

THE IRONMONGERS' COMPANY, ITS HALL, RECORDS, PLATE, LIBRARY, ETC.

*Address at a Meeting of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, held at
Ironmongers' Hall, Tuesday, January 12th, 1904.*

BY

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Master 1890, and Hon. Librarian of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers.

THIS Ironmongers' Hall in which we are now assembled is believed to be at least the third hall which has stood on this site. The history of our first hall or halls is exceedingly obscure. All we know for certain is that the site was acquired for the Company in 1457, Henry VI's reign, but whether our brethren built a new hall at that time or whether they utilized some existing structure which is supposed may have been on the site, or whether even prior to this time they had a hall, we do not know. In the absence of any information to the contrary, we will suppose that our first hall came into being somewhere about 1457, in Henry VI's reign. The second hall dates from 1587, reign of Queen Elizabeth. Of neither of these halls have we any drawings or plans, but we may reasonably suppose they would have been timber structures.

Our second hall witnessed two great national calamities, the Great Plague of 1664-5, and the Great Fire of 1666. Our hall, from which the valuables had previously been removed, was not burned down, but for three days it was in grave peril, and was doubtless much scorched, as considerable repairs were executed after the fire. This second hall lasted

till about 1745, when the third hall, this present building, was taken in hand, George II's reign. This present hall is a quadrangular, brick built, stone fronted building, in what is generally termed the Palladian style, and possesses some very good features. The vestibule with its groined ceiling and columns is much admired, but the centre of attraction is this banqueting room in which we are now assembled. Observe the beautiful ceiling, the walls hung with the portraits of many of our distinguished past members, the dado filled with the arms of our past masters, as far as we have been able to secure them, the earliest dating from 1351, and the rich warm tone and colouring which pervades every part, all which combine to make a most beautiful room, and one which for general pleasing effect is not surpassed in this City of London.

Permit me now to call your attention to some of our past worthies whose portraits are before us. The large picture on the left is that of Lord Viscount Exmouth, who received honorary membership for his brilliant victory at Algiers in 1816, when he broke the power of Moslem slavery. The painting is by Sir William Beechey. The next picture is Lord Viscount Hood, who received honorary membership for brilliant services in 1782. The painting is by Gainsborough.

The next picture by the doorway is our great benefactor Thomas Betton, whose memory we Ironmongers delight to honour; his magnificent charities have brought untold benefits to hundreds of Church schools for long years past. The painting is by Philip Mercier. The large picture on the other side of the doorway is Sir Robert Geffery, a Lord Mayor of

London, twice master of this Company, and a great benefactor. He left property to this Company to build and endow almshouses, which resulted in the erection of those handsome almshouses, in the Kingsland Road, fourteen houses and a chapel, to which has been added of late years the Victoria room, built by the Company from its corporate funds in memory of our late good Queen, and also for the comfort and enjoyment of the pensioners. Sir Robert Geffery is believed to have been of Cornish extraction, as he left gifts to that county, and also a considerable sum to Landrake in Cornwall for the promotion of religious education, which resulted in the formation of a good school, now in a flourishing condition and annually visited and inspected by members of this Company. He died in 1703, at the ripe age of 91, and was buried in the church of St. Dionis Backchurch, Fenchurch Street; when that church was pulled down, his remains, with those of his wife, were removed to the little burying ground attached to the Company's almshouses in the Kingsland Road, where also, close by, is the tomb of our other great benefactor, Thomas Betton, who was buried there in 1724 in accordance with his own will. With reference to this church of St. Dionis, it may be added that it was built by Wren on the foundations of the previous church, destroyed in the great fire. It was an interesting building with a good stone tower, and its unfortunate removal robbed us of another of London's historic landmarks.

The last picture to which I will refer is that over the gallery, Izaak Walton, the author of that charming English classic "The Compleat Angler." It is a copy of Houseman's celebrated picture in the National

Gallery. It is pleasant to remember that the gentle fisherman was a member of this ancient guild. On the front of the gallery there are three coats of arms, which are those of the Blacksmiths, the Founders; they and the Tinsplate Workers all representing allied trades and were placed there by those Companies at their particular request to signify their appreciation of benefits received from this Company. We have on several occasions had the pleasure of lending some portion of our hall to the Blacksmiths and Founders for exhibitions of their crafts, and to the Tinsplate Workers for their annual festival.

