

THE GUILD OF ST. GEORGE, THE PARISH OF ST. PETER'S AND THE TOWN OF NOTTINGHAM 1459–1546

by

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Rare survivals from Nottingham's medieval past are the account books of the guilds of St. George and St. Mary in the parish of St. Peter's. The accounts relating to St. Mary's guild are relatively brief, but those for St. George's not only run for eighty-six years (with a few gaps) but are comprehensive and detailed. This article describes the manuscripts and then, through a detailed analysis of the St. George's accounts, attempts to shed some light on the importance of the guild to its members, to St. Peter's parish, and to the town as a whole.

The volume known, perhaps rather misleadingly, as 'The Book of the Guild of St. George in the Church of St. Peter's, Nottingham' was bound together probably in the middle of the 17th century. It comprises not just the accounts of the guild of St. George but those of St. Mary's guild and other financial records relating to St. Peter's church such as summary churchwardens' accounts and lists of parish officers from the 16th and 17th centuries. The first known mention of the accounts is by Charles Deering who, in c.1744, stated that they began in 1440; unfortunately any early accounts are now lost and the first is dated 1459–60.¹ Perhaps the best known edition of the manuscript is by R.J.B. Hodgkinson, whose translation of both sets of guild accounts was published, posthumously, in the Thoroton Society's *Record Series* in 1939;² his notebook comprising a translation of the whole manuscript is lodged in the University of Nottingham Department of Manuscripts.³ An earlier, less well-known version is a transcription begun in 1877 by Joseph Tollinton, now held at Nottinghamshire Archives.⁴ In his introductory description Tollinton says 'I find from several *mems* in lead pencil, that I had been preceded by others, one of whom was W[illiam] Stretton, the local

antiquary.' Tollinton's notebook contains a number of loose sheets, mainly miscellaneous notes, including an excerpt from a Stretton manuscript reporting the discovery in 1819 of an alabaster stone in St. Peter's church, dated 1469 'supposed to have been to the memory of John Hunt Esq. the first Alderman of the Guild in 1440.'⁵ That Stretton was able to identify Hunt as the first Alderman and give the date 1440 supports Deering's statement that the accounts began in that year and suggests that the first part of St. George's accounts were lost during the 19th century. Based on his work on the manuscript, Tollinton painted an imaginary 'title page' for his transcript of the account books (Plate 1).

As a result of the lost pages, St. George's accounts open part way through the account for 1459–60 and end in 1545–46; a total of eighty-six years, although gaps reduce the number of years recorded to seventy. The most significant break is between 1500 and 1508 although for at least two of these years (1501–2 and 1502–3) the pages are headed but left blank, so it appears that the account was not drawn up for some, currently unknown, reason.

Medieval auditing practices required an annual verbal report or 'account' to be presented, probably to the whole guild membership although possibly to a representative sub-group, which was then written up or 'engrossed'. In most years there is a payment of 8d recorded for this work. Over the eighty-six years a number of people were employed for this, many of whom can be identified by the payments entered into the account books; at least two, William Barwell and William Easingwold, were Mayor's or Town Clerks. The style in which the accounts were presented changed over time; some are more neatly written than others, some are more



PLATE 1: Imaginary title page for his transcript of the guild book by Joseph Tollinton. The inscription reads:

Design for the title page of my Guild Book. The first bay of the South aisle of St Peter's Church, Nottm. with supposed banner of the Guild suspended aloft - supposed screen with the arms of Lenton Abbey and the coat of York - Hatchments above for arms of Hegyn (not found) - the other hatchment has the arms of John Hunt.

Source: Nottinghamshire Archives, M 399.

detailed than others, and, of course, the hands differ considerably. The pre-1500 pages are the most comprehensive, often written in a small hand and squeezed onto a single page. After 1508 the amount of detail reduces so that by the 1540s it comprises a basic list of receipts and payments – although these are still more detailed than the equivalent accounts of St. Mary’s guild – written in a very elaborate hand (Plates 2, 3 and 4).

One of the most striking characteristics of the accounts is their narrative style which mixes different types of transaction and perhaps reflects the verbal report on which they are based. A typical entry for 1479–80 reads:

And for 11d for the moiety of the offerings found in the casket of St. George in this year. And for 2s for corn collected and sold in the same year. And for 12d delivered on the account of Simon Stalworthman for the exchange of bad money...⁶

Even when laid out in columns, as in this 1537–38 example, the mixed denominations suggest the columns were not used to aid calculation:

Imprimis the same Accountants are charged with 46s 8d which they owe for the arrears of the last account	46s 8d
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And with £3 17s for the rents of divers lands and tenements of the same Guild received by them this year ⁷	£3 17s
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Income and expenditure is as usual recorded as pounds, shillings and pence, but this is an imaginary ‘money of account’ that bore no resemblance to the coinage in circulation which comprised silver coins ranging from farthings (¼d) and groats (4d) through to nobles (6s 8d, also called angels) and gold marks (13s 4d). As the price of gold rose in the 1460s the noble was re-valued to 8s 4d – that is by 20d for each coin and, as St. George’s guild had 23 nobles

