



THE HONOURABLE COMPANY OF MASTER MARINERS

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Is HQS Wellington sinking?

No! And to be perfectly honest, there was never any risk of it sinking, at least not for so long as the Honourable Company had control and management of the vessel. This was, and remained, the state of affairs right up to the point when HCMM departed the vessel.

2. Why is HCMM leaving Wellington?

HCMM is and always has been a membership organisation. The members, their guests, visitors, and social event participants who board the ship are owed a legal duty of care under what is a barrage of health and safety legislation. The Master, Senior Warden, the Wardens, the Clerk and all HCMM staff take this duty of care very seriously and, above all other things, your safety is paramount.

For historical reasons, the Honourable Company does not own the ship. The legal owners are the Wellington Trust (WT). HCMM has a contract with WT to carry out basic maintenance and repairs, but the larger Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) items fall outside the remit of the agreement between HCMM and WT. Over the last year, or so, HCMM has expressed growing concerns about some of those items that they are not contracted to maintain.

In the last few months, concerns have risen to such a degree that surveys were called for. The outcome of these surveys is that there are significant health, safety, and safety-at-work issues that cannot be resolved by HCMM alone.

There are significant parts of the ship that have been certified as unsafe and, overall, the ship has generally been certified as unfit for purpose on a number of health and safety grounds. The issues are so significant, that they cannot easily or immediately remedied without the ship going to dry-dock and undergoing significant internal structural upgrade, this falls outside the remit of the HCMM agreement with WT.

As a result of the realised issues, our insurers decided that the risk involved in staying on the ship and keeping the Company treasures and Chattels on board was an unacceptable risk. The insurers gave HCMM 28 days to clear our possessions, after which, neither they, nor anyone on board would be covered by insurance.

3. Who made the decision to vacate HQS Wellington? How was this decision made?

This is a 2-part question but briefly:

The initial decision to curtail public access was taken in the light of safety issues with the escape gangways, electrical wiring problems, and the fire detection system. that was obsolete and for which no

spares were available. The system was not retrospectively compatible with modern systems, and once the existing spares were used up, it was only a matter of time before the entire fire detection network became ineffective.

In reality, HCMM had no option but to protect our members, staff, and visitors, hence the initial decision to curtail access to the ship.

The second reason is somewhat simpler. Following extensive surveys, the ship was found not to comply with Statutory Health and Safety Regulations, and it was not possible for HCMM to give safety assurances to staff and ship visitors. Consequently, our insurers were not prepared to underwrite the significantly increased risks. HCMM had no choice but to leave the ship.

4. What will happen to HCMM staff?

Not all staff on the ship are HCMM employees. There are contractors and service personnel (for example, cleaners, service engineers, and security staff) that have legal contracts with HCMM, which ended fairly and naturally, as set out in the agreements we had with them. Service Company employers will simply allocate their personnel to other contracts.

Some staff have been with the Company for less than 2 years, since activity resumed following the Covid pandemic. Most of these staff have already been approached and offered contracts with other employers., They may have the option to return to a future floating livery hall.

Key staff will remain with the Company and continue to provide the services necessary for a Livery Company. That said, they will no longer be burdened with the issues that attached to HQS Wellington. Consequently, more emphasis will be given to dealing with membership matters - as should always have been the case.

5. What is happening to HCMM possessions?

The task of moving over 5000 items (some of them very large) off the ship was not something that just happened overnight. The prospect of having to move so many items has been many years in the planning. The Clerk and his team simply brought those plans to fruition.

Perhaps a separate question has to be, **‘why were those plans developed in the first place?’**

All ships have a finite life span. This is something we, as mariners, know and understand.

HQS Wellington, at 90 years old, is no different, and the condition of the ship has been carefully monitored during the 75 years it has been on the Victoria Embankment moorings.

For several years, the Wardens have been carrying out research into identifying a new floating livery hall. This research has gone through many stages and is fairly well advanced. As part of that research, it was always understood that the Company, and all its assets, would have to be removed, and possibly put into storage during the change-over period - between leaving HQS Wellington and moving to a new ship.

The silver and treasures are now in secure storage. All other items are in secure warehousing or have been moved to our temporary offices’.

6. How long will HCMM remain at its temporary premises?

This is like asking ‘how long is a piece of string’? The short answer is ‘as long as necessary – but no longer than is necessary’!

The Company has a ‘passage plan’ and a ‘risk assessment strategy’ in place – the current situation may have arisen quickly, but it was not unforeseen, nor was it unplanned for. The speed and efficiency with which the Company was able to move its assets off the ship should leave no-one in any doubt that the Company was always prepared – these things take a long time to plan and arrange – in the event, far longer than we had time for. This forward planning has proven its worth.

In the same vein, the availability of temporary premises didn’t ‘just happen’. The Wardens have had a back-up plan for some time, and it would be disingenuous of anyone to think that this was not the case. There are, however, good practical, commercial, and legal, reasons why the full scope of our planning was not promulgated.

