

A Very Modern Tradition

Livery Companies in the 21st Century

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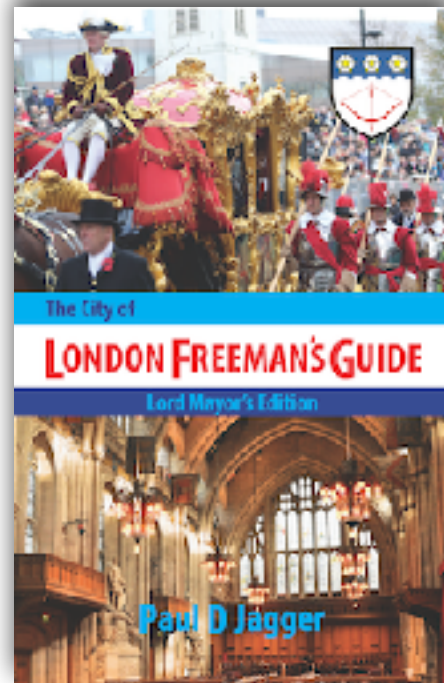


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Welcome to 'A Very Modern Tradition', a swift exploration of the role, relevance and impact of the City of London's Livery Companies in the 21st Century.

Recommended Reading



The City of London Freeman's Guide is the definitive concise guide to the City's customs, ceremonies, events, officers, landmarks and institutions. This is the handbook every Journeyman, Yeoman, Freeman, Liveryman, Alderman, Sheriff and Lord Mayor should have in his/her knapsack!

Available in hardback £15 or eBook £9.99 in all good City outlets and online.

City of London Secrets of the Square Mile gives an overview of the City's kaleidoscope of colour facets; civic, commercial, social, heritage, arts, gardens, etc.

Available in glossy paperback £5 in all good City outlets and online.

The Livery Companies



110 Companies, of which
33 are 'Modern' and
77 are 'Ancient' of which
12 are 'Great' all comprised of
c27,000 Liverymen
c20,000 Freeman (of companies)

A quick review of the Livery Companies as they are today (October 2019):

There are 110 Livery Companies, the most recent was elevated to that status in 2014 (The Worshipful Company of Arts Scholars). Of the 110 companies, 33 of them are described as 'Modern' (a term meaning much the same as 'New' in New College Oxford) and probably will ever be so. The modern companies are those dating from 1926, the first among them being the Honourable Company of Master Mariners*. The ancient companies date from before the Norman conquest (nobody knows precisely when), through to the 1740s. The most prestigious among the ancient companies are The Great Twelve (sometimes the Twelve Great or simply the XII) of which the Mercers are first in order of precedence.

The most recent records for the Livery Companies identify c27,000 Liveryman and 20,000 Freeman (of their respective Company). There are now more companies and more Liverymen than at any time in recorded history. Many centuries ago a (very) few Livery Companies failed, some merged (e.g., Brown and White Bakers), some split (e.g., Bowyers and Fletchers). In the past 90 years the trend has been for growth in companies and membership that has accelerated in the last 30 years.

* Two Livery Companies are 'Honourable' rather than 'Worshipful'. They are: Master Mariners and Air Pilots. The 'Honourable' prefix comes from the fact that they have a Royal Patron who is professionally qualified in their respective occupation.

Charity



Education



Industry / Trade



Fellowship



It is often said that the Livery Companies are active in four domains: Charity, Education, Industry and Fellowship. A popular Internet encyclopaedia describes many Livery Companies as 'now primarily a charitable institution'. Livery Companies were ever charitable institutions, they have not transformed in to being so, neither have they lost their connection with the other domains. However, that's not the full picture..

Civic Duty



Tradition / Heritage



Armed Forces / Cadets



Church



In addition to the four domains mentioned on the previous slide, Livery Companies are also active in the following: Civic Duty, Tradition, support to HM Armed Forces (and Cadets), and support to the Church (of England). Each of the domains are 'cardinal points of the compass' of the livery, all are important and vital to navigating through the role and impact of the companies in modern times.

Charity



Charitable Disbursements (2018)

£67M
75,000 hours

(92 companies)



The charitable activities of the Livery Companies are as diverse as they are substantial. The latest estimates show that c1,000 people reside in alms houses owned, funded and governed by the Livery Companies. The Livery Companies provide more than £20M each year for education in various forms (compulsory, further, higher, workplace training) and make grants small (£500) and large (£x,xxx,000) to all manner of worthy causes. Fund raising comes primarily through rental income from properties (for the older companies), the donations of the membership (all companies), by charitable giving and events such as the annual Sheep Drive.

