

This note is one of a series placed in the Almanac for the guidance of livery masters, wardens, and their clerks,

## **Translation**

Translation (when not used in its language context) is a term which seems to have been taken from the church – bishops typically “translate” from one see or diocese to another. But in the livery world, liverymen may occasionally “translate” (in effect transfer) from one livery company to a different one.

This note explains the background.

### **Mother Company**

First, it is key to understand the notion of a liveryman’s “mother” company (this applicable to those who have more than one). The mother company is that of which he/she became a member first. So not necessarily, for example, the more senior company, or the chosen preference of the liveryman in question.

Whether the “first” is that of which the person was first made free, or whether when clothed as a liverymen is not clear!

### **History**

Up until 1649 it was considered mandatory that every lord mayor should be a member of a Great 12 Company, indeed to have it as his mother company. Thus until that date, many ambitious aldermen would have had to translate to a Great 12 livery to progress to become LM, and the practice of translation was common.

But the first to break this “rule” was Leatherseller Thomas Andrewes who was elected LM in 1649, and again a year or two later. However, it was not until a further nearly 100 years that another non great 12 liveryman, a Cooper (Robert Willimott), was elected LM, and thereafter the monopoly was broken.

### **Modern times**

In the memory of this writer, Great 12 LM’s have been relatively few (though examples include Clothworker Gadsden in 1979, Mercer Graham in 1990, and most recently Grocer Bowman, 2017). And the idea of “translation” has been all but forgotten. Which is your mother company is now of little practical relevance to any liveryman.

### **Lord Mayor**

However, the mother company of the LM (and indeed of the sheriffs) does carry responsibilities, and COSTS (and privileges, esp for the master of that year). The major expenses are funding the new LM’s Presentation Dinner in October, and entering a float in their Show the following month. There are other smaller financial commitments (the traditional gift to the LM), and aside from the dinner, these will typically have also been incurred in their sheriff year.

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The mother livery of the LM invariably finds a way to fund this exceptional expenditure. But for a less wealthy livery (eg a modern company) if they find themselves having to do it in eg more than once in just a few years, the financial strain may tell. For this and other reasons, an alderman expecting to progress may consider translation (to a different, wealthier, company).

This practice has been very rare in modern times, but two recent examples by current aldermen have brought the procedure out of the shadows.

### **The practicality**

The authority to allow translation rests with the Court of Aldermen, and is administered by the Chamberlain's Court. When considering approval or otherwise, they will need to be persuaded of the merits by all parties, including, importantly, the endorsement of the livery from which the person is departing. Or rather the one ceasing to be the mother company. In all likelihood, the liveryman will remain a member of his/her original company. In days gone by, the liveryman would have ceased to be a member of the company he (invariably a man in those days) was leaving, not least because typically one was only permitted to be a member of one livery. That is no longer the case, except in a very few companies.

### **Brewers' Bond**

Nothing to do with translation, but I am indebted to the Archivist of the Brewers' Company who tells me of the still extant practice requiring every new liverymen to enter into a Bond, indemnifying the Brewers' Company against future costs that they may be called upon to pay, should that person ever become a Sheriff or Lord Mayor. The last Brewer LM was in 1799! I believe this practice to be unique to the Brewers.

### **Summary**

Though common prior to the eighteenth century, Translation is now extremely rare. And recent examples of aldermen again translating may be of interest, but it is unlikely that they will, or should, set a precedent for a resurgence of the ancient procedure. Joining a livery company is something you do for life!

Nigel R Pullman

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Was this note helpful? Do you have comment? Email [nrpullman@btinternet.com](mailto:nrpullman@btinternet.com)