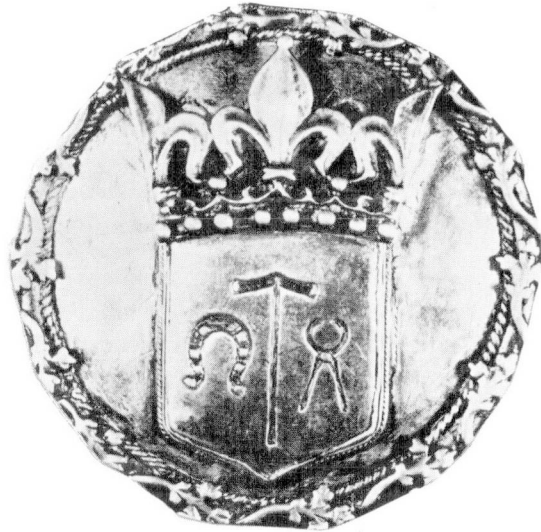


PLATE III.



(a) Silver badge of the Smiths, Cutlers and Plumbers company presented to them by Prince Arthur in 1499.



*(Blocks by courtesy of Chester Corporation)*

(b) The banner and standard-head of the Smiths, Cutlers and Plumbers company in the Grosvenor Museum.

PLATE IV.

15<sup>th</sup> Feb<sup>r</sup> 1710

Gentlemen

It is not all your excuses in due time & the reasons  
sent from Mr. Storer touching duty, or rather giving a reason  
to his death & also not duty, or rather as to the duty that he  
will not have for that could not more ways than his death, thought  
of the duty, would be glad if it might have for their duty, would in the  
first place be a duty, the duty of the duty to the duty, (which would  
be the duty of the duty) and they would also advance the duty of  
the duty, affirming they could not sell the duty, this would be very  
duty upon all the duty, for duty and other reasons, as if the  
giving the duty, will not be allowed of duty, the duty, will be  
duty upon all the duty, and untrained, except duty, will not  
be allowed of duty, to present it, to that duty, would have duty,  
and duty, duty, as if duty, will not be allowed of duty, and  
duty, duty, as if duty, upon all the duty, untrained, the duty, will not be allowed of duty, for or duty,  
a duty, therefore all you can do is to furnish us with the duty, arguments  
of duty, of this duty, we shall make the duty, up of duty, we shall  
for your duty, of this duty, is duty, we shall, it will be, as the duty,  
was a duty, but the duty, to be duty, by duty, of duty, and  
duty, of duty, which we shall, will be very, untrained, because the  
duty, shall, then pay, equal to the duty, and a duty, will be duty, for  
what the duty, of duty, off, it will, off, duty, so -  
towards all the duty, as to duty, on duty, of duty, how it will  
affect, and duty, of poor people, let us know your duty, and -  
• answers, just, post, to us, Gentlemen,

Your humble friends & servants  
Henry Bunbury  
Peter Shakerley

To the Aldermen & Stewards of  
the company of Tanners and  
Shiners in the City of Shrewsbury

(Block by courtesy of Chester Corporation)

Pl. IV.--Letter to the Tanners company by Henry Bunbury and Peter Shakerley, dated 15th February 1710 (p. 100).

# The City Gilds of Chester

by MARGARET J. GROOMBRIDGE, M.A.

**I**N Chester have survived down to the present day twenty three of the ancient gild companies, the oldest of which were probably first formed in the 13th century.

This account is not intended to give a complete history of them, but to indicate why and how they were formed, to describe their organization and to give some idea of the position they have held in the City down the centuries. This has been made possible by the first complete survey of their records which I have recently made. These records, which vary in quantity from company to company, are still in the majority of cases kept in the small homes of Chester in the hands of the stewards of the individual companies. Some are kept in steel safes, others in brown paper parcels, but many are to be found in the boxes made for them from two to three hundred years ago, varying in shape and size from the large chest of the Mercers, Ironmongers, Grocers and Apothecaries Company to the table desk of the Masons Company. In the majority of cases the documents are in excellent condition, but it is to be regretted that so much has been lost either through ignorance of their value or through wilful destruction on the part of one or two "black sheep" in a company. Chester, however, can congratulate itself on the amount that has survived. Few other towns throughout the country can provide so much information concerning these associations which played such an important part in the history of their day.

To understand the position held by the gilds, it is necessary to appreciate that they meant as much to people in Medieval times as the trade unions do to the people of the present day. They fostered trade, they regulated wages, apprenticeship and conditions of work, and they gave help to their sick and poor. They differed from the trade unions in that every town had its own gilds and in that both masters and men were members of the same organisation. In origin, the gilds were probably an outgrowth of the Gild Merchant, an association found in many towns, of all the merchants and craftsmen of every trade, which sought to promote by regulation, trade and working conditions. The citizens of Chester were first granted recognition of their Gild Merchant in the year 1200 by Randle III, 6th Earl of Chester, but as by the middle of the 13th century, all power in the Gild Merchant had tended to become concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy merchants, discontent arose as the needs of the poorer individual seemed to be little considered. For this reason separate gilds for each craft gradually came into being towards the end of this century to protect the interests, trade and well-being of the individual and his family. In those days and, indeed, until well into the 17th century, the economic policy they followed was one of protection; protection from the intrusion of outsiders and protection from the encroachment of users of other crafts. In fact, a "closed shop" attitude was adopted. A craftsman had to be a member of a gild in order to carry on his business and he must practice no other craft except his own. Outsiders could only trade in the City if they paid tolls at the port, or at the gates, or came at specified times such as the Mid-summer and Michaelmas Fairs.

