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The History of the Guilds of Bristol.

by F. F. Fox
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THE HISTORY OF THE GUILDS OF BRISTOL,

By ALDERMAN FOX.

Read at Bristol, 31st July, 1878.

THE History of the Guilds of Bristol is very much the history of religious, social, and commercial life in most of our towns during mediæval times; and, with the exception, perhaps, of the Guild of Kalendars, there was nothing unusual or remarkable to distinguish them from the guilds which flourished in London, Norwich, Lynn, Exeter, Winchester, or York.

The Guilds of Bristol consisted of:—

- 1.—*The Religious or Social Guilds.*
- 2.—*The Town Guilds or Gild Merchants.*
- 3.—*The Craft Guilds.*

The most remarkable, by far, in the first division was the Guild of Kalendars, which claimed to have been established nearly 400 years before the Norman Conquest, whose history is so well known, and has been so amply recorded, that it is unnecessary to do more than allude to it. There was also the Guild of the Holy Cross attached to St. John's Church, and that of the Holy Ghost to St. Nicholas.

In the second division the most distinguished was the Guild of Merchant Venturers, followed at some distance by that of the Merchant Tailors, both of which are still in existence.

But in the third division, namely, that of Craft Guilds, there are many which, with slightly altered names, and very much altered constitutions and ordinances, have come down to us in the present day under the title of Trade Unions. It is of one of these Craft Guilds that I am about to speak to-night, namely that of the "*Bakers*," not so much because it was distinguished above

the 25 or 30 others of the same class that flourished in Bristol (for it would not compare in importance with either the Guilds of Weavers or of Tuckers), but because it has lived almost to our own day, and because we possess, in a MSS. book, an ample record of its history from the year 1499, in the reign of Henry VII., down to that of Queen Anne. Indeed one of our older citizens assured me that he remembered when a boy hearing his nurse say "The mayor has fixed the assize of bread with the Bakers to-day."

The architectural remains of the Dominican Priory on the Weir are not only valuable for presenting some of the original monastic arrangements in a nearly complete state, but also for including in their connexion the Guild-hall of the company of Bakers, one of the most important of the trading communities of ancient Bristol. This fraternity was part of the vast organization that embraced the entire commercial life of England, an organization in the words of Mr. Froude, "Set on foot to realize that most necessary, if not difficult, condition of commercial excellence, under which man should deal faithfully with his brother; and all wares offered for sale, of whatever kind, should honestly be what they pretend to be." In every town were these companies, whose duty it was to see that no one professed a trade to which he had not been educated, to determine the price at which every article was to be sold, and to take care that everyone bought what he believed himself to be buying.

The modern Friendly Societies and Trades' Unions are rough representatives of the ancient craft guilds, but all vitality of likeness to their prototypes is absent by reason that devotional exercises form no integral part of their ordinances. In the Trades' Unions of the present day offices of religion would be considered an impertinence, but in the mediæval guilds they were as inseparable as green tints from summer foliage. "In this respect," says Mr. Toulmin Smith, "the Craft Guilds of all countries are alike:" and in reading their statutes one might fancy sometimes that the old craftsmen cared only for the well-being of their souls. All had particular saints for patrons, after whom the society was

frequently called ; and, where it was possible, they chose one who had some relation to their trades. They founded masses, endowed altars, and erected painted windows in cathedrals and churches ; and even at the present day their coats of arms and their gifts range proudly by the side of those of kings and barons. Sometimes individual Craft Guilds appear to have stood in special relations to a particular church, by virtue of which they had to perform special services, and received in return a special share in all the prayers of the clergy in that church. In later times the Craft Guilds frequently went in solemn procession to their churches. We find innumerable ordinances, also, as to the support of the sick and the poor. The chief care, however, of the Guildsmen was always directed to the welfare of the souls of the dead. Every year a requiem was sung for all departed guild brothers, when they were all mentioned by name ; and upon the death of any member special services were held for the repose of his soul, and distribution of alms was made to the poor, who in return had to offer up prayers for the dead, as is still the custom in Roman Catholic countries. In the Baker's company of Bristol, we find this characteristic feature of the mediæval craft-guilds set forth in the reformation aspect of the Society, by the maintenance of altar lights to their patron saint, and by their solemn sacramental processions, torch bearing, and minstrelsies ; while on its secular side there are the regulations concerning apprentices and the admission of strangers, together with the various restrictions and limitations by which the solidarity of the association was maintained. The records begin in 1499, the 13th year of Henry VII. It is first of all stated that there were to be four masters, two of whom were to retire yearly ; the remaining two to have precedence of the newly-elected two, and to be answerable for the maintenance of St. Clement's lights, for the torch making, for the floral decorations, for the midsummer feasting, for the payment of the minstrels, &c. The first four masters were John Bole, William Harwyste, Thomas Hawkins, and John Corne, "by whose first mind this book was made ;" the book, which is contained in an old vellum wrapper, and which is a curious specimen of the book-stitching of the 15th century, being

