

**Merchant Taylors Company of York:
Interpreting the Survival and Contemporary Functions of a Trade-Based
Medieval Guild**

By Kathryn Lazell

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*“How many leather sellers does it take to change a light bulb?”
To which the Clerk replies, ‘Change?!’”¹*

The joke above is not an altogether accurate characterisation of guilds and Livery Companies in the United Kingdom. However, it does get to the heart of an assumption made about these types of organisations: that they are ancient institutions adverse to change.² Nevertheless, the number of surviving ancient companies in the UK, including over 70 ancient Companies in London alone, suggests that these organisations maintain a degree of relevancy in the modern era.³ Moreover, over 30 London Companies have been established since the 20th century, and this number continues to grow.⁴ One can conclude, then, that guilds and Livery Companies continue to perform relevant functions in contemporary society, though their roles as craft and trade institutions may be diminished in some cases.⁵ It is my intent to elucidate the contemporary functions of one ancient company, the York Merchant Taylors, and explore the extent to which the Taylors have adapted their traditions to suit the modern day. Further, I will examine factors that have enabled their survival into the 21st century, and investigate how the Guild negotiates between its historic identity and traditions, while remaining societally relevant. I contend that the modern Merchant Taylors’ Company performs three primary functions that derive from its historical identity, and enable its survival. Despite the adaptations and changes that have taken place since their formation, the Taylors have survived by performing either historical functions, or contemporary functions that connect them to their historic identities. In this way, the York Merchant Taylors’ history allows them to maintain modern relevance in spite of their longevity.

My introduction to this topic came in January 2016 through a work placement with the York Merchant Taylors as part of my Public History Master’s Degree at the University of York.

1 Nigel Pullman (Chairman of the City of London Livery Committee), interview, London, England, 8 June 2016.

2 *Ibid.*

3 City of London Livery Committee, *City Livery Companies* (City of London: City of London Public Relations Office, 2011), 29-37.

4 *Ibid.*

5 R.B. Dobson and D.M. Smith, *The Merchant Taylors of York: a history of the craft and company from the fourteenth to twentieth centuries*, edited by R.B. Dobson and D.M. Smith (York: Borthwick Publications, 2006), 1.

I worked with the then Master, Dr. Andrew Grace, and historian Dr. Susan Grace to create an oral history project with this Guild, which captured the memories of seventeen Members and two spouses of Members. As an American, I was fairly unfamiliar with the role medieval guilds play in 21st century England. However, through over seventeen hours of interviews and subsequent transcriptions, I gleaned a much deeper and more nuanced understanding of the contemporary roles of medieval guilds, and their duties in the modern world. I created a series of open-ended prompts that explored participants' first experiences of the Taylors, their roles in the Guild throughout their Membership, and their observations of change over time within the Guild. The prompts also asked Members to express their views regarding the balance of past and present within the Merchant Taylors. I used the recordings of these interviews to write transcriptions for deposit in the Taylors' archives at the Borthwick Institute. Members were given the option to remain anonymous in the archives, as well as the option to edit their transcripts before deposit. As a result, the transcripts from which I drew include those that have been read and edited by their subjects, as well as others that have not been edited. Members were also informed that their transcripts would likely become part of a Memories' Booklet to be circulated within the Company in 2017. Because these interviews were conducted as part of a separate project, I made all Taylors' quotes anonymous for my use of them in this study, and instead assigned each interview a number. In addition to interviews with the Taylors, I also joined several Company luncheons between January 2016 and June 2016, attended the 2016 York Mystery Plays, accompanied the Taylors on a walking tour of York guildhalls, and went to the Joint Guilds' Service in June 2016, all of which allowed me to observe the Company dynamic and ritualistic features of the Guild. In addition, I explored the Taylors' archives in the Borthwick Institute, examining documents such as the York minute books from 1906 to 1930, as well as documents from the York Charities Register Committee between 1911 and 1934, and quarterly listings of charitable benefactors from the late 1800s till the early 1900s. I was given digital access to the Taylors' minute books from 1931 to the present day, as well as to digital archives that contained hundreds of 20th and 21st century documents from newspaper clippings and brochures to quinquennial inspection reports. I also examined the Masters' Newsletters for the 2015-2016 year, and studied the yearly reports submitted to the Charity Commission since 2011. Though I have only drawn from several of these archival documents, their composite value contributed to a sense of the inner-workings of the Merchant Taylors, and corroborated the memories shared

during my interviews. Ultimately, I have relied heavily on Members' oral histories because they illuminate the contemporary qualitative experiences of Guild Membership in a way the documents cannot. Although the memories may be contradictory or even incorrect at times, they are valuable in sharing how individuals within the Guild perceive their history. That is not to say that the interviews are an unbiased source, however. Fifteen of the nineteen participants requested the opportunity to edit their transcripts before deposit into the archives, which suggests that the Members were acutely aware of the public effects of their personal memories, and thus tailored their responses in part to the perceived audience. Arguably, any written historical document will have some level of bias as it is created with a specific audience in mind: newspaper articles will differ from reports for the Charity Commission, which will differ from the Master's Annual Reports. But despite the effect of the perceived audience, the Merchant Taylors' transcripts are extremely valuable not only because they reveal Members' insights into the Guild, but also because they uncover how Members wish to be memorialised in the public historical record.

In order to further understand the contemporary identity and functions of the York Merchant Taylors, I also travelled to London where I conducted interviews with members, Clerks, and archivists of several ancient and modern London Livery Companies, including The Worshipful Company of Dyers, The Drapers' Company, The Clothworkers Company, The Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors, The Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, The Vintners' Company, and the London Livery Committee. Finally, I interviewed a member of another York guild: the York Merchant Adventurers. All participants were offered anonymity, and had the choice of whether to have their interviews recorded, thus, my citations of these interviews are in accordance with the interviewees' wishes. The audio recordings of these interviews are the only complete record of my conversations, and are securely stored through the University of York's filestore system, not available for public use. My purpose in conducting these interviews was to learn about the York Merchant Taylors by examining the similarities, as well as the differences, between the Taylors and London Livery Companies in their duties and manifestations of historic identities. Through these roughly hour-long interviews, I obtained insight into the personal motivations behind joining these organisations, as well as information regarding the personal impact of guild and Livery Company

membership, and the organisations' roles in modern-day England. To my knowledge, an in-depth exploration of the human experience within these companies has not yet been undertaken.

Inevitably, the contemporary motivations for joining a guild or Livery Company will vary somewhat for those whose members are no longer affiliated with their original craft or trade. With the sheer number and diversity of these organisations in the United Kingdom, as well as the differences in their histories, it is impossible to generalise conclusions about the contemporary functions and reasons for the survival of all guilds in England. I will therefore focus on the York Merchant Taylors. The York Merchant Taylors prove to be a pertinent case study for this subject for several reasons. The information from the Merchant Taylors' Memories Project provided me with an in-depth view regarding the personal experiences of Merchant Taylors today. Additionally, of the eight established guilds in Yorkshire, the York Merchant Adventurers and the York Merchant Taylors are the only ones in the possession and care of their original medieval guildhalls.⁶ However, the York Merchant Adventurers' Hall is in a more central location within York, close to the city centre,⁷ whereas the Merchant Taylors' Hall is tucked away "beside the walls of this historic city."⁸ Further, the Adventurers' current membership is around 150 men and women,⁹ whereas the Taylors number about 90.¹⁰ Finally, the Merchant Taylors are one of three guilds in York that have survived into the present day from their establishment in the Middle Ages.¹¹ Thus, the Merchant Taylors provide an interesting and unique case study: they are a medieval guild surviving into the present day, and they continue to care for their medieval guildhall though they are not the largest or most central guild in York's existence. So while they are clearly a prestigious institution, they do not have the size or recognition of the Merchant Adventurers, which makes their survival into the present day all the more noteworthy. The Merchant Taylors therefore provide a germane subject for study.

6 "The Medieval Hall of the Merchant Taylors," *The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 20 July 2016, <http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/the_hall/index.html>.

7 "Find the Merchant Adventurers' Hall, York," *The Merchant Adventurers*, accessed 22 July 2016, <http://www.theyorkcompany.co.uk/location_information.php>.

8 "Hire the Hall," *The Company of the Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 20 July 2016, <http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/hall_the_hall/index.html>.

9 "The Merchant Adventurers Today," *The Merchant Adventurers*, accessed 22 July 2016, <http://www.theyorkcompany.co.uk/find_out_more/page050101.php>.

10 "Membership," *The Company of the Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 20 July 2016, <http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/the_company/membership/index.html>.

11 "A Short History of the Guilds, and of Guild Life in York," *The York Butchers Guild*, 2013, accessed 22 July 2016, <<http://www.yorkbutchersguild.co.uk/a-history-of-york-guilds.html>>.

To contextualise my original research and exploration of recent Guild documents, I will draw primarily from Gervase Rosser's *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages*, and *The Invention of Tradition* edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, as well as several other pertinent academics. I will use Rosser's modern characterisation of medieval guilds in their ancient form to serve as a precedent for their current structure and functionality. Rosser categorises the medieval guild structure as follows: "moving beyond a single, essentialized model of the guild to situate the institution within a dynamic interplay between competing social and political forces. To see the guilds as kinetic and adaptive organizations, engaged in an evolutionary way with the social history of which they formed a part, is necessarily to resist any precise or static definition of the form."¹² Rosser describes the adaptive social and political network within the guild, and though his theory pertains to medieval guilds during the Middle Ages, his modern perspective can be applied to the present day, which serves as a further testament to the guilds' adaptability and functionality outside of their specific craft or trade. In addition, Rosser gives several explanations for the strength of fellowship within guild membership, not the least of which is a deep Christian tradition and the embodiment of ethical values that allow the members to form bonds and dictate the goals of the organisation.¹³ As an organisation with a religious foundation, and a contemporary focus on charitable engagement, it is vital to consider Rosser's arguments as motivation for the Taylors' contemporary functions. I will also use Robert D. Putnam's sociological explanations of voluntary associations to corroborate Rosser's social theory. Together, these accounts provide two perspectives on group cohesion, through both an historical explanation of guild solidarity, and an exploration of the social functions of voluntary organisations in the present day.

In examining the contemporary functions of the Merchant Taylors, I will inspect several types of tradition in the Guild, using Hobsbawm's parameters for tradition. He says: "The object and characteristic of 'traditions', including invented ones, is invariance. The past, real or invented, to which they refer imposes fixed (normally formalized) practices such as repetition."¹⁴ In this analysis, I will use Hobsbawm's "tradition" accordingly to refer to those practices in the Taylors that have been repeated as evidenced throughout either historical documents or Members'

12 Gervase Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9.

13 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 227; 76.

14 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2.

memories. To further unpack the nuances regarding the recent adaptations in the Merchant Taylors, I will use Hobsbawm's theory of invented tradition. He describes:

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past...In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant.¹⁵

His theory roots contemporary practices in historical precedent, allowing for modern interpretations of the past to be used and adapted to suit an institution's needs. He differentiates between invented and genuine tradition, arguing: "where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented."¹⁶ Several authors critique Hobsbawm for his indistinct definitions of invented and genuine, or authentic, tradition. Peter Burke questions: "Given that all traditions change, is it possible or useful to attempt to discriminate the 'genuine' antiques from the fakes?"¹⁷ Stephanie Trigg adds further nuance to the debate through her examination of the Order of the Garter. While Hobsbawm suggests clean parameters between invented and authentic tradition,¹⁸ Trigg's arguments imply gradations of tradition, as old practices are adapted for new situations.¹⁹ In evaluating the use of tradition within the Merchant Taylors, I will use these debates to explore how Hobsbawm's genuine traditions are used in an explicit and nuanced capacity, as well as how invented traditions are established and manifested in the Guild, and the purpose they serve. Further, I will explore the implications of the Taylors' use of invented tradition in crafting their contemporary functions and identity. Hobsbawm goes beyond differentiating between invented and genuine tradition, however, and argues that invented tradition is established most often during periods of significant social and societal change,

15 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 1-2.

