



Update

News from the Livery Company to the Trade

Issue 4 - October 2025

Master's Message

At just past the halfway point in my year as Master of the Upholders this edition of Update is a welcome opportunity to reflect on the fascinating opportunities that have come my way. I have relished the opportunity to raise the profile of the Upholders at every function and have explained to many the role of the Upholder throughout history as early interior designers responsible for Upholstery, Furniture Making, Fabric walling, Drapery, Mattress making, Funeral arranging and engaging Auctioneers. I use the example of performing the role for a Stately home as a way to set the scene. However, rather than dwell too much on the past I highlight our wonderful project to celebrate the 400th Anniversary of receiving our Royal charter in 1626 when on 9th July 2026 we will unveil our spectacular Circle of Life art textile at Guildhall. The project is too comprehensive to describe here so please visit our website in order to learn more <https://upholders.co.uk/circle-of-life/>

Here is a selection of my favourites moments over the last six months:

Upholsterers and craft:

Being at the first ever Festival of Upholstery, meeting so many Upholsterers and weaving a stool with Danish cord. Attending our award-giving ceremonies at West Dean, London Met. and Sandhurst, and inviting winners to attend our Banquet at Mansion House.

Ceremonial encounters:

Staying silent during the Silent Ceremony where the Lady Mayor took office on November 7th and the next day having the best view of 126 floats at the Lady Mayor's show from the grandstand outside Mansion House.

Widest Extremes:

One day visiting a naval base in Scotland to have a tour around our affiliate Submarine and the next day explore a turkey farm in Essex as a guest of the Poulterers Livery.

Guests:

Having Dame Sarah Mullally as our guest speaker at Trinity House the week before the announcement that she will be our next Archbishop of Canterbury

Above all my most pleasing job though has been to relaunch our Yeomen membership category where members of our trades can join the Upholders and enjoy contributing to the Upholstery community in a whole new way. Please see our article in this edition and become members.

We appreciate everything that you create. Until the next issue,

Roger Wates, Master Upholder

Festival of Upholstery

The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

10-11 October 2025

The first Festival of Upholstery was a project that I took on during my year as the Warden to the Trade. I wanted to create an event specifically for upholsterers that we couldn't get at any other trade show.

The location at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst was chosen for its location close to transport links for the whole of the UK, it was really important that as many people as possible could get to the Festival. We not only welcomed people from Cornwall to North Scotland, but America, Australia, Norway and Finland to name just a few.

I had trained at Sandhurst myself in the past, but what really helped us get the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst as the venue was that it was being run by a member of one of the City Livery Companies. The reputation and standing of the City Livery Companies goes a long way even today.

11 months of planning, with a committee of around 20 people volunteering their time and energy allowed over 500 upholsterers and professionals related to the industry to gather together.

The Festival had 3 aims:

1. Promote the upholstery craft.
2. Provide educational opportunities.
3. Foster networking within the industry.

Opportunities to promote the craft came in unexpected ways; welcoming curious hotel guests to view the courses running prior to the exhibition. Appearing on regional TV discussing the craft and the need to keep it alive. Featuring in Berkshire radio during the set up of the exhibition and a mention from Aled Evans on Classic FM. We also approached schools and colleges nationwide to invite them to the event.



Festival of Upholstery

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Every element of the Festival was designed to offer new skills or knowledge to the visitors. The Federation of Small Businesses and The British Library were represented to educate people about business support and grants available to them. Sewing machine demonstrations were run by Triumph Needle and box cushion advice was generously given by Susie Stanway. We learnt about sustainability, social media and photography for our businesses and even how to stretch our work-worn bodies to maintain them for as long as possible.

There was much more on offer and it can all be seen on our website www.festivalofupholstery.co.uk and our social media channels @festivalofupholstery.

The final aim was achieved by creating a space where people could chat, meet each other and suppliers and take their time. Whilst it was cosy, we felt that the environment provided this and is something that we can build on for next time.

The evening social event, whilst it had its challenges was enjoyed by many, especially the committee who had a chance to relax and enjoy the atmosphere and get to know each other. Many of the committee had only met in person for the first time after a year of working together!

It is to them that this article is dedicated - their hard work, enthusiasm and ideas brought you the first Festival of Upholstery, a huge success, and they have agreed to do it all again next year!!

Kirsty Lockwood, Warren to the Trade and proud member of the Festival of Upholstery Committee.

The Usher Travel Award

Each year the Worshipful Company of Upholders award up to £1000 to applicants who want to undertake personal development or an educational project in the trades currently represented by the Company, namely upholstery and soft furnishings and the funeral trade.