the gift of "Thomas Hawkins, the younger, to the use and worship of the said craft."

In the year quoted the lights at the altar of St. Clement, the patron saint of the Guild, were all newly made, by the help of the whole body of the craftsmen, who brought their waxen tapers to the Blackfriars, where the altar had been in former time. It appears that for some reason not explained the company had temporarily left the Blackfriars, and paid their devotions to St. Clement at Christ Church; and upon their return to their earlier chapel, they left the old materials, that is to say "The beme, the iron-work, the Judas, the wax, and the boll." The "Judas" was a candle so named, the symbolism of which has never been satisfactorily explained¹, and the boll was the candlestick of the same. At the Blackfriars they placed a massive iron beam (weighing 177 lbs), and Master Robert Maynfield, the prior of the Dominicans, supplied an iron bar. Thereupon they set ten square tapers of new wax, weighing 34 lbs., "standing there afore the

¹ Since this article has been in type an explanation has been given, by the learned Mr. Mackenzie Walcot, of the symbolism of *Judas Candles and Judas Candle*. He says: there appears to be an uncertainty about the true meaning of the curious mediæval symbolism of the Judas candles and candle. The true meaning lies,—1, in the colour of the candles, and, 2, the mock candle of wood.

1, The Tenebræ candles were the "Judas candles." They were extinguished by a hand of wax, signifying the hand of Judas, of which our Lord said, "He who dippeth with me in the dish, &c." In the old symbolism the wax meant flexible to evil (John Beleth, cap. cj. p. 219; Durand, lib. vj. fo. cclxj, b) The number of lights varied from twenty-seven to seven. They bore the name of the traitor because lighted during the reading of the Passion at Tenebræ, and all but the central one of white wax were of Judas' colour, unbleached, or yellow, the "dissembling colour of Shakespeare.

2 The Judas Candle, Jewes light, Judas of the Paschal, Judas torch, taper wood light, "betinge" light (made of betars or firewood), "indithc" (indictment) light, was a wooden sham or counterfeit candle supporting the true Paschal in the seven-branched candlestick, which stood upright, the others diverging on either side. It was also known as the "Paschal post," or the "timber that the wax of the Paschal is driven upon." The "Judasses" of the rood loft were also wooden candles, on which the wax lights were mounted on the "candle beam." The "Judas Cup" was in use at Durham, on Maundy Thursday. (Notes and Queries, 5th S. xj. 325.)—Ed.

altar of Seynt Clement, in y^e said Fryars, to the honour and worship of God, and Seynt our Blessed Mary, (*sic*) and Seynt Clement.”

Two waxmen were appointed to gather “Seynt Clement’s money.” Their duty was to warn strangers, who were admitted to work in the craft, to pay their duty to St. Clement’s lights; the waxmen who, through want of vigilance, suffered any stranger journeyman to “depart and goe his way” without paying such duty, were to make good the deficiency. Every stranger, after he had served a month was to pay xii pence, and then to serve six weeks and pay a penny, and every month following a penny. At the same time they purchased their common hall for a term of sixty years. The hall was then painted, three of the windows (A.D. 1500) were barred with iron, and the window at the high dais was half built up with freestone and half glazed. About the walls were hung pictures on canvas, severally imaging St. Clement, St. Thomas of Canterbury, St. Michael, St. James the pilgrim, St. Peter, St. John the Baptist, and St. Stephen. We have then the names of sixteen strangers admitted during the year, who each paid his xiid. to St. Clement’s lights; also William Hawkins gave to the worship of God and St. Clement, “a ryal”¹ towards ten new Judasses, and ten bolls to hold them.