16 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 8.

17 Peter Burke, "Review," *The English Historical Review* 101:398 (1986), 317.

18 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 7-9.

19 Stephanie Trigg, *Shame and Honor* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 11=12.

particularly as seen in the last 200 years in post-industrialised England.²⁰ I contend that the Taylors lost trade power during roughly the same period of industrialisation to which Hobsbawm refers, but rather than cease to exist, they were able to use genuine and invented tradition to address social change and survive as an institution by fulfilling other functions of the Company outside of their trade. Hobsbawm's arguments provide a theoretical basis for the examination of tradition, both genuine and invented, and indicate the atmosphere in which invented tradition is the most beneficial. Invented traditions, coupled with the spiritually focused fellowship of the Company, have allowed the Taylors to adapt their institutional goals and survive into the 21st century.

Chapter One gives a brief history of the York Merchant Taylors, and introduces the reader to the world of guilds and Livery Companies in the United Kingdom. Chapters Two to Four explore the contemporary functions of the Taylors: namely, care of the Hall, charitable engagement, and cultivation of fellowship. The conclusion engages in a more thorough discussion regarding the Taylors' capacity for change, as well as the role of tradition within the Company. The York Merchant Taylors, like many ancient companies, are formerly trade-based guilds that no longer engage in their original craft.²¹ Nevertheless, they provide relevant and important social and societal functions in the present that have enabled their survival, and allow them to adapt their traditions for the modern day.

Chapter One: An Abbreviated History of the York Merchant Taylors and Guilds in the United Kingdom

*"I'm proud to be involved, to be a Member, and really, I'm a great traditionalist, and I think...it's lasted 600 years, and hopefully it'll go on for another 600 years."*²²

The Taylors in York: Then till Now

Like many of the guilds and Livery Companies in the United Kingdom, the York Merchant Taylors have a long, rich and varied history with their oldest surviving ordinances

²⁰ Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 4-5.

²¹ Dobson and Smith, *A History of the Craft*, 1.

²² York Merchant Taylors Interview #8, transcript, York, England, 4 February 2016.

dating back to the fourteenth century.²³ From as early as 1370, the Taylors controlled admission into the organisation, and were internally regulated by a Master and four Searchers:²⁴ similar to the structure of the Guild in the twenty-first century.²⁵ In the current visitors' booklet, the Taylors describe their origins in York: "the tailors were most likely to be found as members of a powerful religious fraternity devoted to the worship of St John the Baptist...It was that fraternity which built the present Hall."²⁶ During this time, the religious duties of Guild Members included production of the York Corpus Christi mystery plays, a tradition that continues into the present day.²⁷ The Taylors gained their Royal Charters of Incorporation on 10 February 1453 from Henry VI, which bequeathed them with "the right to hold property and to be administered by a master and four wardens to be elected every Midsummer; they were also to have the right to impose their own clothing or livery on themselves and their servants."²⁸ The rights granted to them, as well as to the Drapers in York with whom they later joined,²⁹ gave the Guild nearly total control over the regulation and production of the York textile trade.³⁰

The York Merchant Taylors continued with a relative degree of stability in Membership and power to control their trade and care for the Hall until the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835. This Act "removed all guild restrictions on industrial activity," diminishing the power of guilds in England.³¹ The booklet continues, describing the period following this as the most unstable in the Taylors' time.³² The Hall fell into disrepair, and Membership stalled, forcing Members to look to those in non-tailoring professions to stabilise their numbers, and "serve the Company in a wider capacity than had hitherto been the case."³³ When in the 1930s, local solicitor Mr H.E. Harrowell made efforts within the Company to revitalise both the Membership

23 The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York. *The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York: A Brief History of the Company*, 2016, 2.

24 "Brief Chronology," *The Company of the Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 25 July 2016, <http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/history/brief_chronology/index.html>.

25 "Court of Assistants," *The Company of the Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 25 July 2016, <http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/the_company/goverance1/court_of_assistants/index.html>.

26 *Ibid.*

27 "York Mystery Plays," *The Company of the Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 25 July 2016, <http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/charitable_work/york_mystery_plays/index.html>.

28 *A Brief History*, 3.

29 W.J. Sheils in *A History of the Craft*, 53.

30 *A Brief History*, 3.

31 *A Brief History*, 4.

32 *Ibid.*

33 E Royle in *A History of the Craft*, 163.

and the Hall, the Company was “restored to their former splendour,” and the Taylors turned their attention to defining the Company goals outside of the regulation and production of tailoring.³⁴ They were registered with the Charity Commission on 23 October 1963.³⁵ Today, “very few of the ninety members who constitute the Company of Merchant Taylors...are practising tailors.”³⁶ But despite the Taylors’ transformation in Membership, output, and upkeep of the Hall in the latter part of the 20th century, the York Merchant Taylors preserve relatively the same posts and calendar of events from their original foundations, with some additions as necessitated by the changing functions of the Guild.³⁷ The maintenance of these traditional posts provided the Taylors with order and stability during their most tumultuous years, and illustrates an effect of retaining genuine tradition in historic communities. Today, the Court of Assistants, “the executive committee of the Company...charged with the day to day management of the Company and with long term planning and strategy” consists of yearly appointed roles: Master, the Immediate Past Master, four Wardens, four Searchers, and Chairmen of any Committees in existence for the year.³⁸ Committees as of 2016 are as follows: Catering, Charitable Activity, Fabric, Finance, and Membership. The Committee memberships are filled from the wider Company Membership. The Chancellor and the Clerk are also in attendance at Court Meetings,³⁹ and the Clerk provides a degree of consistency through the changing Mastership, as he or she is responsible for “the day to day management of the Company within the terms of reference laid down by them. He arranges all the Company’s functions including seating plans and invitations. He is responsible for keeping the minutes of the Full Court and Court of Assistants and for communicating the decisions of these Courts to the membership,” and other such activities which promote the running of the Company and communication between relevant bodies.⁴⁰ Since 2002, the role of Clerk has been a paid position hired from outside the Company.⁴¹ As the duties of the Clerk have grown, an Assistant Clerk has been appointed to help with the planning of events.⁴²

34 *A Brief History*, 5.

35 The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York, *Company Handbook 2015-2016*, 2015, 3.

36 Dobson and Smith, *A History of the Craft*, 1.

37 York Merchant Taylors Interview #18, notes, York, England, 13 July 2016.

38 *Company Handbook*, 3-4.

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Company Handbook*, 4-5.

41 York Merchant Taylors Interview #9, transcript, York, England, 8 February 2016.

42 York Merchant Taylors Interview #18.

The Company calendar begins on Charter Day, “held on the nearest Wednesday to the 24th of June, the feast of St John the Baptist,” during which the old Master exits and the new Master is sworn in, along with new Wardens, Searchers, and Members to the Guild.⁴³ Following this meeting, the Company processes through York to All Saints Pavement “where the Company is joined by the Civic Party and the members’ partners for the annual Charter Day Service.”⁴⁴ Other annual events include the formal Livery Dinner in April, the family-filled Martinmas Feast in November, a Full Court Dinner, Half Court Dinners, Past Masters’ Dinner, Court of Assistants’ Dinner, September Full Court, and the recent addition of several Court Luncheons, as well as other events throughout the year by the discretion of the then Master and other Company Members.⁴⁵ Degrees of formality vary depending on the event and those in attendance, as do the rituals that accompany these events.⁴⁶ Finally, it is worth mentioning that in addition to a one-time payment upon admission into the Merchant Taylors, Members pay an annual fee once a year into the Membership Fund, as well as the ticket price for any event they and their guests wish to attend that calendar year.⁴⁷ Any additional privileges, such as parking at the Hall, are charged for separately. The finances are divided into separate funds to ensure that no Member benefits financially from his or her Membership, and to certify that the paid fees and donations are allocated to their intended areas.⁴⁸

Guilds and Livery Companies in the United Kingdom

In order to more fully comprehend the nature of the modern York Merchant Taylors, it is worth placing the Taylors in the context of guilds in York and across the United Kingdom, as well as with Livery Companies in London. A member of the Merchant Adventurers described guilds thus: “I think they’re an interesting feature of British life. They do exist in most of the old cities in the nation...it’s a tradition of English life that is rather quaint. They’re not necessary, but I suppose that they perform a social function, they perform a kind of civic function, they express the traditions and history of these ancient places where they exist, and they’re not

⁴³ *Company Handbook*, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Company Handbook*, 7-8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ York Merchant Taylors Interview #18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

necessary but they're useful and they are fun to have.”⁴⁹ As of 2016, Yorkshire is home to eight guilds, with its eighth guild established in 2014 as the area's most modern guild: the Guild of Media Arts.⁵⁰ Though the Lord Mayor does attend several guild events, and vice versa, they have no official civic relationship, unlike the London Companies with their Lord Mayor.⁵¹ The sheer number of Liverymen and Companies in London precludes generalisations about these organisations, except to speak to their diversity. Currently, there are 110 Livery Companies in London, as well as several guilds and Companies without Liveries.⁵² Some Companies own property around London, which allows them to generate income, others do not.⁵³ Some are enormously wealthy; others are not.⁵⁴ The makeup of the membership, as well as the assets, size, and activities of each Company vary greatly. New Companies continue to be formed, and the civic relevance of these Companies is seen in their duty to nominate and elect the Lord Mayor from the Aldermen of the City of London.⁵⁵ Thus, the London Companies maintain a level involvement in civic life not precisely mirrored in the York guilds. It is within this larger world of guilds that the York Merchant Taylors function and build relationships with others in their local community, as well as with their London counterparts and organisations across the United Kingdom.

49 Peter Addyman (member of the York Merchant Adventurers), interview, York, England, 20 June 2016.

50 “The Guild of Media Arts,” *York UNESCO City of Media Arts*, accessed 2 August 2016, <<http://www.cityofmediaarts.com/guild-1/#guildintro>>.

51 York Merchant Taylors Interview #1, transcript, York, England, 11 January 2016.

52 Paul D. Jagger, “The Livery Companies,” *City and Livery*, 2016, accessed 2 August 2016, <<http://cityandlivery.co.uk/the-city-explained/the-livery-companies.html>>.

53 York Merchant Taylors Interview #8.

54 Paul D. Jagger (author, member of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists), interview, London, England, 8 June 2016.

55 Jagger, “The Livery Companies”; Paul D. Jagger, “The Right Honourable Lord Mayor,” *City and Livery*, 2016, accessed 2 August 2016, <<http://cityandlivery.co.uk/the-city-explained/the-lord-mayor.html>>.

Chapter Two: Survival of the Guildhall, Survival of the Company

*“Here we have a 600 year-old Hall, which is superb. But it’s not just important to preserve it for its own sake; it’s to preserve it preferably in a way where it can be used and seen and valued. And that’s the challenge we as a Company face.”*⁵⁶

The visitors’ booklet, Merchant Taylors’ website, and personal reflections of the Members all confirm the sentiment that the maintenance of the Merchant Taylors’ Hall is the primary responsibility of the Company today.⁵⁷ In fact, preservation of the Hall is itself articulated as a charitable objective on the Company site.⁵⁸ And not only does the Hall provide the Taylors with their central focus for the modern day, the Taylors “owe the existence of their Company to the survival of the Hall. Had it not been for that survival – rather against all odds – it seems more or less inconceivable that the Company of Merchant Taylors would itself have outlasted the abolition of its economic monopolies and privileges by the Municipal Reform Acts of the 1830s.”⁵⁹ In order to glean a sense of what the Hall means in the identity of the modern Merchant Taylors, I will examine how the Hall’s unique facets make it emblematic of the Taylors’ identity. I will explore the extent to which adherence to the Taylors’ traditional identity has affected how the Hall is preserved and presented, and explore the tension that exists between the preservation and public access in within the preservation movement since the late 19th century. Finally, I will explore the ways in which a balance is struck between modernisation and preservation of an historic building.

