

The Dyer's 1471 Charter

An Emerging Craft or Mystery

The Dyers' Charter was incorporated on the 16th February 1471 by King Henry VI and was re-incorporated by King Edward IV on the 2nd December 1472. In default of a complete translation of the 1471 Charter I have relied on research done in 1955 by a nameless but very erudite researcher who summarised it as having three main clauses:

Membership: it constituted a fraternity or perpetual guild to the glory of God and the Virgin Mary of two Wardens and a commonalty of free brothers and sisters.

Governance: the Wardens were to have full power to survey, rule and govern the said community and all men and their servants using the mystery in the City and suburbs.

Maintenance of quality: the Company had the power to search work and merchandise within 20 miles and seize false goods. The income from this was to be divided equally between the City and the mystery. If the seizure was made outside the City the Crown was to receive half.

Twelve dyers signed the first Charter with all but three of them signing the second one. A delay then occurred before the Ordinances designed to lay down the procedures were approved in 1482. They were promoted by a petition signed *by all the good folks enfranchised in the craft of Dyers* to the Mayor and Aldermen.

This Charter is generally seen as the starting point of the Dyers' Company with all previous evidence consigned to murky origins in the Middle Ages. However several authors have clearly demonstrated that the Dyers already had an identity as a mystery, or craft, and fraternity, or brotherhood, for centuries prior to the incorporation of the Charter. I am particularly dependent on the paper delivered to the Society of Dyers & Colourists in 1955 as well as to our very own Judge Daynes' history and one contributed to the SDC Jubilee Book in 1934 by Arthur H Brewin, another eminent Member of the Court.

The 1955 work states that already in 1187 the Dyers were claiming a separate identity for their craft, or mystery. His summary of the charter's main articles is important because he reveals the Dyers were a fraternity or perpetual guild to the glory of God and the Virgin Mary. This would answer a question asked by Judge Daynes on page 4 of his book and to which he inclined to give a positive answer. This would be typical of the origins of guilds across the country and no doubt further afield. Shakespeare's father was a member of such a foundation in Stratford on Avon. Judge Daynes quotes the 'second or confirmatory charter' was granted *for the praise glory and honour of God and St Mary*. The Reformation put an end to such religious purpose and by the time of the ordinances issued in 1704 there is no reference to religion.

On the basis of the Weavers' Guild it seems entirely feasible that a charter was granted to the Dyers in about 1187, or 1188 as Judge Daynes prefers, and that the origins of the Company reach back some 900 years. The Charter of the Weavers', the earliest surviving in the City, was granted in 1155 but it already refers to an earlier one from Henry I's reign. The work suggests that, as on the continent, it was the textile crafts that led the way in organising themselves. The great trading companies were only incorporated in the 1300s or 1400s as international trade developed. The

Goldsmiths and Merchant Taylors were formed in 1327 and the Vintners, Drapers, Grocers, Mercers and Salters follow before the turn of the century. The Haberdashers were incorporated in 1448; this list appears to make the Dyers a Johnny come lately, only just ahead of the Pouchmakers. However many of these companies make the point that they emerged from previous activities. The Grocers, for examples, trace themselves back to a Company of Pepperers founded in 1180. The latter had five mayors 1189-1354 and a Draper filled the office for the first 24 terms. The claim of the Dyers to have formed an association in 1187 therefore seems entirely feasible. It was natural at the time for trades to attempt to organise themselves and protect their interests.

Judge Daynes also suggests the Dyers might claim to be some 700 years old. In 1310 Mr Brewin states that the Mayor Sir Richard de Refham, a mercer, granted the Dyers powers of self-regulation. This was important because 'adulterine' guilds, those without official recognition presumably, were frowned on. Perhaps it was an essential step in the establishment of the office of warden in the Dyers but as Refham was deposed so his grant may have lapsed.

Through the City records the increasing importance of the trade in dye goods can be traced and this led to the establishment of the office of Woad Porter. There is consensus that early cloths were coarse and poorly dyed as reliance on British-grown woad would have produced disappointing results. So woad is the dyestuff that features most strongly in the earliest trade records. In 1305 woad merchants, or mongers, and dyers formed a jury of 'Candelwyckstrate', now the eastern arm of Cannon Street up to the Walbrook, to settle a dispute over the falsification of woad barrels. In the same year a woad monger was among a group accused of breaking and entering. The importance of the trade is demonstrated in 1366 when a cargo of *37 tuns and a pipe of woad* was shipped from Calais to London.

