

Master Cutler's report for 2017/18 – Kenneth Cooke



Being Master Cutler has been a unique and exhilarating experience and I will look back with so many happy memories. For a year my life has been consumed by my activities as Master Cutler and I have met some amazing people, visited unique manufacturing facilities and been shown a warm welcome and hospitality at over 200 events.

I have been well supported in my role by my wife Janet, our two daughters Joanne and Natalie, our grand-children James and Charlotte along with other members of our close family. It is well known that Janet has been quite ill throughout a large part of my year but her positivity and confidence has carried me through during this amazing journey.

I would like to thank the Members of the Cutler's Company for allowing me the honor of being Master as well as the chairmen and members of the various committees, and the Clerk and his staff for their support throughout the year.

During my year of office one of my aims was to see the Cutlers' Company and the Hall opened to a wider audience and, to this effect, we have seen larger than normal attendance at the Christmas carol service, the Freeman's and Friends' dinners, the Cutlers' and Forfeit Feasts and at the Mistresses' Lunch where over 100 ladies took part.

There is no doubt that part of this success is attributed to the Cutler's Company's management of the Hall and my thanks to the staff of the Hall for making this happen and enhancing our reputation around the Region.

The charity work continues through the Cutler's own Charitable Trust and the Sir John Osborn Charitable Trust, distributing around £ 55,000 in grants to small local charities and also the Master Cutler's Challenge is now in its eleventh year.

This year's Master Cutler's Challenge has raised money for the Bluebell Wood Children's Hospice. It has followed the format of previous years in encouraging companies and individuals to involve friends, work colleagues and associates in fun ways of fund raising.

My thanks to Bluebell wood for their organizational skills and to everyone who has participated during the past 6 months and although we are still awaiting a final figure, we expect that the amount raised to be in excess of £ 200,000.

The Company continues our education program, 'Better Learners Better Workers,' and we have consolidated our position with schools in Sheffield, Rotherham and Barnsley. The year culminated in March with our 160 Cutlers Ambassador being presented with their passport to employment. My thanks go to Chris Edwards, Sarah Ward, Sheffield City Council, participating schools and the Business Champions who make the scheme so successful.

We also have our Joint Awards Scheme with the Worshipful Company of Armourers and Brasiers, supporting Undergraduates, Apprentices and Young Managers with travel awards to enhance their experience and career prospects. There were some excellent applications this year with successful overseas trips now completed.

Like my immediate predecessor, I participated in an International trade mission, in my case to Poznan - Poland in early June. A number of manufacturers from the Region took the opportunity to visit the industrial shows taking place at the time and feedback was extremely positive. My thanks go to William Beckett and Renate Halton of the International Trade Forum for the superb organization and making the visit possible.

Our principle guest at the Cutlers Feast in May was the Rt Hon Lord Adonis. His speech followed that of The senior Warden, Nick Cragg, who covered many topics including leaving the European Union, the Industrial Strategy, as well as the opportunities presented by regional devolution and the strength of the Sheffield City Region as a manufacturing base. Lord Adonis is noted for being outspoken in many areas but his speech concentrated on the unique opportunities for the region including HS2. and he also responded to the Senior Wardens speech.

At the forfeit feast, I was pleased to host the Lord Mayor of the City of London, Alderman Charles Bowman and his wife Samantha, accompanied by the Sheriffs and Mansion House team. They enjoyed the day with site visits to AES Seal and also found time to be briefed by 25 manufacturing business leaders, who confirmed the value, versatility and quality of the goods and services supplied from within the Sheffield City Region. Following the excellent meal and speeches the evening culminated with the sounds of the Worsborough Brass band.

As you are aware, the Master Cutler gets the opportunity to express the views and concerns of local manufacturers to those with power and influence. I have kept up the tradition by visiting as many local companies as possible and promoting articles in the local media ensuring that a positive image of our values is presented. I have also taken the opportunities, when presented, to talk to local and national politicians on issues affecting manufacturers and the wider business community.

In the Region the AMRC and Olympic Legacy Park are still attracting investment from international companies and the funding for the Health and Wellbeing Center has now been approved. In addition, many established manufacturing companies are reporting high levels of investment, growth in exports and improving business confidence.

On the downside politically and economically with the election of Dan Jarvis MP as our Regional City Mayor, we expected the 4 local authorities in the region to sign the Sheffield City Region deal but this is unlikely to happen in the near future. Sadly, the result is that since 2017 we have lost a minimum of £ 30 million per year for the Region, money we can ill afford to turn away.

Janet and I have enjoyed upholding the traditions of the Company, visiting many livery companies in London, Bristol, York, Glasgow and Edinburgh and each visit has been unique. During these memorable occasions I have been continually working to promote the region and have seen the high regard in which the Master and Company are held by everyone we met. It was not unusual to find ourselves on the top table at a prestigious Mansion House function and the Company's relevance and involvement with the manufacturing community is admired and well respected throughout.

My thanks go to my Chaplain the Rev Canon Keith Farrow and his wife Alison for their support over this last year and I would like to thank Keith for his excellent speech at the Cutlers Feast.

It has been an enormous honor to be the Master and Mistress Cutler, and it will be a period of our lives we will never forget. I wish my successor Nick Cragg a happy and successful year for 2018-19.