# 2. 'Writying, making and engrocyng': clerks, guilds and identity in late medieval London*

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In 1484 the accounts of the London Carpenters included expenses for a 'table for the brethern and sistyrs', a list of deceased members of the guild whose souls were to be remembered in prayers and masses. It seems from the accounts that it initially took the form of a painted and gilded wooden board, but a year later a stationer was paid to copy it on to parchment, and this was also decorated. Several other craft guilds in this period also produced memorial tables of this kind, including the Pinners and the Pewterers, as well as greater guilds such as the Tailors, who in 1464–5 paid 10*s* 1*d* to compose, write, illuminate and paint a table of indulgences and remissions granted '*per diversos papas archiepiscopos, episcopos ac alios prelates*'. This was hung in a chapel they maintained in St. Paul's Cathedral.[1] These were meant to impress and instruct, and it is worth remembering that when Robert Fabyan was researching the dates and names of some of the earliest British kings, he used a certain 'Table hangynge vpon the wall of y^e^ North syde of y^e^ Ile in y^e^ back of y^e^ Quere of seynt Poules Churche of London'.[2] Tables and lists took on an added significance on ceremonial and religious occasions when the names would be read out, and the souls of the dead would be prayed for, fostering the ever-important dialogue between corporate identity and religious belief which underpinned the existence and activities of medieval guilds. Yet as well as their status as what one might call 'cultural capital' (whether for private or public purposes) we ought to remember that lists of this kind also had a practical function in a corporate context, reflecting the proliferation of written records within lay organizations, such as urban guilds and fraternities, in the later middle ages.

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[1] LMA, CLC/L/CC/D/002/MS04326/001, fo. 41 (Carpenters); CLC/L/PE/D/002/MS07086/001, fo. 90 (Pewterers); CLC/L/MD/D/003/MS34048/002, fo. 261 (Merchant Taylors); *The Pinners' and Wiresellers' Book 1462–1511*, ed. B. E. Megson (London Record Society, xliv, 2009), pp. 11, 15, 23.

[2] *The New Chronicles of England and France by Robert Fabyan,* ed. H. Ellis (1811), p. 40.

In this essay I want to look at the development of record-keeping by the London craft and merchant guilds (or 'livery companies') and in doing so try and touch on this intersection between records as tools of governance and as expressions of identity, tradition and community. This was a formative period for the London guilds as institutions, and in that sense they afford a remarkable opportunity to look at record-keeping and record-creation as they evolved over time. In this context, the range of practices across the guilds are as striking as the commonalities between them. In particular, the essay will discuss the people who served the companies as clerks and scriveners, who combined linguistic, scribal, quasi-legal and literary skills. As Jim Bolton has shown, scriveners played an important part in oiling the wheels of commerce in late medieval London, notably by drawing up bonds and other financial instruments which underpinned the use of credit – vital (Bolton suggests) during periods of bullion shortage. Many of the same individuals turned their hands to other scribal tasks, working for the London craft and merchant guilds, facilitating the administration of their growing estates and memberships, promoting the causes of London's merchants and craftsmen to the City and to parliament, but also enabling the accumulation of layers of written records and corporate memory.

As Derek Keene, Elspeth Veale and others have reminded us, diversity was a key characteristic of the early years of the city livery companies.[3] Some emerged from parish fraternities and retained important religious functions; others developed as part of local occupational clusters; some received royal recognition as early as the twelfth century; some struggled to develop institutional structures until the sixteenth. Their often obscure origins means that we cannot easily talk about a foundation date or foundation documents, even (or sometimes especially) in the case of royal charters which frequently just confirmed the existence of a corporate body of some kind. A rare internal reference to the alleged origins of a craft guild occurs in the forty-two London returns to the royal inquiry into guilds and fraternities of 1388–9: the Pouchmakers stated that their brotherhood was 'begonne in the yeer of our lord 1356'.[4] As well as detailing their religious and charitable functions – rarely referring to economic activities – these guild returns provide occasional clues about early written records. In their response to

[3] See for example D. Keene, 'English urban guilds, *c.*900–1300', in *Guilds and Association in Europe, 900–1900*, ed. I. A. Gadd and P. Wallis (2006), pp. 3–26; E. Veale, 'The "Great Twelve": mystery and fraternity in thirteenth-century London', *Historical Research*, lxiv (1991), 237–63.

[4] Transcribed in C. M. Barron and L. Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates of 1388–9', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, xxxix (1995), 140–1.

the royal inquiry the Carpenters produced an ordinance book that was said to have been begun on 1 September 1333, clearly a momentous date even if it cannot perhaps be called a foundation date.[5] This book no longer survives, but the mention of ordinances is useful, because it reminds us of some of the key functions of the crafts and their guilds in London – and hence that there were certain kinds of recording practices which were common to most guilds. In particular, it was important to maintain records of apprenticeship and the Freedom: from the end of the thirteenth century the guilds were responsible, as delegates of the mayor, for regulating access to the Freedom – which the overwhelming majority obtained by apprenticeship.[6] The 'audit trail', so to speak, included apprenticeship indentures (many of which contained requirements that apprentices should learn to read and write), and enrolments of apprenticeship – these now mostly survive as entries in financial accounts, although some guilds were starting to keep separate registers by the fifteenth century. Apprenticeship was just one aspect of the wider task of economic and moral regulation, also delegated to them by the City government. Most of the early ordinances of London's craft guilds in fact survive in the City's archives – mostly ordinances for the lesser crafts, who obeyed the mayor's demand to inspect them. Ordinance books, such as the one the Carpenters claimed to have started in 1333, were created by the guilds to preserve these regulations themselves, and were updated to respond to economic problems, such as threats from other crafts or from aliens, or to reflect institutional changes: the Tailors had a 'Grete Boke' of ordinances which was added to regularly following meetings of the guild's court, but only one quire of this remains, covering the years 1429–55.[7] Ordinances in that sense were a combination of an ongoing historical record with an idealistic and normative description of how the craft and the guild ought to be governed.[8] Like the royal charters which the guilds increasingly sought, ordinances were expressions of mercantile and craft identities, especially in the public versions submitted to the mayor, and could be contested as part of disputes over jurisdictions and privileges. As the identities and aspirations of the crafts became more and more invested in guilds as institutions, there was increasingly a need (as in 1388–9) to create and produce documentary evidence, and a premium was therefore placed on each guild's ability to

[5] Barron and Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates', p. 113.

[6] M. Davies, 'Crown, city and guild in late medieval London', in *London and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Derek Keene,* ed. M. Davies and J. A. Galloway (2012), pp. 247–68.

[7] LMA, CLC/L/MD/A/003/MS34003.

