

The earliest livery companies were formed in the early Middle Ages as trade "guilds". They were both employers' federations and trades unions, and their functions included ensuring high standards of business conduct and product quality from all their members, helping in the education of future generations in the particular ways of the trade or craft, and supporting those members of the company or their families who had fallen on hard times or were suffering poor health.

The earliest mention of the Company is in 1371 when the Fletchers presented a petition to the Lord Mayor, where they agreed that, for the common good, the two trades of Fletcher (the maker of arrows) and Bowyer (the maker of longbows) should be kept entirely separate and no man of one trade should do the other, under a penalty of £4.

The first mention of wardens and masters of the Company is in 1385 when Nicholas Benet and William Jerberge were sworn in. The Company issued its first Ordinance on 16th June 1403, and in 1423 Fletchers were forbidden to open their shops on Sundays and High Feast Days.

The longbow was primarily responsible for the victories at Crecy in 1346 and Agincourt in 1415, and Fletchers were kept busy with the supply of arrows for the Hundred Years War in France and the Wars of the Roses in England.

By the time of Henry VIII the Fletchers Company had a hall in St Mary Axe and various rolls show the elections to office. It also appears that in the 16th century widows were admitted as members on the death of their husbands and even single women appear to have been admitted. This practice continued into the 18th century despite the Company informing the 1887 Commission that "No women have hitherto been admitted".

The rise of the gun caused the eventual extinction of the longbow as a weapon of war and archery is now confined to the sports field. However the Worshipful Company of Fletchers continues to flourish and has one of the newest livery halls in the City of London - Farmers' and Fletchers' Hall, which is shared with the Farmers Company.

The Fletchers' history is documented in ***The Fletchers and Longbowstringmakers of London*** by James Oxley (1968), together with ***The Fletchers' Company of London 1969 to 2010*** by Michael Roberts (2012). Copies may be purchased from the Clerk.