

## **The 2021 Public Speaking Competition**

The Company's annual Public Speaking Competition would normally have taken place in mid-March 2021, but had to be postponed until 30<sup>th</sup> June because of the impact the C-19 pandemic was having on schools. But the best laid plans .....! With only a few weeks to go, and with some Covid restrictions still in place, what had been intended to be a 'live' event at Anglia Ruskin University had to be rapidly converted into another online event via the 'Zoom' platform.

The competition duly took place via 'Zoom' on the evening of Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> June. There were thirteen competitors from eight schools: Lillian Baylis Technology College, Merchant Taylors' School Northwood, City of London School for Boys, City of London School for Girls, James Allen's Girls' School, William Perkin CE High School and Grey Coat Hospital School. The judging panel consisted of Mrs Pamela Taylor (Past Master) and Professor Sir Deian Hopkin (Liveryman & Court Assistant, formerly Vice-Chancellor of London South Bank University). Mr David Taylor (Past Master) took the vital role of Official Timekeeper, and the whole evening was managed by our Gallant Clerk and accomplished Zoom-meister, Mr Christian Jensen.

The necessarily restricted 'virtual' audience, which included members of the Company's Education Committee and members of staff from the competitors' schools, was treated to thirteen extremely interesting and very well-presented speeches on a wide variety of fascinating topics, including the impact of neurotechnology on our lives, exams, the importance of music, global warming and our 'broken' education system. The winner, who was the judges' unanimous choice, was Lucy Barker of Grey Coat Hospital School, who gave an impassioned and intensely personal speech entitled '*What feminism means to me*'. The two runners up, both of whom offered us intriguing titles to whet our appetites, were Amara Rigault of William Perkin CE high School, whose title was '*Simon doesn't need a say*', and Vuvraj Juttla of Merchant Taylors' School, who gave the first speech of the evening with the title '*The ripened fruits of boredom*', daringly opening with what felt like a very long ten seconds of silence. Millie Lall of the City of London School for Girls was highly commended by the judges for her speech entitled '*Why can clever people make bad decisions*'. As was the case with the 2020 competition, the competitors are all to be congratulated on their mastery of 'virtual' presentation, which we now know, on the back of almost two years' experience of Zoom and similar online platforms, has become an essential 21<sup>st</sup> Century communication skill.

The competition winners were presented (regrettably, once again, by post) with glass trophies specially commissioned from Royal Scot Crystal, along with certificates bearing the Company's seal

and WHS vouchers for £100 (winner), £50 (runners up) and £25 (highly commended). Each participant received a certificate, along with brief feedback about their performance.

At the end of the evening, there appeared to be a unanimous view that, once again, the Company's foray into a 'virtual' Public Speaking Competition had been a remarkable success. The schools were particularly appreciative, not least because of the competition actually going ahead at a time when so much other extra-curricular activity had been cancelled. Some of the teachers commented that participation in the competition had provided their pupils with a valuable and very timely boost for their self-confidence. Several schools hold internal competitions in order to select their entrants, and so the 'reach' of the competition goes well beyond the actual participants.

One of the competitors wrote to her teacher the morning after the competition, saying to her:

*Despite not winning anything it was a great experience and I really enjoyed it. I even made some new friends! Thank you for such a great opportunity :).*

The Head of English from another of the competing schools wrote:

*The boys both said how much they enjoyed the event, meeting like-minded peers from other schools, and how they would be very interested in entering similar competitions in the future. You have sown a seed!*

Plans are now in hand for what is very much hoped will be a 'live' competition at Anglia Ruskin University in March 2022

**John Dewhurst**

**Liveryman and Court Assistant**