The office of Woad Porter, survived into the late 19th century as a position in the Dyers' Company, but originated in the 14th century as an attempt to manage the honest sale of the dye. The principal of control of the market may have been established in 1311 when Fulbert de Pedefer de Wytsand was elected *by the good men of the City, merchants of woad, and by the merchants of Corbye* (Corbie on the Somme near Amiens?), *to be a broker of woad and was presented and sworn before the Mayor to faithfully execute the office between buyer and seller to the West of London Bridge and not elsewhere*. The agreement was probably fully recorded so that it could be referred to in case of disputes in future. In 1332. John de Wytsand, hostele, Thomas Irishman and John le baker, measurers of woad, were sworn to inform on all French imports before they were warehoused or measured to prevent Londoners claiming them and so avoiding the 50 mark tax. Direct association with the Company is first recorded in 1343 when Gilbert le Pipere was chosen by the mistery of Dyers to act as a broker for woad. Judge Daynes cites 1349 and 1353 as other years when the position appears in the City records. It was the Mayor and Court of Aldermen who were attempting to find a solution to the problem of miss-selling woad and evasion of royal taxes, no doubt as a result of petitions from dyers and onerous disputes such as the 1305 case. Finally in 1433 the court accepted a petition from the Dyers that *no one was to buy woad except the wardens and it was to be fairly distributed among all members both rich and poor whereas formerly it was engrossed by a few men*. Whether or not this very fair-minded regulation was maintained, clearly the Company had a structure and identity that allowed it to contemplate such ideals.

This tradition of devolving the responsibility for resolving disputes to the interested trades can be seen in the earliest reference to the Dyers, in 1298, in the Mayor's Court. It was a case brought against fullers who were sending cloths to be pounded by fulling stocks in Stratford whereas they ought to have been fullled *by the feet of men of the craft or their servants in the houses within the City*. A committee of 4 Tailors, 5 Weavers, 8 Burrellers and 12 Dyers and Fullers was named by each craft and came to a rational conclusion that must have doomed the trade of fulling in the City in the long run. It was agreed that fullers working on other people's materials must use the traditional process of fulling by foot. Only the owners of cloth could take the material outside the City to use the fulling stocks. This demonstrates that guilds could respond to innovation for this is the first mention of fulling stocks around London (though they are recorded in the Cotswolds in 1170). The Mayor's Court then ordered the Fullers to appoint three men of the craft, and their wives, to ensure that the settlement was adhered to. As late as 1342 the Dyers Wardens were sworn to ensure that the orders about fulling and dyeing of cloth at Stratford were observed; this demonstrates the City relied on the guild for the regulation of the craft. Also, though, the Wardens must have been strengthened in the exercise of their authority by the interest the City took in the craft's affairs.

One essential role of the guild always mentioned was the promotion of human capital by apprenticeships. A study of the London Guilds suggests that poor apprentices often had to work for below the market wages to pay for their training. The quality of the training could be very variable and one authority cites Dick Whittington's attempts to abscond as an example of the distress apprentices suffered. The Mayor's Court is again the source for the earliest references to the apprenticing of dyers. In 1438 Thomas Frere, son of Richard of Whatlington in Surrey, was exonerated from his apprenticeship to William Hoker, dyer, as the latter had withdrawn from the City, had no shop, had not turned him over to a new master or given him food, clothing etc. Hoker is the only dyer to appear in these records as failing to care for his apprentice, but he manages it twice. In the same year John ap Lowes son of Fitz Lowes ap John ap Edward of Llandaff brought a bill in the Court against Hoker, stating that he had been apprenticed in the parish of St Benet at 'Paules warff'. That only two cases involving the Dyers are recorded could mean that Hoker's is a particularly egregious case that had defeated the authority of the Wardens or, alternatively, that the two young men, being 'foreigners' from outside the City, may have had the parental resources to appeal to the court.

The need to control the activities of dyers inevitably extended to their behaviour out of work. Much later, during the years of the Cockayne Project in the second decade of the 17th century both the Dyers and the Clothworkers were castigated for the disruptive behaviour of their journeymen and apprentices. Happily no cases against dyers are recorded in the Mayor's Court. However in 1445 seven journeymen shearmen were deemed to be *of dissolute character and were sworn on the Gospels to be of good behaviour in future and obedient to their master and would not wander about at night and especially would not enter that place of dissolute character called Blanchapulton*. This verdict recalls the oath we apprentices swore not so many years ago, though we were not given any specific addresses to avoid.

The review of another study of the London guilds states that from the early 14th century the freedom of London equalled membership of a guild with the right freely to make and or trade goods within the City. Foreigners from outside the City or abroad (aliens) were excluded, along with servants and women (except the widows of freemen who took up their trade). By the mid 15th century the

records of the Merchant Taylors Company show the formal structures of a guild were carefully recorded in the Court Minutes. The main topics arising were admission to the livery, granting of freedom, apprentices and the regulation of English and alien foreigners – something that became more inflexible by the 1500s. It appears that a Dyer from even before the granting of the Charter would have recognised many of the subjects discussed nowadays at the Court of Assistants.

