

PRIESTS IN THE VINTNERS' COMPANY IN THE 15th CENTURY

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SUMMARY

Why did four priests join the craft and mystery of vintners of the City of London in the 15th century? The purpose of this essay is to examine the lives of four ordained priests who, in the 15th century, gained the Freedom of the City through membership of the craft and mystery of vintners of the City of London. This essay discusses their possible motives and the benefits to them of becoming freemen, and suggests their usefulness to the Vintners. There is little evidence of ordained clergy gaining the Freedom of the City through membership of trade guilds and it is hoped that this article may stimulate further discussion.

By the mid-15th century most London craft guilds and fraternities had regular business with the clergy, both as incumbents of their parish and fraternity churches and as chantry priests, whom they engaged to celebrate masses for deceased members under the terms of bequests of properties to the guilds: these chantries to be maintained from the rents and profits on the properties. However, the subjects of this paper were ordained priests who became freemen of London through the mystery of the Vintners.

Freedom of the City, with the citizenship that this gave, was necessary for career advancement, particularly the right to sell by retail, or to practise a trade or craft in the City on one's own account. Other rights enjoyed by citizens included exemption from toll in all English markets and fairs, the franchise to vote in ward and parliamentary elections, and immunity from impressment into armies.¹ Freedom gave citizens the right to hold and demise property by burgage tenure

(as opposed to feudal tenure) and thus was a requirement of a feoffee to property. From 1319 Freedom of the City was obtained through membership of craft guilds.

Simon Adam was one such priest who was free of the Mystery of Vintners. In his will enrolled in the Court of Husting in 1448,² he styled himself 'clerk, citizen and freeman of the mystery of Vintners of the City of London'. As a freeman he was useful to the company as a trustee of property. He left property to the Vintners who copied his will into their 'Ordinance Book', together with a copy of his now lost admission to the Freedom of the City. This reveals that Adam was a 'Clerk of the Countie of Cambridge, Vinter [vintner]' and was admitted to the 'libertie of the Cite of London and sworn in the tyme of John Michel, Maier [1436-7] and John Chichele, Chamberlayn, the 19th September in the 16th year of Henry VI [1437]'. He was then living in Candlewick Ward. The bill was sealed the same day by the office of the Chamberlain of London.³

In his will Adam left his 'hostel called the Bere on the Hope' in the parish of St Matthew Friday Street to the Vintners, as well as tenements in St Martin's Vintry. This had been conveyed in the will of William Hervy, vintner,⁴ to Thomas Style, also a vintner, who enfeoffed them to Simon Adam, Thomas Walsyngham and William Scarborough. These latter released their right to Simon Adam, who bequeathed it to the Mystery of Vintners, on condition that they maintain a perpetual chantry for William Hervy at the altar of St Eutropius the Martyr in the church of St Martin's Vintry. The Vintners administered

this chantry in 1548 when it was known as Simon Adam's chantry.⁵ St Eutropius, Bishop of Saintes, is a French saint known on the Continent but this dedication appears to be unique in England: its translation here must reflect the influence at St Martin's of Gascon vintners. The church was rebuilt about 1299 at the expense of the Gascon Matthew de Columbar,⁶ a wine dealer with royal sinecures including that of king's chamberlain and taker of wines.

Simon Adam also left a portfolio of properties to the parson and wardens of St James Garlickhithe, with conditions attached that they too maintain chantries for William Hervy and others. As executor of William Hervy, Adam had been a party to a dispute between the parson, wardens and parish of St James Garlickhithe and the same of the parish of St Martin Vintry, over the right to sing masses in the two churches for the soul of William Hervy. In 1436 Archbishop Henry Chichele had stepped in to arbitrate, ordering that one of the chaplains appointed under the terms of the will should celebrate mass in the church of St Martin's Vintry, and the other in the church of St James Garlickhithe. In his arbitration the archbishop referred to Adam as 'chaplain'.⁷

