

LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

7.4 LONDON LIVERYMEN AND THE LIVERY COMPANIES

Voters in Common Hall in pre-reform London exercised their franchise by virtue of being freemen of the City and members of livery companies.¹ These were mutual organisations, which played a public role.²

Membership of a livery company could be gained by any of three means: by patrimony (the right of a son born when his father was a liveryman); by servitude (after serving a period of indenture to learn a trade); or by redemption (payment for the privilege of joining). In addition, liverymen who attained the aldermanic bench could, according to ancient custom, translate to one of the high-status ‘Great Twelve’ companies.³ Nonetheless, this practice was in decline by the eighteenth century.⁴ Thus while it remained theoretically possible for an individual to migrate from one livery company to another, such an eventuality was rare.⁵ Hence a livery company membership is a very stable category.

Although the names of some livery companies look like occupations, these titles were not occupational categories. The trades of the Bowyers’ and Fletchers’ companies had already disappeared by the start of the eighteenth century. And there was no automatic correlation between a man’s mode of making a living and the title of his livery company. In practice, this assertion is difficult to check, because surviving occupational data about liverymen are very patchy.⁶ But it was understood that the companies were transforming themselves from old-style occupational guilds into a mixture of charitable bodies, social clubs, and property-owning associations.

It is true that in 1700 nominal servitude still remained one standard way of qualifying to join a livery company. Yet for various reasons – including social distinction, sociability, charitable assistance, and the right of voting itself – there was an increase in the number of freemen seeking to join these bodies. As a result, a growing proportion of freemen was admitted by patrimony and redemption.⁷ This process left

many companies increasingly unrepresentative of the trades whence they once sprang.

To be sure, some livery companies continued to be associated with occupations, either by membership or by the regulation of trade. Members of the Society of Apothecaries were still closely associated with the practice of medicine and eventually with regulating admission to the profession.⁸ The Goldsmiths' company long maintained a role in regulating standards in the jewellery trade. Furthermore, the Butchers' and Brewers' companies were closely associated with their eponymous trades, as were the Innholders' and Vintners' companies with victualling, the Scriveners' company with the legal profession, and the Stationers' company with the book trade.⁹ The company of Carmen was an exception, in that its members were wholly associated with its trade; but the Carmen constituted a company without a livery.¹⁰

Meanwhile, the electoral register of 1832 records clusters of Butchers in markets, of Shipwrights in riverside parishes, and of Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers in Long Acre. All these identifications suggest a continuing association of some liverymen with their company's original trade. Nonetheless, these cases were becoming increasingly exceptional. As social associations with political rights and other charitable functions, the livery companies had in effect an optional membership, regulated by individual choice and a sufficiency of wealth and social standing.

In the course of the eighteenth century, the right of members of certain companies to poll in Common Hall was disputed and liable to change. Much depended upon whether the company was one with a livery (a distinctive badge or suit), and when that livery was granted. For example, legislation in 1745 separated the Surgeons from the Barbers;¹¹ but the surgeons did not thereafter have a livery and were ineligible to poll in Common Hall.¹²

Moreover, in some other cases, their rights to vote remained disputed throughout the eighteenth century. The Carmen, the Gardeners, and the Glass Sellers did not have liveries and their claims were uncertain. Hence the names of the 33 Glass Sellers who polled in 1710 were printed at the end of the poll book, alongside the record of a solitary Gardener. One Longbow-stringmaker sought to poll in 1734, but his disputed vote was placed at the end of the printed poll, along with those of two Gardeners and a Druggist.¹³ A schedule drawn up in January 1832 recorded freemen without livery for the Carmen, the Horners, the Longbow-stringmakers, the Paviours, and the Tobacco Pipe Makers.¹⁴

Table 88 shows membership of the London livery companies at intervals between 1700 and 1850. Three related processes are revealed. The first of these was an overall growth in the membership of Common Hall from about 7,800 in 1700 to almost 12,100 in 1831. While membership of some old-established companies was capped, extant lesser companies such as the Needle-makers' company experienced a considerable increase in the number of their liverymen. The expansion was particularly marked in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ It led to a highpoint, immediately before the imposition of a residential qualification under the 1832 reform legislation, after which there was a slow attrition in the number of liverymen eligible to vote in parliamentary elections.

