



# THE LIVELY COMPANIES



The City of London's Livery Companies are unique entities that grew out of the mediaeval craft and trade guilds that were a common feature of many European cities. Elsewhere guilds have largely died away, but in the City they have increased in number, membership and impact upon wider society through their support for a wide range of philanthropic, occupational and educational activities.

A revival in the fortunes of the City's Livery Companies began in the late Victorian era with the formation of the City and Guilds of London Institute, now the world's largest vocational examination awarding body. A hiatus of almost 200 years in the formation of new Livery Companies came to an end in 1926 when the Honourable Company of Master Mariners became the first of the 'modern' Livery Companies. The only difference between the



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The Worshipful Company of Information Technologists are clearly creatures of the 20th century.

Many Livery Companies are still very active in their particular occupation, for example the Goldsmiths' Company run the Assay Office in London and hallmark gold, silver, platinum and palladium (precious metals); they also conduct the annual Trial of the Pyx in which the coins of the realm are tested for quality. The Gunmakers' Company test the barrels of all small-bore firearms to ensure they can withstand the pressures exerted during firing. The Fishmongers' Company still inspect the quality of fish sold at London's Billingsgate Market. Livery Companies invented the concept of the apprenticeship, and a Freeman of the City of London may still take an apprentice under his or her wing. On successful completion of the apprenticeship, the apprentice may be admitted to their Livery Company as a Freeman.

ancient and modern Livery Companies is that of age, and some very modern Livery Companies represent long-established professions such as The Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers (for London Black Taxi drivers), a trade that has existed for centuries. Others such as The Honourable Company of Air Pilots and

Several of the Livery Companies own halls, the very grandest of which rival large stately homes and provide magnificent dining venues for the formal banquets for which they are famed. Not every Company owns a hall, and many Companies enjoy visiting other halls for their social events.