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Portraiture, precedence and politics amongst the London liveries c. 1540–1640

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ABSTRACT: Portraiture has accurately been identified as one of the many harmony-inducing, commemorative devices employed in the celebratory culture of the London liveries in the century after the Reformation. But a closer examination of the developing tradition of livery company portraiture shows its use to be considerably more complex, and sometimes more divisive, than previously recognized.

Thanks in large measure to the pioneering work of Ian Archer, it is now pretty well established that portraiture formed an important part of the celebratory vocabulary of the London liveries from the middle of the sixteenth century and perhaps even before. Especially in his essay on 'The arts and acts of memorialization in early modern London'[1] Archer considers such portraits as part of a continuum of commemorative devices which breached the putative Reformation divide. He places them alongside other commemorative events (company dinners, funeral monuments, sermons and so forth) which were intended to enhance harmonious relations within the liveries and the City itself. His contribution regarding portraiture adds to an established chorus singing the role of commemorative and ceremonial devices to encourage harmonious relations in urban communities both before and after the Reformation.[2]

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[1] I. Archer, 'On the arts and acts of memorialization in early modern London', in J.F. Merritt (ed.), *Imagining Early Modern London, Perceptions & Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598–1720* (Cambridge, 2001), 89–116.

[2] Landmark contributions to this consensus include C. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen: the communal year at Coventry, 1540–1550', in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700* (London, 1972), 57–85; M. James, 'Ritual, drama and social body in the late medieval English town', *Past and Present*, 98 (Feb. 1983), 3–39; M. Berlin, 'Civic ceremony in early modern London', *Urban History Yearbook* (1986), 17–25; B. McRee, 'Religious gilds and the regulation of behaviour in late medieval towns', in J.T. Rosenthal and C. Richmond (eds.), *People, Politics and Community* (Gloucester, 1987),

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But there may well be more to the use of portraiture amongst the London liveries than has been recognized, and they may not always have been quite the harmony-inducing device which one readily assumes them to be. This article explores the post-Reformation emergence of secular, panel portraits as they came to be commissioned and displayed by the London liveries (or at least by that representative sampling of such companies whose portraits and archives survive). It suggests that circumstances such as the location and duration of their display within company halls allowed them to serve even more functions than we tend to realize. It also suggests that not all the responses to such display had the desired harmony-inducing consequence.

To begin with, let us understand that most livery company portraits, especially the early ones, were not quite the same sort of thing as those 'personal portraits' – for want of a better label – which contributed so substantially to the personal self-fashioning of English men and women in the Renaissance era. 'Personal' portraits were conventionally commissioned by or on behalf of the sitter, displayed in residential premises, and designed to exhibit that sitter's personal status and achievements. If we think of these portraits as texts, they were essentially autobiographical or at least biographical in nature, delivering statements about the sitter, his or her friends, associates, and especially family, often placing those subjects in their genealogical and social context. In the words of the late Prof. Lawrence Stone,[3] 'Noblemen and gentlemen wanted above all full family portraits, which take their place along with genealogical trees and sumptuous tombs as symptoms of the frenzied status-seeking and ancestor worship of the age. What patrons demanded was evidence of the sitter's position and wealth by opulence of dress, ornament, and background.'

Most early *livery* company portraits, by contrast, may be classed as 'civic portraits': paintings of civic and institutional officials usually commissioned by the civic institution, displayed in institutional rather than residential spaces, and emphasizing civic above (though not necessarily instead of) personal virtues.[4] They, too, were meant to be read as texts, but they conveyed quite different messages, and to quite different audiences, than their more fashionable and familiar counterparts on display in, for example, the long galleries of country homes. But by the early seventeenth century the functional potential of livery company portraits began to expand, blurring the lines between the personal and

108–22; S. Brigden, 'Religion and social obligation in early sixteenth-century London', *Past and Present*, 103 (May, 1984), 67–112; D. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells, National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989); I. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability, Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), especially 116–20; and R. Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England, Politics and Political Culture, c. 1540–1640* (Oxford, 1998), especially Part IV.

[3] L. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (Oxford, 1965), 712.