Common Place and Purpose

Pragmatically, the Hall provides the Taylors with a common physical space in which to meet and conduct business, now and throughout their history. In his chapter, John Baily states: “The Hall itself had several functions; as a general gathering place for members, as a court where the Master and Wardens would manage the business of the Company and adjudicate on disputes,

56 York Merchant Taylors Interview #1.

57 *A Brief History*, 5; “The Company of Merchant Taylors,” *The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 4 August 2016, < http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/the_company/index.html>; York Merchant Taylors Interview #1.

58 “Charitable Activities,” *The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 19 June 2016, http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/charitable_work/index.html.

59 Dobson and Smith, *A History of the Craft*, 1.

and for feasts on saints' days and festivals.”⁶⁰ Given the uniqueness of the space, letting out the Hall has long been a function of the property. In reference to their early years, the visitor booklet states: “Then, as now, the York Tailors were fortunate to have one of the largest closed spaces in the City at their disposal; and within a few years of its construction their new Hall was being leased for social and convivial purposes.”⁶¹ The 2015-16 Charity Commission Report establishes: “The Hall and its facilities are available to the public for weddings, dinners, conferences and other events... Surpluses arising in the service company from the use of the Hall and facilities by the caterer are donated to the Company as a charity.”⁶² Since 2009, the Taylors have worked with Poppy Caterers to hire out the Hall for special events,⁶³ an endeavour that generates a substantial amount of income for the running and upkeep of the Hall, and enables the other charitable objectives of the Company.⁶⁴ Though the Hall is now being let out with more regularity, the Taylors' history shows that this activity may have saved the Hall in the 17th century as well. “Only by leasing their Hall for a variety of purposes, mostly educational, theatrical, or convivial, did they succeed – where most other once celebrated medieval English guilds eventually failed – in preserving their buildings into the early nineteenth century.”⁶⁵ Thus, the Hall has given Members a place to meet at conduct business, offering them common space and collective responsibility throughout their history. The activities that take place in the Hall have enabled their survival and allow them to perform other Company objectives in the modern day.

Rosser establishes the notion of the “community of the guild” in the Middle Ages, and explains that the community of guilds was a result in part of physical proximity and social ties, but that Christian ideals and the spiritual understanding of community were the strongest factors in uniting a body of people within the guild framework.⁶⁶ He continues: “On this understanding, the community of the medieval guilds consisted neither in their social nor in their territorial

60 John Baily in *A History of the Craft*, 184.

61 *A Brief History*, 2-3.

62 The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York, Annual Report for the year ending 24 June 2016, 2.

63 “Poppy Caterers,” *The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 7 August 2016, <http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/hall_the_hall/poppy_caterers/index.html>.

64 York Merchant Taylors Interview #8.

65 *A Brief History*, 4.

66 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 192.

definition, but in their members' sense of a collective responsibility."⁶⁷ The Merchant Taylors, founded on Christian principles, embody this sense of collective responsibility through their care of the Hall. Further, by acting as stewards for the Hall, they are ultimately preserving the Company itself as the Hall has enabled their survival. This sense of common responsibility is echoed in the statements of the Taylors' most senior Member. In his oral history, he stated:

Well, I think one of the most important things, strangely enough, is to preserve our very old building, which is really quite an expensive thing to do; it takes quite a lot of time and effort. And I think that is important, for both those guilds. The new guilds that I talked about in York—they don't have their own hall, and they don't have that responsibility. But that is...one of the benefits of having an ancient Hall, and one of the responsibilities of having an ancient Hall. And I think, in a city like York, tradition is quite important.⁶⁸

The common purpose that care of the Hall gives the Taylors, as well as their authentic tradition in caring for the Hall, provides a level of historic continuity not otherwise present given the lapse of professional tailoring identity as a cornerstone of Membership. As it pertains to historic houses, George W. McDaniel elaborates on how these spaces can provide historic continuity: "We are called to strive to connect people with their history and to help them thereby achieve a sense of belonging to a larger community, of belonging to those who came before and to those who will come after."⁶⁹ In the same vein, the Taylors' visitor booklet describes the Hall "as a memorial to six centuries of continuous if ever-changing guild history."⁷⁰ Not only does care of the Hall connect the Taylors to each other through their sense of collective responsibility, it gives them a connection to the historic Taylors, as well as Taylors to come. Defining care as the primary Company purpose proved even more important following the loss of trade and craft power, and "the move towards non-trade members to some extent began to blur the distinction between the Merchant Taylors, a trade guild in origin, and the Merchant Adventurers, which appealed to a wider membership among the businessmen of York."⁷¹ Thus the Taylors' Hall

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ York Merchant Taylors Interview #4, transcript, York, England, 18 January 2016.

⁶⁹ George W. McDaniel, "At Historic Houses and Buildings: Connecting Past, Present, and Future," in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, edited by James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (Malabar: Krieger Publishing Company, 1999), 234.

⁷⁰ *A Brief History*, 5.

⁷¹ Royle in *A History of the Craft*, 166-167.

helps them to maintain an identity distinct from other local guilds while giving them continuity and purpose through genuine tradition.

Objectifying Identity: A Private Hall for the Public

The distinct features of the Hall have helped the Taylors to define their collective identity, which subsequently affects their interaction with the public. Firstly, it is not altogether common for guilds to be in possession of any sort of a Hall or common meeting space. The London Livery Committee Chairman explained there is a misconception that all Livery Companies have halls. In reality, only about 35 of the 110 London Companies can make this claim.⁷² Further, “thanks to the destruction wrought elsewhere by time – and by the Great Fire and the Blitz in the case of the City of London – the main Hall of the York Taylors is in many ways now one of the most authentic large guild halls surviving anywhere in medieval England.”⁷³ One Member articulated the sense of importance the Taylors glean from their possession of the Hall. He explained that given the lack of surviving medieval Halls, their London visitors were “very curious and very interested and feel very privileged to actually come from London, regardless of their background of ‘precedence,’ or wealth, to York to dine within this medieval structure and enjoy Yorkshire hospitality, good food and wine.”⁷⁴ The sense of pride embodied in this statement shows the relatively unique position the Taylors find themselves in with possession of the Hall in the wider English landscape. Patrick Wright uses Heller’s theory of objectification to explain how historic sites are imbued with social significance. He explains: “This interdependency of subject and society is central to Heller’s definition of everyday life as *objectification*: a process in which the subject is both externalised and constantly recreated – in which the social determination of subjectivity becomes in its turn...constitutive of society.”⁷⁵ The Hall is an external representation of Taylor identity, and consequently is objectified. Therefore, its utilities throughout history and in the present day are emblematic of the Taylors’ functions in society. As a result, care of the medieval Hall becomes increasingly pertinent as a modern focus of the Company.

72 Interview with Nigel Pullman.

73 *A Brief History*, 1.

74 York Merchant Taylors Interview #2, transcript, York, England, 14 January 2016.

75 Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (London: Verso, 1985), 7.

In addition to differentiating the Taylors from the London Companies, the Taylors' Hall also distinguishes them from the Yorkshire guilds. Though other guilds in York have use of halls such as Bedern,⁷⁶ the Taylors and Adventurers are the only guilds in possession of their own medieval structure not shared by other organisations.⁷⁷ However, the Taylors' Hall does not have the same publicity as the Adventurers, either in place or prestige. In some ways, the physical isolation has worked in the Taylors' favour, but in other ways it has affected their public interaction, as well as, potentially, the institutional aims for public engagement. The visitors' booklet describes: "Indeed [the Taylors] were almost unknown to most residents as well as visitors to the City. Until within living memory, the Hall itself stood in seclusion behind a row of unprepossessing cottages on the north side of Aldwark. Perhaps it was because of that seclusion that it escaped the complete re-development of the site, which in retrospect may seem to have been its most likely fate."⁷⁸ Similarly, a *York Press* article from 2016 calls the Taylors "one of York's best kept secrets,"⁷⁹ and describes the public knowledge of the sites: "the Merchant Adventurers' Hall, which everyone knows, and the Merchant Taylors which hardly anyone knows. In part that is down to it being tucked away in Aldwark, but also because to see inside you have to be a member or hold your wedding there."⁸⁰ Though this may be a reductive description of the availability of the Hall for the public, the Taylor's history, too, says that the Hall "has never been one of the most visited monuments in a much visited city."⁸¹ The result of this is to keep the Taylors relatively unknown within the larger York community. The seclusion of the Hall, though, may in fact be a sign of its value in the present day. In discussing the 1980s preservation movement, Wright discusses Calke Abbey, a fairly unknown country house. He explains: "The major virtue of the house was declared to be precisely that...almost no one knew about the place,"⁸² and later, "Here was a time capsule, a 'little piece of England' which had shown such remarkable resistance to the march of time."⁸³ By this logic, the isolation of certain historic spaces becomes vital in the preservation movement as icons of national identity. The

76 "Bedern Hall Guilds," *Bedern Hall*, accessed 7 August 2016, < <http://www.bedernhall.co.uk/bedern-hall-guilds/>>.

77 "The Medieval Hall of the Merchant Taylors."

78 *A Brief History*, 4.

79 Matt Clark, "Inside one of York's best kept secrets," *The Press*, 18 July 2016.

80 *Ibid.*

81 Dobson and Smith, *A History of the Craft*, 1.

82 Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, 39.

83 Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, 40.

Taylor's Hall is valuable precisely because of its separation from the public. Within the context of the preservation movement, the Hall's privacy safeguards it against the influence of outside sources, and imbues it with the qualities of a "little piece of England."⁸⁴ This, in turn, complicates notions of historical preservation and public access as its privacy makes it valuable as a representation of national identity.

Wright's discussion of the preservation movement and the establishment of historic spaces as icons for national identity illuminates the tension that occurs regarding the Hall as it exists for the public, and the Hall as it exists as a private space. Wright describes the emergence of the preservation movement in the mid-1800s, arguing that the movement does more than "plea for old calm and settlement in the midst of contemporary turmoil and change,"⁸⁵ which complicates Hobsbawm's articulations of invented traditions occurring in times of great change. Wright establishes the National Heritage Act of 1980 as both "concerned with the preservation of property which defines as 'the heritage', but it also seeks to secure public access."⁸⁶ Further, Wright explains the establishment of the National Trust in the 1980s. He states: "The two are now negotiated, if not wholly reconciled, but at a displaced level: as a registered company the National Trust holds property privately, and yet it does so in what it also works to establish as the national public interest."⁸⁷ In the process of caring for and preserving these private spaces, organisations must grapple with both encouraging public access, while protecting the space itself, at times from the very public for whom access is advocated. For example, in the Taylors: "In 1996 the Hall was completely closed to visitors after a theft was reported, but the English Heritage conditions obliged the Company to re-open it again at least for the minimum period of thirty days a year."⁸⁸ Additionally, if its value as a site is in its seclusion, it implies that public access may change its significance as a site of national identity. The tension between the Hall as it exists for the public and as it exists for the preservation of national identity is thus contextualised within wider issues of preservation and access. Though access is idealised as part of a national priority in the facilitation of a national identity, the need to preserve the space creates, at times, disharmonious objectives. So while the public can gain access to the Taylors'

84 Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, 40.

85 Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, 49.

86 Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, 44.

87 Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, 52.

88 Royle in *A History of the Craft*, 176.

Hall through contracted events, the prioritisation of preservation may make further public engagement programs slower to progress.

