



The Worshipful Company of Distillers

RICHARD WATLING MASTER 2016-2017

Languages and travel were important to me from a young age and my enthusiasm for them has had a profound influence on my life and career.

I considered taking a Flying Scholarship but having studied French German and English at Bedford School I went instead to the City of London College to read business studies and French. A formative year with Wilkinson Sword drove me to take the marketing option and an opportunity to work in Switzerland with Alfred Dunhill fuelled the desire to work internationally, which has never faded.

After graduation I moved to Brussels for three years to work for Rothmans as the UK was joining the then EEC and over the next fifteen years I had an extraordinary time building brands and opening new markets mainly by developing local manufacture through joint ventures. They gave me a strong grounding in commercial management and during those years I covered the globe – especially in the Middle East, Africa and East Asia. To hone my classical marketing skills a stint in the UK running Global marketing and the British market itself was a valuable experience, but Solihull never had the same appeal as Saigon had had on my first visit in 1974.

By 1986 it was time to move on and I joined the spirits industry as the International Marketing Director of Hiram Walker – the Canadian Club, Ballantine's and Courvoisier group. Fifteen days later we were in a take over battle and after a while became part of Allied Lyons. My family and I moved to Scotland as I became part of the Scotch Whisky industry as the first Marketing Director of Allied Distillers and surfed the second golden wave as Spain and France fell in love with this wonderful product.

A move to IDV/GrandMet gave me experience of J&B, Bombay Sapphire, Smirnoff and Baileys firstly in Europe then in Asia when I moved to Hong Kong as Managing Director of North Asia and another wonderful time, creating new businesses in China, Korea and Japan before returning to the UK after Diageo was formed. Justerini and Brooks, the famous wine merchant and leading Scotch brand was my new home and I progressed over the next five years to my last position as Scotch Whisky Director of Diageo. I was proud to be the Royal Warrant Holder of Johnnie Walker, the Chairman of the Keepers of the Quaich and a member of the Council of the Scotch Whisky Association as my role expanded into industry affairs, and we completed the new Scotch Whisky Act to strengthen the consumer understanding of this noble spirit.

My loyal family of Sarah, whom I married in 1972, and our children Katie and Christopher had their share of the excitement of international life having lived through twelve moves before we settled in Gloucestershire. Life now is immersed in the Livery, being a Trustee of the Royal Warrant Holders Charity, a member of the County Priory Group of St John, and indulging my passion for fast cars as a Director of the Porsche Club. Our two wonderful grandchildren who live close-by ensure that our days are always busy, full of fun and ice-cream.

Becoming Master Distiller is a great honour and a wonderful way to complete my career. I am very proud to be able to build on the momentum we have attained in the transformation of the Company, growing the involvement by the membership, bringing us to the hub of the Distilled Spirits industry and perhaps above all by raising our game in charitable giving. It will be busy of course but also lots of fun.