

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF FISHMONGERS.

BY

J. WRENCH TOWSE, Esq.,
CLERK TO THE COMPANY.

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THE origin of the Fishmongers' Company is lost in remote antiquity: it is unquestionable that it existed prior to the reign of Henry II, and originated in an association or brotherhood of persons combined together and contributing to a common fund, and having for their objects mutual protection, especially in their trade as fishmongers, the enjoyment of social intercourse, and the making provision for indigent members, their widows and children.

At first there were two Companies of Fishmongers, viz., the Stock-fishmongers and Salt-fishmongers, each bearing different coats-of-arms; but in the twenty-eighth year of King Henry VIII (1536) the Companies were united.

The Fishmongers' Company lost the greater part of its earliest records, books and muniments in the great Fire of London; and the earliest existing record in the possession of the Company is a Court book dating from 1590.

In 1298 the Company evinced their great wealth by meeting King Edward I on his return from Scotland after the defeat of Wallace at Falkirk. Maitland thus graphically describes the ovation given to the King:—

“The Citizens made such extraordinary rejoicings

that the like had not been seen in this city on such or any other occasion: for not only every private citizen did exert himself in an uncommon manner to demonstrate his joy in honour of the said victory, but likewise the several corporations of the City vied to excel in magnificence: every Company having a pageant, by which were represented their several mysteries: but that of the fraternity of Fishmongers for pomp and grandeur far excelled the rest, before which in a solemn procession were carried four stately gilt sturgeons on horseback, then four large and beautiful silvered salmon on as many horses, followed by forty Knights richly accoutred and armed cap-à-pie, accompanied by Saint Magnus on Horseback (because of the Festival of that Saint), attended with a thousand Horsemen finely mounted."

In the reign of Edward III. it appears the Companies were not always peaceably inclined, for we are told by John Stow that in 1340 "two more Guilds fell to quarrelling." This time it was the Pelterers (furriers) and Fishmongers, who seemed to have tanned each other's hides with considerable zeal. It came at last to this, that the portly Mayor and Sheriffs had to venture out among the sword blades, cudgels, and whistling volleys of stones, but at first with little avail, for the combatants were too hot. They soon arrested some scaly and fluffy misdoers, it is true; and most audacious of all, one Thomas, son of John Hausard, fishmonger, with sword drawn, terrible to relate, seized the Mayor by his august throat, and tried to lop him in the neck; and one brawny rascal, John le Brewere, a porter, desperately wounded one of the City Sergeants: so that here, as the Fishmongers would have observed,

“there was a pretty kettle of Fish.” For striking a mayor blood for blood was the only expiation, and Thomas and John were at once tried at the Guildhall, found guilty on their own confession, and beheaded in Chepe, upon hearing which Edward III wrote to the Mayor and complimented him upon his display of energy on this occasion.

The Fishmongers gave a proof again of their relative importance amongst the Companies in 1363, when their present of money to Edward III, towards carrying on his French wars, amounted to £40, which was only one pound less than the Mercers, who were and are the highest Company. In a list in 50 Ed. III of the numbers sent to Common Council by the Companies, the Fishmongers rank fourth, as at present.

The reign of Richard I was productive of considerable trouble to the Company. In 1380, during the Mayoralty of John de Northampton, an Act of Parliament was obtained for laying open the trade to all persons in amity with the King, and the Mayor compelled them to admit that their occupation was no craft, and was therefore unworthy to be reckoned among the mysteries.

In 1382 Parliament enacted that in future “No fishmonger should be admitted Mayor of this City,” the prohibition, however, according to accounts given by Stow and Sir Robert Cotton, was removed the following year.

Owing to frequent squabbles, which, strange to relate, were carried to the House of Peers, it was enacted in 7th Richard II that the Company and other victuallers should be under the rule of the Mayor and Aldermen; and that all affairs belonging to the Fish-

mongers' Company should be decided in the Mayor's Court, conformably to the Charter granted to them.

Although the two Companies had originally each a Hall, after the union by Henry VI the fishmongers and stock-fishmongers in 19 Henry VII adopted the Lord Fanhope's house in Thames Street as the sole meeting-place of the united Companies.

The public records, and those of the Company, trace the descent of the site of Fishmongers' Hall, as divided into separate tenements, from John Lovekyn to the final union of the fishmongers and stock-fishmongers in 28 Henry VIII, and thence downwards from its destruction in the Fire of London and its rebuilding after that event, until it was succeeded by the present new Hall, a period altogether of nearly 500 years.