Beyond their physical seclusion, the lack of public recognition may affect the Taylors' identity, and subsequently how they choose to engage with the public through presentation of the Hall itself. As stated on the website, the Company aims are to "maintain its ancient hall, artefacts, and records," as well as more charitable goals.⁸⁹ Engagement with the public through education of the Taylors' past is not a widely stated goal of the Company. Though individual Members may express a desire to engage with the York community, or be optimistic about the level of community engagement,⁹⁰ the dearth of permanent historical interpretation within the Hall, as well as the absence of public visitation outside of booked events and the Residents' First Weekend⁹¹ limit the public's relationship with and image of the Taylors in York. The Master's and Committee Chairmen Reports for the Merchant Taylors state the following: "This was the first residents' festival since the refurbishment, and four new information boards were prominently displayed to inform the visitors about our Company and the Hall. In total 265 visitors attended during the open day."⁹² Seemingly, there is a public desire to access the Taylors' history through the Hall, and a tentative effort to publicly engage through interpretation, though interpretation does not extend to contracted visitations. The limited interpretive provisions of the Taylors are perhaps best illustrated with a contrasting example, the Merchant Adventurers, who "everyone knows."⁹³ Regarding their visitation, Paul Shepherd specifies: "Today the building is in excellent condition, is in daily use and visited by over 20,000 people every year."⁹⁴ He goes on to articulate the contemporary goals of the Company, the first of which mandates: "To maintain and improve the Hall for the education and enjoyment of the public and as an important place of business."⁹⁵ These institutional goals, coupled with the multiple forms of interpretation found within the Adventurers' Hall enable the public to engage with the Adventurers' history, and help them to become more well known and linked to the community. In part, the Taylors' lack of

89 "The Company of Merchant Taylors."

90 York Merchant Taylors Interview #14, transcript, York, England, 19 February 2016.

91 York Merchant Taylors Interview #1.

92 Andrew Grace, "The Master's and Committee Chairmen's Reports 2015-16," *The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 21 June 2016, 4.

93 Clark, "Inside one of York's."

94 Paul Shepherd in *The Merchant Adventurers and their Hall*, edited by Pamela Hartshorne (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2011), 6.

95 Shepherd, *The Merchant Adventurers*, 7.

interpretive engagement may be due to logistical reasons. One Member explained: “We are not in a position to be able to [have visitors come in], because we haven’t got somebody—there’s an office in the Adventurers—we don’t have that capability so that we can’t—so that, you know, from that point of view, we haven’t got finance coming in with visitors going round, which would make a lot of sense, so not so many people get in to see it, because it can’t be organised.”⁹⁶ Lack of interpretation may also be due to the Halls’ physical isolation: they’ve been unknown for quite some time and so engagement with the public lacks precedent, to a degree, though recent years have seen a greater degree of public engagement in an historical sense. But while the public can access the Hall, their access is predominantly through contracted events rather than in a museum capacity. I contend that the tendency towards their continued separatism can be attributed to tension between preservation of the Hall as a business, and the presentation of the Hall as a public site.

Solving an Identity Crisis

The lack of consistent interpretation at the Taylors’ Hall may due in part to an uncertainty regarding how to present the identity of a Taylor in the present day, now that tailoring is no longer a component of Membership. Hobsbawm provides insight into the how the Taylors negotiate their contemporary identity in his discussion of the parameters of custom. He says that adherence to custom helps to “give any desired change (or resistance to innovation) the sanction of precedent, social continuity and natural law as expressed in its history... ‘Custom’ cannot afford to be invariant, because even in ‘traditional’ societies life is not so. Customary or common law still shows this combination of flexibility in substance and formal adherence to precedent.”⁹⁷ As stated, the Taylors’ custom is to treat the Hall as a working building that can be rented out to the public.⁹⁸ It was this customary use of the Hall that enabled the Taylors to survive following the Municipal Corporations Act,⁹⁹ and which drives many of the contemporary attitudes regarding the modern use of the Hall.¹⁰⁰ To add interpretation to the Hall would be to deviate

96 York Merchant Taylors Interview #8.

97 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 2.

98 *A Brief History*, 2-3.

99 *A Brief History*, 4.

100 “Hire the Hall.”

from custom, which sees the Hall as an on-going business venture. Wright explains further: “Far from being somehow ‘behind’ the present, the past exists as an accomplished presence in public understanding. In this sense it is written into present social reality... Any attempt to develop and assert a critical historical consciousness will find itself in negotiation if not open conflict with this established public understanding of the ‘past’.”¹⁰¹ Inviting the public to engage with historic interpretation of the Guild would be to risk a public understanding of the Guild as solely in the past, rather than a surviving institution that continues to contribute to society. One Member articulated the tension that exists within the Membership between the Hall as a business and the Hall as an historic site:

I didn't view the Company as we must strive to make a business, you know, we've got to make the—the Hall earn its money, we've got to maximise our income—I understood the reason why we had to obviously generate as much income as we could, but I suppose... But to me, I still feel that we're moving away from the Hall focus, and sharing the Hall as much as we can, and the history of the Hall... I would like the interpretation to be better.¹⁰²

This statement conveys the two schools of thought regarding the Hall's function: the Hall as a business venture, and the Hall as an interpretive site. Though these two functions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the Taylor's adherence to customary use of the Hall discourages it from non-business engagement. Interpretation puts the Taylors in the past, particularly as the Hall has become a symbol of the Taylors in the modern day. The Taylors' history suggests that this has been a topic of discussion since the late 1960s:

The minutes of the Company suggest from time to time that members were aware the conservation and decoration of their Hall might not be all they should be doing to fulfil their historic role within the city and community of York. Concerning the Hall, had it been preserved for themselves or did they have a responsibility towards the general public, beyond the thirty days' opening a year required by English Heritage?...Members discussed in 1993 whether the Hall could be closed to all outside functions, but in the absence of such a decision, there was a clear conflict of interest between the commercial lets necessary to support the Hall and public opening throughout the week.¹⁰³

101 Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, 142.

102 York Merchant Taylors Interview #9.

103 Royle in *A History of the Craft*, 175-176.

Thus, the minimal interpretative material has been a conscious decision on the part of the Taylors based on their identities and customary values for the Hall and Company. Though recent years may have seen a greater public outreach through activities such as Residents' Day,¹⁰⁴ the Hall remains an active part of the Taylors' identity as a productive organisation, and subsequently lacks interpretation and open public visitation. The physical separation of the Hall keeps them from the public eye and reduces community pressures to present their site with historical interpretation. However, the Taylors' history concludes: "There is also a growing awareness that the Hall is an integral part of the social life and fabric of the City. This will place future demands on the York Company of Merchant Taylors to initiate change and adaptations to their Hall, in response to the changing needs of society."¹⁰⁵ Until the Taylors move from a strict traditional adherence to the Hall as a business, the ability to change will be limited.

Balancing Past and Present

The custom of the Hall as a business has enabled the Taylors to make decisions regarding the balance of tradition and modernity as it pertains to updates of the Hall. Regarding the Order of the Garter, Trigg describes recent changes to ritualised feasts, and says: "It is one of the many ways in which the Order of the Garter willingly proclaims its readiness to reconcile medieval traditions with the imperatives and innovations of modernity."¹⁰⁶ Her description of changes within the Order show the extent to which historic organisations can adapt to meet the needs of the day, thus balancing the pressures of historic maintenance with the need for contemporary adjustments. For an ancient organisation with contemporary relevance and production, it becomes imperative to strike a balance between modernity and history. As it pertains to country homes, Christopher Ridgway explains:

This is a place where people have to confront the issue of how old buildings are modified to suit modern needs. Elevators are an essential part of large buildings today, particularly hotels, and if they can be fitted with a degree of sympathy with existing schemes they should be accepted. It is not hard to find examples of

104 Clark, "Inside one of York's."

105 Baily in *A History of the Craft*, 195.

106 Trigg, *Shame and Honor*, 8-9.

houses that were altered in previous centuries to accommodate new technologies and new styles...Houses change: they decline, they rise again, they project back in time, they cast ahead, and in some instances they remain fossilized. Historic houses are more likely to be in a state of permanent flux than petrified in a single historical moment.¹⁰⁷

His elucidation of modern adjustments is echoed in the aesthetics of the Merchant Taylors' Hall. Though the interior of the Hall "has been restored to much of its original appearance when it was originally built six hundred years ago,"¹⁰⁸ there has been a noted effort to make the space useable in the modern day.¹⁰⁹ An earlier oral history project captured the insight: "If we were going to make money of letting the Hall, we had to have decent toilets, and the scheme worked well by providing appropriate cloakroom facilities."¹¹⁰ Therefore, the Hall maintains a balance as a medieval atmosphere with modern comforts that enables it to be an historic building from which a business is run. Though I expected to find unease in striking this balance, the Members acknowledged the necessity of modern adaptations. Said one: "If you've got a building, you've got to maintain it, you've got to make it attractive for people so they can go and use it."¹¹¹ Rather than detract from the age and authenticity of the Taylors' Hall as a medieval building, Ridgway asserts that the ability to adapt to layers of history is a hallmark of a true historic space. He says: "The power of houses to transform themselves, this is what defines the authentic historical house...mostly it is through continuous re-engagement with itself."¹¹² The layers of history and adaptation in the Hall thus embody the Taylors' tradition of productivity.

Finally, the Taylors display their continued contribution to the modern Company through contemporary additions to the Hall. As a commemoration for the 600th year of the Hall's history, the Taylors will add a piece of stained glass with their Coat of Arms to the East Window.¹¹³ Andrew Grace described the project thus: "Over £50,000 was contributed by members to enable the installation of new stained glass artwork by Helen Whitaker incorporating our own Coat of

107 Christopher Ridgway, "Making and Meaning in the Country House: New Perspectives in England, Ireland and Scotland," in *The Irish Country House, Its Past, Present and Future*, edited by Terence Dooley and Christopher Ridgway (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 216.

108 *A Brief History*, 1.

109 *Ibid.*

110 John Baily, "Some of John Baily's Memories of the Merchant Taylors," from conversations with Graham Wilford, transcript, October 2013 to December 2014.

111 York Merchant Taylors Interview #10, transcript, York, England, 9 February 2016.

112 Ridgway, "Making and Meaning," 222.

113 Andrew Grace, "The Master's Reflections: 2015-2016," *The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 21 June 2016.

Arms, and embracing tailoring themes in the Great Hall...The windows will be formally unveiled in January 2017.”¹¹⁴ Another Taylor gave her personal reflections on the modern additions: “I’m sure everybody feels that the Hall ought to be preserved in—not necessarily to fix it at a single point in time, but that we should add maybe more contemporary—put our stamp on the Hall.”¹¹⁵ By continuing to add modern additions to the Hall, the Taylors show themselves to be not simply preserving an historic space, or maintaining an historic institution, but actively and contemporarily engaging with their past and present identities. The addition of the stained glass may seem to contrast notions of preservation; however, it exemplifies how customs have been adapted to suit the modern identity of the Taylors as an active body. This adaptation provides one instance of an invented tradition within the Merchant Taylors. Charles Briggs asserts that invented traditions “reflect the contexts and interests that inform their construction in the present more than the accuracy with which they represent historical events.”¹¹⁶ His articulation of invented tradition exemplifies how the Hall is adapted to validate modern Taylor prioritisation of the Hall as a place of business rather than interpretation. Ironically, the authentic tradition of being a contemporarily functional body enables the Taylors to use invented traditions to preserve their identities while simultaneously altering the fabric of the Hall.

Chapter Three: Charitable Engagement

“[The Taylors] have raised quite a bit of money for the support of students in arts and music, you know, they’ve supported pianists, and dancers and things like that in quite a considerable way. And I think it was one leg on the stool, the three legged stool, which certainly needed strengthening, and they have done that. But of course, that’s happened, because that’s now a manifestation of religion.”¹¹⁷

Many guilds and Livery Companies participate in some form of charitable activity through the donation of funds, resources, or expertise, and the York Merchant Taylors are no exception. Though their history of charitable activity is well established, this section will explore

114 *Ibid.*

115 York Merchant Taylors Interview #5, transcript, York, England, 19 January 2016.

116 Charles L. Briggs, “The Politics of Discursive Authority in Research on the ‘Invention of Tradition,’” *Cultural Anthropology* 11:4 (1996), 463.

