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The Best of Company

Clockwise from right: A company beadle; an evocative street name; coopers are among London's livery companies; the Grocers' Company arms; winners of the annual Doggett's Coat and Badge river race, organised by the Fishmongers' Company.

London's livery companies maintain a fine tradition of fostering trade and serving the community, discovers **Olivia Temple**.



THE WORSHIPFUL Company of Glovers, the Butchers, Bakers, Horners, Turners and Scriveners, the Makers of Playing Cards, the Woolmen, Apothecaries, Glaziers and Painters of Glass. It is such a colourful prism of names that the imagination runs riot and one can only wonder how the curious tradition of Livery Companies began.

In medieval England "livery" was the term used to embrace the clothing, food and drink provided to officers and retainers of great households, such as those of bishops and barons, colleges and guilds. Later the term came to signify the distinctive clothing and badges worn as a sign of protection

ANDREW STOWELL

anyone wanting to keep a shop or exercise a trade or craft within the City walls. With it came many advantages, including freedom from impressment into the armed forces by press gangs.

Even today freedom of the City is a crucial qualification for the holding of civic office. The livery companies continue to help to educate and train young people, to support colleges, hospitals and industry and to donate generously to charities.

The City of London still richly evokes

and privilege. Throughout Europe guilds were set up to act as a support system for all sorts of craftsmen, the forerunners of the trade unions.

"Guild" derives from the Saxon "gildan," meaning "to pay." Members paid to belong in the same way that they pay an annual subscription to a trade union today. The most popular route for admission

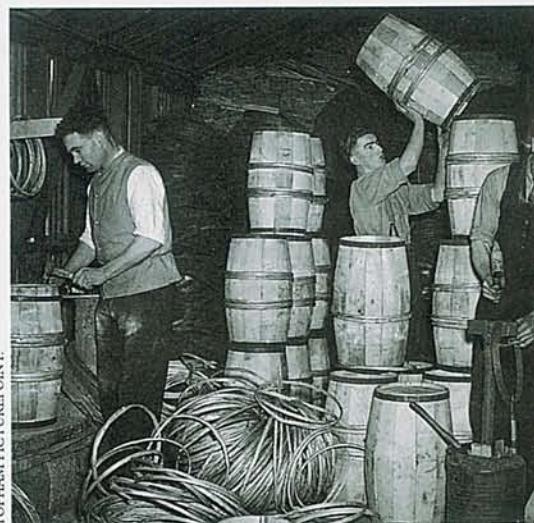
to a craft was through apprenticeship, with a young person being taught by a master, normally for seven years, after which he could claim his "freedom."

"The freedom of the City of London" was a prerequisite for anyone wanting to keep a shop or exercise a trade or craft within the City walls. With it came many advantages, including freedom from impressment into the armed forces by press gangs.

