

Being a Consort: Some Basics

Version 2.4

as of 19 April 2018

The Role

It's a matter of choiceand partly tradition

Preparing for the role

Responsibilities

Consort Brooch

What you can expect

The Year in Brief - Typical Invitations

Ironbridge

Your Year's Association of Consorts

Appeal Events – Lord Mayor, Lady Mayoress, Shrieval Consorts, other Livery Companies

Typical Ceremonies at Formal Events

Public Speaking

Accommodation

Having a Great Time

Attend, Attend, Attend

Prepare and have fun

Greeting everyone

Possibly host your own event

Where to get help or advice

Immediate Past Consorts

City Consorts as a resource

The Master as a Resource

The Clerk and The Beadle of your Livery Company – build relationships now!

The Role

It's a matter of choiceand partly tradition

So, you are the Consort to the Master. You may often wonder: am I the icing on the cake, or a supporting pillar or a flying buttress (as cathedrals have)? Perhaps you are all three – an attractive finish and a visible support and, at times, an invisible support to The Master. Your role is not set in stone. Immediate Past Consorts found being a Consort was what they made of it and you might want to chat to them to find out how they saw their role.

How you undertake your role is your choice as you take into consideration your own Livery Company, your Master's style and your personality. While the role is one with some responsibilities, simply being there and reaching out to connect, to greet and make others feel welcome is important and valuable. As Consort to the Master, others consider it a treat to be with you, just as it's a treat for you to be around the Lady Mayoress or the Sheriff's Consorts or others in The City. A welcoming smile and handshake will leave a lasting impression and it often has a profound positive impact on those in your Livery Company, and particularly guests. Imagine that!

Preparing for the role

Just where do I start? By becoming a member of City Consorts, you have taken a positive step in preparing to be "the best" Consort you can be, or in helping to prepare others. Preparing for the role definitely starts before your Master's Installation ceremony and in the time when you are the Warden's consort.

What will I need to know as Consort? To be prepared it's a good idea to find out a bit about The City and the world of The Livery, their history and players. As Consort of your own Livery, you will find that you will want to be able to share a few stories about its history and composition. Given that charity is one of the key pillars of the world of Livery (about £50 million is given to charity each year by all the Livery Companies combined), you may be asked about the charity connections of your Livery Company, which includes educational recipients.

To minimise surprises during the year, you may want to brush up on the ceremonies that are often part of a formal event – such as the Loving Cup, Sung Grace, Rose Water Bowl, Processing In and Out and Toasts. Many liversies are members of informal groupings such as the Financial Services Group, the Leather Liveries, the Wet Group, Guns & Armoury etc. Knowing your other group members is always helpful for making them feel welcome.

With all that to learn, who can help me? In a nutshell, learning from those close to you is a good source. Perhaps, in order of ease of access, there is The Master (to be), any of the Consorts who precede you into office, members of City Consorts, other members of your own Livery Company and your Livery Company's Clerk. Face to face exchanges are very valuable especially when you have specific questions on your mind.

Where else can I turn to learn? Possibly the next best source is the City Briefings run by The Livery Committee. There is a link to their schedule of courses in the Information section under 'Really Useful Websites' – Page for the City Briefing Programme.

What about things to read? There is a great deal to learn simply by reading what you can. You might start with the Information tab on this website under the City and Livery. Beyond the few pages up front, look for links to specific gems such as the Videos, the Jargon Buster (in the list of 'Really Useful Resources') and The Livery Committee website.

Will other Consorts of my year be willing to share thoughts and ideas? Meeting other Consorts who will be in office during your year will certainly boost your confidence and help you feel prepared. At City Consort events you will be able to do this. And you will be able to ask any question of Past Consorts – from the simple to the sublime.

Responsibilities

As the Master's Consort you with the Master represent the Company whenever you are at events so you have a general responsibility to present yourself well on behalf of the Company. Within the Company you have a high profile, so members of the Company and the guests will enjoy conversing with you. The particular responsibilities you take on are often defined by a combination of your own Livery Company's expectations of you, your Master's requests, and your own interests.

You will be invited to accompany The Master to a number of events. You will also be invited to a number of events as Consort, on your own. As Consort, it is your responsibility to attend where it is a "requirement" and to wisely elect to attend where you have the choice. Your Master and Clerk will be able to brief you on which might be deemed a "requirement" or not.

Those who choose to attend most events will be committing a good amount of time to being a Consort. Events are typically teas, lunches, dinners and, at times, tours or special viewings - often with lunch or tea as part of the event. Such invitations can often take much of your day.

