

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE ARMOURERS' AND BRASIER'S COMPANY.

*Read to the London and Middlesex Archæological Society at Armourers' Hall,
March 25th, 1911.*

BY

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TIME will not permit of my doing more than give you in a short space something like a resumé of the History of the Armourers' Company with a few extracts from its records to show you the nature of the work it performed in by-gone days.

Stowe says: "The Society or Company of the Armourers have been a brotherhood of ancient continuance, and became incorporated in the beginning of the reigns of King Henry the Sixth, the King being pleased to stile himself a Brother of their Society."

I have quoted this passage from the "surveye" because I think it a fair example of the reliance to be placed upon Stowe's account of City matters.

It has been rather the fashion of late to disparage him as not being trustworthy. I for one do not feel inclined to join in the cry against the good old chronicler to whom we citizens are so much indebted.

Archæology as a science was not then known, and we cannot expect the same degree of accuracy in the chronicles of that time which we demand now from the historian and the antiquary; and while I have confidence in the correctness of his main facts, I am willing to admit that the same reliance cannot always be placed in the accuracy of his details.

In this instance he is correct in saying that the Company of Armourers was of ancient continuance (as I shall presently show) and that it was incorporated in the reign of King Henry the Sixth, but the thirty-first year of the reign can hardly be said to be the beginning of the reign, nor have I been able to find any solid foundation for the statement that King Henry the Sixth was himself a Brother of the Society, although such may doubtless have been the case, as it appears to have been handed down as a tradition amongst us.

In a report to the Court of Aldermen dated 20 Eliz. (1578) from two referees appointed to examine into variances between the Companies of Armourers and Blacksmiths as to the right of search of armour, guns, weapons, and edge tools, we find the following passage:—"The Armourers did shewe unto us that the Kinge Edward the Second his time the Lord Maior and his brethren did then grannte the search, unto the Armourers." From this statement, therefore, it is clear that the Company was in existence as an unincorporated, although licensed, fraternity before 1327, the end of Edward the Second's reign.

By Letters Patent under the Great Seal of England, bearing date at Westminster the 8th of May, 1453, in the thirty-first year of the reign of King Henry the Sixth, that King, as is recited in the Charter, did of his special grace and certain knowledge make, found, create, erect, and establish during all times thenceforth a certain fraternity or Guild of his liege subjects of the Mistery of the Armorers of his City of London, and of other Christians whomsoever who should be willing to be of the same fraternity or Guild, and did also grant to the brothers and sisters of the fraternity or guild afore-

said, so by the said King made, founded, created, erected, and established that that fraternity or guild, so by the said King made, founded, erected, and established, should for ever be called the Fraternity or Guild of St. George of the Men of the Mistery of the Armorers of his City of London. By Letters Patent under the Great Seal, dated at Westminster, the 29th of September, 1620, in the 17th of King James the First, that King confirmed the privileges of the Company and did ordain, constitute, and grant that from thenceforth all and all manner of brass and copper works and all and all manner of instruments called edged tools, and all and all manner of small guns and all other works that should thereafter be made and wrought by any person or persons being of the same Fraternity or Guild of the Armorers of the City of London, should be searched and approved by skilfull artificers of the said Fraternity or Guild of Armorers of London only, and not by any other person or persons whatsoever, which expert artificers should from time to time be elected and constituted by the Master, Wardens, and Assistants of the said Fraternity or Guild of Armorers, or by the major part of them for the time being, and that the said expert artificers so elected and constituted should be sworn before the Mayor for the City of London for the time being, well and faithfully to perform the said office in searching and approving the said works.

This charter was not only a most important confirmation of title, but contained also a complete code for the regulation of the craft. It was obtained at a very considerable cost of trouble and labour, the company joining in the general movement made by the City and the various Corporations of London, for barring them-

selves against all future vexatious adverse claims under any pretence. The company paid £100 at that time as their proportion of the contribution which the City was called upon to pay after vainly petitioning to be relieved from half that sum.

The gradual decline of the armourer's art caused by the improvements in firearms led the company no doubt to consider the policy of a fusion with the numerous workers in brass and copper, and accordingly we find them petitioning Queen Anne for a new charter which was granted to them in the seventh year of her reign, 1708.

