

# The Flame



## Win a Bottle of Champagne



Win a Bottle of Champagne in our "What were these made for?" Quiz!

My husband and Past Master Turner, Nicholas Somers, has a lifelong passion for Treen (things made of wood). He has kindly given us access to his extensive collection to source some intriguing items for our Flame competition.

On page 8 you will find photographs of six Treen items that have each been made for a specific purpose. Use your skill and judgement to work out what these were originally created for and email your answers to [firebirds.membership@gmail.com](mailto:firebirds.membership@gmail.com)

The person who submits the highest number of most accurate descriptions will win a bottle of Champagne.

**Entries close on  
22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021.**

Good Luck!

Anne Somers  
Membership Secretary



## DEAR FIREBIRDS,

I don't know about you, but I still get the spring cleaning vibe each year come March. This was probably the reason for wanting to change the format of the Flame a little. Tell me what you think about the new layout and share any ideas you may have with me.

Thank you to Anne Somers, who has created a special QUIZ for us. Good luck – you can win a bottle of champagne. Something to share with friends or family to celebrate 21<sup>st</sup> June, when hopefully all legal limits on social contact will be removed. (My son's employer is giving its employees a day's holiday on 21<sup>st</sup> June.)

Lockdown brought Zoom into our lives. Whilst we may get a bit tired of Zoom occasionally, I hope that some Zoom habits will continue - my Zoom yoga classes for instance. I would also be sad to lose my regular Zoom visits to both my sisters in Germany. Then, of course, there are our virtual Firebirds events; the Committee is thinking of keeping some of those going in the future. This will enable members, who are not happy or able to travel to London, to take part.

In the last issue I did advertise 'Egypt Part Two' for the Spring Flame, but I will keep this for another time and instead of visiting Egypt, we are going to China with Rue Hoddinott. Rue visited China in 2013 and reading her article brought back lovely memories of a family trip to Australia 28 years ago, when we stopped in Beijing for 5 days on our way back to England.

This Flame is shorter than the newsletters before. The idea is, that instead of having a bumper issue, it might be better to have an additional publication if there is extra material available. Therefore, please let me have your articles and notices whenever you feel like it. However, I will still remind you for the Spring, Summer and Winter edition contributions.

I look forward to seeing you at the Afternoon Tea Party on 26<sup>th</sup> March and wish you a very happy Easter.

With best wishes

Erika Gloyn

[firebirds.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:firebirds.newsletter@gmail.com)

## FORTHCOMING FIREBIRDS EVENTS

Friday

**26th March 2021**

3.00pm

Afternoon Tea Party

This is very informal for anyone who wants a chat. If enough people join, we will go into breakout rooms.

Thursday

**22nd April 2021**

4.00pm

'London through Artists' eyes' by Mark Lewis - Paintings of London through the centuries.

## Firebirds Committee News

Five Committee members were up for re-election at the recent AGM: Sheila Higgs, Rue Hoddinott, Peter Green, El Moss and Vicky Nugeé. We thank them for continuing in their posts for another three years.

They have helped the Firebirds to flourish with energy, creativity and good-humouredness and will now continue to do so.

## VISIT THE FIREBIRDS WEBSITE

on

[www.firebirds.london](http://www.firebirds.london)

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.



**MANUSCRIPT ILLUSTRATION OF CHRISTINE DE PIZAN BUILDING THE 'CITY OF LADIES', ASSISTED BY JUSTICE, REASON AND RECTITUDE.**

## WOMEN IN THE LIVERY

by Vicky Nugeé (Weavers)

Please click on <https://www.ladymasters.org.uk/historical-records> to read **Women in the Livery and High Civic Office in the City** by Phoenix Erica Stary.

Erica, Past Master Plumber and past Chairman of the Lady Masters Association, has written a very interesting paper in which her original plan to explain the Lady Masters Association was expanded to include women's roles in the Livery, and in the City generally. In it she explains how women struggled to make headway in the Livery. In 1983/4, the first ever female Lord Mayor (Dorothy Mary Donaldson, Baroness Donaldson of Lymington) proved that women were fit and very able to hold high office. From there, though hardly a canter down the home straight, there has been steady progress to the position that we have today.

While Erica touches on the historical position of women in the City, she chiefly concentrates on what the Livery and the City have achieved by way of equality in the present day. Below are excerpts of Phoenix John Nugeé's, Past Upper Bailiff of the Weavers, response to Erica.