[8] See M. Davies, 'Governors and governed: the practice of power in the Merchant Taylors' Company', in *Guilds, Society and Economy in London 1450–1800*, ed. I. A. Gadd and P. Wallis (2002), pp. 67–83.

organize its affairs, to promote its role within the craft, and to communicate concerns to the City and beyond.

The expansion in record keeping among the guilds of London in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was also driven by their development as social, religious and political entities. Account books survive for most of the greater companies, and for many of the lesser ones, often with a huge amount of detailed expenditure and income – reflecting an expansion of their activities into many different areas. The guilds were not just responsible for apprenticeship and trade regulation, but for processions, feasts, chaplains, maintaining their newly acquired halls, as well as lobbying the City, crown and parliament for extensions of their privileges. The ability to hold property corporately was especially important, and was confirmed through so-called charters of incorporation: this boosted the fortunes of some guilds, particularly those with a wealthy membership who could make substantial bequests for chantries and other forms of *post obit* commemoration. By the Reformation, when such practices were declared 'superstitious', the London guilds were found by the chantry commissioners to be funding sixty-one chantry priests and 158 anniversaries at an annual cost of more than £1,000. These figures do not of course include the many other benefactions, such as gifts for almshouses, which did not attract the attention of the chantry commissioners, but which nonetheless added to the administrative burden.[9] The guilds were increasingly seen by London's merchants and craftsmen as reliable trustees for their property and their souls, paving the way for the remarkable expansion of their charitable activities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[10] Even before the Reformation, the London guilds were rapidly developing into major landlords, with charitable interests which stretched far beyond London – as can be seen, for example, in the foundations of schools by Londoners in this period. Underpinning all this activity was a huge amount of administration, including writing documents, obtaining legal advice, communicating with potential donors, and maintaining valuable estates. Without the expertise of clerks and other officials, the guilds would have found it much more difficult to develop their charitable reputations and roles as foci for the charitable and religious aspirations of some of London's leading citizens.

[9] TNA: PRO, E 301/34, mm. 36–39d, printed in *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, ed. C. J. Kitching (London Record Society, xvi, 1980), pp. 81–95. This is probably an underestimate, as returns were not apparently completed for all the guilds.

[10] See, for example, I. W. Archer, 'The livery companies and charity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in Gadd and Wallis, *Guilds, Society and Economy in London*, pp. 15–28. The charities of the Clothworkers' Company are documented on the 'People, property and charity' website: <http://www.clothworkersproperty.org> [accessed 18 Feb. 2015].

The expansion of the business of the guilds also enhanced the role of the 'courts of assistants' which emerged in the fourteenth century as governing bodies. Normally comprising the leading liverymen and past masters, the matters considered by the courts were often quite diverse, including the regulation of apprenticeship, settlement of disputes, but also matters of wider policy and communication with the City, crown and parliament. Court records were kept by some guilds from quite early on: we are told in a seventeenth-century inventory that the Tailors had 'Nyne books severally marked with these severall letters viz A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H and I … the Booke A begynnyng in the xxviiith yere of K. Edw. the First Anno Domini 1299 and the Booke I endyng the xxiiiith day of January 1574'. The earliest of these books are now lost, apart from court minutes from the start and end of two volumes, altogether providing coverage for the period 1486–93.[11] It is striking that the Tailors' minute books were said to have begun in 1299, during a period which saw the start of some of the City's own key record series such as the 'Letter Books'. Indeed it is almost certain that guild record-creation was connected with key phases in the expansion of the City's own bureaucracy and records, whether in the late thirteenth century, when the first town clerks took office, or, under John Carpenter, in the early fifteenth century. For the short period for which they survive, the Tailors' minutes show that its court was meeting very regularly indeed: notes of more than 400 meetings survive for a period of six-and-a-half years, which works out at an average of just over one meeting a week. As we will see, court records provide some of the most vivid insights into the role played by scribes and records in the formation and expression of guild identity – not least because they were shaped as much by the personalities of those who wrote them as by the business they record.[12]

As mentioned, the status and wealth of the guilds and their members significantly affected institutional development, and hence record-keeping practices. A large or wealthy membership provided a solid financial basis for some guilds, through regular payments of quarterage or alms, one-off levies for projects, and a potential source of bequests of property and high-value goods such as plate, all of which had to be administered and accounted for. At this point we can look at two examples at either end of

[11] LMA, CLC/L/MD/G/256/MS34360, fo. 14; H. L. Hopkinson, *Report on the Ancient Records in the Possession of the Guild of Merchant Taylors of the Fraternity of St. John the Baptist in the City of London* (1915), pp. 99–101; and see *The Merchant Taylors' Company of London: Court Minutes 1486–1493*, ed. M. Davies (Stamford, 2000), p. 7.

[12] Davies, *Court Minutes*, pp. 12–13. Not all of these meetings were 'full' court meetings, judging from the inclusion of attendance lists for only about 25% of the 405. Most were smaller meetings of the master and four wardens.

the social and financial spectrum. The London Pinners were recognized as a separate trade by the mid fourteenth century, when they submitted ordinances in 1356 to the mayor for approval. Yet they struggled to develop a strong institutional presence over the next hundred years, mainly because they were a small, specialist trade, which faced the threats of rising imports as well as incursions into their business from other trades in London. Temporary respite came in 1462 when their trade was among those meant to benefit from a new statute (which the Pinners called a 'charter') limiting imports of manufactured goods, including pins of various kinds.[13] A new guild book was created, which survives in the British Library: thirteen skins of parchment were bought, and 12*d* was spent on a binding and two clasps for it. They also bought a chest, probably used to store the book as well as their meagre corporate funds.[14] However, their existence remained precarious – and symptomatic of this was their lack of a hall. They rented a small tenement briefly from the Tailors in the 1440s, but by the 1460s were hiring out Girdlers' Hall for their meetings. They later transferred to the Armourers' Hall, but at one point in between the wardens had to meet in a tavern, the 'Sign of the Rose' in Old Jewry, to present the annual accounts. This rather itinerant existence was not uncommon, as we can see in the Brewers' accounts, for example, in which several other crafts appear hiring their hall in the first half of the fifteenth century.[15] It was a major problem in terms of looking after records – at one point the Pinners gave documents to the Cutlers to look after, which implies a good deal of trust on the former's part given the frequent strictures on secrecy that appear in guild records. Eventually the Pinners did manage to rent a hall of their own, but a combination of hefty repairs and an expensive lawsuit meant that they could barely afford it. In 1497 the Pinners merged with the Wiremongers to form the Wiresellers, and eventually (it is not clear exactly when) the Wiresellers were absorbed by the Girdlers.[16]