Education



Latest estimates show that over 100,000 school pupils in the UK attend schools that were founded by, are funded, governed or otherwise substantially linked with the Livery Companies. Most of the older schools are now famous independent schools in the first rank of the private school sector (Haberdashers' Aske's, Oundle, Gresham, others). More recently the livery has focussed on Academies and maintained schools. One such example is Hammersmith Academy, opened in 2011, and the first new school founded (literally from the foundations upward) by the livery in over 100 years. Hammersmith Academy was jointly funded by the Mercers' Company and the Information Technologists' Company.

The educational activities of the Livery Companies extend beyond compulsory education in to apprenticeships (over 250 at last count), bursaries, awards, scholarships and in several cases the funding of professorial seats. The Livery Companies have links with 173 universities and numerous other charitable education initiatives.

Industry / Trade



A common myth is that of the Livery Companies having long since lost their links to their respective trade, craft or profession. Nothing could be further from the truth. An unscientific and cursory analysis of the links that the Livery Companies maintain with their occupations identified over 90 such substantive links in 2012. Companies are linked with over 150 professional bodies or trade associations. Some companies are still engaged in regulation and inspection (e.g., Gun Makers, Goldsmiths), examination and awarding (e.g., Vintners and Scriveners, Farriers).

In some cases the links between the profession and the livery are very close such that membership is restricted to those who are professional qualified or directors of businesses in the trade (e.g., Solicitors, Chartered Accountants, Chartered Surveyors, Engineers, Chartered Architects, Brewers, Distillers).

All modern companies (since 1926) must have a substantial proportion of the membership active in their occupation (usually at a senior level) and as such these companies are often described as 'working companies' since they comprise practitioners from their respective occupation.

Fellowship

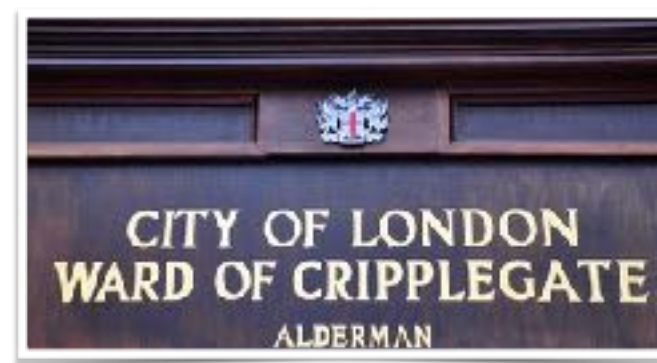


The formal fellowship activities of the Livery Companies are famous in the City and beyond. Nobody who has attended a Livery Company banquet (White Tie) or Dinner (Black Tie) can be left in any doubt about their reputation for being where 'gastronomy and philanthropy meet'. The video clip from Stephen Fry's documentary 'Keys to the City' gives a peak in to the more formal side of the City.

To watch the video visit: youtube.com/watch?v=MmknWUFzrbs

There are a wealth of other less formal activities, such as the monthly meeting of the Information Technologists' Company at Bangers Wine Bar, or the annual inter-Livery Skiing competition, the Clay Pigeon shoot and various other sporting events.

Civic Duty



Another dimension of the Livery Companies involvement in the City is that of Civic Duty. To this very day the liverymen (imports both genders) elect the two Sheriffs of the City of London (an annually elected position lasting one year) and with the Aldermen of the City of London they elect The Right Honourable The Lord Mayor of (the City of) London.

The liverymen also elect certain other ancient offices, including the Bridge Masters and Ale Conners. They also elect as many auditors as are required each year. The two election meetings (one for Lord Mayor and one for Sheriffs and other officers) are known as 'Common Hall'.

I've written a blog article on democracy in the City if you'd like to know more (see last slide)

Tradition / Heritage



The Livery Companies are rife with traditions, and so numerous are they that entire books have been written on this aspect of the livery. One tradition which is common to every company is that of the Loving Cup ceremony, although how it is practiced usually differs slightly from one company to the next, thus ensuring that even if you know it off by heart - an invitation to dine with another company will result in fumbled and embracing incidents with those unfamiliar with the peculiarities of the Loving Cup ceremony in other companies.