Being able to chat with other Consorts or Hosts or Guests is a key responsibility. Often this is managed by sharing stories of your livery with those you are meeting. And in return, asking about theirs. Have a few stories about the origins of your livery, about its current link to its trade, particularly if it is an ancient livery and the trade is no longer active in London and about its educational and charity connections. Knowing these things and asking others, leaves a very favourable impression of you and your Livery Company.

Consort Brooch

Most Consorts wear their Consort's Brooch at any function related to their Consort role. The Consort's Brooch can be an excellent way to break the ice with other Consorts. By spotting anyone's brooch and asking them more about it, you are able to get into an easy conversation. And if you are unsure if the brooch they are wearing is the Consort's Brooch, you can simply ask. It is a great way to start a conversation. Masters often scan the room for others wearing a Master's Badge and approach each other on that basis. While the Consort Brooch is often not as large as a Master's Badge (and some Consorts have none), you can use the Consort's Brooch as a topic to break the ice and get to know others. Generally, it is good practice to remove the brooch in public as they are often quite valuable.

What you can expect

Typical invitations

Your year will be filled with events – many are likely to be attended jointly with the Master. The most prestigious is probably the Queen's invitation to one of her Summer Garden Parties at Buckingham Palace. Your year will include the usual diary of events for your own Livery – be they the annual installation, lunches, dinners, your banquet, Christmas carols or social events. The year is also likely to include: visits to enterprises connected to your livery trade, educational or charitable contributions; and formal dinners and banquets at Mansion House and other Livery Companies.

You are also likely to be invited to events without the Master. As recently as 2017, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of events that Consorts have attended without their Master. One of these is an invite to an event sponsored by the Mistress/Consort Picture Book Committee. Every calendar year, the Mistresses & Consorts Picture Book Committee invite all the Consorts & Mistresses to participate in a party in the Guildhall to meet the incoming Lady Mayoress at the very start of her year in office (typically November). They also host a second event – a buffet dinner with the Lady Mayoress as the principal guest again. The buffet is typically in May, only weeks before your year of Consorts and Masters converge on Ironbridge. These marvellous occasions allow you to meet the Lady Mayoress and catch up with friends, old and new, amongst the other Mistresses and Consorts.

You may also be privileged to lunch at The Old Bailey or Mansion House as a guest of either the Shrieval Consorts or the Lady Mayoress or to receive invitations from other Consorts hosting their own Social Event.

At times, Consorts find their engagements extend beyond London as livery relationships extend to Guilds and Livery Companies in Scotland, North England and some in Europe. These are often specific to your own Livery Company's relationships. The Master will be able to brief you on this part of your year.

You and other Consorts may host "your own" Consort Event. Each year is different and is totally at the discretion of each individual Consort to arrange. You might therefore receive invitations to these events. There is more on this in the next section under the tab *Making the Most of Your Year*.

The timing of events changes every year. August is always a "dead" month in the City Diary and is a good time to take a holiday.

Ironbridge

In June, your entire year of Consorts and Masters are invited to a weekend hosted by the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. This tradition started 34 years ago. The accommodation for Friday and Saturday is very near Ironbridge, typically in Telford. The village of Ironbridge lies on the River Severn, at the heart of the Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire. It is a World Heritage Site and the beating heart of the Industrial Revolution. Ironbridge is home to 10 amazing museums that make an unforgettable experience.

The weekend is comprised of tours of the various museums on Saturday and Sunday, including the famous Iron Bridge, the first major bridge in the world to be made of cast iron. The evening events include a black tie Livery Dinner on Friday night and a black tie President's Summer Ball on Saturday. The weekend is designed for you to get to know the Consorts and Masters of your year better with coaches laid on both for ease of seeing the museums and for thoroughly enjoying your dinners.

Your Year's Association of Consorts

At the close of your Ironbridge weekend, a short "meeting" is held with all Masters in one room and all Consorts in another. The goal of this "meeting" is to create your year's Association by proposing and then agreeing to its name. For example, the 2017 cohorts are the Prime Masters and Prime Movers as 2017 is a prime number. The 2016 cohorts are the Phoenix (The Masters) and the Firebirds (The Consorts) in honour of the City of London celebrating the 350th anniversary of the Great Fire of London that year.

The purpose of the Associations is to have a way to continue to build and enjoy the friendships started during your year. Some Associations are active in the years following their year in office with events such as social outings, dinners, lunches and at times, trips abroad.

At the “meeting” in Ironbridge, the Association’s Chair, Secretary and Treasurer are often named or individuals volunteer shortly thereafter for these roles.

