

Sermon for the Fuellers' Company 21st April 2004...

Yesterday, as I was getting this talk ready, an envelope dropped through my letterbox containing this lurid sheet of paper. It was a letter from The Chairman of the Fuellers' Escape Committee. You perhaps didn't know we even had an escape committee, nor yet a Chairman of it. But it looks, you see, as if our esteemed Master, Doug Barrow, is to have himself arrested next month and incarcerated in the Tower Of London where he will languish until £1000 is raised for his release: this hoped for thousand quid donated to the Lord Mayor's Appeal for the British Red Cross. So, if you wish to see the Master again after 14th May and you would like to make a contribution to The Red Cross, please send you cheques to The Chairman of the Escape Committee – otherwise known as Jane Ayre at 68 Portway, Tadley.

I must say the Master is living dangerously. He has already got married this year and now he's going to end up in the Tower. And this after I counselled him at his wedding not to go too far – specifically, not to go too far on the first night. I told him and his delightful bride that my wife and I went as far as Spain on our first night – and it was far too far

Mention of the Tower of London recalls an earlier spot of bother in which our Illustrious Company found itself back in the 17th Century. The Charter given to us in 1605 by King James had to be surrendered owing to some little local difficulties concerning prices and the collection of taxes. Happily all is now restored and we are acquitted; and we have enjoyed livery status for twenty years.

More nonsense has been spouted about fuel down the ages by people who ought to have known better. In 1848 for example, Professor Erasmus Wilson of Oxford University solemnly declared, "When the Paris Exhibition closes, electric light will be done with and no more will be heard of it." Another luminary said that Edison's invention of the light bulb was, "...good enough for our transatlantic friends but unworthy of the attention of practical or scientific men in England." Gas fared no better. In 1810 Sir Walter Scott, no less, said, "Here is a young madman proposing to light the streets of London with gas."

Our Company was known back in the Middle Ages as the Wood-mongers and Coal-sellers. And wood is a deeply religious material. The Tree of Knowledge in the Garden was made of it and so was Noah's great ship in the legend of the Ark. Wood has from the earliest times been regarded as a mystical substance. In the ancient Greek language it is called ULAY and for the philosopher Aristotle it was a form of the basic material of the whole universe.

I would just like to end by reminding ourselves this Eastertide of the thought-provoking fact that God, the Creator of all the world – of all the basic material and ULAY – was for our sins crucified on a Cross of wood. As we celebrate today this great occasion in our Company's year, let us also renew our thanks to Almighty God who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures.

All this did he for us; for the remission of all our sins and the life of the world to come. Rejoice for he is risen indeed. Amen