[4] R. Tittler, *The Face of the City. Civic Portraiture and Civic Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2007), especially 3–5, 11, 14–15.

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the civic, and creating tensions about where and for how long portraits should be displayed. These tensions were anything but stabilizing to their ambient society. A summary of the emergence of these livery company portraits suggests how these developments unfolded.

The motivation for London liveries to adopt easel portraiture – still a fairly novel medium in mid-sixteenth-century England – as a form of discourse stemmed from many sources. Humanist-derived visions of the right ordered society, the social aspirations of contemporary merchant elites and continental models of both institutional governance and civic portraiture itself certainly played important roles. But other factors, especially those which threatened the stability of the commonweal, loomed even larger.

One such critical reality lay in that deep sense of economic and social malaise, experienced by the 1540s and climaxing (after several decades of relative peace and prosperity) in the 1590s. Rooted in population growth and other economic factors, the spectre of warfare and religious tension, and marked by fears of crime, rootlessness and unrest, this latter decade proved the most crisis-ridden of the century.[5]

Another pressing factor entailed the surging challenge of early free enterprise capitalism, and the threat to guild monopolies and the traditional economic morality which they strove to defend. And still another lay in the religious and the secular aftermath of the Henrician Reformation. These years saw many of the beliefs and values of the traditional church proscribed or revised according to political and religious requirements. From this followed, amongst many other things, an incalculable loss of institutional memory, and even some of the conventional means of creating and sustaining such memories as had been implicit in medieval popular religious practice.

These circumstances also created a widespread disruption of traditional identities, not only amongst individual people and whole families, but amongst civic institutions of all sorts. The London liveries, like most English guilds, often emerged out of occupationally specific religious fraternities. Group worship and its attendant ceremonial had long been central to their communal life. But conventions of belief, status and loyalty, of authority and obedience, of making a living and behaving responsibly, all came up for grabs in the post-Reformation era. The consequent search for refashioned identities and redefined roles, whether on the part of the crown or the cobbler, the individual or the institution, emerged as one of the underlying cultural and social dynamics of the age.

Some of this angst lay in the personal quest for religious identity. Some lay in the quest for personal status which Professor Stone had definitively

[5] On the crisis of the 1590s, see S.T. Bindoff, *Tudor England* (Harmondsworth, 1950), ch. 9; J. Guy (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge, 1995), Introduction and ch. 9; P. Clark (ed.), *The European Crisis of the 1590s, Essays in Comparative History* (London, 1995).

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addressed. And some lay in the need for civic institutions and fraternal bodies – town and borough governments, grammar schools, hospitals, university colleges and both provincial trade guilds and the London livery companies – to take stock of their role and purpose, and reaffirm their own position both to their members and the outside world.

These circumstances placed increased pressure on such institutions and governing bodies at every level. The crown had no choice but to depend on what Peter Clark and Paul Slack have termed 'small knots of reliable men', each in their particular locale or civic institution, to enforce the royal fiat, keep the peace and maintain stability amongst those over whom they exercised authority.[6] As with many other institutions, the same circumstances compelled the crown to make all sorts of demands on the liveries. In return, Tudor government in particular continually, if sometimes erratically, supported the liveries and the system of guild monopolies for which they stood.[7]

In legislative terms, that support is probably best symbolized in the Elizabethan Statue of Artificers of 1563 (5 Eliz., cap. 4), the longest statute of the sixteenth century. But in visually symbolic terms, we might well see something of a counterpart to this landmark statute represented in Hans Holbein's huge group portrait of Henry VIII granting his charter to the Barber-Surgeons in 1541: one of the very first English civic portraits in the form of an easel painting, and quite possibly the earliest secular easel painting of all to appear in a livery company hall (Figure 1). This grand, carefully composed and notably iconic work serves as a harbinger of the civic portraiture to follow: not in its dimension as a group portrait, of which there were few forthcoming, but in suggesting the possibilities of portraiture as political discourse which could be explored and employed in years to come.