At the other end of the economic scale, the Grocers – one of the leading mercantile crafts – were able to draw upon the wealth and influence of some of London's most prominent merchants in furthering their corporate objectives through record-keeping. Their 'Black Book' was started in 1345 and updated thereafter with accounts and ordinances, but like other guilds, the business became more and more diverse as the guild acquired its hall, as well as a portfolio of property holdings. This caused an expansion of its record-keeping. At around the same time as the Pinners proudly started

[13] Megson, *The Pinners' and Wiresellers' Book*, pp. xii–xxi.
[14] Megson, *The Pinners' and Wiresellers' Book*, p. 6.
[15] LMA, CLC/L/BF/A/021/MS0544, fos. 11v, 84.
[16] Megson, *The Pinners' and Wiresellers' Book*, pp. 8, 11, 15, 30, 32.

their new book, we have a unique short series of inventories of the Grocers' books and records, which they included at the end of the annual accounts in the 1460s. The information was recorded as part of the formal handing over of the guild's assets from one set of wardens to the next, and although earlier inventories of the company's goods exist in the accounts, these are the first to include detailed lists of books and manuscripts.[17] The inventories tell us, for example, that each year's accounts were written and stored in separate 'quires of account', only being bound together much later. Records parallel to these were known rather evocatively as 'quires of remembrance' – the minutes and ordinances of the craft produced at quarter days and other occasions. The term 'remembrance', as I have discussed elsewhere, was part of a vocabulary of record-keeping and guild culture which emphasized the role of the records as the written memory and heritage of the craft; each year the Grocers' accounts began with the phrase 'be it remembered that these are the accounts of x and y, wardens of the Grocers'.[18] The inventories list other records, mainly in book rather than quire form – these included a 'grete rede boke wt ii claspes coper and gilt which is begon to write in our tyme wt constutucions accompts and laste wills of divers men'.[19] We know from the accounts that this had been assembled in 1455 using eight quires of paper bought at a cost of 2*s*.[20]

Remarkably, all of the descriptions in the inventories can be matched to surviving books in the Grocers' archive: the 'Red Book', for instance, has the fair accounts of the company, which summarized income and expenditure under headings, referring for the detail to the annual quires. The inventories, finally, list numerous chests and great boxes, some clearly meant for the books just mentioned, while some already contained copies of testaments, deeds and bills of various kinds. The person responsible for these inventories was the clerk, Henry Nicholl, who took office in 1460. As Caroline Barron notes in her contribution to this volume, Nicholl was the author of what she terms a 'bureaucratic chronicle' (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 359), which combined some elements of a civic chronicle with an ongoing list of wardens of the Grocers and mayors of the City. In many ways, therefore, Nicholl's 'chronicle' and his innovations within the guild's accounts were both expressions of his interest in history

[17] LMA, CLC/L/GH/D/001/MS11571/001, fos. 77v–78v (1463–5), 103v–104v (1465–6), 139 (1466–7), 164–5 (1467–8).

[18] M. Davies, '"Monuments of honor": clerks, histories and heroes in the London livery companies', in *The Fifteenth Century X. Parliament, Personalities and Power: Papers Presented to Linda S. Clark*, ed. H. Kleineke (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 145–65, at p. 150.

[19] LMA, CLC/L/GH/D/001/MS11571/001, fos. 77v–78v.

[20] 'viij quars paper to make a reed book' (LMA, CLC/L/GH/D/001/MS11571/001, fo. 43v).

and the 'remembrances' of his guild and the City. We know very little about Nicholl: he does not seem to have been a scrivener by training and it has been suggested that he was related to a senior member of the Grocers.[21] He remained clerk for some years, being described as such in the will of the eminent grocer Sir John Crosby (d. 1475) who pardoned Nicholl 40*s* of a debt he owed the alderman.[22] He was dead by 1483, when Sir William Taylour, another grocer alderman, made his will: in it he bequeathed to his 'cosyn' Robert Sturmyn several books, including 'my newe boke of Engelish that I bought of thexecutours of Henry Nicoll'. We have no way of knowing what this book was, although of course it would be tempting to speculate that it was Nicholl's 'chronicle'.[23]

Most of the London guilds lay somewhere between the extremes of the Pinners and the Grocers. It was unsurprising that the greater companies and their merchants led the way, and by the mid fifteenth century most were keeping several series of records dealing with their finances, memberships, court proceedings, ordinances, benefactors' wills, properties, or perhaps more typically, combinations of these. Guild clerks were gradually increasing their use of English – the Brewers' clerk William Porland famously switched his guild's records to English in the early 1420s, while the Goldsmiths in 1417 had created a new register of deeds, with a prologue that was 'wrtyn in englysshe to euery mannys undirstondyng'.[24] English was not new as a language of record, of course – many of the London guild returns of 1388–9 were written in the vernacular – but it was rarely used to the exclusion of French and Latin. Indeed, recent work has also sought to put the statements of the Goldsmiths and Brewers in a broader context, by emphasizing the persistence of French and Latin for official purposes such as proclamations, interspersed with English examples.[25] What is certainly the case is that language mixing and tri-lingualism were characteristics of

[21] P. Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community: the Grocers' Company and the Politics and Trade of London, 1000–1485* (1995), p. 520.

[22] TNA: PRO, PROB 11/6/327. Crosby's will is transcribed and printed in P. Norman and W. D. Caröe, *Crosby Place* (Survey of London Monograph, ix, 1908), pp. 69–84.

[23] TNA: PRO, PROB 11/7, fo. 81.

[24] C. Metcalfe, 'William Porlond, clerk to the craft and fraternity of Brewers of London, 1418–1440', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, lxiv (2014), 267–84; L. Jefferson, 'The language and vocabulary of the fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century records of the Goldsmiths' Company', in *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain*, ed. D. A. Trotter (Cambridge, 2000), p. 177.

[25] Barron and Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates', pp. 108–45; D. Rowland, personal communication. These themes will be explored in D. Rowland, 'The publication and reception of local and parliamentary legislation in England, 1422–*c*.1485' (University of London PhD thesis, in progress).

the records of many of London's guilds in the first half of the fifteenth century: the Tailors switched their account books from French to Latin at some point between 1445 and 1453 for their accounts, but kept their ordinances mostly in English, as did the Grocers from 1463. It seems likely that this was a major encouragement for the guilds to employ professional, skilled scribes to write and organize their records, and to deal with the linguistic diversity of communication with the City, the crown and their own members.[26] Porland, Nicholl and other proactive clerks clearly spent a good deal of time and effort ordering and updating the archives of their guilds: the Goldsmiths in 1418 sought to make good the loss or destruction of some of their property records by organizing them by tenement into chests and boxes, obtaining new copies of lost documents from Guildhall, and copying everything into a new 400–folio book.[27]