Adam's will, made in April 1442, was not enrolled until October 1448. During this period the death occurred of the rector of St Clement, Candlewick Street. His name was also Simon Adam. He had been admitted to the living on 12 November 1433, and since his successor was admitted on 27 June 1446, he must have died shortly earlier.⁸ There is no extant will for Simon the rector. It will be remembered that Simon Adam the vintner also lived in Candlewick Ward. Although Archbishop Chichele addressed him in 1436 as chaplain, and not parson, this dispute must have festered for some time during which Simon may have been an unbeneficed chaplain. Thus, Simon Adam the 'clerk, citizen and freeman of the mistery of Vintners of the City of London', and Simon Adam, rector of St Clement's, Candlewick Street, were surely the same person, though the evidence is not conclusive.

Thomas Crofton was another clerical member of the Vintners' mistery. He was ordained acolyte in December 1405 and in December 1406 was sponsored to the

priesthood by the London hospital of St Mary without Bishopsgate.⁹ Under canon law he must then have been a minimum of 24 years old. The son of John Crofton, a London tailor, it was as a vintner that some thirty years later he was admitted into the 'libertie of the Cite of London and sworn ...' and 'entred into the boke signed with the letter ff [F] of biyngis [buying] of libertteis & admissions of fremen', on 14 February 1439. Seven days later he made his will, proudly styling himself: 'Thomas Crofton, Preist and Citizen and Freeman of the Crafte of Vinteners of the Citie of London'.¹⁰ The will lacks a probate clause so that the date of his death cannot be established, but he asked to be buried in the church of St Botolph, Billingsgate. Crofton recites that Alderman John Wakele, vintner (died 1407), late owned a tenement with wharf called Buttolph Wharf in Thames Street in the parish of St Botolph, Billingsgate. Geoffrey Dalling, vintner, enfeoffed it to Simon Seman, Richard Meryvale and William Scarborough, vintners, and to Thomas Crofton. He was the last surviving feoffee and bequeathed the property to the 'maysters or wardens of the Crafte of Vinteners of the Fraternity of St Martin in the Vintry'. (Crofton should have been free of the City many years earlier, before he was feoffed of Wakele's estate. As it was, he must have been putting his affairs in order prior to making his will.) Crofton's legacy was conditional that they maintained a chantry at St Botolph's, Billingsgate, for the souls of John Wakele, Maude, his wife, and John, his son, and also for Geoffrey Dalling, who married Wakele's widow.¹¹ Crofton did not include himself. When in 1548 the Vintners Company administered this chantry, it was for the soul of Thomas Crofton.¹²

From 1434 onwards the Vintners' recorded admissions to their craft in a series of registers. Thus, Master John Westlake, the parson of St Martin's in the Vintry, London, was 'ressett & sworne to the crafte of Vintrares'¹³ on Saint Martin's Day in Winter, 1446. St Martin of Tours is the patron saint of the Vintners' Company, and St Martin's Vintry was the guild church of the Vintners before its destruction in the Fire of London, never to be rebuilt. Thus, the feast-day of St Martin, 11 November, was celebrated

by the Vintners, who on that day would meet in their hall to elect their master and wardens for the coming year. They would then parade in their livery to St Martin's church for a service conducted by the rector, who probably preached a sermon. On their return to Vintners' Hall there would be a patronal feast.

Outsiders were frequently admitted to the craft of vintner on the payment of a fee and the register entry for John Westlake indicates admission by this method. With one exception, Master Westlake's is the only admission of a priest recorded in the Freedoms Register in the 15th century. This exception was Rechard Knot, a chantry priest employed by the Vintners to sing masses for the above-mentioned William Hervy.¹⁴ In 1497 Knot was sworn as a brother, presumably of their Fraternity of St Martin. As this would not have led to the Freedom of the City, he is not discussed here.¹⁵ Unlike Knot, Master Westlake was sworn to the craft of vintners so would have gained the Freedom of the City through the mystery, though there is no extant evidence of his appearance in the Chamberlain's Court.

