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Gifting cultures and artisanal guilds in sixteenth-and early seventeenth-century London

In the late sixteenth century a select group of London citizens began an inventory of 'goodes and other moveables remaininge and beinge within the Common Hall of the Company of Cutlers'. It is striking that a considerable proportion of the objects listed by the appraisers were specifically recorded as 'gifts', donated by company members and friends of the guild. Material donations included a carpet of broad cloth, 'stayned' cloths, napery, silver, pewter and stone pots, a large collection of silver spoons and a considerable quantity of weaponry and knives that had been made by the donor's own 'hand'. Other citizens gave a bible with a desk, a portrait picture, 'the storie of Noe [Noah]in a table', 'a table of the armes of the misterie' and 'a table of the companys of London'. The Cutlers' diverse range of gifts for display, ritual use and storage in the various rooms of their institutional building, including hall, parlour, 'drinking howse', buttery, yeomanry hall and armoury, was not unusual.¹ Books of gifts and inventories reveal that a wide range of moveable objects and material fixtures (such as wainscot and plasterwork) were given, made or commissioned by company men (and occasionally women) and recorded by the recipient guild.

The established literature on gifting and London's livery companies is exclusively focussed upon the gift as an act of civic philanthropy by the city's most successful mercantile elites.² By contrast this article explores a significant but overlooked culture of material gifts within London craft companies between c.1500 and c.1640. It asks a series of questions: which people gave gifts? What, when and how did they give? And, perhaps most important, why give? What did donors hope for and expect in return? This article will argue that returns were in terms of honour, status and memorialisation. That makes this culture rather different from that of medieval religious gifting, with

¹ G[uildhall] L[ibrary], MS 7164, fos. 5^r-13^r.

² Robert Tittler, 'Sir Thomas White of London: civic philanthropy and the making of the merchant-hero', in idem., *Townsperson and nation: English urban experiences, 1540-1640* (Stanford, 2001), pp. 100-120; Ian Archer, 'The livery companies and charity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis, eds., *Guilds, society and economy in London 1450-1800* (London, 2002), pp. 15-28; Joseph Ward, *Culture, faith and philanthropy: Londoners and provincial reform in early modern England* (New York, 2013).

very specific spiritual returns, or the secular culture of gifts designed to secure favours or patronage from courtiers and office-holders. Moreover, within the craft guild, an urban institution composed of highly discerning producers and consumers of material cultures - including apprentices, journeymen, master craftsmen, retailers and regulators of the crafts and trades - the gift could have particular and unusual significance. Artisans were especially well placed to assess the symbolic, design and material qualities of judiciously commissioned or personally crafted offerings. This article shows that citizens were closely attuned to the importance of suitable temporal and spatial contexts for both the initial gift presentation and subsequent 'social life' of their offering. It further demonstrates that across the sixteenth century gifting was embedded into the ritual calendar of elections and commemoration, and into the built fabric of the city's livery halls.

The rationale for this investigation of traces of tangible, physical gifts, derives from both the abundance and variety of archival evidence of gifting practices within guild societies, and from a methodological understanding that a material approach offers a new and enriching perspective on company cultures. Examining a range of primary sources, including company court minutes and accounts, books of gifts, benefactors and inventories, in addition to rare material survivals within guild collections, reveals that a complex material gift 'economy' existed alongside the philanthropic culture of charitable endowments that has been so comprehensively elucidated in the historiography. Material gifts - including kitchen utensils, plate, armour, paintings, textiles, furniture and building supplies - were not simply representations of identity, but a means through which early modern guildsmen expressed competing claims to civic status and professional artisanal accomplishment. The donation of goods for display or use in one's livery hall were tools through which citizens established and sustained their status, honour and memorials within complex guild hierarchies. This article first considers the distinctive nature of gifts within guilds; second the ways in which gifts were managed, recorded and remembered by the recipient company; third the range of gifts and multiplicity of motivations for gifting (the anticipated 'returns' of the gift bearer); fourth the ideal spatial, gestural

and temporal contexts for the presentation of gifts; and finally patterns of continuity and change in relation to gifting practices and material collections over time.

I

Building upon sociological and anthropological theory, a growing body of recent historical scholarship has demonstrated the significance of gifting cultures throughout early modern English society.³ Gift relations, from the (apparently) altruistic, to the market-like exchange, from the 'symmetrical' to the 'asymmetric', have been shown to be a fundamental, dynamic element of social, economic and political relations. In middling and aristocratic households, the exchange of presents, such as clothing, plate and food gifts, at significant stages of the lifecycle and on holidays and festivals, particularly New Year, was a means of demonstrating affection and loyalty.⁴ At the universities and the Inns of Court, gift exchanges were an essential form of social interaction and political negotiation, which materialised 'obligations and expectations between giver and receiver'.⁵ At court the asymmetrical relationship between monarch and subject, or patron and client, and associated notions of deference and honour, were structured through the presentation and receipt of gifts judged appropriate.⁶

First theorised by Marcel Mauss, the idea that a gift is never without expectation on the part of the donor, but an act that inherently entails an exchange (or imposes a 'burden' on the recipient), now features prominently in all studies of gift exchange.⁷ In early modern England, no donor presented a gift without some hope of appropriate 'return'. In guild culture, since the monetary or material donation was presented to the institution, a citizen 'gave unto this house', not an individual, the

³ Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in early modern England* (Oxford, 1990); idem., *The power of gifts: gift-exchange in early modern England* (Oxford, 2014); Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The culture of giving: informal support and gift-exchange in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁴ Heal, *The power of gifts*, pp. 63-82.

⁵ Louise Durning, 'The Oxford college as household, 1580-1640', in Sandra Cavallo and Silvia Evangelisti, eds., *Domestic institutional interiors in early modern Europe* (Farnham, 2009), p. 90.

⁶ Linda Levy Peck, *Court patronage and corruption in early Stuart England* (London, 1990), pp. 18-20; Heal, *The power of gifts*, pp. 31-59; *The Elizabethan New Year's gift exchanges, 1559-1603*, ed. by Jane A. Lawson (Oxford, 2013).

⁷ Marcel Mauss, *The gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, trans. by W. D. Halls (London, 1990), p. 3.

nature of the return could be somewhat intangible; it lay with the corporate body as a whole.⁸ Gifting within late medieval craft guilds and fraternities was embedded within Catholic religious culture, principally the performance of the Mass, which bound living and dead guildsmen together in perpetual cycles of material and spiritual exchange. Fraternities were abolished in the 1540s and Purgatory undermined, but the significance of material, social and (reformed) spiritual reciprocity remained paramount to the sustained vitality of London's craft and mercantile guilds.⁹

The existing research on London's post-Reformation livery companies has conceptualised the act of gifting in terms of large-scale charitable donations of money, land or property, by exceptionally affluent merchants to their companies. Gifting was a strategy through which 'godly' civic reputations and cultures were founded and perpetuated.¹⁰ By the late sixteenth century London possessed a distinct civic culture in which mercantile elites, chiefly those associated with the 'great twelve' companies, established perpetual gifts and charitable trusts, in addition to one-time gifts, administered on their behalf by fellow guild members.¹¹ The direct beneficiaries were the 'deserving' urban poor (including company widows and orphans), university scholars, godly parish preachers, inhabitants of hospitals, prisons and almshouses and impoverished, or 'decayed', company members. Charity (and notions of godliness) were also extended beyond the city walls to the benefactor's county of origin, to include provincial preaching lectureships, grammar schools and almshouses.¹² Robert Tittler's pioneering work on the 'civic portrait', a genre of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century panel portrait painting, has demonstrated how ideals of philanthropic gifting were linked to the material collections of London companies. Gifted or bequeathed by major donors and their families

⁸ GL, MS 5817, fos. 7-8.

