

Past Master Dr Simon Fradd remembers



To me there are two highlights in the year of a Master of the Needlemakers Company. The first is the Mansion House banquet. This I found to be a terrifying experience. With the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral on one side and the Lord Mayor on the other, both took great pleasure in comparing notes of how many times they had made their respective speeches. How was I to compete with them especially as I would be speaking last? From then on it was all downhill.

The other high point was our trip to St Petersburg. Liz and I had done a dry run the year before. This had not gone entirely as planned. Liz was scathing that I had come without a notebook which she forced me to rectify at Heathrow airport. She insisted I not only made the decisions but also the notes. This was a major change in job description from being a surgeon.

In the event, our planning need not have been so specific. Our travel agents imposed much of their own thinking on the trip including the choice of hotel. We almost had rebellion before we had unpacked. Fortunately, the Dame and I had adjoining rooms and could hold his and hers receptions every evening.



Breakfast was a different problem. The service was appalling and clearing away used crockery and cutlery was definitely off the agenda. Fortunately Needlemakers were the model of patience. Not so a French man who upturned the coffee urn and threw around the plates. Magically secret service officials instantly appeared and led him away.

We had an early morning cruise on the river Neva to the Peter and Paul Fortress.



It was a lovely boat with small tables for every four people. Each had a bottle of vodka on it. Everyone declined until our guide, Boris, pointed out we had paid for it and could not take it away with us. Like most others I remember nothing else of the morning.

The museums and palaces were astounding, especially when one considers they are basically modern reproductions, the originals having largely been destroyed in the second world war.





We were privileged to be in St Petersburg for the May Day celebrations. Retired army officers paraded in their medals and were presented with red roses by members of the public.



We finished with a visit to the war memorial where people were decorating it with slices of bread in memory of the catastrophic food shortages in the war. The sound of Shostakovich's Leningrad symphony brought a tear to many an eye.

