

**The Lady Mayor's speech at the 2026 Dinner to the Masters, Prime Wardens and Upper Bailiff
Mansion House, Thursday 19th March 2026**

Masters. Prime Wardens. Upper Bailiff. Fellow Aldermen. Mr Recorder. Mr Dean. Sheriffs. Chief Commoner. Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good evening and a very warm welcome to Mansion House for this very special dinner, to thank you for the support you have shown not only to me and Gary, but the entire civic team and - importantly - to our City.

It genuinely makes a real difference.

And let me say a huge thank you to our other speakers, the Master Mercer and the Master Grocer.

I wondered what to speak about this evening and decided what I'd really like to do is to talk about something that often goes unseen, but has an extraordinary impact...your commitment to supporting young people, sectors and heritage crafts.

I'm often asked, "*what does the livery **actually** do?*"..."*who is the Livery for?*"..."*aren't they just glorified dining clubs?*".

It's very tempting to reply with a little sarcasm...to say, "*oh, nothing much - just £81 million of charitable giving and over 76 thousand hours of pro bono support a year.*"

But we have to have a real answer. Because **we** know what the livery does. But, to the rest of the world, we are sometimes a curiosity, or historic, or quaint.

But, across the City, and far beyond, the Livery movement does something rare and powerful...

It is a community rooted in tradition, yes, yet deeply committed to the future.

You carry centuries of history, craftsmanship, standards, and service.

But one of the most important things you all do is not preserving the past, it's investing in the next generation.

That's why, during this mayoralty, I want to highlight the work you do to support heritage crafts, as well as your other industry sectors.

When I said I was going to launch a Heritage Crafts Taskforce, it raised a few eyebrows - just like when I said I wanted to lightly modernise and go by "Lady Mayor".

I could see people's brains trying to compute -- thinking, "*heritage crafts - well that's not very modern, is it*".

But that couldn't be further from the truth.

As you know, I am an East End girl, loud and proud. My parents always told me, "*anything is possible*", and I believed them.

I came into the job market with an open mind and an optimistic outlook, and the City has rewarded me with a fantastic career.

So, I was horrified to read the results of a recent survey, which said that more than a quarter of young people feel they're going to fail in life.

And they have a right to be worried.

It's been predicted that, by the mid-2030s, up to a third of current roles could have just... disappeared.

...which presents a *real challenge* for young people looking to find their place in the world.

As AI takes a sledgehammer to the career ladder, crafts present a *real opportunity* for young people - many not always academic - looking for a pathway into something different...

...not hundreds of thousands, perhaps, but every life changed counts.

From basketweaving to goldsmithing, clockmaking to ironmongery, the skills you nurture can't be replicated by a machine...and they are in demand.

There's a *growing* desire for authentic, one-of-a-kind items that are produced slowly and sustainably...that tell a story about the person who made them and the world we live in.

Custom furniture, tailored clothing, artisan food products - in a sea of mass-produced goods, *these* are the things people are seeking out, to feel special and connected with tradition.

The number of people buying craft in England has grown from 7 million to over 31 million.

This is a sector with *significant potential for growth*, with estimates suggesting the *global* market could reach \$1 trillion.

So, there couldn't be a better time to support young people...which so many of you do, through bursaries, awards, course funding or more...

And that's not self-serving - it's not *just* about preventing crafts from dying out, it's about continuing traditions in a way that gives *life* and *livelihoods* to the next generation.

The Livery has survived for centuries because it can be disruptive, not dogmatic...

From the Needle-makers' Award for Advanced Innovation Technology to the Furniture Makers' Sustainability Award, you push your industries to innovate and adapt.

And innovation is what the City needs...and that's what we want to see more of.

To return to the raised eyebrows...

Yes, of course, I want to support heritage crafts and, in fact, all of the sectors you support...

Because, this isn't only about giving young people a career - a chance to *succeed* - it's also about making them feel like they *belong*.

You're not just helping them learn a skill, you're providing a network, and a sense of fellowship, and equipping them with the social skills that are going out of fashion.

That's what I mean when I talk about wanting to "unsquare" the Square Mile, and create opportunities for all.

I'm pleased to say, supported by you, our work on the Heritage Crafts Taskforce is going well...

Over half of you took part in our survey, which found there's a core, committed group of companies who support crafts, but knowledge transfer between liveries is limited.

That's something for us to work on together.

We also received lots of nominations for the Lady Mayor's Livery Apprentices award scheme...

...and I look forward to celebrating the winners - *and you* - here at Mansion House in September.

Over 30 liveries showcased opportunities to young people at Guildhall during London Careers Festival.

And I encourage you to get involved in the Open House Festival and Heritage Open Days in September.

Dinner to the Masters

Finally...to set young people up with the skills and attitude to succeed in life...as well as heritage crafts, we're also supporting *cadets* this year...

-- another area where livery companies are unsung heroes.

Gary is an Honorary Colonel for cadets...so, please do speak to him if your company is interested in sponsoring more cadet units...

As a sign of the close links between the City, the Livery, and the military, can I now please say a special thank you to our five ADCs for our mayoral year. Can they stand up so we can give them a round of applause.

Friends...

Gary, Robert, Keith, Elspeth, Kevin and I are so grateful for the way you open your arms to us throughout the year.

But this is *your night*.

...a chance for us to say "thank you" for the generosity...support...and friendship you give so freely.

I've always said that you change people's lives one person at a time.

If each of you even change the direction of *just one*, and open up the door to opportunity, that *has* to be worth it.

Crafts, trades, professions, and even military units only survive when one generation takes on the responsibility to teach the next.

And that...

Is exactly...what you do.

Thank you.