117 York Merchant Taylors Interview #6, transcript, York, England, 26 January 2016.

the modern manifestations of charitable activity within the Company, and examine the degree to which charitable activity allows the Taylors to maintain their relevancy in the present day. In addition, I will investigate charitable activity as a link to the Taylors' historic identity through its targets as well as through continuity of purpose. One Clerk described the balance between historic connection and modern relevancy thus: "It is important to retain a solidly contemporary function, because otherwise it becomes an anachronism...if it just becomes purely an old fashioned dining club, then it's lost the plot. So I think it's very important that we do continue to sponsor events, people, things, courses, students, whatever it may be, so that there is some purpose to having all this."¹¹⁸ Though the charitable giving of the York Merchant Taylors is secondary to their care of the Hall, it nevertheless acts as a significant and vital component of their contemporary and historic Company identity.

From Religious Foundations

While the religious foundations of the guilds could be explored in great depth, its function here is to establish ethical focus for charitable tradition. Regarding the religious foundation of the guilds, Rosser explains that when, in the mid-16th century an official act of parliament denied the existence of purgatory, guilds were forced to reassess the direction of their resources. He states:

The remaining public purposes which the fraternities had served retained their perceived importance, to the extent that by diverse means, many of these functions resurfaced after the dissolution, to be carried forward in a new guise...the strength of a larger public feeling which had previously sustained and continued to support a range of public works, association with which imbued their sponsors, of whatever social standing, with the character of good Christians and worthy citizens.¹¹⁹

The Taylors, too, have kept an embodiment of Christian tradition and incorporated it into their tradition of charitable engagement, though religious tradition of the Taylors has been adapted for the needs of modern Members. There is still a degree of Christian tradition within the Taylors;

118 Jonathan Bourne-May (Clerk to The Worshipful Company of the Vintners), interview, London, England, 9 June 2016.

119 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 202.

for example, the Charter Day service takes place annually at All Saints Pavement as part of their ceremonial activity.¹²⁰ Additionally, Reverend Jeremy Fletcher has been the appointed Company Chaplain since 2009.¹²¹ But despite an on-going adherence to Christian tradition, the Taylors have adjusted to suit the religious diversity of modern Membership. Said an upcoming Master:

I have one other reservation, which I have aired, which is because I'm not a Christian, and you become a Master at Charter Day, when we have the Charter Day—the St John the Baptist Commemoration Service in All Saints Pavement Church in York. And I was slightly worried about that, but I've talked to our Chaplain, Jeremy Fletcher, and he has assured me that he can create a non-denominational service that will reflect my needs on that day.¹²²

Thus, though the Christian tradition is maintained, and even embodied in the Taylors' ethos of charitable giving and fellowship, there is room for Members from other religious traditions to fit their own beliefs to the Taylors' foundations. Another Member, however, expressed the limitations of this modern interpretation: “At the end of the day the Guild, like the Adventurers, is a Christian body, and a non-Christian would have to take that into account before accepting the Mastership.”¹²³ Although there is room for modern understanding of the Taylors' foundations, there may be limitations to the lengths the Christian tradition can be stretched, because, as Rosser has shown, it is deeply embodied in the guild structure.

Charitable Inventions

Though many guilds lost power and relevancy, and subsequently dissolved during the 18th and 19th centuries, the surviving Companies justified their existence into the present day in part through charitable engagement, which allowed them to support each other as well as the wider community. In order to do this, however, the nature of charitable giving had to be redefined. Hobsbawm discusses both the adherence to historical practices as well as the

120 “Charter Day,” *The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 8 August 2016, <http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/the_company/charter_day/index.html>.

121 “Chaplain,” *The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York*, 2015, accessed 8 August 2016, <http://www.merchant-taylors-york.org/the_company/goverance1/chaplain/index.html>.

122 York Merchant Taylors Interview #5.

123 York Merchant Taylors Interview #6.

reconsideration of their manifestations in his definition of “invented tradition.”¹²⁴ Although Hobsbawm’s invented tradition is more ritualistic than the charitable activity with which the Taylors engage, his premise is useful in explaining the role and manifestation of charitable engagement in the present day. Charitable giving has long been a tradition of the Taylors, but its modern interpretation and recipients allow them to respond to their contemporary societal role while maintaining historic continuity. The York Merchant Taylors’ original charitable activity is described as follows: “Charity was specifically for guild members, and did not extend to the wider public.”¹²⁵ However, the changing nature of charity affected the attitudes and recipients of charitable activity across England. Keith Laybourn discusses the transformation in the ways in which the middle classes viewed those living in poverty in 18th and 19th century Britain.¹²⁶ Laybourn cites this adjusted understanding and the subsequent revitalised charitable engagement as factors in Guild revival. The Taylors’ renewed charitable efforts gave them a continued purpose after the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 stripped much of their power, and their craft and trade roots weakened during the Industrial Revolution. This renewal is corroborated by Hobsbawm’s assertion that invented tradition becomes especially common following great periods of upheaval, as groups attempt to establish a degree of stability and historical continuity.¹²⁷ By the 19th century, as the connection to tailoring became more tenuous, charitable recipients were chosen from a slightly wider pool. Laybourn explains broadly: “The years between 1860 and 1920 saw dramatic changes in the lives of the English people and the attitudes of society towards poverty... The social surveys of London and York, conducted by Booth and Rowntree, did much to challenge the view that poverty was necessarily a result of personal failing and implied that society might do more for its unfortunates.”¹²⁸ As it pertains to the Taylors, Royle states: “As fewer ordinary working master tailors joined, once the needs of the Company’s own poor had been met charity was extended to the poor tailors not members of the Company but was refused to those connected with neither the Company nor the trade.”¹²⁹ Specifically in York, local philanthropist Seebohm Rowntree made an attempt to address local

124 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 1-2.

125 H. Swanson in *A History of the Craft*, 12.

126 Keith Laybourn, *Social Conditions, Status and Community, 1860-c.1920*, edited by Keith Laybourn (Thrup, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1997), 1.

127 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 4-5.

128 Laybourn, *Social Conditions*, 1.

129 Royle in *A History of the Craft*, 144.

poverty through the connections and help of the area's middle class, of which the Merchant Taylors were likely included. Organisations such as the Guild of Help "saw the middle classes attempt to operate through the local community...in order to establish a partnership between philanthropy, community and, ultimately, the state."¹³⁰ In the 19th century, and into the 20th century, as the philosophy behind charitable giving began to change, the recipients of the Taylors' giving continued to broaden, though they remained focused on small and local donations. In addition to the individual recipients of charity, "Some assistance was also given to good causes in the city."¹³¹ Thus, the Merchant Taylors entered the 20th century with a long established history of giving, as well as a contemporary understanding of poverty and charitable engagement for the post-medieval world. The latter half of the 20th century saw a complete revival of the York Merchant Taylors in Membership, repairs to their Hall, and financial stability.¹³² After the completion of the major renovations to the Hall, the Company was able to address the level and manifestation of its charitable giving.¹³³ One Member discussed an individual's donation to the Company that was particularly effective in stimulating charitable activity of the Company. He narrated:

But I think probably the most significant that happened was about in 2002. One of the Members called Michael Dawson gave a very large sum of money as a personal gift to the charity to be directed towards the giving to the people in traditional crafts. We then had a fundraising within the Membership, where people were asked to make a donation either on a one-off or an annual basis, or both, and that pretty substantial gift has subsequently been built up, so we've now got an endowment of about £140,000, which can be used—the income from it can be used for this charitable giving to people with—learning the traditional crafts... So that has made an enormous difference to the Taylors for a number of reasons: it's given us an external profile, it's made the Members look outside.¹³⁴

The stabilisation of the Company, in conjunction with the recent financial contributions of Members and the tradition of charitable giving has collectively formed their contemporary tradition. The charitable activity connects Company Members to the larger community, and helps

130 Laybourn, *Social Conditions*, 9.

131 Royle in *A History of the Craft*, 147.

132 *A Brief History*, 4-5; Dick Stanley, "Some of Dick Stanley's Memories of Merchant Taylors," from a conversation with Graham Wilford, transcript, March 2013.

133 Royle in *A History of the Craft*, 176-177.

134 York Merchant Taylors Interview #14.

them to develop a philanthropic awareness. This sentiment was echoed in many of my interviews, both with York Merchant Taylors as well as the London Livery Companies. Said one Merchant Taylor: “I do like the way the Company is trying to look outwards rather than being always looking in...It’s doing something for society.”¹³⁵ And another: “I think it’s really important that the Company is seen to be doing something in the city of York. I don’t think it’s good enough just to be a Hall; I think it has to look outwards.”¹³⁶ Therefore, charitable activity provides a continuity of purpose by connecting the modern Merchant Taylors with their historic identities, while at the same time influencing the Taylors to engage with others outside their community. Thus, the Taylors engage in “a mutual act of charity”¹³⁷ which helps them to embody the Taylor’s foundational religious principles, and allows them to solidify their fellowship both with each other and the larger community.

The Taylors’ pamphlet for visitors outlines their primary functions in the present day. It states:

The objects of the present day Company, which consists of about 90 Members, are twofold. Firstly to preserve the historic institution of The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York, and in so doing maintain its ancient Hall, its traditions, and its ceremonies. Secondly, wherever possible, to provide financial support to deserving and needy young people pursuant to their advancement, encouragement, and skill development in the fields of art, craftsmanship and music.¹³⁸

The objectives, as stated here, prioritise the maintenance of the Merchant Taylors’ Hall, as well as the preservation of the Company as the primary duties of the Company. Beyond this, the Company aims to engage in charitable activity, though the qualification of “wherever possible” demonstrates the secondary, though still significant, component of this objective. Charitable engagement has been an on-going tradition throughout the Company’s existence; however, this function has been revitalised, solidified, and redefined in recent years. Further, the incorporation Hall preservation as a charitable objective shows the redefinition of charity in the Taylors, and suggests that charitable engagement is a way for institutions to engage with the public, both through preservation of space and public access, as well as through distribution of funds. Again,

135 York Merchant Taylors Interview #3, transcript, York, England, 15 January 2016.

136 York Merchant Taylors Interview #17, transcript, York, England, 25 February 2016.

137 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 78.

138 *A Brief History*, 5.

Hobsbawm's invented tradition explains the phenomenon: "Sometimes new traditions could be readily grafted on old ones, sometimes they could be devised by borrowing from the well-supplied warehouses of official ritual, symbolism and moral exhortation."¹³⁹ Today, the York Merchant Taylors give away between £10,000 and £15,000 per annum, not including "the value of services provided by volunteers" to "deserving and needy young people pursuant to their advancement, encouragement and skill development in the fields of art, craftsmanship and music."¹⁴⁰ Thus, their charitable tradition lives on in its contemporary manifestation.

Revisiting the Taylor Identity

The charitable activity in the Merchant Taylors, as with many Livery Companies and guilds in the United Kingdom, is interpreted differently today than in its original form.¹⁴¹ But because of the modern modifications of original aims, I assert that charitable engagement is one of the primary ways in which Guilds and Livery Companies connect to their historical identities. Specifically, the Merchant Taylors' charitable activity links them to their historic identity through continuity of purpose, which becomes particularly germane as other purposes, such as craft and trade regulation, have waned throughout the years.¹⁴² In my interview with Jagger, he stated that when Companies declare their functions as primarily charitable institutions, it "gives the impression that they've evolved into charitable institutions. They were ever charitable institutions."¹⁴³ Furthermore, Rosser's modern articulations of the medieval charitable activity show the complementary motivations behind Company objectives in the present day. Says Rosser: "The exercise of charitable functions fostered amongst members a sense of social responsibility and ethical purpose,"¹⁴⁴ and later, "From one point of view the guild offered material support for members in need. By the same token, and with profounder significance, it fostered the expression of an active charity."¹⁴⁵ Despite the religious foundation behind medieval

139 Hobsbawm, *Invention of*, 6.

140 The Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York, Annual Report for the year ending 24 June 2011, published 7 October 2011, 2; 3; 7; http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends67/0000229067_ac_20110624_e_c.pdf.