Appeal Events – Lord Mayor, Lady Mayoress, Shrieval Consorts, other Livery Companies

During your year, you will receive a number of invitations to attend a variety of charitable fundraisers. The Lord Mayor’s Appeal Office will lead the way on those he (or she) has named as the key charities for the year. The Treloar’s Charity Gala Dinner at Mansion House is a standing event annually. Treloar’s is a nursery, school and college in Alton, Hampshire for physically disabled young people providing integrated education, therapy, medical and care support to both day and residential students.

The Lady Mayoress is also likely to name charities that she supports during her year in office. Often Consorts hosting their own event invite the Lady Mayoress as well and honour her with a token of appreciation with financial support towards one of her chosen charities. The Shrieval Consorts annually host a number of fundraisers for the Sheriffs’ & Recorders’ Fund Appeal. Founded in 1808, the Fund gives small grants to ex-prisoners and their families in London, to help them stop offending and start a new life. The makes grants to ex-offenders are typically for clothing, household furnishings, training courses and tools of trade.

Each Livery Company is likely to have its specific fundraising events in aid of charity each year. If you are unavailable to go, it is at your discretion as to whether you send a donation or not.

Typical Ceremonies at Formal Events

At formal events, a number of traditional ceremonies may be part of the festivities. This could include Sung Grace, The Loving Cup Ceremony, Rose Water Ceremony and Toasts. You may also wish to know how you will be Processing In and Out, or how you will be involved in photographing – either in the receiving line or formal line-ups with special guests, before the procession in begins.

Sung Grace: The lyrics for Sung Grace are generally provided on the menu card and it is acceptable to follow along reading the card. Many Consorts prepare by memorising the words to be able to “lead” the room in the song.

The Loving Cup Ceremony: There is a degree of uncertainty about the origin of the ceremony surrounding the Loving or Grace Cup. The custom is said to have originated as a protective precaution to keep the right, or 'dagger' hand, employed. This way the person who drinks may be protected and avoid a treachery, like that of Elfrida (step-mother to King Edward the Martyr) who arranged for the unsuspecting King to be slain while drinking at Corfe Castle in Dorset on 18 March 978 AD.

In today’s ceremony, there is no treachery, just a bit of fun.

Rose Water Ceremony: In medieval times the Rose Water Ceremony was a necessary part of dining without cutlery. This ceremony is not peculiar to Livery Company dinners and uses a bowl of scented rose water. The Apothecaries’ Society suggests that the perfumed water is patted behind the ears using a corner of one’s table napkin, thus soothing the digestive organs which were felt to be connected to this area of the body (on a similar principle to acupuncture).

Toasts: A series of toasts are made on these occasions and will always begin with a toast to The Queen. Typically followed by The Royal Family, and then The Lord Mayor and the City of London Corporation. Other toasts are likely to include Principal Guests, Guests and The Company. Each toast is generally taken in turn by standing, calling out the toast and then sitting down again.

It is considered a break in protocol to leave the dining room before the toast to The Queen.

Processing In & Out: Where the Master and you are special guests, you may be asked to form the Procession. Often the entire procession is “clapped in and out”. Notice that this is not always true. It is helpful to be aware of where your seat actually is, so that you do not walk past it during the procession.

Where the event is for your own Livery Company, your Clerk, Beadle or Master will keep you informed of the plan for the Processing In & Out. If you are a novice, simply ask, as it is very easy to reduce your anxiety before it all begins.

Photographs: You and The Master may be asked for your photograph either in the receiving line or perhaps in a formal line-up with special guests before the procession begins. With support from the Clerk or the Beadle, the photographer generally tells you where to stand and where to look. You have no role other than to smile at the camera.

Public Speaking

The requirements for you to do any Public Speaking depends on your Livery Company traditions and your own choices. For example, some Consorts host an event (or more) where they welcome the attendees and speak about their livery, their hall or themselves in a relaxed and friendly manner. Many Consorts have the privilege of saying a few words of thanks to their Livery members at the end of their year or perhaps when they pass their Consort Brooch on to the next Consort. All of these occasions can be well planned in advance. Remember that the whole assembly is with you and wishing you to do well – and they are eager to hear whatever you have to say.

Accommodation

You and The Master will want to anticipate when evening events finish too late to get home. Should you choose to stay in London, Past Consorts and Past Masters have turned to hotels, their personal clubs, rooms in Guildhall and rooms in other Livery Halls.

Making the Most of Your Year

Attend, Attend, Attend

Words of advice from so many Past Consorts has repeatedly been – “*Make the most of your year as it is only one year. Go to every event you possibly can.*” For some this means clearing their diary of work or other obligations. It could mean being proactive and seeking new experiences that are available. In short, take a look at the City Diary and accelerate getting to know others in your year by attending events as much as you can. You can consider hosting an event of your own. By doing so, you may find that reciprocal invitations become the norm.