By this charter, after reciting the two last mentioned charters, and that it had been humbly represented unto us by the petition of the Master and Wardens, Brethren and Sisters of the fraternity or Guild of St. George of the Men of the Mistery of Armourers of our City of London, on behalf of themselves, and of the new workers in copper and brass, wrought and hammered, in the City of London. That of late years many of the members of the said Corporation having employed themselves in working and making vessells and wares of copper and brass wrought with the hammer, they came to be commonly called brasiers, and that by virtue of the said Letters Patent of the said King James the First, the said Corporation was empowered to search all brass and copper works (made by any of the said Corporation) only and none other. That the said Corporation pursuant to the said Charters and Letters Patents have taken all possible care impartially to execute the powers thereby granted to them for the better regulating of their Corporation and for correcting, as much as in them lay, all frauds and deceits in the working and making of

all vessells and wares made of copper and brass wrought with the hammer which are now made and sold to our subjects by divers workmen and others within our said City. But for the want of more ample powers duely to search for the same, and to make by-laws and constitutions to bind the workers of such wares in our City of London and places adjacent, several frauds and deceits in the working goods and vessells made of the same metals are of late years very much increased, to the great abuse of such of our subjects as have occasion to buy the same.

And therefore the said petitioners have most humbly prayed us that the said Company of Armorers and all persons working and making vessells and wares of copper and brass wrought with the hammer within our City of London and eleven miles thereunto adjacent be incorporated together by such title of incorporation.

And it then proceeds " to grant, ordain, constitute, and declare that the said Master Wardens, Brethren and Sisters of the fraternity or Guild of St. George of the Men of the Mistery of Armorers of our City of London by whatsoever name or names they are or have been called or named, and all persons working and making, or who at any time or times hereafter shall work and make vessells and wares of copper and brass wrought with the hammer in the City of London, or in any other place or places whatsoever without the said City for five miles next adjacent to the same, shall from henceforth for ever hereafter be and be called one body corporate and politick in deed and in name by the name of ' The Company of Armorers and Brasiers in the City of London.' "

I should mention that the brasiers were incorporated

by Letters Patent of 19th Edward Fourth, but they do not appear to have exercised their corporate functions and were never a livery company.

RECORDS.

The principal records of the company are the Court or Minute books and the account books. The earliest Court book commences with about twenty pages of scanty memoranda followed by consecutive minutes. The earliest date is 1413.

The accounts commence with the year 1497.

The entries in the Court books are very voluminous, and comprise much curious matter concerning the armourer's art, together with accounts of transactions of the company with other corporate bodies. Thus we find the Union and translation of the whole craft of Bladesmiths with the craft of armourers "for ever to come to be called Armourers," took place on the 25th April, 1515.

This union was the occasion of bitter and long-protracted strife between the armourers and cutlers as to the right of search, and the books are full of appeals to and adjudications by the Court of Aldermen on the subject. An arrangement for a joint search by the two companies seems at last to have healed the breach.

The fairs at which the company searched the stand-holders were Bartholomew, "Our Lady" or Southwark fair, and St. James's. Certain localities in the City were also visited. The earliest record of a search, upon which the names are registered, was in 1538, at Bartholomew Fair, when the stand-holders numbered fifty-one.

In 1539 they were seventy, and that continued to be about the average number for many years.

It was not till about the year 1789 that, influenced by the extension of business and the growth of the population, and probably also by the legal doubts which had been raised as to their powers, the company ceased to exercise their rights of search and of regulating the trade.

On the 8th of August, 1538, the company, by command, returned to Sir Richard Gresham, Lord Mayor, the names and number of the body, by which it appears that there were then :

The Master and two Wardens,
Twelve Assistants,
Seven Liverymen, and
Twenty-six Freemen,

making a total of forty-eight persons.