Master John Westlake was a Cornishman. He became a fellow of Exeter College, Oxford at Michaelmas 1433. By Trinity term 1435 he had attained a Master of Arts, when he rented a school from Exeter College. In September 1436 he became principal of Black Hall.¹⁶ On 22 December he was ordained sub-deacon, rapidly followed at the end of February by deacon, and on 16 March 1437 he was ordained to the priesthood. Each of his ordinations was to the title of Plympton Priory, in Devon; that is, he was sponsored by the priory. All three ceremonies took place in London.¹⁷ In 1438 he became principal of Hart Hall, Oxford, next to Black Hall, a position he held until 1441. He was elected rector of Exeter College from 1442 to 1443, a post generally held for only one year. At the end of Trinity term that year he vacated his fellowship.¹⁸ Master Westlake was admitted to the living of St Martin's Vintry on 24 July 1444. The patronage was held by the abbot and convent of St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester.¹⁹

Little is known of Westlake's incumbency of St Martin's but one document survives: an indult from Pope Nicholas V, complete with

its papal bulla. It is dated at Rome, 22 May 1450, and granted Westlake authority to hear the confessions of, and to grant absolution to, parishioners of both sexes, not only in St Martin's Vintry but in any other parish church.²⁰ This suggests that he was officiating in other churches and may have been looking for another parish. In the event, Westlake exchanged his living at St Martin's for the rectory of Welford, near Newbury, where he was admitted on 3 September 1452, and he remained there until his death, probably in 1489. No record survives of Westlake's long rectorship of Welford and all efforts to find his will have proved unsuccessful.

At first Westlake seems to have maintained links with his vintner friends. In December 1455, John Bolthorp, son and heir of Nicholas Bolthorp, vintner, demised a tenement called the 'Emperoureshede' in the parish of St Martin's Vintry to a group of six citizens, headed by Westlake, who was described as a clerk. Three of these men had been master or warden of the Vintners during Westlake's incumbency at St Martin's: Andrew Body, Thomas Fetherston and Richard Rowe. The other two, Thomas Quixley and Thomas Waryn, would likely have been prominent vintners too, but have slipped into obscurity.²¹

The advowson of St Gregory, Welford, was in the patronage of Abingdon Abbey.²² It was a good career move for Westlake, being valued by Henry VIII's commissioners at £35 15s 3½d:²³ St Martin Vintry was then valued at only £18 13s 4d: still a good living though.²⁴ He was to remain at Welford rectory for about fifty years until his death. He is commemorated today by a small memorial brass in the chancel, with an effigy showing a tonsured priest in academic dress, with a tippet.

The final vintner-priest Peter de Taster or Tastar,²⁵ Dean of Saint-Seurin in Bordeaux, was by far the most distinguished of the four. He appeared in the Court of the Chamberlain of London on 11 April 1454, accompanied by his sureties: John Pemberton, Robert Clebury, William Stede and Laurence Wylkynson, vintners and citizens, who must have been the master and wardens of the mystery. He pledged the usual recognizance of 100 marks, swore oath before the mayor and aldermen, and was admitted to the Freedom of the City of London.²⁶

In the late 1440s, as the Hundred Years War was coming to a close, the civil administration in Bordeaux was pro-French but the church, led by the Archbishop of Bordeaux and Pey (Peter) du Tasta, Dean of Saint-Seurin, were 'vigorous upholders of the English cause'.²⁷ De Taster came to England in 1449, one of many Gascons who migrated here at this time. Most Gascons, including the archbishop, were involved in the wine trade,²⁸ and in 1452 Henry VI granted de Taster a licence to send ships to Bordeaux to lade wine and other goods for England.²⁹

