

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](#).

Biographies for masters – some thoughts

Why write a biography

Every new master will be asked before taking office for his/her biography or CV. It is worth those writing these biographies to reflect for a moment as to why are they writing them? before putting pen to paper.

Points to consider

It is NOT for a job application! Though most wardens will have an old CV lurking somewhere, it is not sensible to simply dust it down, add a few grandchildren, correct a couple of dates, and send it off.

Reflect on who is going to read it, and why. The answer in most cases will be because either they are going to welcome you in a speech, or they are going to meet/be seated next to you at a social event.

What to avoid

In both these scenarios, your lengthy list of O level passes and non executive directorships is unlikely to prove helpful or interesting to the speech writer or your dinner companion. Whilst a brief summary of your career is clearly helpful (we may assume it was successful – you are about to become the Master!), it is the quirky interests and achievements that are more likely to prove of interest and amusement. Family, hobbies and other interests will add colour.

Context

Be aware that you are going to hear your words played back to you publicly (so be prepared to smile at yourself) and also that what you write will enter the public domain.

Word count

Unusually in this regard, too short may not be helpful. But too long will inevitably sound self-serving. A sensible compromise may be something that will comfortably fit on an A4 page. (Probably well under 500 words, and 200 may be quite sufficient). Some may consider having two biogs available - the shorter lighter version; and a longer more detailed record of who you are and what you've done, eg for use when principal guest of honour.

Distribution

The clerk will want the biography for a number of reasons:

For their own file/information

To post at the Company website (maybe)

To post at the Livery Companies Database at this website (hopefully for sure)

To be available to send to host companies when their master is a guest

~~To send to the publisher of the Blue Book for inclusion in the Who's Who section in that annual directory.~~

[Sadly the Blue Book ceased publication in 2018.]

Photo

A recent good photo will also be required, and is a useful addition to a biography. Be aware that this photo is not only likely to be placed on your company's page at the Livery Companies Database, but will also be used in the various masters' picture books (ditto of your spouse/consort). As these are essentially aids to recognition of your fellow masters, it would be sensible to ensure your own photo is clear, face on, and neck up only.

Of course it is not obligatory to publish your biography at either the website or elsewhere, but your hosts will be grateful if you do.

Nigel R Pullman

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