This year, two applicants were awarded funds to support their professional development. One applicant is still on her journey so a future edition of Update will feature her report. Below is the report from recipient Helen Fry who found out about the Livery and the award from meeting an upholsterer and Liveryman local to her.

Helen Fry Passementerie



I applied for the Ray Usher travel bursary from the Worshipful Company of Upholders to explore hemp as a fibre to inspire and use in my Weaving and Passementerie specialist designs, with the opportunity to demonstrate my weaving at the Festival of Upholstery.

With the award I have been able to attend both the Hemp Retreat at Wakelyns Farm, Suffolk 22-24th August 2025 and the Festival of Upholstery, Sandhurst, 9-10th October 2025.

Have you ever dreamed of exploring an idea or undertaking research or study related to your trade and passion?

If you have a great idea for a project here is an opportunity to be awarded up to £1,000 from the Ray Usher Fund towards your costs.



The Usher Travel Award

Helen Fry Passementerie

The August Hemp Retreat at Wakelyns was a fantastic event to be a part of. At the retreat I had the unique opportunity to connect with the raw material and UK growers. I met UK growers of Hemp, Flax and Nettle, harvested the Hemp being grown at Wakelyns, deepened my knowledge of sustainable fibres, how they are processed, and learnt about the history of traditional Hemp weaving in Suffolk.

The weekend was hands on, immersive and rewarding. In particular I enjoyed and learned so much from the harvesting and being in the fields hand processing the plants. This was followed by learning the processes of turning the fibre into yarn by retting, heckling and scrutching the plant to then seeing how to spin the fibre.

I am currently sourcing commercially spun hemp yarns to use in my weaving. I want to experiment and promote hemp for its innate soft and lustrous qualities. The Bursary has enabled me to fully appreciate and be inspired using it in contemporary textiles and interiors.

Being able to attend the Festival of Upholstery at Sandhurst this October proved invaluable as the second part of my journey because it allowed me to showcase my hand weaver skills and promote Passementerie weaving.

The Heritage Crafts Association currently classes Passementerie weaving as an Endangered Craft with few UK practitioners. At the Festival of Upholstery I was able to promote this Heritage Craft to the upholstery sector and connect with individuals, upholstery companies and suppliers.



The Bob Fowlds Bursary

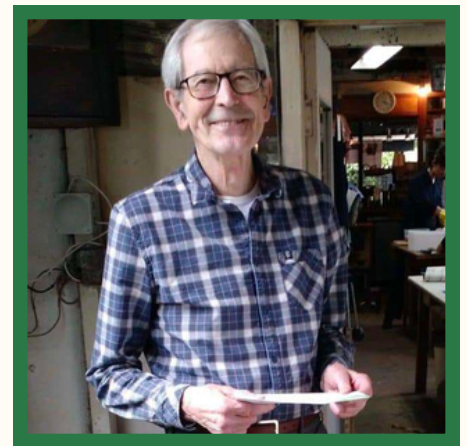
The Upholders Charity was fortunate to receive a substantial gift from the Fowlds family following the passing of Bob Fowlds, which has allowed them to award bursaries to upholstery students, covering up to 50% of their course fees. This has given the students selected opportunities to study upholstery that they may not have otherwise had.

The bursaries are for adults and students aged between 16 and 24 years in financial need who are studying for an AMUSF qualification. The bursary covers up to 50% of the cost of one stage of the AMUSF upholstery diploma qualification.

Applications for the Bob Fowlds Bursary must be received between the 1st February 2025 and 31st May 2025.

The application form and more information can be found on the [Upholders.co.uk website](https://upholders.co.uk)

You can find out more about Bob Fowlds and A. V. Fowlds & Sons at the [British and Irish Furniture Makers Online](https://www.britishtoyandfurnituremakers.com)



If you have any questions about the scheme or the application form, please email the Clerk at clerk@upholders.co.uk.

Newsletter Content

The Trade and Education Committee are always looking for interesting content to include in our Update and newsletters. If you have a story to share please contact clerk@upholders.co.uk

The Upholders National Upholstery Awards 2025



1st Place Elizabeth Stone

Usually the National Upholstery Awards are held at the January Furniture Show, NEC Birmingham, some 5 months after the students have finished their courses.

This year we had the opportunity to hold the awards at the first Festival of Upholstery at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst on Friday 10th October.

This award was set up to recognise the achievements of those students from all the AMUSF schools across the UK. Students who have achieved a double distinction in their 3rd year projects can be put forward to be judged against other double distinction recipients.

The student chairs are collected free of charge by the company Celtheath who kindly donate this service to the livery in support of the awards. This year they were delivered at 7am to Sandhurst where the Festival committee carefully unwrapped and placed them ready for judging.