In 1450 Peter Taster was summoned to the council of Henry VI, a position he used to foment revolt against Charles VII, becoming 'anchor man in England' of Henry's policy towards Gascony. He was particularly active on the council and commissions in the mid-1450s and later served on the council of Edward IV. He was well-rewarded and garnered a number of clerical appointments. On 31 May 1457 he was appointed rector of St James Garlickhithe,³⁰ in Vintry Ward, the church closely associated with the vintners. His other benefices included the rectories of Chartham, Kent, and West Bedwyn, Wiltshire, and the prebendary of Leighton Buzzard, in the diocese of Lincoln: he became canon of Lincoln Cathedral. On 30 September 1465, Master Peter Tastour was appointed by Archbishop Neville to the provosty of Beverley,³¹ and before October 1466 he resigned the rectory of St James Garlickhithe. He made his will on 17 January 1466/7, which was proved 13 July 1467. In a long list of the heavenly host to whom he dedicated his soul, he perhaps betrayed his French roots in choosing St Vincent (patron saint of winegrowers) and St Saturninus (first bishop of Toulouse). Otherwise, his name apart, there is little reference to his Gascon origins; he had become an Englishman: 'Peter de Tastar, provost of the Collegiate church of St John of Beverley'.³² He asked to be buried in St James Garlickhithe if he died in London, but if he died in the House of the Augustine Friars he was to be buried in that church. Should he die in one of his benefices he was to be buried there.

He left no real estate. Of the more significant bequests, he gave his best missal, for which he had paid twelve marks, to his church of Leighton Buzzard and his

portiforium³³ to Sir Raymund Bernard, his priest (*presbitiro meum*). William Gassias, his nephew or kinsman (*nepoti*), described as a scholar, inherited his books of canon law, and twenty marks (£13 6s 8d). Taster instructed his executors to buy from his estate a set of vestments (*apparamentum sacerdotale*) to the value of twenty pounds for his church of Leighton Buzzard; two antiphonals to the value eight marks (£5 6s 8d), a missal valued at ten marks (£6 13s 4d) and an ambo³⁴ for his church of Chartham; and to purchase a gilt chalice weighing three troy marks (*calix deauratus ponderis trium marcarum de Troia*) 'to the service of god in my church of Westbedwyn'. To his now former church of St James Garlickhithe in London, he left twenty pounds for the necessary repair and ornament of the church, less the ten pounds that it owed him from a loan for the repair of the Oxenford chantry (*primo solutis tamen decem libris quas dicta ecclesia michi debet ex mutuo pro reparacione cantarie vocate Oxenford*).³⁵ A notable absence is any gift to Beverley Minster, and he did not request to be buried there should he die in Beverley, suggesting that he seldom, if ever, visited the minster. His boy, Richard Charnok, was to be supported at grammar school for two years and to be fed and dressed honestly 'as he was in my service at the time of my death'.³⁶

CONCLUSION

The four priests, Simon Adam, Thomas Crofton, Master John Westlake, and Peter de Taster were a diverse group: two chaplains, a parish rector, and a provost of Beverley with a string of livings. Three at least had obtained the Freedom of the City by payment of a fine into the Court of the Chamberlain of the City of London. Westlake was an Oxford fellow; Peter de Taster a king's councillor and doctor of decrees,³⁷ bringing great honour to the Vintners' Mistery. For him Freedom was one more rung on the ladder of success: the church, the state, and now the City of London. Of the four, only Peter de Taster appears to have been directly involved in the wine trade. As freemen, Simon Adam, Thomas Crofton and John Westlake proved useful to the company as trustees of property. Simon Adam and Thomas Crofton proved of particular importance to the company at their

deaths. All four had one thing in common: all were sworn to the ordinance and freedom of the craft and mystery of Vintners of the City of London. Little is known of ordained clergy obtaining the Freedom of London through membership of other crafts: perhaps this article might provoke further discussion on the subject.

NOTES

¹ B R Masters *The Chamberlain of the City of London, 1237–1987* (1988), 93.

