

## **The Freedom of the City**

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers".

The existence of a privileged class of Freemen was not peculiar to London. It was a feature of the Roman Empire and St Paul was proud to be a Citizen of Tarsus. Indeed our citizenship of London may well have developed directly from the Roman occupation. The earliest evidence of the Freedom of the City of London is a Registry of Freemen and Apprentices dated 1275.

There are two ways of achieving the Freedom of the City. One is by joining a Livery Company thus giving an entitlement under a 14<sup>th</sup> century ordinance whereby only those of the trade may be admitted, now commonly termed "Freedom by Intervention", when applicants are considered by the Court of Aldermen. The other is simply to apply directly through the Chamberlain's Office, when nominations are considered by the Court of Common Council, the nominations being Aldermen, Common Councilmen or Liverymen. The latter method is comparatively modern, dating from 1835 when Common Council so enacted in order to try and preserve the exclusive privileges of Freemen, but it must have been a revolutionary step at that time.

The ancient power to elect and order the admission to the freedom of a Company depends upon the Ordinances; this power is exercised by the Court of Assistants.

The actual method for admission to a Company and to the City has changed very little over the centuries. The first stage of membership being the "Freedom" which is achieved in one of three ways:

By Patrimony – inheritance – by virtue of being over 21 years of age and the son or daughter of a Freeman of the Company, and born after the admission of the father or mother.

By Servitude – apprenticeship – by virtue of having served a term of Apprenticeship according to the custom of London.

By Redemption – purchase – that is to apply for admission on payment of a fee, if over 21, and not eligible by patrimony or servitude.

"Freedom and not servitude is the cure of anarchy, as religion, and not atheism, is the remedy for superstition". Edmund Burke.

### **Servitude**

In Tudor times and indeed until relatively recently, the majority of admissions to the Freedom were by apprenticeship and although today this method is but a shadow of former days, a modest number of apprenticeships still pass through the Chamberlain's office each year. Again in the 15<sup>th</sup> century the governors of the Bridewell stirred the national conscience by introducing a system of apprenticeship available not only to the homeless and destitute but also to children of poor freemen of the City. Some 400 years later we are again faced in London with a large number of unemployed and homeless young people – can a modern Bridewell arise in the City to help solve our 20<sup>th</sup> century social evil?

But to revert to the procedures, an Apprentice, male or female, bound according to the Custom of London, is entitled at the expiration of the term of the indentures, and on proof of faithful service, to be admitted by servitude to the Freedom, first of the Company in which he or she was bound, and then of the City through that Company.

After admission to the Freedom of the Company, the Apprentice presents himself at the Chamberlain's Court with:

a) the signed indentures, b) the Master's copy of Freedom, c) a Certificate of the Apprentice's admission to the Freedom of the Company by servitude, d) his birth certificate, e) a written declaration by the Master (or personal testimony) that the full term has been served. Neither the Master, nor the parents of the Apprentice need attend. A good title having been made, the Apprentice is admitted to the Freedom of the City forthwith (fee in 1982 - £10).

## **Redemption**

After admission to the Freedom of the Company, the applicant must attend at the Chamberlain's Court with the birth certificate and certificate of admission to the Freedom of the Company by Redemption. An application for the Freedom is drawn up, which the applicant signs (fee in 1982 - £12). That is all that is required on this occasion. A second attendance, however, is necessary.

The application is presented to the Court of Aldermen at its next meeting, provided the application is made in the Chamberlain's Court not less than ten days before that meeting.

When this has been approved, the Chamberlain notifies the applicant by letter to make a second attendance at the Chamberlain's Court, this time to make the Declaration and to receive the Freedom of the City.

An applicant whose name appears on the current Ward list for the City of London seeking admission by Redemption, either through a Company or without the intervention of a Company, may be admitted without reference to the Court of Aldermen or Court of Common Council, and without payment of a fee.

The foregoing is the procedure for the more customary – the individual. But there is of course established precedent that the City can bestow the Freedom en bloc in special events – for example the City Imperial Volunteers: 1,750 officers and men received the Freedom after the relief of Mafeking when they returned home.

## **Rules for the Conduct of Life**

All new Freemen are presented with a Certificate of Freedom and a red book entitled "Rules for the Conduct of Life".

There is little positively known of the origin of these Rules. Several early editions of such a book are in the Guildhall Library dating around 1700-1800. One was printed by Henry Fenwick, "Printer to the Honourable City of London", and thus became an official publication. The authorship has been attributed to Sir John Barnard (Bardnard), Lord Mayor 1737-8, purely on the grounds of his known authorship of a book of precepts entitled "a present for an apprentice from an affectionate and tender parent to her beloved son, or a sure guide to gain Esteem and Estate, with the Rules for his Conduct to his Master and in the world".

## **Honorary Freedom**

It has been the custom of the Corporation for over two centuries to confer the Freedom by Presentation as an honour and a mark of high distinction for exceptional services to the City, the Nation, the Commonwealth or the world at large. It is the highest honour the City has within its power to bestow. Decisions to confer the Freedom honoris causa, are taken by the Court of Common Council. Admissions to the Freedom of the City are made by the Chamberlain who on occasions when the admission is by way of Presentation performs the ceremony in the Great Hall in the presence of Common Council.

When it is desired to honour Foreign Personages who, as they do not owe allegiance to the Crown, cannot be admitted to the Freedom, such persons, and subjects of the Queen who are already Freemen, are voted the Honorary Freedom and receive a Resolution of the Court in place of a Freedom Certificate.

The Honorary Freeman, after making the Declaration, signs the "Roll of Fame". The Roll of Fame beginning in 1757 embraces some of the most famous names in modern history such as Pitt, Nelson, Peel, Wellington, Livingstone, Beaconsfield, Gladstone, Stanley, Booth, Lister, Nightingale, Smuts, Haig, Mountbatten, Nehru, Alexander, and Royal Personages.

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