This policy of following only one trade led frequently to quarrels between craftsmen within any one town. It was perhaps inevitable that this should be so, as it was the general desire that all should fare alike and that none should benefit at the expense of others. This feeling accounts for many of the steps taken by the guilds and when one craftsman attempted to carry on some part of another's trade, swift action was always taken to put a stop to it. The frequency of the disputes and the closely allied nature of some of the crafts led finally to the only possible solution—amalgamation. Such unions first took place in the 15th century, but others were also formed and added to in the 16th and 17th centuries. Examples of such unions for this reason can be seen in the companies of Shoemakers and Cordwainers; Joiners, Carvers and Turners; Wrights, Slaters and Sawyers; and Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers. The largest amalgamation is perhaps that of the Smiths, Cutlers, Pewterers, Plumbers, Founders, Cardmakers, Girdlers, Headmakers, Wire drawers, Spurriers, Arrowheadmakers, Armourers and Bellfounders Company. When such amalgamations were made is not always known but even within a union no Joiner, for instance, was permitted to be a Carver. Amalgamations were not, however, made only because of disputes. Poverty, and consequently, inability to pay their share to the lights at the Feast of Corpus Christi and to the production of the Miracle Plays led some to unite. This was the case when the Cappers, Pinners and Wire drawers united with the Linendrapers in 1552, but when the Coopers, Bowyers and Stringers combined, they did so because they considered that their united strength would enable them to keep strangers using their trade out of the City. Some of the unions perhaps need explanation. That of the Linendrapers and Bricklayers was because of the poverty of the latter; that of the Mercers, Ironmongers, Grocers and Apothecaries was because they were the leading traders, traders who got materials and spices from abroad and consequently stocked medicines, groceries and ironmongery. Few crafts in Chester, as in other towns, were sufficiently rich to remain independent. London was alone in having a separate guild for each craft. In Chester only the food trades of Bakers, Butchers and Brewers were sufficiently wealthy to be guilds by themselves.

Only to a partial extent can information concerning the origin of guilds, the unions they made and the reason for such unions be discovered. Where they exist, the charters of a guild tell us, but it was not always necessary to have a charter to be recognised as a company. Their existence as a group was recognised by right of custom alone. This was especially so in the Middle Ages and it is therefore not possible to give an exact date as to when many of the guilds were first formed. Only when their position was threatened, or when they wished to strengthen it, was a charter obtained. The oldest now in existence is one granted by the Black Prince in 1370 permitting the Shoemakers to tan their own leather. This company also had further charters granted to it in the 15th century, as did the Coopers, Bakers and Saddlers Companies, but in no instance were they recognised as a corporate body, only as a group with sole rights to use their trade in the City. It is possible that some companies never had a charter, but many did seek them during Elizabeth's reign, when it was becoming popular to desire to be recognised as a corporate body

with rights at law. It is known that fifteen companies at least had charters, but of these, only six<sup>1</sup> now have the originals in existence. The Painters lost at least one of theirs in the 18th century<sup>2</sup> and the Bakers' charter has been mislaid since 1880.<sup>3</sup> Of the remainder, copies in the Harleian Manuscripts<sup>4</sup> made by Randle Holme, or the official enrolment in the Public Record Office, are all that now survive. Some of the charters were direct royal grants,<sup>5</sup> others were grants by the Mayor and Citizens, of which several were later confirmed by the Crown.<sup>6</sup> In them are to be found the reasons for their issue; the desire for amalgamation, the need for protection from outsiders and the wish to be incorporated so that they could plead in a court of law. Some give the full rules of the company,<sup>7</sup> but those of incorporation generally merely recognise its officers, appoint a day for their election and permit a company to make its own rules. Yet, the cost of obtaining a charter was not a cheap business, particularly if it was a royal grant. The Brewers, for instance, paid £55 12s. for theirs in 1635. The expense lay not so much in the drafting of the grant, but in the numerous fees that had to be paid, the visits to country gentry and to London to get support for it and, of course, in the incidental "entertainment" that was necessarily incurred.

The organisation and rules laid down by each company were in the main essentials remarkably alike. Although in most cases the rules were probably not written down till the 16th century, one gains the impression that they date from a much earlier period. All but three of Chester's companies were ruled by an alderman and stewards; two of the exceptions being the Goldsmiths and the Bricklayers Companies, who were governed by a master and wardens, who though they bore a different name, carried out exactly the same functions as the aldermen and stewards. These officers were elected annually near the anniversary of some saint's day, a day chosen by the various companies for this purpose probably because of its religious associations with the company. Some companies elected the same men year after year as their aldermen, but usually the stewards were changed as they were responsible not merely for summoning the companymen to meetings, but for keeping the company's accounts, which could involve the stewards in financial loss, if the accounts were not balanced. The alderman's position, on the other hand, was not so onerous. As chairman of the gild, he presided over all meetings and before him all new members and officers were sworn in. The oaths that were taken were very similar in form, being a promise to obey the officers, to attend the company's meetings and to keep the company's rules and secrets. They were generally written at the very beginning of every company's book, together with its rules and regulations. These rules concerned not only the holding of elections, the holding and summoning of meetings, dress, and the fines to be levied for failure to observe the rules, but also

<sup>1</sup> Original charters are in the possession of the Brewers, Coopers, Innkeepers, Mercers, Shoemakers and Weavers Companies.

