

The Flame



DEAR FIREBIRDS,

This edition is full of reports about events that involved both the Firebirds and the Phoenix Past Masters. From the Firebirds Old Bailey Tour and Biennial Lunch to the Phoenix Porto visit. This shows perhaps that we all have similar interests and seem to enjoy being in each other's company. So much so, that Isobel Pollock-Hulf OBE (Phoenix Past Master Engineer) has written a captivating article (pages 9-11) about the HMS Warrior. It is hoped that her article will persuade the Firebirds, if they need persuading, to accompany their Past Masters on another Phoenix Past Masters trip. This time to the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth, giving us the opportunity of seeing the newly restored HMS Warrior. It worked for me - despite not being a seafaring person, I am sold on it!

I enjoyed reading Rosemary's report (pages 6-8) about the Porto trip. With the big barrels at Grahams' holding 70,000 litres, the whole cellar area apparently holds 4,500,000 litres or 6 million bottles worth. If you drank a small glass every night, it would take you over 160,000 years to finish it. (Numbers courtesy of John Nugée.) Enough there then to enjoy for the next few Christmas celebrations.

Wishing you all a peaceful Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year,

Yours

Erika Gloyn (Masons)
Editor

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FORTHCOMING FIREBIRDS EVENTS

**Monday
17th February 2020**

Firebirds AGM and Lunch at the Farmers' and Fletchers' Hall. Booking details will be sent out in the new year.

Please put this date in your diaries and come to the AGM. It is a very good opportunity to air your preferences for future outings. This in turn would be very helpful in planning events.

FORTHCOMING PHOENIX EVENTS

**Wednesday
11th March 2020**

Phoenix Spring Dinner, including Firebirds, at Apothecaries Hall.

**Friday/Saturday
22nd / 23rd May 2020**

Phoenix and Firebirds visit to Portsmouth, dinner on HMS Warrior and visit to the Historic Naval Dockyards with tours of the Mary Rose and the Victory.

**Monday
8th June 2020**

Phoenix and Firebirds visit to Michael and Hilary Goodridge's garden (Surrey), with afternoon tea.

The views and opinions expressed by the authors and those providing comments are theirs alone and do not reflect the views and opinions of the Editor or the Firebirds Committee.



OLD BAILEY TOUR

by Peter Green (Framework Knitters)

Late afternoon, 29th January 2016. Liz and I experienced the wonder of the Old Bailey courtesy of a charity auction 'Tea with Sheriff' prize courtesy of Phoenix and Firebird vice-presidents Christine and Stephen Rigden. Over the last year, Liz and I have had the pleasure of leading groups small and large around this amazing building and I always recall our initial awe as we toured the building for the first time.

Therefore it was with much pleasure that we were able to host a group of 49 Firebirds and Phoenix Past Masters for a tour and supper on July 23rd 2019. The City of London is host to many fabulous buildings, but for me the Old Bailey is particularly special, due in part to being a working building and the contradiction of amazing architecture with horrific criminal trials.

We have been on both the 'giving and receiving' end of numerous Old Bailey tours, and each 'guide' tells the story from a different perspective so there is always something new to learn. Our predecessor, Neil Redcliffe, was a Charles Dickens fan so brought to life some of these novels with stories from the Old Bailey and Newgate prison. Without a literary bone in our bodies, Liz and I took a different route by recounting some of the idiosyncrasies of past cases (some of which may even have been true!) and explaining a little about the current judicial process from trials to rehabilitation. And no tour would be complete without background on the architecture and artwork. So we had some homework to do before our early tours. In 1898 the land was purchased by the City of London Corporation and an architectural competition ensued. Six architects submitted plans with no restriction but requiring "impressiveness and dignity without excessive ornamentation". Edward Mountford's design was selected although, as an unbiased observer, only the late Victorians could consider the Grand Hall 'understated'.

The 'wow factor' of walking up the main staircase into the Grand Hall never diminished during our year at the Old Bailey and it was always a great pleasure watching faces on rounding the first flight of stairs (having first told the story of Edward VII who, for the opening of the new building in 1907, had a special lift installed, since "the King doesn't do stairs" – and then proceeded to stride up the staircase to the bemusement of all).