Secondly, the eighteenth-century expansion was furthered by the institution of a number of new livery companies. In particular, the later decades of the century witnessed a profusion of new grants of livery by the Court of Aldermen to City companies, doubtless made in response to demand from below as the membership of many existing companies was capped. Beginning with the Clock Makers' company in 1766, these included the Wheelwrights' company in 1773, the Gunmakers' company in 1778, the Gold and Silver Wyre Drawers' company in 1780, the Shipwrights' company in 1782, and both the Silk Throwers' company and the Playing Card Makers' company in 1792. In the early nineteenth century, these cases were followed by grants of livery to the Fan Makers' company in 1806, the Spectacle Makers' company in 1809, and the Basket Makers' company in 1825. Those twenty-first century liverymen who object to the granting of liveries to new occupational groups (such as Air Navigators and Tax Advisers) may console themselves by reflecting that the tradition of such creations is a venerable one.

Thirdly, as a result of general expansion and new creations, there was a concomitant decline in the proportion of liverymen belonging to the Great Twelve companies (shown in **bold** in Tables 81.1-2). Their share fell from almost three-fifths of the total recorded in 1701 to just one quarter of those in 1832. This change suggests that status gradations between one company and another were tending to diminish, even while the liverymen as a whole retained a collective reputation as elite traders and professionals within the City of London.

Table 81.2 lists alphabetically the 78 livery companies active in 1832, showing all available information about their membership. Extinct and moribund companies are excluded. In practice, it is difficult to know

with absolute certainty whether a company was extinct or not. Contemporary estimates varied.¹⁶ Moreover, some companies, which had collapsed but were later revived, claim a continuous existence. Nonetheless, any company without members throughout the period from 1700 to 1850 may be considered to have a *prima facie* case for extinction.

In terms of nomenclature, all company names are given in convenient shorthand. Officially, the company, commonly known as the Drapers' company, was constituted as: 'The Master and Wardens and Brethren and Sisters of the Guild or Fraternity of the Blessed Mary the Virgin of the Mystery of Drapers of the City of London'. But, unsurprisingly, such cumbersome terminology encouraged abbreviation. Thus a liveryman would be known as 'John Smith, citizen and Carpenter' to indicate his freedom and company; or as 'John Smith, Carpenter and victualler' to indicate his company and occupation.

It is a matter of historical note, too, that the 'sisters', indicated in the long title of the Drapers' company, were not present among the membership in the eighteenth century.¹⁷

Table 81.1
LEH coding of London livery companies

Code	Livery company
Apo	Apothecaries
Arm	Armourers and Brasiers
Bak	Bakers
Bar	Barber Surgeons (Barbers from 1745)
Bas	Basket Makers (1825)
Bla	Blacksmiths
Bow	Bowyers
Bre	Brewers
Bro	Broderers
But	Butchers
Car	Carpenters
Clm	Clock Makers (1766)
Clw	Clothworkers
Coa	Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers
Com	Comb Makers
Cok	Cooks
Cop	Coopers
Cor	Cordwainers
Cur	Curriers
Cut	Cutlers
Dis	Distillers
Dra	Drapers
Dye	Dyers
Fan	Fan Makers (1806)
Far	Farriers
Fel	Felt Makers
Fis	Fishmongers
Fle	Fletchers
Fou	Founders
Fra	Framework Knitters
Fru	Fruiterers
Gar	Gardeners
Gir	Girdlers
Gls	Glass Sellers
Glz	Glaziers
Glo	Glovers
Gwd	Gold and Silver Wyre Drawers (1780)
Gol	Goldsmiths
Gro	Grocers

Code	Livery company
Gun	Gunmakers (1788)
Hab	Haberdashers
Hor	Horners
Inn	Innholders
Iro	Ironmongers
Joi	Joiners
Lea	Leathersellers
Lor	Loriners
Mas	Masons
Mer	Mercers
Met	Merchant Taylors
Mus	Musicians
Nee	Needle Makers
Pai	Painter Stainers
Pat	Patten Makers
Pew	Pewterers
Pla	Plaisterers
Pcm	Playing Card Makers (1792)
Plu	Plumbers
Pou	Poulters
Sad	Saddlers
Sal	Salters
Scr	Scriveners
Shi	Shipwrights (1782)
Sil	Silk Throwers (1792)
Ski	Skinner
Spe	Spectacle Makers (1809)
Sta	Stationers
Tal	Tallow Chandlers
Tin	Tin Plate Workers
Tur	Turners
Tyl	Tylers and Bricklayers
Uph	Upholders
Vin	Vintners
Wax	Wax Chandlers
Wea	Weavers
Whe	Wheelwrights (1773)
Woo	Woolmen

Note: The Great Twelve companies are shown in **Bold**.