The judges this year were Malcolm Hopkins, Past Master and FAMU, and Kirsty Lockwood, Warden to the Trade. These students had already been judged as having produced excellent work, so the judges were looking for the little details that set each student apart from the others.

Winning 1st place, with a prize of £500, was Elizabeth Stone from St Albans Upholstery School.

2nd place, with a prize of £300 went to Courtney Winstone from the British School of Upholstered Furniture.

In 3rd place, winning £100 was Lynn Fewell from South West Upholstery School.

The highlight of the event was being able to present these awards, to their worthy recipients in front of around 100 other upholsterers, an audience that we have not enjoyed at the January Furniture Show in the past. It was also a pleasure to share the stage with the awards presented by Adrian Smith to members of the Guild of Traditional Upholsterers.



2nd Place Courtney Winstone



3rd Place Lynn Fewell

Yeoman Category of Membership

During the Festival of Upholstery, the Upholders launched their new Yeoman category of membership.

The current Master Roger Wates wished to create a membership route for those within our associated trades that would demonstrate who we are and what we do with the anticipation that they may progress into Freeman or Liveryman membership in the future.

Members would get to know the Livery, its aims and objectives, the charities that we support and work that we do to support and promote our trades.

YEOMAN MEMBERS CAN:

- 1) Attend History Society walks, visits and events
- 2) Attend Trade & Education visits
- 3) Attend one dinner each year at a significantly discounted rate
- 4) Attend other social events with guests
- 5) Join the Yeoman Committee and be involved with the broader Membership and Trade & Education Committees

Membership is for 3 years after which you will be encouraged to consider Freeman or Liveryman membership.

Membership for 2026 - £75

The annual membership begins in Feb 26. Between now and then there will be two meetings of the new Yeoman category, one online and one in person. The location of the in-person meeting is being planned as is a speaker for the online meeting.

If you are interested in joining the Upholders as Yeoman, please sign-up via the QR code.

If you are interested in more information please contact us via the clerk@upholders.co.uk



Scan here to sign up

Katie wins top prize in Festival Draw

In an initiative between The Upholders and Townsend Systems, two Bench-PALs were donated into the Festival of Upholstery Free Prize Draw.

Katie Matthews is now the proud owner of her fully adjustable Bench which was delivered on Wednesday 12th November. She said having this new bench (which is on lockable wheels and is height adjustable using a handset) is a game changer. She hopes to eliminate aches and pains by always working at the best height.

She is also excited to be able to wheel the bench directly up to her van which will eliminate a lot of heavy lifting.

Katie has an AMUSF Level 3 Diploma from the British School of Upholstered Furniture when it was run by Gareth Rees and Greg Cupitt-Jones and is a recent recipient of the AMUSF Bob Fowlds mentoring Award for new businesses.

Since qualifying she has gained valuable experience working in an upholstery company in Farnham and now runs her own company, Katie Matthews Upholstery.



The picture shows from left to Right: Roger Wates, Master of the Upholders Company, Katie Matthews, James Townsend and Barry Townsend.

Master Certificate Scheme

The City & Guilds Master Certificate Scheme, launched in 2001, is a program run by London livery companies in partnership with City & Guilds to recognise vocational excellence and promote career progression from apprentice to master.

To earn a certificate, individuals must demonstrate a high level of technical knowledge and support others in their industry, with certificates awarded at a ceremony hosted by the Lord Mayor at a formal annual ceremony. The scheme includes other levels like Journeyman and Apprentice certificates and is supported by various livery companies.



The poster features a circular crest on the left with a lion and a unicorn. Below it, the text 'Three levels: CRAFTSMAN APPRENTICE MASTER' is displayed. At the bottom left is the City and Guilds of London Institute logo. On the right, a dark box contains the title 'Upholders' Master Certificate Scheme', the application deadline 'Now open for applications until 30th November 2024', and nomination instructions: 'If you know someone who deserves recognition for their UPHOLSTERY or SOFT FURNISHING skills and would like to nominate them, contact clerk@upholders.co.uk'. At the bottom right, it says 'for more information: upholders.co.uk'.

Upholders' Master Certificate Scheme

Now open for applications until 30th November 2024

If you know someone who deserves recognition for their UPHOLSTERY or SOFT FURNISHING skills and would like to nominate them, contact clerk@upholders.co.uk

for more information: upholders.co.uk

The process to nominate someone for one of the three levels can be found on our website;

<https://upholders.co.uk/upholding-our-charities/master-certificate-scheme/>

If you are interested in more information please contact us via the clerk@upholders.co.uk