What we have, then, is a period of rapid institutional development and a consequent proliferation of records to address their roles as economic regulators, religious fraternities, and as participants in political processes in the city and beyond. As the Grocers' inventory suggests, books and quires had both a practical importance and a wider symbolic significance, representing the inheritance of the guild passed on from generation to generation. This idea was partly responsible for some of the new developments in record-keeping towards the end of the fifteenth century. In particular, there was a sort of 'taking stock' happening – literally, in the shape of inventories of books, plate and other fixtures and fixings, but also more figuratively in some of the 'books of evidences' or 'guild books' (as Malcolm Richardson calls them) which were being produced.[28] These were sometimes simply new iterations of their ordinances: the Ironmongers in 1487 paid 3*s* 8*d* for a 'newe boke to wright in oure artis of oure actis of oure felischipe'. Most of the cost (3*s*) was for writing, with 4*d* for paper and 4*d* for a 'parchemyn skynne for a coverynge'.[29] The timing is significant: although the City government had long asserted the right to approve guild ordinances, this had been formalized in a statute of 1437, and in the late 1480s the mayor and aldermen made a particular effort to get the 'lesser' guilds (i.e. not their own!) to conform. Some evidence books were becoming even more elaborate, and contained transcripts of charters, grants of arms, lists of members, and other material – often prefaced with religious content and imagery, as with the lavishly illuminated books produced by the Pewterers,

[26] M. Richardson, *Middle Class Writing in Late Medieval London* (2011), pp. 41–2.

[27] *Wardens' Accounts and Court Minute Books of the Goldsmiths' Mistery of London 1334–1446*, ed. L. Jefferson (Woodbridge, 2003), p. 383.

[28] Richardson, *Middle Class Writing*, pp. 81–2.

[29] LMA, CLC/L/IB/D/001/MS16988/001, fo. 56.

Skinners and Merchant Taylors.[30] Religious elements gave the books a sacral character – the Carpenters and Pinners were among a number of guilds which included liturgical calendars in their books.[31] In 1501 the Drapers paid the impressive sum of £4 6*s* 8*d* to a certain 'Wodecok for devising and making of our book of all our evidences etc'. This was Henry Wodecok, by then one of the most prominent members of the Scriveners' Company, whose career is discussed below.[32] External pressure was once again behind some of this activity in the early sixteenth century, not least following a statute of 1504 which required guilds to have their ordinances approved by the lord chancellor. Partly because of the likelihood of an external audience, these books were more than simply collections of rules and regulations: they amounted to a kind of history of the guild concerned, assemblages of material relating to origins, development and heritage. Some guilds produced these in-house using their clerks (although the illuminations were done by someone else), while others commissioned them from scriveners and limners.[33]

All of this activity brings us to the practicalities of writing these records. There is abundant information, for example, on the purchasing of paper and parchment (but particularly paper) by the guilds: the Grocers tended to buy between two and four quires of paper each year, at a typical cost in the late fifteenth century of 2*d* to 3*d* per quire.[34] The Tailors' annual expenditure more than doubled over the course of the fifteenth century from 12*d* to 30*d* (so possibly up to ten quires of paper a year) in a period when paper prices were steadily declining.[35] We also know a lot about how books and quires were bound and kept, sometimes in chests, sometimes in so-called 'coffins', which allowed important records to be displayed. The Pewterers, after many years of lobbying, finally gained a royal charter of incorporation in 1473 which allowed them national rights of search: in addition to the

[30] LMA, CLC/L/MD/A/004/MS34004; CLC/L/PE/A/027/MS07114; CLC/L/SE/A/004A/MS31692.

[31] LMA, CLC/L/CC/D/002/MS04326/001, fo. 5v; Megson, *The Pinners' and Wiresellers' Book*, p. 6.

[32] Drapers' Hall, London, wardens' accounts 1475–1509, fo. 72.

[33] Davies, '"Monuments of honor"', pp. 150–1.

[34] For example, LMA, CLC/L/GH/D/001/MS11571/001, fos. 7, 119v; MS11571/002, fo. 18v.

[35] LMA, CLC/L/MD/D/003/MS34048/001, 002, 003. For discussion of the price of paper and other commodities, see R. Edvinsson and J. Söderberg, 'Prices and the growth of the European knowledge economy, 1200–2000' (unpublished paper, 2009), esp. pp. 9–12, consulted at <http://diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:384596/FULLTEXT01.pdf> [accessed 11 Jan. 2015]. This draws on price/wage data for England available at <http://gpih.ucdavis.edu/files/England_1209–1914)_(Clark).xls> [accessed 11 Jan. 2015].

substantial costs of obtaining it, they laid out a further 4*s* on a 'koffyn' to put it in.[36] The Grocers' inventories list several 'coffyns' containing deeds and other documents, as well as a 'greate chest bound with iron with ij locks and ij keys and a bolt of iron'.[37] But it is the people involved who are of particular interest. By the later fourteenth century, if not before, many of the leading guilds were starting to draw on the expertise of professional scribes. Some of these have become better known in recent years because of the work of historians, and of literary scholars, who have brought new perspectives to bear on the administrative records of the London guilds and the City government itself. Thomas Usk, for example, was identified by Caroline Barron as the clerk employed by the Goldsmiths in the 1380s, and his career and connection with the guild has been further explored by Marion Turner.[38] Linne Mooney's work on scribes and Middle English literature has suggested many possible connections between the worlds of literature and civic government – the most famous example being Adam Pinkhurst, who wrote the famous petition of the Mercers against Nicholas Brembre to the parliament of 1388, and was also Chaucer's scribe.[39]

By the early fifteenth century several guilds were employing their own salaried clerks. Some, like Pinkhurst and Usk, displayed literary connections and interests. As noted by Caroline Barron (*vide infra*), John Brynchele, the earliest known Tailors' clerk, died in 1422 leaving a copy of *The Canterbury Tales* (the earliest recorded testamentary bequest of this), as well as Latin and English versions of Boethius. Brynchele in fact described himself in his will as a tailor, which implies that he had obtained the Freedom through this craft, rather than as a scrivener, even though his expertise took him in that direction. The same was the case with the Grocers' first known salaried clerk, Thomas Hulverwood, who took office in 1448–50: he was described as 'citizen and Grocer' in a transaction of October 1457.[40] The general trend,

[36] LMA, CLC/L/PE/D/002/MS07086/001, fo. 48v. For the lobbying by the Pewterers and the other guilds, see M. Davies, 'Lobbying parliament: the London livery companies in the fifteenth century', *Parliamentary History*, xxiii (2004), 136–48.

[37] LMA, CLC/L/GH/D/001/MS11571/002, fos. 77v–78v.

[38] C. M. Barron, review of *Wardens' Accounts and Court Minute Books of the Goldsmiths,* ed. Jefferson, in *Urban History*, xxxii (2005), 175; M. Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*: *Languages of Antagonism in Late Fourteenth-Century London* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 104–14.