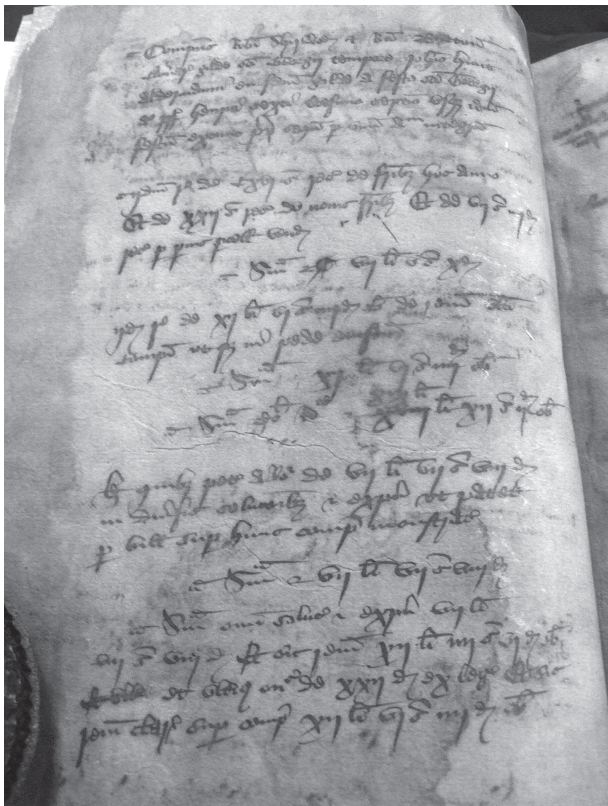


PLATE 2: Account for 1459, writer unknown. Source: Nottinghamshire Archives, PR 21, 599.

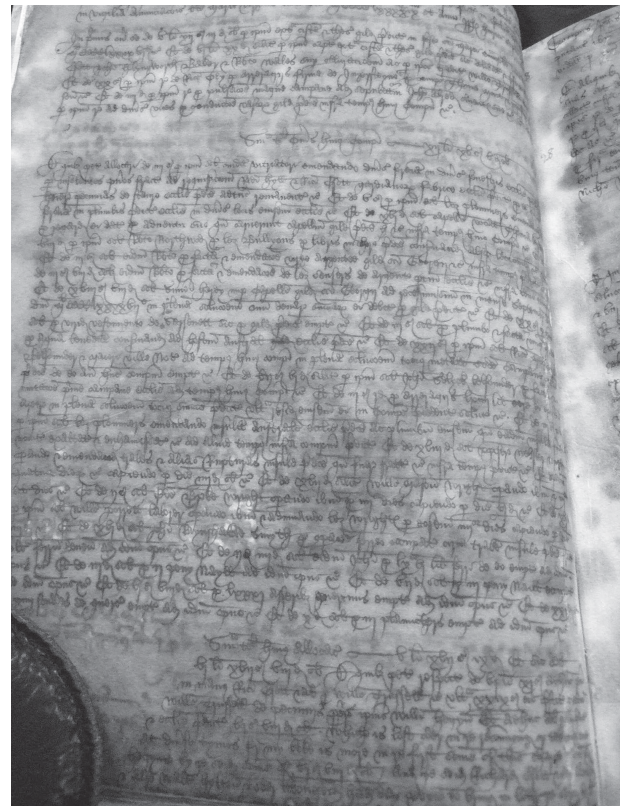


PLATE 3: Account for 1500, probably written by William Esingwold. Source: Nottinghamshire Archives, PR 21, 599.

Gilda Tempus *ff homo herp gū & Alunlogi stāde pānloz*
Gilde de Georgy mētre in sctā bāt pōqī sōc qōct
comptū & ffico vā pānū dno ff hēmya vādm ff gūntadēmo
vff; vādm ff; & dno sūpū & ff cōdēmo ff p vno dno integro

Omne *In comptū dnt dō* — *in ff vō q p vōdō pōpō qōc*
dno dō vōdō dnt dō tōpā tōndōz. Gūldō pōs pōmōt
pnt pī p pōntō dnt dō Gūldō sūp qūō comptū sōmō pōntō
q dō — *in ff vō q pōpō qōc dno dō cōffāzū ffū &*
vōz. Gūldō pōdō qōc dno cōllōt pnt pī p sūp sūp qūō comptū
sōmō pōntō **Q dō** — *ff dō q p vōdō pōpō p gūmō; qōtōz*
vōz de bēnōvōlōncā ffū & pōz gūldō pōs qōc dno cōndōt
Q dō — *qūō pōpō p cōndōtō dnt sūm gūldō pōmōt qōc dō*

Omne — *vū h v dūy*

Alloz *Quibus ipse computant potuit illos videt de* — *in ff*
dnt dō vō q p vōdō pōntō cōpōllāno gūldō pōs p pōtōz sūo p
qōc dno sōpō **Q dō** — *vō dō vō q pōntō vōc dnt dō;*

PLATE 4: Account for 1523-24, probably written by Henry Stathum. Source: Nottinghamshire Archives, PR 21, 599.

in its 'treasury' in 1463–64 it benefited from this revaluation by 38s 4d. The affect of having one currency for everyday transactions and another for formal recording is best illustrated by pro-rata calculations which are made using marks and then converted to pounds, shillings and pence. In 1483–84, for example, the guild chaplain was paid £4 20d for 'three quarters of a year plus half one quarter according to the rate of 7 marks per annum'.⁸

