



# LIVERY COMPANY RECORDS & FURTHERING YOUR ANCESTRY

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**Livery Companies of London – What they are ~ Their role in History ~ Who joined them ~ Their records and what difference their use can make in studying family history. Related organizations will be clarified and additional resources will be covered.**

1155 Charter ~ Worshipful Company of Weavers  
The oldest recorded City Livery Company.

## WHAT THEY ARE. . . .

The development of trades & crafts can be understood by studying the livery companies of London. As these self-governing guild organizations emerged in the 1100s they became part of the economic structure in England and served a multi-faceted role in politics and society over hundreds of years. Livery companies have particular historical value from the earliest known chartered company of Weavers in 1155 into the 1700s when over 80 such organizations functioned. While there are just over 100 London livery companies known today, the 1700's ended the greatest period of economic and historical influence due to the changing role of these companies. Thru the 1700s company members represented the business interests of what we would refer to today as an industry. The most prominent and influential livery companies were termed, "The Great Twelve" distinguished from all other such companies known as the "minor companies". In either case, the organization's membership represented unique craft and merchant business trade interests. (See page 4.)

## ROLE IN HISTORY. . . .

Derived from mutual protection societies that provided fraternity, early guilds or companies eventually could be recognized by the Crown with charters that formally gave them entitlements and defined their duties and responsibilities. As they progressed, mercantile, political and social interests both in London and in the building of the empire were facets of the role fulfilled by Livery company members. Each company's commercial interests were of importance to London's ruling leaders so members were included in the City's decision-making infrastructure as part of the governing body. Their influence was even more intertwined in the City's functioning with company members providing the pool from which the Lord Mayor was selected. Specific to Livery companies, once a person was granted freedom of the Company, the Lord Mayor could then grant the person the privilege of freedom of the City. Once this rite of passage was attained, members could then practice business, and elect and be elected as Common Councilmen and Alderman. It was common for the reigning Monarch to also look to the company and their members for financing and support of ventures for exploration and colonization throughout the world. Through their involvement with the City, they were given special consideration and civic privileges in return. Also, thru membership in trading companies, another type of organization, Livery company members gained further opportunities to promote business and personal interests. It was not uncommon for a trade company to receive entitlements by being given sole trading rights for specific commodities relative to a country or a colony thereby adding to a freeman's business prospects and advantages.

## WHO JOINED THEM. . . .

Livery Company membership was essential to practice business in London. Members were craftsmen and tradesmen representing a range of social classes including gentry. The choice to join and move up in the ranks of the company was influenced by cost of

admission, livery fees and civic responsibilities one could anticipate fulfilling. To practice business in London, admission to “freedom” of the city was attainable only by (1) completion of apprenticeship (servitude); (2) being a child of a freeman (patrimony); or (3) purchase or gift (redemption). Only in one of these instances could a man (21 years being the minimum age) become a citizen of London. Apprentices could be ages 11 to 21 with the average age beginning at 14. After 7 years an apprentice, admitted as a member of the company, was eligible to apply to the City of London Court of Common Council or the Court of Alderman for admission to the “freedom”, and if approved, required to make oath to both the Sovereign and the Lord Mayor of London. Depending on the company, estimates have been given that 20-30% of company members were from London with the balance coming from shires to live in London. Women joined as widows of members or as daughters by patrimony. In some cases members were from countries outside of England.

### LIVERY COMPANY RECORDS. . . .

Livery company records can provide rich details of interest to the genealogist. Knowledge of the company organization, member roles and status, and the nature of records and their content will help clarify their value in family history. This information should be studied within the context of London and records about its residents and history as found in collections of the City of London Corporation, Guildhall, London Metropolitan Archive, Society of Genealogists, TNA The National Archives and the LDS Family Search Family History Library. Each has an on-line catalogue and in some cases searchable abstracts or digitized records available. Comparisons of holdings should be made for thorough record coverage and complete record access.

**Company Information** Each company has a governmental framework based on charters, ordinances, grants, etc. The Court of Assistants is the governing body and specific roles emerge for those who have progressed from an apprentice to freeman to livery member. Roles are mentioned throughout records so familiarization with them can be helpful in studying record content particularly as it relates to the nature of the contribution of one’s ancestors. Additional membership categories will be presented. Refer to websites of some company’s to also learn more.