[39] L. Mooney, 'Chaucer's scribe', *Speculum*, lxxxi (2006), 97–138; L. R. Mooney and E. Stubbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375–1425* (Woodbridge, 2013).

[40] Hulverwood had undertaken some scribal work for the Grocers the year before he received his first salary (*Facsimile of the First Volume of the MS. Archives of the Worshipful Company of Grocers of the City of London, AD 1345–1463*, ed. J. A. Kingdon (2 vols., 1883–6), ii. 296, 305–6; *CCR 1454–1461*, p. 251; Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community*, p. 466).

however, especially among the greater guilds was towards the employment of professional writers: men described variously as scrivener, 'writer of court hand', clerk, or, less frequently, as notary.[41] In most cases they had been apprenticed as London Scriveners and were full members of that guild rather than of those they served as clerks. The guilds drew upon an ever increasing pool of such people in the city of London and Westminster, feeding the demand for scribal services, and particularly for credit, from merchants and skilled craftsmen. Bolton, for example, tracked the numbers of scriveners who appear in the City's fifteenth-century records, indicating an increase from fewer than ten individuals in the 1420s to forty-three in the 1440s, and broadly similar levels thereafter.[42] It seems likely that the institutional development of the London guilds, discussed above, was a contributory factor here, not least because of the frequency with which many of these individuals crop up in guild records as suppliers of services or even as permanent clerks. Although they had some legal expertise, especially in relation to documents such as wills, deeds and bonds, they were usually differentiated from the many lawyers and attorneys who were hired by the guilds, even though many of them worked on the same causes, such as dealing with benefactors' executors or preparing bills for law suits. Many of these scriveners worked in the city in a variety of capacities as scribes, feoffees, arbiters and executors, acting for individual citizens, the City government, and institutions such as London Bridge, the city's 100–plus parishes, and of course the guilds.

Although guilds such as the Goldsmiths, Grocers and Tailors appointed permanent clerks from the end of the fourteenth century, most seem to have taken a more flexible approach initially. Partly this was a reflection of institutional development and hence the degree of complexity of their affairs, but also of their financial wherewithal. Some guilds seem to have continued to rely upon craftsmen-turned-scribes, especially those lower down the economic scale. The Cutlers, for example, employed one of their own members, Nicholas Asser. He leased one of the guild's tenements on London Bridge in the mid 1450s, and continued to enrol apprentices while serving as clerk.[43] The Carpenters seem to have been fairly typical of the 'lesser' guilds. Judging from the hands in their manuscript books, the fair accounts (like those of the Pinners) were generally written up by a

[41] On these men and their roles, see especially N. Ramsay, 'Scriveners and notaries as legal intermediaries in later medieval England', in *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. J. I. Kermode (Gloucester, 1991), pp. 118–31.

[42] J. L. Bolton, personal communication.

[43] C. Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company of London and of the Minor Cutlery Crafts, with Biographical Notices of Early London Cutlers* (2 vols., 1916–23), i. 168, 322.

different person each year, who was paid six or eight pence to do so. In 1483 Thomas Clifford, a member of the Scriveners' guild, took over the task, improving the consistency and coverage of the accounts, but he remained self-employed, taking on work for the Carpenters as and when he was needed, but also working for other guilds, including the Pewterers. The connection with Clifford was important, however, because in 1490 his own apprentice, John Forster, became the first full-time clerk of the Carpenters, with a salary of 33*s* 4*d* a year.[44] This was a fairly modest salary, reflecting the status of the guild in terms of size and wealth – both of which had an impact on the amount of regular business. The Tailors' clerk, by contrast, was normally paid a salary of £5 per annum, while the Grocers paid Nicholl £4 a year. Even these were not large salaries, compared with the 10 marks (£6 13*s* 4*d*) or so that chantry priests working for the companies were often paid – which perhaps suggests that some continued to undertake other tasks privately, such as drafting legal documents or even copying works of literature. As well as a salary, however, these company clerks often received grants of livery gowns or hoods, as Peter Goldisburgh of the Goldsmiths did in 1412–13.[45] This did not mean that they were 'liverymen' of course – they were very much regarded as employees. Other 'perks' could be significant, not least in reinforcing the ties between clerk and guild: in recognition of his service, Henry Nicholl was granted 8 marks (£5 6*s* 8*d*) a year for life at a court meeting of the Grocers in 1470, as well as a house 'whether sick or whole'. In return he was to continue to attend on the wardens, keep the books of the fellowship and the secret counsels, gather the rents, 'attend to the lyvelode', and 'kepe the garden'.[46]

Surprisingly, perhaps, given their status, the Mercers also seem to have preferred to pay people on a more short-term basis for much of the fifteenth century. However, because of their wealth they were able to secure some of the leading scriveners in the city, who took an active role in furthering the interests of the guild and its merchants. A well-known example is John Stodeley, who took the Scriveners' Company oath in April 1433 and served as warden in 1446.[47] He subsequently

[44] LMA, CLC/L/CC/D/002/MS04326/001, fos. 40, 57v; CLC/L/PE/D/002/MS07086/001, fo. 67v. Clifford subscribed to the Scriveners' oath in April 1462, and took on a number of apprentices, including Forster (*Scriveners' Company Common Paper 1357–1628 with a Continuation to 1678*, ed. F. W. Steer (London Record Society, iv, 1968), pp. 12, 22).

[45] Jefferson, *Wardens' Accounts and Court Minute Books of the Goldsmiths,* p. 355.

[46] LMA, CLC/L/GH/D/001/11592, fo. 47. The Grocers were inordinately proud of their garden, and the clerks and others were regularly paid for tasks such as weeding and pruning the roses.

