

The Clerkship

Perhaps the oldest reference to a Clerk is in the Acts of the Apostles xix v 35-41 "... and when the townclerk had appeased the people he said ... you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly ... the law is open and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly ... and when he had thus spoken he dismissed the assembly ..."

This summary of the situation is that Demetrius, for the love of gain, raised an uproar against Paul which is appeased by the clerk – hopefully not a situation which appears in modern livery affairs today. But observe the quality of the clerk who, in the course of his duty, exercised the arts of communication, conciliation, calmness, patience, jurisprudence, debate, decision, eloquence and authority. What a Solomon!

Or to put it like William Cowper:

*There goes the parson, oh! Illustrious spark,
And there scarce illustrious goes the clerk!*

Or alternatively, from the Young Clerk's Vade Mecum 1728:

"The subject of Clerkship may be resembled to a field wherein many are the Ways that lead to fame; and if it has been my good fortune to find a Path that is New or more easy than the former, I hope to be excus'd from my present labours."

Clerks came into prominence as such in the 16th century, when they were visibly the most or only literate men in trade companies, and one of the panegyrics written by a historian of municipal institutions concludes on the somewhat flat note that they "... may rank amongst the higher class of educated and intelligent men ..."

As we all know (or persuade ourselves) the health and development of a Company rests upon the Secretary or Clerk! His duties have, as might be expected, have undergone a change of accent with the passing of time. In Livery affairs he continues to be the chief executive responsible for the link between the Privy Council, Court of Aldermen, The Chamberlain of London, The Town Clerk of London, other companies and associate societies. Depending upon the size of the company and its property, he must have access to office facilities and staff and presumably be remunerated. It is desirable that he operates in London and nearly all the companies in fact have offices in the City itself, because meetings and functions should ideally be held in the City. By custom, Clerks are re-elected annually.

A less arduous view was proclaimed by a former President of the City Livery Club, Mr T F Clarke, during his reply at the annual banquet in Guildhall.

"The qualifications of a Clerk are simple: discretion and honesty: my wife is the judge of the former and my banker the latter. In practice the Clerk is really a human carpet sweeper, gathering crumbs of oratory which fall from the lips of the great ..."

The government of a Company is in the hands of the Court of Assistants. Every Company continues to maintain ceremony, pageantry, hospitality, charity, property and, if it is to stay alive and healthy, a forward-looking policy. Thus the procedures by which the Court takes decisions must be well planned and successful, not necessarily fashionable or formal, but planned to suit the particular Company circumstances. Today in modern business setting, the Agenda for Court and Committee meetings issued by the Clerk can be skilfully prepared. Each member of the Court should thus be able to attend a Court meeting fully briefed and participate in decisions based on facts, and so avoid the complaint, particularly from professional viz a viz voluntary bodies, that Parkinson's Law operates.

The Clerk of course writes the minutes. There was an appropriate ditty which ran:

*"And whilst the Great Ones revive at their dinner
The Clerk sits perplexed and growing thinner
Racking his brains to record and report
What he thinks they think that they ought to have thought."*

Some post-war companies, at least, have broken with the traditions of the ancients whose Clerks record in the minute book "in a big, round, cursive hand".

The style of recording and the clarity must be left to the historians for comment, for as Alexander Pope says:

*"True ease of writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance".*

The Ordinances in Companies are varied in quantity and details according to its age; traditionally such rules set the objects, including a specific connection with the City, attempt to settle controversies amongst members, inculcate respect for the law, commercial honesty and high conduct, binding of apprentices, administration of the Company, and importantly breathing a spirit of kindness to those in need of benevolence.

To reconcile all these objectives today requires a sensitivity and devotion to duty which calls upon the conscience.

In detail, those clauses in the Ordinances relating to internal administration include inter alia meetings of the Court and committees, election and admission of Freemen and Liverymen, election and rotation of the Master, Wardens and Officers and the duties of the latter, management activities, finances, audit, custody of records, apprenticeship and amendment of rules.

*A Haberdasher, a Dyer, a Carpenter
A Weaver and a Carpet maker were
Among our ranks, all in the Livery
Of one impressive guild-fraternity.
Their wisdom would have justified a plan
To make each one of them an Alderman.*

Canterbury Tales

It is fitting to give below a few examples of some distinguished "guides, philosophers and friends" with life-long and devoted service, often traditionally held in the firm or family, whose interests are wide, and whose pens have been active in the cause of the Livery.

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| Drapers | Sir Ernest Pooley GCVO, Clerk from 1908-1944, Master in 1944; Chairman of the Arts Council, author of <i>The Guilds of the City of London</i> published in 1945. |
| Wax Chandlers | C G Todd, a Past Master and Clerk from 1952-70; he was the first Clerk to put together a mass of detailed information about this 14 th century company. His grandfather was admitted in 1843; a member of the Court for over 50 years, was twice Master, and his four sons occupied the chair, some of them twice. |
| Tallow Chandlers | Randall Monier-Williams, formerly the doyen of modern Clerks, from 1928-1978; Master in 1962. A solicitor, the fourth member of his firm to have served as a Clerk during a period of close on 140 years. Author of four volumes of the definitive history of the Tallow Chandlers of London (1977). |

Plasterers	Henry Mott, Clerk from 1948; and author of a Handbook of the Company, he succeeded Alfred Mott and Henry Mott who was Clerk in 1848.
Basketmakers	HH Hobart MBE, FSA, Clerk 1907-1952 who wrote a compendious work <i>Basketwork Through the Ages</i> published in 1936.
Glaziers	Col Robert J Blackman CB CMG CIE, former Clerk and Liveryman of the Glaziers Company, Liveryman of the Needlemakers Company and the Apothecaries' Society – author of three popular books, <i>The Story of the Temple; London's Livery Companies; Scalpel, Sword and Stretcher</i> in the 1930s.
Spectacle Makers	Sir William Champness, deputy, a descendent of Sir John who was Lord Mayor in 1534, a Past Master and Clerk 1926-48, leading the Company in the registration of opticians. A forebear, James in 1764 figured prominently in the noted Dolland achromatic lens controversy. Succeeding his father Roland Champness MA LL.M CC Past Master and Clerk 1948-1966, and a former Clerk of the Cutlers Company.
Turners	Roland was a Past Master; Clerk of the Turners 1934-38 and 1946-62 and his labour of love a history published 1965 is fascinating.
Needlemakers	CDK Furlow MA, Clerk from 1915-1948, succeeding his brother who held office since 1887; he was a Deputy for Candlewick Ward.

And there are many, many others who have given long and dedicated service to their Livery, and like Gray

*Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenour of their way.*

Written in 1982 by:
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then Honorary Clerk of
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