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| C:\Users\CESA\Downloads\image002.jpg | **COMMERCIAL EDUCATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA**  **PERIODIC DISCUSSION PAPER No.45[[1]](#footnote-1)\*** | **September**  **2022** |

**SCRIBITE SCIENTES … WRITE, YE LEARNED MEN!**

**THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF SCRIVENERS**

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**[Reproduced from *CESA REPORT “73”*, Volume 1, Number 12, Pages 26-28[[2]](#footnote-2)ǂ]**

**Introduction**

The early records of the City of London reveal little about the “good men of the mistery of writers of court letter”. These writers or scriveners (a form of spelling dating from Butler 1680) were professionals – bound by a code of ethics and of standards of performance, although they practised from “shoppes” in the City of London and elsewhere, “…I did resort ‘to a scriveners shoppe’ to have a letter written to my wife’s mother” (1602).

**Scriveners**

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|  | Most of their early archives were destroyed in the Great Fire of London. There is, however, ample evidence that the copying and illumination of manuscripts was not confined to the monasteries as has been generally stated in the past.  A scrivener is noted in the Oxford Dictionary as “a drafter of documents, a notary”, and there is no doubt that, over a long period of years, they did draft, draw or write up a wide range of legal documents, but originally they were writers of the court and text letter and limners. Writers of the court letter were professional scribes whose style of handwriting was that used for legal documents; text letter was the larger (book) style of |

writing, and the limners were the illuminators or artistic decorators of mediaeval manuscripts. It was a calling long practised in the City of London and, in its time held in the highest esteem.

There is a Mayoral minute of 20 May 1357 making it clear that “… the writers of the court and text letter, the limners, and the barbers dwelling in the City should not in future be summoned on judicial investigations or inquests in the Sheriffs’ courts, but if they were summoned to Guildhall on any arduous business they were to attend or be liable to a penalty.

There is also a Mayoral minute, or Articles, of 1634 requiring all of the various crafts to be organised in order to put down “deceits and bad practices”, to ensure the integrity of all who were engaged in the crafts, “thereby reflecting honour on those so engaged and giving confidence to the population at large which used their services” [Steer].

**Regulatory controls**

A special set of regulations was approved for the scriveners in 1373, and, for a few years, Wardens were elected to control the profession, as it was then regarded. These rules were neglected and “the said craft of scriveners of the court letter was afterwards without Wardens and without rule or control for fifteen years and more”.

The absence of controls or of effective restraint led to a revival of the earlier abuses and men, now free of the craft and unqualified, set up in business. One such, a Thomas Panter, who had been serving a professional scrivener for two years but had never been apprenticed, went into practice on his own account, but his lack of knowledge in the science of the craft resulted in his being sent to the pillory within three months, “… to the great slander and shame of all the good men duly enfranchised of the said craft”.

**C.E.S.A. Diplomates**

This is an appropriate place to remind all of our first level diplomates that the *Diploma of Accounting (Dip.Ac.)* is a staff training course, as indeed is the second, advanced level work.[[3]](#footnote-3) The right to public practice is not in the gift of any private grouping of men, but is entrusted by the Parliament to statutory boards. The small minority of students who are interested or affected will make appropriate enquiries and comply with the law in this area. We are confident of that. And in all their activities, in whatever sphere they may be placed, we hope that they will remain ever conscious of the charge laid on them by their association with this Society to “walk worthily”; “I exhort you to walk worthily,” said Paul, “as befits men called to such a vocation as yours” (Ephesians 4:1). A detailed account of the arms granted to this Society has appeared in earlier Annual Reports[[4]](#footnote-4).

**Armorial bearings**

The Worshipful Company of Scriveners first had authority to use armorial bearings by virtue of a grant made by Sir Richard St George, Clemenceux King of Arms, on 11 November 1634. The following details are adapted from Steer: The central design shows a golden-coloured eagle standing on a red book holding a “penner” and ink “horn” in its mouth. On the left you see the ink “horn” or ink supply and, on the right, the penner or pen holder.