Another regular payment (although not annual) was 8d to have the 'book of the fraternity'⁹ drawn up. Unfortunately these books have not survived but information about membership can be extrapolated from the accounts and it seems that St. George's attracted members from the wealthiest families in Nottingham. Named at the head of every account, the master or 'alderman' of the guild usually held office for a number of years so that over the eight-six years of records only nine aldermen are listed. Until 1500, with one exception, they are all merchants; the exception was Walter Hilton (alderman 1490–94) who is identified as an 'imagemaker', which probably means he was associated with alabaster carving. After 1500 they were mercers or drapers, which may imply they were also merchants but perhaps on a smaller scale than their predecessors. Whatever their occupation they were all mayors of Nottingham, often at the same time as being alderman of the guild, and because of the town's charter of incorporation granted in 1449 they were all aldermen of the town as well. The other officers named at the head of the account were the chamberlains, or treasurers, who were responsible for the guild's finances, including presenting the accounts. There were always two and although they only held office for one year, they might be appointed again a few years later. Like guild aldermen, the chamberlain played a large part in town government since for almost every year between 1459 and 1546 at least one of the town's chamberlains or sheriffs had been a chamberlain of St. George's and frequently two or more of these important town officials in any given year had some association with the guild. This, however, is not an unsurprising situation: 'Control of urban government was always vested formally in a wealthy minority ... Political power was largely an expression of economic influence'.¹⁰ Not only did

wealth and power go hand in hand, but often there was a formal relationship between guilds and local government. In Coventry, for example, prior to his appointment, each mayor was master of the Corpus Christi guild and afterwards master of Trinity guild.¹¹ How formal or informal the relationship between St. George's and the council was is not discernable from the account books, but it is clear that its officers were influential in local government and formed part of the town's elite.

Guild membership was not however limited to the elite or even to men, as the accounts frequently refer to 'brothers and sisters'. Although there is no record of how many people belonged to the guild in total, it is nevertheless possible to make estimates based on the annual membership fee. This did vary slightly according to ability to pay; in 1488, for example, 'the greater part gave 13d and the remainder more'¹² but between 1492 and 1499 while most paid 13d, some paid less. Using 13d as an average payment it is possible to estimate the number of members, although this calculation often produces an odd decimal result (which for simplicity has been rounded). In 1468–69, the first year membership is quoted as a separate figure, £5 15s 7d was collected in fees, giving an estimated membership of 107 people. This rose in 1473–74 to c.164 but then declined so that by 1500–1 there may have been only c.80 members. The next twenty years saw a further decline to c.50 members in 1520–21, a level which with slight variations remained constant until 1537–38 when there was a slight rally to c. 65; this was followed by a gradual decline so that by 1545–46, the last year of accounts, there were only c.19 members. Some suggestions for this decline are made below.

Individual members are not usually named unless their fees were in arrears, they made gifts, left bequests to the guild, or are noted for acting on behalf of the guild in some way. Annually there are not many of them, but taken together they do provide evidence that membership was not limited to St. Peter's parishioners, or even residents of Nottingham. The 1524 lay subsidy roll for Nottingham which is organised by streets shows that while some members – at least those who paid tax – lived in the parish many came from both St. Mary's

and St. Nicholas's parishes, with addresses in Stoney Street, Long Row, Friar Row (now Beastmarket Hill), Broad Marsh, Castle Gate, Wheeler Gate, Timber Hill (now South Parade), Bridlesmith Gate, Low Pavement and Hen Crosse (near The Poultry, now demolished).¹³ Others came from the outskirts of Nottingham such 'de Briggeford juxta pontes' (West Bridgford near Trent Bridge ?),¹⁴ Keyworth, Kingston, Tithby and Attenborough, and also from further afield: Kingsthorp (near Northampton ?), 'Hersley' (Horsley, Derbyshire ?), and Garendon (near Loughborough). There is also some evidence for joint membership and for fees paid in kind: in 1482–83 the accountants declared '16d received from John Houghton for himself and the men of Kingesthorp'¹⁵ and in 1489–1490 they accounted for '20d received by them for two sickles (*falcibus*) given by the men of Herseley for their fraternity ... and thus sold'.¹⁶ There may have been many reasons why men from so far away might have wanted to join St. George's guild; possibilities include family connections or trade contacts as the guild attracted members from many crafts, trades and professions. Members' occupations are sometimes mentioned in the records, and by cross-reference with official borough records as published in the *Records of the Borough of Nottingham* it is possible to find more. These fall into discrete groupings:

<i>Wool & Textiles:</i>	draper, dyer, glover, hat maker, merchant, mercer, tailor, shearman
<i>Leatherworkers:</i>	cordwainer, corviser (both shoemakers), currier, saddler, tanner
<i>Builders:</i>	pointer, thatcher
<i>Food:</i>	baker, butcher, grocer, innholder
<i>Metal (& wood) workers:</i>	armourer, locksmith, pewterer; cooper, wheelwright
<i>Priests:</i>	abbot, chaplain, rector, vicar

Other: carver, chapman, imagemaker (alabaster carver), mayor's or town clerk

In the early years merchants and men connected to the textile industry dominated, but as numbers decreased there was a small but noticeable shift so that by the 1520s the membership comprised fewer merchants and more leatherworkers. This may be simply a reflection of the changing economy as the wool trade in particular declined, but it may also suggest that the guild became less fashionable, or had less social status and therefore attracted less wealthy townspeople and a reducing membership.