In obedience to a command, the company in the year 1542 gave a " Bill unto Sir Michael Dormer, Lord Mayor, of the number of harness and weapons being with our craft, which commencing with the name of John Richmond, as having six coats and 200 ' skulls, ' " is followed by the names of eighteen other members whose stock, varying much in amount, is described as consisting of old harness, arming swords, halberds, black bills, demi lances, pole axes, coats, splents, sallyts, skulls, old bodys, axes, and large quantities of *Almaine* (or German) rivets (German rivets used for securing the plates of armour for the lower parts of the body), and this return is followed by a record of the names of divers merchants and other men " which doth sell harness and weapons " with their dwelling places, to the number of thirty persons, including four aldermen (two

of the Gresham family), three of the Mercers' Company, and three of the Drapers' Company.

A proof that the armourers were skilful hammer men is afforded by the following entry :

In 1560 on the Queen's behalf, the Lord Mayor issued his precept to the company commanding them to appoint "discreet" and "apt" of the company to attend at the following halls," that is to say, "two of them at the Clothworkers' Hall, two of them at the Sessions Hall, Southwark, and two of them at the Merchant Taylors' Hall, to strike and stamp with portcullis and greyhounds (badges of the houses of Beaufort and York), the several pieces of money called "the testons" there to continue until the end of fourteen days from the date of the precept.

At a Court held 4th August, 1561, six workmen of the Queen's Armoury at Greenwich were at dinner, and when that dinner was done they were called before the Master Wardens and Assistants, and it was demanded of them if they would consent to be brothers with us, and being well content were all sworn. And the Master sent for a gallon of wine for them and made them good cheer, and gave them spice bread home, and the names of the men are set down, amongst whom are foreigners.

At this same time John Kelk, who appears to have been a favourite German artificer, made promise before the whole Court in the name of all the rest that they will make a whole harness complete and give in unto the Hall there to remain for a sample, and the said John Kelk did promise that he would make the "greyves" for his part.

It was not until six years afterwards that the promised sample suit was brought in and given to the

House, at Roger Tindall's second election dinner, "and the same day that it was brought and given it was carried in a platter, and so carried before the first mess of meat to the high table, and given and delivered before all the whole company."

We find that the Company called this pattern suit a "Mannakine," and made the following payments for it:

It: pd. for sackeclothe, sattin and for blew	s. d.
sarsnitt for the Mannakine - - - - -	1 10
It: pd. to Røbert Joiner for the cubbard wherein	
the Mannikinge dothe stand and for worke	
to ye same - - - - -	14 8
It: pd. to hime for a daise worke to sett it upe -	1 4

This pattern suit unfortunately is not now in possession of the Company, nor do we appear to possess any record of how or under what circumstances it was parted with.

In the reign of Elizabeth great efforts were made to obtain an Act of Parliament having for its object in various ways the encouragement and extension of the armourer's art, but great indifference was shown by the State, and much opposition was received from rival crafts. A very lengthy paper on the subject is upon the Minutes under date of 1580, detailing the various steps taken in the business, and in which are the following curious passages:

"It was the Master's chance to speak with Sir Walter's honor again, Sir Walter Mildmay, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Dr. Doull, one of the Masters of the Requests being with him, praying him to have the Armourers' Bill in remembrance. 'What,' said Mr. Doctor, 'there is none of your Company that can make

an armour.' 'Yes, Sir,' saith the Master, 'that there is verily good workmen, and skilful as needeth it to be.' 'Tell me not that,' saith he, 'for I will hould you a hundred pounds that there is none in England that can 'trampe' an armor for 'the cappe to the soul of the foot.' I will lay with your Worship afore Sir Walter's honor if you will give me leave, that we have in England that shall work with any in the world, from the great toe to the crown of the head from 100 to 1000'; and then he made as though he would have laid it. 'No,' saith Sir Walter, 'ye shall not lay, for he will win of you, for they have very good workmen, and I know of the workmanship myself. 'Well,' saith Sir Walter, 'I will do the best for you I can.'"

Pickering's work not long afterwards proved how truly the Master spoke.

The paper goes on to describe the preparation of a certain supplication, "but the Frenchman's long tarrying was the let of the delivery."

"The Frenchman," no doubt, was the Duke of Anjou, who came to England to pay his addresses to Queen Elizabeth in person, and returned home in 1582 despairing of success.