During evening visits it is easy to forget the role of the building as the senior criminal court in the country. The trip to the cells is a stark reminder, and of my surprises during our year was the impact on Liz of learning about the judicial system and in particular the challenges of prisoner rehabilitation. The events of the last few days at Fishmongers' Hall is a stark reminder of the human cost of any failure in the system. We met several amazing charities such as Working Chance, and companies such as Timpson's that help to rehabilitate and reintegrate ex-offenders into society – surely the best outcome for all. And other charities such as Leadership Through Sport and Business that focus on creating aspiration and opportunity for youngsters who would not typically be exposed to potential careers in professional services.

The committee agreed for a charitable donation to be included in the ticket price since we did not have to pay for the venue hire (or tour guides!). Combined with two extremely generous personal donation, the evening raised £1,000 for the Sheriffs' and Recorder's Fund. Thanks to all those who joined us.

Now our year at Old Bailey has drawn to a close, we can look back on so many happy occasions. Our evening with fellow Firebirds was clearly one of these – good food and fine wine, but more importantly the conviviality of our year group. And although Liz and I are now members of a second year group, we will always be Phoenix and Firebirds at heart!



FIRBIRDS AND THEIR PAST MASTERS ENJOYING DINNER AT THE OLD BAILEY



THE FIREBIRDS BIENNIAL LUNCH ON HQS WELLINGTON

By Angela Chambers (Pewterers)

After grey skies and rain in the morning, the Firebirds' Biennial Lunch kicked off with a reception on the Quarterdeck of HQS Wellington just as the sun came out. Seventy Firebirds and consorts mingled enthusiastically and with the Thames skyline as a backdrop it seemed like a jolly good start to the proceedings. We were very pleased to be joined by our President, Juliet Mountevans, and, despite the best efforts of Network Rail to thwart her, our Vice President, Samantha Bowman.

HQS Wellington is unique as it is the floating Livery Hall of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners. HQS Wellington is also a floating museum and library, as well as being a conference and dining venue. She entered service in January 1935 as an Imperial Patrol Sloop destined for the New Zealand Station. She had a total crew of 107 and was armed with two 4.7 inch guns, one forward and one aft, and one 3 inch high-angle gun used for anti-aircraft defence.

During the Second World War Wellington was fitted with depth charge throwers for anti-submarine warfare and provided escort to 103 convoys on the eastern side of the Atlantic, rescuing many survivors from sunken ships.

In January 1947 the Admiralty sold Wellington to the Honourable Company of Master Mariners. She was towed to Chatham Dockyard where she was converted for civilian use, This took two years to complete. During this time a striking teak staircase leading down to the Courtroom was installed, this came from the Isle of Man ferry, SS Viper, which was being broken up on the Clyde at the time.

An excellent two course lunch with both red and white wine was served in the Courtroom, originally the boiler and engine rooms. After the usual Toasts our Chair, Vicky Nugee, welcomed everyone and touched upon the recent successes of the Association. She also paid tribute to El Moss for organising the lunch and this was greeted with deserved applause.

It was then the turn of Liz Ward to introduce the guest speaker, Vivian Widgery. Vivian worked for Hansard of the House of Commons for 32 years and gave an illuminating and amusing talk, entitled 'A Life in Words'. She started working for Hansard in October 1979 as one of the first trainee reporters and ended up as Deputy Editor. The role of Hansard is to interpret the spoken word into the written word and it is mostly a verbatim report of what is said in Parliament. It became a department of the House of Commons at the beginning of the 19 century, and today it is streamlined and efficient with everything that is said in the House of Commons posted on the internet within three hours. Vivian regaled us with a string of stories about her time working there and said the only topic she was unwilling to discuss was Brexit!

This was a memorable and convivial occasion with the turnout demonstrating that the Association is thriving.



THE PORTO EXPERIENCE

By Rosemary Mahony (Plasterers)

On Monday 16th September 2019 a group of 35 Phoenix Masters and Firebirds arrived at the Hotel Carris Porto Ribeira in Porto. Porto is Portugal's second city and is sited on the steep banks of the River Douro at the point where it runs into the Atlantic Ocean. It is most famous for the many brands of Port wine that are produced on the terraced vineyards of the Douro.

The Ribeira Quarter where we stayed is a World Heritage site where multi-coloured houses tumble down to the river and a string of restaurants are scattered along the boat-lined quayside. Behind the waterfront lies a labyrinth of steep cobbled alleys and stairways with houses clinging together in a jumble of colour and decoration.

