

SELKIRK'S first Standard Bearer of 2016 was officially appointed last Friday night, when Selkirk Merchant Company elected David Amos to cast its colours in the Market Place at this year's Common Riding ceremonies on June 17.

There was no disguising the new Standard Bearer's pride and excitement as he addressed a large gathering of members and guests in Selkirk Rugby Club's Philiphaugh Suite. "I stand before you both humbled and truly honoured at having been asked to be Selkirk Merchant Company's Standard Bearer for 2016," he said.

"When Company Master Douglas Hogarth arrived at my home to offer me the position last September, it honestly felt like a punch in the chest - I literally fell against my car, absolutely speechless!"

David, who lives just outside Selkirk and runs his own dyking and fencing business, said not once since joining the Merchant Company in 2011 had he considered, or even anticipated, ever becoming Selkirk Merchant Company Standard Bearer.

In a heart-felt speech, the 52-year-old Standard Bearer pledged to do everything in his power to fulfil his duties to the same high standard set by his predecessors, concluding his address by saying: "I hope I've given you an idea of how honoured I feel tonight, and I hope that as many of you as possible will join me as I head over the Green on June 17."

The toast to the Standard Bearer was proposed in superb style by David's wife, Michelle, a member of Selkirk Merchant Company since 2009. "When David asked me to propose this toast I asked him: 'Why me?'

"His reply was: 'You're a member of the Company, you're my best friend and nobody knows me better than you'. Needless to say I was a bit taken aback, but very grateful and even tearful that he had thought of me."

Michelle, who will be her husband's lady busser, told dinner guests that David had attended Knowepark Primary School and then Selkirk High, where he was appointed Head Boy in 1980. He went to Edinburgh University to read biology and pharmacology, working in a laboratory after completing his studies.

"He knew this really wasn't the career for him, so decided to follow in his father's and grandfather's footsteps and learnt the art of drystone dyking. He set up his own business in 1993, and this is what he does for a living to this day."

Michelle and David married in 1999. Daughter Stephanie was present at the dinner to see her father appointed Standard Bearer, but unfortunately son Blair had been called away to a family emergency and so couldn't be present.

David and Michelle's speeches contained witty poems each had written about the other, and there seems little doubt the couple will prove a winning team at Selkirk's summer ceremonies and celebrations.

A no-holds-barred toast to "Selkirk Merchant Company, Town & Trade" was proposed by well known Selkirk actor and raconteur John Nichol. He said tourism was an unexploited business opportunity for Selkirk, but added that the town's many attractions and assets amounted to very little if the town looked 'dilapidated and neglected'.

"There are too many derelict properties to begin with. There are also sprawling heaps of rubble and poorly-maintained grassy areas in and around Selkirk, and the litter-strewn verges of the roads leading into the town are an eyesore.

"There are, of course, welcome initiatives that have been set up to improve the situation, such as the Selkirk Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) and the 'Selkirk Means Business project'.

“However, as a community we must open our eyes to what is good and valuable, and we must also see what can be improved.

“Selkirk is a unique and priceless gem. She is our home and where the heart dwells, and because we love our town we have a tendency to excuse the empty properties, the cracked pavements, the potholes, the general deterioration, the bent-over railings, the flaking paint, the uncut grass, the unpruned rose bushes, the litter, that have sadly become part of the overall townscape. **We** may excuse them - **visitors** will not.

“It’s not enough to love our town. The ‘love us or leave us’ attitude simply won’t do. Every effort should be made to persuade strangers to love Selkirk too. If we all pull together with firm resolve and a clear vision, plus a willingness to roll up our sleeves and get stuck in, Selkirk will undoubtedly flourish and her reputation for being a friendly, attractive and fascinating town to visit will be greatly enhanced.”

Replying to the toast, Selkirk’s new Honorary Provost, Jake Wheelans, assured David Amos that he and his fellow Standard Bearers would be at the heart of the 2016 Common Riding. “The respect, support and good wishes of Selkirk Common Riding Trust will be with you throughout.”

Provost Wheelans added that it was incumbent on the Trust to maintain not only the integrity of the ceremonial aspects of the Common Riding, but also to safeguard its financial stability. “Every year the public Common Riding Appeal receives an overwhelmingly generous response from the people of Selkirk, even in difficult times. We are extremely grateful for this support.

“However, we all need to be aware that although the finances are very well stewarded, the total expenditure between the Trust and the Executive to run Selkirk Common Riding is now approaching £50,000.

“So for anyone who is unsure of what they should give, I would say that any amount, however small, will be gratefully received, and will go a long way towards the townspeople enjoying Selkirk’s unique occasion.”

Friday’s dinner was chaired by Selkirk Merchant Company’s Master, Douglas Hogarth, and the vote of thanks was given by company member Grant Kinghorn. Musical entertainment was provided by Hilary Bell and Tommy Knox.

At the AGM prior to the dinner, eight new members were officially admitted to the company – Ferdous Ahmed, Callum Deacon, Robin Elliot, Dale Henderson, Greg MacDougall, Mrs Agnes Mitchell, Bruce Riddell and Kenneth Scott.

Honorary life membership was bestowed on Allan Hogg, who has been a Selkirk Merchant Company member for 40 years.

Reporter – John Smail