Table 81.2
Membership of London livery companies, 1700-1850

	1701	1727	1750	1796	1831	1832	1848
Apo	147	142	145	66	150	35	18
Arm	58	85	75	63	92	81	64
Bak	153	196	140	152	339	270	185
Bar	201	308	370	211	324	250	168
Bas					7	7	3
Bla	199	223	169	151	150	113	82
Bow	34	31	36	30	61	51	35
Bre	90	109	115	40	113	48	44
Bro	149	111	74	23	31	23	24
But	192	236	173	152	224	195	143
Car	100	104	100	77	132	120	100
Clo				86	187	160	76
Clw	169	149	138	116	160	135	130
Coa	56	118	92	78	94	65	56
Com					25	18	8
Cok	77	78	54	47	198	160	117
Cop	145	243	248	206	433	313	216
Cor	112	95	79	59	102	85	101
Cur	101	107	87	80	136	112	99
Cut	99	118	62	55	123	95	98
Dis	125	118	103	22	55	35	38
Dra	200	201	156	117	383	248	236
Dye	177	175	96	97	187	147	112
Fan					31	21	39
Far	41	82	66	112	151	119	65
Fel			100	56	109	87	62
Fis	221	141	159	155	390	308	291
Fle	18	31	31	17	21	18	14
Fou	99	138	100	72	130	98	65
Fra		59	51	67	79	56	34
Fru	39	57	41	29	73	58	
Gar							34
Gir	84	90	71	79	129	94	79
Gls		39	50	27	71	64	34
Glz	79	97	68	83	60	84	61
Glo	123	127	206	174	138	122	84
Gwd				44	49	54	32

	1701	1727	1750	1796	1831	1832	1848
Gol	298	225	162	140	190	155	140
Gro	284	193	125	76	187	141	148
Gun				17	37	35	28
Hab	346	316	312	143	541	401	390
Hor							6
Inn	117	142	111	167	484	412	206
Iro	104	99	88	75	89	69	85
Joi	191	298	370	207	197	144	95
Lea	169	169	117	109	120	99	107
Lor		78	99	39	340	273	5
Mas	65	60	78	27	50	51	42
Mer	285	254	147	49	104	89	71
Met	494	433	275	152	370	301	222
Mus	20	28	101	170	132	106	63
Nee		49	45	250	612	533	188
Pai	139	140	98	111	145	117	112
Pat		56	54	34	200	181	70
Pew	106	91	96	38	87	73	47
Pla	88	66	74	51	99	77	63
Pcm				22	95	69	52
Plu	54	58	55	49	98	73	50
Pou	95	127	91	58	79	70	60
Sad	67	69	65	59	73	66	65
Sal	140	193	125	84	151	121	127
Scr	40	43	52	22	53	43	38
Shi				34	74	91	68
Sil				11	14	8	6
Ski	179	175	118	58	135	110	114
Spe					100	80	266
Sta	233	213	199	294	483	392	343
Tal	154	181	159	77	100	119	110
Tin				42	100	71	42
Tur	118	142	133	92	86	69	50
Tyl	80	106	92	130	170	135	91
Uph	127	142	95	94	153	134	69
Vin	255	227	186	182	435	298	257
Wax	71	106	104	41	93	72	62
Wea	191	266	203	157	227	101	90
Whe				116	222	183	95
Woo				1	18	16	27
Total	7,798	8,553	7,559	6,321	12,080	9,527	7,486

Notes: Figures for 1701, 1727, 1750, and 1831 are for members; figures for 1796 are for voters only - at a time when the total number of liverymen was between 9,000 and 9,500; figures for 1832 and 1848 are for parliamentary electors. Figures for 1701, 1727, 1832, and 1848 include unpolled electors.