The freedom of the company was purchased for different sums:—One Thomas Sonnys, in 1501, gave 6s. 8d. for his “setting up,” and in the same year John Barrell set up craft amongst us by an agreement to pay 40s., half the sum at once

¹ The ryal was identical with the noble. This coin was first issued by Edward III., at the value of 6/8 or half a mark, and was the only gold coin of English mintage until 1485, when Edward IV. published the angel. It was sometimes called the *rose-noble*. The obverse represents the King standing in a vessel asserting the dominion of the sea. Henry V. is said to have diminished the noble, at the same time making it pass for its original value. It was restored by Henry VI. to its former size, who caused it to pass for 10/- under the new name of *ryal*, which, with the angel at 6/8, were the only gold coins in circulation until, in 1585, Henry VII. issued double ryals and double sovereigns. At the time of the gift mentioned in the text, therefore, the ryal was worth 10/-. Henry VIII., in 1527, increased the value of the ryal to 11/3.—ED.

and the remainder in three instalments during the year. For the same privilege in A.D. 1504, from 16 pence to 18 shillings and 4 pence was paid. The number of names on the book in A.D. 1502 was thirty. Amongst the payments in this year was 3s. 4d. for a "Breakfast to IIII. Aldermen, and the Town Clerk at the 'Star.'" The heaviest item of the year 1529 was 20s. 6d. to the Minstrels at Midsummer; and in 1532 five Minstrels receive 30s. This was before it had been declared of minstrels that

"Beggars they are with one consent,
And rogues by Act of Parliament."

In 1544, in addition to xxs. paid to four Minstrels, xiid. reward was paid to the King's (Henry viii) Minstrels, for trumpeting before the Bakers, which is the last mention we discover of the profession in these records. Towards the end of the 16th century, the order of men called minstrels had lost all credit, and had sunk so low in the public estimation that in the 39th year of Elizabeth, a statute was passed whereby Minstrels, wandering abroad, were included amongst rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars, and were adjudged to be punished as such.

On Corpus Christi day it was customary for the company to go in procession to the High Cross, and many entries occur of payments on such occasions to bearers of the "pageants" and "torches," and to Minstrels for their music. This festival was, perhaps, the greatest feast of the mediæval Christian Year: being celebrated in the open midsummer air, there was opportunity afforded for a brilliant display of hallowed banners, chalices, crosses, relics, lights, and crucifixes, which, with images and pictures of scriptural and legendary saints, were conveyed in procession through the street; while the walls and windows were hung with rose garlands and green boughs, and adorned with rich tapestries, and the way was strewn with flowers. The consecrated Host, the crown of the rejoicing, was carried in a gold or silver pix, beneath a canopy of silk and cloth of gold, while the four orders of Friars, Monks, Priests, and Clergy, together with the Guilds of religion and commerce, with bedesmen and burghers completed the retinue of

the large and splendid procession. A dinner was also served in the hall of the respective companies, but the repast, in general, does not seem to have been a sumptuous one, and in that of the Bakers there were no extravagant luxuries; bread and ale appear to have been liberally supplied, these being the only articles of diet specially named.

One of the offices of the Mayor of Bristol was to overlook the Bakers and the assize of bread. In Ricart's Calender (18 Edw. IV.) we are told that "hit hath been vsid, the Maire of Bristow anon after mighelmas, to call byfore hym in the yeldhall, or counsell hous, all the Bakers of Bristowe, there to vndirstand whate stuff they haue of whete. And after whate sise they shall bake, and to assist and counseil them in their byeng and barganyng with the Bagers, such as bryngeth whete to towne, as wele in trowys as otherwyse, by lande and by watir, in kepyng downe of the market. And that the Bakers lak no stuffe, in especiall ayenst the fest of Christmas, and at suchē tymes as many straungers resortith to the towne. And the Maire dyuers tymes to oucrsee the weyeng of brede, at such seasons as he thynketh it necessary and requisite, aftir his discrecion, or vpon complayntz made vnto hym for the same. And that the Baker's enhaunce not their sizes above vid. at ones, according to the statute, &c. And whate Baker that breketh the sise to be punysshed aftir the constitucion of the Towne." (Ricart's Chronicle, p. 82.) What these constitutions were, we have ample evidence in the charter granted to Bristol by Edward III., in April, 1347, which states that "We have also granted for ourselves and our heirs to the Mayor, bailiffs, and goodmen, that they and their successors aforesaid, for the better keeping of the assize of bread to be made in the town, shall be empowered in future to inflict such punishment on bakers who break that assize in the same place: namely, to draw such bakers who offend against that assize upon sledges through the streets of the town aforesaid, and otherwise to punish them, as is practised in like manner with regard to such bakers in our city of London." This charter is beautifully illustrated with the picture of a baker being so drawn on a hurdle, and being