141 H. Swanson in *A History of the Craft*, 12.

142 *A Brief History*, 4.

143 Interview with Paul Jagger.

144 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 79.

145 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 117.

charitable involvement, the sentiment Rosser expresses is largely relevant in the modern day Merchant Taylors, and throughout many of the Livery Companies and Guilds.

Contemporary charitable activity within the Merchant Taylors engages in both genuine and invented traditions by maintaining an historic connection to two of its original targets: those associated with its Membership, particularly widows and older Members, and youth. According to the York Taylors' history, in the 20th century: "The sort of people who merited a Company pension were, as in earlier years, old tailors and their widows."¹⁴⁶ While the pension program is no longer part of the Merchant Taylors' charity, several individuals did receive a Company pension as late as 1963.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, the York Merchant Taylors no longer operate functioning almshouses, although several London Livery Companies have retained their facilities and operations, as well as others in the United Kingdom.¹⁴⁸ But for the York Merchant Taylors, they find modern ways to care for their affiliates. Speaking to one widow, she described her continued involvement with the Company, despite the passing of her husband, a former Master of the Company. "I'm not totally cut off from the Company; they're very kind, and they look after the widows. And there are two things: we're allowed to park at the Hall, it's a gift to be able to park at the Hall without paying...and we're always treated as guests to Charter Day. And occasionally some of the luncheons."¹⁴⁹ The Members, too, try to actively support each other in times of need. When speaking to the Member with the current longest-running Membership, he said, "If so-and-so's not very well we try to arrange for somebody to go and visit, that sort of thing. As the senior Member now, I've said to the Clerk 'I feel I ought to go to any funerals that are going to take place,' and...last March, I went to no fewer than six funerals, four of which were Merchant Taylors."¹⁵⁰ Despite the loss of the Merchant Taylors' almshouses and the abolition of pensions, the Merchant Taylors find contemporary ways to care for their Members, affiliates of Members, and the elderly through the donation of time, fellowship, and resources. Subsequently, the modern Merchant Taylors maintain tradition with their historic charitable goals. This engagement complicates Hobsbawm's idea of genuine and invented traditions in that it seems to embody both definitions at once. On the one hand, the Taylors maintain a genuine

146 Royle in *A History of the Craft*, 169.

147 *Ibid.*

148 Richard Winstanley (Clerk to the Drapers' Company), interview, London, England, 8 June 2016; Nick Harris (Clerk to the Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors, London), interview, London, England, 9 June 2016.

149 York Merchant Taylors Interview #7, transcript, York, England, 2 February 2016.

150 York Merchant Taylors Interview #4.

tradition through their care of older affiliates of the Company. However, manifestations of “care” today, such as allowing widows to park at the Hall, are disparate from their medieval manifestations, though the charitable focus and intent is arguably the same. In this way, Burke’s critique of Hobsbawm’s invention of tradition as “a splendidly subversive phrase, but it hides serious ambiguities”¹⁵¹ is particularly apt. Though the Taylors’ charitable engagement undoubtedly has elements of invention, the consistency with which they have engaged in charity provides a degree of authenticity lacking in Hobsbawm’s definitions.

The Merchant Taylors today similarly engage youth through their charitable activity as they have done in varying capacities throughout their history.¹⁵² However, I contend that the relationship with youth provides multiple forms of historic continuity and a manifestation of Hobsbawm’s invented tradition in that the Taylors’ charitable engagement with youth also connects them to their original craft. While some ancient Companies are still engaged in their original crafts or trades, many Companies such as the Taylors have crafts no longer widely practised in the modern day. A booklet produced by the London Livery Committee explains:

Companies whose original crafts have virtually vanished have adapted...It may not be appreciated that today the majority of companies support their trade, craft, or profession in one way or another. Much support goes to universities and other institutions which train young people for careers in particular industries. A growing number of companies support either new or existing apprenticeship schemes and concern for young people and their future still exists in very large measure.¹⁵³

The Livery Committee encourages companies to modernise their original aims in charitable giving, while simultaneously embodying the historic sentiment behind them. The booklet goes on to state that “Today’s companies know that they have an obligation to ensure that the charitable giving for which they are responsible is not restricted by outdated terms of reference and needs to meet the spirit if not the letter of an original bequest.”¹⁵⁴ Though not all the Companies have apprenticeship programs or own schools, they still find ways in which to engage both with the youth as well as to maintain ties to their original craft. The specific ways in which charitable activity allows the York Merchant Taylors to maintain their original

151 Burke, “Review,” 317.

152 S.D. Smith in *A History of the Craft*, 89-92.

153 *City Livery Companies*, 9.

154 *City Livery Companies*, 14.

contributions to craft development came up throughout my interviews with the Members. One Member stated that a major strength of the Company is its ability to support students, and discussed the ways in which tailoring is manifested through charitable giving:

On the charity end and supporting students...you know, financial support, and enabling them to do things they wouldn't have done otherwise, particularly in the, in the garment trade, and fashion and so forth. Because although I don't think there are physically any tailors per se in the Merchant Taylors, for reasons we've already discussed whereby trades have stopped—finished and changed dramatically over the years, I think really that would be probably the most important point about the, you know, existence of the Company that we're in a position to be able to do that.¹⁵⁵

The York Merchant Taylors' website states more generally that: "Wherever possible, the Company sets aside modest funds to provide financial support to projects involving young people who wish to advance and develop their skills in the fields of art, craftsmanship and music."¹⁵⁶ So although tailors failed to make up the majority of the Membership by around the middle of the 20th century, and tailoring has long since ceased to be a major product of the Company,¹⁵⁷ the modern Merchant Taylors have maintained links to their historic identity through their charitable activity. Broadly, they help youth to develop specialised skills in various areas of craftsmanship, and specifically, they enable learning in some areas affiliated, albeit at times somewhat loosely, with tailoring.

The use of charitable giving to connect with a former trade is a method that many London Companies employ as well. Paul D. Jagger describes many instances of modern manifestations and affiliation with ancient trades. He states: "Some Livery Companies still continue the tradition of apprenticeship, albeit adapted for modern times...In 2014, the Livery Companies Apprenticeship Scheme enrolled its first batch of 52 modern apprentices, these in addition to the individual companies that continue to admit apprentices allied to their particular trade, craft or profession."¹⁵⁸ He goes on to say that of the 110 London Livery Companies: "A tour of all the Livery Company websites reveals that no fewer than 90 of the companies retain substantive links

155 York Merchant Taylors Interview #8.

156 "Charitable Activities."

157 Dobson and Smith, *A History of the Craft*, 1.

158 Paul D. Jagger, *The City of London Freeman's Guide: Magna Carta Edition* (London: The Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, 2015), 97.

with their trade, craft or profession through education. As new companies form, they will no doubt continue and strengthen this tradition.”¹⁵⁹ Jagger’s claims were verified through my conversations with specific London Company Members. At the Drapers: “The last ten per cent [of our charitable giving] is in the heritage field, slightly taking us back to our roots. It can be modern textiles in terms of support there, but it’s really more tipped towards apprenticeships than textiles base, and the occasional sort of heritage, conservation project.”¹⁶⁰ The London Merchant Taylors discussed their recent support of apprentices on Savile Row in London.¹⁶¹ The Vintners described their charitable donations to students wishing to improve their wine expertise.¹⁶² The Clothworkers explained the ways in which their relationship with the Textiles Department of Leeds University allows them to rekindle their trade roots.¹⁶³ The list goes on, and confirms that the modern adaptations of original trade and craft purposes are able find a home in the invented tradition of modern charitable engagement. It’s worth noting as well that the modern Livery Companies, those that were formed during the 1900s, have embodied the charitable culture of their ancient brethren, and many modern Companies have made charitable activity a significant part of their modern identities. Jagger explains: “In the 1960s, where was this kind of split of the Companies’ legal entity and charity entity—that gave a philanthropic focus. It then provided an impetus for new Companies to form in existing professions, with a clear purpose for charity... Why would you form a new Company? Because there was not a charity for that profession.”¹⁶⁴ Taken together, these statements show how deeply the invented tradition of modern charitable giving is embodied in guild and Livery Company membership.

To solely examine the charitable activity of guilds and Livery Companies would provide an inauthentic depiction of the numerous historic and contemporary functions of these institutions. Nevertheless, I argue that the philanthropic activity is one of the most vital aspects of its being, in part because it ties the Companies to the larger community, and creates relationships with outward bodies who are both impacted by and that impact the Companies themselves. Charitable tradition is deeply ingrained in the organisation through multiple capacities. Rosser’s description of charitable evolution from Christian foundations to a vital

¹⁵⁹ Jagger, *Freeman’s Guide*, 98-99.

¹⁶⁰ Penny Fussell (archivist to The Drapers’ Company), interview, London, England, 8 June 2016.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Nick Harris.

¹⁶² Interview with Jonathan Bourne-May.

¹⁶³ Jocelyn Stuart-Grumbar (Clerk to the Clothworkers’ Company), interview, London, England, 10 June 2016.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Paul Jagger.

component of guild activity in the Middle Ages provides precedent for their charitable activity today. This precedent provides directionality for the Company, and allows the modern Taylors to engage in both authentic and invented traditions through their charitable activity, as it enables them to reference their historic identities. Though Hobsbawm's ideas are somewhat problematic as multiple forms of engagement prove to be both authentic and invented, by expanding the parameters set for these types of traditions, one can see that the Taylors are historically engaging in multiple capacities. The charitable engagement in the Merchant Taylors and other Guilds and Livery Companies serves not as an appeal for positive press, as engagement was termed "doing good quietly"¹⁶⁵ by one London Clerk. Rather, charitable engagement is an entrenched part of guild and Livery Company identities, and provides the Taylors specifically with a continuity of purpose, as well as a contemporary manifestation of medieval trade.

Chapter Four: The Fellowship of the Taylors

*"The Merchant Taylors' Company, with all this stuff, is actually all about people. And without the people, there would be no Company."*¹⁶⁶

To glean a more complete understanding the contemporary functions of the York Merchant Taylors, it is imperative to look at the fellowship of the Company. Though not explicitly stated, the camaraderie within the Guild is a vital component of its survival. In this section, I will explore the Taylors' fellowship by examining it on both an individual and community level. Through the interviews conducted with the Taylors and other Livery Company members, I will explore the ways in which individuals use the Guild history to place themselves in a wider historical context, as well as the social benefits of Membership using Rosser's explanations in *Art of Solidarity*, and Trigg's theory of medievalism as it pertains to the Order of the Garter. Further, I will discuss Taylors' modern adaptations to their Membership requirements, and evaluate the explanations of these adaptations as a manifestation of invented tradition. Finally, I will examine the ways in which fellowship is reinforced through ritual and ceremony in the Company.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Richard Winstanley.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Nick Harris.

Who Joins, and When?

Investigating the Taylors' fellowship requires an exploration of the contemporary reasons for joining a formerly trade-based medieval guild. The Taylors' website gives the following explanation of their Membership: "The Company has a membership of about 90 men and women who are generally residents of the York area. There are sadly few members these days with a tailoring connection, therefore method of entry is by patrimony or nomination by a member."¹⁶⁷ It follows that the motivation for Membership must lie outside Members' connection to tailoring. Though the reasons for joining these Companies are likely as diverse and individual as the Members themselves, my interviews with Taylors and Livery Members highlighted several themes worth exploring. Firstly, several Members shared their opinions that those who join the Taylors are a certain type of person,¹⁶⁸ joining at a certain time in life.¹⁶⁹ To establish this first from an historical perspective, Rosser describes guildspeople as distinct from both the very impoverished and very wealthy. He says: "The moral standing which was associated, in the public eye, with the ability to make even the most modest contribution to guild funds, distinguished fraternity members from the large, excluded class of the destitute. In their social definition, the overwhelming tendency across the range of medieval European guilds was to occupy the territory above that of the absolute and probably irredeemably poor, and beneath that of the aristocracy."¹⁷⁰ Beyond this, however, Rosser says that membership included a diverse range of people and occupations. Because modern Taylors pay an annual fee in addition to the price of the ticket for their events,¹⁷¹ one can conclude that Members have a certain amount of expendable income, as their Membership is voluntary, and therefore are likely to be from at least a middle class background. Said one Member, "It's very diverse...in the professions and occupations of people. But it's not very diverse from a socio-economic perspective, or a gender perspective."¹⁷² In addition, Hobsbawm provides insight as to why the middle classes may be more inclined to join certain types of organisations, particularly beginning in the latter part of the

167 "Membership."