The Weavers' 1155 Charter was in part an attempt by the craft to make themselves independent of the Mayor and his Court, dominated by the great trading guilds, by appealing to the higher authority of the king. So they were granted the right to issue their own ordinances. In return the weavers promised to pay a tax to the king, something they apparently found hard to maintain. There was good reason for this defensiveness. Between 1189 and 1354, when the Mayor's title was enhanced to Lord Mayor, no weavers, or indeed dyers, were elected to the office. As already stated for the first 24 years it was filled by a draper, a trade that had constant transactions with these crafts, and the dyers' interests were regularly settled by the Mayor in his Court. For example in 1362 he set a scale of charges for dyers of wool and woad to dye hats, caps, thread or silk. Perhaps the Dyers felt this higher power made it easier to maintain the interests of the masters. The 1433 agreement went on to settle wages for the 'servants' of dyers. They were not to be paid more than 40/- (£1248 today) a year plus victuals and clothing.

So who were members of the Dyers' 'commonalty' at the time? Why in 1298, when the numbers of Tailors and others was precise, did the Mayor's Court leave the Dyers and Fullers to share a dozen places? The 1955 paper suggests they may have been combined into one body at the time; after all in Florence and Venice the dyers were for many years part of the respective weavers' guilds. Certainly it takes time for a coherent identity to emerge. In 1343 a case involving fraudulent treatment of leather raises this question. 'The good men of the mistery of Pouchmakers' had complained that sheep leather was being made to appear like roe leather, meaning that it would not last two days if it became wet when used on plate armour. It was decided that leather dyers must burn such work, rather than dyeing it. Were they members of the early fraternity of Dyers?

In 1343 dyers of leather and their wives were sworn to maintain the ordinances. They also were involved in a dispute with the Leathersellers and Pouchmakers over the price they could charge for dyeing skins red. They used brazil wood for dyeing and wished to raise the price for using a pound of dye from 7½d to 12d or even 14d. The other crafts complained and the court reached a compromise of 10d a pound with no dyer making a profit of more than 2d a pound.

Trade in Dyes and Dyed Goods

The importance of woad as an early import has already been referred to but it is in the 15th century that evidence of the trade in dyestuffs really develops. The records are informative because the king in his concern to raise money wanted to track imports and exports. A system existed, at least between 1440 and 1444, called the View of the Hosts of Alien Merchants. By it foreign merchants (including one called Tottus Machiavelli) had to be attached to a citizen who was responsible for recording the goods they brought with them, who bought them, what they bought and who sold the goods. So we learn that in 1440-1 Thomas Chatton was host to two merchants of Venice who had joined the Drapers and Grocers companies. Their galley had landed at Southampton, among other items, 340 bales of alum as well as saffron, madder, woad and raw silk. The prices the bales fetched

were recorded and demonstrate their respective values. Woad and madder fetched £2 a bale, alum £3 and saffron £30. In return a grocer and tailors were selling large amounts of diverse cloths.



Oak tree with kermes: the original 'grain'. Copied in 1910 from 1833 image (Dyers' archives)

Clearly this was a success as Chatton in 1441 again hosted one of them when the merchant landed 174 valets of woad at Sandwich. His two galleys then brought to the City cotton, spices, pepper, silk, currants and ginger. The sacks of cotton sold at between £8-£10 each while a bale of brazil dye fetched £18; this compares with £23 for a bale of ginger. There was something also for royalty. The Duke of Gloucester spent £107 (£68,800 today) on 17 lengths of brocade embroidered with gold. One can see how the Venetian was testing the market as in 1442 he brought 6 bales of brazil. He also brought a bale of grain (an insect found on the kermes oak in the Mediterranean area), but this was unsold. He was unlucky, a bale of grain

from an Italian carrack, in the same year, sold for £21. The first reference to the import of 'Inde indigo' was in 1445 while in 1457 a Piedmont merchant imported some woollen cloth dyed with 'Corket Crymesyn'. This is a red dye, cork or corkir, from lichen.

Clearly there were merchants who could afford to buy. In 1443 Henry Kent bought 140 valets of woad, out of a consignment of 161, for £200 and the rest were scooped up by Amery Mateny for £80. They would then sell the woad on as is shown by a case for debt when ten casks of woad were 'arrested' from a Lincolnshire merchant to settle a £40 debt to a grocer. So we can see how London merchants fed the demand for dye materials across the country. The Court was a separate level of customer; Adam Selman bought two woven cloths of gold for £172 10s. These merchants did not necessarily keep to the trade defined by their guild. The Grocer John Pekok bought £39 of pepper but also a bale of grain for £21.

This was big business but as merchants they could hope to deal in exports as well. So a Fishmonger, John Coggeshall, bought a sack of saffron but sold 600 'Essex straits or stretts' for £330. (Stretts were woven one yard by 12). Less ambitiously Adam Semy bought a bale of brazil and sold two lengths of kerseys (a coarse, narrow worsted, often ribbed, about 15 yards long made in Kersey in Suffolk).

