

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](#).

Consorts

This note is written to offer guidance/reassurance to unmarried masters in selecting a consort for their year in office (and ideally in the senior warden year also). It may be particularly useful to the master who has chosen a companion in a category which will be a first for that livery.

It seeks to reassure those about to take the chair as to how to go about introducing/explaining/welcoming a consort who is not their spouse or partner. Some unmarried masters may prefer to have no consort, and in this writer's (an unmarried man) view, that is absolutely fine too.

The choice of consort for an unmarried livery master is entirely up to the office holder, but he/she would be diplomatic to ensure the court are aware of their plan well ahead of the election court. Further, it is helpful to all parties if hosts welcoming a guest master and their consort are clear and aware of what the relationship between them is.

Back in the day, the livery master was a man, and the mistress (or other title) was his wife. Nowadays virtually every livery welcomes women to its ranks, and many of them serve as the Master. In the current year (2018) there are 15 lady masters or prime wardens.

Meanwhile marriage for life is not as prevalent as it once was, and today there will be many masters (male or female) who are unmarried, as widow(er), divorcee, or by dint of sexual orientation or preference. Many of these will have partners, a few will be in a civil partnership, and one or two will prefer either no consort, or multiple companions during their master's year.

In this day and age, all of these scenarios are fine in every livery company, though the last listed, *multiple companions*, should be handled with sensitivity!

The Livery Company Database, where the name of the consort will be published, offers 10 choices of description, and also an *Other* option where you can choose what you wish:

Wife	Husband
Spouse	Partner
Companion	Friend
Daughter/son	Sister/brother
Widow	Civil partner
Other	

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This list is intended to indicate that **all** chosen consorts are welcome whatever their status or relationship, and to remove any embarrassment caused by ignorance. Hence a widower's daughter, for example, is not assumed to be the master's new young girl friend!

But as with all matters of etiquette, the aim is to put your guests at their ease. Hence a wise (unmarried) master will seek to be clear, to their court/livery/guests as to whom they have chosen to be their consort. This writer has received more discrete enquiries on this topic than one might expect – from wardens nervous at their planned choice of consort. In every case, the choice has seemed entirely sensible, in the circumstances that the future master finds himself. Eg a relatively recently widowed person may not wish to be seen with a consort who could be misconstrued as a partner, and in such circumstances the master might choose his/her daughter/son/sibling, and a widow might ask a woman friend.

Two caveats. In general it is not wise for a master to choose a married person to escort them to events. And as hinted above, a single master would be sensible in taking care before inviting multiple different partners to accompany them during the year.

Summary. The general principle in all the forgoing is that masters may choose whom they please to accompany them to events (if invited to do so), but it is courteous to one's livery/guests and hosts to ensure that the situation is understood where appropriate. It may also be noted that most frequently, the master is invited to be accompanied to outside events by their clerk. But where the invitation is with a "partner", then an unmarried master may choose to invite their clerk.

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