Prepare and have fun

Prepare in the way that suits you best You might like to speak with others, do some research and reading, use this website to get some useful information, build a close (possibly mentoring Or buddy) relationship

with a Past Consort and so on. Looking up the Mistress/Consorts picture books will give you an idea of who is in the same year as you and when they come to office. Attending events in City Consorts ahead of your year will introduce you to other Consorts from which to build relationships. Knowing about your own Livery Company and having something to share is very useful in connecting with the other Consorts.

And it is important to learn well before the installation. Thinking ahead about your year probably begins about a year before you take on the role.

Even if you have a bit of apprehension in the beginning, you will quickly find that the year is about having a bit of fun and building new friendships.

Greeting everyone

Almost everyone is equally nervous, equal in wanting everyone to like them and wanting to have a good time. When greeting someone, say your name and livery every time even if you have met them before. This is particularly helpful in the first six months when names and faces are a bit blurred. Even if you remember their name, say yours again anyway, as they may be trying desperately to remember yours. If you hear someone introducing themselves with their name and livery, give them the gift of doing the same as they are often re-introducing themselves in the hope that you will do the same to jog their memory.

Possibly host your own event

One of the great tips in the FAQ & Tips section is from Felicity Chadwick-Histed, IT Consort 2017. She decided to host a consort event early in her year and in doing so she noticed that her diary began filling with other engagements. When invited to any event, we naturally want to reciprocate. The power of reciprocity is a wonderful thing in the world of Consorts. Hosting your own event is by no means an expectation!

Those Consorts with halls have an option that others may not have. They have the possibility of hosting an event in their hall with a special tour of the hall as part of the event. Of course, this requires coordination with those who manage the hall, perhaps the Clerk or the Beadle and their staff. Additionally, there may be traditions for those Consorts to understand.

If the Company does not own a Hall, this can become expensive to the host Consort. In recent years the cost of such events is paid for on a pro-rata basis by all the attendees. Costs have ranged from £25 to £65. Hosting your own event may not be practical if you require the support of your Livery Company staff who may not have the time to help you organise such a function.

Where to get help or advice

Immediate Past Consorts

A number of Past Consorts have kept personal notes or lists of what they wore, who they met & what they did or learned during their year. Towards the end of my year, the incoming Master and Mistress invited me and my husband for lunch to have a most enjoyable social-working afternoon. We brought all our diaries and notes and perhaps overwhelmed them with all we knew. I share this story to help you see the good news and the bad news of asking the Past Consort for information. Overall, it is a good thing to do.

The Past Master Plumber 2015, Erica Starey, developed a Guide for future Consorts of the Plumbers. She, as Master, realised that additional support through her guide could help a great deal. With her permission, it is available here in pdf format.

City Consorts as a Resource

The members of City Consorts are enthused by our goal to give the Consort of any future Master the confidence and knowledge to embrace and enjoy their year. You will find all members, especially Past Consorts, eager to share their stories and offer practical advice should you ask. At each of our events, we create an environment, generally over a meal or tea, to raise any questions you may have...and get responses from those around you.

City Consorts website www.cityconsorts.org is a treasure trove of information and is building all the time. Have a look at The City and Livery tab on this website which gives you a lot of background, and view the videos on the City. They are brilliant. If you prefer to get help or advice by reading, the website Information sections are a great place to start. The 'Really Useful Information' section gives you many further references.

The Master as a Resource

Your spouse/partner who will be Master when you are Consort

The future Master is a great person to turn to....if they realise what it is you know and don't know. Sometimes it is hard to describe what you don't know. There have been stories from Past Consorts where their spouse, as Master, often said, "*Oh, I thought I had told you that.*" Or, "*I thought you already knew that.*" So, you can see that part of your journey may be in creating new lines of communication, ones that include the future Master or give you access to others who know as much as him/her.

The Clerk and The Beadle of your Livery Company: build relationships now!

Every Clerk (across the 110 Livery Companies) will have their own style and approach when it comes to supporting you as Consort. You (and perhaps together with the future Master) will want to discover what level of assistance the Clerk can give you in your year. Definitely discuss this topic with the Master as it is usual for the Clerk to be working very closely with the Master and will want the Master's year in office to be a great success. It is important to have a good relationship with the Clerk as there have been times when invitations to the Consort have gone astray (or never forwarded) as the Clerk is swamped with other matters. Finding ways to work with the Clerk, whilst honouring his or her primary role and other responsibilities, is possible.

Many Livery Companies have a very active Beadle who may be a very important and helpful person to you. A number of Beadles run the hall, for example. Again, find out how your Livery Company works and discover from your future Master what is possible.