whipped into prison. It is believed also that they were "*wynched*" in Wine Street, where the corn market used to stand, the wynch being a mild sort of rack, or neck-stretcher, the application of which would be deemed by many spectators almost as entertaining as was that of the ducking-stool for scolding women.

We find the first gleam of the Reformation in the title accorded to the king, who 10th Dec., 1545, is styled "our Sovereign Lorde, Henry VIII., by the grace of God the only hygh and supreme hedde of the Church of England and Ireland, &c." Unfortunately the leaves containing the entries of the year 1556 and 1557 are missing, but we find no more payments for "bearing the pageant"¹ after the death of Queen Mary. The Pageant, however, with four flags, and two silk streamers were kept in store, perhaps in waiting for another change of faith, till 1642, after which we hear no more of these ensigns of the craft.

Additional ordinances and fines appear in the book, the more important of which may be summarised thus :—

In 1578 it was decreed that henceforth "No Baker shall bake any sale bread for their shops on Tuesdays nor Thursdays, but they shall bake sufficient store of such sale bread to serve the Commons only on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays;" and likewise "Shall bake wyven² bread only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, for the Commons, and on no other days."

In 1624 it was resolved that no bread of any kind should be sold to "hucksters," to be sold by them again. Of twenty-two masters who signed this agreement, ten could not write their own names. In 1668, it was agreed that "No half-penny roll should be made for wholesale or retail sale, on pain of forfeiture of ten shillings and their bread."

¹ The primary signification of this word was a stage or platform, which was called *pagina*, it may be supposed from its construction, being a machine *compaginata*, framed and compacted together. It was the stage on which the plays or mysteries of the Guilds were performed, which from it derived the names of "pageants;" and for this purpose was borne from place to place. (See Promp. Parv.)—Ed.

² Household bread, from *wyven*, a wife; that is bread made at home and sent to be baked.—Ed.

In 1669 "No young man was to be made free of the Company and Society of Bakers unless he paid £3 3s. 4d. towards the Hall and Hall implements."

In 1673 the Master and Wardens bought of Mr. Richard Streamer, Mayor, near upon 600 bushels of wheat, at 7s. the bushel, to be divided amongst the whole company, who received from 20 to 40 bushels each.

In 1674 it was ordered that "Weaven¹ batch should be baked only on Tuesdays and Fridays;" that "No vantage should be given to bread in a shop, nor to sell bigger than 2d. bread to hucksters."

In 1691 it was agreed "Not to bake for meat-sellers, and to stop ovens before 6 o'clock in the afternoon.

In 1692 it was agreed "Not to sell more than thirteen to the dozen to hucksters."

In 1700 "Not to sell any other than bread of assize, except bespoke."

In 1705 "Not to bake for less than eight pence per bushel."

In 1705 "Not to bake any half-penny roll, except bespoke."

In 1709 the charge for baking was reduced to 6d. a bushel, and 3d. half-bushel.

In July, 1697, the Hall was ordered to be sold.

In 1665 the Mayor and Aldermen ordered that no bread should be baked or sold on the Lord's day.

I conclude this paper with an epitaph, copied from the tomb of a master-baker, in Christchurch.

Here lyeth Thomas Turner, and Mary, his wife. He was twice Master of the Company of Bakers, and twice churchwarden of this parish. He died March 6th, 1654. She died May 8th, 1643.

Like to a Baker's oven is the grave,
Wherein the bodies of the faithful have
A setting in, and where they do remain
In hopes to rise, and to be drawn again;
Blessed are they who in the Lord are dead,
Though set like dough, they shall be drawn like bread.

¹ Household, see note on last page.