The part of Thames Street containing the two Halls, termed in the old Charters Stock-fishmongers' Row, as noticed by Stow and Herbert, stood at the south-east end of Upper Thames Street, between what was called the Water Gate and Old Swan Lane, and lay in three parishes. It was parted into six great slips of ground by five avenues or stairs to the Thames, the names of which in the city plan or "Exact Surveigh of the Ruins of London after the Fire of 1666," were—Water Gate, Churchyard Alley, Fleur de Luce Alley, Black Raven Alley, and Ebgate Lane or Old Swan (the last two were divided after the Fire of London by a new alley called Wheatsheaf Alley). The Water Gate was originally called Oyster Gate, and also Oyster Hill, from its being the ancient landing-place for oysters; and was afterwards named Water Gate, Water Lane, and the Gully Hole, from its becoming the site

of the Water Works, to which it led till the alterations for the present bridge. Churchyard Alley is called, as early as 42 Edward III, "Steven's Lane," otherwise Church-haw Lane; Red Cross Alley was a small passage that partially divided one of the slips into two and does not appear to have been a thoroughfare; Fleur de Luce Alley was so named of the Fleur de Luce Tavern, which adjoined it westwards; Wheatsheaf Alley was founded on the site of the Wheatsheaf public-house, anciently "Whiteley's Rents."

Lovekyn has the credit of having rebuilt the Church of St. Michael, Crooked Lane, and of establishing the Stockfish Market, in his street, both which he effected on his removing from Stocks Market, when the alliance of the two Companies was first formed in the reign of Edward III, at which time, himself becoming the owner of the estates on it which have been mentioned, he was followed by numbers of his brother stockfishmongers, who took stations at the same spot, and whose united residence had, before the 22 Richard II, given to the place its name of Stockfishmonger Row.

Before Lovekyn's removal hither there were few buildings on the spot, the whole being chiefly an open strand on the river's bank, on which at first the stockfishmongers had probably only such slatts and standings as at Stocks Market, which they had left, or the old Fish Market. On their being allowed, by the Charter 22 Richard II, to have a Hall here—which was afterwards built on the site of Lovekyn's second tenement at Oyster Hill, above mentioned—their slatts arose to shops, and afterwards to toll houses, as Stow states them to have done at the latter market.

The effects of the Fire of London on Fishmongers' Hall are described in several contemporaneous works. Thames Street, in which it stood, is stated to have been at that period "the lodge of all combustibles, oyl, hemp, flax, pitch, tar, cordage, hops, wines, brandies, and other materials favourable to fire; all heavy goods being warehoused there near the water side, and all the wharfs for coal, timber, wood, etc., being in a line common with it, unto Fish Street Hill." And Dryden (*Annus Mirabilis*) in stating the course of the fire, after it had crossed the bridge foot from St. Magnus, where it began—and where it made its earliest attack on Upper Thames Street—describes it, in extending along the Thames bank, when Fishmongers' Hall must have been the first great building consumed, as forming a key of fire:—

" A key of fire ran along the shore;
And frighten'd all the river with a blaze."

Almost the entire shell of the Hall next the river escaped, but the Hall, properly so called, was wholly destroyed.

The new Hall was rebuilt and completely finished in June, 1671. Mr. Jarman was the architect, as he was also of Drapers' Hall. This in part was again burnt, and owing to the necessity of making room for the present London Bridge, it was pulled down, forty feet of its late site was sold to the Corporation, and the present Hall, the architect of which was Mr. Roberts, was built in 1832.

The first extant Charter is in Norman French, dated 10th July, 1364 (37 Edward III); it recites that from ancient times, whereof memory runs not, it was a custom that no fish should be sold in the City of London

except by fishmongers, except stock fish, which belongs to the Mistery of stock-fishmongers (subsequently incorporated with the fishmongers); and further recites that the Mistery of fishmongers had grants from the King's progenitors in ancient times, that the fishmongers should choose yearly certain persons of the Mistery to well and lawfully rule the same. This Charter was confirmed by a proclamation of the following year, 12th July, 1365, which granted further power and privileges to the Mistery of fishmongers of the City of London.

By a further mandate, dated 24th July, 1365, the King granted to the fishmongers of the said city and of the liberty of the halmote of the same Mistery, that no person, stranger or inhabitant should in any manner occupy the Mistery of fishmongers in the said City, or intermeddle therewith, unless he were of the same Mistery; and that the fishmongers of the same liberty should be able in every year to elect four persons, to be sworn, to oversee the buying and selling of fish in the said City, and well and faithfully to rule the said Mistery "for the common commodity of our people."