Control over the art is shown by the following entry:

At a Court held 6th May, 1595. At this Court was seen two target plates, and several other pieces sent by Mr. Alderman Marten's son for examination, and the opinion of the Court was, that all the stuff generally was not of the proportion that cometh from beyond the seas, that the breast and back plates were too short and too narrow everywhere, and that the narrow plates were not to be used for making of armour without great waste.

Another instance of useful control is worthy of quota-

tion: At a Court held 12th March, 1599. At this Court appeared nine men all of this Company and gun makers unto whom was shewn a mould, sight, and charge for a muskett, and also another for a calyver, who liked the same and answered that they were good and efficient. And the Court ordered the proving of all musketts and calyvers and the marking thereof with the letter A and crown.

The following interesting transaction is recorded: At a meeting at the Hall, 17th Mar., 1618. The Privy Council having on the 15th of the same month inquired first "Who be the ingrossers of plate to make armor in London, and secondly, what the reason is of the scarcity of armor and how it may be remedied?" The Company agree to the following answer:

"That concerning the first: We know no ingrossers of such plate, and we have called to our Hall all the workmen of armor in London, and we find them very few, for that in regard to the long peace which God be thanked, we have had, they have settled themselves to other trades, not having employment for making of armor, nor means to utter the same if they should make it, for remedy of which scarcity, if it please the Privy Council to take order that the armourer's work to be by them made in London, may be taken and paid for at every six months' end. They will undertake, if continually employed to use their best means for provision of stuff to make armor; in every six months to furnish one hundred lance armor, two hundred light horsemen's armor, and two hundred footmens' armor, at such rates and prices as followeth," and set out below:

At the end of the return are the names of twenty

armorers, who appeared and promised to furnish the armour mentioned in the answer.

The lance armor containing breast, back, gorget, close head piece, poulderons and vambraces, gushes, and one gauntlett, to [be] colored russet, at the price of - - - - - 4 0 0

The light horseman's armour being breast, back, gorgett, a barred head piece, pouldrons and an elbowe gauntlett, to be russet, at the price of - - - - - 2 10 0

The footman's armor containing breast, back, gorgett, head piece and laces, with iron joints, to be colored russet, at the price of - - - - - 1 10 0

THE HALL.

The Company acquired their Hall in the year 1428 by the description of the Dragon and two shops, and the site was subsequently enlarged by the purchase of adjoining property in the years 1750 and 1777. The shops were let off up to the year 1795.

Possessed of a home, the Company began to receive gifts wherewith to furnish it, for we find during Henry the Sixth's reign numerous gifts of glass windows, culinary vessels, furniture, and decorations with sundry small sums of money, varying from forty shillings to a few pence. In the same reign we are told that "Thomas Robard, M^r gave a pype of wine the price fower pounds."

The original building, exclusive of the shops let off, consisted of:

The Hall, The Buttery, The Kitchen, The Parlour,
The Counting House.

Under the head "In the Hall," we find, in 1585, the following Inventory of effects:

- 3 Tables with 3 frames, 9 forms and 5 Stools
- A Carpet to the High Table of "Warder" and 9 cushions
- A cupboard of Wainscot with a desk
- A door to the Hall, with lock and bolt
- A George of complete Armor over the screen
- A cupboard over the stairs, with a demy Man in it
- A new Streamer with a banner of arms
- A banner with the red Cross, 4 old Trumpet banners
- A Coat of arms with a sword and a Shield
- A complete armor which was the gift of Mr.-----
- A Table of arms of our Coy, another with the Queens arms and a Plate Candlestick.

In Mr. Collingwood's inventory of 1663 we find mention of the new parlour, and the old parlour, a room behind the old parlour, an outer gallery, cellar, the gallery over the hall, and the larder.

In the old building the banqueting hall with its gallery was the most important feature. This was constantly let for various purposes; thus we find:

1565	Reced for a wedding in our Hall	„	3	4
	Reced for a wedding kept in our Hall	„	5	0
	Reced of the Wardmote Inquest for sitting in our Hall	„	3	4

In the time of the Civil War, when the Parliamentary soldiers came into the City in expectation of a siege, the Company lodged in their hall one of the leaders, the celebrated Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston, and laid out £4 for "Stuffe" to hang his chamber with, and 11s. for a "Jacke" for the kitchen for him. 10 Feb. 1640.