<sup>2</sup> The evidence for this is in their Attendance Register, 1748-1761.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Jeaffreson in the Historical Manuscripts Commission Report of 1878 mentions this charter, but states that it is in poor condition.

<sup>4</sup> British Museum Harl. MSS. 1996, 2054.

<sup>5</sup> *e.g.* Merchant Drapers and Brewers Companies.

<sup>6</sup> *e.g.* Innkeepers had a civic charter in 1583 and a royal confirmation in 1592.

<sup>7</sup> *e.g.* The charters of the Innkeepers and Weavers Companies.

full details concerning apprenticeship, admission to the company, journeymen and regulations concerning the trade of that company alone. It is these special regulations which reveal most intimately any one company to us. The Joiners, for instance, were limited as to the price they might charge for "funeral chests"; the Brewers were forbidden to keep any cask having another brother's mark on it; the Glovers were not to buy sheepskins from country butchers except in the Common Hall<sup>8</sup> or the Shambles and that during market hours; the Goldsmiths were ordered to put their "touch" mark on all plate they made and if an article was silver gilt, a small hole was to be left to show the silver beneath; the Butchers ordered in 1661 that their members must not smoke, while the Mercers were told not to display their goods beyond the "pentizes"<sup>9</sup> of their shops. Many of these latter rules have not remained permanently in force, but were later repealed or amended to suit the needs of the time.

Most of the rules and the ones which were added later as occasion arose, were formed at the quarterly meetings held by all companies in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was only in the 18th century that the meetings became less frequent and only in the 19th that they became annual. To these meetings members were summoned by the stewards. Their rules made attendance compulsory on all and laid down that members must wear their gowns and officers their tippets.<sup>10</sup> The meetings provided an opportunity not only to admit new members and fine those who were failing to observe the rules, but to pass enactments for the future better practice of their craft or trade. As there was no central gildhall in Chester, each company had to find its own meeting place. These were therefore to be found scattered all over the City. Some possessed their own property, but many rented a room in the Phoenix,<sup>11</sup> or King Charles Tower. This tower was rented from the Mayor and Assembly by the Painters, Butchers and Barbers Companies and it was sublet by them to the Bakers, Coopers, Joiners, Clothworkers, Tailors, Bricklayers and Weavers Companies. For a time, however, the Bakers rented another tower, the Water Tower, but their tenancy was of short duration. Of those who had their own property, most kept it till the 18th century, except the Tailors Company whose house, near the Newgate, was pulled down in 1596 to widen the street and, in spite of a promise given by the City Treasurers, was never rebuilt as the frame was more than once mislaid. The other property owned by various companies varied from a single house to several buildings. The Glovers had their meeting house by the walls at the end of Duke Street. This they sublet to the Brewers, Innkeepers, Slaters and Dyers Companies but though it was rebuilt in 1713 for £160 10s., they ceased to use it later in the same century. The Saddlers had a house on the walls at the end of Abbey Street which was only pulled down in 1774. When it had been repaired in 1690, it was then stated to be 241 years old. The Smiths, Cutlers and Plumbers Company had their house in Commonhall Lane which they bought very cheaply in 1700 and sold in 1778 for

<sup>8</sup> This is now the Music Hall Cinema.

<sup>9</sup> Shutters which opened out from the top to form a counter on the pavement.

<sup>10</sup> These were insignia of office and were worn round the neck and down the back. They were modelled on the 15th century merchant's hat in the same way that a university hood is based on a monk's hood.

<sup>11</sup> This is the badge of the Painters Company.

£105. The Weavers Company had property<sup>12</sup> near St. John's Church, but its exact whereabouts is not now known, while the Cordwainers had their meeting house in part of the buildings once owned by the Fraternity of St. Anne in St. John's churchyard. The reason for disposal by a company of its property in the 18th century was not entirely due to a decline in the companies themselves, but to the realisation that on the occasion of a meeting a large amount of time was spent over entertainment. Many companies therefore instead of starting in their meeting house and adjourning to an inn, held the entire meeting at one or other of the City's many licenced houses. Their books in the 18th century form an interesting source of information as to the names borne by such places at that time, as each company tended to patronise a fresh house for every meeting.

The question as to how these companies were financed as so few had any landed property, is one of importance. As has been seen, some derived a certain income from the letting of their meeting house, but most had to rely on the quarterage paid by each member at each meeting. This sum, which varied from 3d. to 6d. payable each quarter, was, together with the admission money paid by new members, the main source of income for most companies. The money was spent chiefly on refreshment at the time of their meetings, but a not inconsiderable sum had to be found for equipping the Miracle Play and the Midsummer Show, as long as these lasted, and for the City Plate Race in the 18th century. A fee was also paid to a clerk if no member of the company could write up the books for them and contributions were always made towards the funeral of any brother, as attendance at them was compulsory. Occasionally, if there was any extraordinary expenditure, a special levy was made on all members, as when members of the Brewers Company each gave a large sum in order to obtain their charter. Generally, however, if there were lawsuits, the income of the company was expected to pay for them and if, at the end of the year, the accounts did not balance, it would appear that the stewards had to bear the loss alone, though in the Linendrapers Company, each member seems to have borne an equal share of the almost annual loss.