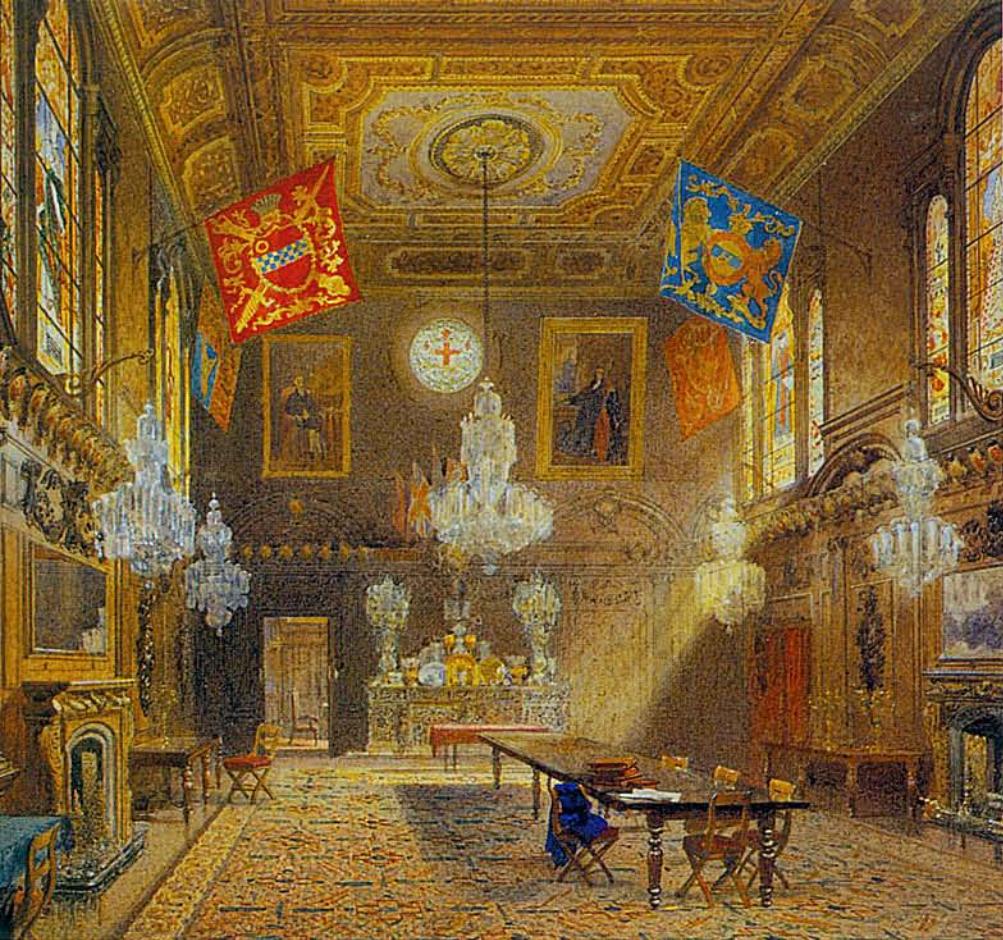


that time when it all started with street names such as Cloth Fair, Bread Street and Milk Street and Ironmonger Lane where traders and craftsmen clustered to carry out their business.

A fraternity or guild protected employees and customers, as well as employers, by seeking out inferior work or shoddy goods and checking their weight and quality as well as regulating wages. Fines were heavy and could lead to ruin due to expulsion and loss of livelihood. Disputes were settled by arbitration in the livery company halls, which were also used for recreation.



TOPHAM PICTURES/POINT



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MEPL

Clockwise from above: The Mercers' Hall at the turn of the century; Sir Richard Whittington; company coats of arms; a statue in the Guildhall; the 1572 Grant of Arms to the Goldsmiths' Company.



THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF GOLDSMITHS.

Members could seek medical aid when ill and even in death help was at hand with funeral arrangements, vigils for the dead and the ringing of bells. Each guild had a patron saint and strong links with a monastery or church. Care of the infirm and elderly was always a major concern.

Perhaps the most famous name in the annals of the City of London is that of Richard Whittington, three times Master of the Mercers' Company and four times Lord Mayor of London. On his death in 1423 he left property worth some £6,000 (many millions in today's terms) for almshouses. Whittington

College almshouses remain to this day a fine memorial to the spirit and purpose of their benefactor.

The Mercers' Company is the City's premier livery company – based upon an order of precedence decreed by the Lord Mayor in 1515. Mercers, their name deriving from the French word for merchant, were chiefly concerned with the export of wool and the import of linen and luxury fabrics in medieval times.

But the best-known livery company is probably the Goldsmiths. Its hall is a magnificent building situated north-



ROGER HOWARD

NEIL HOLMES

east of St Paul's Cathedral and is one of London's hidden secrets. Goldsmiths work in silver as well as gold, and from the 14th century leading goldsmiths were appointed by the sovereign to oversee regulations concerning the quality of coin and standards for precious metals. No gold or silver vessel was to leave the hands of the ►



CRISPIN BOYLE

Clockwise from left:
The present Goldsmiths'
Hall is the third on the
site; a leopard and
butterfly vase from the
Goldsmiths' Hall; the
Salters' Hall depicted in
1828. Originally for people
who dealt in salt, the
company is now involved
in chemistry and science
education; an 1840
portrayal of the
Fishmongers' Hall;
a Vintners' Company
procession.



COLLECTIONS/ERIAN SHUEY

► workers until it had been inspected by Guardians of the Craft and marked with the leopard's head said to be taken from the royal arms, the King's Mark.

Many of the livery companies' halls were bequeathed by wealthy citizens or the Church. Goldsmiths' Hall is on the identical site of the property purchased by 19 goldsmiths in 1339 and no other company can claim an earlier tenure.

The present hall is the third on the site. A unique collection of antique and modern silver and jewellery is on display and many well-known silversmiths and jewellers have developed their careers as a result of patronage from the company.

There are 36 livery company halls remaining in the City, although some

companies do share halls. However, livery companies are far from being a mere historic tradition. Since 1945 more than 20 new livery companies have been established, the most recent being the Information Technologists who have formed a vital link with the stock market since it adopted a computerised share-dealing system in 1987. The new companies represent such professions and trades as airline pilots and navigators, chartered accountants and engineers.

Companies continue to adapt and develop. For example, the Worshipful Company of Fan Makers today encompasses the mechanical fan trade, one of its members being Rolls-Royce who make turbo-engines.