We may read this painting as a text meant visually and emphatically to link the newly created Barber-Surgeons Company with the royal source of its authority, in this case represented by the iconic image of the king, enthroned on high as if he were the vicar of Christ on earth handing down the word of God. That image cannot have been coincidental. Not only was it well precedented in pre-Reformation depictions of various kings and Christ himself, but contemporaries will have connected it far more immediately to the similar royal enthronement in the title page for the Coverdale Bible of 1535 (Figure 2), or to the Great Bible of 1539 (Figure 3), both of which in turn had recently been required for purchase in every parish church in the land.

By the same token, the inclusion in this group portrait of members both of the court and the Company provided a useful reminder of the links between those poles of power and authority. It affirms the point

[6] The phrase, and the context for it, is Clark and Slack's in *Crisis and Order*, 22.
[7] The fullest and most nuanced discussion of this remains Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, *passim* and especially 32–9.

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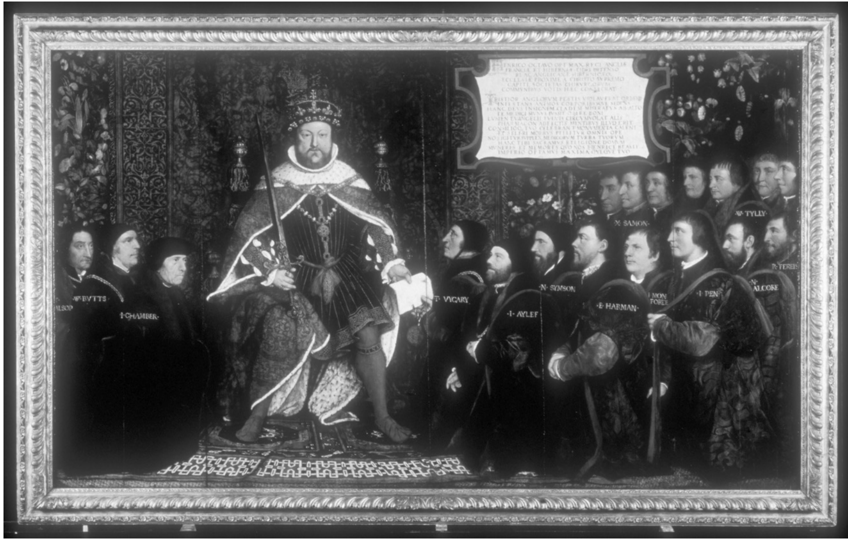

Figure 1: Holbein, 'Henry VIII granting his charter to the Barber-Surgeons', *c*. 1541, reproduced by kind permission of the Company of Barber-Surgeons

Figure 2: Holbein, title page for the Coverdale Bible of 1535

that leading liverymen of the day were often known to and respected by members of the court, and that the crown saw itself in a mutually supportive relationship with the City. It was that very relationship which was to save the crown for Henry's daughter when Wyatt's rebels marched on London barely a decade later. And from the livery's perspective, just at a

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Figure 3: Anon., title page to the Great Bible of 1539

time when Henry sometimes treated charters with disdain, the witnessing of such a grant by these eighteen clearly portrayed and identifiable figures constituted a precise and irrefutable visual record of the Company's royal foundation, and of the civic virtue of its founding fathers in achieving that milestone. This iconic image seems also to have impressed upon the Barber-Surgeons themselves the potential of company portraiture in their own hall. As we shall see, few companies took portraiture as seriously in this era as they did.

Save to note that, as panel paintings on wood, they sustained a continuity with an important pre-Reformation visual tradition, it is impossible to provide an entirely accurate chronology of the appearance of livery company portraits. Paintings from the early and mid-sixteenth century had a notoriously low rate of survival. Few early or mid-sixteenth-century companies yet recorded their possessions with sufficient frequency or in sufficient detail as to list their paintings. Nor did paintings, being neither plate nor furnishing, fit into any of the standard categories into which most company inventories were divided. By the same token, many company accounts at that time were insufficiently detailed to record the acquisition of items which cost so surprisingly little: in many cases well under a pound a painting throughout the sixteenth century.[8] Though many more livery portraits must have been commissioned from the mid-century onwards, the practice of recording their purchase or possession does not seem to have become common until the last years of the sixteenth century and, in some companies, later still. It is only from the mid- to late 1580s that such purchases and possessions come more regularly to be recorded. It is from

[8] Tittler, *The Face of the City*, Appendix B, 'The cost of civic portraits', 187.