In the twenty-second year of Richard II, 9th May, 1399, a Charter was granted, which is no longer extant, but which is fully set out in a Charter of confirmation granted in the sixth year of King Henry VI, 10th July, 1427, whereby the King again granted to the fishmongers of the City of London and their successors powers for the regulation of the trade in fish, and granted that they might choose among them every year six persons of their own craft to rule and govern the said craft.

In the Charter of 11 Henry VI, dated 8th February,

1433, the King granted to our well-beloved liegemen of the Mistery of fishmongers that they should be one body perpetual with a common seal.

The powers granted by this Charter of Henry VI were confirmed by Charter of Henry VII (1508), who then also granted to the Stock-fishmongers a separate Charter, which conferred upon them power "that the same Wardens and Commonalty and their successors for ever may be able to purchase, receive, grant, alienate, and demise lands and tenements."

The Stock-fishmongers were subsequently, in 1537, incorporated with the Fishmongers' Company as one Company, and in the same year a Charter was granted by King Henry VIII confirming such incorporation, and providing that their Hall shall be but one, in the house given them by Sir John Cornwall and Lord Fanhope in the reign of King Henry VI. It embodies the substance of certain articles of union agreed on by the two Companies as early as 1513, and which were acted on and finally ratified by the joint Company, executing an Indenture on 31st March, 1536.

After confirmations of the existing Charters by Edward VI, Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth, a further Charter was granted to the Company by King James I., in the second year of his reign, under date of 30th August, 1604, which re-incorporated the Company with its present governing body of six Wardens and twenty-eight assistants, in whom it vested powers to make laws for the good government of the Wardens and Commonalty of the Mistery and of all freemen and other persons in London and Southwark, the suburbs, liberties and precincts thereof, exercising the Mistery, their servants, apprentices, things and merchandise.

The Fishmongers have their regular code of ordinances on record at the Guildhall of as early a date as the 9th and 35th Edward III and 4th Henry VI, besides many others to which it is hardly necessary here to refer.

The ordinances as to the sale of fish enjoin that no person shall buy salt fish or salt salmon but by the appointment of the Wardens, except white and red herring, "red sprot salt ellys and dry fish"; that no salt fish shall be sold *watered*, as salmon, salt eels, stock fish, or sturgeon, nor the same be put to sale unless in the three markets assigned; that no fish of any "foren" (non-freeman) shall be "colored"; that no fishmonger of the craft shall suffer his wife or servant to stand in the market to sell fish, unless in his absence; nor suffer any apprentice servant of the craft, between eight o'clock in the morning and eight o'clock at night, to stand in the market "in his jacket, doublet, or waistcoat, without a gown"; nor to wear "such shop-gowns out of the market-places"; and that none shall cast "owte in sweet (unsweet) water into the street, except at proper hours"; that no man of the craft shall go to Berwick, Scarborough, or any other place north from London, to buy any salt fish or salt salmon without first acquainting the Wardens, in order that such Wardens may give him instructions to buy the same "according to the good ordinances therefore ordained," and that the same may be brought sweet, "as it ought to be, for the well of the King's subjects"; and that no Scarborough fish shall be brought but what is made "by besom of xxvi. inches, and is salt and sweet"; and also it shall be salted with bay salt, and not *white salt*, on pain to forfeit 6s. 8d. the pound for such fish;

that fish sold at Winchelsea and Hastings shall not be bought by any attorney or agent who is not duly allowed by the Wardens.

That no fish shall be made (cured) or bought after it is shipped; that no man of the craft shall buy any salt salmon at Berwick or elsewhere, where it is to be sold, salted and packed, unless the barrel or barrels are the full assize of forty-three gallons, and the salmon truly packed according to the Act of Parliament, 12th Henry VII; that no member cast another out of his house, shop, or cellar without his own free will; that no Sunday markets shall be openly kept in Lenten season, or fish exposed for sale at any wharf, cellar, or open door or window ("pike at the water side, in tanks or in gardens, where they be usually fed and kept only excepted"); and that no barrel-fish or herrings shall be sold or packed till the barrel is gauged by the changer or officer appointed.

