

Livery Weekend in Ironbridge

In a tradition started by Sir Peter Gadsden (Lord Mayor, 1979-80), this weekend has developed into an event considered by most Masters, Prime Wardens and Upper Bailiffs to be one of the highlights of their year. Sir Peter was brought up in Shropshire and led a Mayoral Visit to Ironbridge. He was fascinated by the story of Ironbridge, the place where the Industrial Revolution started, and he recognised the potential beneficial links that could be made with Livery Companies and their historical trades and professions. He organised the first official Livery Day there in 1983 - a day that has now morphed into the Ironbridge Weekend from Friday afternoon to Sunday lunchtime, thanks to the enthusiasm of the Livery for what is a unique opportunity to meet others from the City, with plenty of time to talk freely over the weekend and share ideas and experiences.

Connections between Ironbridge and the City date back to 1775 when Abraham Darby III, the Quaker Ironmaster who built the actual Iron Bridge, was given the Freedom of the City. His grandfather, Quaker Ironmaster Abraham I, had perfected a revolutionary technique of smelting iron with coke instead of charcoal in 1709. This sparked the birth of the Industrial Revolution and Coalbrookdale led the world with innovations in engineering, metallurgy and manufacturing over the next century.

The weekend is organised by the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust (who liaise with Livery Clerks) and is now regularly attended by almost every Master, Prime Warden and Upper Bailiff each year. They attend with their Consorts and it is a highly-recommended opportunity to socialise. Whether they are at the beginning, middle or end of their tenure, this weekend is when the Masters and Consorts meet and decide upon a name for their Past Masters Association and Past Consorts Association. They then elect a Chairman and other Officers, who will soon start planning a series of annual events as friendships forged continue for many years to come.

Everyone stays at the same hotel in Telford, usually the Holiday Inn. The journey can prove tortuous depending on motorway traffic and some prefer to travel by train. Arriving in time for a calming cup of tea is suggested before perhaps meeting in the Bar prior to being taken away in coaches for Dinner. On Saturday, everyone piles into the coaches to spend the day seeing some of the many fascinating sites of interest. The President's Ball on Saturday is almost always attended by the Lord Mayor (subject to overseas visits), the Lady Mayoress and the Sheriffs with their Consorts. When back at the hotel, the Bar is a popular destination. Sunday morning offers some self-guided tours before people start their homeward journey, after the opportunity for a final lunch together.

It should be noted that Ironbridge Museums Trust is a registered charity and hopes each year to develop existing and create new relationships with Livery Companies in order to raise financial and in-kind donations. There is without doubt an element of fundraising during the weekend – and a fun raffle is usually held at the President's Ball. Masters of Livery Companies that have donated can see their Company shield displayed in the Covered Bays at Coalbrookdale as everyone usually has lunch there on the Saturday. The Trust has been badly hit this year with extensive flooding in February, which damaged two of its museums, followed only weeks later by closure due to the Coronavirus Pandemic - leading to a £2 million loss of income. Eleven Livery Companies generously donated just under £11,000 to Ironbridge to help its recovery and they look forward to the 2021 Livery Weekend.

Plans are currently being considered to offer alternative venues for the Livery Weekend in places around the UK with strong links to the Livery in future years. However Ironbridge would continue to be part of this new network of Livery Weekend venues. The date for the next Livery Weekend may be found in the [Calendar](#).