The cloths sold in exchange in 1440-4 demonstrate the work of dyers even if it was merchants from the 'Great Twelve' who did the selling. Drapers sold 40 yards of black cloth for £4, a 48 yard black cloth for £9.10s and 40 yards of 'crimson in grain' cloth for £26 13s 4d. Cheaper cloths also feature. A crimson kersey fetched £3 12s and red cloths and medleys, a mixture of hues, for example of red or green, were sold in quantity.

The royal concern to raise money has already been mentioned as leading to the View of Hosts of Alien Merchants. The evasion of duties and attempts to prevent them naturally had a long history. In 1429 the issue blew up and there were complaints about the activities of 'common colourers of goods'. These were not errant dyers but people who *sell foreign goods under the colour of their*

freedom, pretending the goods belong to them. Perhaps the merchant guilds had mechanisms to thwart such activities but it means that they and the Crown shared an interest in preventing the artisan guilds from trading with 'aliens'. So, when in 1422 Henry Fyshere, dyer, sold to a Genoese merchant seven London-made cloths for £70 (they were 6 ¼ of an ell wide and weighed 9 to 11 pounds), he did not directly make the deal. Philip Saty, an alien, brokered it. In 1441 the View records that John Palmer, dyer, and a partner bought 22 yards of satin and 12 ¼ of damask for £30.

John Hickeman, in 1444, is also recorded in the View buying two bales of grain for £40 7s from Lucca merchants. He is the first dyer I have found dealing directly in dyestuff. He is also the first dyer to have more information about his life recorded. He became a master dyer in 1433 and was dead by 1452. Dyers were beginning to make their mark.

Work and Identity



1500s Candlewicke Street (Cannon Str) with London Stone. St Swithuns Lane runs north from east of the Stone and the church marked 'S'. Eastcheap was at the east end of Candlewicke Str.

Some early dyers are recorded as active around Candlewick Street, where the Weavers were centred, and Thames Street. In 1373 Sir Edmund Cheyne, from Somerset, had at his death a dyehouse in the parish of St Swithins, near London Stone on Candlewick Street. I imagine this was rented to a dyer.

Dyeing was not a neighbourly or, necessarily, a salubrious activity. Urine might be used; woad can be extremely smelly; much water is used. So we learn something of such a dyehouse from a case brought against Thomas de St Edmunds and his wife Idonia. They were carrying lengths of wet cloth up steps and along a passage running through the middle of the tenement of a vintner by Eastcheap near Candlewick Str in the parish of St Michael Crooked Lane *so that water falls upon the steps and penetrates parts of the house*. The defendant pleaded that the property had been used as a

dyehouse since 1303 and *has always been let subject to the right of entry by the passage to the Dyehouse.*

In 1417 a case, and the Court's verdict, add details to the inconvenience that could be caused. Richard complained of a pit at the front door of William's house in which he put hot cloth after it had been dyed, to the great nuisance of Richard. He continued: *There is an oven in the tenement and he should remove it and put his pit there.* He also complained about William's gutter to the dyehouse but the Court decided this was to stay. However, since Richard had vacated his apartment beyond the vat because of the nuisance William was to pay the rent. In turn William complained of the defective stair to the Thames but was ordered to make the best of it until Richard returned from Harfleur.

The population in general could also suffer inconvenience from the dyers' activities. The Dowgate Ward beadle in 1421 made a series of complaints that demonstrated how filthy the streets could be. Cosin Lane, now swallowed up in Cannon Street Station, 'is stopped with filth' etc; also *the dyers of the ward throw their raides (bark used in dyeing) into the Thames to the destruction of the stream and the nuisance of the community.* A year later it was the fullers who were the focus of his complaints as they washed their cloths at Haywharf Lane, obstructing others from using the Thames.



1500s St Peter's the less Church on Thames Street. A later Dyers' property at 'Trygglane' is arrowed; Paul's Wharf is the blank space to the west, at the other end of the arrow.

Dyers, with their often noxious and certainly very wet activities, could not have been popular neighbours in the crowded tenements and narrow lanes of the City. Clearly a position on the banks of the Thames was an asset and by the later 1400s there were several dyehouses on riverside sites. Decades after William's rather rickety arrangements, in 1457 there is evidence of a more specific site for a dyehouse having been developed. John Ludford, dyer, in partnership with a goldsmith and a shearman, leased to Thomas Bottyng, dyer, 'the Dyhous' in Thames Street in the parish of St Peter the less with the adjoining wharf. The site cannot have been far from the later Dyers Company property called Paul's Wharf and clearly the area was already favourable for them. Another dyer, Thomas Wayfeld, and a 'steynor' were among the 6 neighbours listed. The site ran from Thames

Street to the Thames so no other person would be inconvenienced. Also Bottyng, for his £6 annual rent, was free to choose how to use the site: to *equip and remove leaden vats, vessels, utensils household goods etc.*

The scale of some dyers' business is indicated by an agreement in 1435 when William Danyell dyer gave a draper *four leaden vessels six leaden cisterns and four great cruces belonging to the trade of a dyer and in the donor's house*. The meaning of 'cruces' is obscure but, in a 1604 inventory of the contents of the extensive dyehouse at Dyers' Hall, after the cisterns there is reference to a holding cross of iron and two standards to the cross. Clearly the technology of dyeing has advanced considerably as no contemporary liveryman has been able to explain precisely what a cross was for. Dyers' Hall also had four lead cisterns. Two were 'great' for liquors and were lined with wood. Another was also for liquors while the fourth was for water.