*'Thank you for this paper... Clerks of every company should have a copy of this in their library.'*

*'It does strike me that the question of the role women play in the Livery is really not just the story of the fight to gain equality in the 20th century, but should also include the attrition (mostly in the 19th century I think) of rights and status they held in the more distant past. ... there were definitely times in the past where women were losing rights they had traditionally held.'*

*'That is the side of the story that is less often told when it comes to women's rights more generally, and one looks back at the patriarchy of the Victorians in particular and wonders why the ruling elite felt it both justified and indeed necessary to bear down on women in the way that they did.'*

*'... The Mansion House ... is clearly concerned that there are not more women in the Livery and in Masterships. ... The current view in most Livery Companies is, I think, that they should encourage women, celebrate and enjoy their fellowship and contribution, but not grieve too much over those who look at us and decide it isn't for them – even if, as a result, the Livery movement remains for some time to come well short of equality of numbers of women and men. ...'*

'Women in the Livery' is clearly not only a subject with an interesting past, as Erica's paper has shown, but it remains a live issue; one in which the research that Erica has meticulously carried out will be referred to again and again. Comments and debate would be most welcome.



# CLIMBING HIGH

by Catherine Martin

*Catherine is a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Masons and wife of Richard Martin.*

*Richard, also a Freeman of the Company, started his small business, Heritage Stone Access Ltd, in 2006 and takes pride that he represents a skilled craft and plays a part in preserving the country's historic buildings.*



**RICHARD INSPECTING A GROTESQUE ON YORK MINSTER**

Richard Martin started training as a stonemason in 2002. He was taken on as an apprentice at Worcester Cathedral, being supported by the Worshipful Company of Masons' Craft Fund. After qualifying as a stonemason in 2005, he left to work at York Minster. It was at this time that Richard also started to train in industrial rope work.

Richard was working as a stonemason in the works department at York Minster when he recognised the need for a safe system to be able to maintain and repair the extremities of a building. Scaffolding a huge cathedral tower or a fragile pinnacle to inspect the stonework is a

enormous undertaking; logistically, structurally and financially. Richard could see an alternative and set out to combine the skills he had as a cathedral trained stonemason with his experience as an alpinist to save the country's most valuable buildings.

Many of the rules and principles of the rope systems Richard had used to climb mountains in the Alps and Scotland in his early twenties could be adapted to provide access to high structures. Passionate about conservation and the country's built heritage, he believes it is important to maintain and restore our historic buildings in order to preserve them for future generations.

Richard delights in the stories he can tell - not only of detailed architecture, but of his experiences on the buildings. For instance, Richard spotted a fire in the city of York whilst working on the Minster's main tower. The tower is 70m high, and Richard and his colleague were working high up on the ropes inspecting the stonework for cracks and weathering. When Richard stopped to look at the view over the beautiful medieval city of York, he saw smoke billowing from a rooftop. He called the fire brigade and explained his remarkable situation. At such a height he was able to direct the fire brigade to the fire - a restaurant kitchen fire none the less! Other wonderful anecdotes include being shown bars of gold at The Bank of England, where he was repairing column capitals and getting wonderful views of Cathedral Peregrines swooping for their prey.

Richard takes pride in the fact that he represents a skilled craft and plays a part in preserving the country's historic buildings. 'I think it's important that we try to rebuild the reputation of craftsmen and the status of trades such as master masons. We need to put the trust back in the building industry. Re-establishing traditional skills is a part of this and we need more apprentices so that these skills can be passed on to future generations. I am very grateful to the Worshipful Company of Masons for their support and it is a pleasure now to be able to provide teaching and experience for the next generation of stonemasons.'



THE GREAT WALL

In 2013 we took a tour through China, starting in Beijing where most of the original city has been demolished, replaced by wide boulevards, high rise flats and businesses; but our tour started with a visit to what is left of old Beijing.

Tiananmen Square is huge, over 100 acres, dominated by Mao's Mausoleum, Government buildings and the entrance to the Forbidden City, which showed something of how life had been for the Emperor and his Court. Moving on to the Temple of Heaven, another impressive group of Imperial buildings, we were enchanted on the way out to hear a choir singing; investigation brought us to a group of

elderly people, standing under one of the arches of the gatehouse, an impromptu choir of residents from nearby high-rise flats singing Chinese folk songs – more melodious to our Western ears than Chinese opera or music heard at Chinese New Year.

