

This note is one of a series placed in the Almanac for the guidance of livery masters, wardens, and their clerks, especially new ones, seeking advice on a particular topic. They are not prescriptive, and how individual companies choose to conduct their affairs is, of course, entirely up to them. Most are written by a past chairman of the Livery Committee, of whom you may read more at the foot of the Contact page.

Apprentices – a guide

Introduction

Livery companies admit new freemen by one of three methods: patrimony (through father or mother), redemption (by paying a fine), or servitude, that is by serving an apprenticeship. This paper is concerned with the last of these – apprentices. Livery company apprenticeships (as a route to entry to the freedom) are relatively rare. Many companies have no apprenticeship system at all – but for a few (notably the Merchant Taylors) it is a major source of new members.

Caveat

These apprentices should not be confused with the many other apprenticeship schemes now in existence. Described here is a largely symbolic and historical system, no longer purporting to be in any sense a real training to become, eg a Taylor (though of course that was their origin). Schemes run by government, businesses, and indeed the Livery Companies Apprenticeship Scheme Ltd, to train “real” apprentices are outside the scope of this guide.

Guildhall Rules

Though the age of majority has long been reduced from 21 to 18 years old, most companies do not admit new freemen under the age of 21 years. Apprenticeships (leading to the freedom) can typically last between 4-7 years, but most now are four years. It follows from this that a new apprentice would not be “bound” (to his master) until he/she is about 17/18, so that he/she would complete their “indentures” sometime soon after their 21st birthday. The rules preclude starting the process after reaching 21 years of age. These historical “rules” emanate from the Chamberlain’s Court in Guildhall, where the bindings of new apprentices are recorded and indentures held. Successful completion of the term leads automatically to the Freedom of the City (and of the livery company).

Modern Companies

Though the older companies are unlikely to wish to change these ancient traditions, some of the Modern Companies may want to adapt them to suit the present day. For example the traditional wording of the indentures (no ale houses, no fornication etc) may seem silly or irrelevant, and the age rules may not work eg for a post graduate livery prize winner who may be considered a suitable candidate for joining the livery by servitude. It is quite in order for any livery company to set up its own apprentice scheme, with its own rules to suit the kind of candidates they have in mind, but they simply won’t be recognised by the Chamberlain’s Court.

This note is one of a series placed in the Almanac for the guidance of livery masters, wardens, and their clerks, especially new ones, seeking advice on a particular topic. They are not prescriptive, and how individual companies choose to conduct their affairs is, of course, entirely up to them. Most are written by a past chairman of the Livery Committee, of whom you may read more at the foot of the Contact page.

Why have apprentices?

Whether the livery company scheme is ancient or modern, there are many reasons for allowing or encouraging admission by servitude, or even (re)introducing such a scheme if one doesn't exist. Some are:

It is a recruitment method for young people allowing both parties to assess the suitability of joining the livery. Especially so, maybe, for prize winners, heads of school etc of colleges in which the livery company is associated. Or to allow a family member to join a "closed" livery where the rules of patrimony don't work.

To maintain an historical tradition of the ancient livery companies.

And to enable the Modern Companies to become part of such tradition, with schemes adapted to their own needs.

The Guildhall authority on this subject is the Clerk to the Chamberlain's Court
Murray Craig <Murray.Craig@cityoflondon.gov.uk>

Nigel R Pullman
Apprentice Leatherseller 1964-1969

5th March 2015

Was this note helpful? Do you have comment? Email nrpullman@btinternet.com