Copy of 16th century image from Germany used as a Dyers' Christmas card. Possibly this illustrates the 'cross' and its use.

The attachment of dyers to the river ran deep. It appears to have helped to thwart plans to create a fine promenade facing the river on the north side. In about 1670 a petition to the Lord Mayor stated that *the Dyers of the City of London inhabiting the north side of the River Thames have always constantly for time immemoriall had and enjoyed Staires and put Galleys on the Bank of the said River for the use and Exercise of their Trades without any impediment or molestation*. They went on that they had objected to the proposal by the City and had appealed to the King for the continuance of their right, which he had agreed to. Now the Water Bailiff was prosecuting dyers in the Quarter Sessions for rebuilding their stair and 'put galleys' and they wanted the Mayor to tell him to desist. These rights clearly were much valued and deeply implanted in the traditions of the dyers and were

successfully defended at this time. Sadly our attachment to the river could not be defended after the next great destruction of the City, during the Blitz.



1721 crest in the Estate Book

Among the superb collections in the Victoria & Albert Museum the ecclesiastical vestments of the English school from the late 15th century suggest that there were skilled dyers in London capable of matching the best European work. The newly incorporated Company chose a coat of arms that celebrated their skills and the materials they worked with: the panthers with spots of many colours, the 'greyn' tree and the sacks, or bales, whether they were of madder or of woad.

Dyers of Fortune

Throughout Europe textile crafts were early organisers of guilds. However the place of the dyers was uncertain. In some European countries, as already stated, dyers were originally part of weavers' guilds and in London the origins are opaque. However the 1155 Weavers' Charter makes no claim to control their sister crafts. It seems that even in the 1300s the dyers' relationship with the fullers was uncertain, as it was with the dyers of leather. However they were organised with Wardens, they could regulate their craft and enforce apprenticeship rules and pay regulations. This suggests the powers of self-regulation granted by the Mayor in 1310 had survived.

There is no record of the Dyers playing a part in controlling the affairs of the City until 1376 when the Company is listed as 15th in the City with the Fullers at 16th. Four dyers attended Common Council: John Clavering, Henry Greencob, Nicholas Maynard and Richard Godard. In 1381, during the reforming mayoralty of John of Northampton, two 'Digheres', Maynard again and Walter Anne, were elected. Their representation seems only fair since they were responsible for supplying men for the defence of the City and, indeed, the Realm.

By the 1400s the trading records demonstrate that dyers were using increasingly diverse and sometimes very valuable dye-stuffs. In 1445 a cargo including 8 pieces of 'brasyll' from the East Indies weighing 92 lbs arrived; another cargo brought 30 bales, along with a barrel of indigo. In 1453 179 bales of madder arrived.

In fact some dyers were starting to prosper, as the Pleas and Memoranda Rolls demonstrate. Mostly these are summary and give limited information. The earliest record I found of a dyer making a settlement is in 1437 when John Jakes, dyer, made a gift of goods and chattels to a fuller and a shearman. Some settlements were accompanied by money, 2d or 4d. Presumably the delivery of six silver spoons to a barber demonstrates that this agreement was much more valuable. This agreement was by Robert Watervall alias Colyn of London, dyer, in 1472. There were as many fullers as dyers making such agreements; presumably they tell us trade was becoming more sophisticated. The names of dyers making such agreements and, in brackets, any delivery of money are as follows:

- 1440 Richard Wobryche to 3 drapers
- 1443 Thomas Danyell to 2 people
- 1448 William Wykwan to Stephen Foster, Alderman Fishmonger and two others
- 1453 John Bromley of Southwark to 2 people
- 1454 John Bernard to John Heydon
- 1454 A carpenter to William Wykwan (silver spoon)
- 1462 Richard Priour of London to a draper
- 1465 Thomas Fraunceys to a draper
- 1469 a tailor to William Elmet and a mercer, tailor and fishmonger
- 1470 Gregory Copping to an Alderman Grocer and Thomas Danyell
- 1484 Edward Coyfield to a draper

A case of debt in 1421 demonstrates the variety of work one dyer was undertaking. Thomas Cook was owed £89 16s 8d for:

15 Ludlowe cloths mixed green; a dark green medley; 8 cloths light green and plain green; 4 brown shade medleys; 2 mixed green cloths; 8 cloths of mixed colours called mustedevilers (thought to be grey); a green medley and a red medley. Cook appears to have the capacity to work as a cloth dyer and to either dye in the wool or dye threads to make the medleys. These were mixed shades of the same colour.

