The Master leads a day visit to his old school, Christ’s Hospital, Horsham on the 15th September. Founded in 1552 by King Edward VI in old buildings vacated by the Grey Friars in Newgate Street, this ‘school like no other’ enjoys historic links with the City, the Lord Mayor and the Livery.

The school, whose pupils continue to wear a distinctive blue uniform little changed since Tudor times, was established to provide food, clothing, lodging and ‘a little learning for fatherless children and other poor men’s children’. The children were not only cared for but prepared for future careers.

Funding was raised by the City of London. The Church, businesses and householders in London were asked for donations. Governors were elected to serve the school and in November 1552, Christ’s Hospital opened its doors to 380 pupils; within a year the number had increased to over 500.

King Edward VI became patron and founder and a Royal Charter was signed to this effect by Edward just 11 days before his death in 1553.

The school moved to its present site in West Sussex in 1902. Our day will include an introduction from the Headmaster and/or the Senior Grecian, a performance by the school band, lunch, and a tour of the school.

This year’s Harvest Festival, held on the 27th September and led by the Reverend John Robson LVO, Extra Chaplain to the Queen, will be at All Hallows by the Tower, Byward Street, followed by lunch at Watermen’s Hall. This charming venue, built in 1780 by William Blackburn, remains the only original Georgian hall in the City.

It is home to the Company of Watermen and Lightermen, a Guild rather than a Livery, who in 2014 celebrated the 500th anniversary of the granting of Royal Assent by Henry VIII to the 1514 Act of Parliament regulating watermen, wherrymen and bargemen. Under a further Act of 1555 the Company introduced apprenticeships for those wishing to learn the skills of the Watermen. In 1700 the Lightermen (carriers of goods and cargo) joined the Watermen’s Company. The Company is a working guild and is still actively involved with the life of the Thames and those who work on it.

On 5th October the Master leads a visit to the Middle Temple Garden. It is possible that gardens have been on this site since the Knights Templar established themselves in about 1160 when they moved from Holborn but Temple Church is the only surviving building from that time.

Middle Temple Hall was begun in 1562 and it was here that Shakespeare’s ‘Twelfth Night’ was first performed in 1602.
NEW MASTER IS A MAN ON A MISSION

Our new Master, David Green CB QC, was installed on American Independence Day in the lavish surroundings of Drapers’ Hall. In a full-length portrait of Admiral Lord Nelson, a Freeman of the Drapers’ Company.

Thirty one personal guests of the new Master out of a total attendance of 177 made it through the sweltering heatwave to attend dinner within the cooler Livery Hall overlooked by huge portraits of Kings William III, George III and George IV.

Alderman and Assistant Robert Howard introduced the Guest Speaker, the Master’s old friend and fellow barrister David Etchingham QC who later entertained us with his recollections of knowing the Master in chambers for over 25 years.

He also cited Magazine’s description of the Master as “a man on a mission” before describing how he transformed the private and underused courtyard outside 18 Red Lion Court into a garden oasis where “sandwiches are eaten, drinks consumed, cases solved and plots hatched”.

He said the common room in the chambers was always empty following the Master’s horticultural successes.

After thanking the Immediate Past Master and congratulating him and his family on a most successful year, the Master introduced two new Liverymen, Paul Gooding and David Pittaway QC.

He also announced the installation of former PA to the Clerk, Sue Thorne, and former Deputy Clerk, Major David Bredin, to the Freedom of the Company Honoris Causa. This follows long and devoted service from both staff members for which the Company is most grateful.

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Senior Past Master Tom Gough, who during the evening provided fabulous musical accompaniment on the piano, was also welcomed as our new Honorary Almoner, following Alan Wiltshire’s retirement from this post after 32 years’ service.

A sumptuous dinner of roast rack of lamb was beautifully presented amongst Liveryman Stephen Crisp’s arrangements of English peonies and hydrangeas within his personal collection of Constance Spry vases.

Report by Miles Watson-Smyth. Photographs by Michael Worren (visit the Company website to see more photographs).

SEASONS TURN AND ALL THINGS PASS

Gardening teaches us many things and one might think chief among these is patience. Gardeners play a long game: they plan ahead and there are few quick fixes to the problems they face, things move slowly in a garden. But, the thing is, things do move. They never stop. Nothing ever stays the same in a garden and this is a most profound lesson that we must all learn in our own time.