Whether at its height or during the later less prosperous years the broad-based membership of St. George's guild must have expected some benefit in return for their membership fee. As a religious guild its function, according to H.F. Westlake writing at the beginning of the 20th century, was the commemoration of the dead, the provision of funeral rites and regular prayers for the souls of its deceased members.¹⁷ More recently, historians have argued that guilds allowed their members greater active involvement in religious ritual than the simple observance of the Mass permitted by parish worship. Barbara Hanawalt, for example, summarises the activities of 'the serious, adult guilds of English men and women in the late Middle Ages'¹⁸ as including membership, processions, livery and charitable work, while Eamon Duffy places emphasis on the energetic participation of lay people in the 'provision of Masses, alms, pilgrimage, the adornment of churches, and images'¹⁹ which characterised medieval spirituality – a participation that was for the living as much as for the dead.

What then were the activities of St. George's guild and how did they satisfy the spiritual needs of its members? First of all it maintained a chapel dedicated to St. George, which was probably at the east end of the north aisle of St. Peter's church,²⁰ and the guild chamberlains spent considerable sums over the years decorating and maintaining it. Judging from the many references to wax, torches and tapers the chapel was well lit; in 1500–1, 3s 4d was paid for:

six pounds and a half of wax for making the tapers of the aforesaid Gild at divers times in this year as well in the Chapel of the same Gild as about the Image of St George²¹

There was an aumbrey (cupboard where the sacred vessels were kept) with lock and key containing candlesticks, altar cloths and frontals which were cleaned and repaired on a regular basis. Most of the expenditure on decoration dates however from the 1470s and 1480s when the guild was at its height. In 1470–71 it acquired a 'small image of St. George in alabaster, newly purchased for offering to be kissed etc.'²² and in 1471–72 the chaplain John Coo donated some pewter from which were made two 'small dishes (*parapides*) for the altar of St. George'²³ at a cost of 12d. A further 2s went on a 'picture on horseback ... of St. George and other pictures there'²⁴ In 1480–81, the chapel was furnished with an ornate lectern:

4d for the making of a certain reading desk (*lecturni*) in the Chapel of St. George in this year. And for 3d paid for pigment and ordinary varnish and red lead for the painting of the same reading desk ... And for 3d for the working of certain stones for placing on the foot of the said reading desk²⁵

It also had a casket or charity box and it was either this, or the strong box which held the treasury, which was painted green in 1484–85. All this was complemented by new vestments purchased in 1478–79 at a cost of 73s 4d. They had, however, to last a long time. There are numerous entries for washing and repairing vestments and albs, but it was twenty two years before another set of vestments in green sarsenette was bought for 20s, and a further thirteen before a new dalmatic was acquired. An important attraction of the guild was that it had Letters of Indulgence (Papal 'promises' to reduce time in purgatory or reduce sins, etc, sold for money) purchased in 1481–82 for 10s from 'the Chancellor of the lord Archbishop'.²⁶ A copy of these was made in the same year to 'hang on the pulpit'²⁷ and a further copy in 1483–84, although what happened to this is not recorded. The importance of the altar and its separation from the rest of the parish church was emphasised by curtains which hung 'around the image of St. George'.²⁸ In 1516–17 the old ones were sold for 4s

and four new ones purchased for 55s 6d; another 20s was paid for a 'banner of St. George with the Dragon made from green and gold and silver silk'.²⁹ These are the only new items purchased for the chapel after 1500.

The main purpose of the altar was for the saying of mass for the souls of its members – living and dead – and mass required the services of a priest. Eighteen chaplains are named in the St. George's accounts. The first, John Coo, seems to have been a permanent fixture as his name appears every year between 1462–63 and 1476–77, with a salary of 100s. He is almost certainly the son of Robert Coo, town bailiff in 1435–46³⁰ and a corviser or leather worker who in 1447–48, with his wife Agnes, granted all his tenements, land and meadows to his son, John, and another chaplain, John Olson of London.³¹ On his death Coo left a silver cup to the guild which was sold for 20d. After him, the guild employed a series of priests and sometimes increased the salary, possibly because the sum received by John Coo was, so Beat Kümin claims, only half that needed by 1500 for a priest to make ends meet.³² It does appear to have been difficult to find a full-time chaplain. In 1476–79 John Blomlee received 106s plus 5s for rent of a chamber; the following year he only worked for a quarter of the year, being paid 28s 8d, and the year after that £4 20d for three-quarters of a year. In 1481 he shared the work with William Gournay who received 38s 8d (7 marks pro rata) while he got 53s 4d (8 marks pro-rata) plus the rent of a chamber (5s). After 1500, it does seem to have been possible to employ a chaplain for the whole year, the longest serving being Robert Morely between 1509–10 and 1522–23 for 106s 8d (8 marks). It is interesting that this period of stability co-incided with the beginning of a decline in membership which suggests that the cause was not religious and confirms the proposition that guild membership became unfashionable, unaffordable or socially unattractive.