The trade search was to be made by the Wardens and the Mayor's officers, who, the ordinances enjoin, shall quarterly or oftener, as need shall require, perambulate the whole city and suburb for corrupt or unseasonable fish; and make a plain showing of, and presentment respecting, unto the Mayor for the time being, in order that due punishment and correction may be administered, according to the laws and customs of the City.

The points as to the Company's domestic management ordain, as respects apprenticeships, that any apprentice who shall run away from his master shall be discharged the craft, unless he shall bring security for his good behaviour; that the years or remaining terms of apprenticeship shall not be sold, under forfeit

of forty shillings; that "vicious and unrul'd apprentices, and using dice, cards, or any such games, or haunting or resorting to taverns, or for other misbehaving," shall be punishable by the Wardens according to the circumstances of the case; that no man shall take an apprentice without leave of the Wardens, and if he have leave, shall pay six shillings and eightpence "to the box"; that no man shall take or keep another man's servant without the express consent of the master of such servant.

Freemen were first to be sworn at the Hall of the Craft before they were made free at Guildhall. If they refused to take the clothing (livery) when chosen, they were subjected to a penalty of forty shillings.

Persons trying to get translated to another craft without leave were finable according to circumstances. Any man of the Craft brawling or fighting openly in the street with any other of the Craft, in presence of the Wardens, was to forfeit six shillings and eightpence. Any member of the craft neglecting, when warned, to come to the Hall of the Craft, or into the market or street, or to a dirge, anniversary, or masse burying of any person, or "to do a procession with the more of the Craft, or the Maire of the said City, without reasonable cause," was to be fined at the discretion of the Wardens; and when summoned or warned, if he neglect to wait upon the Mayor and Sheriffs to Westminster, by land or by water, without licence of the Wardens, he was to pay twelve pence to the box.

"Misbehaviour to the Wardens by reviling or otherwise," was reasonably finable at such Wardens' discretion; and the party was to make "convenient submission, as by the Wardens and assistants of the Craft

should be thought reasonable and convenient." Persons of the Craft chosen "to ryde to receive the King, Queene, Prynce, or any other estate at the King's commandment," and neglecting to attend, were to forfeit twenty pence to the box. Members falsely withdrawing themselves from their creditors, or going into sanctuary, or keeping house, for debt, are declared to become thereby ineligible to be called to any Court, Council, or Assembly, unless they can find security for their paying and better conduct in future. Quarterage was to be "gadderyd of every persone fre of the Craft, towards the reliefe and sustentacon of the nedy people of the said craft decayed and fallen in poverté."

An *Inspeximus* of 55th George III, under date of 4th November, 1815, by writ of Privy Seal, exemplifies the Charter of James I, which is set out verbatim from the record preserved in the Rolls Chapel.

The earliest Parliamentary statute relative to fish is that of Edward I, which prohibits partnership in fish with foreigners who bring it in their ships, thereby to enhance the price, and ordains that none shall store it up in cellars, to retail afterwards at exorbitant rates; or buy before the King's purveyors have made choice; and that no fish, except salt fish, shall be kept in London beyond the second day, on pain of forfeiture of the fish and being fined at the King's pleasure. The City "Assize of a Fyscher," made in consequence of this ordinance, limits the profit of the London fishmongers to a penny in the shilling. It forbids forestalling and regrating the market, to prevent which none were to sell their fish secretly within-doors, but to "sel it in playne market-place." No fishmonger was to water

fish twice or sell what was bad. If he broke either of these regulations he was for the first offence to be amerced twelve pence, for the second twenty pence, and for the third to be "jugyd to a pair of stockys openly in the market-place." The statute of Westminster 13th Edward II, c. 17, prescribes peculiar regulations for the preserving of salmon in those English rivers which were the earliest frequented by that fish.

It appears by these statutes that there was at this early date a vast fishery on the Norfolk coast in general, as well for cod, ling, etc., as for herrings; and that the ports of Norfolk, such as Blakeney, Clay, Cromer, and others had many "doggers and lode-ships," and had long been very thriving towns; for it was ordained that the "lob, ling and cod" sold there should "be good and convenable, as in old time had been used."

When the Dutch entered with so much spirit and commercial zeal into this fishery, these towns fell into decay, and they are only now beginning to resume their original status.

The Act 6 Richard II, c. 11, 13, forbids all manner of hosts or victuallers in the City of London from forestalling fish and other victuals, and prohibits the fishmongers of London from buying from certain places mentioned any fish to sell again, except eels, lucies and pikes. The Act 22 Edward IV prescribes various regulations for the package of small fish.