168 York Merchant Taylors Interview #5.

169 Interview with Paul Jagger.

170 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 56.

171 York Merchant Taylors Interview #18.

172 York Merchant Taylors Interview #5.

19th century.¹⁷³ Hobsbawm explains: “The middle classes in the broadest sense found subjective group identification unusually difficult, since they were not in fact a sufficiently small minority to establish the sort of virtual membership of a nation wide club...nor sufficiently united by a common destiny and potential solidarity, like the workers.”¹⁷⁴ In his review of Hobsbawm, Richard Handler provides further context for the environment in which invented traditions take hold. He says: “Tradition is a Western concept that entails culturally specific notions of historical time, social order, and political boundedness particularly appropriate to centralized bureaucratic polities. That is why invented tradition has been so closely associated with the nationalism and imperialism of modern Europe.”¹⁷⁵ To place this statement in the wider context of Hobsbawm’s arguments, the industrialisation era in the United Kingdom altered the social structure of the country, and thus the middle classes needed to establish connection and solidarity in the absence of traditionally unifying social factors. Hobsbawm states: “In Britain ‘old boy dinners’ appear to have started in the 1870s, ‘old boy associations’ at about the same time – they multiplied particularly in the 1890s, being followed shortly after by the invention of a suitable ‘old school tie’...In the U.S.A. the establishment of ‘alumni chapters’ also began in the 1870s, ‘forming circles of cultivated men who would otherwise not know each other.’”¹⁷⁶ Guilds allowed these types of individuals to meet and form bonds, and provided a social network for Members in a time when the regulatory powers of the guilds were waning. Thus, guild survival can in part be attributed to the social network they provided for middle classes. Additionally, Western society’s notions of time and order enabled invented traditions to establish group values and solidify Membership identity for those “who would otherwise not know each other.”¹⁷⁷ As a result, individual Membership is motivated in part by the need of the middle class to establish a social network following industrialisation. Finally, the expendable income required to be part of organisations such as the Taylors, as well as the ideal amount of free time to contribute to and benefit from Membership, precludes certain groups of people. Membership therefore tends to favour those at a certain point in their careers. Jagger explained:

173 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 295.

174 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 301-302.

175 Richard Handler, “Review,” *American Anthropologist* 84:4 (1984), 1026.

176 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 295.

177 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 1-2; 295.

The point in time in your life at which people have got time and space mentally, in their diary, in their bank account, for a Livery Company, is the time when you have found your life partner, got yourself onto the property ladder, onto your third or fourth job where you're kind of settled in, and you're thinking about maybe having some offspring, thinking about provision for the future, and then at that point of time in your career is the point in time when you've probably got the bandwidth to consider a Livery Company...[Members] all kind of fit a certain mould in terms of where they are in their life. Not in terms of gender, not in terms of ethnicity, not in terms of schooling or how far they are in their academic pillar, but where they are in their life.¹⁷⁸

Individual motivations for joining guilds and Livery Companies are contingent in part by Members' availability, which has resulting implications on their age and social status, though some Livery Companies provide additional tiers of Membership that broaden the range of ages.¹⁷⁹ Beyond this, Membership can be more diverse.¹⁸⁰

Facilitating Social Networks

Rosser's modern lens regarding the social network within medieval guilds provides insight into the network of guilds in the present, as he coalesces the benefits of professional networks with the benefits of social networks. He says: "Many fraternities of tradespeople additionally broadened the range of their clientage by the admission of members who were not professionally engaged in a particular craft," which he argues "conveys the sense of a deliberately cultivated friendship network, through which the craftsmen might hope to establish a variety of working or commercial relationships."¹⁸¹ Elsewhere, Rosser states:

The formation of guilds was by no means exclusively an urban phenomenon, but it was precipitated with particular frequency in towns, where growing populations, temporary visitors, and incoming settlers found an attractive point of reference in membership of one or another fraternity. The formation of a guild in such circumstances was a strategic means to create a measure of stability where other social coordinates were lacking... To the migrant worker, a stranger in a new town, there was a particular perceived value in joining a neighbourhood confraternity.¹⁸²

178 Interview with Paul Jagger.

179 Interview with Nick Harris.

180 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 56.

181 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 181.

182 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 50.

In addition to broadening one's professional network, the guilds offer social support, particularly for those migrating to the area. Today, the social network that the Taylors provide continues to be a motivation for individuals to become involved. Several Members corroborated this point in their interviews. Said one: "I live outside of York, thirteen miles to the north. Other than travel to my office which I had at the Mount, on the west side of York— until I sold it a few years ago following my retirement from my accountancy practice—I wasn't really involved in the York social circle. With the Merchant Taylors you do get involved in a social circle made up of Members from a variety of different backgrounds."¹⁸³ And another:

I moved up to Yorkshire...and needed to find a job. And so looking in the local paper, I saw an advertisement for the Clerk, three days a week...I thought, "Well, it looks a really interesting thing to do, I don't know anybody in Yorkshire whatsoever," so I thought, "Actually, this is just up my street." It's an interesting Company, I know nothing about guilds, but it is a way of getting to know York, getting to understand that side of things.¹⁸⁴

Though Rosser's characterisation of the social network of guilds refers to medieval societies, the guild format is similarly conducive to social networks in the modern era. Additionally, Rosser and Robert Putnam discuss the idea of membership in exclusive networks as a sign of honour and credibility.¹⁸⁵ Rosser discusses religion within guilds as a vital component of their solidarity, asserting: "The culture of the guilds fostered a continual oscillation between the spiritual development of the individual member and the social aims and practice of the group."¹⁸⁶ Additionally, Rosser explains that the religious foundation of guilds allowed for camaraderie to develop between those from potentially disparate walks of life. He explains: "It was the work of the guilds to catalyse new friendship between individuals of different background experience. This was not a light undertaking. To treat a relative stranger as if they were a friend entails a risk. It only makes sense as an act of faith."¹⁸⁷ Together, these statements articulate the capacity of the

183 York Merchant Taylors Interview #2.

184 York Merchant Taylors Interview #9.

185 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 87; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 19.

186 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 76.

187 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 227.

guilds' religious foundations to enable the fellowship of the guild, and foster a charitable engagement, which subsequently reinforces the fellowship of the Company via a common focus. Many Members echoed the fellowship felt within the Guild today. Said one Taylor: "I just think there's a terrific esprit de corps, companionship, comradeship, whatever you like to call it amongst members of the Guilds,"¹⁸⁸ and another, "the fellowship of the Guild, maintains a standard of behaviour which is possibly sadly lacking in much of the community."¹⁸⁹ Putnam, too, specifically uses membership in a social network as an indication of high moral standing. He says: "social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue.' The difference is that 'social capital' calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations."¹⁹⁰ Putnam's articulation of civic virtue can be compared to Rosser's spiritual development as both refer to a type of charitable engagement in the larger community, though from different perspectives. In the context of the Taylors, an organisation with a charitable output, membership both enhances the individual's social network while instilling and reaffirming a sense of spiritual development.

Rosser explains that humans are social creatures, and out of necessity must depend on each other for survival, and for "complementary skills and strength."¹⁹¹ Later, he elaborates: "The relationship between the member and the guild was reciprocal. ... To the worker seeking allies and patrons in the community at large, those societies whose memberships were relatively diverse provided distinct advantages. In the vital process of building up trust, and with it potential economic opportunities, contacts made outside the individual's immediate professional, socio-economic, or status group would always be at least as important as those within it."¹⁹² Putnam corroborates this point from a sociological perspective, arguing: "A society characterized by generalized reciprocity is far more efficient than a distrustful society... Trustworthiness lubricates social life."¹⁹³ These arguments, taken together, articulate two main points. Firstly, the Members benefit from a diverse social network, both in the variety of skills and resources they

188 York Merchant Taylors Interview #14.

189 York Merchant Taylors Interview #15, transcript, over the phone, 20 February 2016.

190 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19.

191 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 2.

192 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 161.

193 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 21.

can access through their Membership, as well as from the trust generated between Members of their society, which greatly enriches their social lives. Secondly, the Guild itself is enriched by the diverse skills of its Membership. This point was especially emphasised by those within the Guild and Livery Companies. From the Drapers: “We’re seeking to put the right expertise in the right areas, so our Investments’ Committee comprises those who are in the investment banking world, and those who have an understanding of property.”¹⁹⁴ More generally, one Taylor stated: “It is amazing how, if we need somebody with a certain expertise we can generally find somebody within the Company.”¹⁹⁵ Others talked about how their personal skills and knowledge assist the running of the guild, such as a background in historic buildings and materials providing support for the fabric of the Hall.¹⁹⁶ Thus, the Taylors and guilds more generally maintain their authentic tradition of guild membership as a reciprocal relationship, with the guild providing the members with resources and social trust, and the members contributing their diverse skills to the running and success of the Company. Put another way: “The recruitment process is really based on the people you know. And you think might someone (a) Contribute, (b) Enjoy the process.”¹⁹⁷ The spiritual foundation of the Guild subsequently enables the development of fellowship and fostering of a social network to occur.

Performing Membership

Belonging to the Taylors places Members on an historical timeline, and enables them to perform their history. In one capacity, the Guild provides Members with a genealogical connection. Numerous interviewees in both London and York mentioned fathers, daughters, cousins involved in some capacity with the world of English guilds.¹⁹⁸ To allow contemporary Members to gain entry into the Guild via patrimony further exemplifies the relevance of this

194 Interview with Richard Winstanley.

195 York Merchant Taylors Interview #5.

196 York Merchant Taylors Interview #10.

197 York Merchant Taylors Interview #12, transcript, York, England, 15 February 2016.

198 York Merchant Taylors Interview #2; York Merchant Taylors Interview #3; York Merchant Taylors Interview #4; York Merchant Taylors Interview #7; York Merchant Taylors Interview #11, transcript, York, England, 12 February 2016; York Merchant Taylors Interview #13, transcript, York, England, 16 February 2016; York Merchant Taylors Interview #15; York Merchant Taylors Interview #16, transcript, York, England, 22 February 2016; Interview with Nigel Pullman; Interview with Paul Jagger; Interview with Jocelyn Stuart-Grumbar.

authentic tradition.¹⁹⁹ However, I argue that in the modern day, familial connection in the Taylors is a manifestation of recent genealogical interest, and the desire to place ones' own life in a larger historical context. Jerome de Groot discusses the recent popular interest in family history and genealogy, explaining:

As a model for critical and philosophical inquiry genealogy has also been theorised in relationship to subjectivity as a means of writing the self. Popularly, genealogy has become one of the most common historical activities in the world...The numbers of users run into the tens of millions, and they are persistent...the growth in this field over the past 30 years, a time when genealogy turned into 'family history' – a more inclusive term suggesting a sense of identity rather than the more traditional proving of (paternal) bloodline.²⁰⁰

In the same vein, de Groot goes on to argue there is “a clear sense among all those who use genealogy to understand themselves that there is some ‘true’ identity hidden in their family makeup... Genealogy provides points of reference, is an aid in the finding and defining of oneself.”²⁰¹ Not only does Guild Membership provide individuals with a social network, it provides Members with an historical network by connecting them to their family history, as well as to past generations of Taylors and guild members. And, given the continuity in the social and value systems instilled into guild membership since medieval times, Members can subsequently make assumptions about the character of their family history, which may, in turn, give Members insight into their own identities. The desire for historic familial connection was reflected in several interviews. The Clothworkers' Clerk said that in addition to giving members a sense of their history, their Company allows families with multiple members in the organisation to maintain substantial contact and connection they otherwise wouldn't have.²⁰² Membership, he explained, fosters familial connections. The Clerk of the London Merchant Taylors described the genealogical connection as a “familial anchor.”²⁰³ A York Merchant Taylor talked about the ways in which the Company tied her to her religious and cultural heritage in unforeseen ways. She stated: “coming from a family of Jewish immigrants—most immigrants to Leeds—not all, but a lot had worked in the tailoring industry, and they did play on this link with tailoring, and on

199 “Membership.”