**Record Categories** These form the basis of classification schemes in which records can be accessed from repositories. Knowledge of these categories will help narrow down record search choices. General categories cover:

Constitutionality	Financial Trade/Craft/Professional
Governance	Administrative and Legal
Membership	Charitable Gifts & Property

### Using Livery Company Records

- STEP 1 Study Livery company record content.
- STEP 2 Examine non-livery company apprenticeship records.
- STEP 3 Study the findings in conjunction with non-apprenticeship records related to London and its inhabitants.

(Specific record features and their implications for family history will be presented.)

### Livery Company Records

Freedom Admission Registers & Indexes ~ Alphabetical Lists of Freemen  
 Apprenticeship Binding Books ~ Alphabetical Lists of Apprentices  
 Quarterage Books ~ Court Minutes ~ Accounts ~ Orphan’s Tax Books

### Non-Livery Company Apprenticeship Records & Related Resources

Apprenticeship City & Country Registers (Stamp Duty Books- Stamp Duty Commissioners)  
Register's of the Clerk of the Chamberlain's Court, Corporation of London  
Local and Charity Records  
War Office/Admiralty/ Registrar General of Shipping & Seamen  
Board of Trade/Poor Law Union Papers

### Non-Apprenticeship Records About London & Its Inhabitants

Records of the City Freedom  
Poll Books  
Common Hall Register  
Parish Records  
London Citizens, Aldermen, Common Councilmen  
Orphan's Recognizances & Tax Books  
& more. . .

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### Related Organizations

Trade Companies ~ Inns of Court ~ Shire guilds ~ European Guilds

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## Resources, Family History Study Examples & Acknowledgments

### Resources

Apprentices of Great Britain Index, 1710-1774. Society of Genealogists. (indexes Stamp Duty records in The National Archives)

Apprenticeship Records. In-Depth Research Guides. The National Archives.  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/apprenticeship-records.htm>

THE CITY LIVERY COMPANIES And Related Organizations. A guide to their archives in Guildhall Library. Guildhall Research Guides 3. c.Guildhall Library. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1989. Out-of-Print.

GUILDHALL LIBRARY MANUSCRIPTS SECTION. Leaflet Guides to Records:

SEARCHING FOR MEMBERS OR THOSE APPRENTICES TO MEMBERS OF CITY OF LONDON LIVERY COMPANIES <http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/livapp.htm>

SOURCES FOR TRACING APPRENTICESHIP AND MEMBERSHIP IN CITY LIVERY COMPANIES AND RELATED ORGANIZATIONS <http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/livdet.html>

LIVERY COMPANY MEMBERSHIP GUIDE. Guildhall Manuscripts Section. London, England.  
<http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/livintro.htm> <http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/livlist.htm>

LIVERY COMPANIES DATABASE. Hosted by the Fishmongers' Company.  
<http://81.130.213.163:8002/cgi-bin/lcl.exe>

"LONDON CITIZENS 1550-1603," R. M. Benbow, *un-published, available at the Corporation of London Records Office:*

LONDON LIVERY COMPANY APPRENTICESHIP REGISTERS. Cliff Webb.

See also "British Origins London Apprenticeship Abstract Database" 1442-1850 <http://originsnetwork.com/>  
(a fee based database of apprenticeship records for livery companies extracted by Cliff Webb)

## Family History Study Examples

**Archdales, Combs &c. of the City of London**

<http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/index.html>

**Early Combs &c. of the City of London (pre-1500)**

<http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/early.htm>

**Archdale, Combs &c. Freedom of the City and the London Livery Companies.**

<http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/freedom.htm>

**COMB, COMBER, ARCHDALE, LOVETT &c. of the Worshipful Drapers Company of London.**

<http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/drapers.htm>

**Combs-Coombs &c London Livery Company Records:An Introduction**

<http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/livery.htm>

**Combs-Coombs &c London Livery Company, Guild & Professional Organization Records Organized by Company/Guild/Profession**

<http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/livery02.htm>

## Acknowledgments

**THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF WEAVERS.** <http://www.weavers.org.uk/>

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The  
**TWELVE  
 GREAT  
 LIVERY  
 COMPANIES**