The name Danyell has already appeared several times; it is a very important one in the early history of the Dyers so I will trace the recorded activities of what I presume was a family of dyers. In 1421 Richard was sworn and admitted a dyer. Only three years later he gave a 100/- bond for a draper who was taking office as a broker. In 1426 he served on a jury and in 1430 he described himself as merchant when making a £30 attachment. This must be kept in proportion – £30 was the price of a sack of saffron at the time. However, by calling himself a merchant he was telling the world he did not work with his hands, a feature of the craft of dyeing.

It was in the next generation that Thomas Danyell, dyer, made a greater impression than any previous dyer. In 1443 he was first recorded making a settlement. Two years later in a debt case by a draper against a German merchant he had £100 in his hands. In 1461 he, with a gentleman and a carpenter, made a settlement with a grocer upon delivery of 2d. In 1470 he has already been mentioned in dealings with an Alderman Grocer and the next year Thomas Gresham, perhaps the grandfather of the founder of the Royal Exchange, settled with Danyell and two others about the debts of three fellmongers of Southwark.

This is small beer in comparison with the dealings of some City merchants. In 1462 Geoffrey Boleyn, Alderman and Mercer was in a case against a German merchant regarding a £700 debt for 322 bales of woad. In 1475 a Merchant of the Staple sold to a goldsmith, mercer and draper *50 tons of Spanish iron, 5000lbs of Polish beeswax, 8 sacks of wool, 12 white steel harness, burnished armour, 20 linen cloths and a bale of madder* that he had stored at his house in Thames Street. Such merchants moved in much more exalted circles than any dyer and of course Boleyn's descendants enjoyed, and suffered, the extremes of social success. Alderman Ralph Verney, future Lord Mayor and ancestor of our own distinguished Verneys, appears quite often making settlements; for example in 1470 with a draper and the Bishop of Carlisle.

However Thomas Danyell is so important to the Dyers for two great milestones. It was during his time as Warden that the Charter was secured. In the City records the following entry appears:

1st March 1471 John Haydon dyer to Richard Tunstall knight, the King's Chamberlain, Nicholas Walton, yeoman of the Crown and his son Thomas and Thomas Danyell dyer

Being so soon after the grant of the Charter (16th February) this can only refer to it being recorded in the Mayor's Court. John Haydon could be the same as the one making a settlement in 1454. He also appears as one of the signatories to the Charter. In 1482 Danyell appears again in a settlement with four gentlemen by the delivery of a silver spoon, a year that matches the delivery of the Ordinances of self-regulation that were drawn up after the grant of the Charter.

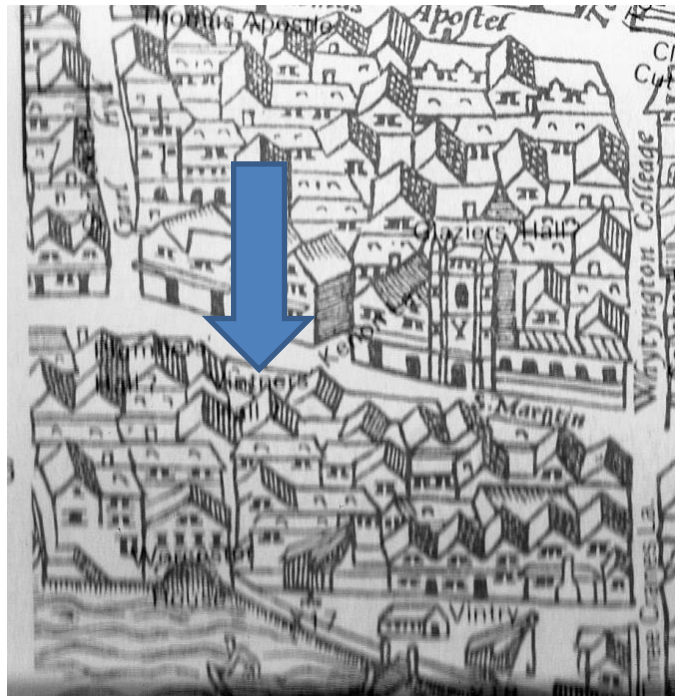
In the interim, Danyell features in the other important milestone for the Company: the acquisition of the property on Thames Street that was to become the first Dyers Hall. On 14th February 1475 Thomas Danyell, dyer, Humphrey Starkey, Recorder of London, William Dunthorne, Common Clerk of the City, Robert Vaus, gentleman, Thomas Roger, fishmonger, and Thomas Rede, dyer were granted *the messuage called le Three Sterres with shops in front and abutting north on Thames Street and south on the bank of the water of Thames*. A document dating from around 1509 describes this as the 'common hall of the craft and fellowship of Dyers' in Thames Street and confirms that the Company had actually acquired the property considerably earlier, most probably in or soon after 1484. The 1475 document suggests that Danyell was not simply purchasing the site for himself. The association of the City officials and Thomas Rede, another signatory of the Charter, in the acquisition indicates this marks the start of the Dyers' property portfolio.