The fairs of Stourbridge, St. Ives and Ely are stated in the Act 25 Henry VIII to be "the most notable faires within this realme, for pvysions of fysshe, and most of the rileff of the Kynge's subjectes."

In the reign of Elizabeth our home salted and cured

fish had acquired such a superiority over the foreign that the statute of the 22nd of her reign forbids the importation of cured fish, which, it stated, is found "farre inferiour to the fysshe taken by Englishmen in the island voyages."

The following is a short summary of the subjects to which some of the by-laws relate:—

For the prevention of enhancing the price of salt fish. Wardens to appoint freemen to buy same in counties of Kent, Essex, Suffolk, or Norfolk.

Punishment of a deceitful factor.

Forfeitures and fines for not dividing fish equally according to the shares of the respective buyers.

Punishment for putting unwholesome fish for sale.

Meter to take an oath.

No person to buy fish for forestalling.

Barrelled fish to be gauged.

Oasts and buyers of fish in Sussex and Kent to be appointed by the Wardens.

Oasts to make fish in due time, so that the rippyers may take up fish to the markets in convenient times.

The rippyer to bring a lotty containing the price of the fish that he may have carried from Rye, Winchelsea, etc.

Fresh salmon to be divided and prices to be set.

For prosecuting offenders.

For ruling disputes—Wardens to arbitrate before proceedings be taken in law.

The Company has always exercised the jurisdiction conferred upon it by its several Charters by the appointment of persons called "fishmeters," whose main duty it is to be in constant attendance at Billingsgate

Market—which was opened as a free market by Act of Parliament, 10th May, 1699—for the purpose of examining into the wholesomeness of the fish offered for sale there, with powers delegated to them by the Company to seize and condemn any fish which may be unsound.

At the present time the Company has in its employ five fishmeters, who make a daily return to the Company of the quantity of fish brought to the several markets in London, and a monthly return of the quantity of fish seized and condemned, of which there is scarcely any prime fish.

It may not be uninteresting to revert once more to the year 1274, when provisions, according to the accounts given by Strype and Stow, being very dear in London and without the least appearance for such dearth, the King, out of his great regard to the welfare of the citizens, commanded the Mayor and Sheriffs to regulate the prices of provisions to prevent his people being imposed upon by a few rapacious regraters. Wherefore the magistrates, in obedience to the Royal precept, and to obviate the like abuses for the future—which are chiefly occasioned by forestalling—ordained that no huckster of fowls, poulterer or huckster of fish should thereafter presume to buy any of the commodities he, she, or they dealt in without the City, nor to be concerned in partnership with any country dealer in those goods. And for effectually preventing monopolizing, it was also enacted that no person whatsoever shall presume to lay up provisions with a view to enhance the prices thereof. And for the more effectively obviating all such pernicious practices thenceforth, the following tables of prices

were published for the regulation of all dealers in the several sorts of provisions therein mentioned:—

THE FISHMONGERS' TABLE.—The best Plaise at 1d. $\frac{1}{2}$ q.; Soles, the dozen at 3d.; fresh Mulvel at 3d.; salt Mulvel at 3d.; Barkey at 4d.; Mullet at 2d.; Conger at 1s.; Turbet at 6d.; Dorac at 5d.; Bran, Sard and Betule at 3d.; *Mackarel in Lent* at 1d.; *Mackarel out of Lent* at $\frac{1}{2}$ q.; Gurnard at 1d.; fresh Merlins, four for 1d.; powder'd ditto, twelve for 1d.; pickled Herrings, twenty for 1d.; fresh Herrings before Michaelmas six for 1d., after Michaelmas twelve for 1d.; Thames or Severn Lamprey, 4d.; Buge-Stock-fish at 1d.; Mulvil Stock-fish, $\frac{3}{4}$ q.; Croplings, three at 1d.; fresh Oysters, a gallon for 2d.; fresh Salmon from Christmas to Easter at 5s.; ditto after Easter, 3s.; Sea Hog at 6s. 8d.; Eels or Stike at a quarter of a hundred, 2d.; Lampreys in winter, the hundred, 8d.; ditto at other times, the hundred at 6d.; Smelts, the hundred at 1d.; Roche, in summer, at 1d.; ditto at other times, $\frac{3}{2}$ q.; Lucy, 6s. 8d.; Lamprey at Nantes, at first, 1s. 4d.; ditto a month after at 8d.; Thames or Severn ditto towards Easter at 2d. ("The best" is specified in each case.)