Mass was, of course, said or sung daily and the chaplains were assisted by a clerk, six of whom are named in the accounts where the payment of 6s 8d 'for masses and "le Salve" observed'³³ is recorded with monotonous regularity. All but the first are

described as parish clerk of St. Peter's so presumably the guild salary supplemented their parish wage. In 1500–1 there is some elaboration as the payment is made 'for the observation of the Mass of Saint George and "le Salve" of the Blessed Mary in this year'.³⁴ Richard Buntying (clerk 1510–40) was paid for 'the observation of the Masses of St George and the Antiphon daily'³⁵ and in 1516–17 this is expanded to 'the Antiphon daily with chant (*cum nota*)'.³⁶ The phrase 'Le Salve' derives from 'Salve Regina' the opening words of a text dating from the 11th century which was a popular part of the evening devotions of guilds and confraternities across Europe.³⁷ It is one of the four Antiphons of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so the latter entries probably refer to the same observance. Music seems to have been of some importance in the devotional life of the guild. In 1476–77, 12s 3d was paid for 'one book of priksong, twelve sheets of one processional'³⁸ and in 1481–82, 5s went 'to the organist',³⁹ probably to supplement to his parish salary as another entry in 1516 records '6s 11d paid to Robert Dowse, organist, at the request of the greater part of the parishioners, in augmentation of this stipend etc. in this year'.⁴⁰

There are some things the accounts do not reveal about the spiritual activities of the guild. It might be expected, for example, that the death of a member would be particularly commemorated. In Leicester the rules of the guild of St. Margaret and St. Katherine state that the guild should provide a hearse and torches for the funeral of a member, and that all members should attend the obsequies,⁴¹ while members of the guild of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, also in Leicester, had to pay 1d each for the soul of the deceased.⁴² There is no way of saying if members of St. George's guild had a similar set of obligations because funerals are only mentioned in the accounts when they involve the receipt or expenditure of money. The guild certainly owned a hearse and a pall as in 1500–1, 4d was paid for 'repairing the great table which lies on "le herse" at the obit of the brothers and sisters'.⁴³ These annual obits or general anniversaries not only commemorated all its deceased members but gave the guild the opportunity to demonstrate some charitable giving through the distribution of bread and beer, and sometimes cheese, to the poor of the

parish. In addition to the annual service St. George's accounts show that three members – all significant benefactors of the guild – qualified for individual and repeated recognition. The first, John Thrompton, gave three properties 'for the betterment and support of the aforesaid gild [and] for the welfare of his soul and the souls of his parents'.⁴⁴ The anniversary of his death was commemorated in 1472–73 at a cost of 6s 6d, 1473–74 at 3s 4d, and 1474–75 and 1475–76 both at 1s 4d each.⁴⁵ William Hegyn (or Higgin), who was alderman of the guild until his death sometime before 1509 and mayor on several occasions, bequeathed six properties to it, and gave instructions that his anniversary was celebrated on 'the Feast of St. William, Bishop and Confessor, according to the foundation of the same William, made in his lifetime'.⁴⁶ The most likely candidate for this saint is William Fitzherbert, Archbishop of York, 1154, who was popular in the Diocese of York, but there may be another as St. William the Confessor was Archbishop of Bourges in 1200. He lived a life of great austerity, was in demand as a confessor, aided the poor of his see, defended ecclesiastical rights even against the king, and converted many Albigensian heretics.⁴⁷ William Hegyn was a Merchant of the Calais Staple so it is just possible he had a personal devotion to a French saint, but this seems unlikely. His annual anniversary cost 4s 2d and is recorded every year until the accounts end. The 1514–15 entry specifies that the expenses covered 'bread, beer and cheese for the priests and clerks'.⁴⁸ The inclusion of clerks suggests a sung mass, and the plurals imply it was presided over by several priests.

The third member who warranted individual attention was Margery Doubleday who left £1 6s 8d to the guild.⁴⁹ She also left bequests to the town and to St. Peter's church and is sometimes, perhaps erroneously, referred to as a washerwoman.⁵⁰ In fact, she is likely to have been the widow of John Doubleday, a former mayor of Nottingham, churchwarden of St Peter's and one of the few people named in the accounts of St. Mary's guild. Her anniversary was marked for the first time in 1544–45, at a cost of 10s 7d and for the second and final time in 1545–46 for 8s. The costs suggest that these commemorations were grand affairs, but they

were brought to an end by the Chantries Act of 1547 which closed guilds and chapels.

To be a member of St. George's guild was to participate in a rich spiritual life. Not only was your soul cared for in life and death through constant prayer and intercession, but the membership was able to contribute to the provision of those things necessary for worship – a chapel, altar, priest, vestments and commemoration – in a personal way which otherwise was only open to the extremely wealthy who could endow a private chapel or chantry. The wealthier members may have received special treatment but all could rely on the collective worship of their brothers and sisters to assist their journey through purgatory to heaven. Guilds moreover catered for their members by providing social bonds between members who pledged themselves to their guild brothers and sisters. Drawing members from all levels of society, except probably the very lowest, they provided an opportunity for social mixing that perhaps was not possible in an otherwise hierarchical society. The most obvious of these was the annual feast which Gervase Rosser describes as representing 'social politics in action',⁵¹ albeit with a ritual element. It was, he argues, an extension of the patronal mass, characterised by a procession, the welcoming of new members with a kiss of peace, the circulation of a common drinking vessel, the distribution of food to the poor, candles and prayers, structured by rites which he describes as 'paraliturical'.⁵² Over and above the religious symbolism, however, was a more complex interpretation of the feast as a 'forum in which political networks could be adjusted, and the individual's relationship to them redefined'.⁵³ In other words, a guild's annual feast was the opportunity for networking and perhaps even social climbing. Again, there are not many entries in St. George's accounts which refer to the feast and what actually occurred is impossible to discern, but it is possible to speculate, based on Rosser's description, that after a patronal mass, the guild members dressed in guild livery processed from St. Peter's church through the town to the monastery of the Friars Minor in Broad Marsh where they held their feast, perhaps led by the guild beadle carrying the silver wand made in 1464–65 at a cost of 11s 4d from 'broken silver given for this purpose by John Squyer',⁵⁴ and