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this point, and no doubt in part because of that more regularly recording, that the survival rate at least seems to improve.

Coincidentally, there is every reason to assume that the political and economic crises of those years, what many years ago S.T. Bindoff presciently referred to as the Elizabethan 'Recessional', served also to bring livery company portraits to blossom more fully than ever as a common institutional expression of institutional memory and civic virtue.[9] This chronology affirms for us that livery companies were not, of course, driven in their pursuit of portraiture by the same motives of personal self-fashioning as the landed classes, for whom the craze for portraits had been in effect for several decades. They were more likely responding to the pressing economic factors of that time: the encroachment on their monopolies on trade and production; the pressures of rampant migration, inflation and war.

These circumstances surrounding what we might call the 'long 1590s', stretching from the Spanish Armada to the death of Elizabeth and including at its core perhaps the most famously crisis-ridden decade of the century, made the affirmation of institutional and occupational identity even more imperative than ever. Under these circumstances, the mnemonic element therefore remained high on the agenda of such display. The need to remember particular sorts of attainments, and the people associated with those attainments, commonly survived the destruction of so many forms of memorialization wrought by the Reformation. The forms of this commemoration commonly included company banners or plate and the endowed sermon and the company feast, but came rapidly to include portraiture as well. And, once established as part of the celebratory vocabulary, such images became an enduring feature of the livery hall. In subsequent crisis periods like the 1620s the didactic device of civic portraiture no longer had to be invented. Over time they did of course become more regularly recorded in accounts and inventories, more commonly displayed in a didactic or celebratory context, and also (however inadvertently) more often contested in at least the more fractious liveries.

Portraits served to remind living members of the lives and benefactions, the wisdom and leadership, of their forebears. They reiterated in visual terms the virtues of fraternal obligation and pious benefaction. Their images evoked and perpetuated acts of foundation or benefaction in the collective memory of the institution. The mnemonic quality of these portraits, including symbolic devices of dress and ornament – the company livery and arms especially – along with illuminating and often didactic inscriptions, allowed them very effectively to serve as 'sites of memory'.[10]

[9] Bindoff, *Tudor England*, ch. 9; Tittler, *The Face of the City*, 54–7.
[10] The phrase is Pierre Nora's, in 'Between memory and history: *Les lieux de mémoire*', *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 7–25.

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In addition to affirming the historic identity of a particular livery they were also meant to inspire and guide the leadership of each generation to negotiate the challenges of their own time. The decision of the Goldsmiths to display a portrait of Sir Thomas Lovell by the early date of 1566, and of Sir Stephen Soame before 1619,[11] clearly emanate from the same motives which led them to display the names and arms of other such worthies during the same era. The Company did so, their court minutes tell us, 'as well for the honour and reputation of those worthy benefactors who are departed this life as also by their example to imitate and stir up hereafter others to like works of charity and piety'.[12] Though the Grocers' archives have survived more fully than most, the context which produced such a statement seems widely applicable to other liveries as well, and with reference to actual portraits as well as arms and names. It is in this vein that the Drapers, for example, chose in 1605 to display portraits of four of their members so that their charitable acts could be remembered;[13] the Merchant Taylors followed suit with theirs – widely imitated elsewhere – of Sir Thomas White in 1606;[14] the Cutlers commemorated the benefactions of Margaret Craythorne, wife of the Cutler John Craythorne.[15]

That ability of livery company portraits 'to imitate and stir up hereafter others to like works of charity and piety' went far beyond the mere depiction of the subject. The particular qualities of those depicted were often rehearsed in inscriptions, or signified by such props as books which might indicate their learning or piety, or charters which they will have obtained.[16] They were also emphasized by displaying such portraits, not just randomly or for mere decorative effect, but deliberately in close proximity to other symbolically meaningful artefacts. In this manner one or more selected portraits became part of a visual and didactic programme within a single, enclosed space.

