

In good Company

Its roots may be in the Middle Ages, but the City of London Livery movement is as active as ever in supporting trade, education and charity

Ranging from the oldest, the Worshipful Company of Mercers, to the newest, the Security Professionals, there are 108 Livery Companies in the City of London. They have a diverse and wide membership and most of the oldest can trace their origins to the medieval trade guilds that operated on behalf of employees and employers to ensure fair practice and quality produce.

Today, the Livery (as the Companies are collectively known) continues to have a role in commerce and trade. Several Companies have a statutory or regulatory role such as the Apothecaries which offers medical diplomas and qualifications for pharmacists, or the Goldsmiths, which since 1300 has been responsible for assaying (testing for purity) and marking gold and silver wares. The Company continues to run the London Assay Office, where several million articles of gold, silver and platinum are hallmarked each year.

Some Companies, such as the Scriveners, still have a professional role, while others, such as the Worshipful Company of Bowyers, exist purely as charitable foundations.

Lord Mayor Gifford is a Liveryman of his 'Mother' (first) Company, the Worshipful Company of Musicians. He is also past Master of the Worshipful Company of International Bankers.

Here, the current Masters of the two Companies provide some background:

THE MUSICIANS

John Morehen, Master of the Worshipful Company of Musicians, says that the Company membership

currently stands at about 500, with Liverymen (senior members) outnumbering Freemen by about four to one.

"The membership comprises a remarkably varied and talented group of professional and amateur musicians, including instrumentalists, singers, composers, instrument makers, music administrators and educators," he explains. "Many other members of the Livery would probably be content to describe themselves simply as keen music-lovers."

As the only City Livery Company devoted to the performing arts, the Musicians' principal remit is to encourage and promote musical performance and education to the

“Following tradition, it was Liverymen of the City’s Livery Companies who voted in Lord Mayor Roger Gifford”

highest professional standards, particularly among young musicians.

Says John: "Through the administration of our charitable funds we aim to help musicians at the outset of their careers, mainly through the provision of prizes, scholarships, performance opportunities, medals and other awards that recognise excellence and achievement. Our activities embrace a wide range of music-making, including classical music, composition, brass bands, military bands and jazz.

"The Company funds more than 50 prizes and awards. Some are of significant financial value, while others

are simply prestigious in their own right. In addition, it organises performance opportunities for young musicians, of which the most coveted are the Musicians' Company Concerts at the Wigmore Hall, and our annual jazz programme. The Company now enjoys an enviable reputation for identifying those young musicians who have the greatest potential, and who are most likely to benefit from support in those crucial early years of their career."

John says that one of the most rewarding aspects of Company membership is the camaraderie. "Another valuable benefit," he states, "is the ability to enjoy a wide spectrum of musical events in some of the City's most historic venues. Our

regular banquets always conclude with a short recital of music. During my year as Master these will be provided by present and former students of Chetham's School of Music (Manchester), some of whom are also Company award winners.

"It is, of course, a tremendous privilege for the Company to have one of its Liverymen as the incoming Lord Mayor," concludes John. "The last occasion on which the Musicians was the 'Mother' Company of an incoming Lord Mayor was almost a century ago, when Sir Edward Cooper served both as Master and Lord Mayor in 1919-20."