[47] Steer, *Scriveners' Company Common Paper 1357–1628*, p. 68.

became connected with the duke of Norfolk, and was returned as the MP for the duke's borough of Reigate in 1450. As a Norfolk associate he was the author, in 1454, of the famous newsletter to the duke in which he conveyed information 'espied and gadred' by him and other informants concerning political events in London.[48] Throughout this period, however, he provided scribal and legal services for the Mercers. He was first paid for writing up the accounts in 1439–40, the same year that 6*d* was paid out for 'i rolle ove les nouns des gentz del mercerie'. As his career flourished, Stodely's usefulness for the guild seems to have increased, and in 1450–1 he was paid 2*s* for writing a supplication to the lord chancellor concerning the seizure of imports from Flanders. The mid 1450s were especially busy for the Mercers, as they sought to convey their views to the City, crown and parliament on a range of topics, from the proposed grant of a subsidy, to the protection of the seas and the threat to their interests posed by the alleged favouring of Lombard merchants. Stodely was involved once again, charged with obtaining a copy of the act of parliament dealing with the subsidy, and providing copies of articles from the duchess of Burgundy to the king, one in Latin and the other in English. He also supplied notes on a document sent to the king concerning Lord Bonville, who, despite being keeper of the seas had attacked convoy ships from the Low Countries, resulting in reprisals against the goods of Staple merchants. Meanwhile, several other London scriveners were employed to take on other copying and writing tasks. Concerns about the encroachment of aliens on their business continued to occupy the Mercers, and in 1460–1 Stodeley and two other scriveners drew up bills concerning the Lombards and 'Easterlings'.[49] Despite his particular connection to the Mercers, Stodeley was not a salaried clerk, so was able to take on work for other guilds: in 1454, for example, he was paid the large sum of 40*s* for copying the testament of the grocer Ralph Say (d. 1447), and for drawing up several tripartite indentures.[50] One of Stodeley's predecessors was Robert Bale, better known to scholars today as a chronicler, who lived around the corner from Mercers' Hall in

[48] *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. L. Gairdner (6 vols., 1904), ii. 295–9.

[49] *The Medieval Account Books of the Mercers of London*, ed. L. Jefferson (2 vols., Farnham, 2009), i. 540; ii. 698, 786, 912; A. F. Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods and People, 1130–1578* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 255–6.

[50] LMA, CLC/L/GH/D/001/MS11571/001, fo. 6v. Say left property in the parish of St. Martin Pomary to the Grocers for a chantry (D. J. Keene and V. Harding, 'St. Martin Pomary 95/6–7', in *Historical Gazetteer of London Before the Great Fire Cheapside; Parishes of All Hallows Honey Lane, St. Martin Pomary, St. Mary Le Bow, St. Mary Colechurch and St. Pancras Soper Lane* (1987), pp. 150–9, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-gazetteer-pre-fire/pp150–159> [accessed 14 Feb. 2015]).

the Poultry. Like Stodeley, Bale regularly wrote up the fair accounts and translated French and Flemish documents into English for the Mercers in the 1440s, soon after taking his oath as a member of the Scriveners' guild.[51]

In fact it was common for most guilds, even those with permanent clerks, to pay other scriveners and notaries to undertake specialist tasks, such as writing a bill. In this sense, the increase in the volume of work and hence the abundance of written records was directly related to political and economic activity, such as lobbying for charters, getting embroiled in lawsuits and so on. Although clerks were expected to be literate to some degree in Latin and French, as well as English, the evidence suggests that when high-grade translations were required it was best to find a specialist. After gaining their royal charter of incorporation, the Pewterers had three copies in English made, one of which was destined for the West Country, presumably to demonstrate their newly obtained national rights of scrutiny to the local tin workers. When the Drapers wanted a translation of 'certain of our corporations from French into English' in 1502–3 they paid one John Bird *3s 4d* to do it.[52] This was a busy year for some of the mercantile crafts because of the controversy generated by the granting of a new charter to the Tailors by Henry VII, which was alleged to infringe the rights of the City and the other guilds. The storm created by the charter was doubtless welcomed by London's scriveners, to whom the guilds turned urgently for scribal services. The Drapers, like the Mercers, spent a lot of money on lawyers as well as on clerks to write bills and submissions. They paid *16d* to 'engross' their supplication to the king's council, *20s* for a parchment copy of what they called the 'whole charter of London', probably the Great Charter of 1319, and *2s* for translating the Tailors' new charter from Latin into English.[53] This suggests an increasing dissatisfaction with keeping older records solely in Latin or French, and this was perhaps another reason for the new 'guild books' that were commissioned towards the end of the fifteenth century. Occasionally, however, there are glimpses of a more informal, indeed familial, approach to record copying. Particularly intriguing is a note in the 1509 ordinance book of the Fishmongers, which states that it

[51] Jefferson, *Mercers*, i. 572, 574; ii. 594, 606, 620, 632, 646; Steer, *Scriveners' Company Common Paper 1357–1628*, p. 22. For a recent insight into Bale's career, see H. Kleineke, 'Robert Bale's chronicle and the second battle of St. Albans', *Historical Research*, lxxxvii (2014), 744–50.

[52] LMA, CLC/L/PE/D/002/MS07086/001 fo. 48v; Drapers' Hall, London, wardens' accounts, 1475–1509, fo. 74. Bird is described elsewhere in the records as 'of the chamber', suggesting that he may have been employed in some capacity by the city chamberlain.

[53] Drapers' Hall, London, wardens' accounts, 1475–1509, fos. 74–74v.

was 'written by me Rychard Felde the sone of maister John felde then being warden and I saide Rycharde being of the age of xii yeres at the finishing here of'.[54]

The burgeoning affairs of London's guilds created many opportunities for career advancement (and indeed enrichment) for some of the leading scriveners in the city. Two examples can be used to illustrate the success and connections that some could enjoy. Thomas Fermory, one of Bolton's most active London scriveners, appears across the records of many institutions in fifteenth-century London. The apprentice of Richard Claidich (who himself worked for guilds such as the Drapers and Tailors), Fermory took the Scriveners' oath on 17 June 1434, although his career might have come to a premature end if a suit brought against his master in 1428 had been successful. Simon Welles, one of the clerks of the king's court, alleged that Claidich had infringed a recent statute which prevented parents with an income of less than 20*s* a year from apprenticing their children to Londoners. Claidich neatly, and successfully, argued that there was nothing stopping a son or daughter from apprenticing him or herself as they pleased.[55] Fermory went on to become one of London's most ubiquitous and well-connected scriveners: like William Porlond, he was a very popular choice as a feoffee, and as a recipient of 'gifts' of goods and chattels made to facilitate business transactions, reflecting the importance of the quasi-legal skills and experience that went alongside the ability to draw up important documents.[56] He was an executor for the wills and testaments of men such as the controversial draper and alderman, Philip Malpas (d. 1469), and Nicolo Micheli (d. 1449), a member of a prominent Italian mercantile family resident in London. In the latter document he was described as a 'notarius in lombardstrete', indicating that he had established his business right in the financial and mercantile heart of the city, close to the houses and businesses of many of his clients.[57] Fermory's work for London institutions include several commissions from the wardens of London Bridge: in 1461–2 he wrote some indentures relating to a grant of the south part of the Stocks, known as the 'fisshmarket', to a group of fishmongers, and that same year

[54] J. Colson, 'London's forgotten company? Fishmongers: their trade and their networks in later medieval London', in *The Medieval Merchant: Proceedings of the 2012 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. C. M. Barron and A. F. Sutton (Donington, 2014), p. 27.

[55] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: K, Henry VI*, ed. R. R. Sharpe (1911), p. 87.