Hanging a portrait of a civic worthy alongside the portraits or arms of particular monarchs certainly achieved this effect. Such proximity visually connected the institution's ruling elite with the crown, and especially with a king or queen who had granted a founding charter with whom a company wished to ingratiate itself at a particular time. In the fiscal year 1606–07 the Merchant Taylors commissioned Jan de Critz to paint two Company benefactors, Robert Dow and the much-heralded Sir Thomas

[11] Wardens' Accounts, Grocers' Company, Guildhall Library MSS 11571/6, fol. 205v, 11571/10, fol. 44, 11571/8, fol. 706r; 11671/10, fols. 410v and 458r, and 498v; 11571/12, fol. 459r.

[12] Sir W.S. Prideaux, *Memorials of the Goldsmiths' Company*, 2 vols. (London, 1896), vol. I, 129.

[13] A.H. Johnson, *The History of the Worshipful Company of Drapers of London*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1914–22), vol. III, 77 n. 2.

[14] Merchant Taylors' Company Masters' and Wardens' Account Book no. 9, Guildhall Library MS 34048/9, unpaginated accounts for 1606–07, and Tittler, 'Three portraits by John de Critz for the Merchant Taylors' Company', *Burlington Magazine*, 147 (July 2005), 491–4.

[15] Guildhall Library MS 7147/1, p. 98, and C. Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company of London and of the Minor Cutlery Crafts*, 2 vols. (London, 1916–23), vol. II, 125.

[16] Tittler, *The Face of the City*, 113–37.

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White, and asked him to 'refresh' the portrait of Prince Henry, so that they might all hang in that prime venue of their company hall known as the 'king's chamber'.[17] By 1611 the Grocers' Company had hung banner portraits of Elizabeth and James I near images of some of its own heroes so as to emphasize the historic affinity of one with the other.[18] The 1639 inventory of paintings held by the Carpenters lists 'tables' of the king's arms and portraits of Charles and his late brother Prince Henry, along with a portrait of that Company's most prominent member, William Portington, Master Carpenter of the Royal Household from 1579 until his death at 84 in 1629.[19] Portington's long and illustrious career brought fame to his Company as well as to himself. His brethren and successors had no difficulty recognizing the value of perpetuating that fame for all time, and they planned accordingly: the portrait may still be seen in the Carpenters' Hall.[20] In addition, the spatial proximity in that hall between his portrait with those monarchs' portraits still recalls that association.

It should also be noted that the growing value placed by companies on the display of members' portraits made it increasingly important to have those portraits done by painters of established fame and reputation. These early years of the seventeenth century saw companies turning away from the anonymous and almost always English-born and trained craftsmen-painters and painter-stainers upon whom they had formerly relied, and towards true 'artists', usually foreign born or trained, with established reputations and professional expertise in contemporary techniques and styles. These same years caught the portrait medium in its transition from craft to art, appropriately enhancing a portrait's monetary and social value along the way.[21] The liveries were quick to join in on this trend.

This new concern for the reputation of the painter, and the sharp increase in cost which went with such acclaim, is clearly signalled by the Merchant Taylors' 1606 commission to De Critz.[22] De Critz's long and lucrative

[17] Merchant Taylors' Company, Masters' and Wardens' Account Book, no. 9, Guildhall Library MS 343048/9, microfilm no. 915; accounts for 1606–07.

[18] Grocers' Company, Wardens' Accounts, Guildhall Library MS 11571/10, annual inventory of 1611–12, fol. 44v.

[19] Prideaux, *Memorials of the Goldsmiths' Company*, vol. I, 129; inventory of the company hall, 1639, Guildhall MS 4329A, fol. A (this page, paginated by letters and not numbers, has been written upside down and it begins at the back of the volume moving towards the front); H. Colvin *et al*., *A History of the King's Works*, 6 vols. (London, 1963–82), vol. III, 101 and 133.

[20] B.W.F. Alford and T.C. Barker, *A History of the Carpenters' Company* (London, 1968), 225; Carpenters' Company Memorandum Book, Inventory of 1639, Guildhall Library MS 4329A, fol. A.

