

THE SALTERS' COMPANY – A BRIEF GUIDE

The Salters' Company was founded over 600 years ago by London's salt traders to protect their trading interests. The Company regulated the price and quality of salt and over time formed a community, supporting each other through to old age. Today, The Salters' Charitable Foundation continues to uphold the philanthropic traditions of the Company.



Royal Charter granted in 1607 by King James I

Salt has been an essential commodity for thousands of years, particularly in food preservation, but rock salt was not mined in England until 1670. Instead it was imported from countries including Portugal, Spain, France and Ireland, and brought into England via the River Thames. The Salters' Company received its first Royal Licence to trade in 1394, and those trading it grew wealthy and powerful. The first Salters' Hall was in Bread Street, convenient for the sale of salt to the local bakers. It acted as a meeting point for the members of the Company. When the Lord Mayor set the order of precedence of the Livery Companies (see box below) the Salters' Company's importance was formalised as ninth of the Great Twelve Livery Companies.

Livery Companies

The Salters' Company is one of a number of Livery Companies in the City of London, which grew from individuals working in the same trade coming together to regulate competition and maintain high standards. The 'livery' was the name for the uniform they wore to identify which Company they were from. This 'livery' is still worn today. In 1515, there were 48 Companies and the Lord Mayor established an order of precedence for them, finally ending many years of dispute. The Salters' Company is listed as ninth out of the Great Twelve Livery Companies, signifying that it was one of the 12 richest at the time.

The Seven Halls

The Salters' Hall you can visit today is its seventh Hall. The first three Halls were situated on Bread Street, with two destroyed by fire in 1533 and 1598. In 1645 the Company relocated to a larger Hall on St Swithin's Lane, which had been converted from a house. Sadly this fourth Hall was short lived, succumbing to the Great Fire of London in 1666.



The sixth Hall, St Swithin's Lane, 1823



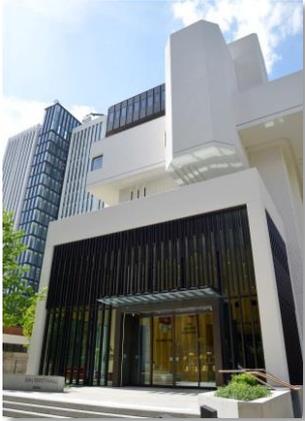
The ruins of the sixth Hall in 1941. 'The Housemaid' sculpture can be seen in the foreground.

The fifth Hall was built on the same site and completed in 1668. It remained in use until 1821 when it was demolished to make way for a new building which was more suited to the Company's needs. This sixth Hall (see images) was in use until it was bombed on the night of 10th May 1941. Thankfully, the Company staff had been moved out to Watford in 1939 when war broke out. By 1944, the German Luftwaffe had destroyed 31 out of the 36 Livery Halls in the City of London.



The Hall today

The Salters' Company was without a Hall for 35 years following the Blitz. Livery dinners had to be conducted in other Companies' Halls, of which the Ironmongers' was the most frequently used. The current Hall was opened by HRH The Duke of Kent in 1976.



Main entrance to Salters' Hall

This, the seventh Hall, was designed by Sir Basil Spence and David Nightingale Hicks and can be visited with a guided tour. Spence is well known for his Brutalist structures – of which Salters' Hall is an excellent example. He is particularly well known for his work on Coventry Cathedral. Salters' Liveryman David Hicks designed the interiors of the Hall, which are intended to be very different from traditional Livery Halls. When visiting, you will note the lack of chandeliers, paintings and wall hangings in the main Hall.

Written on the gates is the Company's motto: *Sal Sapit Omnia*, which translates as 'salt knows all' or 'salt flavours all'. It also appears on its coat of arms.

The Salters' Company originally purchased the gates in 1887 (the date which is written on the gates themselves) to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The date on the outer panels, 1991, commemorates when the gates came back to Salters' Hall from Watford Almshouses.



Salters' Hall gates

The interior

The Salt Lobby is the Hall's main reception space and was designed by Hicks to look like a salt mine. He designed its distinctive carpet with the unusual colour scheme of purple and scarlet. The shapes on the carpet resemble benzene rings, echoing the Company's interest in science. The lobby is topped off with an unusual cascading chandelier, designed by Charles Marsden Smedley in 2016. The shape of its lights are made to resemble rock salt crystals.



From left to right – the Salt Lobby; a close-up of the carpet; the rock salt chandelier

Highlights from the collection

Salters' Hall holds a national collection of domestic salt cellars (salt holders or 'salts'), the oldest of which dates from 1602. However, it also holds some more unusual pieces relating to its history.

This gilt pair of tritons (1811-13) each towing a seashell through waves is part of a set of four salt cellars made by silversmith Paul Storr. These salt cellars appeared on the BBC's Antiques Roadshow and were subsequently bought at auction by the Salters' Company. The seashells are a nod to salt's extraction from the ocean.





This is one of two bronze snow leopards which were purchased from Chelsea Farmers' Market in 1992 because of their resemblance to the spotted beasts on the coat of arms. They are incredibly heavy!

This large salt sculpture was mined at Meadowbank, Cheshire and sculpted by Constantine Smith. It was presented to the Company in 1974, and the lighting was added during the refurbishment of 2016.



This large piece of rock salt was a gift from the Ironmongers' Company in 1975. It is from ICI's salt mine in Pakistan and the salamander (front left of the image - highlighted) is in the Ironmongers' coat of arms.

'The Housemaid' sculpture amazingly survived the 1941 bombing and can still be seen in the Hall today. It was a gift from Sir Thomas Woolner's daughter, to thank the Company for providing her with a pension after she fell on hard times following her father's death.



The Salters' Company today

By the 19th century, salt's importance had shifted into other areas, in particular into the chemical industries, given the importance of salt in many chemical reactions. In 1918, the Salters' Institute of Industrial Chemistry was formed, and two previous Masters of the Company went on to win the Nobel Prize for their contributions to chemistry. The Salters' Institute today supports science education, including nationwide chemistry festivals for school pupils. The Salters' Charitable Foundation also funds bursaries for disadvantaged students studying STEM subjects at A Level.



The Salters' Charitable Foundation maintains the important philanthropic traditions of the Company by distributing grants and donations to a wide range of organisations, including military affiliates and projects supporting poor and vulnerable people. The Company also supports two Almshouses (in Maidenhead and Watford).

Students at a Salters' Institute Festival of Chemistry

You can visit Salters' Hall by guided tour to explore its unique Hall, as well as the pavilion entrance and Salters' exhibition and archive. Tours are available Tuesdays to Thursdays for up to 30 people. Tours are 60 to 75 minutes in length and are an excellent way of exploring the history of the City of London and the history of salt through the unique lens of a Livery Company. Light refreshments on arrival can be arranged for a small charge.

To book a tour or make an enquiry, please email outreach@salters.co.uk or telephone **0207 826 4060**.

Find us: **4 London Wall Place, London, EC2Y 5DE** (5 minute walk from Moorgate underground station).

Find out more: www.salters.co.uk