On our way to view The Great Wall, an obligatory stop at a jade factory impressed with some exquisite craftsmanship. The Great Wall was partly shrouded in mist but, even so, was a fine sight and experience as we walked some way along it.

Xian was our next stop, a city with huge ramparts, wide enough on top for chariots to pass each other. The object of our visit was the Terracotta Warriors. These lifelike silent sentinels are almost spooky in their serried ranks, a remarkable sight.

On to Guilin, where we boarded a cruise vessel, sailing down the Li River past spectacular limestone hills; water buffalos grazed beside the river banks and in the river. Disembarking at Yangzhou, we visited a small farm growing rice and soya beans, as well as keeping a few farm animals. The dung and human waste is collected in a tank, giving off biogas, used for cooking and to heat the simple house in winter; there was no detectable odour.

Chengdu is home to the Giant Panda Breeding Project, over 160 giant pandas, many on view to the public; some equally endearing but unrelated red pandas were also on display. There is some controversy about the cost and lavish scale of this project but it certainly makes for an enchanting visit.

Our road journey to Chongqing took us via the UNESCO World Heritage site at Dazu where there is a vast array of Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist rock carvings. Created between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, these carvings survived the Cultural Revolution because the remote location meant their existence was known at that time only to a very few local inhabitants.

Chongqing at the confluence of the Jialing and Yangtze Rivers is a vast modern industrial and university city; here we embarked for a three night cruise down the Yangtze. Chaotic scenes at the waterfront, by now well after dark, as porters vied to carry our suitcases down the slippery steps and onboard the cruise vessel. Next morning, we went ashore at Shibaozhai, a town built to house some of the 1.3 million people whose homes are now well below the water level created by the Three Gorge Dam Project. The authorities are sensitive to foreign criticism of the wholesale displacement of entire communities and we were only allowed ashore with an official guide; however our guide was forthcoming, describing the short notice given and seeing her mother and aunt weeping as they left the family home of many years. But, while the older generation missed their simple homes, the younger generation felt the modern flats in which families had been rehoused were an improvement and, from outside, the accommodation did seem to be of a reasonable standard.

Proceeding downstream we passed through the spectacular Qutang and Wu gorges; in former times coolies known as trackers would haul vessels upstream against the strong currents flowing through the gorge, stark naked for the arduous task as these poorly paid men did not wish to spoil their few clothes.



A further stop enabled a trip up one of the tributaries of the Yangtze, through a very narrow, steep sided gorge, with a perilous rope suspension footbridge overhead. Here we saw some wildlife, a troop of monkeys and some wild goats.

The dams have a visitors centre, proudly presenting a clear explanation of this ambitious project. The huge hydro-electric turbines were built by a European consortium, one condition of the contract being that the consortium would teach the Chinese how to build such turbines; now, we were told, the Chinese are pleased to provide turbines to projects all over Africa.



JADE BUDDHA TEMPLE, SHANGHAI

Last stop on our journey through China was Shanghai. With a population of 25 million, Shanghai is China's largest city, with an impressive city centre and waterfront area. The Jade Buddha Temple was the highlight and a place of worship for the devout. Apart from the British Customs House on the waterfront, there was little sign of the days of the foreign Concessions.

China had provided a fascinating visit – the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and the Terracotta Army as relics of ancient China;

modern China boasting sweeping highways, spectacular bridges, high-rise buildings, stylish airport terminals and construction cranes everywhere; the scenery of the Li River and the Yangtze gorges; and the enchanting Giant Pandas. Recent history has been hard for the Chinese with memories of Japanese occupation, the civil war, and the Cultural Revolution still raw for those of middle age or older. The abrupt relocation of whole communities for the Three Gorges Dam project and other construction works and the iniquities of the one child policy (since relaxed) were topics often mentioned in conversation with our guides and the few Chinese with whom we were able to converse.

## FRAMEWORK KNITTERS 'KNIT FOR COMMUNITY'

by Peter Green

Just one year ago, R numbers were unknown, mRNA certainly would not have been allowed in Scrabble, and Chris Whitty was not a celebrity. Then lockdown arrived. To provide a focus The Framework Knitters launched their 'Knit for Community' project aiming to create a handful of blankets for distribution to three charities.