To seek perfection and hope that once it is attained it can somehow be ‘kept’ is futile. When someone pays a gardener the compliment of saying they ‘have a nice garden’, it is wise to note the use of the present tense: it might well be nice today and that might reflect a great deal of effort expended on the part of the Gardener, but what will it look like in one month’s time is not yet decided.

Gardens change over time. Paths might stay where they’ve always been, walls and buildings rarely take up their foundations and move a yard here or there, but the plants, the flesh of a garden, grow, mature and, teaching us all another lesson, eventually die.

No one gardens the same patch over decades without one day coming across a once-tiny sapling, perhaps a gift, or a purchase planted years ago with the help of small hands, connected by memory to a day in the distant past, but now monstrous and out of place. It is by facing up to such decisions and taking the decisive action they inevitably demand that a gardener stays young!

When I took charge of my garden I very nearly cut down a small weeping willow that was clearly in the wrong place, but somehow I never did. It grew. Stood by water it was happy and it grew very well. In fact, in no time at all it took on the role of the key feature in its part of the garden.

Its leaves appear early and dense and it casts a great deal of shade, making the beds beneath it a challenge. Years ago I managed to graft a piece of the purple flowered parasitic ‘Toothwort’ to its root and now it’s not unusual to find a purple carpet appear from nowhere in spring, providing real interest and conversation.

So I was more than a little upset when I returned home one windy day to discover my willow standing at an unfamiliar angle and threatening to fall over completely. Talks with a tree surgeon eventually bought a reprieve: a massive branch was removed along with much else, probably halving it in size, rebalancing and letting light into areas that had been dark for years.

For now my willow remains, much reduced and, for now, looking a little offended at its ill fortune. While I am becoming excited at the opportunity brought on by the transformation.

And, once again, I realise that nothing stays unchanged for long: the seasons turn and all things pass.

Robin
BLUEBELLS AND OTHER KENTISH DELIGHTS

On the 25th of April, one week after the ‘Vicar’s daughter’ stood outside 10 Downing Street and announced a snap election, a party of some 40 Company members, their friends and partners, made the trip deep into Kent to visit Hole Park Estate, winner of the title Kent Garden of the Year in 2016.

This was the time of year to see a magnificent display of native bluebells set in the woodland part of the garden. Looking at the sea of blue with the odd white specimen amongst them (one in every 100,000 we were told), one’s thoughts went to the 8th June wondering if this is how the election map so loved by David Dimbleby and Jon Snow would look.

The bluebells were in fact the last part of the garden we visited. Hole Park is a ‘small’ by some standards house, set in parkland with a vista to the south, with no road or other house in sight. Looking out over the park is where we met our guide, Quentin, the head gardener for the last 15 years. This is very much a family garden where the owners, the Barham family, work closely with Quentin and his team of three, exchanging ideas to further develop the site.

We were led through a complex of topiary yew hedging, past two large herbaceous borders and a sunken garden to a bronze statue called the Eagle Slayer, a copy of which is in the V & A. In this garden setting I am sure it is far more impressive than its copy.

From this statue we worked our way past a somewhat neglected egg-shaped pond which, as Quentin explained, is the next project for improvement. From here we were able to appreciate some of the magnificent trees within the garden. On our way towards the woodland garden we passed by a wisteria covered pergola surrounded by standard specimens as well as a delightful cottage garden.

As we descended through an area not unlike the Savill Garden with azaleas and rhododendron in full flower, anticipation of the massed bluebells began to mount. But first we passed through a pinetum planted out with several 200- year-old pines. A surprise to all of us was just around the next corner: set amongst the trees was a totem pole carving of bears climbing up a tree to a pot of honey. This very new addition to the garden is carved out of a dead oak. It was shortly after this we said farewell to our guide and walked into the magnificent bluebell wood.

This was a lovely garden to visit. It is close to Sissinghurst and Great Dixter, a good addition if you are travelling to Kent. Thanks go to the Master for finding and choosing this garden. It gave us a day to remember.

Report by David Aitchison-Tait