⁹ Susan Brigden, 'Religion and social obligation in early sixteenth-century London', *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), pp. 67-112, at pp. 94-102.

¹⁰ Joseph Ward, 'Godliness, commemoration, and community: the management of provincial schools by London trade guilds', in Muriel McClendon, Joseph Ward and Michael MacDonald, eds., *Protestant identities: religion, society and self-fashioning in post-Reformation England* (Stanford, 1999), pp. 141-57; Ward, *Culture, faith and philanthropy*; Ben-Amos, *The culture of giving*, pp. 242-55.

¹¹ Archer, 'The livery companies and charity', p. 15; idem, *The pursuit of stability: social relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 120-23; Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds: structures of life in sixteenth-century London* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 195-201; Ben-Amos, *The culture of giving*, pp. 95-104.

¹² Ward, *Culture, faith and philanthropy*.

and displayed within livery halls, these portraits 'reiterated in visual terms the virtues of fraternal obligation and pious benefaction'.¹³ Urban institutional identities, 'attributes, virtues and achievements', were self-fashioned through visual culture (figure 1).¹⁴ Portraits of contemporary office holders or historic benefactors for display in company premises were however exceptional gifts, representing a very small fraction of the objects donated by guildsmen. Outside the largest and wealthiest mercantile companies these were very rare gifts indeed.¹⁵

This article adopts a more wide-ranging perspective on types of gifts and incentives for giving, beyond grand philanthropic gestures and the civic portraits to which these donations were closely associated. It is concerned with material gifts of all kinds, and with the craft guild itself as the designated recipient.¹⁶ Donations to London companies ranged from the technically innovative and intrinsically valuable artefact for use in exclusive company rituals, such as silver gilt and rock crystal election cups, to everyday objects made from quotidian materials, like wooden trenchers for feasting, which were viewed and touched by a range of estates and stored in the less prestigious rooms of the hall (the kitchen, pantry or larder). Gifts included textiles and soft furnishings, such as carpets, cushions, banners, tapestries, painted cloths and hearse cloths; furniture such as tables, chairs, forms and stools, cupboards, chests and presses. Silver and pewter plate; cooking apparatus; weaponry and armour; books and manuscripts were also considered suitable gifts. Against the backdrop of major rebuilding projects and structural adaptations to guild architectures across the city, the gifting repertoire also included decorative material features such as wainscot, painted glass panels and plasterwork. Even the physical supplies required for building projects, such as timber, stone and mortar, could be conceptualised as gifts, and recorded as such. Thus the armourer William Sympton

¹³ Robert Tittler, 'Portraiture, precedence and politics amongst the London liveries c. 1540-1640', *Urban History*, 35 (2008), pp. 349-62, at p. 355.

¹⁴ The distinguishing features are mapped out in Robert Tittler, *The face of the city: civic portraiture and civic identity in early modern England* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 3-7.

¹⁵ Tittler lists only nine 'civic portraits' acquired by companies outside the 'great twelve', all but one in the early seventeenth century [*The face of the City*, pp. 174-75].

¹⁶ Compared to the 'great twelve' these guilds had much more modest charitable endowments; in some cases none at all. See Ben-Amos, *The culture of giving*, pp. 102-4.

'gave to the foundation of the chymney in the kitchin [of Armourers' Hall] two loads of stones'.¹⁷ The donation of building supplies could take the form of obligatory donations, offerings which were still framed as 'gifts' in the court minutes and accounts. When the Carpenters' Company undertook a major extension of their hall chamber in 1594, for example - 'thenlarging of the Hall at the east ende' - one hundred and twenty-two members of the livery and yeomanry gifted timber from their workshops, or money, depending upon their status within the guild.¹⁸ Similarly, perishable goods, including food stuffs and alcoholic beverages, for collective consumption at guild feasts and dinners, constituted another strand of guild gifting culture.¹⁹ Gifts of consumables could also express loyalty, foster 'fellowship' or mark social distinctions.²⁰ Such was the symbolic richness of the food (and drink) gift within artisanal companies that it merits separate discussion, and is not explored further here.

Methodologically, material gifts might be interpreted as cultural signs that reveal identities, systems of belief or knowledge.²¹ Where physical objects or documented details of artefacts from guild collections survive, the visual imagery and materiality of gifts is complex and intriguing.²² Visual references to company, city and crown abound; so too do the craft marks of particular artisans and workshops, and the iconography of guild patron saints. The sign of the craft mark was reproduced upon company records, on the walls and ceilings of company halls and on moveable gifted artefacts, and emerges as an especially charged symbol of ownership, status and expertise. A 'parcel' of gifts might also reveal multiple loyalties and cultural identities. In 1559 the tallow chandler John Mery donated two green streamers for display in his company's court house, 'the one of the picture of Seynt Peter and the other of the Armyes of London'. In the Pewterers' mid sixteenth-century hall we find the

¹⁷ GL, MS 12105, fo. 10.

¹⁸ GL, MS 4326/6, fo. 39^r. This number represented just over a third of all guild members.

¹⁹ Gervase Rosser, 'Going to the fraternity feast: commensality and social relations in late medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), pp. 430-46.

²⁰ Felicity Heal, 'Food gifts, the household and the politics of exchange in early modern England', *Past and Present*, 199 (2008), pp. 41-70.

²¹ John Dixon Hunt, 'The sign of the object', in Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, eds., *History from things: essays on material culture* (Washington; London, 1993), pp. 293-98; Richard Grassby, 'Material culture and cultural history', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35 (2005), pp. 591-603, at pp. 592-94.

²² Material survivals are limited as a consequence of the Reformation; the Great Fire of 1666, and the aerial bombardment of the City of London in the early 1940s.

two 'scowchyns [painted wooden shields] of the gyfte of Robert Taylor one with our lady Assumptyon and one with ye kynges [Edwards'] armes'.²³ Moreover, objects or commodities, like people, can be said to have 'social lives' and culturally-embedded biographies. Things do not just represent identities or values, but act to create them. It is only by tracing the 'trajectory' of the life of the 'thing' that we begin to comprehend the shifting associations between artefacts, human agents and spatial and temporal contexts.²⁴

II

The status of the gift within guild culture is most clearly demonstrated through the careful recording of material donations within company inventories and books of gifts or benefactors. The many objects and material fixtures specifically labelled as 'gifts' reveal that citizens valued the opportunity to make their mark on the interior decoration or physical structure of their company hall. From the institutional perspective, these narratives of gifting, typically compiled over centuries and across generations of office-holders, show that recording material donations, including what was given, when, and by whom, was of considerable social and cultural value. Symbolically inventories and gift books acted as coherent and permanent records of institutional reciprocity. They worked to construct a material corporate community with lists of 'gifyts of such goodmen that be alyve and they that be paste oute of this worlde'.²⁵ From the 1540s the Pewterers' Company clerk even self-consciously noted down in the guild inventory 'this present book of Inventories (in which the gifts of good people are written) which is the gift of Walter Walshe, whose name is written in it'.²⁶ Long after things had been mislaid, stolen, exchanged or simply worn out, the entry in the inventory or gift book could also stand in for the original gifted object and memory of the donor. In November 1637 for instance, the hard-pressed Goldsmiths' Company recorded 'the particuler waight and Armes and other remarkable expressions

²³ GL, MSS 6152/1, fo. 70^r; 7110, fo. 15^r.