The selection of plate contains little that is ancient, and that for reasons probably well known. Our monarchs in earlier times made such frequent requisitions on the Companies, that it was often necessary to sell or pawn the plate, and hence it is that, with some few exceptions, the London Livery Companies possess very little ancient plate. We have, however, two mazer bowls of the 15th century, a pair of parcel-gilt silver salts, hour glass pattern, of the 16th century, and a cocoanut cup or hanap, also of the 16th century. The monteith and two pilgrims bottles were presented by the Corporation of London, and the Livery Companies of Brewers, Scriveners, Pewterers, Barbers, and Carpenters associated with us in the management of our Irish estates, in recognition of the kindness, courtesy and hospitality extended to them at this hall during many years. The four handsome loving cups with baluster stems are known as the Humfreys, the Lane, the Thorold, and the Westwood Cups, those being the names of their respective donors. The Humfreys cup is the oldest.

Sir William Humfrey was master in 1705. A pair of silver candlesticks with branches was presented by Alderman John Shakespear, master in 1769-70, supposed to be a connection of the immortal bard, his arms being identically the same. The carved oak snuff box bears on the lid in silver gilt the arms and crest of the Company, which is the ancient badge formerly worn by the Company's bargemaster. Three rosewater dishes and two ewers of 1784 are handsome and worthy of note, also the silver gilt ewer presented by Frederick William Manson, master in 1902-3, from whom we also received two other pieces of plate, and a piece of old Nuremberg iron-work.

The books displayed are a selection from the Company's library. Particular attention is called to the following: "The Manuscript History of the Ironmongers' Company," by John Nicholl, in six volumes royal folio, the same history as printed and circulated among the members; the "Illustrated Catalogue of the Exhibits of Antiquities and Works of Art held at Ironmongers' Hall in 1861," said to have been one of the finest ever held in London, and the precursor of the 1862 loan collection at South Kensington. The exhibition was visited by Prince Albert and other persons of eminence, and this splendid work was compiled by the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, and although that Society's invaluable services were duly acknowledged at that time, still it is a source of much pleasure again to recall these matters, as probably there are not many of the Archaeologists or Ironmongers left to us who took part in those

proceedings. It is some satisfaction to know that those priceless labours will never be lost, they are enshrined in this magnificent work, which will be handed down to all time as a monument of the Society's achievements in the past.

"The Compleat Angler," by Izaak Walton, in two volumes, edition de luxe. "Drawings of Iron Work," by John Tijou, 1693, and by Fordrin, 1723. "Remarks on Timber Houses," by the late Charles Baily, Master in 1874, and uncle of our present esteemed Master. "Annals of St. Olave's, Hart Street," by the late Rector, Dr. Povah, an interesting work, and nicely illustrated. St. Olave's is now the Company's parish church; formerly it was All Hallows Staining, of which only the tower standing in an enclosed graveyard is now left: the body of the church became ruinous and was taken down, and in 1870 the parish was annexed to St. Olave's, which then became the Company's parish. On one day in the year this Company makes a formal visit to its parish church, *i.e.*, on Master's Day, or Confirmation Day, as it is otherwise called, being the day on which the newly elected master and wardens are confirmed in their offices. Immediately after the business of the court, the Company proceeds to its parish church for service and a sermon by the chaplain, and although that service may possibly be but a faint reflection of the more stately services which in earlier times we have reason to believe our brethren took part in, still it enables the Company to preserve and keep alive a most laudable custom, which it is hoped will never be allowed to fall into abeyance.

The following selection from the Company's old office books will be found of interest :

Book of Orders, 1498.

Presentment Book, 1515; the same of 1680 (still in use).

Court Minute Book, 1555.

Cash Book, 1593.

Quarterage Book, 1602.

Irish Estate Minute Book, 1609.

Ancient Orders of the Yeomanry, 1590.

And finally your attention is called to the

Company's first Charter of Edward IV, 1463.

Charter of Confirmation by Philip and Mary, 1558

Grant of Arms, Henry VI, 1455.