Our first trip took place on the Tuesday morning when we visited the world famous Graham's Port Lodge, but before we set off we 'mustered' on level -2 of the hotel for a briefing. This proved to be a considerable challenge as the hotel is built on split levels and it required a number of different lifts and a keen sense of direction to actually turn up in the right place. Several of us visited the gym and a number of storage areas before we finally arrived. However, everyone was in good form and the majority opted to take a river taxi across the Douro to Vila Nova de Gaia and then to walk up a relatively steep hill to the Lodge where we were met by Alex, our guide for the tour.

He was an immensely knowledgeable young man who was able to answer the questions thrown at him by our Masters – many of whom already knew a thing or two about Port!

Alex explained the whole production process from the growing and harvesting of the grapes through to the filtering and maturing. We walked through rooms full of the most enormous barrels, each one containing between 60,000 and 70,000 litres of Port and were told that the most expensive bottle would cost you €8,500. We learned that Vintage Port needs to be drunk quickly once it is opened, but Tawny Port can be enjoyed for a much longer period – the concept of enjoying a glass or two at Christmas over a number of years was met with incredulity by most of the group!

The lodge is now owned by the Symington Family and we visited their private collection of bottles of Port going back for over 80 years. Apparently, the best year ever for Port was 1945, but 2011 was also named as a classic Vintage year. There needs to be a very dry period during maturation and a spell of rain before harvesting to create the perfect conditions.

Following our tour we were invited to a tasting of four different Ports; a 10 year old Tawny, a 20 year old Tawny, Graham's Six Grapes and Graham's Quinta Dos Malvedos Vintage. There was very little use of the Spittoons during this session as the Ports were all extremely good and we had worked up quite a thirst with all the talking about the making of the wine. At the end of the tasting we were asked as a group to vote for our favourite and the majority of the Firebirds and some of the Masters preferred the Tawny Port. As a result the Chair of the Phoenix Past Masters, Mark Chambers said that he would consider changing to this variety at future dinners - look out for this at forthcoming events!

We finished off this most enjoyable tour with an excellent lunch in the Vinum restaurant, the food was exceptional and, of course, there was plenty of Port wine to go with it.

Our time was our own for the rest of the day and we discovered lots of places to visit and things to do, including riding on the funicular railway and cable cars and visiting the many cultural sites within the city.

The following day we mustered in the same place again – a bit quicker this time – and then left for a river cruise. The weather was not great and some of us were caught out by the coolness of the wind and the fine mist that hung over the river but it was a spectacular trip with the many bridges that span the river looming up out of the gloom. This was a great way to find out about Porto and its heritage and to appreciate just how steep the Douro gorge is and how precariously the buildings cling to its sides.

In the afternoon the indefatigable John Nugée offered to lead a gentle walk to visit some of the local sites but my husband and I opted instead for a 'tuk tuk' ride around the town. Our driver was an enthusiastic guide who flouted all the traffic laws and took us to places which were notable for their isolation. However, we did see and learn a lot and returned to our hotel unscathed. Did you know that J.K Rowling lived in Porto for a while and used the university students' formal dress as the template for the Hogwarts school uniform?



AT THE FACTORY HOUSE

In the evening we had the privilege of dining at the Factory House. This is the home of the British Port merchants and has a long and interesting history. The current building was erected in 1806 and was used as a meeting place for British Port Merchants, known as 'Factors', to conduct their business and defend their interests. Its rather stern exterior, protected by wrought iron gates, belies the treasures that lie within. A very fine hall leads on to an open stair well, where every step is made from a single piece of granite and the landings are embedded in the wall with no supporting pillars.

We were given a guided tour of this magnificent building by Dominic Symington who represented the British Association of Port Shippers and was our guest. His cousin Charles is Treasurer (equivalent of Master) of The Factory House and gave the formal permission for us to dine there.

Dominic took us through the Library which was filled with old and interesting books, the map room, with its unique cartographic collection and the ball room which was resplendent with its Wedgwood inspired walls and glittering chandeliers. Every Wednesday a lunch club meets at the Factory House and a copy of the Times newspaper dated exactly 100 years earlier is placed on show. There are displays of fine porcelain, silver and Chippendale furniture which remind us of the wealth that the exporting of Port to Britain created for the British Merchants.