²⁴ Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: commodities and the politics of value', in idem, ed., *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 3-63; Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process', in *The social life of things*, pp. 64-91.

²⁵ GL, MS 7110, fo. 2^v.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 14^v.

of the donors' of their corporate silver, just as the collection was about to be sold, so 'that when the Companye shalbee of abilitie then they may supplie and restore the said guifts of the Donors'. Gifted objects were indeed re-made at a later date (figure 2).²⁷

Unlike probate inventories of contemporary domestic interiors, which were, by definition, taken at the end of a person's life, and that of the household, and thus depict one fixed moment, guild inventories are representations of a living, dynamic community.²⁸ Taking an inventory did not signal the demise of the institution, but a particular moment in the life of a corporation which expected to exist in perpetuity. Most London guilds made inventories of their corporate possessions at some point, albeit at irregular intervals. They enable us to analyse changes over time in the use of built environments, patterns of corporate 'consumption' and the 'social life' of specific objects.²⁹ In guilds holding records which allow comparison across considerable time periods, we find an increase in both the number of physical objects and the variety of material cultures.³⁰ Artisanal companies that did not compile dedicated 'inventory books' sometimes listed the contents of their livery halls within general administrative and court minutes. An inventory of the Armourers' Company Hall in 1585, listed objects according to their location in the hall; buttery; kitchen; harness gallery; parlour and counting house.³¹ Companies often organised inventories according to the spatial arrangement of the company hall, which was subject to considerable 'repairs', 'enlargements' and 'beautifications' across the early modern period.³² It is probable that many more corporate inventories once existed, but have been

²⁷ G[oldsmiths'] H[all] A[rchive], T, fos. 30^{v-r}.

²⁸ See Margaret Spufford, 'The limitations of the probate inventory', in Joan Chartres and David Hey, eds., *English rural society 1500-1800: essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 139-74.

²⁹ Giorgio Riello, 'Things seen and unseen: the material culture of early modern inventories and their representation of domestic interiors', in Paula Findlen, ed., *Early modern things: objects and their histories, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2013), p. 129.

³⁰ The literature on consumption in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England is extensive, see Joan Thirsk, *Economic policy and projects: the development of a consumer society in early modern England* (Oxford, 1978); Carole Shammas, *The pre-industrial consumer in England and America* (Oxford, 1990); Mark Overton, et al., *Production and consumption in English households, 1600-1750* (London, 2004); Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming splendor* (Cambridge, 2005).

³¹ GL, MS 12071/2, fos. 475^{v-r}.

³² Typical was the announcement in 1622 by the assistants of the Plumbers' Company, 'that the hall and house which is our usuall place of resort [...] to be repayred and made decent and comely' [GL, MS 2208/1, fo. 4].

lost. A single, damaged folio from 1558 survives, for example, listing part of the Curriers' Company's communal property.³³

After inventories, books of gifts and benefactors, typically compiled in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are the richest manuscript sources for gifting within craft guilds. The Girdlers' Company's Benefactions Book lists gifts of land, property, material culture and money, from 1431 to 1638. A great number of sixteenth-century 'Gyfts to Thall' are noted within this volume, including silver and pewter plate, textiles, painted tables, books and 'newe glasse wyndoes' engraved with the donors' names.³⁴ Similarly the Coopers' Company's Benefactors' List, running from the late fifteenth to the late eighteenth century, and first compiled by the clerk in 1718, includes both charitable endowments and material legacies.³⁵ Unlike inventories, which were in part working documents enabling company officials to keep track of their moveable property, record the value of plate and napery, and assess rates of deterioration, books of gifts and benefactions, compiled retrospectively, served a more explicitly self-aggrandising purpose. The Book of Benefactors compiled by the Armourers' Company from the early 1660s, for instance, lists 'plate, goods and money' donated to the guild from the acquisition of their hall in 1428, and was evidently intended to be a permanent record of the generosity and virtuosity of guild patrons and worthies.³⁶ This careful commemoration of civic philanthropy was no doubt also intended to spur additional donations and bequests.³⁷

For the historian, the limitation of gift and benefaction books lies in their inevitable selectivity. Often writing generations after the initial donation, company clerks recorded benefactions that the liverymen themselves deemed to be significant and which required a 'return', in the form of ceremonial memorialisation in company archives, on commemorative boards in the hall and in quarter

³³ GL, MS 14357.

³⁴ GL, MS 5817, fos. 7-37.

³⁵ GL, MSS 5618/1-2.

³⁶ GL, MS 12105.

³⁷ Ian Archer, 'The arts and acts of memorialization in early modern London', in Julia Merritt, ed., *Imagining early modern London: perceptions of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 90, 97-98.

day speeches.³⁸ The objects recorded in gift books (and inventories) were things which the assistants had decided were 'gifts' and were thus labelled as such. It is entirely feasible that there were a host of other objects, whose presence is now forever lost, which were not thought worth recording because of the social status of the donor, or were rejected or considered unsuitable. As a consequence this article is inevitably focused on the gifting patterns of the company elites, the liverymen, and especially those who formed the core of this group, the court of assistants, though there is also some evidence of material presentations from within the yeomanry. The account book of the yeomanry 'governor' and wardens of the Tallow Chandlers' Company, a group who had their own dedicated chamber within the company hall, features an inventory of the yeomanry's possessions for nearly every year of the accounts, from 1519 to 1627.³⁹ There are also occasional, tantalising hints in the archival record that the gifting process could sometimes be disrupted, and that the donation might even generate controversy. When the goldsmith George Smithes bequeathed a cup to the Goldsmiths' Company, for example, the assistants expressed their 'dislike of some of the verses graven on the cup, which they desire to be altered'.⁴⁰ Moreover, changing political and religious circumstances meant that objects once deemed 'good' gifts and entered into official records might subsequently come to be viewed as unsuitable, even subversive, and so be deleted from the archive, removed from the hall and destroyed or hidden.

III

Why give? What motivated the presentation of material gifts by guildsmen to their companies? Donors never stated their motives explicitly, but the nature of the gift, its timing and physical placing can yield clues. Broadly there were four principal anticipated returns on the guild gift, none of which were mutually exclusive. This discussion begins with the establishment of civic status and memorial

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁹ GL, MSS 6155/1-2; *Records of the Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers*, ed. by M. F. Monier-Williams, 2 vols (London, 1897-98), II, p. 255.

⁴⁰ *Memorials of the Goldsmiths' Company*, ed. by Walter Sherburne Prideaux, 2 vols (London, 1896-97), I, 125.

cultures, before turning to the construction of craft identity, the material production of 'company' and the connection between gifting and civic authority. This section ends with a brief consideration of the gifting patterns of women associated with craft companies.