Every trader and craftsman in the City had to be a freeman and a member of a company if he was to practice his trade. To become a freeman, he had to be either the son of a freeman, or have served his apprenticeship, or be admitted a freeman by order of Assembly.<sup>13</sup> It was also necessary to take up one's freedom before one took up one's company. Only in London and Norwich was the company taken up before a man's freedom. As apprenticeship, apart from being one of the means of gaining one's freedom, was also essential to obtain admission to a company, strict rules were laid down about it in each company. The minimum term of service was seven years, but in the 16th century some companies insisted on a longer period. Painters and glaziers, for instance, commonly served nine or even ten years until as late as 1635. On entering their term of service, each apprentice had to have his indentures, binding him to his master, enrolled both by the Clerk of the Pentice<sup>14</sup> and by the

<sup>12</sup> This was leased from 1734 to the "Society"—was this Society, the Gentlemen Bellringers of St. John's?

<sup>13</sup> City Council.

<sup>14</sup> The Town Clerk.

company he would join in special books, so that at the end of his servitude there was proof, other than his indentures, which were liable to get lost, of showing his ability to take up both his freedom and his company. In the 17th century the cost of admission to a company was generally between £3 and £5, but in some companies it was much dearer. Admission to the Glovers, for instance, cost £10 for an apprentice, though only £7 for one free born. In addition, all new members were expected to provide a dinner for the company. This practice was dropped in the 18th century, but the price of admission was put up because of the valuable benefits to be received from Owen Jones' charity. It was not always easy, however, to become an apprentice in the first place, as many companies restricted the number any one master might have, for it was considered that if any one man gained too many helpers, he would become over powerful. Thus the Cordwainers prohibited any master from having more than four apprentices and two journeymen and for twenty one years in the 18th century, the Butchers were forbidden to take any apprentice at all. Yet, once admission to the company had been obtained and the oath of obedience had been taken, the admission money was divided equally amongst all members and the admission itself was, from 1698, enrolled on a special form on which stamp duty was payable. This was at first only 2s., but by 1792 it had been doubled, and by 1800 it had become £1.

Though men did not always take up their freedom and company unless they wished to become masters, because of the responsibilities involved, women could and did gain a recognised status in a company. They could not receive training but, if a woman's husband died, she was permitted to take his place as a member of a company in order that she might carry on his business and thus provide for herself and her family without becoming liable to the company or the City. She could take apprentices and journeymen as other masters and she paid quarterage, but she could not vote at meetings. She was permitted to carry on her trade in this way as long as she remained a widow, but if she remarried, then she must close her first husband's shop, as neither she, nor her second husband, was allowed to carry it on. This custom, which appears to have come in at the end of the 16th century, is not found in all companies, but the Joiners, Brewers, Painters, Weavers and Coopers Companies all clearly permitted women among their members until as late as the early years of the 18th century.

The matter which is of greatest importance, however is the relationship between the gilds themselves and between them and the City Corporation. It is one which needs a much closer study than that which has been possible in the course of making the survey of their records. From the information which can be gleaned from the company books themselves, it is obvious that the gilds in the 16th and much of the 17th century ruled the lives of their members and fined them for the slightest disobedience. Unfortunately, very few companies still possess the Waste Books in which were recorded reports of assaults on other members, forestalling the market, or failing to observe the rules with the note as to the fines levied as a consequence. Notable amongst those which are still in existence, are those belonging to the Cordwainers, Butchers and Joiners Companies. In the last named book occurs the interesting



entry in 1621 that William Liverpool, who was dismissed from the company because "he was questioned for his conscience," was allowed to re-enter it if he would obey the laws of the kingdom and go to church. This is the only discovered occurrence of a man being victimised for his religious beliefs.

In their attitude towards each other, the guilds were on the whole very guarded. Rarely did they act together for the good of the City. Only once, when there was a threat to breach the Causeway by the Old Dee Bridge in 1607, did they combine to put a stop to it, as so many used the river for various processes in their crafts. To them, of most importance, was the keeping of all trade in the City within their own hands. To this end their aim was to keep out all strangers and only allow them free access on market days or at the time of the Midsummer and Michaelmas Fairs. It is therefore understandable that they should insist that all craftsmen should be members of a guild and, in their desire that no man should gain undue prosperity for himself, they ordered that he must follow only his own trade and not infringe on that of any other company. He must only keep one shop in the City and must not even have a branch in another town. These regulations the guilds were usually able to enforce on their own members but when another company infringed their rights, their only remedy was to petition the Mayor and Assembly. It is thus in the petitions to Mayors and in the Assembly Minute Books of the City that many details concerning the guilds are to be found. The company books give an indication of disputes, but only the expense to which they were put, not the cause and result of the quarrel, as only in the Mercers Company have any legal papers survived. Lawsuits were not infrequent as many trades were closely allied. The Mercers and Linendrapers in particular, were continually quarrelling, but they, in common with other companies, were always ready to accept the Assembly's arbitration. The cost of such an award could, however, be a considerable charge on a company as can be seen from the following extract from the Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers accounts for 1604:

Itm spent at sundry tymes when wee went about the Imbroderes peticione	xijjd.
Itm given to Thomas Dalby for drawinge and writtinge the peticone	ijs.
Itm payd to Mr. Whitby <sup>15</sup> for preferringe the said petisyone at the assembly	xijjd.
Itm payd to Mr. Whitby for ingroeing the order graunted unto us by the Assembly and writeinge it in the black booke of the Citty for Recorde	viijs.
Itm spent upon him in wyne at Thomas Alertons taverne	vijjd.
Itm payd to Thomas Corbyn for a cobby of the order	ijs.

