

The Lord Mayor and the Livery Companies of the City of London

The office of Lord Mayor dates back to around 1189, the first year of the reign of King Richard I, the Lionheart. Since that time, for over eight centuries, the Lord Mayor has had the responsibility of representing, supporting and promoting the people and the businesses of the City of London.

Back in those early days the City had a relatively large resident population and their businesses comprised every day trades such as bakers, butchers, carpenters, drapers, fishmongers, glass sellers, mercers and weavers, as well as those for specialist purposes such as armourers, glaziers, goldsmiths, painters and scribes. Over the centuries, the City of London developed as a major port, and as a business and trading centre. There was always plenty of money to be made, and increasingly available to be lent or traded. If the monarch needed money, it was often made over to the Crown in return for privileges, such as a monopoly right to trade. The special rights accorded to the City and to its livery companies in turn caused their status and their influence to grow further.

For many years therefore, the livery companies were the all-powerful institutions of the City of London. They supported schools which provided recruits for their craft. They had well-defined systems of apprenticeship. They ensured quality among their members (known as liverymen). They would penalise the baker who sold stale bread and the Fletcher who made arrows that did not fly straight. Without their support, in London at least, you could not learn a craft. If you were not a liveryman you could not trade and you would not be considered for election as a Sheriff. You would certainly never become Lord Mayor. The livery companies were closed shops and they were protectionist. While this has changed, and trades are now open to everyone, they were, and still are, the backbone of the constitutional make up of the City.

In the 19th century new professional institutes and trade associations were established which operated on a national basis, some with Royal Charters. With new nationwide exams and certification procedures, they gradually assumed the role of livery companies in terms of training, quality control and ethical behaviour. In the late 20th century, deregulation was introduced such that there are now no barriers to entry into any trade or profession. If you can pass the relevant exam, you can use the initials of the certifying organisation and you can then trade or practise, subject to external independent regulation.

Today, the livery companies still support their crafts. Their links with their trades and professions are very strong. But this role is focused, in most instances, on

encouraging young trainees, through prizes and bursaries, and on providing a forum for discussion of major issues affecting their area of interest. The charitable role of livery companies is significant and it is calculated that their donations total around £40 million each year. Many support schools and colleges, which in some cases they founded, and they offer many prizes and awards. They generously support the Lord Mayor's charitable appeal and they are great supporters of the cadet movement and the Reserve Armed Forces.

Today's 35,000 liverymen are the only franchisees entitled to vote each year in the Shrieval elections and around 1,000 gather together in Guildhall on Michaelmas Day to be invited to express their support for the Court of Aldermen's candidate for Lord Mayor. They also contribute to the collegiality of the City and maintain the customs and ceremonies, some of which are centuries old. They are the bedrock of the Civic City. In addition to adding colour and tradition, they represent the continuity of the values of the City, as evidenced in a unique culture that makes the financial sector successful today. They cherish values such as honesty, integrity, equity and fairness, where one's word is one's bond.

The Lord Mayor as Champion of the Livery Companies

The Lord Mayor is considered to be a figurehead for the Livery – the 108 livery companies and also the guilds that represent the ancient as well as the modern trades and professions of London. The approbation by the livery movement of the choice of candidate for Lord Mayor is clearly important, even if the Lord Mayor's main role is head of the City of London Corporation, supporting and promoting the businesses of the City. The livery companies regard each Lord Mayor as theirs. The interface with the livery movement is extensive; each company expects to see the Lord Mayor at some function or event during the year. While it is physically impossible for the Lord Mayor to accept an invitation to lunch or dine with every company, there are many other Livery activities in which he can participate and which are enjoyable as well as having enormous historical significance.

Additionally, the Lord Mayor is in an excellent position to influence the thinking of liverymen, to help livery companies respond to the changing needs of society. The organisation that can be very effective in ensuring effective contact is the Livery Committee, which exists to provide a channel of communication between the Livery, the City of London Corporation and the Lord Mayor. It is also traditional for the Lord Mayor to address the Masters and Clerks of all the livery companies at Mansion House soon after taking office.