If the guild gifting 'repertoire' ranged from the 'freely given' to the 'obligatory', the presentation of silver stands at the end of this spectrum.⁴¹ Through inscriptions of crests, names, personal mottos and craft symbols there was however considerable scope for an individualised and competitive dimension. Silver plate and cutlery, including covered cups, bowls, spoons and knives, were the most ubiquitous type of gift recorded; they were also often compulsory offerings within most city guilds. Gifts of plate, especially silver gilt drinking vessels with lids, and silver spoons of a certain weight, were the customary donations made by an individual upon admission to a guild, acceptance into the livery, as a fine for unacceptable behaviour such as trade offence, or compensation for declining office.⁴² Typical was the order of the court of the Pewterers' Company, recorded at the end of an early sixteenth-century inventory that any man entering the livery 'shall bring in and hand over to the Master and Wardens a silver spoon weighing an ounce or more. And this rule is to continue till the Hall has a stock of spoons for as many people as may be seated in the Hall and Parlour'.⁴³

The particular significance of the gift of silver plate lay in its intrinsic material value and potential for mutability and exchange. Collections of silver formed essential reserves of ready bullion and at times of political and financial pressure, or extraordinary expenditure, guilds sold or melted down their collections of plate, accumulated through generations of individual donations. 'Gre[a]tly impoverished by reason of the dayly charges and taxes' levied by both City and Crown, the Founders' Company had sold off all their admission spoons by 1635, each marked with the donor's initials or name, all except Humphrey Bowen's spoon, gifted in 1624-5, and inscribed on both sides of the

⁴¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The gift in sixteenth-century France* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 14-15.

⁴² Philippa Glanville, *Silver in England* (New York; London, 1987), pp. 308-9.

⁴³ GL, MS 7110, fo. 6^r.

handle: 'If You Love Me, Keep Me Ever. That's My Desire and Your Endeavour'.⁴⁴ In this instance the inscription evidently proved instructive and the single object stood in for the entire dispersed collection. The aspiration to keep up with changing fashions in plate design and the shifting prestige of object types also resulted in the dispersal and remodelling of existing plate collections. In 1579 the assistants of the Armourers' Company paid a goldsmith for the 'changing of vi owld platters and ii pottell potts into ii great chargers and ii newe pottell potts'. In 1602 they decided to 'change awaye so manie of [the] silver spoones belonging to this Companie as should amount unto the value of three salts [...] which were set up in the counting house amongst the other plate'.⁴⁵

The (often) obligatory nature of these gifts and the intrinsic value of company silver, which made it both a gift and a commodity, did not however negate the potential for plate to act as a conveyor of status and memory. Through designs, markings and inscriptions these objects acted as tangible bearers of identity. Gifts of plate marked an individual's term of civic office or transition from non-citizen to citizen, or from yeomanry estate to that of the livery.⁴⁶ These objects also played an active role in the ritual and social life of the company, observed on the buffet or table in the hall or parlour and touched and utilised by company elites at feasts and dinners. Records of the inscriptions on silver and pewter plate speak of the significance of sociability and affective bonds between citizens, and how these objects facilitated convivial interactions. This language of fellowship was particularly appropriate at the feasting table, which epitomised - in theory, if not always in practice - the reciprocal culture of guild gifting, mutual obligation and 'brotherly love'.⁴⁷ Typical was the silver spoon presented by cutler and 'younger warden' William Cave to his company, 'marked on the handle thereof be ye all of one mynd love as brethren'.⁴⁸ Bequests of silver cups with engraved armorials and inscriptions,

⁴⁴ William N. Hibbert, *History of the Worshipful Company of Founders of the City of London* (London, 1925), p. 274; Guy Hadley, *Citizens and founders: a history of the Worshipful Company of Founders, London, 1365-1975* (London, 1976), pp. 72-73.

⁴⁵ GL, MSS 12065/2, fo. 15^v; 12071/2, fo. 663.

⁴⁶ A parallel argument has been made in relation to the 'symbolic or representational meaning' of gifts of silver plate within the Oxford colleges, see Durning, 'The Oxford College as Household', p. 90.

⁴⁷ The assistants of the Armourers' Company lamented in 1610 that as a result of the 'neglect' of quarterly dinners, 'discords have arisen and brotherly love decreased' [GL, MS 12071/2].

⁴⁸ GL, MS 7164 fo. 61^r.

objects which were customarily used for the first time at the remembrance dinner of the donor in the company hall, after the citizen's burial and funeral sermon, played strongly on the connections between institutional fellowship and personal memorialisation. Gifts presented to the early seventeenth-century Goldsmiths' Company included silver gilt cups inscribed with the arms of the donor and the following mnemonics: 'This guifte I leave amongst my friends, Of that which God did give, That when I dye this guifte of myne Amongst my friends may live'.⁴⁹ And, 'When at your Hall doth shine with plate, And all your dishes served in state, When mirth abound, and wine is free, Then (freely drinking) think on me'.⁵⁰ Through interactions with such objects at guild feasts and dinners, 'amongst my friends', the symbolic community of guildsmen extended beyond the present company.⁵¹ Gifts of plate were undoubtedly investments, forming essential reserves of institutional silver, but they also perpetuated the 'social memory' of previous generations of guildsmen in the minds of the living civic community.

Words or the armorial bearings of a donor or the company were not the only symbols upon gifts of silver and pewter plate. Craft marks of master artisans and mercantile dynasties were also inscribed, providing a strong link between the identity of the donor as a skilled workshop practitioner, and the gift for ritual use within the guild community. In 1519 carpenter Thomas Smart did 'give and bequeath [...] A Cupp of silver and cleane Gylt with my name and my timber mark in it weighing 27 oz' so 'that I the said Thomas may be the better rememb[e]red and prayed for in the said fellowship of Carpenters while our world shall endure'. In 1559 girdler John Cooke 'gave unto this house A Cupp with a Cover graven and gylt and with his mark'.⁵² Though religious and memorial cultures had changed considerably since Smart's day the craft mark continued to operate within the guild as a meaningful mnemonic device. Upon serving a successful apprenticeship, receiving the freedom and

⁴⁹ *Memorials of the Goldsmiths' Company*, I, 150.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-57.

⁵¹ Shelia Sweetinburgh, 'Remembering the dead at dinner-time', in Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson eds., *Everyday objects: medieval and early modern material culture and its meanings* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 257-66, at pp. 264-65.

⁵² GL, MSS 4332, fo. 2; 5817, fo. 13.

thus becoming a citizen and active artisan, a maker's mark, which often incorporated the letters of his name or the tools or products of the trade, had to be formally approved and registered at the appropriate company hall. Inventories show that pewter or lead tables 'with the marks of all the whole craft' were prominently displayed within company parlours, the key site of civic governance and craft regulation.⁵³

The association between gifted object, mark and donor must surely have had a further charge, within an institution of producers and retailers, when the artefact was created from the materials with which the giver had artisanal expertise. Thus a 'stope pot [...] vi lb markid with his owne marke' was presented by pewterer Robert Turner to his company in 1594.⁵⁴ Members of the Pewterers' Company frequently gave pewter plate to their guild, including 'pottell potts', spoons and dishes. Goldsmiths gave plate from their own workshops; armourers working in the city or at Greenwich gave suits and tools for display in their Hall on Coleman Street.⁵⁵ These were artefacts which demonstrated the donor's personal labour and skill in the craft of the company, a feature of civic identity and status overlooked in existing interpretations of urban cultures.⁵⁶ The 'spirit' of the maker (and donor) was inextricably and uniquely linked to these gifts.⁵⁷ The early sixteenth-century French craftsman Marion Garret, for example, Henry VIII's personal bladesmith, presented 'a table knyf and a carvyng knyf of [his] guift' to the Cutlers' Company, possibly a donation associated with his naturalisation and admission to the English guild.⁵⁸ By the late sixteenth century these knives were displayed in the same hall chamber as Garret's portrait, demonstrating that working identities were closely in dialogue with

⁵³ GL, MSS 7164, fo. 6^r [Cutlers' Company]; 12107, fo. 3^r [Armourers' Company]; 7110, fo. 32^v [Pewterers' Company].

⁵⁴ GL, MS 7110

⁵⁵ GL, MSS 7110, fo. 33^{v-r}; 7164, fo. 6^v.