Other traditions include (but are not limited to): The Boar's Head Ceremony, The Passing of Water Ceremony, The Cocks and Caps Ceremony (Skinners), The Garland Ceremony (Barbers) and many others.

Some of the City's ceremonies and customs have resulted in, or otherwise popularised phrases such as 'At sixes and sevens', 'Keep it under my hat', 'Past your prime', 'If the cap fits, wear it' and 'Bury the hatchet'. I've written a blog article on City and Livery traditions if you'd like to know more (see last slide)

Armed Forces / Cadets



The Livery Companies have a very long standing relationship with the Armed Forces of the Crown. This stems from the fact that in medieval times the Livery Companies provided the watch for the defence of the City walls, and the patrolling of the wards. They Livery Companies also had a responsibility to provide men, clothing, arms and food for the City's Trained Bands (precursor to the Army Reserve) and of course many Freemen and Liverymen were members of The Honourable Artillery Company.

Today the Livery Companies maintain links with over 200 Regular and Reserve Forces units and over 100 Cadet Forces Units. In many cases the links are built upon common professional interests (e.g., Royal Signals with the Information Technologists' Company) and there is no shortage of serving and former members of HM Forces among the ranks of the livery.

Many Livery Companies employ retired military officers (some of very senior rank) as their Clerk (Chief Executive Officer) and retired warrant officers (sergeant majors) as their Beadle / Hall Manager.

Church

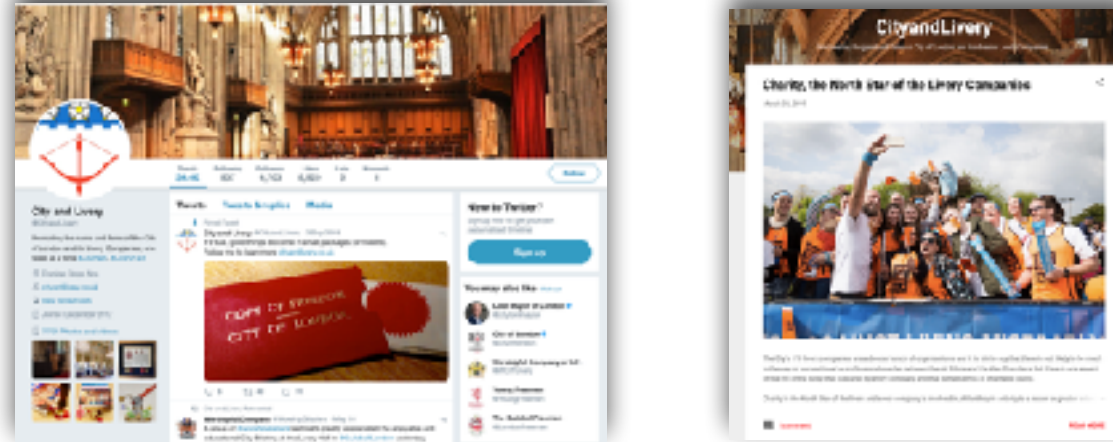


The Livery Companies started as fraternal organisations in the Christian Church and later took on a trade, craft or professional bias in the City of London. As such the Livery Companies were creatures of the church before they became occupational guilds. This fact is manifest in some of the more ancient Royal Charters granted to Livery Companies that often describe them as 'The Brethren and Sisters of the Guild or Fraternity of the Saint so-and-so'.

The reason why the Livery Companies are often described as 'Worshipful' is because their members worship together, not because the company itself is worshipful. In modern times the Livery Companies admit those of any faith or none, but the links to the Church of England are still present through events such as the installation service of a new Master, or a Royal Charter presentation, and inter-Livery events such as the United Guilds Service. Furthermore every Livery Company has an associated church and honorary chaplain.

Some companies still retain the right to appoint the vicar or rector of one of more churches as patrons either singularly, or jointly with other organisations, of many church benefices.

On Social Media



I am frenetically active on Social Media, and you can follow me on Twitter @CityandLivery for news, views and facts about the City and its Livery Companies.

Every few months I publish a blog article on some aspect of City lore, customs, traditions or other goings on of interest to the Livery at cityandlivery.blogspot.co.uk