In 1795 extensive repairs and alterations took place and the shops then attached to the hall were pulled down.

In 1839-41 the old hall was entirely pulled down and the present structure erected at an expense (inclusive of furniture) of over £10,000, and in 1872-73 extensive works were executed which have much improved the appearance of the interior.

REMARKABLE PERSONS.

Time will not allow me to give you even the names of many remarkable men who have been members of the Company or to notice any of the interesting facts connected with them with which the books abound.

I shall conclude this paper with two or three short extracts, however, to show you that good fellowship and hospitality are not plants of modern growth amongst them, but have been known to and practised by the Armourers from time immemorial.

In 1559 a dinner was "made at our Hall when that Master Richmond was buried," the charges of which amounted to 29s. 4d.

It was a fish dinner, and included—

- A Bushel of oysters,
- A great "lyng" and a green fish,
- Four great salt eels,

Half hundred small lampreys,
 A hundred and a quarter of great lampreys,
 Four pikes, and a pail of yeast (1d.) to dress them,
 with a stand of ale, beer, red wine and claret. There
 was "paid to a woman to dress the dinner 6d."

In 1585 we read "The Company went to Church at 2 of the Clock at afternoon where they had a sermon and afterwards came home to the Hall with their wives where was a seemly banquet, at which the new master and wardens were chosen in the presence of the whole livery, their wives and some other grave Citizens, and afterwards a Boy-armed, with a virgin following him, leading a Lamb, came in, with a Drum and Flute before the Dinner, and after marching thrice about the Hall, the tables all set, they marched to the High Table with a speech."

The last entry I shall give you relates to a gift to the Company which we have the pleasure of producing for your inspection to-day.

At a Court holden 6 July, 1557, Mr. John Richmond and Esabell his Wyff boith they ded there of ther good wylls that they boith ded bere to hus and to all other our brethern there at that day and tym ded gyve to o^r haul a very fayre Cupe of sylv^r wtha cov^r with gylded weying xxxi oucs boith there mynds and wylls y^s that the same Cupe shall be the Cupe always to chose the new M^r wyth, all as oft as that neds shal requer, unto such of tyme as that therer y^s a bett^r to go in that place belongyng unto our haul this y^s both ther mynds and wylls.

Three and a half centuries have passed and gone since John Richmond and Isabell his wife gave us that

beautiful "Cupe" but no better to go in that place belonging to our Hall has yet been found.

The men of the Mystery of Armourers of the City of London still drink the new Master's health in that cup. Long may they continue to do so and long may they and the Brasiers flourish and in the words of their toast ever continue one.

THE ANCIENT SILVER PLATE.

It is probable that, in common with the other Livery Companies of the City of London, the Armourers suffered from the heavy exactions levied by King Henry VIII upon the citizens, and that their plate was forcibly sacrificed to satisfy the demands made upon them, since the Company have not now any specimen which was in their possession prior to the decease of that monarch, with the exception of the Owl Pot---a piece which, although now precious and full of interest hallowed by three-and-a-half centuries of existence, was then unimportant and liable to escape the hand of the despoiler.

The Owl Pot, a brown stoneware jug in the form of an owl, and mounted in silver and standing seven and three-quarter inches in height. The head of the bird forms the lid, which is mounted with a silver rim of a leaf pattern. The neck of the jug is furnished with a plain rim. The upper mount of the foot is decorated with a leaf border, and its outer rim is encircled with a twisted cable. There is no mark of any sort upon the silver mounting of this piece. An entry in the Company's records dated 1537, states that "This year the 26 day of Aug. Julyan late the wife of William Vyneard alias Seger deceased and gave to the Hall a stone

Pot like an Owl with certain silver about it gilt the value of 26s. 8d."