⁵⁶ There is a parallel here with the intellectual 'labour' associated with the gift of a manuscript or poem presented to a court patron, see Heal, *The power of gifts*, pp. 46-49.

⁵⁷ Bert De Munck has argued that every hallmarked product was in a sense a gift offering, 'anchoring the spirit of the giver to the product'. See 'Artisans, products and gifts: rethinking the history of material culture in early modern Europe', *Past and Present*, 224 (2014), pp. 39-74, at p. 64. For Mauss's original formulation of the 'spirit' of the gift, see *The gift*, pp. 14-16.

⁵⁸ Charles Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company of London and of minor cutlery crafts*, 2 vols (London, 1916-23), I, p. 208; GL, MS 7164, fo. 6^v.

what have conventionally been perceived as 'civic' virtues.⁵⁹ The status that such a hand-wrought gift might hold within the guild in the years following its presentation is indicated by 'a knyf of the guifte of Mr Richard Mathewe' being placed first on the list of objects in the parlour, the most exclusive room in the late sixteenth-century Cutlers' Hall.⁶⁰ Mathew also presented knives for use at the Lord Mayor's feasting table in Guildhall and a sword of state, 'well and workmenly wrought and gylded' to the City Corporation, 'desiring onely ye reasonable favour of this Court in suche his honest sutes'. Mathew was an active citizen and working cutler with an unrivalled expertise in the manufacture of knives.⁶¹ He was even praised in John Stow's *Survey of London* for his innovative workshop practices: 'the first Englishman that attained to the Skill of making fine Knives and Knife-hafts'.⁶²

Gifts to guilds worked not only to demonstrate the personal expertise of the associated donor, but also to make the ideal of institutional 'companie' material.⁶³ The link between gifting and the physical construction of corporate community is most explicit in the case of the sponsorship of the material apparatus of the guild feast. In the 1550s for example, a member of the Girdlers' Company 'dyd gyve to this howse one playne table cloth ii dozen playne napkyns and the frame for the high table', a parcel of gifts which ensured that he had single-handedly sponsored the entire top feasting table.⁶⁴ An early seventeenth-century armourer even gave 'three dozen of Brasse hookes [...] for to hang hats upon as the Co[mpany] sitteth at dinner'.⁶⁵ Gifts from the yeomanry to their guild were typically items for use in the yeomanry's quarterly feasts, including mazers, horns, wine and beer pots, trenchers, long spits and 'dripping pannes'.⁶⁶ The significance of provisioning these events, to which all yeomanry members were invited, suggests the strong institutional and social identity these meals

⁵⁹ Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company*, II, p. 116.

⁶⁰ GL, MS 7164, fo. 6^r.

⁶¹ Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company*, I, pp. 222-24. Richard Mathew was Master of the Cutlers' Company three times during the 1580s.

⁶² Cited in *ibid.*, p. 224.

⁶³ Phil Withington, 'Company and sociability in early modern England', *Social History*, 32 (2007), pp. 291-307, at p. 300.

⁶⁴ GL, MS 5817, fo. 11.

⁶⁵ GL, MS 12105, fo. 14.

⁶⁶ GL, MS 6155/2, fos. 43^{v-r}.

fostered. Amongst the livery, the donation of napery, especially table napkins and cloths, by a master or a warden in the year of his service - and marked with his initials and/or craft mark - was a custom across the craft guilds. The gift of the master pewterer Sir Thomas Curtis, on 1 January 1550, of 'a playne table clothe for the hie table [and] a dd [dozen] of playne napkyns markyd with his marke', demonstrates that a citizen's mercantile or craft mark might act as a powerful status symbol on textiles as well as plate.⁶⁷ As each individual seated at the high table would be provided with a napkin 'markyd with hys marke', Curtis was explicitly demonstrating ownership over the social and material worth of the gift itself and the legitimacy of his place at this privileged site of fellowship.⁶⁸ In this particular instance, the longevity and representational authority of Curtis's craft mark upon the table napkins was further enhanced through being reproduced by the company clerk in the margin of the archival record on which the gift was recorded.⁶⁹

The gift of painted wooden surfaces in the form of framed 'tables', hung and displayed in court room, parlour, gallery, but most frequently communal hall, did not have intrinsic material value, but was nevertheless a highly visible means through which a donor might assert a personal association with the good government, biblical history or antiquity of his company. Depictions of biblical scenes or the patron saints of companies - such as the 'storie of Noyes [Noah's] flude' on a table in Cutlers' Hall or 'a table of joyners worke with the picture of St George upon it in vellom' in Armourers' Hall - were popular choices.⁷⁰ A group of liverymen of the Carpenters' Company sponsored a mural at the high-end of their late sixteenth-century hall representing the fundamental role of carpenters and the craft throughout Old and New Testament history (figure 3).⁷¹ Within the guild context, such representations of biblical ancestry no doubt served to bolster both the occupational identity of the

⁶⁷ GL, MS 7110, fo. 11. Curtis was the first member of the Pewterers' Company to serve as Lord Mayor in 1557-58.

⁶⁸ For 'paraliturgical' features of the late-medieval guild feast, see Rosser, 'Going to the fraternity feast', pp. 433-37.

⁶⁹ GL, MS 7110, fo. 11.

⁷⁰ GL, MSS 7164, fo. 7^r; 12105, fo. 9.

⁷¹ B. W. E. Alford and T. C. Barker, *A history of the Carpenters' Company* (London, 1968), pp. 62, 150, 225-27.

craft practitioners and the legitimacy of the company elites who had sponsored the image.⁷² The visual emphasis on historic antiquity was perhaps all the more significant for the city's craft companies, which lacked the extensive endowments, philanthropic cultures and 'merchant heroes' of the city's wealthiest and most prestigious mercantile companies.

Ubiquitous in guild buildings were tables displaying text, related to the ordinances of the company, regulations of the craft and the founders and benefactors of the guild; gifts which unambiguously represented civic authority, particularly in relation to the yeomanry, the predominately artisanal, and occasionally unruly element of the guild body.⁷³ The display of these tables in the common hall specifically ensured that they were viewed by the largest number of guild members and visitors. By contrast there was a parallel trend of displaying 'civic portraits' in the more exclusive and generally inaccessible rooms of parlour and great chamber.⁷⁴ In the 1550s the Girdlers' Company were presented with five tables from John Nicholls, including 'a joyned table to hang in t[he] hall wherein he hath wrytten with his owne hand the Actes and ordinances of t[he] howse to be reade ev[e]ry quarter daye'. The other tables related to the taking and enrolling of apprentices, the making of 'lawfull' wares and 'of all the evidence and wrytinge that be in t[he] hows of this daye'. The association between Nicholls and these gifts was reinforced by each being 'of his owne hand wryting'.⁷⁵ Likewise a donor to the Armourers' Company 'did make and give [...] a table faire written in meeter of the Antiquity of this Co[mpany]'.⁷⁶ The Cutlers' guild had in their 'great hall' a framed table of 'the orders of the Companye fayrelye written and lymmed' in addition to a table listing the names of 'divers of first beginners of this company in the tyme of Edward third', with two doors 'to

⁷² Keith Thomas, *The perception of the past in early modern Europe: Creighton Trust Lecture* (London, 1983), p. 2; Ian Archer, 'Discourses of history in Elizabethan and early Stuart London', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 68 (2005), pp. 205-226, at p. 206.

⁷³ Systemic tensions between the yeomanry and the livery should not be exaggerated, see Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds*, pp. 219-32; Archer, *The pursuit of stability*, pp. 106-111.