How things change in a year. To date over 247 blankets and 192 lap blankets (comprising well over 23,000 knitted squares) have been completed or are in production, and deliveries of blankets have been made to seven charities, most recently a hostel at St Pauls that provides accommodation before clients move to permanent housing.

Last November, an auction of 30 blankets raised over £6,000 with the proceeds being split between our charities.

Members or friends of 35 different Livery companies have supported this initiative and we have 548 volunteers from across the UK, including one Liveryman from America! The initiative is 100% volunteer led and following TV coverage on East Midlands Today and Look North, as well as knitting publications, local papers and a number of charities, we gained a large number of new volunteers from local communities, the majority of whom would not have heard of a Livery company.

Our house resembles a sorting office and wool factory, we have the most photographed bed in the UK, and I can confirm that 55 blankets pretty much fill an SUV. But thanks to the amazing volunteers who are willing to keep knitting and assembling, **the initiative rolls on**. If anyone knows of a family member, friend or group who would support this project please ask them to go to [www.frameworkknitters.co.uk](http://www.frameworkknitters.co.uk) or email Liz Green [liz@lizgreen.co.uk](mailto:liz@lizgreen.co.uk). Donations of wool are also very welcome.



# THE CHRISTMAS AND LENTEN ROSE

by Georgina Hall



CHRISTMAS ROSE

Hellebores are very popular plants with gardeners, slow to grow but bringing colour to dark shady borders in the depths of winter. *Helleborus Niger*, the Christmas Rose or Black Hellebore, flowers just after Christmas. It has white rose-like flowers which age to pink and has black roots, hence the name Black Hellebore. *Helleborus Orientalis*, the Lenten Rose or Oriental Hellebore flowers slightly later, usually around Lent. The flowers come in all shades from pink to purple, with many hybrids in between. The Christmas and Lenten roses belong to the buttercup family. Both varieties of plants hide the true beauty of their flowers with bowed flower heads.

These plants are poisonous and in ancient times had medicinal and magical properties, being frequently prescribed by Hippocrates as a purgative. It was also given as a cure for madness, gout, melancholy, epilepsy and used as a sedative. It could cause stupor, thirst, swelling of the tongue and throat and could lead

to cardiac arrest. It has been speculated that Alexander the Great died of Hellebore poisoning while being treated for an illness.

The Christmas Rose features in Christian folklore. A young shepherdess called Madelon was tending her sheep in the hills outside Bethlehem when a strange procession began to approach. It was the Magi on their way to see the Baby Jesus bearing valuable gifts. Madelon gazed in awe at the gifts the Magi had brought - gold, frankincense and myrrh! She gazed around, the fields were covered in snow and she could not find even a single flower to offer to Baby Jesus. When Madelon reached the stable door she felt helpless and began to weep quietly as she had no gift to give. An angel outside the door took pity on her as she bowed her head in sorrow. The angel brushed aside the snow at her feet and where her tears had fallen, a cluster of white winter roses sprang up. The angel whispered to her that these Christmas roses were far more valuable than any of the Magi's gifts, for they were pure and made of love. Madelon gathered up the flowers and Mary bade her enter the stable and offer her gift. The fingers of the infant Jesus brushed against the petals which started to take on the pink glow we see today in the Christmas Rose as it ages. Thus, the Christmas Rose came to symbolize hope, love and purity.

Perhaps when you next look at a flowering Christmas or Lenten Rose you will think of Madelon and forgive the flower for bending its head!



LENTEN ROSE



# QUIZ - "WHAT WERE THESE MADE FOR?"

Below you will find six Treen objects (things made of wood) that have each been created for a specific purpose.

Use your skill and judgment to identify each of them and then submit your answers to have the chance to win a bottle of Champagne.

Answers should be sent by email to [firebirds.membership@gmail.com](mailto:firebirds.membership@gmail.com) together with your name, address and phone number. Entries to reach us by 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021. The winner will be notified by email and answers will be published on our website and in the next edition of the Flame.



QUIZ PHOTO 1A



QUIZ PHOTO 1B



QUIZ PHOTO 2



QUIZ PHOTO 3



QUIZ PHOTO 4



QUIZ PHOTO 5



QUIZ PHOTO 6

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