Dates of the granting of liveries are given for those companies granted liveries after 1700. 'Surgeons who appeared in livery lists or poll books after 1745 have been re-classified as Barbers, on the assumption that they gained their right of voting prior to that date as liverymen of the Barber-Surgeons' company.

The Great Twelve companies are shown in **bold**.

Source: LED; Anon, *A list of the liverymen of the several companies of the City of London* [London, 1750]; LMA COL/CP/01/027; Anon., *The register of persons entitled to vote in the election of Members of Parliament for the City of London* (London, 1832).

Notes

- ¹ See section 3.2.
- ² For much useful information, see Kahl, *The development of London livery companies*; Doolittle, *City of London and its livery companies*; and Palfreyman, *London's livery companies*. Most of the livery companies have a published history, many of them of a somewhat celebratory nature.
- ³ For an early account, see William Herbert, *The history of the twelve great livery companies of London* (2 vols, 1834-7). The Twelve were, alphabetically: the Clothworkers, Drapers, Fishmongers, Goldsmiths, Grocers, Haberdashers, Ironmongers, Mercers, Merchant Taylors, Salters, Skinners and Vintners.
- ⁴ Beaven, vol. i, pp. 329-57, discusses and lists these translations.
- ⁵ A few examples of this phenomenon are recorded in the brief biographical details of candidates for City elections: see section 5.3.
- ⁶ One listing in 1750 and two in 1776 give the occupations of some liverymen. See Anon., *A list of the liverymen of the several companies of the City of London* [London, 1750]; Thomas Tomlins, *A canvassing book, for the purpose of elections by the livery* (London, 1776); and Anon., *A list of all the liverymen of London* (London, J. Miller, 1776). In addition, there is further information from a later date: Anon., *List of the whole body of the liverymen of London* (London, J. Wilkes, 1792) contains occupational details for a rather higher proportion of the 9,500 or so liverymen listed. The City of London electoral register of 1832 also gives occupational details of some of the Masons and Needle Makers. Such information could be used for a fruitful investigation.
- ⁷ W.F. Kahl, 'Apprenticeship and the freedom of London livery companies, 1690-1750', *Guildhall Miscellany*, 7 (1956), pp. 17-20.
- ⁸ *BPP* (1837), xxv, p. 18. See also W.S.C. Copeman, *The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London: a history, 1617-1967* (Oxford, 1967); P. Hunting, *A history of the Society of Apothecaries* (1998); and P.J. Corfield, 'From Poison Peddlers to Civic Worthies: The Reputation of the Apothecaries in Georgian England', *Social History of Medicine*, 22 (2009), pp. 1-21.
- ⁹ These examples are given from an impressionistic examination of Anon., *A list of the liverymen of the City of London* (1750).
- ¹⁰ See *BPP* (1837), xxv, p. 18.
- ¹¹ 18 George II, c. 15 (1745). For the separation of the Surgeons from the Barbers, see

P.J. Corfield, *Power and the professions in Britain, 1700-1850* (1995), pp. 153-4; and M.H. Pelling, 'Corporatism or individualism: parliament, the navy, and the splitting of the London Barber-Surgeons' Company in 1745', in I. Gadd, I. and P. Wallis (eds), *Guilds and association in Europe, 900-1900* (2002), pp. 57-82.

- ¹² 89 'Surgeons that were Barber Surgeons' are listed separately at the end of Anon., *A list of the liverymen of the City of London* [London, 1750], pp. 171-2.
- ¹³ See also section 5.3.2 and within that n. 38.
- ¹⁴ LMA COL/CP/01/027.
- ¹⁵ The annual totals of admissions to livery companies for the period after 1801 are listed, company by company, in *BPP* (1837), xxv, pp. 249-592.
- ¹⁶ The schedule of liverymen in January 1832 considered that the Fullers, Hatbandmakers, Pinmakers, and Soapmakers were extinct: see LMA COL/CP/01/027. Meanwhile the Commission on Municipal Corporations believed that the Fishermen, Hatbandmakers, Longbow-stringmakers, Parish Clerks, Pinmakers, Silkmen, Soapmakers, Starchmakers, and Woodmongers were all extinct: see *BPP* (1837), xxv, pp. 298-342. Other extinct companies were the Paviours, Pinners, and Tobacco Pipe Makers.
- ¹⁷ In the twenty-first century, there are over 100 livery companies in the City of London, a proportion of which still decline to admit women members.