



YOUNG FREEMEN

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MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER

THE GUILD OF YOUNG FREEMEN

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FOREWORD BY THE MASTER



Welcome to the Guild's first newsletter of 2026, which sets out a number of recent changes - not least my own election as master just two months ago - as well as introducing the Master and Wardens who will take the Guild forward as it enters its next Guild year beginning on 1 July, which follows our Election Court on 26 March.

I am honoured to have been given the opportunity to lead the Guild at this time, particularly as we prepare to mark our 50th anniversary in December, and I hope to have the opportunity to catch-up with many of you at our next flagship event - our *Reunion Banquet* - at Stationers' Hall on 1 May. You will find further details of that event and how to book places in this newsletter.

In the meantime, if I or other members of the Court can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Michael Polak

Master of the Guild of Young Freemen of the City of London, January-June 2026

About the Master

Michael is a barrister practising from Church Court Chambers near Chancery Lane. He is Director of Justice Abroad and an elected member of the Bar Council and sits on its International Committee. He is Secretary-Treasurer of the International Bar Association's Rule of Law Forum and in 2021 was awarded the International Bar Association's Annual Outstanding Young Lawyer Award.

Michael is past Chair of the Young Bar of England and Wales, past President of Middle Temple Young Barristers' Association, and past Chair of the Human Rights Lawyers' Association's Young Lawyers Committee.

He is a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Drapers and has been a member of the Guild of Young Freemen since 2020. Michael lives in London with his partner and their two children.

RECENT CHANGES TO THE COURT

In January, we notified members of a number of changes to the make-up of the Court (the Guild's governing body) which followed allegations of misconduct concerning some former members. The Court took the allegations extremely seriously and acted swiftly: immediately commissioning an independent inquiry into the matter.

The independent inquiry found that a number of individuals had behaved in a manner that fell significantly short of the high standards of behaviour we expect and in breach of our Code of Conduct. None of those individuals remain members of the Guild.

This necessitated the election of several new officers, which took place at a special meeting of the Court in January. They are as follows:

- Mr Michael Polak - Master
- Mr Jago Toner - Upper Warden
- Mrs Charley Teale - Middle Warden
- Mr Jack Armitstead - Renter Warden
- Mr Stephen Hodgson - Acting Clerk

In February, the Court met again to discuss and agree a number of governance reforms, including:

- making the Guild subject to external supervision
- recruiting the Guild's first paid professional clerk
- adopting a [whistleblowing policy](#)
- a new [complaints and disciplinary procedure](#) with additional checks and balances

Our new policies and procedures can be found in the *Membership* section of our website (also linked above) and we expect to be able to report on the appointment of our first paid professional clerk in the coming weeks.

We are determined to avoid anything like this happening again and we are working closely with our partners throughout the City and Livery to regain their trust.

The Court is grateful for the on-going support of members as a new team takes office and as we prepare for the Guild's 50th anniversary later this year.

MASTER AND WARDENS

2026-27

Each year in March, the Court of Assistants (the Guild's governing body) elects a Master and three Wardens from amongst its number to lead the organisation for the forthcoming Guild year beginning on 1 July. We are pleased to present the results of the Election Court held on Thursday 26 March 2026. The following individuals will be installed in their offices at the Installation Court on 30 June.



Jago Toner, Master-Elect 2026-27

Jago has been a member of the Guild since 2017 and has spent his career in the City. For the last 11 years, he has worked in a City-based financial services firm, where he is now a partner. He is a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of International Bankers and has previously chaired financial literacy charity Financial Futures. Jago lives in Warwickshire with his wife and two children.

Charley Teale, Upper Warden-Elect 2026-27

Charley is Head of Finance Operations for UK Health and Talent at a major City-based insurance broker. Since 2016, she has been following in the footsteps of her grandfather, father, uncle and brother as a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths, and last year she was delighted to be elected as one of its Court Assistants. In her free time, Charley is a competitive weightlifter and part of the GB Masters Weightlifting Squad.



Lewis Hooper, Middle Warden-Elect 2026-27

Lewis is a solicitor specialising in commercial law, with a particular focus on the payments industry. He has spent the last few years working as in-house legal counsel for a U.S. payment services business based in the City. He is a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers, a Habs Aspire mentor (mentoring sixth form students) and Vice-Chair of Trustees at the Jack Petchey Foundation (supporting young people in London and Essex).

Jack Armitstead, Renter Warden-Elect 2026-27

Jack has been an active member of the Guild for the best part of a decade, having played an important role in all of its flagship events. He is a solicitor specialising in commercial property. Jack is Junior Warden of the Guild of Mercers' Scholars, where he works with the membership committee, assists with the speaker series, and works with alumni to support and inspire apprentices looking to begin their careers in the City.



NEWS FROM THE COURT

Election of Michael Polak as Honorary Master 2026-27

At its meeting on 26 March, the Court voted unanimously to bestow the special title of “Honorary Master” on Michael Polak for the Guild year 2026-27 in recognition of his exceptional service to the Guild in recent months.

During the forthcoming Guild year, Michael will work closely with Master-Elect Jago Toner, the Wardens, and other members of the Court of Assistants to continue to lead the Guild and to ensure it is appropriately represented in the City.

Quarterage and fines frozen for the year beginning 1 July 2026

Each year in March, the Court undertakes a review of the levels of quarterage (annual subscription) and fines (one-off joining fees) for the forthcoming Guild year beginning on 1 July. Following a review at a meeting of the Court on 26 March, the Court elected to leave the rates of quarterage and fines unchanged at their current levels of £125 and £75 respectively.

As usual, members will receive electronic invoices by email from the Guild’s accounting system Xero during the month of June. Quarterage for 2026-27 at the agreed rate of £125 will then be collected from bank accounts by Direct Debit on or around 1 July.