By .D. Mortorff c.2009

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|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Mercers * ♦        | 7. Merchant Taylors * ♦ 📖 ✓ |
| 2. Grocers * 📖 ✓      | 8. Haberdashers * 📖 ✓       |
| 3. Drapers * ♦        | 9. Salters * ♦              |
| 4. Fishmongers * 📖 ✓  | 10. Ironmongers * 📖 ✓       |
| 5. Goldsmiths * ♦ 📖 ✓ | 11. Vintners * 📖 ✓          |
| 6. Skinners * ♦ 📖 ✓   | 12. Clothworkers * ♦ ✓      |

~ **The Minor Companies** ~

<p>Actuaries                  Air Pilots &amp; Navigators                  Apothecaries * 📖 ✓                  Arbitrators                  Armourers &amp; Brasiers * 📖 ✓                  Bakers (white) * 📖 ✓                  Barbers (surgeons) * 📖 ✓                  Basketmakers * 📖 ✓                  Blackmiths * 📖 ✓                  Bowyer * 📖 ✓                  Brewers * 📖 ✓                  Broderers * 📖 ✓                  Builders' Merchants                  Butchers * 📖 ✓                  Carmens * 📖 ✓                  Carpenters * 📖 ✓                  Chartered Accountants                  Chartered Architects                  Chartered Secretaries                  Chartered Surveyors                  Clockmakers * 📖 ✓                  Coachmakers &amp; Coach Harness                  Makers * 📖 ✓                  Combmakers * 📖 ✓                  Constructors                  Cooks * 📖 ✓                  Coopers * 📖                  Cordwainers * 📖 ✓                  Curriers * 📖 ✓                  Cutlers * 📖 ✓                  Distillers * 📖 ✓                  Dyers * 📖 ✓                  Engineers                  Environmental Cleaners                  Fanmakers * 📖</p>	<p>Farmers 📖                  Farriers * 📖 ✓                  Feltmakers (&amp; Hatband Makers) * 📖 ✓                  Firefighters                  Fletchers * 📖 ✓                  Founders * 📖 ✓                  Framework Knitters * 📖 ✓                  Fruiterers * 📖 ✓                  Fuellers                  Furniture Makers                  Gardeners * 📖 ✓                  Girdlers * 📖                  Glass Sellers * 📖 ✓                  Glaziers * 📖 ✓                  Glovers * 📖 ✓                  Golde &amp; Silver Wyre                  Drawers * 📖 ✓                  Gunmakers * 📖 ✓                  Horners * 📖 ✓                  Information Technologists                  Innholders * 📖 ✓                  Insurers                  Joiners (&amp; Ceilers) * 📖 ✓                  Launderers                  Leathersellers * ♦                  Lightmongers                  Longbowstringmakers * 📖 ✓                  Loriners * 📖 ✓                  Makers of Playing Cards * 📖                  Marketors                  Masons * 📖 ✓                  Master Mariners                  Musicians * 📖 ✓                  Needlemakers * 📖 ✓                  Painter-Stainers * 📖 ✓</p>	<p>Parish Clerks 📖 ✓                  Pattenmakers * 📖 ✓                  Paviors * 📖 ✓                  Pewterers * 📖 ✓                  Pinmakers * 📖                  Plaisterers * 📖 ✓                  Plumbers * 📖 ✓                  (Fellowship) Porters 📖 ✓                  Poulters * 📖 ✓                  Saddlers * ♦ 📖 ✓                  Scientific Instrument Makers                  Scriveners * 📖 ✓                  Shipwrights * 📖 ✓                  Silk Throwers * 📖                  Soapmakers * 📖                  Solicitors                  Spectacle Makers * 📖 ✓                  Starchmakers                  Stationers (&amp; Newspaper                  Makers) * ♦ ✓                  Tacklehouse &amp; Ticket Porters *                  📖 ✓                  Tallow Chandlers * 📖 ✓                  Tin Plate Workers * 📖 ✓                  Tobacco Pipe Makers *                  Turners * 📖 ✓                  Tylers &amp; Bricklayers * 📖                  Upholders * 📖 ✓                  Water Conservators                  Watermen &amp; Lightermen * 📖 ✓                  Wax Chandlers * 📖 ✓                  Weavers * 📖 ✓                  Wheelwrights * 📖                  Woodmongers *                  Woolmen * 📖 ✓                  World Traders</p>
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\* = existed 1700's & earlier  
 (116 company's noted including defunct ones; a few may lack livery; new ones may be omitted)

♦ = records at Company  
 📖 = records at Guildhall

✓ = records at LDS Family History Library

