

Vote of Thanks

Annual Banquet –
the Society of Young Freemen of the City of London
Thursday 29th May 2014
Mr Anthony Bailey, OBE, GCSS

"Master, Wardens, Your Serene Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Aldermen, Honorary Presidents, Deputy Master of the Charterhouse, Ladies and Gentlemen."

It gives me great pleasure on behalf of my fellow guests to express our sincere thanks to you Master and your ever more vibrant Society of Young Freemen of the City of London for your invitation to this memorable banquet this evening.

I'm only sorry that having now passed into my early forties I have just discovered that I am not eligible to join. How time flies!

It is also very special for me to be here in the Charterhouse, where London, faith, martyrdom, charity and education are so well intertwined.

As someone born and brought up in this great city, I deeply cherish and value my ever increasing and ever changing ties to it. Whether through my membership of my livery companies, the Loriners and Stationers, or through the Guild of Freeman or the Royal Society of St George, both of which I have the honour to serve on its Court, it is a relationship which matters greatly to me on both a personal and professional level.

From a very young age I've had a deep passion for the wider world. I revelled in its diversity, I was overwhelmed and humbled by its beauty, I appreciated its countless cultures, its many traditions, its rich faiths, its literature, its business

practices, its architecture, its music, its food and so much more.

I journeyed across the world with travel writers and explorers alike through their countless books. I knew some of them personally such as Sir Wilfred Thesiger who titled his book "A Life of my Choice" – a sentiment I wholeheartedly share.

For over 25 years I have travelled to over 100 countries and territories and built up friendships, which remain the cornerstones of what I do today in both a personal and professional capacity.

My original plan was to join the Foreign and Commonwealth Office once I had finished studying at UCL. I had opted to study the then forbidden and closed world of Eastern and Central Europe. Within months of commencing my studies the great political and economic upheavals occurred during 1989-1991.

I was able too and often at first-hand, to witness their successful and hard-fought struggle for freedom and democracy which strung up following the end of totalitarianism, dictatorship and oppression. Joyful events for the entire world and especially for us here in Europe as we finally were able to heal this open post-war wound.

It brought home to me the unique position and role of the City of London in this transformation from command economy to free market.

It was not by accident that the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development headquartered itself here in the City together with many other relevant and associated financial institutions.

My travels also made me realise how fortunate we are to be Londoners and British. It left an indelible mark on me as to the values and freedoms we enjoy here and so often take for granted.

Yet the FCO was not to be, as shortly before the end of my studies and having recently returned from Universities in Hungary and Bulgaria, I was tempted away by the international chairman of the global communications giant Burson-Marsteller.

I ended up in the corporate world doing what someone once described as being a corporate diplomat – someone who does the job of a diplomat but gets paid commercially for it. Or as someone else remarked your role as diplomats is ultimately one of telling people to go to hell in such a way that they actually look forward to the trip.

What ever the truth of it I remember so well my first array of clients, the exiled King Constantine of Greece, the President of Egypt, Pope John Paul II, femidom, sugar puff cereals, caterpillar trucks, flora margarine and Zantac. An interesting and at times conflicting group of clients I am sure you will agree.

I lived in Cairo, Budapest, Lima, Bucharest, Paris, Riyadh, Lisbon, Sofia, Marrakech and New York.

I soon realised that hanging out with kings, presidents, popes and prime ministers in exotic palaces and places in far flung parts of the world or creating with others powerful and heavy-weight programmes to welcome them here to London and Britain was far more exciting and rewarding and frankly much more fun than promoting the virtues of forklift trucks, margarine and condoms for women.

As a result and after my years at Burson-Marsteller and later at IBM Europe Middle East Africa I later set up my own

consultancy firm. To date my company has advised in one capacity or the other over 66 countries and over 46 international companies resulting in an extensive network of contacts which continually feed off each other and continues to grow in strength.

Many smaller and medium sized countries have limited diplomatic missions and therefore limited access to key decision markers in many parts of the world. As a result I have often been called in to advise on creating programmes for their Heads of State, Government, Ministers or Mayors.

This can involve working, official or state visit coordination, crisis management, speech writing, protocol and ceremonial, or special events as well as establishing high level meetings between officials.

A key theme of such work is my continual demand for absolute reciprocity in all aspects whether you are a nation of a few thousand people or a nation of tens or hundreds of millions. I help smaller and medium sized nations to reach the highest tables or to push them higher up the agenda of larger states. I do the same for international companies that need access to key decision markers government officials.

It could be in Tonga, Lesotho, Lebanon, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Hungary, Montenegro, Dominica, Costa Rica, Panama, Kosovo, Peru and Vatican City.

