

Some Notes on Guilds and Professions of the Tudor Era

by Richard Foss



he trade guilds had an enormous amount of power, membership being required for social, economic, or political advancement. Some of the most important guilds had legal enforcement rights, and could forbid traders or artisans to operate within their jurisdiction on penalty of confiscation of their wares and tools. Several, such as the

Fishmongers and Glovers, could, on their own authority, search private homes to seize inferior goods. The Lord Mayor was elected from the ranks of the guilds, and was generally Master of one of them. It was common for guilds to present gifts to the Lord Mayor and to the Sovereign on their patron saint's day, a practice continued to this day by some companies.

The guilds all owned a set of plate and treasures that were donated by wealthy members. The Fishmongers of London still have a dagger that one of their Masters used to slay rebel Wat Tyler, and the Goldsmiths have a Roman altar of the goddess Diana.

The formal name of a guild is Worshipful Company, as in the Worshipful Company of Butchers. The formal title of a Master is Master of the Mysteries of the Guild or Chief Warden. As this implies, they were very concerned with protection of trade secrets. Guild officers served a one year term, and were crowned in office with great pomp. All companies share the ceremony of passing a loving cup of wine or ale clockwise with the man who passed it standing to protect the drinker's back. This ceremony of mutual protection remains unchanged from Saxon times, and is still performed among the London Guilds.

Honorary memberships, called the Freedom of the Company, were often awarded to nobles, popular heroes, and monarches. Queen Elizabeth granted the original charters of four guilds: the Basketmakers, Blacksmiths, Tilers and Stationers, and revoked and renewed the charter of almost all of the rest. Elizabeth's notorious penny-pinching generated this flurry of paperwork, as she confiscated the old charters and forced the guilds to buy them back.

Guild	Livery	Notes
Apothecaries	Yellow & Blue	affiliated with Grocers
Armorers	White & Black	Patron saint: St. George
Bakers	Green & Maroon	special ceremony on Midsummer's Day
Barbers	White & Black	included Surgeons & Physickers
Basketmakers	White & Blue	Master's title: Prime Warden
Blacksmiths	Yellow & Black	Patron saint: St. Eloi or Loye
Bowyers	White & Black	Motto: "Crecy, Poitiers, Agincourt"
Brewers	White & Red	faced heavy home competition

Guild	Livery	Notes
Broderers	White & Blue	embroiderers, had very silly guild song
Butchers	White & Blue	included Costermongers (onion sellers)
Carmen	White & Red	St. Katherine, Carters and Woodmongers
Carpenters	White & Black	at odds with the Joiners
Chandlers	White & Blue	divided into Tallow and Wax Chandlers
Clothworkers	White & Black	St. Mary, once Fullers and Shearmen
Cooks	White & Red	included Pastelers (pasty makers)
Coopers	Yellow & Red	made barrels, buckets and casks
Cordwainers	Yellow & Blue	Shoemakers and leatherworkers
Curriers	Yellow & Blue	mainly leatherdressers
Cutlers	White & Red	made blades and surgical instruments
Distillers	White & Blue	made malt vinegar, brandy and gin
Drapers	Yellow & Blue	also Milliners, sold fabric
Dyers	White & Black	odd that they have such boring livery...
Farriers	White & Black	shod and cared for horses
Fishmongers	White & Blue	a very powerful guild
Fletchers	Yellow & Blue	at odds with the Bowyers
Founders	Yellow & Blue	Patron saint: St. Clement
Frippers	White & Black	pawnbrokers, also sold used clothing
Fruiterers	White & Green	presented fruit to each Lord Mayor
Gardeners	White & Green	also sold flowers and some produce
Girdlers	Yellow & Blue	also gartermakers; both worn by men
Glaziers	White & Black	English glass was notoriously poor
Goldsmiths	White & Red	active moneylenders and coiners
Grocers	White & Red	St. Anthony; controlled the spice trade
Haberdashers	White & Blue	St. Cathrine; included hatmakers
Guild	Livery	Notes
Horners	White & Black	cut and shaped horn, made combs
Innholders	White & Blue	also Hostellers; always in trouble
Ironmongers	White & Red	also Feroners; dealers in iron
Joiners	White & Red	St. James; made furniture; see Carpenters
Leathersellers	White & Red	included tanners
Loriners	White & Blue	made horse bits and tack
Masons	White & Black	absorbed Marblers in 1585
Mercers	Yellow & Red	masters included Dick Whittington
Musicians	Blue & Red	kept out foreign minstrels
Painters	White & Blue	incorporated Cloth Stainers in 1585
Parish Clerks	Yellow & Blue	Patron saint: St. Nicholas
Pattenmakers	White & Red	made high heeled galoshes

Guild	Livery	Notes
Paviors	White & Black	paved streets and courtyards
Pewterers	Yellow & Blue	Enforced standard measures
Plasterers	Silver & Blue	quarreled with Painter-Stainers
Plumbers	Yellow & Black	used hammer, knife and shaving hook
Poulters	White & Blue	raised fowl
Saddlers	Yellow & Blue	burned bad saddles at maker's door
Salterers	Blue & Red	called Fraternity of Corpus Christi
Scriveners	Yellow & Blue	wrote letters and documents
Shipwrights	Yellow & Blue	St. Simon and St. Jude
Skinners	Yellow & Red	strange election ceremony
Stationers	Yellow & Blue	made paper and newsprint
Tailors	White & Red	St. John the Baptist
Tinplaters	Yellow & Black	made tin utensils and ornaments
Turners	Yellow & Blue	woodworkers who used lathes
Tilers	Yellow & Blue	also brickworkers, chartered 1568
Upholders	White & Black	made featherbeds and pillows
Vintners	White & Black	give 5 cheers instead of 3
Watermen	White & Blue	operated ferries and barges
Weavers	White & Blue	Master called Upper Bailiff
Wheelwrights	Yellow & Red	a complex and respected craft
Wire Drawers	Yellow & Blue	worked in copper, gold and silver
Woolmen	White & Red	sold wool, did not raise sheep

Others:

Shoemakers, Millers, Soapmakers, Merchant Venturers, Pursers, Hosiers, Potters, Milkmen, Heamers, and Hatband Makers.

Farmers were not permitted to form a guild for fear of price fixing.

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