

London Metropolitan Archives

Information Leaflet Number 16

Searching for members or
those apprenticed to
members of City of London
livery companies



Important Access Information

Access to some of the records described in this leaflet may be at Guildhall Library. Please see our online catalogue or contact us for specific advice before making a special journey.

London Metropolitan Archives administers the original records of over 80 City of London livery companies or related organisations (City companies or fellowships without a livery), some of which are now defunct. Individuals who were not members or apprenticed to members of a livery company, or who were members of a guild or company outside the London area, cannot usually be traced in these records.

Would someone I am interested have been a member or apprenticed to a member of a livery company?

Until about 1800, if he was an adult male practising a trade or craft in or around the City of London, he would almost certainly have belonged to a City of London livery company. However, from about 1800, this was increasingly unlikely. If he was a merchant or professional man or worked in a business firm in or around the City of London, he may have become a member of a City livery company; but such people often did not become members.

From the middle ages to the nineteenth century, most young men and a few young women, who lived in the City of London, were apprenticed between the ages of 14 and 21 to members (freemen) of City livery companies and had their apprenticeships recorded in company records. The completion of an apprenticeship was the usual means by which such persons could themselves become members. However, from about 1750 a decreasing proportion of young people were apprenticed and an increasing proportion became members of the livery companies by other means, i.e. by virtue of their father's membership (*patrimony*) or by payment of a fee (*redemption*).

Women, unskilled men and persons who worked outside the London area are very unlikely to have been members. However, many young men and a few young women came from the provinces to live in London and to be apprenticed to a member of a livery company.

If he was a member or apprenticed to a member of a livery company, which one would it, be?

Until the early 1700s, if he was a tradesman or a craftsman he would probably have been a member and served an apprenticeship with a company corresponding with or approximating to his occupation.

After the early 1700s, in some trades or crafts he would still probably have belonged to the appropriate company, but in most trades or crafts it was increasingly likely that he would have belonged to a company unconnected with his occupation. Indeed, after the early 1700s, many served an apprenticeship in a company unconnected with their occupation, or no apprenticeship at all.

After about 1750 an increasing proportion became members by means other than apprenticeship (see section 1 above), and after 1856 few tradesmen or craftsmen served an apprenticeship in a livery company.

If he was a merchant or a professional man or worked in a business firm, he may have become a member of almost any livery company; but such people sometimes preferred a company connected with their occupation if there was one. However at all dates, merchants, professional men and persons in business firms or unskilled occupations are unlikely to have served apprenticeships in livery companies.

How can I discover his livery company?

There is no general index to members or apprentices of all companies. However, there are several sources at LMA and elsewhere which list the names and companies of many members and may include the person in whom you are interested. The major sources are:

admission papers of those company members and apprentices who became freemen of the City of London, 1681-2004 [subject to closure period because of the Data Protection Act]. The papers should indicate the livery company of a freeman. Held by LMA.

London Livery Company Apprenticeship Registers, abstracted and indexed by Cliff Webb and published by the Society of Genealogists. A series of indexes to apprenticeship records of about 40 livery companies, to ca. 1800; more volumes are planned. Copies available at LMA and Guildhall Library, Aldermanbury, London EC2V 7HH, email guildhall.library@cityoflondon.gov.uk; also available from the Society of Genealogists, 14 Charterhouse Buildings, London EC1M 7BA and online at the [Find My Past website](#) (subscription required)

Boyd's *Inhabitants of London*, listing many but far from all inhabitants, chiefly 16th and 17th century. Held at the Society of Genealogists, with an index held at Guildhall Library.

The Apprentices of Great Britain, an index to certain apprenticeships, 1710-74, includes many who were bound between 1710 and 1774 to company members (commissioned by the Society of Genealogists). Copies of it are held at Guildhall Library, at the Society of Genealogists, and at The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Surrey TW9 4DU.

a will or other contemporary document may indicate a person's company by using the phrase "citizen and of London".

If I know his livery company, what membership/apprenticeship records are available?

Each of the City livery companies kept records of its own members and apprentices. Their coverage varies but they generally give details of the admission of members, the binding of apprentices, and of their careers within the company, and sometimes give much genealogical and biographical information. However, they do not contain detailed accounts of members' personal or business activities. The records are often extensive and unindexed, and lengthy searches may be necessary even for a known member or apprentice of a company.

Most of the surviving records are now administered by LMA. Brief details of the records available are given in *City Livery Companies & related organisations: a guide to their archives in Guildhall Library* (Guildhall Library, 2010, 4th ed.); a copy is available from the Information Desk. A guide specifically to livery company membership records is also available from the Information Desk and online at the [former Guildhall Library Manuscripts website](#)..

The following ancient livery companies keep their own records: Clothworkers, Drapers, Goldsmiths, Leathersellers, Mercers, Saddlers (some records held by LMA), Salters, and Stationers. For contact information, see the '[Livery Companies Database](#)'.

If he was not a City livery company member or apprentice, how can I find information about him?

Information about persons who lived in the London area may be given in the many biographical and genealogical sources which are held by LMA. Details of these sources can be found in Information Leaflet No.1, 'Family History at London Metropolitan Archives'.

Enquiries about persons who lived outside the London area, and about records of guilds and companies in other towns and cities, should be made to the local record office for the area concerned. The addresses of such offices are given in the current edition of *Record Repositories in Great Britain: a Geographical Directory* (HMSO). This can be seen in most public reference libraries and record offices.

Is it possible to find his "indenture" of apprenticeship?

Formal apprenticeships were based on apprenticeship "indentures" (i.e. written contracts), copies of which were kept by the parent or guardian and the master of the apprentice. If the apprentice became a freeman of the City of London it may be possible to locate his indenture among the City freedom records held by LMA. For more details, please see Information Leaflet No.14, 'City of London Freedom Archives'. In the case of other apprentices, the indentures do not usually survive.

It should be noted that many boys and most girls never served formal apprenticeships and that records of such formal apprenticeships as were served rarely survive except in those cities and towns where they took place within a guild or company framework.

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