² London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), Husting Roll of Wills and Deeds (HR) 177/12.

³ Vintners' Company 'Ordinance Book': Guildhall Library (GL) Ms 15197, f. 45v/92. Recognizance Rolls recording Freedoms by purchase begin in November of that year, in the mayoralty of William Estfeld.

⁴ No will survives for either Hervy or Style.

⁵ C J Kitching (ed) *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate, 1548* (1980), 82.

⁶ See correction of Stow's dating in J Schofield 'Saxon and medieval parish churches in the City of London: a review' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 45, 116.

⁷ Vintners' Company: GL Ms 05157A.

⁸ Revd G Hennessy *Novum Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Porochiale Londinense* (1898), 129.

⁹ V Davies *Clergy in London in the Late Middle Ages: a Register of Clergy Ordained in the Diocese of London based on Episcopal Ordination Lists 1361–1539* (2000), Person id. 15912.

¹⁰ The will survives as a later translation, in the Vintners' Company 'Ordinance Book': GL Ms 15197, f. 44, which is followed by the bill of his admission to the Freedom.

¹¹ S Thrupp *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (1948; paperback edn 1962), 371.

¹² Kitching *op cit* (note 5), 83: Thomas Crofton's name has been rendered as Owston.

¹³ Vintners' Company, Freedoms Register: GL Ms 15211/1, f. 11v.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, f. 45.

¹⁵ Nicholas Kent is another priest omitted from this discussion because he was ordained late in life, *after* a successful career as a vintner.

¹⁶ Except where noted otherwise, Westlake's career is from A B Emden *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to AD 1500*, 3 vols (1959) III, 2023.

¹⁷ Davies *op. cit* (note 9), Person id. 15250.

¹⁸ Revd C W Boase *Registrum Collegii Exoniensis, Register of the Rectors, Fellows, and other Members of the Foundation of Exeter College, Oxford* (1894), 36.

¹⁹ Hennessy *op cit* (note 8), 335.

²⁰ TNA, SC 7/32 28: transcribed in T Rymer (ed) *Foedera*, V (ii), 25. I am indebted to Dr Jenny Stratford for assistance in translation.

²¹ *Calendar of Close Rolls (CCR) 1454–1461*, 117: 15 December, 34 Henry VI. No trace of Quixley or Thomas Waryn has yet emerged, but a John Waryn was admitted to the Vintners' fellowship in July 1444, following an apprenticeship: GL Ms 15211/1, f. 8v.

²² *Victoria County History of Berkshire* (5 vols; 1906–27), IV, 124.

²³ Record Commission, *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp Hen. VIII* (ed John Caley), II, 157.

²⁴ *ibid.*, I, 376.

²⁵ Known variously as Pey du Tasta, Peter de Tasta, Tastar, Taster, Tastur or Tastour.

²⁶ LMA, Recognizance Roll: COL/RG/01/022, m. 3d.

²⁷ M W Labarge *Gascony, England's First Colony 1204–1453* (1980), 222–3.

²⁸ A Crawford *A History of the Vintners' Company* (1977), 16.

²⁹ M K James *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade* (1971), 88.

³⁰ Hennessy *op cit* (note 8), 248.

³¹ A F Leach (ed) *Beverley Chapter Act Book II* Surtees Society 108 (1903), xci.

³² PCC, PROB 11/5; published, with minor omissions: J W Clay (ed) *North Country Wills ... 1385–1558* Surtees Society 116 (1908), 46–8.

³³ 'alias portuous', a portable breviary.

³⁴ An elevated reading desk or lectern, largely replaced by the 14th century by the pulpit.

³⁵ John de Oxenford, vintner, mayor 1341–2, died in office 18 June 1342.

³⁶ No evidence has come to light linking him with Richard Charnock, prior of Holy Trinity, Aldgate, the friend of Erasmus.

³⁷ *CCR 1461–66*, 389.