Yet in spite of this cost, the guilds turned to the Assembly for assistance, not merely to maintain what they considered to be their privileges, but for protection of their trade. The Assembly was generally well disposed towards the guilds, for its members were themselves mostly companymen. It was this body that often first granted a charter to a company, as it realised that the guilds would probably carry out its trading policy. The companies, on the other hand, looked to the Assembly for support and when they feared that some stranger was being admitted as a freeman of the City to their detriment, they often sought to stop it. Such appeals were

<sup>15</sup> Clerk of the Pentice.

generally acceded to, though sometimes only on certain conditions, as when the Assembly enacted that it would only refuse admission to a barber, if his company<sup>16</sup> reduced the price of candles.

Occasionally evidence of bigger trade issues are to be found in a few isolated papers belonging to some companies. The Brewers, for instance, put up a long fight for the sole right to brew in the City. They considered it unfair that innkeepers should be permitted to brew as they, the Brewers, were quite capable of producing sixteen hundred barrels of beer a week, all the City needed. The Bakers, too, seem to have had considerable trouble from country bakers who came and sold their bread at the Gloverstone, near the Castle, where they were exempt from the City's authority and there was much conflict and strife in trying to put a stop to this practice. Most interesting of all, is the early 18th century correspondence between the Tanners Company and Peter Shakerley, M.P. for Chester at that time (pl. iv). It deals with Shakerley's unavailing efforts to prevent a tax being imposed on leather and later, his attempts to prevent the exportation of oak bark to Ireland as this enabled the Irish to tan their own hides and so deprived the English tanners not only of their source of bark, but of the raw hides.

From this it is clear that well into the 18th century the guilds still exercised considerable influence over the trade of the city, but its influence was felt not only in this direction. Right from their early days the guilds had played an important part in the social life of the city. Each company was responsible for the production of a miracle play. These plays, which were probably first performed in the late 13th century, were given during the course of three days at Whitsuntide at the Abbey Gate, the High Cross and the principal streets of the city. They continued to be given until 1575, when in a somewhat delayed response to an edict of the Archbishop of York, they were banned. Five copies of the cycle of these twenty five plays<sup>17</sup> made soon after this date are fortunately still in existence. In the 16th century, in addition to this, the guilds were also responsible for the Midsummer Show. This was first held about 1500 and it consisted of a procession for which each company gaily dressed and mounted on horseback a child who was accompanied by the leading characters of each play. There were also giants and other features which livened up the show, which continued annually, except for the years of parliamentary rule, until 1678. Another festive occasion with which the guilds were associated was the races. In the early days the Shoemakers, Saddlers and Drapers Companies were chiefly responsible for the presentation of prizes for these races, but by the end of the 17th century, each company was expected to make a contribution, a custom which continued until nearly 1800. In addition to these, there were other minor entertainments provided by the guilds, such as the bullbaiting at the time of the mayoral election in October, the bull for which was provided by the stewards of the Butchers Company, and the mock elections held at the same time by the apprentices of the Glovers Company. These latter activities continued well into the 18th century and show

<sup>16</sup> The Tallowchandlers and Barber Surgeons formed one company.

<sup>17</sup> The Coopers Company has its own copy of its play "Scourging of Christ".

that in Chester the power of the guilds did not decline at the same rate as in other towns.

What then were the reasons for this? Little or no mention of the Civil War is to be found in any of the companies books but its effect may be seen especially during 1645-6, the last year of the siege, when no new guildsmen were admitted and very few entries were made. As might be expected the guilds suffered financially. The growth in numbers of large-scale traders with many assistants under them inevitably had some effect on the authority of the guilds, as they found it increasingly difficult to keep strangers out and to prevent infringements on their own particular craft. Yet because Chester had none of the mineral resources of Lancashire and Yorkshire, nor any of the other factors which promoted the Industrial Revolution, its guilds could still retain some influence over trade in the city until a late date. What did keep them alive, more than anything else, was Owen Jones' charity. This was a bequest left in 1658 by a butcher who desired that the income from his property at Minera in Denbighshire should be given to each company in turn, so that each company received it once every twenty four years. In 1709 lead was discovered on this land and the royalties derived from the mines which were then worked, gave the guilds an enormous sum of money, much of which was invested in property or in other schemes such as the Chester-Middlewich Canal. The share each company received when its turn came round was therefore very considerable and though it was intended that only the poorer brethren should benefit, every member was given an equal portion. The tendency as a consequence was to restrict membership of companies by raising to extreme limits the admission price for new members. This led to a great decline in the guilds lasting from about 1780 to 1830. At this later date there was a slow revival and one sees them keeping up the old traditions of holding annual meetings and by 1870, with the reorganisation of Owen Jones' charity, its income was used to provide scholarships, old age pensions and sickness benefits. It is this which keeps the guilds alive today. Only four<sup>18</sup> of the original companies have ceased to exist but the books of the Drawers of Dee and the Butchers are still extant. The other two Companies were the Dyers and the Fish-mongers. If, however, the guilds are to survive some means of altering the term of apprenticeship must be found. It is the exception now to be admitted as an apprentice, from whence alone new blood can come. Most are admitted by birth, with the consequence that in no company, except the Goldsmiths, are there any practising members of the guild to which a man belongs. It is to be hoped that the City Corporation will, as in the past, come to the support of the guilds.

<sup>18</sup> Dyers, Fishmongers, Drawers of Dee and Butchers.

## SURVEY OF THE RECORDS OF THE CHESTER CITY GILDS MADE IN 1950-1951

Arrangements can be made for the inspection of the records in the majority of cases. Students should apply to the City Archivist at the Town Hall, Chester, or to Mr. J. Formstone of 10 White Friars, Chester for further information and for the addresses of the stewards of the companies concerned.