repaired in 1499–1500 for 3s. When they arrived at the Friars Minor they would share a meal, the most senior members using the 24 silver spoons

made out of a certain chest weighing 28 ounces, a half and a quarter of an ounce given for the use of the aforesaid Guild by William Halifax etc. and for 9d paid for 1 quarter of an ounce of silver bought to complete the aforesaid spoons.⁵⁵

They would eat from the guild's pewter vessels and drink from 'certain large cups purchased ... [for 3s 8d] as well as one wine bowl'.⁵⁶ They drank beer brewed from malt collected by members over the year, and malt was also used to feed the geese 'for the feast of the aforesaid guild'.⁵⁷ Anything left over was sold off: half a pound of pepper brought 6d, and the chamberlains accounted for:

2s 1d received by them for the garbage and for the dregs of the beer left from the aforesaid feast ... And for 12d received by them for the remainder for the "Ctharcole" left at the same feast⁵⁸

The meals seem to have been riotous at times. The first reference to the feast (*convivium*) or breakfast (*jantaculo*) is probably in 1479–80 when '19d for divers repairs to the utensils in the house of Friars Minor in Nottingham'⁵⁹ is recorded, and the following year

8s paid for 8 [blank] of glass for the making of the windows in the hall in which the feast of the brothers and sisters was held. And for 4s 4d paid for glazing of the same windows.⁶⁰

In 1484–85 there is another payment of 22s 11d for the 'repair of "le Hestrie" in the Friars Minor where the breakfast (*jantaculum*) of the brothers and sisters was held ...'.⁶¹

It was obviously an occasion for public display and conspicuous consumption. How much the feasts cost is not specified, but in 1489–90, £3 6s 6d was collected 'at the great feast of the brothers and sisters'.⁶² This may have included some alms giving, but if it paid for the celebrations it compares well with the feast of the guild of St. George, Wymondham, Norfolk, where two calves, six sheep, eight pigs and twenty six geese were

consumed at a cost of £3 15s 1½d.⁶³ Despite all the feasting and ceremony it may be that the annual banquet was not a successful affair. In 1493–94 there was a loss of 10s 10d on the feast⁶⁴ and the accounts for 1485–86, 1488–89, 1492–93, 1494–95, 1495–96 and 1498–99 all record the sale of grain ‘collected among the brothers and sisters of the aforesaid gild towards the great feast’ because the breakfast was not held. After 1500 there are no entries at all for the feast which, given the record of the 1490s and declining membership, suggests it may have been discontinued.

Another occasion for public display and ceremonial was the town’s annual Corpus Christi procession which, as described by Mervyn James, was simultaneously a symbol of social unity and a statement of social differentiation.⁶⁵ The Body of the Lord when paraded through the town represented the completeness of the social body – men united by their faith. On the other hand it was also a statement of social status – the closer you walked to the Host the greater your prestige and rank in the town – and an opportunity to display the ‘costly artefacts and costumes’⁶⁶ of the guild which highlighted disparities in wealth and power.

The first mention in the accounts of Corpus Christi occurs in 1473–74 when 14s 6d is paid ‘for wax for the lights of the torches carried on the Feast of Corpus Christi and other small expenses.’⁶⁷ After this, the entries become more detailed:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| [1480–81] | 17d paid for the carrying of the torches and banners round the Body of the Lord ⁶⁸ |
| [1488–89] | 7d paid to John Strete, ‘steynor’ for putting the arms of St. George on the torches ... and 12d paid for the carrying of 8 torches and 4 banners ... around the Body of the Lord on the day of Corpus Christi ... And for 2d paid for bread and beer to the same bearers ⁶⁹ |
| [1494–95] | 2d paid for the painting of the arms of Saint George ... 10d paid for the carrying of the torches and banners about the Body of the Lord ... 2d paid for bread and beer ... And for a halfpenny paid for paper to make liveries for the same bearers ⁷⁰ |

In addition to these expenses was the cost of the torches, which in 1480 was considerable:

43s 4d for 100lb of wax bought in London for 8 torches newly made... and for 14d for the carriage of the same wax from London ... And for 5s paid for 34lb of “candelwyk” for the same torches ... and for 2s for two dozen and 10lb and a half of “roseyn” for the same torches ... And for 4s 6d for the making of those torches⁷¹

This made a total of £2 16s. Torches were so valuable that in 1483 a lock was put on the chest which held them. Torch and banner bearers were dressed in paper liveries and walked ‘about the Body of the Lord’ suggesting an honour guard provided by St George’s guild that would not be inconsistent with the militaristic nature of its patron saint, but which may have been wishful thinking implying as it does that the guild surrounded the Host, a very prestigious position to have held. After 1500 entries relating to Corpus Christi become more muted and after 1521–22 the costs seem to be absorbed into ‘necessary expenses’. What this indicates is open to interpretation. It might reflect the declining membership when such display was no longer affordable or a reduction in social status as its membership base moved from mercantile to manufacture with a consequent lower position within the procession; or it may simply be a change in the style of accounting.