The whole experience was similar to that of visiting an English stately home but the best was yet to come. We ate in the grand dining room which was redolent of a city livery hall with elegant candelabra casting a glow over the beautifully laid table and the very good meal that was provided. My favourite course was the Apricot and Camomile ice cream! Needless to say the wines were excellent - presumably they had been chosen from the 15,000 bottles that are stored in the building's underground cellar.

As if we hadn't had enough 'wow factor' for one night, we were then invited to participate in the custom of "Going Through" to the separate Dessert Room. In yet another splendid hall we were treated to dried fruit and nuts and Graham's 2000 Vintage Port. This is a splendid tradition, the reason for which is that the aromas of food from the dining room should not affect the appreciation of the fine port! A splendid finale to an excellent dining experience.

As a token of the Phoenix Master's thanks to the Board of the Factory House, the Phoenix Chairman, Mark Chambers, presented Dominic with a pewter water pitcher from a design used just by the Pewterers' Company. The piece was made by Sam Williams of AE Williams who is possibly the finest young pewter maker in the country.

This was a wonderful experience and provided a fitting end to an extremely well planned and stimulating trip to Porto. The Phoenix Committee and in particular John and Vicky Nugée and Mark and Angela Chambers put a great deal of time and effort into the planning of this expedition and I am sure that everyone who was lucky enough to be a part of the visit would want to thank them for a most memorable and enjoyable time.



PORTO FROM THE CABLE CAR

HMS WARRIOR

By Isobel Pollock-Hulf OBE (Phoenix Past Master Engineer). Isobel, Chair of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) Heritage Committee, became involved with and led the HMS Warrior 1860 Preservation and History Outreach Sub-Committee because of her interest in promoting engineering heritage.

A MULTI-MILLION POUND MAKEOVER BRINGS HISTORY TO LIFE ONBOARD

HMS Warrior is special. She is Britain's first iron-hulled, armoured warship and, when commissioned in August 1861, she was the largest warship in the world and immediately made all previous ships obsolete.

For naval historians HMS Warrior is the link between the wooden Ships of the Line of Nelson's Navy and the Dreadnoughts of the 1st World War Grand Fleet. She is fully masted with a full complement of sails, but also has powerful steam-driven engines and 20 boilers consuming 10 tons of coal an hour at full speed. The gun deck is open plan and very reminiscent of wooden ships, but also has breech loading cannons alongside the more traditional muzzle loaders. The style of the officers' quarters would not be unfamiliar to Nelson himself, but the ship was very much ahead of her time, providing all her crew, officers and ratings alike, with full bath and washing facilities, room to stow personal possessions and proper freshly cooked food. HMS Warrior really is one of a kind.



**HMS WARRIOR, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL NAVY, PORTSMOUTH
PATRON: HER ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCESS ALEXANDRA**