The companies are listed in their order of precedence.

## TANNERS COMPANY.

- 1646-1697 Account Book till 1660 with record of fines levied till 1697.  
 1661-1830 Account Book with rules and orders.  
 1697-1844 "Waste" book giving report of elections and fines levied.  
 1797 to date Minute Book with rules.  
 1701-1902 Admission forms.  
 1655-1753 18 Bonds to restrict strangers trading in skins in Chester.  
 1664-1717 Papers relating to lawsuits—mainly receipts.  
 1711-1717 Correspondence between the company and Chester's M.P.'s concerning the im-  
 1722 & 1769 position of a tax on leather and the prevention of the export of oak bark to Ireland.

## BREWERS COMPANY.

- 16th Sept. 1634 Royal Charter of incorporation.  
 1606-1638 Company Book with rules, oaths and accounts, also apprentice enrolments.  
 1725 to date Company Book.  
 1698-1869 Admission forms.  
 17th-19th Centuries Correspondence, petitions, indentures, etc.

## Other MS sources:—

- 9th March, 1606/7 Copy of Charter granted by Mayor and Citizens (in Harl. MS. 2054 and in Corporation Lease Book at Town Hall, Chester).

## BARBER-SURGEONS COMPANY.

- 1606-1698 Company Book of Barber-Surgeons, Wax and Tallowchandlers giving ordinances: list of members 1606-1649: Accounts 1649-1698: Apprentice enrolments 1608-1698.  
 1699-1777 Company Book giving accounts, minutes, copies of charters, apprentice enrolments and membership admissions.  
 1778-1842 Company Book giving accounts and minutes.  
 1842-1949 Company Book.  
 1706-1938 Stamped admission slips.

Publication: Barber-Surgeons Company by Frank Simpson in *Journal of Chester Archaeological Society* vol. 18.

## MERCHANT DRAPERS COMPANY.

- 1637-1877 Company Book of Merchant Drapers and Hosiers giving ordinances: minutes 1635-1658: Accounts 1650-1819.  
 1685-1935 Company Book giving annual elections and stamped admission forms (stuck in)—condition poor.

## Other MS. sources:—

- Undated Copy of Charter by Elizabeth in Harl. MS., 1996, British Museum.  
 17th Feb., 1604/5 Copy of Royal Charter in Harl. MS. 2054.

**CAPPERS, PINNERS, WIREDRAWERS AND LINENDRAPERS COMPANY.**

- 1587-1607 Order Book giving rules, oaths and lists of officers written in early 17th century.  
 1607-1675 Order Book with lists of officers, and membership admissions 1607-1943, and apprentice enrolments, 1620-1756.  
 1696 to date Order and Minute Book.  
 1706-1788 Notebook of meetings and election results.  
 1680-1733 Account Book.  
 1849 to date Account Book. At beginning is subscription list for lawsuit against Mercers in 1671 and at reverse end is annual membership lists 1680 to date.  
 17th century Copy by Randle Holme of Linendrapers Charter of 1552 and the order of Assembly granting the severance of the Bricklayers and Linendrapers in 1679.

Other MS. sources:—

4th Oct., 1552 Copy of Charter granted by Mayor in Harl. MS. 1996.

**BRICKLAYERS COMPANY.**

- 1683-1895 Company Book giving ordinances and accounts: apprentice enrolments at end.  
 1895-1950 Company Book of Bricklayers.

Publication: Bricklayers Company by Frank Simpson in *Journal of Chester Archæological Society*, vol. 22.

**WRIGHTS AND SLATERS COMPANY.**

- 1721 to date Book of ordinances and minutes of Carpenters, Slaters and Sawyers.  
 1680-1727 Admission Register—Slips removed.  
 1721-1949 Admission Register.

Other MS. sources:—

Copy of charter granted by the Mayor in 1587 in Harl. MS. 2054.

**JOINERS, CARVERS AND TURNERS COMPANY.**

- 1576-1756 Company Book giving oaths, rules, minutes, accounts, fines and apprentice enrolments.  
 1615-1726 Minute Book.  
 1728-1860 Account Book.  
 1860 to date Minute Book.  
 Undated 17th century copy of Charter granted by Henry Hardware, Mayor of Chester 1559.  
 17th century Miscellaneous orders and petitions.  
 1676-1742 Bonds on admission to obey rules.  
 1707-1796 Admission forms.

**PAINTERS, GLAZIERS, EMBROIDERERS AND STATIONERS COMPANY.**

- 1567-1619 Account Book of Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers with rules and apprentice enrolments.  
 1620-1706 Account Book with apprentice enrolments: company's proposals concerning Owen Jones' charity in 1803; ordinances on parchment and badges of four crafts in colours.  
 1700-1906 Account and Minute Book—pages added from 1888-1906. Admission forms 1698-1722 at end.  
 1907 to date Minute Book.  
 1694-?1802 Minute Book with stamped admission forms some of which are pasted over the minutes.

## In the Strong Room of the Town Hall—

- 1725-1747 Attendance Register.  
1748-1761 Attendance Register.

## In the Chester Archæological Society Library, Public Library, Chester—

- 1624-1651 "Waste Book" giving rough notes of elections and fines levied at meetings.

## Other MS. sources:—

- Copy of charter by Mayor of 1536 in Harl. MS. 2054. Copy of confirmatory charter by Charles II in 1661 in Harl. MS. 2054.

