

Fellowship of Clerks (of Livery Companies)

A Short History

The founder of the Fellowship was H H Bobart (Basketmakers). He had conceived the idea in 1925 and had two meetings with no appreciable response. After the Clerks Association refused to admit clerks of hall-less companies, Mr. Bobart, at the suggestion of W S Pennefather (Clockmakers), organised a six course dinner at the Connaught Rooms at a cost of ten shillings a head. After this function there was no difficulty in forming the Fellowship. At the first effective meeting on 25th October 1926 Bobart was elected President, Pennefather Hon Sec and there were seven members, the clerks of the Gardeners, Tin-Plate Workers, Wheelwrights, Needlemakers, Loriners, Feltmakers, Cooks and Glovers. The Fellowship rapidly grew to 24 members.

From the start, the Fellowship had knotty problems to deal with. At that first meeting there was a long discussion on the taxation of freedom fines. The Glaziers had refused to pay the tax, on the grounds that Livery Companies were "associations not for profit". They lost and wanted to appeal. Would other companies assist towards the cost? The Fellowship was not unanimous, and despite the long discussion no resolution was passed.

Once the Fellowship was formed, close links were established with the Clerks Association which have continued and many members of the Association also joined the Fellowship. Our President (Andrew Gillett, Founders) belongs to both. There was a joint meeting with the Association in September 1949 about a proposal from the then Mr Palumbo to make a gift of hall in St Swithins Lane to those companies who did not have one. It would only cost £20,000 for the decoration.

Although there has been a new President each year, there has been only nine Secretaries during almost 94 years:

1926-1927	W S Pennefather, Clockmakers
1928-1932	T Harvey Hull, Wheelwrights
1933-1943	W N Earle, Distillers
1943-1949	A C Williamson, Feltmakers
1949-1973	Ralph Lane, Needlemakers

1973-2001	Michael Burke, Farriers (retired), Carmen Deputy
2001-2012	Edward Windsor Clive, Turners
2012-2016	Philip Grant, Needle-makers
2016- Present	David Barrett, Makers of Playing Cards (retired 2019)

Topics discussed have been varied. In 1942 there was discussion on admission of women freemen. Female liverymen, clerks and Masters were accepted with much greater ease. Absent liverymen have been a recurring topic, with advice sought from Guildhall on several occasions. Other frequent topics have been the emoluments of clerks, and livery and court admission fines.

We have had special guests on several occasions: Sir Lindsay Ring (when he was plain Mr) on 29 October 1959, the Private Secretary to the Lord Mayor, the Clerk to the Chamberlain's Court (Terry Morris, who subsequently became a clerk and a member of the Fellowship).

In March 1966 we had a film show. Older cinema-going members will remember the Rank series "Look at life...", and at that meeting the Fellowship were treated to "Look at life with the Livery" which Hon Sec Ralph Lane had borrowed for the occasion.

In more recent times, the working meeting (held before dinner) has concerned itself not only with the perennial problems of absent liverymen, incidence of VAT (some companies can claim exemption for subscriptions), relations with Guildhall and Mansion House and the cost of catering, but also with the problems of circulating notices to the livery, use by clerks of Guildhall bedrooms and the Club and the organisation of the wickets at Common Hall.