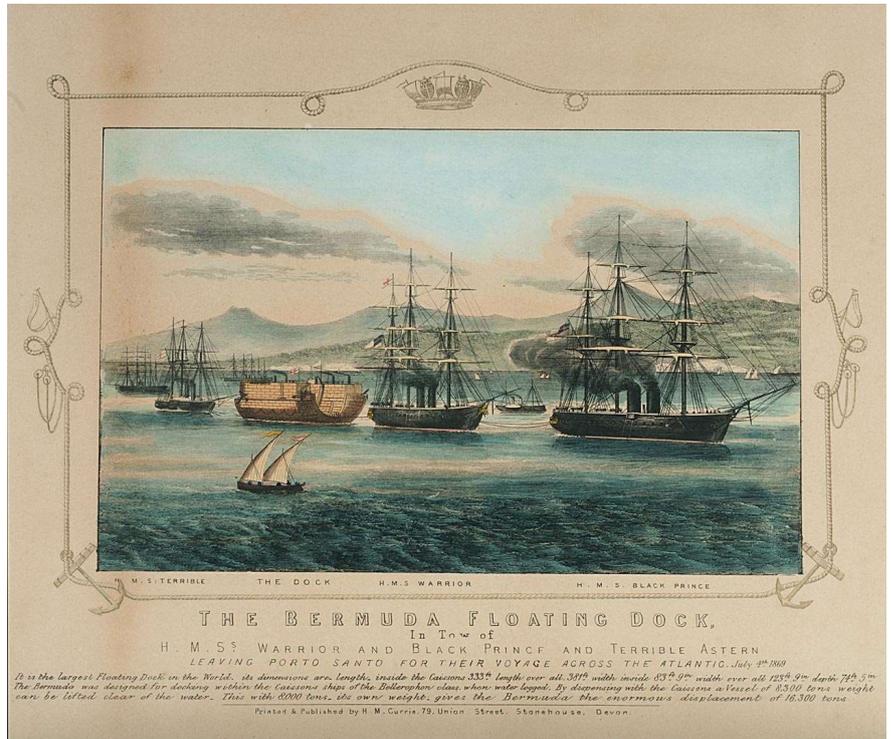
HISTORY

HMS Warrior was launched in 1860. Powered by steam and sail, Warrior could now be considered an early example of a dual fuel system. She was the largest, fastest and most powerful warship of her day and had a lasting influence on naval architecture and design.

Warrior was the pride of Queen Victoria's fleet. Built to counter the latest French battleship, Warrior was, in her time, the ultimate deterrent, although she never fired a shot in anger. Warrior is a unique survivor of the once formidable Victorian Black Battlefleet.

Having introduced a revolution in naval architecture, by 1864 Warrior was superseded by faster designs, with bigger guns and thicker armour. An example of the lesser role that she then played in the Navy is captured in this print of 1869 where she is shown towing a floating dock to the Naval dockyard in Bermuda.

By 1871 Warrior was no longer regarded as the crack ship she had once been, and her roles were downgraded to Coastguard and reserve services. In May of 1883 with her fore and main masts found to be rotten and not considered worth the cost of repair, Warrior was placed in the reserve, eventually converted to a floating school for the Navy and re-named Vernon III in 1904.



THIS COLOURED PRINT WAS FOUND BY ISOBEL AT SPANISH POINT, BERMUDA

Put up for sale as scrap in 1924, no buyer could be found, and so, in March 1929 she left Portsmouth to be taken to Pembroke Dock and converted into a floating oil pontoon, re-named again as Oil Fuel Hulk C77. By 1978, she was the only surviving example of the 'Black Battlefleet' - the 45 iron hulls built for the Royal Navy between 1861 and 1877.

HMS Warrior was rescued in the 1980's, restored in Hartlepool, and brought back home to Portsmouth in 1987 and at that time was owned by Warrior Preservation Trust, an independent charity.

Sadly, over the last 30 years, maintenance and repairs have remained a constant challenge, whether it be to the mooring chains, the rigging, hatches, the decking or rainwater seeping in, all of which threatened the original fabric of the ship. Most significantly, the bulwarks and water bar that serve to make watertight the junction between the deck and iron hull had rotted away. They were deteriorating to a point which placed the future of the ship at significant risk.

REBIRTH

2016 marked an incredibly important year for Warrior as the HMS Warrior Preservation Committee secured a grant of £3.2m from the Heritage Lottery Fund for essential restoration and conservation works and a visitor re-interpretation entitled "Revealing the Secrets of Shipwrights and Sailors".

There ensued a great deal of hard work as, with the help of specially designed crawling robots equipped with lights and cameras, the project carried out essential conservation work to completely replace the bulwarks and water bar on both sides of the upper deck. This complex and skilled work took 3 years under scaffolding and tarpauling.

The funding also enabled us to digitise the archival collections and, working from the information newly available, to enhance the visitor experience to the ship with exciting new interpretation. It has been a great opportunity to create valuable new learning resources with a wide-reaching programme of activities including outreach, community and volunteer projects, training and skills.

In total a dozen areas of the ship including the captain's cabin, galley and cabins belonging to senior officers have been opened to the public for the first time. Each is packed with historically accurate details, from the heavy diving equipment used by men to repair the hull, to the first washing machines to have been included on a ship and kit bags named with an authentic roll call of the crew. The brief was to present the ship as if the fully working crew had just left it.



THE GUN AND MESS DECK



THE PURSERS STORE



THE 'CREW' OF ACTORS STAND READY TO ANSWER QUESTIONS AND ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION

Across all four decks, visitors can now encounter costumed actors, each portraying a colourful character, while there are also opportunities for visitors of all ages to try their hand at basic sword-fighting and flag signalling - an essential means of communication at sea.

With flags fluttering in the July sunshine this year (2019), we marked the completion of the four-year conservation project and the launch of an all-new visitor experience on board.