Publication: Expenditure on miracle play from 16th century Accounts of Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers Company by J. C. Bridge in Journal of Chester Archæological Society, vol. 20.

## GOLDSMITHS COMPANY.

- 1573-1702 Book of rules and orders of Goldsmiths and Watchmakers: includes election of officers, admissions.  
1723-1725 Book of Orders.  
1703-1803 Book of Orders.  
1808-1882 Account Book.  
1663-1803 Stamp Book giving touchmarks impressed on metal plates attached to parchment leaves.  
1863-1877 Stamp Book—similar to above.  
1880-1885

## SMITHS, CUTLERS AND PLUMBERS COMPANY.

- 1637-1902 Account Book of Smiths, Cutlers and Plumbers: includes ordinances and apprentice enrolments of 17th century.  
1679-1708 Minute Book binding lost.  
1757 to date Minute Book: gives lists of members and admissions.  
1653-1678 Book of fines for lateness, absence, etc.  
1755-1949 Stamped Admission forms—bound.  
1795 Book of orders—copied in 1795.  
1936 Book of orders—copied in 1936.

## Other MS. sources:—

- 1554-1578 Copy of accounts in Harl. MS. 2054.

Publication: Smiths, Cutlers and Plumbers Company by Frank Simpson in Journal of Chester Archæological Society, vol. 20.

## BUTCHERS COMPANY.

- 1656-1812 Account and Fines Book of Butchers Company with ordinances retrospective to 1571.  
1812-1937 Account Book.  
1720-1812 Book of Orders.  
1712-1919 58 Admission slips of Butchers Company—loose.

## WET AND DRY GLOVERS COMPANY.

- 1630-1948 Company Book of Wet and Dry Glovers Company giving ordinances of company: accounts of 1630-1792: minutes 1806-1948: admissions of new members 1630-1799: enrolments of apprentice indentures 1630-1720.

## CORDWAINERS AND SHOEMAKERS COMPANY.

- 6th May, 1370 Charter of Black Prince to Tawyers and Shoemakers allowing them to tan leather on payment of 6s. 8d. a year to Prince—Has good seal.
- 26th Aug., 1401 Precept that no one was to use trade of Skinners and Shoemakers without licence of company on fine of £10.
- 14th May, 1433 Precept to Mayor and Sheriffs of Chester to find and punish by fine all foreigners who used trade of skinner and shoemaker within the liberties of the City as this was not allowed.
- 3rd May, 1438 Precept that no skinner or shoemaker was to practice that trade in the City unless he were a member of the Company on pain of £10.
- 20th Jan., 1482/3 Precept by Prince Edward that no skinner or shoemaker was to practice that trade in the City without licence of the Company on pain of £10.
- 7th Oct., 1546 Order by Company of 13th Feb., 1544/5 confirmed by Mayor that no master was to take more than 4 journeymen and 2 apprentices on fine of £6 13s. 4d.
- 24th Oct., 1549 Royal Charter confirming Precept of 1433.
- 19th March, 1583 Copy of Assembly Order confirming order of Henry Gee that Shoemakers should present their gleaves before Saddlers on Shrove Tuesday.
- 2nd May, 1603 Confirmation by King of Edward VI's charter.
- 6th May, 1605 Lawsuit judgment given for Shoemakers against William Jones for using trade though not free—given at Exchequer of Westminster.
- 1603-1748 Order Book giving rules and copies of some of charters—in very bad repair.
- 1547-1598 Account Book with apprentice enrolments—cover taken from a Service Book.
- 1598-1615 Account Book with some orders at back.
- 1615-1661 Account Book with apprentice enrolments 1646-1666: minutes 1674-1677—unbound.
- 1661-1693 Account Book.
- 1721-1755 Account and Minute Book.
- 1755-1853 Account Book.
- 1892-1942 Minute Book.
- 1620-1625 "Waste" Book giving fines for misbehaviour, etc.—in 4 sections.
- 1639-1644 "Waste" Book.
- 1644-1678 "Waste" Book.
- 1679-1722 "Waste" and Minute Book.
- 1726-1748 Apprentice enrolment book.
- 1718-1942 Admission Register.
- 1829-1942 Stamped admission book.

## Other MS. sources:—

- 1609-1612 Six pages of apprentice enrolment book in Harl. MS. 1996.

## BAKERS COMPANY.

- 1813 to date Attendance Register with admissions and minutes till 1945.
- 1945 to date Minute Book.
- 1831 to date Account Book.
- 1735-1831 Admission book—file of stamped forms.
- 1841-1949 Admission book—file of stamped forms.
- 1629-1773 8 papers including bonds, letters and petitions concerning encroachment on trade.

## Other MS. sources:—

- 1462 Copy of charter granted by City in Harl. MS. 2054.
- 18th Dec., 1495 Copy of Charter of confirmation granted by Prince Arthur in Harl. MS. 2054.
- 5th July, 1552 Copy of Charter of confirmation granted by Edward VI in Harl. MS. 2054.

## COOPERS COMPANY.

- 20th April, 1422 Judgment issued from Portmote Court of Chester severing Bowyers, Fletchers, Coopers, Stringers and Hoopers from Ironmongers and Carpenters.  
Charter granted by City.
- 12th March, 1468 Charter granted by City.
- 2nd Feb., 1511/2 Agreement to have seven years apprenticeship.
- 1568-1777 Order Book.
- 1616-1650 Account Book with register of admissions 1619-82.
- 1651-1696/7 Account Book.
- 1697-1777 Account Book.
- 1687-1728 "Waste" Book reporting elections and fines.
- 1749-1950 Book of fines, with apprentice enrolments. Minute Book from 1909.
- 1749-1909 Minute Book.
- 1597-1776 Apprentice enrolment book containing copy of a mystery play.
- 1749-1948 Admission Register.
- 16th-17th centuries Papers and bonds of general interest.