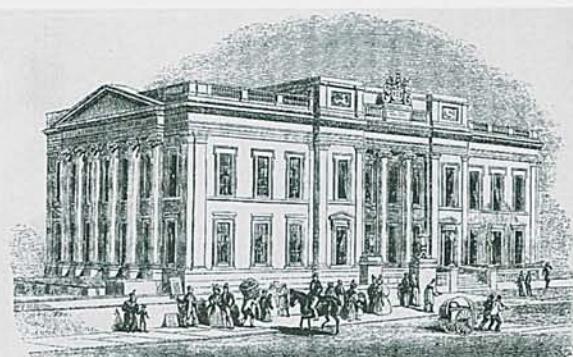
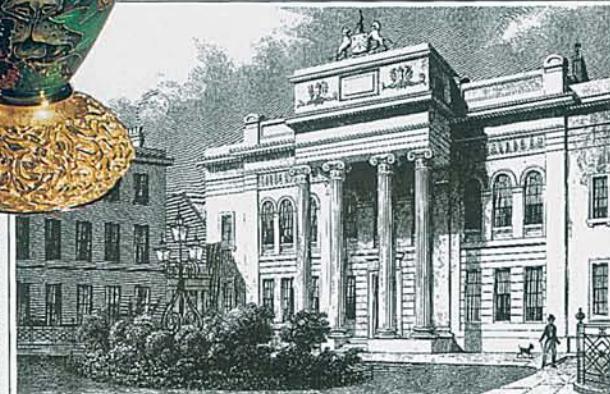
One tradition still perpetuated by the Fan Makers is to present royal ladies with a fan on the occasion of a coronation, wedding or other significant celebration, in return for their signature on the Royal Autograph Fan. The last autograph is that of Lady Diana Spencer on the occasion of her



THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF GOLDSMITHS

marriage to the Prince of Wales in 1982.

The Worshipful Company of Glovers also has a long association with the Royal Family, and at each coronation an ancient ceremony takes place in which a right-hand glove is presented to the





COLLECTIONS BY SHUET

Clockwise from above: The Lord Mayor raises his hat to the crowds; a 1741 dish and ewer from the Goldsmiths' Hall; the Saddlers' coat of arms; the elaborate duplicate coronation glove of King George VI.

sovereign by a peer who has inherited this privilege. A selection of such gloves can be seen at The Museum of Costume in Bath, among them the

duplicate coronation glove of King George VI, beautifully decorated with motifs of the English Tudor rose, Scottish thistle, Irish shamrock, acorns and oak leaves.

The Lord Mayor of London, too, is a recipient of traditional gifts, the Feltmakers, Scriveners and Glovers presenting him with his ceremonial hat, the quill for signing his declaration and gloves.

There are so many fascinating companies. The Horners Company originally controlled the purchase and sale of raw horns within 24 miles of the City of London. Besides being used to make containers and musical instruments, elaborately decorated horns were used for the conveyancing of land and property. In the 20th century many horn products have been superseded by plastics and the Horners are closely associated with the polymer industry.

When we use such phrases as "lock, stock and barrel," or "the baker's dozen," we are probably not aware that their origins lie with livery companies.



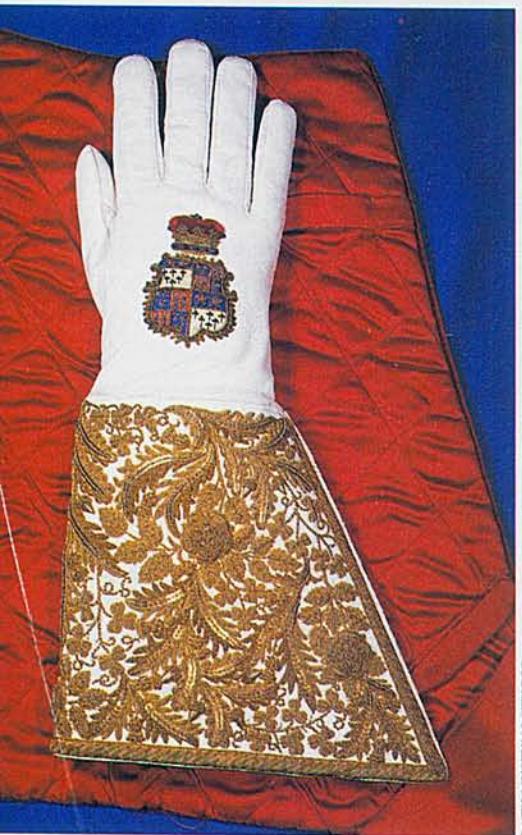
THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF GOLDSMITHS



ANDREW STOWELL

Bakers gave 13 loaves for every 12 bought to allow for any shortage in weight; guns were proofed as safe by firing a charge 30 per cent greater than normal through the barrel; and even the popular nursery rhyme *Baa, baa, black sheep* with its "three bags full" refers to the tax imposed by King Edward I in 1275 on exported wool.

Pomp and circumstance, Lord Mayors and carriages, care in the community, excellence and fair trading – the Worshipful Companies continue to uphold the traditions for which they have always been known. ●



BATH MUSEUMS SERVICE

Turn to our Travel Guide on page 73 for further information.