In 2018, the ship was also transferred from being a separate charity into the National Museum of the Royal Navy where it joins an extensive collection of historic ships. Speaking at the event, Andrew Baines, Deputy Director of Historic Ships of The National Museum of the Royal Navy said:

"Over the past four years a dedicated team has followed in the footsteps of the men and women who built the ship, the crew who sailed her and the people who restored her. The replacement of the bulwarks will help ensure Warrior's survival for the next 150 years, whilst the digitisation of the archive and the opening of new spaces on board makes good on our commitment to National Lottery players to share the secrets of shipwrights and sailors."

You have the chance to see HMS Warrior and experience this marvelously re-created piece of history for yourself as the Phoenix Past Masters have arranged a joint visit, including the Firebirds, to the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth on 22nd May 2020. For more details please speak to your Phoenix Past Master.

Top Ten Trees in the City of London



Bill and I attended the excellent lunch at the Old Bailey, following the then Sheriffs Vincent Keaveny’s and Liz Green’s ride through the City of London to raise money for the Sheriffs’ and Recorder’s Fund.

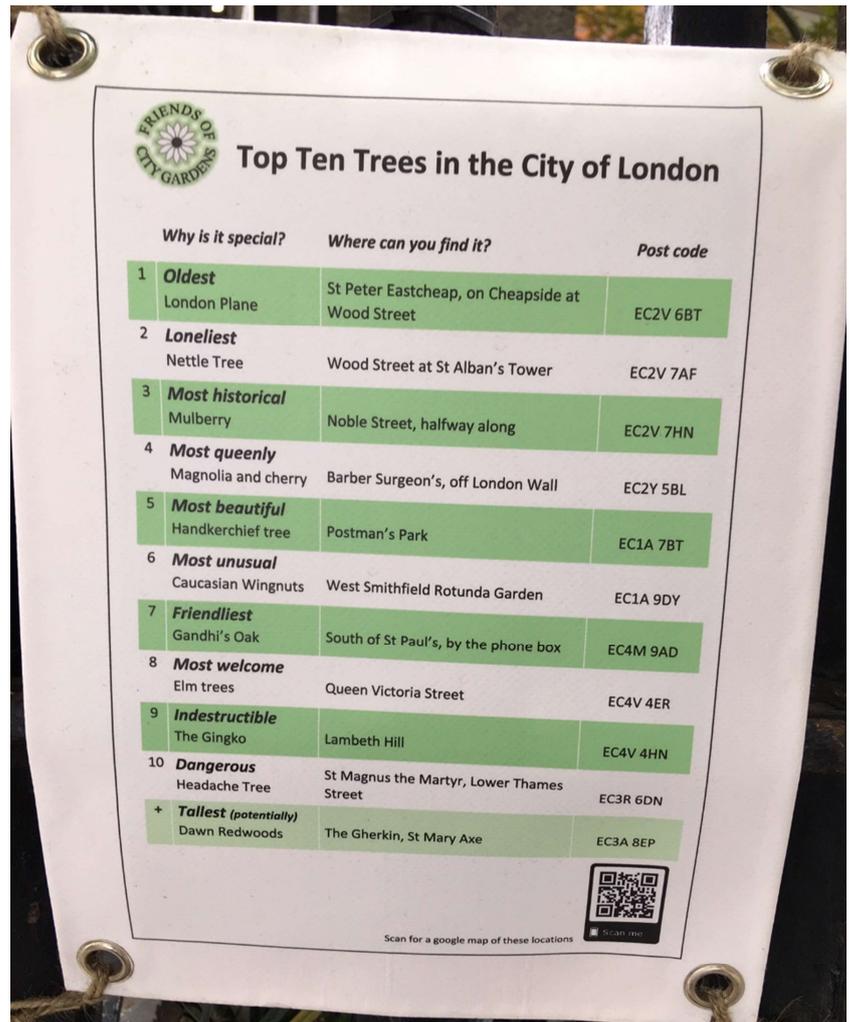
As we were quite close to Postman’s Park, a City Gem that Peter Green wrote about in his City Trivia article in December 2018, this was an opportunity to walk through it on our way back to the station and to look for the memorial wall Peter

described as consisting of glazed Doulton tablets. These commemorate acts of bravery, each one detailing the nature of an heroic act, often involving children and/or concerning fire, drowning or train accidents.

We found the memorial wall and were pleased to have visited the Park, which truly is an oasis.