[21] A widely shared perception, but perhaps most succinctly and successfully articulated in K. Thomas, 'Art and iconoclasm in early modern England', in K. Fincham and P. Lake (eds.), *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke* (Woodbridge, 2006), 22–6.

[22] The Company paid five pounds for the portrait of White, and another five pounds together for 'making the princes picture all anewe in the kings chamber and for Mr Dow his picture in a faier frame'. Both were substantial sums for panel paintings at that time. Merchant Taylors' Company, Masters' and Wardens' Accounts, Book no. 9, Guildhall MS 34048/9,

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patronage by the late Sir Francis Walsingham had made him a court painter of the first rank. In that very same year he became Sergeant-Painter to the king.[23] Portraits by the well-established court painters Marcus Gheeraerts the younger of Sir Henry Lee for the Armourers and Brasiers in 1602;[24] by Cornelius Janssen of Sir Hugh Middleton for the Goldsmiths (1628),[25] of Robert Gray for the Merchant Taylors (1633)[26] and of Thomas Thorold for the Ironmongers (1637);[27] and by Daniel Mytens of Nicholas Leate; also for the Ironmongers (1631);[28] all served to equate the sophistication and value of livery portraiture with those of court figures and the aristocracy. And, as De Critz, Gheeraerts, Janssen and Mytens had all done royal portraits as well, their patronage by the liveries further exemplified the cultural affinities between crown and company, court and city.

Some institutions engaged in a variation of this strategy by displaying civic portraits in close proximity with those narrative scenes known in their time as 'history' paintings, usually depicting episodes from the Bible or classical history. A 1635 inventory of the Ironmongers notes a portrait of its virtuous benefactor Nicholas Leate hanging in the same room as a painting of the followers of Herod tempting Christ.[29] But laurels for the grandest and most imaginative such usage brings us back again to the mid-sixteenth century, and to the Carpenters, who hired a local painter-stainer named John Baker in 1561 and provided him with eleven yards of canvas to make a large mural of what the archives call 'The Story' on the walls of the company hall. Uncovered by workmen in 1845, this turns out to be a tableau of four biblical scenes highlighting the historical role of the Carpenters' craft: 'Noah building the Ark', 'King Josiah rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem', 'Christ in the Carpenters' Shop' and 'Christ Teaching in the Synagogue'.[30]

Similar considerations of symbolic proximity were observed on ceremonial occasions. As is well known, the records of several livery companies describe the 'hanging of the hall' for such occasions, in which

unpaginated accounts for 1606/07; Tittler, *The Face of the City*, Appendix B, 'The cost of civic portraits, 1500–1640', 187–8.

23 R. Tittler, 'Three portraits by John de Critz for the Merchant Taylors' Company', *Burlington Magazine*, 142 (July 2005), 492.

24 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, *vide* Lee, Sir Henry.

25 R. Ormerod and M. Rogers (eds.), *Dictionary of British Portraiture*, 4 vols. (London, 1979–81), *vide* Middleton, dating this portrait to 1628; Prideaux, *Memorials of the Goldsmiths' Company*, vol. I, 136 and 159, dating this to 1631.

26 F.M. Fry (ed.), *A Historical Catalogue of the Pictures, Herse-Cloths and Tapestry at Merchant Taylors' Hall* (London, 1907), 89–91 and plate 36; Court Records, Merchant Taylors' Company, Guildhall Library MS 34010/9, fol. 91v.

27 J. Nicholl, *Some Account of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers* (London, 1851), 473.

28 Ironmongers' Company, Freemen's Registers and Inventories, Guildhall Library MS 16988/5, 7; Nicholl, *Some Account*, 473; Anon., *A Glance at the Pictures in the Hall of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers* (1847), unpaginated.