⁷⁴ Robert Tittler, 'Faces and spaces: displaying the civic portrait in early modern England', in Hamling and Richardson, eds, *Everyday objects*, pp. 179-87.

⁷⁵ GL, MS 5817, fos. 11-12.

⁷⁶ GL, MS 12105, fo. 13.

shut together'.⁷⁷ It is tempting to see an allusion to the closed panels of a triptych in this design, with folding doors which were perhaps only opened to reveal the names of 'the ancient beginners of the societie of cutlers' on quarter days and the election feast (which coincided with the patronal feast day).⁷⁸ The presentation of wooden chests, boxes and presses, which proliferated within company buildings from the mid-sixteenth century - for the storage of charters, books, seals, jewels and plate, and the carrying out of elections - symbolically linked the donor to significant administrative and governmental processes and the company's most precious material collections. The armourer John Pasfield - master of the associated company six times between 1583 and 1597 - gave a 'fair large chest bound with iron. A lock in the midst and fower hanging locks to it the chest' in the 1590s, for the storage of documents, with keys for each of the three wardens, and one for himself.⁷⁹ This was not an unusual gift for a man of his civic position and responsibilities, particularly during an era in which ownership and access to guild archives and treasures was becoming increasingly restricted and contentious.⁸⁰

Conspicuous so far by their absence from this discussion of gifts and returns have been female donors. Women could not hold office or attend court meetings, and female donors were almost always the wives, or more usually widows of the guild elite. Textiles were the gifts most commonly given, an unsurprising discovery in view of the cultural value of textiles within female gifting networks.⁸¹ Since needlework was perceived as a female accomplishment, it is probable that these textile gifts were personally produced or modified by their female donors, thus combining a symbol

⁷⁷ GL, MS 7164, fo. 69^r.

⁷⁸ GL, MS 7164, fo. 70^v. For spectacular surviving examples of early modern Netherlandish guild altarpieces, which combine craft imagery and patron saints, see *From Quinten Metsijs to Peter Paul Rubens: masterpieces from the Royal Museum reunited in the Cathedral* (Antwerp, 2009), pp. 13-43.

⁷⁹ GL, MS 12105, fo. 13.

⁸⁰ Paul Griffiths, 'Secrecy and authority in late sixteenth-and seventeenth-century London', *The Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), pp. 925-51, at pp. 934-35.

⁸¹ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in early modern England, 1550-1720* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 223; Lorna Weatherill, 'A possession of one's own: women and consumer behaviour in England, 1660-1740', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), pp. 131-56, at p. 143.

of identity and status with a demonstration of skill and devotion.⁸² These hand-wrought gifts typically incorporated the initials of the married couple. The ‘six lowe stooles for women’ presented in 1606 by widow Agnes Sherman to the Girdlers Company were covered with green fabric ‘and marked on the toppe in the middle with letters embrodered of black velvet T. S. A: for the name of her [...] And Mr Thomas Sherman her said husband’.⁸³ These seats were used by Agnes and her fellow city wives and widows on the rare occasions that women were admitted into the hall for dinners and festivities.⁸⁴ In 1570 another widow, Mystres Wyet, had given to the Girdlers a ‘cupboard clothe wrought with blacke silke and a blacke and white fringe for the windowe in the hall to set plate vpon’. An armourer’s wife likewise gave ‘to the high cuboard in the [Armourers’] Hall a fine cuboard cloath’.⁸⁵ The cupboard cloth was a highly strategic gift choice since it was placed under the most prestigious window in the hall (usually a bay window), and provided an opulent backdrop for the silver buffet during occasions of civic significance, including election dinners and funeral feasts.⁸⁶

IV

The political culture of guild gifting was firmly embedded within the particular spatial and architectural contexts of the livery hall. On walls, ceilings, staircases and gates, and within window frames, through the mediums of wood, stone, plaster and glass, guildsmen competed to have their initials, marks, words or armorial bearings displayed in the most prestigious spaces and chambers within company buildings (figure 4).⁸⁷ The Pewterers’ Company’s comprehensive inventory includes a list from 1497 of guildsmen and company widows who had gifted glazed window panels for the hall, parlour and counting house, including a bay window, ‘the high wyndowe over the high dais’ and ‘the wyndowe next to the gardyne dore’, using ‘flemysse’ and ‘normandy’ glass. Company hierarchies were both

⁸² Lisa M. Klein, ‘Your humble handmaid: Elizabethan gifts of needlework’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 50 (1997), pp. 459-93, at pp. 471-76.

⁸³ GL, MS 5817, fo. 37.

⁸⁴ Female testamentary bequests were also targeted at women: see Claire Schen, *Charity and lay piety in Reformation London, 1500-1620* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 244.

⁸⁵ GL, MSS 5817, fo. 18; 12105, fo. 11.

⁸⁶ John Schofield, *Medieval London houses* (New Haven; London, 1995), p. 131.

⁸⁷ The display of portraits upon ‘tables’ in company halls could also be immensely competitive, see Tittler, ‘Faces and spaces’, pp. 184-85.

affirmed and negotiated through this process of material sponsorship, for Master Lawrence Aslyn funded the most prestigious 'high' window in the internal hall, and the wardens and former office holders were responsible for additional panes (or 'half' or 'third' panels) throughout the chamber. Whereas the hall windows were sponsored by current and former masters and wardens, the parlour windows were exclusively funded by men with no official title but with evident ambition to enhance their social and civic status. Company accounts show that Thomas Chamberleyn, Robert Langtot, John Magson, William Pecke and Richard Taylor all supplied 'glasid' panes for the parlour in 1497 and subsequently went on to hold company office over the next two decades.⁸⁸ More than half a century later, as the Pewterers were again engaged in a project of building improvement and expansion, civic hierarchies were made material through the institutional built fabric. Between 1551 and 1553 members of the Pewterers' Company competed over the precise locations of their contributions towards the 'seallyng [wainscoting] of the hall'. Heraldic symbols were also set up in the form of carved and painted wooden devices, displaying the company insignia and familial arms of benefactors, though not always by the same individuals who had paid for the general panelling, thus creating a complex material surface of patronage and status.⁸⁹ Material sponsorship of the livery hall was a defining feature of civic ambition and institutional architectures were themselves conceived of as gifts.

London's early modern citizens also demonstrated an acute awareness of the ceremonial value of the very act of gifting, 'the politics of representation'.⁹⁰ Though benefaction books and inventories are generally thin on contextual detail concerning the precise circumstances in which a moveable gift was bestowed, occasional entries in court minutes relating to especially grand donations demonstrate that guildsmen timed their performances of generosity with care. Ideally a large number of citizens, particularly those belonging to the political elite, would witness the act of gifting, and

⁸⁸ GL, MS 7110, fo. 4^v.

⁸⁹ Charles Welch, *History of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers of the City of London*, 2 vols (London, 1902), I, 274.

