

The Master Plumber Certificate

Background to the Scheme

Ancient and Modern

Master Craftsmen were key people in the building process as far back as the 13th century. Records show that in the 16th century each Master Craftsman was responsible for his own work and the training of apprentices. For exercising such skill and supervision a Master Plumber would receive a shilling a day and an appropriate livery (distinctive clothing).

In the City of London, where craft guilds originated in Britain, historic links with Master Craftsmen have been retained through today's Livery Companies. The Worshipful Company of Plumbers obtained its Grant of Ordinances in 1365 and the principal events since that time have been documented in the *History of The Worshipful Company of Plumbers*.

Meanwhile, in continental Europe, especially Germany, the national education and training programme has for many years in continuity, produced Master or 'Meister' Craftsmen. These in turn become leaders in the different sectors of industry where their technical skill supplemented by business expertise, plays an important part in the economy of the country.

Realising that changes to British vocational education, apprenticeship and training were taking place that could affect the availability of experienced, well-qualified plumbers (in effect, Master Plumbers), the Worshipful Company of Plumbers took action in 1987. Working with the City and Guilds of London Institute, a syllabus was prepared for C&G Certificate 605 Master Plumber, resulting in publication during 1988. A pilot project commenced at a Further Education College in Kent leading to a situation where a number of candidates completed the course and the first Master Plumber Certificate was awarded in 1994. However, due to a number of unfortunate circumstances including closure and sale of the craft campus, the pilot scheme was shelved. Subsequently, an attempt was made to revise and re-introduce C&G Course 605, but without success.

The Pace of Change

While this endeavour was in progress, Scottish/National Vocational Qualifications (S/NVQs) had replaced City and Guilds Certificates as evidence of studying and training in the noble art of plumbing. The introduction of S/NVQs occurred in parallel with a decline in Britain's skill base. A National Skills Task Force was charged with the job of producing a report which would ultimately explain what most people would know – we had a problem called a 'skills shortage'.

Faced with this situation, the then Institute of Plumbing,

The Worshipful Company of Plumbers and City and Guilds, acting also with the support of the Engineering Council, decided to adopt a new approach to identify Master Plumbers. This scheme built on the existing S/NVQ system and achieved a number of additional objectives. The main purpose was to offer encouragement to both students and mentors. In other words to provide incentive to those training for a career in plumbing and acknowledge the expertise of individuals who



have responsibility for helping the next generation to achieve their potential. Although six centuries have passed, the demand for a transfer of work-place experience from Master Craftsmen to Apprentice still remains. In 2001 the pace of change was fast and furious. The Master Plumber Certificate offered by a partnership organisation, linked by history and professional concern for plumbing, arrived at the right time. The validity of the Certificate is conditional on the recipient remaining in membership of what is now the CIPHE, where the recipient has the support of a network of colleagues in a learning society.

Mastering a Technicraft

With S/NVQ Level 3 or equivalent in Plumbing now the standard target for trainees, it is important that the content of the course is satisfactory for the majority of those who practise plumbing. Plumbing has become more technically demanding for the many thousands that ply their 'technicraft' in a small business. The Master Plumber Certificate reflects this trend by drawing attention to the role of the Professional Plumbing Technician. Thus, in its own way the new Certificate contributed to the national quest for a rise in standards among the skilled.

This is a sincere attempt by a group of authoritative organisations to introduce a sense of ambition to people who set out to train as plumbers. At the same time, the Master Plumber Certificate presents an opportunity for those who satisfy its requirements to set the seal on a career of true value to the community.

Finally, much mention has been made of the partners in this enterprise so as a reminder of their relationship; The Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering has managed, since 1970, the Register of Plumbers inaugurated by the Worshipful Company of Plumbers in 1886. The City and Guilds of London Institute was founded by City Livery Companies and it is an Awarding Body Partner for plumbing qualifications. The CIPHE is also a Nominating Member of the Engineering Council. Calling for Master Plumber Certificate holders to be, as a minimum, Licentiates of City and Guilds and Registered with the Engineering Council as an Engineering Technician completes a series of meaningful connections.



Master, Journeyman and Apprentice Plumber Certificate holders with David Hamilton, Master of The Worshipful Company of Plumbers and City of London Sheriff Peter Cook at Carpenters Hall, London in June 2010. This was the first joint occasion when Certificates were also presented to Carpenters and Electricians.