It is an absolute privilege to welcome you all to our Annual Banquet.

[intro joke]

Being here at Trinity House reminds me that my speech should be like a lighthouse: brief and brilliantly illuminating but not staying on for too long.

First, my personal thanks to Sir Jan du Plessis. I was fortunate enough to be at Rothmans International while you were there, Jan, and to enjoy your company as well as your wise counsel. I know it came as something of a shock when I asked you, over a year ago, to be my guest speaker, but I was delighted when you accepted! It's a real pleasure to listen to someone who genuinely knows what they're talking about — a refreshing change in our Company, as I'm sure you'll all agree.

It is around ten years since we last held our Banquet here, and I've always wanted to return, so I'd also like

to offer an enormous thank you to Rear Admiral Iain Lower, Deputy Master of Trinity House, who has left us in charge of this magnificent building: I hope it doesn't prove to have been a serious lapse of judgement! But, as you've already heard, the Deputy Master Mariner is also an Elder Brother of Trinity House, so I'm sure he stands ready to step in and look after the building on Iain's behalf. In any case, we're enormously grateful to Iain for letting us borrow the keys.

Of course, even the most stunning surroundings are nothing without excellent food and drink. Our thanks go to Mark and his team at the Cook and the Butler, to the events crew here at Trinity House, and to our Learned Clerk Sandra, and her support team. They've kept our glasses full, our waistlines expanding, and everything else running to perfection.

I also want to thank Past Master Paul Taberer for his speech welcoming our many wonderful guests. Paul, it was eloquent, it was warm and, most importantly, it finished on time!

We're also in for a musical treat tonight, thanks to Lucy Joy, Joseph Game and James Leaver Whitfield, three exceptionally gifted musicians from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Our Benevolent Fund has supported the School for more than sixty years, longer than any other Livery Company, and it's a particular pleasure to be able to showcase its talent here this evening. We wish all three of you every success in your future careers.

Can I ask any Sevenoaks School Pipe Makers' Scholars who are with us tonight to raise their hands? Some of you are already members of our Company; we hope that others may be persuaded to follow your example. Welcome!

But now, before I let you return to your port and conversation, I have one very special duty to perform.

It’s my great honour to present this cheque from our Company to Colour Sergeant Wilson Ma of the Fifth Fusiliers. He is receiving it on behalf of No. 15 (Loos) Company, the London Guards, for whom he formerly served as Company Quartermaster Sergeant.

Thank you all once again for coming, for your wonderful company, and for making my Annual Banquet such a memorable evening.

I do hope you’ll join me for more socialising at the end of the evening. In the meantime, please enjoy everything else we have to offer — and now my light has gone out, so I'll stop talking and hand over the Lucy, Joseph and James.