## MERCERS, IRONMONGERS, GROCERS AND APOTHECARIES COMPANY.

- 20th Jan., 1604/5 Charter granted by Mayor and Citizens of Chester.
- 1606-1667 Account Book giving some orders and admissions to company.
- 1668-1763 Account and Minute Book with admission forms pasted in, 1732-1762.
- 1763-1923 Account and Minute Book with admission forms pasted in.
- 1924 to date Minute book with admission forms.
- 1885 to date Account Book.
- 1667-1753 Apprentice enrolment Book.
- 1694-1737 Stamped Admission Book.
- 28th March, 1634 Order of Assembly giving award against Linendrapers.
- 10th Oct., 1634 Parchment copy of Assembly order made on 28th March against Linendrapers.
- 22nd Aug., 1654 Parchment copy of Assembly order of 15th Aug., ordering Linendrapers not to sell Mercers goods.
- 30th March, 1670 Account on parchment of Assembly orders in favour of Mercers from 1610-1623.
- 1614 Deposition in suit: Aldersey v. Mercers Company.
- 1614 Depositions taken before the Mayor in suit between Thomas Aldersey and Mercers Company.
- 1668 Two files of depositions in suit: Radford v. Mercers Company.
- 1600-1750 Ten packets of miscellaneous letters, petitions, law papers, receipts, etc.

## INNKEEPERS COMPANY.

- 10th June, 1583 Charter granted by Mayor and Citizens.
- 20th Jan., 1591/2 Charter of confirmation by Queen to Innkeepers, Victuallers and Cooks.
- 1571-1902 Company Book containing admissions 1571-1682, list of aldermen and stewards 1582-1681, rules and oaths to which every member signed his name 1725-1902: Apprentice enrolments 1654-1729.
- 1583-1602 Account Book.
- 1670-1709 Account Book. 1709-1824 Account Book.
- 1843-1950 Account Book with orders 1725-1805
- 1673-1729 Minute Book.



- 1812-date Minute Book.  
 1709-1939 Admission Forms—loose.  
 29th March, Order by Exchequer Court of Chester confirming sole rights of trading to inn-keepers and restraining Charles Gerrard from keeping the Blue Anchor as he was not a member of the Company.  
 1710  
 1757 Agreement to permit the Mayor and Sheriffs of Chester to lease the Minera mines for 31 years to Thomas Slaughter, Philip Fernyhough and Richard Richardson.

## SKINNERS AND FELTMAKERS COMPANY.

- 1863 Rules.  
 1714-1932 Company Book giving orders and accounts.  
 1935 to date Minute Book.  
 1698-1920 Stamped admission forms—bound.  
 1927 to date Stamped admission forms.

Publication: Skinners and Feltmakers Company by Frank Simpson in Chester Archaeological Society's Journal, vol. 21.

## SADDLERS AND CURRIERS COMPANY.

- 1640-1950 Company Book of Saddlers and Curriers giving ordinances 1640-1772: Accounts and Minutes 1747-1950: fees for employment of journeymen 1678-1683.  
 1719-1948 Admission register.  
 1721-1864 Stamped admission forms—loose.  
 1864-1948 Stamped admission forms and correspondence in file.

## Other MS. sources:—

- 8th March, Enrolment of charter granted by Edward IV in Palatine of Chester: Enrolments  
 1471/2 11-12 Edward IV (Chester 2.144.m7.), Public Record office.  
 Oct., 1639 Copy of charter granted by Mayor in Corporation Lease Book at the Town Hall, Chester.

## MERCHANT TAILORS COMPANY.

- 1698-1860 Account and Minute Book.  
 1741-1728 Minute Book.  
 1860 to date Minute Book.  
 1688-1754 Apprentice enrolment book.  
 1738-1842 Apprentice enrolment book with oaths and rules at end.  
 1768-1945 Stamped admission forms—in six groups stitched together.

## Other MS. sources:—

- 13th June, 1491 Copy of charter by Henry VII in R. H. Morris, "Chester," p.412.  
 1563 Charter of Elizabeth enrolled in Palatinate of Chester: Enrolments, 4-5 Eliz. [Chester 2.224.], Public Record Office.

## MASONS COMPANY.

- 1739-1948 Minute Book of Clothworkers and Masons Company. Rules made 1845 on printed sheet at end.  
 Stamped admission forms of new members 1738-1948—stuck in.  
 1720 Copy of Lease by Company to George Scott of fulling mills in Chester for 21 years.

## WEAVERS COMPANY.

- 1697-1817      Company Book giving rules, accounts, apprentice enrolments and lists of journeymen.  
1818-1941      Minute Book with stamped admission forms.

In Public Library, Chester.

10th June, 1583      Charter granted by Mayor and Citizens of Chester.

## DRAWERS OF DEE COMPANY.

- 1572-1712      Company Book giving rules and oaths, accounts and admissions.

## OTHER MATERIAL.

18th century banners of the following companies are in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester:—

The Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers; Smiths, Cutlers and Plumbers, (pl. IIIb);  
Skinners and Feltmakers; Merchant Taylors and the Weavers; together with a wooden box  
of "The Company of Painters, etc."