[56] See for example the numerous references to him in transactions recorded in the Close Rolls (*Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry VI, Edward VI*, sub nom).

[57] TNA: PRO, PROB 11/5, fos. 210–11v; D. B. Foss, 'The Canterbury archiepiscopates of John Stafford (1443–52) and John Kemp (1452–54) with editions of their registers' (unpublished University of London PhD thesis, 2 vols., 1986), ii. 636–7.

he composed 'a note and great bill to the mayor and aldermen and the whole Common Council of the city of London concerning the great danger to the Bridge from the force of the ice and frost this year'.[58] It was logical that work for individual citizens would lead to involvement in the affairs of the guilds. Fermory is known to have worked for several: he carried out the important work of copying the text of the new grant of arms obtained by the Ironmongers in 1455; and the Tailors commissioned him to copy more than thirty separate documents in 1438–9 as they gathered evidence to help in their quest for a new royal charter.[59]

Fermory died in the spring of 1471. One of his two executors was another scrivener, Henry Woodcock, whose mother Katherine was related to Fermory – possibly his sister. At that point, Woodcock had only just taken the Scriveners' oath (January 1471) and so was at the start of his career.[60] His career seems to have benefited from the kindness of his putative uncle by marriage: in his will Fermory (who had no surviving children of his own) left Woodcock not only the reversion of property in St. George's parish in Southwark, but also the sum of 20*s*, a psalter and 'my largest book of statutes with a book of calendars'.[61] Moreover, at some point over the next few years Woodcock acquired an annual rent of 20*s* arising from three tenements in London, one of which was the property in Lombard Street where Fermory had lived. By the late 1490s, and probably much earlier, Woodcock and a fellow scrivener were living in the property themselves. The rent was purchased by Dame Elizabeth Bryce (widow of Sir Hugh, a former mayor) and bequeathed to the parish of St. Mary Wolnoth in 1498. Woodcock witnessed her will.[62] By this point, Woodcock was one of the most prominent members of the Scriveners' guild and so a Lombard Street address would have been entirely fitting: he was a warden of the Scriveners in 1497–8 when 'the hoole Company of the Felasship or Mistere of Scryvaners of the Courte l're of the Citee of London in good and honest maner assembled theym self togider in the Mansion or Dwellyng place of Henry Wodecok'. The purpose of this important meeting was, first of all, to confirm those existing ordinances

[58] 'Bridge House Rental 3: account for 1461–2', in *London Bridge: Selected Accounts and Rentals, 1381–1538*, ed. V. Harding and L. Wright (1995), pp. 114–47 (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol31/pp114–147> [accessed 13 Feb. 2015]).

[59] LMA, CLC/L/IB/D/001/MS16988/001, fo. 5; CLC/L/MD/D/003/MS34048/001, fo. 302. For the Tailors' controversial charter, see C. M. Barron, 'Ralph Holland and the London radicals, 1438–1444', in *The Medieval Town 1200–1540*, ed. R. Holt and G. Rosser (1990), pp. 160–83.

[60] Steer, *Scriveners' Company Common Paper 1357–1628*, p. 23.

[61] TNA: PRO, PROB 11/6, fos. 9v–10v.

[62] LMA, CLA/023/DW/01/231 (14).

of the craft, contained in the 'Common Paper', which 'seemed to be good and necessary honest and profitable for the said Felaship', and then to agree new ordinances for the 'better ordryng comforte and relief' of the guild.[63] Like Fermory, Woodcock was a popular choice as a feoffee for property transactions involving London citizens: he also saw service within the City government, in his case becoming, by 1486 the chief officer (secondary) of the sheriffs' prison, or 'compter' in the Poultry.[64] Perhaps because of this, Woodcock's work for the city's guilds was more limited, though he had a particularly close connection with the Drapers. As early as 1477 he was paid 'for his labour and business done in divers writings', and in 1483–4 he received 26*s* 4*d* for 'the writing and sealing of a general pardon'.[65] More commissions from the Drapers followed over the next decade, and as well as payments in cash he was in 1489–90 given quantities of fine cloth, perhaps for a livery gown. As we have seen, when the guild wanted to put together a new book of evidences in 1501–2, they turned to Woodcock, and in 1507–8 he was again employed for a matter of some significance when the Drapers paid him £4 6*s* 8*d* to copy sixty pieces of evidence into their book. This may well have been connected with the requirement to present ordinances to the king's commissioners that was contained in a controversial statute of 1504, effectively overturning the tradition of mayoral inspection.[66] By this point Woodcock had at least one apprentice or servant to help him with this kind of work, and the Drapers allowed an extra 20*d* 'to his chyld that wrote the book'.[67] In his testament, proved in January 1515/16, Woodcock remembered his own guild, the Scriveners, with a bequest of £20, and also made provision for masses and prayers in his parish church of St. Benet Sherehog for the souls not only of his parents, but also those of Thomas Fermory and his wife.[68]

[63] Steer, *Scriveners' Company Common Paper 1357–1628*, p. 49.

[64] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: L, Edward IV–Henry VII*, ed. R. R. Sharpe (1912), pp. 236, 300–1; 'Henry VIII: Pardon Roll, Part 4', *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 1: 1509–1514*, ed. J.S. Brewer (1920), pp. 256–73 (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1/pp256–273> [accessed 14 Apr. 2016]). The City had two compters, one in Wood Street and the other in the Poultry.

[65] Drapers' Hall, London, wardens' accounts, 1475–1509, fos. 11v, 30.

[66] See Davies, 'Crown, city and guild', pp. 265–6; P. Cavill, 'Henry VII and parliament' (unpublished University of Oxford DPhil thesis, 2005), ch. 11, esp. pp. 248–51.

[67] Drapers' Hall, London, wardens' accounts, 1475–1509, fos. 30, 33v, 48v, 72, 74, 74v, 79, 85.

[68] TNA: PRO, PROB 11/18, fos. 102–102v; his will dealing with a quitrent from property in St. John Walbrook and St. Benet Sherehog was enrolled in the Husting Court in Apr. 1516 ('Wills: 1–10 Henry VIII (1509–19)', *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London: Part 2: 1358–1688* (1890), pp. 614–28, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=67029> [accessed 14 Aug. 2013]).