Rhys Jones to continue to serve as Senior Past Master in 2026-27

Rhys Jones was Master of the Guild of Young Freemen in 2022-23 and, as our constitution dictates, has subsequently gone on to serve as Immediate Past Master, Junior Past Master, and Senior Past Master of the Guild in the years 2023-24, 2024-25, and 2025-26, providing continuity and institutional knowledge to aid the work of the Court, as well as occasionally stepping in on behalf of the master when required.

The Court recently invited Rhys to serve a further one year as Senior Past Master starting from 1 July, in order to be able to continue to benefit from his wisdom and experience. We are delighted to report that Rhys has accepted this invitation and will serve one final year as a member of the Court in the Guild year 2026-27.



OBTAINING THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY

The Freedom of the City of London is a unique part of the City's history to which people who live and work in the City are proud to be admitted.

There are a number of special privileges that were traditionally said to be associated with being a Freeman, including the right to drive sheep over London Bridge, to be hanged with a silken rope if sentenced to death, to be armed with a sword in public, and - if found to be drunk and disorderly by the City of London Police - to be placed in a taxi home rather than being arrested!

Whilst we advise against any attempt to exercise these privileges today, it is true that Young Freemen and others still drive sheep into the City once a year, albeit to raise money for the Woolmen's Charity and Lord Mayor's Appeal.



Members of City livery companies must become Freemen of the City before they are able to progress to be Liverymen and the Freedom is also a prerequisite to stand for election as a common councillor or alderman in the City.

Under the Guild's long-standing constitution, all members (except those who are livery company apprentices) must be Freemen of the City or be in the process of being nominated at the time of applying for membership and have a reasonable expectation of becoming a Freeman of the City within one year of admission to the Guild.

Members who have not yet taken this step in their City journey are encouraged to contact the Middle Warden (membership@youngfreemen.org) to discuss the process.

REUNION BANQUET

I MAY 2026

by kind of permission of the Worshipful Company of Stationers

Friday 1 May 2026, 6.30pm for 7.15pm
Stationers' Hall, Ave Maria Lane, London EC4M 7DD
Black Tie

Join us for an evening of camaraderie and celebration at the Young Freemen Annual Reunion Banquet, marking a particularly special milestone as the Guild approaches its 50th anniversary.

This annual event brings together former and current members to honour our rich heritage, strengthen old friendships, and forge new connections across generations of Young Freemen.

We are delighted to announce two special guest speakers:

Ian Clark is Past Chairman of the Society of Young Freemen 1992-93. He is currently Independent Non-Executive Director of Aviva plc, Chairman of Direct Line Group, and has held senior leadership roles across the financial sector, bringing a wealth of experience in governance, risk management, and City life.

Alderman Sir Andrew Parmley is Past Honorary President of the Guild of Young Freemen 2015-19. He was Aldermanic Sheriff 2014-15, 689th Lord Mayor 2016-17, and has been an elected member for the Ward of Vintry in the City of London (first as common councilman then as alderman) since 1992.

The dinner will commence with a sparkling reception, followed by a three-course dinner, complemented by port to finish. In keeping with tradition, the gathering will extend beyond dinner, with a cash bar available until midnight at the hall, allowing for further conversation and fellowship including a live jazz band for entertainment!

Tickets are on sale now for members, former members, and personal guests priced at £129pp

<https://buytickets.at/youngfreemen/1862096>

HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH YOUR GUILD

The Guild is a volunteer-led organisation which offers its members a range of unique opportunities to get involved in the heritage, traditions, and life of the City which are not typically available elsewhere. It provides a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the City, gain valuable experience, hone skills, and develop enduring friendships.

The Court of Assistants

Like guilds and livery companies throughout the City, the Guild's ultimate governing body is its Court of Assistants, which is made up of the Master, three Wardens, Treasurer, Sword Bearer, Beadle, up to two Deputy Clerks, and up to 12 Court Assistants. New Court Assistants join the Court on a rolling basis as vacancies arise.

To become a Court Assistant, an individual must:

- have been a member of the Guild for at least one year
- be a Freeman of the City of London
- have demonstrated service and commitment to the Guild, usually by serving on one of its committees and/or supporting the Guild's activities and events
- be proposed and seconded by two existing members of the Court
- thereafter be elected by a majority vote of the Court

Each year in March, the Court elects a Master and three Wardens from amongst its number to lead the organisation for the forthcoming Guild year beginning on 1 July. It is usual for individuals to serve in each Warden office (Renter, Middle, and then Upper) prior to being elected Master (a "progressive" system of office seen throughout the guilds and livery companies).

Committees

Much of the Guild's work is undertaken by its three principal committees, which serve as a proving ground for future Court Assistants. Each principal committee is chaired by one of the three Wardens:

- **Events and Charity**, chaired by the Upper Warden (events@youngfreemen.org)
- **Membership**, chaired by the Middle Warden (membership@youngfreemen.org)
- **Communications**, chaired by the Renter Warden (comms@youngfreemen.org)

If you are interested in serving on one of the committees for the 2026-27 Guild year, please contact one of the wardens using the above email addresses. (If there is not a vacancy on your preferred committee, you may be referred to a different warden to discuss other options.)

Deputy Clerks

The Court is currently seeking to appoint two volunteer Deputy Clerks (who automatically become voting members of the Court). The Deputy Clerks work closely with the Clerk and other members of the Court, with one Deputy Clerk typically being closely involved in supporting the administration and operation of events and the other being focused on membership and the running of Admissions Courts. Deputy Clerks may also go on to serve as Court Assistants, Wardens, and Master.

If you are interested in volunteering as a Deputy Clerk, please contact clerk@youngfreemen.org.

THE GUILD OF YOUNG FREEMEN

27 March 2026

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