Speech of Founder Warden Brenda Griffiths 26 February 2026

Master, Wardens, Liverymen, Freemen, Fellow Nurses

I need to be honest and share that I am quite overwhelmed by your presence on this most amazing of occasions. 12 ½ years ago, an idea was born, 10 years ago a dream became real.

On such a day, it would be customary to thank all the people who have got us here. It is a very long list and could take us a very long time. When this celebration was planned, I was honoured to be invited to address this auspicious gathering. The request – actually, let's be honest the instruction – was to spend some time looking back and reflecting on our beginnings.

So with that directive in mind, it prompted me to go back and look at the volumes of emails, messages and thoughts of our origins. It is a great time for reviving memories, some long forgotten, some that will never be forgotten, and a time for reflection. At that time, most was only aspiration - it is easy now to forget the anxiety, apprehension and, indeed, fear - the ignorance that accompanied our beginnings – we had no idea if the City or our profession would embrace the venture. We have come far – and today is about celebration.

So I thought it would be useful to go back and look at our very first formal gathering which was on 12th May 2016. This I will share with you – but to get to the point of filling Guildhall with nurses, much work had gone before.

This all started with an idea – in fact, it was an indignation that nurses were not included amongst the noble professions and trades within the livery movement. I approached an organisation that I thought might help develop this idea and was turned down. It cannot be done, Livery companies are vastly expensive, nurses could not afford it, the City would not accept it. My disappointment was profound but he ho, that is life. Until I recounted this rejection to some friends at a Set Reunion. We were upstairs at a favourite Smithfield haunt and the decision was that we should give it a try. It is never wise to tell nurses that something is not possible and so the team of 8 Founders was created. You could say, that the Guild of Nurses was born in the upstairs room of the Old Red Cow.

And then the challenges began……we needed to woo support not only from the City but also our profession. Back then, we had no idea if we could seduce either……..today is testimony that we have managed both.

So back to my first banquet speech, my first speech as Master - an apprehension almost overwhelmed……for those of you who were there, my apologies as you will have heard it all before – but I doubt that you will remember the detail. I suggested that the previous year, the Guild of Nurses was but a twinkle in the eye and about as likely as Leicester City winning the Premiership. But there we were – nurses filling Guildhall and that was the year that Leicester was at the top of the Premiership. The footie fans amongst you will recall Gary Lineker in his underpants – and where is Leicester now? Their glory days may be behind them and now relegated to the Championship but for Nurses glory days are to come and here we are in the livery at 111th. TICK

On that day, we had our first Declaration ceremony – we wondered if we might need one more if others might want to join. They did. We have since held 36 such ceremonies to welcome new members. TICK

We planned to be a wide family – our ambition was for all specialties and the great variety of nurses from up and down the land to join us. We had no idea if they would. From 8 Barts nurses we now have upwards of 500 members from 183 different places of Nurse education. How wonderful is that? TICK

Nurse training badges are hard-earned and to be worn with pride. Back then, I suggested those who no longer wear a clinical uniform give them a polish and an airing. We said we would invite nurse training badges to be worn at all our events. This has clearly become popular – it is wonderful to see the wide diversity of badges on show here today. TICK

Back then, I went on to say I could not let the moment pass without paying tribute to my 7 colleagues – the Founders, I suggested they were and still are all busy, successful and industrious trained nurses – a formidable bunch with a common ethos and team spirit. Our Sponsoring Alderman was heard to say to the Remembrancer and Clerk of the Chamberlain's Court "don't mess with these women". Wise advice – TICK

Another great joy of being in at the very beginning of something was that we were in the enviable position of setting some of our own customs – we are privileged to join the ancient

traditions that have seen the City safely through hundreds of years. We planned to add to those and hoped to enrich our Guild with some customs of our own.

That reminds me……..I was somewhat self-consciously making my way with the Beadle and Learned Clerk into our first formal Court Meeting held at Guildhall. I was wearing my robe for the very first time. In the distance, I saw someone walking towards us, now known to be Mark Grove, and as he got closer, he said 'blimey – you look just like a nurse'. Job done on our robes I thought! It is easy to forget the convoluted, complex and detailed discussions that had been required to design and source our robes but I hope you agree they immediately identify us and are a tribute to our heritage. TICK

Back to Livery traditions…..which leads me onto The Loving Cup. Oh my……..negotiations with City dignitaries, rule makers and senior Livery folk were tetchy….and I mean tetchy! When I suggested that infection control nurses would not condone this tradition and we would prefer to Pass a Lamp the intake of breaths was palpable. Our first attempt at this was demonstrated at this our first formal dinner and it did not go well. If you were there, you will remember that it was not clear that anyone knew what they were doing and our Learned Clerk was exasperated. However, guests of honour, our Sponsoring Alderman and the Clerk to the Chamberlain's Court both said they had not had such fun in years and so our now well respected and well performed tradition was born. TICK. I would like to think that the increasing rejection of the Loving Cup in other Companies is down to us, but I rather think that COVID may need to take credit for that!

We needed an identity and again, much discussion around our logo ensued. Our fob watch is still ticking – and the time starts at 20.16. TICK

I reported that we had hopes in the future to have a full Coat of Arms. The College of Arms may like to heed the warning "do not mess with these women". This work is now nearly at the finishing post but still in progress and a timely reminder of the time and energy it takes to negotiate with a centuries old body. We have learnt well. TICK

10 years ago, our own charity was an aspiration with ambitious plans to build on the work of the profession's rich history; offer benevolent support to nurses when and where it is needed; and contribute to the professional development of nurses today and tomorrow through scholarship and bursary. The Company of Nurses Charitable Trust was created in 2017 with a cheque for £10. We now have impressive funds which with continuing sound management will allow us to fulfil our Objects for years to come. To date, we have attracted monies to enable us to distribute £203,950 in charitable giving, whilst preserving our capital for

generations in the future. We have helped nurses in need, worked with organisations that share our values and recognised and supported the achievement and professional development of over 30 scholars and prizewinners. TICK

10 years ago, I said with unapologetic plagiarism – “this is one small step for 8 nurses, one giant leap for our nursing profession”. Just as Neil Armstrong and Apollo 11 could not have reached the moon without a great team behind them, we could not have got here today without the support of you, our members. It is with great pride that I stand here and say thank you to each and every one of you. You have joined us on this amazing journey, supported the ethos and shared the vision. We are forever grateful and I ask you to raise your glasses to nurses past, present and future and to the Worshipful Company of Nurses, may it flourish root and branch forever.

Brenda Griffiths

Foundation Past Master

26th February 2026