It was in 1557, the year preceding the accession of Queen Elizabeth, that the Company's earliest acquisition (save the Owl Pot) came to their hands. From this time forth, however, throughout the prolonged reign of that sovereign---which gave, through the greater confidence engendered among our merchants and traders in the inviolability of private property, such a stimulus to the development of our commerce and the acquisition of wealth---the Fraternity are found to be receiving the pious offerings of their devoted members in rapidly succeeding benefactions. The Elizabethan plate belonging to the Company is of the highest excellence. In the course of the thirty years which followed upon the close of that reign, another fine and numerous collection of silver vessels was acquired, which are especially noticeable as affording admirable examples of those beautiful types and designs which were peculiar to the first quarter of the 17th century, and which, somewhat unaccountably, had but a brief career of fashion. Brought to the period of the Civil War, the history of the Company's acquisitions suffers a check, and no further sign of growth or increase is apparent until after the restoration of King Charles II in 1660. But if no accession to the array of treasures during the Great Rebellion and the Commonwealth was gained, at least no diminution was suffered; and that prudence and sagacity which have so consistently characterised the policy of those entrusted with the management of the Company appear to have guided them safely through the perils of a period which inflicted heavy losses and sacrifices upon

many other Livery Companies. Another danger, the Great Fire, was also safely passed through, and thus has been preserved to these days, which witness a renaissance of the love and appreciation of much that is rare and beautiful in art, that precious collection of antique plate, a description of which now follows:—

Richmond Cup, presented by John Richmond in 1557. On the cover is the following inscription:---
+ Pra for John Richmond Jentyman cetisn and armerar of London and Eme and Iesabell his wyves.

There is no mark to indicate its precise date, but by comparison with a similar cup in possession of New College, Oxford, it is probably by an English maker and of the close of the fifteenth century.

Cup and Cover, presented by William Bisby in 1582. The Hall mark is of 1553, and maker's mark RD in monogram, and has a statuette of a spearman in full panoply and holding a shield on the cover.

A Cup and Cover, Hall mark 1562, and the maker's mark is W.S. in monogram. The bowl is elaborately decorated with Elizabethan flower and strap work.

A short globular parcel gilt Flagon and Cover, presented in 1574 by Thomas Tyndale, three times Master of the Company. Hall mark 1567, maker's mark R.D. in monogram. Coat of arms of the Tyndale family. On the cover, "The gifte of Thomas Tyndale, Bachelar, 1574." On the flagon "To remember the poore." Sometimes called the "Dancette pot."

A standing Cup and Cover, presented by Florence Caldwell in 1611. Hall mark 1568. Maker's mark a bunch of grapes. On the cover is an orb supported by three scroll brackets and surmounted by a statuette of a human figure lightly draped and with the right arm ex-

tended. On the bowl is "The gift of Florence Caldwell, haberdasher, anno 1611."

A Mazer Bowl, lined and mounted with silver. Hall mark, 1578. Maker's mark P.G. in monogram. The bowl is modern and was fitted to the liner and mounting in replacement of the original bowl which had been presented in 1453 by Everard Frere, first Master of the Company. The liner is gilt.

A tall standing Cup and Cover, presented in 1581 by Edmond Chapman. Hall mark 1580. Maker's mark S.B. between two mullets in pale. The arms on it are of the Joiners' Company, and probably the donor was a member of that Company.

A tall standing Cup and Cover, presented by Joane Doxie in 1605. Hall mark 1585. Maker's mark an escallop shell. The bowl is pyriform, and is decorated in the Elizabethan style with scroll work, acorns, flowers, and lovers' knots. The stem is fashioned as a forked and twisted trunk of a tree.

A Salt and Cover. Hall mark 1588. Probably acquired in 1604, when William Riggs was Master, his initials and the date being thereon.

A silver-mounted Cocoon Cup, presented by John Pasfyld in 1598.

A standing Cup and Cover, presented by Adam Dixon in 1598. Hall mark 1598.

A similar one presented by John Maxfield.

A tall standing Cup and Cover, presented by Sampson Leycrofte in 1608. The stem is formed as a forked and twisted trunk of a tree which a woodman is hewing with uplifted axe.

A tall standing Cup and Cover, presented by John Foster the Elder. Hall mark 1611, and maker's mark

J.T. From centre of cover a steeple rises upon four brackets and supports a statuette of St. George slaying the Dragon.

Scaltops. The Company has seventy-two, ranging in date from 1552 to 1627, in addition to an Apostle Spoon of 1609.