29 Ironmongers Company, Freemens' Registers and Inventories, Guildhall Library MS 16,988/5, 7 (6 Aug. 1635).

30 Alford and Barker, *History of the Carpenters' Company*, 225–7.

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cloth portrait-banners and all sorts of other ceremonial paraphernalia could be put out alongside permanent panel or canvas portraits to complete the scene. The Grocers' Company excelled at this. In addition to several panel portraits of its eminent brethren which were hung permanently, it also commissioned cloth portrait banners of Sir Thomas Lovell and three other Company worthies, Masters Lambert, Ryvers and Ramsay, presumably for display on those special occasions which required 'hanging the hall'. By 1612 there were also banner portraits of six other Grocers who had served as lord mayors.[31]

Almost all the livery portraits which were acquired and displayed in this manner conform to the essential and strictest definition of the civic portrait. They were mostly commissioned by the livery rather than the sitter. They addressed the sitter's role in the livery rather than in his own family or domestic life. They were of course displayed in the civic spaces of the institution. But as has been suggested at the outset, those strict defining elements came over time to be compromised by more *personal* motives, so that the livery hall and its diverse interior spaces also came to serve the *personal* objectives of some of their members. The landed elites, after all, had their grand country houses with their long galleries in which to showcase their family portraits, but most merchants had much less space for such display. They sometimes came to use their company hall instead for those ends. Not only, therefore, did the visual memory of a worthy benefactor or official grace the reputation of the institution, but the reverse process came also frequently to pass as well. And, as might be expected, these personal motives inevitably led to disputes over the sites and duration of such displays. On these occasions, civic portraiture became less vividly distinguished from personal portraiture, and the resulting works became grounds for contention rather than inducements to harmony.

Here again, as affirmed in the story of John Vernon's gift of portraits to his own livery of the Merchant Taylors in 1611, location remains a key consideration. Vernon delivered to that Company in that year seven small pictures, including one of Henry VIII, one of Elizabeth and also one of himself, so that they might be displayed in the company hall. But in making his presentation, Vernon disingenuously noted that, if the court of the Company would not think it inappropriate to hang the portrait of such a 'lesse deserving' man as himself in such a space, he would be pleased to have it hung, not in the main hall itself (where, he might well have added, it would be seen by the hoi polloi of the Company's lesser ranks) but in the parlour. This more private and prestigious place, usually reserved for the

[31] Grocers' Company, Wardens' Accounts, 1566–67, Guildhall Library MS 11,571/6, fol. 44v and (for 1611–12), 11,571/10, fols. 42v–44v. See also references to repairing a banner of the former London lord mayor and Goldsmith Sir Martin Bowes by that Company in 1577 and 1606, and the extensive expenditure for banners and streamers by the Saddlers' Company to celebrate the accession of James I in 1603. Prideaux, *Goldsmiths' Company*, vol. I, 82 and 107, and Saddlers' Company, Wardens' Accounts, Guildhall Library MS 5384, fol. 59r.

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senior officers alone, remained generally less accessible than the main and more public room of the building. In the parlour, Vernon noted, his painting would hang alongside those of such particular Company worthies as Sir William Craven, Sir John Swinnerton and two unnamed members who had served as sheriffs of London.[32] The Company seems to have complied with this, serving both its requirements and Vernon's at the same time. Once the idea of giving one's own portrait to one's company took hold in the early decades of the seventeenth century there seemed for a time no holding back. One comes to understand Vernon's concern that his image not be displayed with those of lesser lights.

This personal interest in having one's image displayed during one's own lifetime seems especially vivid amongst the Barber-Surgeons. Perhaps the constant presence of the Holbein charter painting in their hall made the Barber-Surgeons especially conscious of the value of portraying themselves as well as the worthies of the Company. In addition to the many portraits commissioned for their hall, some of that Company's members are known to have been collectors in their own right. William Martin, for example, seems to have compiled a fairly extensive collection, including images of English kings and queens, one of the ancient Greek botanist Diocorides, and another of 'a Hebrew physician who spoke 28 languages', bequeathing several of them in his will of 1606/07.[33] In any event, that portrait-minded Company went to great lengths to display images of its masters and benefactors and also to satisfy the desires of many lesser men who began to request such displays. But like many other companies, the Barber-Surgeons were often a fractious lot,[34] and their officers sometimes suffered the consequences of trying too hard to meet the aspirations of their lesser ranks.

