

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.

How do you join a livery company?

Much elsewhere in this website assumes membership of a livery company, or other close involvement in the civic activities of the City of London – and hence a certain basic knowledge of the livery world. However, how do you actually become a liveryman? (which is equally open to men and women)

This note seeks to answer the basic questions, but each of the 110 livery companies (at 2020) will have their own admission procedures, and the answer will be very different from the various companies.

It may be helpful to start by dividing the 110 livery companies (or guilds as they used to be known) into three broad categories. Each company has a precedence number, and roughly speaking these three groups will follow the precedence.

- A. The senior (and oldest) are those with significant assets (usually including a hall), and their members enjoy considerable privileges.
- B. In the middle are ancient companies (created before circa 1700) but ones whose wealth is more modest, and often, whose links with their original trade has diminished (not least amongst its membership)
- C. Modern Companies, those formed since 1926, and which represent professions most relevant in today's world.

It is likely that to join group A the applicant will either have a family connection, or receive a personal invitation. A relevant connection with the industry may help an “outsider”, but that is by no means certain. The Grocers' Company has few (if any) grocers amongst its membership. The Brewers', on the other hand, still require direct involvement in the brewing industry, but this is relatively rare in this group.

Group B are also likely to welcome membership through family (patrimony, see below), but are much more likely to encourage applications from suitable individuals with no previous connection. Typically this will come about by personal introduction from an existing member (liveryman). But if a potential new applicant has no such connection, then the company clerk will usually be willing to effect such an introduction.

Group C often have what is known as “closed” membership, ie only open to qualified members of that profession. But even assuming you are a chartered, as with both the groups above, a proposer and seconder for your application will be required, and again the clerk can assist. However, as a practitioner in the profession, it would be odd if you did not already know an existing liveryman. As with the earlier groupings, it is most likely that new applicants will be invited for interview.

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Which livery company should I join?

As may be clear from the above, some kind of family, personal or professional connection will be helpful, and hence offer an answer to this question. However, should you have no such link, and simply want to be a “liveryman”, it would be wise to choose a company with which you have some knowledge or interest in their “craft” – however they choose to interpret it in the 21st Century.

At <http://www.liverycompanies.info/a-z-list-of-companies/livery-companies--their.html> there is a list of each livery company showing their modern day role – obvious for most of the Modern Companies, but less so for some of the ancient ones.

All livery companies admit new freemen by one of three methods: **patrimony** (through father or mother), **redemption** (by paying a fine), or **servitude**, that is by serving an apprenticeship. Those eligible to join a company by patrimony are unlikely to be reading this paper, and those younger readers interested in apprenticeship should read the notes at <http://www.liverycompanies.info/fellowship-of-clerks/freedom--apprentices/>

For all others, *redemption* is the route in, and the “admission fine” will vary. But it is unlikely to be less than £500, and for some companies will be maybe twice that or more. These relatively high entry fees emphasise the fact that livery membership is something that should be viewed as “for life” – not akin to joining a sports club for a few years. Annual subscriptions, known as *quarterage* (but usually paid annually) also vary widely between companies, but will typically be in the region of several hundred pounds p.a. Most companies will additionally expect their members to make regular contributions to their charitable trust.

Again, in keeping with the lifetime commitment, admission procedures are likely to take some time (months not weeks), and potential applicants should be patient. The first step in joining a livery is to receive the Freedom of the Company, and thereafter in due course freemen become liverymen, or “full” members of the company.

For more on any aspect of joining a livery company, the correct person to contact is the Clerk.

Nigel R Pullman

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