The Importance of the Charter

Centuries earlier the Weavers had received their Charter. It granted them independence from the Mayor to govern themselves; in return they promised the King a regular 'ferm', or annual payment. The historian of the guild, Frances Consitt, interprets this as the guild appealing to a higher authority than the City in order to maintain its independence. It was a bargain for the king because his revenue was to be enhanced. By the 1300s the Weavers had failed to maintain their independence or the ferm.

Why did the Dyers spend money, possibly quite a lot of it, to acquire their Charter? It could be said that this was simply a trend – others were doing it: in 1474 the Pouchmakers were

granted theirs. It has also been suggested that they were supporters of the Lancastrian cause; if so they were rotten politicians as Henry VI was bankrupt and soon to be toppled and probably murdered. So they had to be re-incorporated by the restored Edward IV on the 2nd December 1472.



1500s Area of the Vintry with Vintners' Hall arrowed. Anchor Lane ran down to the river to the west of the Hall

It seems more likely that they had less political concerns. Most immediately they had to be incorporated if they were to have secure ownership of property. During the 1400s there is evidence that they wanted a hall. They rented the Brewers' hall in 1420 and later they are recorded as having a hall in Anchor Lane, which ran down the west side of the Vintners' estate. Perhaps they already had plans to occupy the site on Thames Street. Judge Daynes speculates on the dinners and entertainment the fraternity could indulge in there. In 1561 merchant companies complained that dyers were putting up in the Hall names of non-payers for work done. Perhaps Danyell and his fellow dyers already envisaged the Hall could serve such useful business purposes as well.

It has already been established that the Dyers' fraternity already existed in the 1300s with Wardens and regulations. They also had a system of training and agreed levels of payment for servants. Now they had a Royal Charter securing their right to govern themselves. Besides the desire for the prestige of achieving incorporation, during the upheavals of the Wars of the Roses it must have appealed to artisans to have some royal recognition.

It was usual to publish Ordinances specifying how this was to be done, but it took until 1482 for the first Ordinances to be agreed. Possibly a record in the Mayor's Court that year marks their settlement. Thomas Danyell settled with four gentlemen by delivery of a silver spoon; this was acknowledged in Chancery in 1484 and recorded in the Close Rolls on the 23rd December 1482.

There is no explanation for the long delay but later records suggest that the Dyers had to bargain with the established, powerful merchant guilds about trade regulation. In October 1502 there was an agreement confirmed in the Court of Aldermen between the Craft of Dyers and the fellowships of Drapers, Merchant Taylors and the Haberdashers.

- The Dyers agreed *to work dye and greyn all work cloth hats caps and yarn brought by the fellowships as well as or better than has been formerly done by anyone and their servants will be always ready to fetch receive and surely keep such goods.*
- They would provide at their own cost examples of wool etc in woad from 1d to 10d and to have examples of every colour 'to be reviewed as necessary'.
- They were not to dye or greyn for any foreigners except for the Hanse merchants at the Steelyard (known as Peterlings) or their agents except for remnants and cheap liveries.
- Disputes were to be settled between the Wardens, not 'by bills of complaint' brought to court.

These terms demonstrate that the 'fellowships' remained dominant commercially; they benefitted from improving quality of work and they had successfully protected their trading interests with foreign merchants. Also their members would avoid tiresome visits to the courts.

However they did accept aims of the Dyers which concurred with their interests: the wish of the Dyers to control craft activities within 20 miles of London. They also agreed to *send all their cloth to freemen of the Dyers for dying* Furthermore they agreed to help the Dyers to buy a seal for making all cloth dyed by them *to the intent that London dye may be knowen for the best surest and more profitable for the King's ... peoples of any dyeing within the Reame of England.*

So the wealthy merchant guilds accepted the need to protect the dyers' markets and their skills, just as the Charter laid down. The requirement that only freemen of the guild should work within a 20 mile radius from London did not survive. It was clearly under pressure when in 1523 *the Wardens and other good men of the mistery of Dyers* exhibited a bill in the Mayor's Court that was referred to two aldermen to consult with the three fellowships. The bill claimed that their living was being taken away by foreign dyers in Southwark whose *dyeing appearing right pleasant, orient, beautiful and sure, but a few days of wearing will fade and vanish and not London dye. Also they dye in one week much more cloth than they could or can conveniently overcome if they had done it well and substantially.*

It would seem that already the fellowships were backsliding from their 1502 promises but in a city the size of London the enforcement of their monopoly over a long period of time must have been very difficult. In France in the later 17th century the Colbert system and royal power established a system of inspections, courts and orders to maintain standards. In the 1500s the Dyers had no such support. They appointed searchers to enter dyehouses and inspect work, sealing that which reached the set standards; but it was always open to challenge. Maintaining a monopoly and the right of search was an onerous business, as 18th century Court Minutes demonstrate. By then the extent of claimed control was halved to 10 miles.