⁹⁰ Gadi Algazi, 'Introduction: doing things with gifts', in Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner and Bernhard Jussen, eds., *Negotiating the gift: pre-modern figurations of exchange* (Göttingen, 2003), p. 18; Archer, 'The arts and acts of memorialisation', p. 105.

preferably the donor's peers might be assembled within the livery hall on a day of customary importance in the ritual calendar, thus amplifying the status of the giver and gift. At guild feasts, held on days of craft, religious or political significance, the upper echelons of the company were present and the hall was hung with banners, streamers and tapestries (figure 5). Further the feast was customarily a convivial event associated with civic reciprocity and generosity, including the distribution of alms and pensions.⁹¹ In 1567 when the accomplished armourer John Kelte was at the peak of his professional career, as a liveryman of the Armourers' Company and Master Workman at the royal armour workshops at Greenwich, he presented his gift to the company, a model pattern harness in the latest Greenwich style, at the master's election feast. Kelte placed his gift on a platter and theatrically processed it, before the multiple serving dishes of food, to the high table.⁹² The court minutes describe this suit as a 'mannakyne' and it was kept in a specially made cupboard and dressed in satin and blue silk on feast days.⁹³ The highly ritualised giving of this hand-wrought gift, in imitation of civic ceremony, evidently mirrored its future use within the corporate community.

Objects specifically associated with company election rites, such as election garlands, hats or crowns, or election cups, were especially charged gifts, which might only be presented by those who had served as guild master. Election artefacts had an unusual type of agency within guild culture, for it was through drinking from the election cup, and/or having been crowned with the election wreath that one formally became a new master or warden. Rather like a crown at the royal coronation, these garlands did not merely represent authority, but through their use, brought about a new status.⁹⁴ The Goldsmiths' Company's court of assistants stressed that a warden was only invested with civic authority 'at the feast daye by the garlands then sett upon their heads'.⁹⁵ Through their theatrical presentation at the election feast and subsequent use at all such future election rituals these artefacts

⁹¹ Rosser, 'Going to the fraternity feast', pp. 436-37; Ben-Amos, *The culture of giving*, pp. 173-74.

⁹² Elizabeth Glover, *Men of metal: history of the Armourers and Brasiers of the City of London* (Huddersfield, 2008), p. 65.

⁹³ GL, MS 12071/2, fo. 475^v.

⁹⁴ Edward Muir, *Ritual in early modern Europe*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2005), p. 272.

⁹⁵ GHA, K I, fo. 220.

materially linked the memory of the donor with the election ceremony and civic office, long after his lifetime. For the guild community, the use of ritualised objects also provided a sense of continuity and stability across the generations.⁹⁶ The connections between personal reputation, craft identity and durable political legitimacy are nicely illustrated by a gifting example from August 1575, when Master Cuthbert Beeston

of his owne free will gave unto the use of the Master of the said [Girdlers'] Companye yerely to be elected and chosen forever, one crowne Garlande of blacke velvet imbrodered with the letters of his name [...] and a gridyron of golde, and the girdle with the buckles of brodered gold lace compassinge the crowne.⁹⁷

As Beeston's gift choice suggests, the objects presented for use at election ceremonies were highly valuable, both in their use of precious natural and manufactured materials, such as gold, silver, rock crystal, pearl and velvet, and through exquisite craftsmanship. Election garlands, crowns or cups were very often the most intrinsically valuable object in a company's entire collection of plate and linen; the quality of the materials and workmanship heightening the visual and material splendour of the rite. At the Goldsmiths' election feast of 1560, held on St Dunstan's feast day, Master Sir Martin Bowes presented for use at all future election ceremonies four 'fair garlands of crimson velvet, garnished with silver and gold, and set with pearls and stones' and 'a fair gilt Standing Cuppe, weighing 80 ounces [...] with a manikin on the cover holding a skutchyn whereon his arms be graved in an annealed plate of gold'.⁹⁸ The iconography of objects for use at election typically incorporated craft symbols and patron saints, presumably valued because of their antiquity. The 'iiii garlandes of crimson velvet' acquired by the Tallow Chandlers' Company in 1564 were ornamented with 'vii Turtle doves of silver and iiii St Johns hedes of silver and gilte'. The Pewterers' four election garlands were decorated with

⁹⁶ For civic regalia in the post-Reformation urban provincial context see: Tittler, *The Reformation and the towns in England: politics and political culture, c. 1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 272-73.

⁹⁷ GL, MS 5817, fo. 20. St Laurence (d. 258) the Girdlers' patron saint was said to have been roasted to death on the gridiron. See David Hugh Harmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 237-38.

⁹⁸ *Memorials of the Goldsmiths' Company*, I, p. 63. The Bowes Cup is still within the Goldsmiths' Company's plate collection.

silver pendants of 'the image of our lady'. The yeomanry wardens of the Haberdashers' Company were crowned at their election feast with garlands of crimson velvet with silver pendants depicting St George and St Katherine.⁹⁹

Across the city companies a discernible chronological pattern emerges in relation to the gifting of election artefacts. From c. 1560 the spaces within the livery hall where election ceremonies took place were expanded, materially improved and embellished, and the ritual election objects presented underwent a similar transformation. Despite repeated assertions in company archives that all things were observed and performed as 'of ancient tyme it hath bene accustomed', election rites were also being newly codified and adapted.¹⁰⁰ During the 1560s it was decided by the Armourers' Company that 'where as afore tyme there was no place apoynted for the old wardens', now former wardens would sit with the current authorities at the 'feast dener', and might all 'ryse jointly together and goe with their garlands'. In 1595, by a command of the court of the Ironmongers' Company, the precise seating arrangements and order of service at the annual election feast for the 'Highe Table', the 'Seconde Table' and the 'Thirde Table' were codified for the first time.¹⁰¹ The splendour of election ceremonies reflected upon the status of the guild and officers were keenly aware of parallel ritual practices in each other's halls. It is telling that in 1560 the court of the Goldsmiths' Company decided that 'the ceremony of choosing the wardens with garlands on our feast day (as the use is in other Companies) shall be used in this Company'.¹⁰²

V

We turn finally to the issue of continuity and change across the period. The evidence of objects for use at election ceremonies shows that there were some innovations in gifting practices - in the types of things given, and methods of presentation - from the second half of the sixteenth century. This was

⁹⁹ GL, MSS 6152/1, fo. 31^r; 7110, fo. 12^r; 15868, fo. 8^f.

¹⁰⁰ GHA, P1, fol. 28^f.

¹⁰¹ GL, MSS 12071/2, fo. 33; 16960, fo. 65^v.

¹⁰² *Memorials of the Goldsmiths' Company*, I, p. 63.

a trend in all likelihood linked to the enlargement of company halls and the broader elaboration of civic ceremony.¹⁰³ The embellishment of rituals of gift giving within guild communities, events focused upon reciprocity between citizen and company, also look to be further evidence for the rise of associational 'bourgeois' culture, and a robust civic identity in this period.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the strengthening association between gifting and feasting from the second half of the sixteenth century, practices which were intended to reinforce bonds between citizens, is suggestive of the increasing linguistic, institutional and cultural prevalence of civic sociability or 'company' in early modern urban England.¹⁰⁵

We might anticipate that above all the Reformation had a profound impact upon guild gifting cultures. The 'intensely iconoclastic opening phase of the English Reformation' is often said to have dealt a weighty blow to provincial urban culture.¹⁰⁶ Adding an important religious dimension to the pessimistic social and economic analysis of sixteenth-century urban England, Robert Tittler suggests that the comprehensive process of 'refashioning [...] a useful collective memory' by England's citizens from c. 1540, resulted in a truly distinctive post-Reformation culture. Religious iconography and mythology were replaced with new forms of civic regalia, civic portraiture and historical writing.¹⁰⁷ The evidence of London's craft companies presents a rather more nuanced picture of continuity and change. Practices of material gifting and memorialisation survived the Reformation upheavals with relatively few significant changes. Some prominent objects were removed from company halls as no longer acceptable. But many other gifts survived. The guild archives provide no explanation for this

¹⁰³ Michael Berlin, 'Civic ceremony in early modern London', *Urban History*, 13 (1986), pp. 15-27, at pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism? Urban association and the middling sort', in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, eds., *The middling sort of people: culture, society and politics in England, 1550-1800* (London, 1994), pp. 84-112.

