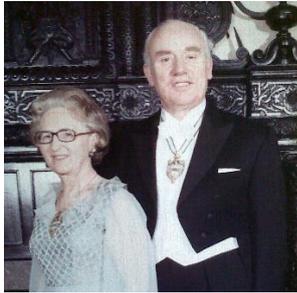


My year as Master Cutler, 1975-76 – Norman Hanlon.



Papers relating to the Cutlers' Company have been given to the Company by the family of the late Norman Hanlon, Master Cutler in 1975 – 1976. Among them is the text of a talk given to the Probus Group in 1977, describing aspects of his year of office. His descriptions are rare in that few personal reminiscences and comments are saved. This is a brief summary of the talk he gave.

After the formality of his election to be the next Master, the Election Dinner is held at which he had to make two speeches. He had already made one as Senior Warden at the Cutlers' Feast earlier in the year, and would be expected to make many more during his year.

His main recollections of the Installation were 'having the badge put around my neck and later, when hearing bells as I left the meeting Hall, I suddenly realised that I was hearing the Cathedral Bells and that they were ringing for me – the newly-installed Master Cutler – a great moment'.

He records that he personally completed 224 engagements, of which 133 were joint functions with his wife, the Mistress Cutler, and that she had another 40-50 engagements on her own. He had to decline 122 engagements due to date clashes, or being abroad continuing his job. He had resolved to limit the intake of alcohol, which proved difficult as most functions had excellent cellars, but he did lay off the port. He calculated that he ate his way through 40 lunches and 74 dinners (saving on housekeeping) and attended dozens of receptions and cocktail parties, but was pleased to report that he was the same weight at the end of his year, as when he started it!

Once a month was spent at Official Church Services. Then there were meetings, lectures, balls, prize-givings, works' visits and other interesting engagements.

He made thirty-five official speeches and many more 'off the cuff', on his theme of 'The Restoration of the UK Manufacturing Industry' as opposed to the merchandising of imported products. He began by dreading the making of speeches and decided that they should be no longer than 12-14 minutes long. He tried to distil his thoughts and make every word matter, but that on re-reading some, he thought that they might be considered to be too concentrated. But he was well-received and reported that no-one threw anything at him!

The formal events brought with them the formality of dress, many involving morning suit and top hat, while all the London Livery Company dinners were evening dress and black ties were not seen. Of course, at all functions he wore the Master Cutler's badge which seems to have readily recognised in London, and the Cutlers' Company well-respected. He was very worried about looking after the Badge and counted the diamonds, after every dinner.

People seem to have been interested in hearing his impressions of all the events of his year, and while all the function were full of interest, small portions fixed themselves in his memory. The Lord Mayor of London's banquet at the Guildhall was impressive for the ceremonial procedures, especially the entry of the cloaked Judges in red or black. The processions at the Swan Feast and the Boar's Head Feast were interesting and well done. The smoking of clay pipes after the Skinners' Dinner was an outstanding feature, though he was amused to see the men walking round with long clay pipes and smoking like fury.

Not all the dinners were large affairs. The Dyers' and the Merchant Taylors' Banquets had about 50/60 people only. In Glasgow, the fourteen trades had combined and the organisation and layout of the hall was thought to be spectacular, as was the menu card and the food and drink. In Edinburgh, he was reminded that one did NOT sing the National Anthem when it was played and, in York, the Merchants of the Staple of England held their dinner by candlelight in the Long Gallery at Castle Howard.

In Sheffield, the Master was invited to innumerable events, many were for fund raising, such as the Lyceum Rescue Fund and for Sheffield Boys' Clubs (where the concert at the City Hall went on until 2am). There were invitations to the many City Clubs for Pensioners, to the Sea Cadets at Loxley House, to the Award Ceremony for Scouts at Hesley Woods and the Graduation ceremony for young navigators at RAF Finningley. And many more. The Master also enjoyed his invitation to the Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and meeting members of the Royal Family who visited Sheffield. But he was really excited by his trip on the footplate of the Master Cutler train.

He was justly proud of the two major events at the Cutlers' Hall – The Cutlers' Feast and the Forfeit Feast – which he considered to be second to none. The principal guest at the Cutlers' Feast was Dr Coggan, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Lindsay Ring, was principal guest at the Forfeit Feast. The customary visit to the Master's works on the day after the Cutlers' Feast went without a hitch and people could not fail to be impressed with seeing the hot steel and the processes of manufacture

Summary by Dr Joan Unwin, Archivist, February, 2015.