

Reminiscences.....2

Roger Graham Past Master 2004-5

I was an early member of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists' having been appointed to the Livery as number 48 on the 22nd April 1992. It was much earlier that Alan Benjamin came into my office at the BIS Group Ltd in the mid 80s and suggested that there should be an international club for IT people. The original idea he had was one agreed with Maxwell Joseph the then CEO of Grand Metropolitan plc who owned Le Meridien Hotel in Piccadilly. The concept was to convert the basement to a club for people in the Data Processing and Information Technology world to meet and gather and of course have access to the bedrooms above rather in the tradition of a London social club.

That was not to be and through the good offices of the City of London officials Alan then pursued the establishment of the 100th Livery Company in the City of London. That involved sharing offices with our lawyers and it wasn't until much later through the generosity of an early Master, Dame Stephanie Shirley that we were enabled to have our own hall, one of the very few modern companies to have one. I recall the first dinner with Barney Gibbons the founder master in the chair. In the late 80s and early 90s – we became a Livery in 1992 – I was preoccupied with building the diversified BIS business which embraced IT consulting and training, banking software, direct marketing and industrial marketing research focused on electronics.

In 1986 we sold the business to one of the “baby bells”, Nynex which was created as a consequence of the sale of the regional operating activities of AT&T in 1984. Two days after the deal was closed on December 19th, 1986 I received a letter from St James Palace inviting me to receive the Queens Honour of an OBE. It was an exceptional period which saw me not only travelling to our many BIS locations across the world but also flying to New York for Nynex meetings. I really enjoyed that period although many who have started a business find the sale process and the post sale involvement with the purchaser unattractive.

I was mostly involved with the education committee of the WCIT but not really actively involved until the mid '90s after moving on from BIS and establishing a more plural life involving many small start-up companies. The Company moved from strength to strength and Dame Steve Shirley's gift made an immense impact in terms of the development of the Company and the spread of its activities, charitable purpose, education and industry work as well of course of the Fellowship which the livery company provided. The early masters including Alan Benjamin and Robin Laidlaw as well as Barney Gibbons made an immense contribution on our way forward and established the Company with firm foundations dedicated to charitable activity as well as city tradition.