Ironically, apparently the earliest records of a London dyer survive in the Drapers Company archives; a draper was working as a dyer despite all the laws and agreements.

In fact the guild did not operate a blanket refusal to allow foreigners to trade in the City. When in 1514 Gwilliam Van Dam, a Dutchman, petitioned to be allowed to continue his trade as a thread dyer, despite not being a freeman of the City, the Dyers were consulted by a committee of aldermen. The response was that none of the Company of Dyers had this skill so he did no damage to their interests. He could continue to work so long as he promised to instruct Englishmen in his art and did not sell retail. Almost a century later the improved use of cochineal was introduced in Bow by another 'Dutchman', Cornelius Drebbel, without any apparent resistance: so in due course scarlet became the symbolic colour of the British army.

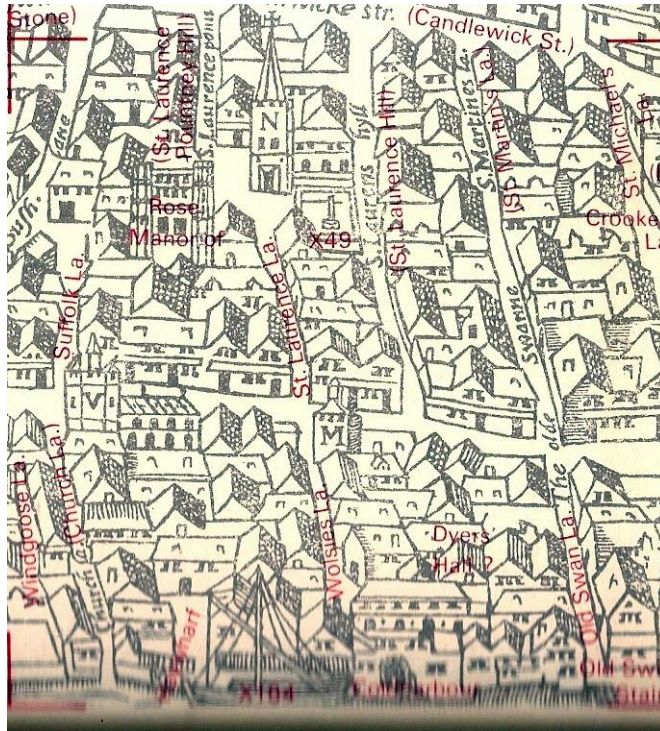
But this influx of new dyes also created opposition and even conflict in the Company. Concern for standards, vested interests and simple conservatism no doubt played their part in the resistance to the use of indigo and logwood in particular. In the 1500s there was a succession of Acts to control their use and in James I's reign there was a quarrel between dyers of silk and the Wardens that came to the Court of Star Chamber with mutual accusations. But change did occur over time. The significance of the office of Woad Porter declined as the East India Company imported indigo; in Victorian times the post was purely honorific, applied to the oldest member of the Livery. The searchers and the sealing of cloth continued into the 1700s when finally even a royal charter could not stand in the way of a free market.

Hopefully the Charter helped dyers to negotiate with their powerful customers, the Drapers, Merchant Taylors and Haberdashers. However there remained limits to their control over their own affairs. In 1523 they attempted to regulate production by limiting the Wardens to producing 14 cloths and other masters to 12 and in 1561 the 'Fellowship of Dyers' forbade dyeing for 20 days after every quarter day. Each time they were promptly taken to the Mayor's Court where the regulations were revoked. The merchant guilds still had the whip hand.

Conclusion

Judge Daynes, in his History, indicated he would not elaborate on the history of the dyestuff industry. This was unfortunate because business was intrinsic to the evolution of the guild.

As an incorporated guild *the Wardens and good men of the mystery of Dyers* could share in the increasing pomp and ceremony of the City. From 15th in order of seniority, just above the fullers, they rose to 12th, before being overtaken by the now combined interests of the fullers and shearmen, united as the Clothworkers. They bought a barge on the instruction of the Lord Mayor otherwise they could not have continued to take part in his procession, which now navigated the Thames. So it is easy to consider the granting of the Charter as a step up in status. However the 'good men' were hard-headed business-men competing with incomers and negotiating with powerful merchants. The Charter was essential in creating a trade association that attempted to protect their interests by asserting their right to self-regulation. It also allowed them to have a home they could call their own.



1500s Site of Dyers Hall and the Steelyard with Cosin Lane next to it

Ian Mackintosh 7/2020