On the way out, we spotted a notice fixed to the gate telling us where to find the top ten trees in the City of London. Apparently the ‘Most Beautiful’ tree was the Handkerchief tree, which was in Postman’s Park. This set us the challenge to find the handkerchief tree. I had seen handkerchief trees in Stourhead and Kew Gardens before, but both times they were ‘in flower’. The tree in Postman’s Park wasn’t, so it took us a little time to find it.

I haven’t tried to visit any of the other trees yet, but I shall put the idea on my project pile of things to do when the weather brightens up a bit.



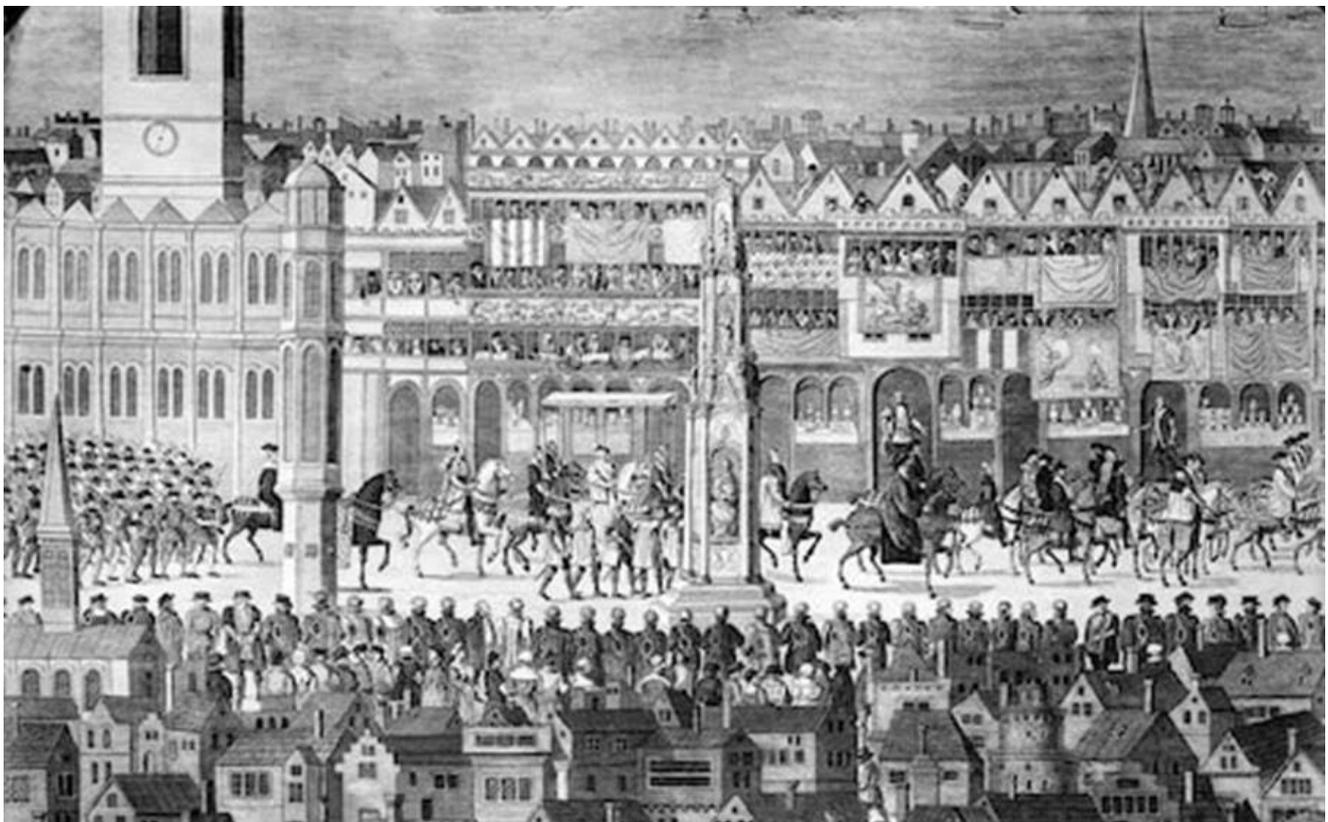


ADVANCE NOTICE

Landmark City musical theatre production and Livery Crafts Fair to be staged in Guildhall Yard at end of June 2020

The Becket Pageant for London, which forms part of **BECKET 2020***, a programme of events developed by partners from across the UK to mark Thomas Becket's triple anniversary, is a unique community project, focussing on Becket's little told relationship with London from birth to his adoption as the City's patron saint.