To meet this demand, and perhaps unconsciously to stimulate it further, the Company erected what are described as 'tables' of the portraits of some former masters hanging in their hall. (The word 'table' had numerous meanings in this era, but in this context we may take it to refer to the frame in which an image or images were placed, or to a framed board or panel containing images which could either be hung on a wall or supported by legs to resemble what we most commonly take the word to mean today.[35]) By the turn of the seventeenth century prominent living members engaged in spirited competition to have images of themselves represented in those tables *even if it meant painting (or drawing) them over images which were already there*. In 1601 the livery's 'Court of Assistants' felt compelled to order that

[32] Cited in Fry, *Catalogue of Pictures*, 67–9, from Court Minutes of the Merchant Taylors' Company, now available as Guildhall Library microfilm, 328/7, fols. 244–6.
[33] D.E. Harkness, *The Jewel House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution* (London and New Haven, CT, 2007), 32–3, citing Guildhall MS 9171/20ff, fols. 251–3. I am grateful to Deborah Harkness for bringing this to my attention.
[34] See Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 108–9.
[35] A fuller discussion of these definitions may be found in Tittler, *The Face of the City*, 93 n. 70.

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no member, without permission of that court, should erase or blot out any of the existing pictures so as to replace them with his own image.[36]

But this seems not to have deterred those who coveted such display. Such requests continued to be made, and also honoured. Three years later four of the assistants were dispatched to confer with De Critz about finishing the 'tables' of pictures which he had been commissioned to produce.[37] In 1627 the Company court ordered the construction of a large wooden frame, and the employment of a 'picture-maker' to paint on it portraits of two famous members of the Company. And by the mid-1630s, the Company displayed no fewer than 41 more portraits of former masters of the Company and Examiners of Surgeons, all apparently displayed in a single, large 'table' framed with wood.[38] From 1634 any newly appointed master or examiner was entitled to have his image added to this number by painting it over one of the existing images.

Throughout that era Company archives frequently record permission for masters' images to be blotted out or erased and replaced in turn, or admonitions not to erase images without permission. The Company's assistants also had their table of portraits, created in 1627 to accommodate those whose images were not already on display. And so the Barber-Surgeons went on for some time thereafter commissioning additional portrait 'tables' to accommodate demand,[39] trying all the while to avoid controversy stemming from exclusion. Other companies, including the Painter-Stainers[40] and the Grocers, faced the same pressure for additional portraits, though some of them specified that portraits were to be removed after a certain duration so as to make room for others. By caving in to the demands of living company members to have their portraits displayed even temporarily along with those of deceased company worthies, the companies themselves risked undermining the didactic and mnemonic value of their earlier portraits.

To sum up, there can be little doubt that livery company portraits did indeed serve as commemorative devices, invoked in the effort to affirm, and sometimes to redefine, the role and identity of the London liveries in the wake of the Henrician Reformation and the economic transition of the sixteenth century. In so doing, they succeeded in bridging the divide between pre- and post-Reformation forms of commemoration. In that sense they were one of a kind with civic portraits and similar devices in analogous institutions – towns and boroughs, university colleges, schools and other charitable institutions – all of which faced the same

[36] S. Young, *Annals of the Barber Surgeons of London* (London, 1890), 508.
[37] It is unclear whether De Critz ever completed this commission. Young, *Annals of the Barber Surgeons*, 508.
[38] *Ibid.*, 509.
[39] *Ibid.*, 509–10.
[40] W.A.D. Englefield, *The History of the Painter-Stainers Company of London* (London, 1923), *Addenda*, vii.

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contemporary need to sustain social harmony within their ranks in times of rapid change. And they did often emphasize links between company and crown; city and court.

But though portraits might accomplish these laudable ends by emphasizing the history and honour of the livery and by holding up particular acts of civic virtue, they could also become the objects of social competition and contention, thus producing quite the opposite effect. By the early seventeenth century, London livery portraiture had many functions, some responding to institutional needs, some more to personal. Like the companies themselves, such portraits may have existed in a sheltered physical environment, but their placement and significance could fuel as well as quell the social tensions of their ambient civic community.

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