



YOUR STORY

The Freedom of the City of London: a peculiar privilege to die for!



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Steeped in long-held tradition, and believed to have been first presented in 1237, the Freedom of the City of London sports one of the oldest surviving traditional ceremonies still in existence.

Since the mid-1800s the Freedom of the City of London has been granted as a 'honour' by a general resolution of Common Council, by 'patrimony' (inheritance), 'apprenticeship' (time served as an trade intern), or by 'redemption' (purchase, that is a donation to the Freeman's School), with the latter still requiring a resolution by the Common Council.

Today, the City of London rarely grants Honorary Freedoms, and these by their prestige, are only awarded to Royalty, Heads of State, or public figures of global standing like the first President of South Africa Nelson Mandela, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Honorary Freedoms are presented at the Guildhall by the Chamberlain of the City of London in the presence of the Lord Mayor, the Court of Aldermen, the Court of Common Council, the Sheriffs and invited guests.

The Freedom of the City of London by Redemption on the other hand is open to a much wider section of society, and includes many notable dignitaries and celebrities who have achieved success, recognition, acknowledgement, or distinction in their chosen field.

Notable personages who have received The Freedom of the City of London by Redemption include the Irish singer Bob 'Boomtown Rats' Geldof, English novelist J.K. 'Harry Potter' Rowling, American actor Henry 'the Fonz' Winkler, English actor Ian 'Gandalf' McKellen, English actress Dame Judi Dench, English comedian Stephen Fry - and American actor Morgan Freeman too!

Freedoms of the City of London by Redemption are presented at the Guildhall by the Clerk of the Chamberlain's Court, or his Assistant, in the presence of the Court Beadle, the prospective Freeman, his nominators, and guests.

The prospective Freeman is invited to read aloud the 'Declaration of a Freeman', summoned to sign the Freeman's Declaration Book, and then welcomed as a 'Citizen of London'.

Each newly admitted Freeman of the City of London is then presented with a beautifully inscribed parchment

copy of their Freedom, together with a copy of a little archaic book entitled the 'Rules for the Conduct of Life'.

From the Middle Ages to the Victorian era, Freemen of the City of London enjoyed a number of inherent privileges denied to other city residents.

Free men had the right to trade and carry-on a profession, to own land and earn money in their own right; they could play some part in determining how the city would be governed; they could take sheep to market across London Bridge without having to pay the mandatory bridge toll, and sell their livestock, produce, goods wholesale.

A Freeman could also carry an unsheathed sword in public, and if found drunk and disorderly in the City of London he would be bundled into a taxi by London Police and sent home rather than arrested and thrown into the lockup.

Children of Freemen of the City of London – just as they were during the nineteenth century - are still afforded preferential consideration for admission to the City of London's prestigious Freeman's co-educational day and boarding school (the CLFS) located in Surrey.

And fortunately – or otherwise - for Freemen of the City of London, along with hereditary peers guilty of capital crimes, or poachers who killed the King's royal deer, condemned Freeman were extended the luxury of being launched into eternity by a silken rope which meant a quick and painless departure from this earth, rather than a slow death by strangulation and asphyxiation hanging in a rough hempen noose.

I was very privileged to have been in London this September past where I was admitted as a Freeman of the City of London by Redemption; after which I was very fortunate to have been given the once in a lifetime opportunity to exercise my right to drive sheep across London Bridge.

#Helon