

Frequently Asked Questions

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What was a Mercer?

Mercers were traders in fine fabrics; the mediaeval company was a professional association with a religious dimension. As membership came to be mainly inherited, Mercers lost their link with a particular trade.

What is a Mercer?

Today's Mercers are the stewards of assets held for the common good, above all in the fields of education and care for the elderly. They are also members of an historic company which enjoys a special status in the City of London.

Has the Mercers' Company always had a Hall? How old is it?

Nobody knows, though records go back to 1348. Mercers first met in a tavern, and then in rooms in a monastery on the present site, the birthplace of St Thomas Becket. The Company bought the entire monastery from the Crown in 1542 after its dissolution. The first Hall was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, and its successor in an air raid in 1941. The present (third) Hall was opened in 1958.



top left

Two fashionable ladies purchasing silk, taken from London's Glory by Josiah Hawkins, 1768, written to illustrate the trades of the Great Twelve Livery Companies

middle

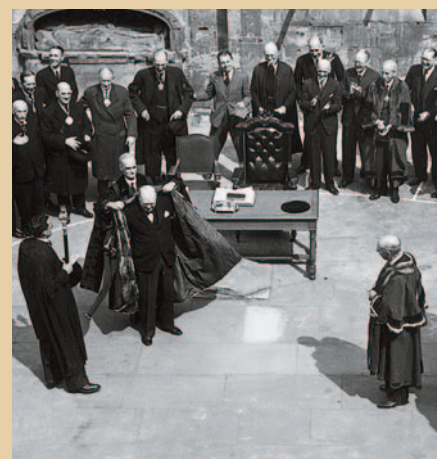
Taken from a tapestry showing the site of the first Hall built 1517-1524, from a map of London dated 1547-1559

right

Sir Winston Churchill being admitted to the Company by the Master, Herbert Drayton Clementi-Smith, amidst the ruins of the second Hall in April 1945 before the current Hall was built

Will the Mercers give money to my favourite charity?

Ask us. Last year we made over 1,000 grants ranging from £100 to £1,000,000. Our average grant is £7,000 – £10,000.





*What does the Mercers' Company actually do?
Is it a charity?*

Various Royal Charters, the earliest dating from 1394, establish the Company. It administers several charities including the Charity of Sir Richard Whittington and the Mercers' Charitable Foundation. The Mercers' Company donates much of its trading income to its Charitable Foundation which, along with the charities' own income, gives around £8.5m each year to charitable causes, especially in the fields of education, care for the elderly and general welfare.

How does the Mercers' Company fit in with the City of London?

The City's freemen, drawn in part from the membership of the 107 Livery Companies, elect the Corporation of London's Lord Mayor and Sheriffs. The Mercers' Company and the Corporation jointly own and administer certain properties, notably the Royal Exchange.

CORPORATION OF LONDON



top

An impression of the first seal of the Company, granted after the second charter of 1425

middle right

Liverymen at Common Hall, electing the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs

*How do you become a Mercer?
Are women admitted?*

Would-be Mercers originally served as apprentices to established members; later, membership passed from parent to child. Today's Mercers are admitted either by such 'patrimony' or by 'redemption': a process of recommendation, vetting and the payment of a fee. The Company began to admit women in 2002 for the first time since 1797; they now amount to 95 out of a total membership of 334.