Perhaps the most well-known fact about St George’s guild is that it possessed a suit of armour – described as a ‘harness’ – that was cleaned every year for about 40 years (1476–1517 with a couple of gaps) by Henry Hobbes, ‘furbisher’, at a cost of 4s. Hobbes of course was not the only person to do this work. Before him, in 1464–65, William Joly was paid 6s 8d for cleaning the harness plus other work, and between 1471–72 and 1475–76 William Armourer received 5s. After Hobbes, Richard Bentley took over, followed by John Fryth. Fryth is listed elsewhere as an armourer,⁷² but was paid 2s a year by the guild as ‘le verge bayrer’⁷³ or ‘bearer of the wand’.⁷⁴ Like the chapel adornment most costs were incurred before 1500. The harness was embellished in 1465–66 by the purchase of spurs for 16d which were gilded at a cost of 3s with copper

that cost another 16d. Five years later, they were partnered with a pair of stirrups which cost £7 18d to make. The armour certainly appeared in the Corpus Christi processions as in 1499–1500 1d was paid for the 'protection of the armour of Saint George for the same carrying this year'⁷⁵ but it is not clear if it was worn or simply carried and there is no reference anywhere in the accounts to a dragon which might have accompanied it as happened in places as far apart of Norwich, Leicester, Stratford on Avon, Little Walsingham and Lostwithiel (and probably other places as well) albeit on St. George's Eve not Corpus Christi.⁷⁶

St. George's guild may have been located in the parish of St. Peter's, but some of its members came from beyond the parish boundaries and it controlled its own chapel and priest, and managed significant funds making it an organisation independent of the parish structure. In other towns this degree of independence combined with an extra-parochial membership led to clashes between parish and guild. In Lichfield, for example, when guild services in the town church were prohibited by the Dean and Chapter because they clashed with parish celebrations, the messenger was thrown out by a guildsman.⁷⁷ Potentially guilds diverted funds from the parish through fund raising and exercised disciplinary and financial authority which were 'tantamount to the creation of something like an extra-ecclesiastical archdeaconry, quite beyond the oversight of the church authorities'.⁷⁸ As Andrew Brown says: 'Commentators on English guilds have tended to see them as 'transcending the parish', 'challenging the old order', and 'providing alternatives to parochial communion''⁷⁹ yet there is much evidence in the accounts of St. George's to suggest there was considerable empathy between parish and guild.

Beginning at the top, and at a time when the guild was most popular, the rector of St. Peter's church, William Gull, (rector 1445–84)⁸⁰ was almost certainly a guild member. With the alderman, he was responsible for holding the guild's treasury and on his death he bequeathed 3s 4d to St. George's, as did his sister Ellen in the following year.⁸¹ His successor, John Mayewe (rector 1484–86)⁸² also left 6s 4d to the guild in 1495.⁸³ There is no proof

that other rectors were members but Robert Colyngnam, (rector 1486–99)⁸⁴ was Meyewe's executor, and William Ilkeston (rector 1499–1510) was left a 'muster-de le-vilows gown' by Edward Hunt, who was alderman of St George's guild in 1483–89.⁸⁵

Administratively the guild and parish seem to have been close too. The accounts of St. Peter's churchwardens which are bound with the guild accounts begin in 1523. Comparison of these with the equivalent guild records shows that they were drawn up by the same person. In addition, cross-referencing shows that all the churchwardens listed except two were guild officers – and the two exceptions may have been related to guild members. In fact, being guild chamberlain seems to have been a precursor to being churchwarden.

Guild and church finances were linked in other ways as well. Not only did St. George's subsidise the salary of the parish clerk and on two occasions contribute to the organist's wage, but most importantly it contributed money for improving the fabric of the church. In 1481–82, the same year St. George's guild paid for a reading desk in its chapel, it paid £3 for 'divers repairs to the said Church of St. Peter'.⁸⁶ Eighteen years later, William Hegyn, alderman in that year, made a detailed account of work to the church which he had personally supervised. The opening remarks are some indication of the state of St. Peter's in 1499:

[Hegyn] prays to be allowed 4s paid by him to a certain glasier for mending divers holes in divers windows in the aforesaid Parish Church broken by insolent boys repaired at the request of Ralph Hyll and Richard Esott, wardens of the fabric of the aforesaid church because they had no moneys of the stock of the aforesaid Church remaining⁸⁷

In about 1485, fifteen years before these repairs, St Peter's had been extended by the addition of clerestories, but it seems their weight must have been too much for the southern columns, which 'settled and left the vertical ... particularly at the east end of the nave'.⁸⁸ The long list of work which follows Hegyn's opening comments (Table 1) not only supports this opinion but clearly shows that

Table 1

Remedial Building Work on St Peter's Church Funded by St George's Guild, 1499–1500