Suffice to say, anticipating crises and future planning are two of the functions that fall to the Wardens Committee. Whilst we may all hope for the best, as mariners, we have an aptitude for planning for the worst. Nothing has happened that we did not, nor could not, anticipate. This has meant that the Company has always had the capacity to be forward thinking and agile - as needs and circumstances required.

7. Are there plans for a new ship?

Yes.

The ‘new ship sub-committee’ is possibly one of the most active groups in the Company, and their work has been progressing for at least 5 years. The onset of the COVID pandemic, quite frustratingly, set plans back several years.

Planning for a new ‘floating’ livery hall takes many forms and there are multiple options and scenarios that need to be considered. Many of the stages have already been gone through, and with each stage, multiple options are revealed, each with its unique challenges and opportunities that have to be carefully weighed and assessed.

There are several prospects now developing, but it would be imprudent of HCMM to make a decision regarding a future livery hall - until all options have been properly reviewed and explored.

8. Will this move affect HCMM centenary celebrations in 2025-26?

No.

The main Centenary events are larger than HQS Wellington could accommodate, and bookings have already been made for the Centenary Gala Banquet at Guildhall and the Centenary River Cruise.

There may be some adaptations for smaller events, but these have been anticipated by the Centenary Celebrations Committee and any venue transition will be seamless.

9. Is there a dispute between HCMM and the Wellington Trust?

The relationship between HCMM and Wellington Trust has not delivered the mutuality of benefits that were anticipated when the Trust took ownership of HQS Wellington in 2006. The Honourable Company considers that the relationship has reached a conclusion.

10. What will recent events mean for the future of the livery?

There will be no change to the Livery status of the Honourable Company.

The City of London Livery has been in existence for nearly 1,000 years. There are 110 Livery Companies, of which only 44 have their own Livery Hall (43 as of now - until HCMM re-acquires its new floating Livery Home). There are 66 itinerant Livery Companies that routinely use Guildhall for Court and administrative functions and are regularly accommodated in the halls of fellow Livery Companies for other major functions.

Historically, the City Liveries were a mutually supporting fraternity of Professional Trade Guilds. This fact has been amply highlighted for the Honourable Company, by virtue of the expressions of support, encouragement, and offers of accommodation during the present difficulty. At times, it may have felt like it, but we were not, and never have been, alone as we faced what seemed like a developing crisis. In addition to the support of our fellow Livery Companies, the Honourable Company has also been encouraged by the City of London and the National Maritime organisations who recognised our need to move on, grow, and develop.

Change need not be negative. Indeed, the Master and Wardens readily acknowledge the exciting opportunities for development and growth that the current situation affords the Company.

11. How will the move impact the 2023 events schedule?

We acknowledge the regrettable need to cancel social and membership functions over the early part of 2023, this was necessary whilst the full extent of the technical problems and safety issues with HQS Wellington were carefully, and professionally, assessed.

Until the issues could be fully ascertained, it would not have been appropriate to make any precipitous, or improperly informed, decisions or announcements. Now that we understand the situation, we can plan for the future with a greater degree of certainty.

The regular schedule of curry lunches and declaration days will resume shortly. These will take place in the 'Little Ships Club' located at **Bell Wharf Ln, Upper Thames St., London EC4R 3TB** - located adjacent to the north bank at Southwark Bridge, and close to Cannon Street Railway and Tube Stations.

The 2023 Installation Dinner will take place in prestigious venue of Trinity House. Plans are well advanced to hold the main Company social events in other Livery Halls. Event schedules and venues may be found on the Company website (hcmm.org.uk).

12. What can I do as a member to help with the current challenges?

The biggest challenge faced by HCMM over the last few months, has been the spread of 'wild gossip and unsubstantiated rumour'. It is true of all organisations that when facts are sparse, rumour fills the vacuum. The present situation is a perfect example – but ask yourself, "*What could the Company point to as 'fact' or 'certainty', save that which was made known to all members?*"

Many have opined that the Company has not been open or honest and members have not been given the facts. The Master and Clerk sent out membership advisories when there was something that was known for certain. Failing that, anything else would have been unsubstantiated opinion.

There were numerous statutory, technical, and contractual matters that could not be placed into the public domain as there were legal and insurance implications. This is why the Master and Wardens asked the membership to trust them with the burden they were obliged to deal with.

For the most part, the Company membership has allowed the Master, Clerk, and Wardens to do what they had to, in order to protect the Company's interests and move us into a place where our future could be assured. The Master, Wardens and Clerk, are grateful and thank the membership for its support and encouragement.

What you can do, is help put an end to any remaining rumours or gossip, continue to support the Company, participate in our social events calendar when you can, and enjoy the facilities, fellowship, and camaraderie that the Company has always offered.

This is your Company, and it has always been the case that you will get as much out of it, as you are prepared to put in. Therefore, we urge you: be actively involved in the Company and grow with us as we look to the future. We ask nothing more.