Surmounting the shield is the crest on a wreath of blue and gold silk, intertwined, on which rests a right hand holding a silver pen, the arm is vested in a gold sleeve with a silver cuff, the end of the arm obscured by a cloud. This colour scheme, blue and gold, is found also in the Commercial Education Society grant of arms. Over the crest is the motto *Scribite Scientes* - “write, ye learned men” or “men skilled in writing”. After the original grant of arms had been destroyed in a fire, the grant held by the College of Arms was copied and it is from this time, 1738, that the company took and used a second motto, *Litera Scripta Manet* – “the written word abides. This second motto was later abandoned. Although clearly appropriate, it was a departure from proper usage and not consistent with the original grant of arms.

The “supporters” of the Company’s arms are two counsellors-at-law, equivalent to present-day barristers. They are dressed in elaborate Stuart costume with black gowns and each holds a scroll in his free hand. This evidences the status of the scrivener in the 17th century

**Conclusion**

These notes are based substantially on a letter written from London to our President, G.A. McKenzie *BEM*, after I had visited a special exhibition housed by the Reed Paper Company for the Worshipful Company of Scriveners of London.

It seemed to me as I looked over the details in that exhibition, and photographed a beautifully executed hand-written grant of arms to John Shakespeare, that here was something from the past – the ancient art of the scrivener – that must have been very close to the later role and office of secretary – the latter-day writer – and therefore was a fragment of history showing the past, and the origins and foundations of another branch of the writer’s art represented by the Commercial Education Society, and, indirectly, in a more developed form by today’s corporation secretary[[5]](#footnote-5).

**References**

Butler, Samuel (Author) and Charles W. Daves (Editor). 1970. *Characters.* Cleveland, OH: Case Western Reserve University.

Steer, Francis W. 1973. *A History of the Worshipful Company of Scriveners of London.* London: Scriveners. [*Cf.* *scriveners.org.uk.*]

* In addition to the *scrivener notaries*, the membership of the Company comprises those with qualifications and interests in the fields of [calligraphy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calligraphy), [heraldry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraldry), [genealogy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genealogy), wider aspects of the law, authorship, accountancy, and business.
* Admission to the Freedom and Livery is, as with other livery companies, via one of three possible routes: redemption, patrimony or servitude. Each applicant has to be proposed by two liverymen, one of whom must be a member of the Court, or by authority of the Selection Committee. Women were first admitted to the Company in 1665.
* The Worshipful Company of Scriveners is the only body from a common-law jurisdiction to have been accepted to the [*International Union of Notaries*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Union_of_Notaries).
* Also, as with many other livery companies, its principal activities divide into four areas: professional, charitable, civic, and social. Its charitable activities are governed by its Sexcentenary Charity Fund referred to in the footnote below.

1. **\* These papers are for internal discussion within CESA on topics related to the CESA Mission.** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ǂ **This is our occasional practice of drawing on our rich history for the benefit of younger members.** [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Before the official Australian Government regulators, the *Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)* for the Vocational and Training Sector, and the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)* for the Higher Education Sector, were established in 2011, CESA was the largest private provider of accountancy training in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, with examination centres in all Australian States and most countries in Asia and the Pacific. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A section in the current *CESA Membership Register* explains the history and details of the CESA Arms. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In 1801 the Scriveners Company secured the Public Notaries Act, compelling all persons applying to the Archbishop of Canterbury for faculties to become notaries within the jurisdiction of the Company to become members of the Company before applying to the Court of Faculties (set up under an Act of King Henry VIII to administer the faculty-granting and other like powers of the Archbishop). This gave the Company responsibility for ensuring that such persons were properly qualified. To mark the Company's Sexcentenary in 1973, a Badge was added to its armorial insignia by grant of the College of Arms, and its charitable funds were consolidated into a single Sexcentenary Charity Fund. Recently-established traditions of which the Scriveners Company is especially proud are the presentation of ceremonial quill pens to the Sovereign on Coronation and to the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs of London annually, following their installation. The Access to Justice Act 1999 removed the exclusive jurisdiction of the Scriveners Company over Notaries wishing to practise within the City of London. although the company continues to examine, admit and regulate Scrivener Notaries. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)