<i>Work</i>	<i>Contractor</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Fitting "lez Bullyons" for keeping the books in the choir away from the desks	Robert Northwod	2s 6d
Repairing "lez sensers" of silver	Robert Northwod	3s 8d
Lead and making of one Stoup (<i>fatte</i>) for keeping the Holy Water in the South Porch	3s 0d	
Metal for the second bell	Richard Mellers, bellfounder	22s 0d
Making and altering the first bell	John Selyok, bellfounder	7s 6d
Mending the south aisle and lead when the aisle was newly raised and pented	"lez plommers"	3s 0d
Working and making beams for the aisle (4 days at 4d)	Christopher Webster, wright	1s 6d
Working for 4 days	William Mason, wright	1s 5d
Working for 4 days at 6d	Edward Broke, wright	2s 0d
Working for 4 days and helping "lez wrights" at 4d	William Porrett, labourer	1s 6d
Working the iron used above the beams of the aforesaid damaged aisle, over and about the iron used on the same work	John Rynshawe, smith	1s 4d
66 pounds of iron		2s 4d
"ii peny" nails		4d
"iii peny" nails		7d
81 oak planks		6s 8d
14 "studdes" of oak		1s 9d
3 "planchers"		10d

remedial work, together with other repairs, was carried out in 1499, paid for by St George's guild because the parish had run out of money.⁸⁹

This account is unusual in that it was made by the alderman not the chamberlains. It is a statement of money he had either 'taken out of the chest'⁹⁰ or of money owed to him because he had made extraordinary payments on behalf of the guild. There are no other entries in the accounts for work to the church but this does not mean that the guild did not pay for other work, only that these payments were probably not the responsibility of the guild chamberlain, and had to be accounted for separately.

On the basis of this evidence there certainly seems to be no conflict between the guild and the church or between the guild and the churchwardens at least, which is a common finding. Rosser says

that 'the English parochial clergy had many causes to lament the suppression of the lay-run guilds. Parochial institutions sometimes owed their very survival to fraternities'.⁹¹ There may have been some at St. Peter's, nevertheless, who welcomed the suppression of guilds as from 1537 it was led by John Plough (junior), a committed Protestant who fled to Basle when Mary succeeded to the throne in 1553.⁹² He was appointed rector of St. Peter's on the recommendation of his uncle, who was also his predecessor, so it may be that his family and possibly a section of the parish community already had reformist leanings. From the 1530s reforming preachers such as Hugh Latimer attacked the doctrine of purgatory and veneration of saints and the year before Plough was appointed Injunctions were issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury that condemned the use of images and lights. A further set of Injunctions in 1538 ordered that 'abused'

images should be taken away. A national survey of churchwardens' accounts shows that across the country offerings to images virtually disappear before 1536 and compliance with the 1538 order to extinguish lights was rapid, probably to protect images by giving the authorities no excuse to remove them.⁹³ Throughout the 16th century St George's seems to have spent less and less on lights, possibly because of declining membership and probably in response to reformist pressure. There was though one exception to this reduction in expenditure and that is on the general anniversary of all its members, the cost of which rose after 1500. Although the 1538 Injunctions condemned the doctrine of purgatory they did not actually forbid prayers for the dead and therefore the annual anniversary was, just, permissible. In 1493, when there were 103 members, only 10d was spent on 'cheese, bells and informing the town';⁹⁴ in 1528–29, with only 57 members the 'expenses of the anniversary of the brothers and sisters and benefactors' of the guild came to 4s.⁹⁵ Average payments are shown in Table 2.

One of the more detailed entries from 1496–97 shows how the money was spent:

6d for the bread given at the general anniversary of the brothers and sisters of the aforesaid Gild in this year etc. And for 11d paid for beer given at the same time etc. and for 3d paid for cheese given at the same time etc. And for 7d paid to divers persons for ringing the bells at the same time etc. And for 4d paid to Henry Belman for his journey about the town ...⁹⁶

John Plough could ensure the parish church complied with the new order, but he had less control over its guilds. In response to national and local pressures St. George's probably represented a strong, traditionalist body which ensured that the commemoration of the dead persisted, against the prevailing reformist tide.

St. George's guild was not, of course, the only guild in Nottingham. There was St. Mary's guild at St. Peter's church and another St. Mary's guild at St. Nicholas's church, plus at least a further three guilds at St. Mary's church, as well as chantries, chapels and hospitals in the town.⁹⁷ How important St. George's was in relation to these others is

Table 2

Average cost of annual anniversary of the brothers, sisters and benefactors of St George's Guild, 1478–1545.

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Number of entries</i>	<i>Average number of members</i>	<i>Average annual payment (rounded up)</i>
1478–1489	7	96	12d
1492–1500	9	90	23d
1508–1521	8	75	40d
1523–1530	9	43	41d
1531–1540	8	54	40d
1541–1545	5	33	53d

impossible to say because they do not have records of equivalent depth or detail. What can be said is that in the 15th century St. George's had sufficient status to attract some of the most important men and women of the town and through its activities these men and women were able to take a lively part in saving not just their own souls but the souls of their guild brothers and sisters, both living and dead, by endowing a richly decorated chapel, and employing a chaplain to perform regular, elaborate masses and other devotions. Above this, the guild contributed to the parish spiritually and financially and to the civic life of the town through processions and pageantry. There is no clue in the accounts as to why it went into decline in the 16th century; perhaps it became unfashionable or its leadership lost status, or perhaps the probable decline in the town's economy at this period rendered the guild no longer affordable.⁹⁸ Certainly the reformist preaching from in the late 1520s and 1530s must have had some effect. All guilds were ended under the Chantries Act of 1547 on the grounds of removing superstitious practices; nevertheless, for a few more traditional believers such as Margery Doubleday the guild must have had spiritual value even on the eve of its dissolution.

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