

ART AND ICONS

Recollections of Liveryman John Howard Gaze, compiled by Liveryman Paul Campion.

Dr Johnson said that "he who tires of London tires of life." The same may be said of Liveryman John Gaze. The Putney-born dealer in Russian Art and Icons has seldom strayed from the environs of our great city, except for brief forays to Russia, Rio, Paris and his beloved Venice, all great cities that hark back to former glories: much of John's life is steeped in the past, from the nature of his business to his long connections with the City of London and its churches.

St. Magnus the Martyr in Lower Thames Street was the first city church to exert its influence upon the young Gaze, a slumbering Wren masterpiece presided over by the rather eccentric cleric Colin Gill. Gaze was appointed Parish Clerk there in 1963, becoming a member of the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks, and rising through their ranks to become the youngest Master this century in 1991. Not surprisingly, the lure of the City took a firm hold and in 1979 he became a liveryman of the Plumbers' Company. He was later to realise that a Company which better represented his interests would be more suitable. Thus in 1990 he joined the Musicians'. A previous member of both the Parish Clerks' and Musicians' Companies had been Sir Edward Cooper, Lord Mayor in 1920 and Master of both Companies in 1920/21. At present, John's principal claim to fame is as a 'settler' to the George Thalben-Ball Trust, a charity making grants connected with church music.

It was his love of church music that led John Gaze to move in 1985 to the parish church of St. Michael, Cornhill, well known for its fine choral services and organ recitals. Although successful as a city church, St. Michael's was not blessed with a rector who regarded it as a parish church and before long Sunday services ceased. The choir was determined to remain together and sang in various places of worship for well over a year. After the departure of the Rector, John Gaze was determined to re-open the church for Sunday worship. With the help of a small group of supporters he

succeeded in doing so, trawling the country for friends and contacts able to take the services, and once more bringing the choir back to its rightful home. Through his efforts, the church found an excellent incumbent in the Ven. Gordon Reid, Archdeacon of Europe, who actively supported and encouraged the glorious music that once more filled the church on Sundays. John's deep affection for church music has also led to more than one conflict with brother Musician Jonathan Rennert, Director of Music at St. Michael's, who is a less than enthusiastic advocate of the Gaze principle of 'a full tilt at everything' delivery.

John formerly lived in a Georgian weaver's house in Spitalfields, which he painstakingly restored. It was only the prospect of a home in historic Albany in Piccadilly which was able to prize him away. His set of chambers there had previously been home to such luminaries as Terence Rattigan, Edward Heath and Phillipe de Rothschild, and has more recently been a setting for several memorable soirees which John hosted.

Ever a fighter, John was called upon to display considerable grit when in



Liveryman John Gaze as Master Parish Clerk.

1991 he was kidnapped from Spitalfields by a gang in the pay of a bogus aristocrat, posing as contact for a group desirous of selling an icon. After a chilling period of captivity, he managed to escape his captors and fled into the Mile End Road where he was picked up by the Police. When his story was later dramatised in a television crimewatch reconstruction, his friends were amused to see a tall good looking actor portray their diminutive chum!



The eminent music critic Felix Aprahamian is presented with the Company's Silver Medal by the then Master, Frank Fowler.