¹⁰⁵ Phil Withington, *The politics of commonwealth: citizens and freemen in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 129-37; 'Company and sociability', pp. 297-300; *Society in early modern England: the vernacular origins of some powerful ideas* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 102-33.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Tittler, 'Reformation, civic culture and collective memory in English provincial towns', *Urban History*, 24 (1997), pp. 283-300, at p. 286.

¹⁰⁷ Tittler, *The Reformation and the towns*, Chapter 13. Tittler was chiefly responding to the established narrative of the decline of sixteenth-century urban society and economy: see Peter Clark and Paul Slack, 'Introduction', in Clark and Slack, eds., *Crisis and order in English towns, 1500-1700* (London, 1972), pp. 1-56.

pattern, but we can speculate on possible factors, including the variable balance of reformed or conservative sympathies among the livery and assistants of each guild; corporate pride in guild traditions, and the close association of patron saints with the particular craft of guild members. It is probable that the symbolic meanings of gifts also underwent modification in new spatial and material contexts.

From the surviving evidence it is clear that following the Edwardian injunctions of 1547 certain iconographies and materialities, those undeniably devotional, were no longer acceptable within London company collections.¹⁰⁸ Among the gifts initially accepted but later removed from guild inventories, gift books and halls were a gilded statue of St Dunstan in Goldsmiths' Hall, set with precious stones; 'the crest of the high deysesse [dais] with three Angells' in Armourers' Hall; and a table for an altar with 'an ymage of Seint Clement', belonging to the Founders' Company.¹⁰⁹ The gift of a gilt image of St John the Baptist, 'standyng in a Tabernacle' in Merchant Taylors' Hall in the early sixteenth century, is conspicuous by its absence in the next surviving company inventory, taken in the first decade of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁰ In a reformed religious context in which the intercessory role of saints was denied, three dimensional, gilded images of these figures were unsuitable. But livery halls were not stripped of all religious material culture. The craft guilds of London showed a sustained enthusiasm for visual imagery of their late-medieval patron saints well into the Elizabethan Reformation, as evidenced by representations of their saintly patrons on gifts of silver plate, banners and flags, wall paintings and hangings, wooden shields and election garlands. In 1562 the Tallow Chandlers still had hanging from the high end of their company hall 'a gilt beame with v lattyn candilsticks with the ymage of our ladie and a turtill dove'. And covering the walls they still had 'ii clothes the one of the ymage of the Assumpcion of our ladie and the other of our ladie and seynt

¹⁰⁸ Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts, vol. 1, Laws against images* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 254-57.

¹⁰⁹ GHA, I, fos. 7, 16, 22; MS 12105, fol. 2; *Wardens' accounts of the Worshipful Company of Founders of the City of London, 1497-1681*, ed. by Guy Parsloe (London, 1964), p. 413.

¹¹⁰ *Memorials of the Guild of Merchant Taylors of the Fraternity of St. John the Baptist, in the City of London*, ed. by Charles M. Clode (London, 1875), pp. 84, 92-96.

Elizabeth'.¹¹¹ The most prized possession of the yeomanry of the Tallow Chandlers, from its donation in 1536, remained a mazer with 'the image of saint Katheryn in the bottome of the gift of Mr Choppin'.¹¹² The company patron saint typically had a close association to the craft of its working members, through the saint's occupation in life, or method of martyrdom. This professional connection to the late-medieval craft, combined with the historic antiquity of the saints, evidently endowed these figures with sustained cultural value, across the Reformation divide.¹¹³ Nor is this picture of iconographic continuity wholly surprising. Research on the decoration of English domestic interiors, and cathedrals and parish churches, shows a similar pattern of religious material culture removals and survivals across the 'long Reformation' period.¹¹⁴

Once part of a company collection the meanings of a gift were also subject to change over time and explicitly devotional associations could be detoxified. Take for example the polychromed oak sculpture of St George and the Dragon, presented to the Armourers' Company in 1528 by William Vynyard, premier citizen and artisan at the peak of his civic ascendancy, and still in the possession of the guild (figure 6). This exceptional gift, encased in miniature steel armour of the latest Italian fashion, had been made in Vynyard's own workshop, and started life as a devotional object - as evidenced by its donation with 'a Lattin Candlestick that is before it' - located before the high table in Armourer's Hall.¹¹⁵ By the late sixteenth century, long after the death of its donor and in a different religious climate, the sculpture of St George, patron saint of the company, was the inspiration not for religious piety but rather stood as an exemplar of the armourers' technical skills. A number of other working guild members crafted and presented miniature armoured St Georges (or 'mannakynes') and full-sized

¹¹¹ GL, MS 6152/1, fo. 98^v.

¹¹² MS 6155/1.

¹¹³ Rosser, 'Going to the fraternity feast', p. 444.

¹¹⁴ Tara Hamling, *Decorating the 'godly' household: religious art in post-reformation Britain* (New Haven; London, 2010); Julie Spraggon, *Puritan iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2003), Chapter 1.

¹¹⁵ GL, MS 12105, fo. 10.

suits, which were conspicuously displayed as a group, with Vynyard's original gift, in the new 'Gallery over the Hall'.¹¹⁶

As with the iconography of gifts, the mnemonic function of material cultures in early modern London guilds suggests more continuity than change. The Reformation brought a certain fundamental alteration to the memorial cultures of the city's artisanal guilds; namely that with the rejection of the doctrine of good works and the suppression of fraternities and chantries, gifts could no longer directly invite prayers from the living on behalf of the soul of the deceased. But memorialisation within the guild involved a broad understanding of the reciprocal relationship between living and dead company members. Commemoration meant more than intercessory prayers.¹¹⁷ The evidence of material gifts, and their continued ritualised uses during feasts, funerals, court meetings, quarter days, elections and civic ceremonies, shows that the social obligation to remember the honour, skill and generosity of former generations of civic office-holders was deeply woven into the fabric of guild culture. Moreover, the cultural persistence of gift giving, and the continued mnemonic importance of particular material gifts, rituals and objects which epitomised fellowship within artisanal institutions, are evidence of the trend for a strengthened urban political culture in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, based upon the ideals of civil society.¹¹⁸

Inventories and books of gifts and benefactors show that the practice of giving material things was a thread of institutional cultural continuity within late-medieval and early modern city companies; a means by which identity, legitimacy and memorialisation were negotiated within London's craft guilds. The culture of guild gifting was so deep-rooted and significant that it could survive the disruptions of the Reformation with relatively few changes. It took the profoundly traumatic blow of the Great Fire of 1666 to undermine much of the guilds' collective memory, destroying forty-four livery

¹¹⁶ GL, MS 12107, fos. 2^r, 6^r.

¹¹⁷ Peter Sherlock, 'The reformation of memory in early modern Europe', in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, eds., *Memory: histories, theories, debates* (New York, 2010), pp. 30-40, at p. 31; Archer, 'The arts and acts of memorialization', pp. 91, 113.

¹¹⁸ Withington, *The politics of commonwealth*.

halls, and in some instances their entire material contents.¹¹⁹ And even then, once company halls were re-established, corporate rituals were rapidly revived.

¹¹⁹ Thomas F. Reddaway, *The rebuilding of London after the Great Fire* (London, 1951), p. 26.