

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.

Closed Companies

A “closed” livery company is one which only accepts members from a well defined professional or trade grouping, eg a chartered architect. I was asked recently if there was a list of such companies, but I am unaware of one.

But virtually all the Modern Companies would claim some level of “closed”, to a greater or lesser degree. . The difficulty is in distinguishing between what we might call (in the current vernacular) a HARD closed company (e.g. Actuaries or others where the relevant professional qualification is a prerequisite for entry), or a SOFT one, where there may not be a simple accepted qualification (eg the World Traders, who do expect an interest/involvement in global trade, but interpret that requirement with some pragmatism).

Those *soft closed* liveries often welcome professionals who service or supply the core trade - e.g. accountants, lawyers etc specialising in a certain sector. (and of course each of those two professions have their own “closed” company).

As to the ancient companies, relatively few seek to exclude on grounds of profession – Brewers come to mind as one that does, and to a lesser extent the Vintners and Innholders. The Barbers and Apothecaries pretty much restrict themselves to the medical profession, whilst Master Mariners (the first of the Modern Companies) and Musicians also expect new members to be active in their field.

As an aside, many of the ancient liveries, whilst in no sense “closed”, actively welcome or recruit those employed in their craft or trade, or that which they have now adopted. So Armourers encourage those in material sciences, and the Tallow Chandlers in the oils & fats industry, for example.

It is, of course, entirely up to the Court (and the letters patent or charter under which it operates) to determine whether or not it is a closed livery, and to what degree it wishes to enforce its own rules.

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