Centred around a new 70 minute stage-work by Emmeline Winterbotham (Phoenix Past Master Skinner) and set against the iconic backdrop of medieval Guildhall Yard, the event will seek to re-imagine the only known London Becket pageant, performed by guildsmen in 1519, through a playful musical entertainment for a modern audience. With a mix of professional and local community players (drawn from livery companies and City schools), original music, dancing, stunning costumes and 16 foot giant puppets, this spectacle will be presented over four performances over two days at the end of June 2020.



MEDIEVAL PAEGANT ON CHEAPSIDE

The pageant will be underpinned by a Livery Crafts Fair with displays of early and modern livery crafts around the perimeters of the performance which will seek to further appreciation of technical and creative skills and the role of the livery trades in building London's prosperity. Phoenix Masters Chairman, Mark Chambers, is in charge of the Fair and The Lord Mayor and Sheriffs have kindly indicated that they hope to be in attendance.

The events will take place over a Friday and Saturday (either 19/20 OR 26/27 June 2020) on which we are awaiting final confirmation by the Corporation.

 **We are looking for actors/singers/stewards and general helpers from across the livery world to work in combination with professional practitioners**

 **We are also looking for Worshipful Companies interested in taking a stall in the Livery Crafts Fair which will be accompanying the pageant.**

 **For further information on how you can become involved in the show or the Livery Crafts Fair please contact:**

- Emmeline Winterbotham Director Becket Pageant for London, (Past Master Skinner).
Becketpageant@gmail.com
- Mark Chambers Director, Becket Livery Crafts Fair (Past Master Pewterer)
Becketpageant@gmail.com

*Becket 2020 <https://becket2020.com/partners>

This is a programme of events and new resources developed by partners from across the UK, including Canterbury, London, Hereford, Lincoln and York to commemorate the triple anniversary of Thomas Becket (900 years since his birth, 850 years since his death, 800 years since the translation to his shrine in Canterbury Cathedral).

London participants include The British Museum, The Museum of London, The Mercers' Company in partnership with Gresham College, St Paul's and Southwark Cathedrals, and the Historic Towns Trust.

The London arm of Becket 2020 (Chaired by Professor Caroline Barron) meets throughout the year at Guildhall by kind permission of Paul Double, Remembrancer, and with the support of The City of London Cultural Programming and Partnerships Department.



El's Christmas Cake Recipe

125 g glacé cherries
50 g no-soak dried apricots
225 g each, currants, sultanas, seedless raisins
50 g chopped mixed peel
100 ml brandy
50 g each, blanched almonds, brazil nuts (optional)
225 g butter
Finely grated rind of 1 lemon
225 g soft dark brown sugar
4 eggs
225 g white plain flour
1 level tsp ground mixed spice
½ level tsp ground mace
2 tbsp milk

The day before you make the cake, rinse the cherries under cold water, dry completely on kitchen paper and cut into quarters. Roughly chop the apricots, place the cherries, apricots and the remaining dried fruit in a bowl, pour over 75 ml brandy, stirring well. Cover and leave to stand overnight. If using, roughly chop the almonds and brazil nuts. Cover tightly.

Line an 8 inch (20 cm) deep, round cake tin with grease-proof paper. Line it twice, making sure that one sheet of grease-proof paper comes above the rim of the cake tin.

Preferably using an electric whisk, beat 225 g butter with the finely grated lemon rind until soft and pale. Gradually beat in the sugar until blended. In a jug, lightly whisk the eggs and slowly beat into the creamed ingredients. The mixture should have a smooth consistency after each addition of egg. At this stage, mine usually curdles!

Sift together the flour, mixed spice, cinnamon and mace. Using a large metal spoon, fold the flour into the creamed ingredients along with the soaked fruit, nuts and milk. Spoon into the prepared cake tin and level the surface.

Put cake tin on the middle shelf and bake at 150°C (140°C with a fan oven) for about 3 ½ hours or until a skewer, inserted in the centre, comes out clean. I usually start testing after 1 ½ hours. If the top of the cake is beginning to over-brown, cover with foil. Leave to cool in the tin.

Skewer the surface, add the remaining brandy and leave to soak in. I usually top it up once a week. Turn out, wrap in grease-proof paper and foil. The cake can be stored for up to 3 months. Decorate with marzipan and icing as you wish.

El's tip: Why not use port instead of brandy?!