For some of these roles it is a requirement of the job to have a diplomatic rank such as my current role as Special Envoy of the President of Montenegro to the Middle East and North Africa and Ambassador-at-Large where I am charged with organising together with other high level visits of the Head of

State across the region including most recently to Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Needless to say over the years I can recount many amusing tales that put a smile on my face after often long and weary round the clock projects and late nights where often minute detail can be the difference between success and failure.

I remember once at a state banquet not so long ago overhearing a senior Vatican Cardinal who was seated next to a prominent Latin American leader who was complaining of a lack of water on the table.

After several unanswered calls to the waiting staff the Cardinal turned to the President and said, "Give me your glass of wine Your Excellency". The Cardinal held it in his hands, studied carefully the contents, made the sign of the cross over the top of the glass and acclaimed. "No need to worry, Mr President, it's water now".

I remember too in autumn 1990 whilst studying in Hungary that an announcement came over the intercom ordering all students of British nationality to report to the Lecture Theatre. On arrival we were told by a very sombre Dean that with a deep sense of regret and a heavy heart he must inform us that a Major has ceased power in Britain and that we should all report to the British Embassy at once.

We were all completely shocked at the news although don't forget at that time Europe was awash with revolution - but a military coup in Britain?

On arrival at the Embassy we pushed our way through the barriers demanding to see the Ambassador and eventually the number two appeared inviting us to a nearby waiting room and in that time honoured and reassuring FCO way said "Calm down dears. Have a cup of tea. It's John Major".

There were other times I can remember when my clients ensured I avoided having points put on my driving licence. For one night after a very long official visit from South Africa here to Britain I drove home late at night and at the junction of Kensington Church Street and Notting Hill Gate I was stopped by the police for allegedly going through an amber light.

The policeman claimed it was red and asked to see some ID. So in the dead of night I pulled out my card in the top pocket and pushed it through the window. Moments later the Policeman bent down and appeared at the window looking at the card I had just given him and exclaimed "So you want me to believe you are His Majesty King Goodwill of the Zulus, do you!"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have often felt that it is only when you are abroad do you truly appreciate what we have here at home in this great city and nation of ours. It's only when you travel abroad do you appreciate the value which our international partners and friends have for the City of London.

London is no stranger to the concept of European and international Assembly. There's a plaque at Vintner's Hall marking some 650 years ago, when the then Lord Mayor of London and Vintner Henry Picard, hosted a magnificent feast for five kings, Edward III of England, David II of Scotland, John I of France, the King of Cyprus and the King of Denmark, plus the Duke of Bavaria and, somewhat alarmingly, the Chief Hostages of France.

This City and its Corporation of London are true global masters of this dialogue and exchange having forged like no other new and deeper partnerships between countries and companies at all levels for many hundreds of years.

We are the leading global financial centre of the world. We must put all of efforts to maintaining and strengthening this position especially against the growing influence of cities like Singapore and Hong Kong.

The City of London is globally appreciated as a place of law and order, of contracts fulfilled, and how this reputation, its democracy and its traditions are considered its greatest strengths.

This is why the City of London is at the heart of all major national and international events and why during state and official visits very few foreign dignitaries of them end up at City Hall preferring the Mansion House and Guildhall instead.

This is also why our Lord Mayors are absent abroad for around 100 days a year in their ambassadorial roles for the City. This is an exhausting and often gruelling activity and having been involved with some Mayoral visits abroad I salute each Lord Mayor for their dedication in this regard.

The world also comes to London to live, work and to learn. To bring back to their countries our experiences, our successes and what lessons we have learnt from our failures.

Since my marriage I have spent less time abroad and much more time encouraging leaders from across the world to come to the City, to London and to Britain.

Building Bridges is in my blood and I am ever more committed to it especially when so many across Europe are reflecting on the troubling elections results last week which

would imply that there is a sizable number of our fellow European citizens who wish to lift up the draw bridge rather than to bring down the barriers.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to end on saying a few words about The Freedom of the City of London which brings us all here tonight. The Freedom is an ancient tradition but is one of relevance in the modern world. It's an instrument of foreign policy, it's a bridge builder between nations, and an important vehicle through which thousands of people from all walks of life and nationalities are joined together in fellowship and in celebration and with a commitment to promoting the role and values of our ancient city and its Corporation.

Only last week I was in Albania the land of the legendary King Zog and of the Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and it was telling for me to see that behind the Mayor of Tirana's desk were his national flag and his Freedom of the City of London certificate.

When I commented on it he said "Anthony, the City of London is important to London, to England, to the United Kingdom, to Europe, but belongs to the world. It is the Jerusalem of the freemarket and of responsible capitalism. It is unique in the world and cannot be replicated. Its mix of tradition and modernity, of standards and relevance in today's economic world is its eternal hallmark."

Master, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sometimes it takes a foreign friend and partner to tell you and spell out for you the obvious. Thank you very much.

It is now my honour and privilege to invite you all to stand in a toast to "The Society of Young Freemen and the Master".