It would be easy to characterize the importance of clerks within the London guilds in purely practical ways. They were undoubtedly becoming critically important as administrators of increasingly complex organizations, not least because of the array of charities and endowments that the guilds were accumulating before the Reformation. Less easy to gauge, however, is their influence on guild culture and corporate identity as they went about their tasks of ordering, quantifying, copying and presenting information to internal and external audiences. To what extent did individual style and personality, as well as corporate sensibilities and outlooks, affect and indeed counteract scribal and documentary conventions? What is certainly apparent from looking across the records of London's guilds is that there are many commonalities between them, but also some important differences in terms of things such as language, presentation, and scope – all of which might have been affected by the personality and preferences of the scribe or his employers. Clerks acted as mediators in several ways, whether in facilitating communication between the guild's governors (wardens and court of assistants) and the rest of the craft, or in writing up the guild's records and creating narratives of different kinds for different audiences that reflected a sense of the guild's purposes and traditions. Occasionally we gain insights into the personalities and interests of particular clerks through their literary or quasi-literary activities, those such as Porlond, Pinkhurst, Usk, Nicholl and others, and it is clear in many of these cases that they were very influential in terms of the ways in which the guilds recorded and presented their affairs. We occasionally have glimpses of how these men regarded their own roles and activities, most famously in the case of William Porland, but also in this example from the records of the Tailors (by now Merchant Taylors) in 1507–8:

> Richard Conhyll, late Master, and the four Wardens with him afore in this book named, with the advice, counsel, and consent of the more part of the most worshipful persons, councillors and assistants of the said Company, commanded me Henry Mayour, Notary Public and their common Clerk, to compile and make a book or two in paper of all such Ordinances and Oaths as should concern and appertain to and for the good refinement and common weal of their said Company, and conservation of the same, whose commandment, I the said Henry, diligently according to mine oath and duty obeyed and fulfilled, which book of ordinances and oaths the four Lords named in the said Act of Parliament have approved, ratified, and confirmed and sithen the approbation, ratification, and confirmation of the same book I the foresaid Henry at desire and request of my right singular good master William Grene, now Master, John Tresawell, John Wright, Richard Hall, and John Sexsy Wardens with the said Master Grene, have written, compiled, engrossed, and ordered the same book after the manner and form as it appeareth to every man's sight that listeth to see or read. And it was clearly written, finished, engrossed, and ended by me

> the same Henry within my dwelling house pertaining to the whole body of this said fellowship the 20th day of June in the year of Our Lord God 1508, and in the 23rd year of the reign of Our Most dread Sovereign Lord, King Henry the 7th.[69]

The particular book Henry Mayour mentions still survives and it is one of the highly decorated evidence books discussed above, produced to satisfy the requirement of the act of parliament of 1504 which required guilds to have their ordinances approved by the crown rather than the City. Mayour is an interesting individual: the earliest reference to him is an unusual one, in that he is described as an 'apprentice' in the witness list to a deed of 1477 concerning property in Essex. The other witnesses included Thomas Harding, a London scrivener, so it is possible that Mayour was formally or informally gaining what we might call 'work experience'.[70] Harding was not, apparently, Mayour's own master: when he took the Scriveners' oath in November 1481 Robert Leggett was named in that role.[71] So the relationship with Harding is unclear. After taking the oath, Mayour's career progressed rapidly and in 1486 he became clerk of the Goldsmiths. The surviving records he wrote for the Goldsmiths are not especially noteworthy, mainly comprising brief lists of payments, together with short and selected proceedings of the guild's court. For reasons that are unclear, he was 'dismissed' from his post with the Goldsmiths in late 1492, and by October was writing the minutes of the Tailors' court.[72]

Henry Mayour's court minutes for the Tailors have attracted the attention of a number of historians and literary scholars. They are some of the most interesting records of the pre-Reformation London guilds: written almost exclusively in English, they are characterized by a fluency and an appreciation of language and narrative which are particularly pronounced in his accounts of the numerous disputes and debates which were heard before the court.[73] Malcolm Richardson, for instance, has recently drawn attention to some of their distinctive rhetorical and linguistic characteristics in his book on merchant writing.[74] Among the most dramatic episodes

[69] LMA, CLC/L/MD/A/004/MS34004, fos. 37–38v (printed in *Memorials of the Merchant Taylors' Company*, ed. C. M. Clode (1875), pp. 200–1).

[70] Essex Record Office, D/DAy T1/34. A London fishmonger and tallowchandler were among the other witnesses to this deed.

[71] Steer, *Scriveners' Company Common Paper 1357–1628*, p. 23. Thomas Harding took the oath in 1467, having served as Robert Bale's apprentice (Steer, *Scriveners' Company Common Paper 1357–1628*, p. 22).

[72] Davies, *Court Minutes*, pp. 10–11.

[73] Davies, *Court Minutes*, pp. 206–62.

[74] Richardson, *Middle Class Writing*, pp. 41, 42, 65, 82.

was a dispute between a former master of the guild, John Heed, and the present master and wardens: Mayour wrote this up in a detailed 1,500–word account in which he includes a great deal of reported speech including some of the choice insults directed by Heed towards his successor as master. In this sense, Mayour can be seen as following in the footsteps of clerks such as Porlond, whose descriptions of the dealings of the Brewers' Company in the 1420s were similarly vivid.[75]

Returning to Mayour's prologue to his evidence book, some of the statements he makes are of great interest in giving us an idea of how important the company clerks had become by this period. We should note, for instance, the description of himself as a notary public (so not just any old scrivener or even 'writer of court hand'), and the statement that he worked on the book in his 'dwelling house', implying a certain amount of flexibility in terms of where documents could be kept. Most significant, perhaps, are his statements about the nature and purpose of his work – the importance of his book of ordinances and oaths for the 'good refinement and common weal' speaks both of the significance of these books of evidence, but also of the crucial role of the clerk in compiling them and thereby fostering a sense of community and common purpose, internally and to external audiences. He writes also of the need for the 'conservation' of these ordinances by compiling the book, which has echoes of the work of earlier clerks such as Henry Nicholl of the Grocers, who took such pains to document the archives and history of his guild. 'Conservation' was not a static notion: quite the reverse, as it implied the continuing use and re-use of books and documents, and their value for the guild in providing an evolving framework for social and economic organization, and in doing so creating a kind of historical narrative. Mayour also refers to the processes of writing, compiling, engrossing and ordering, which took the books through to their final state, and once again has resonances in terms of the importance of archives for the guilds as internal repositories of knowledge, which could be drawn upon to advance the interests of the guild in the wider world. Finally there is another reference to the visual and symbolic significance of books, with the ordinance book being compiled 'after the manner and form as it appeareth to every man's sight that listeth to see or read'. Here was someone who – as his court minutes suggest – had a keen appreciation of both the practicalities and aesthetics of reading and writing. Like many of his fellow guild clerks, Mayour was, in many senses, his guild's chronicler as much as he was its administrator.

[75] Davies, *Court Minutes*, pp. 207–10; *A Book of London English, 1384–1425; with an Appendix on English Documents in the Record Office by M. M. Weale*, ed. R. W. Chambers and M. Daunt (Oxford, 1931; repr. 1967), pp. 141–7.