

# Past Master Dame Stephanie Shirley (1992/3)

It has been my privilege to serve the 100th Livery Company by membership of the Steering Group (which morphed into the Founding Court), then as Master the year after the Company achieved Livery in 1992, and major patron supporting the IT Hall and Charitable Trust. Those initial members were entrepreneurs, the creative drivers of the computer industry, plus one or two senior corporates. Barney Gibbens, Founder Master who served two years in that capacity (1986/88), was an excellent Chairman and pulled all that competitive talent together. The co-founders, in addition to Barney, were Chamberlain Bernard Harty (who steered us through the bureaucracy of the elected City of London's Corporation), and Alan Benjamin, earmarked to be Master when we achieved livery as number 100 (a nicely sounding binary number) in the City's pecking order. He masterminded Monitor and was responsible for the important partnership with the Mercers (number 1). So it was a well-balanced triad.

The British Computer Society (BCS) served as a sponsor in the City and its Derek Harding had a legal/secretarial role in the early days. To fund the various start-up costs, various big players (including my own FI Group), made some initial contributions. It was also necessary to show we had £100k in the charitable arm before we could be considered for livery. Alderman Brian Jenkins was enormously helpful in steering us through the Court of Aldermen's processes and procedures. We met in the Chamberlain's office in Guildhall, which gave gravitas to our meetings. Derek Harding was soon to be replaced as Clerk by Peta Walmisley, a long-time BCS staff member who seemed to carry out Company work in the evenings and at weekends.

My year was distinguished by three things: a strategy day to determine guidelines, for example that we would respect and follow all the City's traditions re livery companies, but be modern, strategic, and, yes, fun; the appointment of a full-time Clerk, Robin Laidlaw, so that the Master could cease also having to serve as chief executive; and the Inaugural Lecture, presented by Bill Gates. Three days before his lecture was scheduled, a terrorist bomb exploded, and we had to relocate everything. This seminal lecture took place successfully.

All my wealth having come from the IT industry, I anonymously offered to support the Company with one, two, or five million pounds, and found myself at several Court meetings discussing alternative business plans. Having agreed on the £5m figure, I then revealed my identity. £4m went into the WCIT Charity and £1m for the freehold of the IT Hall in Bartholomew Close. It was exciting to help set this up and several of my personal possessions, including paintings, found a new home there. It is a matter of pride that a refugee like me could make a permanent impact on one of the City's traditional livery companies. Long may the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists flourish, root and branch