200 Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 73.

201 de Groot, *Consuming History*, 78-79.

202 Interview with Jocelyn Stuart-Grumbar.

203 Interview with Nick Harris.

both sides of my family—my grandfathers—had been involved in tailoring or raincoat manufacturing.”²⁰⁴ And beyond a connection to the familial past, one Taylor explained how his own Membership connects him to future generations of his family. He said: “I admit to feeling proud to have my name on the lists of the many past Masters of the Company, starting from about seven hundred years ago...I pray that my grandchildren and great grandchildren will visit the Hall in years to come to see my name on those lists of Past Masters and that some will take up any available opportunity to participate in guild life themselves.”²⁰⁵ He thus historicises his own Membership, and provides a genealogical link for his descendants. The contemporary vogue of genealogical exploration finds an institutional home in the Membership of the Taylors and similar organisations. It connects generations and family members throughout history, as well as in the modern era and into the future. Further, it provides indication of family character through the moral values historically embodied in guild membership.

In a similar vein to the genealogical motivations behind Membership, I speculate that Taylor Membership is a form of historical re-enactment; an offshoot of living history. Lain Hart discusses specifically the postmodernist perspective regarding participation in re-enactments. Hart says:

The postmodernists would have us believe the key difference here is that reenactors, unlike scholars, are not intellectually persuaded to take an interest in the Civil War; their interest is not on the basis of its historical import, and Dr Rowe did not really take up the hobby in order to broaden her role as a mother, a wife, and a doctor, and enrich her twenty-first-century life, but rather to escape it. Handler and Saxton proclaimed that ‘living historians [i.e. reenactors] seek to re-experience history because they expect thereby to gain access to lives and experiences characterized by the wholeness that historical narratives can provide’...In other words the ‘authentic experience’ that reenactors grope for is nothing more than ‘the notion that an authentic life is a storied or emplotted life.’²⁰⁶

Hart’s article refers specifically to re-enactment events and performances with actors and spectators; however, the explanation here can be broadened to explain membership in ancient guilds on an individual level. To belong to a guild is to belong to an organisation with a traceable institutional history. Membership connects current Taylors to those who came before them, and

204 York Merchant Taylors Interview #5.

205 York Merchant Taylors Interview #2.

206 Lain Hart, “Authentic recreation: living history and leisure,” *Museum and Society* 5:2 (2007): 120.

those who will come after them; it places the individual on an historic timeline. Thus, individual Membership is whole; it is “emplotted.” This sentiment was articulated by one Merchant Adventurer: “I think you’re right to feel that you have, you know, a place in history—you know, what happens when you die? Most people forget you in about three weeks, and the Merchant Adventurers’ Hall has a roll of Governors, you’ve probably seen, and I’m on it. So as long as that thing exists, I’ve got a little role in history. So that was a very nice thought, as you sort of set out for the last time—right, there I am, that’s my place in history along with a lot of people.”²⁰⁷ One Taylor elucidated that Guild Membership provides access to an historic timeline in a way that other membership organisations fail to do. He said:

If you actually look at businesses, which is where much of my world was...businesses disappear, and if I go back to the companies that were very important when I left University, most of them don’t exist. The great companies that existed then in the UK don’t exist at all. They’ve all turned into something else. So the notion of a Company like the Taylors actually surviving broadly with its traditions maintained, broadly probably the same sort of size, with its Hall that still exists physically is a very different sort of experience...and it’s one I enjoy because I think the older you get, the more the continuity with the past matters to you.²⁰⁸

The Taylors provide historical continuity, and give Members an opportunity to belong to history. In addition to the sense of historical belonging, the Taylors and Livery Companies allow their Members to, quite literally, live history. In his discussion of living history and re-enactment, de Groot asserts: “History is both taught and experienced.”²⁰⁹ Correspondingly, a member of the Dyers shared: “And to be a bit involved in—actually involved, rather than reading about a Livery Company in a book just brings it alive a bit more.”²¹⁰ Participation in the ceremonial acts of guild membership: processions through the streets, rituals, filling the historic positions of governance—allows Members to live the roles of the Taylors in history. Hence, though the Taylors have an active contemporary identity and do not recreate battles or specific historic events, engagement in guild ritual is an act of public history. A Merchant Adventurer summarised it thus:

207 Interview with Peter Addyman.

208 York Merchant Taylors Interview #12.

209 de Groot, *Consuming History*, 103.

210 Anonymous (member of The Worshipful Company of the Dyers), interview, London, England, 9 June 2016.

As a historian, I'm interested in the preservation and memorialisation of tradition, and the stories by which or stages by which we've reached the current state that we're in, which in its way rather determines how we're going to develop in the future. And so the organisations express that very well, and in a public sort of recognisable way, so people do see our processions in funny costumes through the city and realise that there's something that's actually been going on for 600 years. And whether you think it's crazy or not—it's part of the character of the place, so that's a sort of good way of maintaining those traditions in a public participatory way. My view is slightly more lively than having thousands of archives sitting in the Borthwick Institute that only extremely brave people go to read, or specialised people go to read. So it's living history in its way.²¹¹

Membership in the Taylors, as with other ancient guilds, is a public and participatory embodiment of history through its rituals, customs, and ceremonies, and allows its members to literally live history through their participation.

Fellowship through Tradition

In order to more fully understand the nature of fellowship in the Taylors, it is useful to examine how fellowship is established through tradition and ritual. As Rosser says, “The fostering of affection amongst the members was a universally expressed goal of the fraternities.”²¹² Hobsbawm describes the way in which fellowship is cultivated within communities through tradition, ritual, and ceremony since industrialisation. He explains that invented traditions “seem to belong to three overlapping types: a) those established or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour,”²¹³ though arguably both genuine and invented traditions have the capacity to perform these duties. Specifically, ceremony within the guilds are a vital component of its character: “If it was your intention in life to avoid customs, traditions, ceremony and heritage, and you arrived at the Livery Companies, you got seriously lost...even the modern ones. It's part

211 Interview with Peter Addyman.

212 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 89.

213 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 9.

of the cultural DNA of what a Livery Company is, so even the most modern Companies embrace the founding principles and ethos of where Livery Companies came from.”²¹⁴ Cannadine goes further, and argues that ceremony has become deeply entrenched in the British identity, particularly due to the blossoming of popularity around royal pageantry, which he argues provides the illusion of stability in times of great change.²¹⁵ Trigg provides another perspective on ritual, explaining in addition to establishing stability and fostering nationalism, it disrupts notions of linear time by connecting the past to the present. She summarises:

For Mircea Eliade, ritual abolishes history, replacing linear time with circular time, suspending ‘profane time and duration.’ The opposition he assumes here is unduly simplified: much of the cultural weight of historical, commemorative rituals, at least, depends on the multiple layering of different linear and circular temporalities... Its medievalism is similarly tied to the Middle Ages while also offering a shifting, mutable signifier, available for the endless reinventions of postmedieval culture.²¹⁶

Consequently, ceremony and ritual in the Taylors reinforces fellowship amongst the Members by “symbolizing social cohesion,”²¹⁷ and facilitating feelings of stability by satiating the British interest in ceremony and expressions of nationalism. Further, ritual connects the Taylors to their historic identities by disrupting conventional notions of linear time and thus creating layers of history with which the Taylors engage each time they participate in a ritual tradition. To illustrate these points, I will look at the oath of admission and procession through York on Charter Day, the role of feasts, and women in the Company, though this is by no means an exhaustive list of the Taylors’ rituals and traditions.

In joining the York Merchant Taylors, Members pledge an oath to the Company, which swears loyalty to the Queen, submission to the rules and regulations of the Guild, and a promise to fulfil the needs of the Company.²¹⁸ Rosser explains the importance of the swearing in process, particularly in marking a change in behaviour through a pledge of fellowship and “shared intentions.”²¹⁹ According to Rosser, admission to the guild not only signifies “the beginning of a

214 Interview with Paul Jagger.

215 Cannadine in *Invention of Tradition*, 160.

216 Trigg, *Shame and Honor*, 30.

217 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 9.

218 “New Members Oath,” *The Company of Merchant Taylors*, 2016.

219 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 58-59.

change of life,” it also indicates “the individual’s admission to the group.”²²⁰ The effect of the New Members Oath is to instill the notion of a reciprocal relationship within Guild Membership: the Members are welcomed into the fellowship, which marks a change from their previous lives outside of the Company, and the responsibilities of Membership are articulated. In addition, the New Members Oath creates an association between the Guild and the monarchy, which provides it with an additional level of historic stability, and further establishes the Guild as a manifestation of national identity. By incorporating loyalty to the monarchy as a component of Taylor Membership, the New Members Oath promotes feelings of nationalism, connecting the Taylors not only through their Guild Membership, but through their duties as British citizens. New Members pledge their Oath on Charter Day, at which time the new Court of Assistants is sworn in for that year, and the Members process together through York from the Hall to All Saints Pavement.²²¹ To pledge this Oath and then process through the streets further solidifies Taylor Membership. Historically, Rosser says: “The procession of the guild through the town was a highly visible expression of identity.”²²² The procession today serves a similar purpose, and connects the Taylors to the past and future Company members who will make that same journey. Trigg explains further: “It is the world of *historical* ritual practice, strongly mediated by cultural memory of a specific event, although ritual repetition has the distinctive capacity to transfigure what may be unpleasant, awkward, or embarrassing into something pleasant, formulaic, and honourable.”²²³ Repetition of the procession solidifies the Membership of the Guild year after year by allowing Members to share an experience, as well as displaying their fellowship to the larger public. Thus, the swearing in process and subsequent procession serves as a highly unifying authentic ritual practice in the Taylors’ Company.

Guild fellowship is further solidified through the Taylors’ annual dinners. Dinners are a necessary authentic tradition, as they strengthen the social network, but are one of the more critiqued aspects of Guild tradition. Rosser gives an example: “At annual feast, more than at any other time of the year, the members of a guild would gather in one place to assert their solidarity. Feasting and drinking were, indeed, regarded as defining activities of the guilds...A clerical opponent of fraternities in the thirteenth century remarked caustically that: ‘if it were not for the

220 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 66.

221 York Merchant Taylors Interview #18.

222 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 197.

223 Trigg, *Shame and Honor*, 20.

feasting, few or none would come.”²²⁴ But although the Guild dinners are undoubtedly an enjoyable component of Guild Membership, they are also vital in encouraging the on-going participation of Members. One Clerk explained:

It is a characteristic of every Company that one of the reasons it works so well is because we do create this fraternity of people who enjoy working with each other. Because there are paid staff, and you’re talking to two of them, and then there are the Membership who do quite a lot of work, but they do it pro bono. And part of the way of thanking them for the work they do is to bring them together and give them opportunities to socialise together. So that they feel comfortable with the work they do subsequently.²²⁵

From this statement, it is clear that not only does the authentic tradition of feast continue to foster feelings of fellowship as it has done since its medieval origins, but it is a vital component in maintaining the other duties of the guild. The Taylors must enjoy their Membership, and feel a sense of fellowship and solidarity in order to invest in the reciprocal relationship and apply their knowledge, skills, and resources both to the care of the Hall, and the charitable engagement of the Guild. Rosser further illuminates this idea:

More than an aspirational symbol, the feast was the collective embodiment of the guild in action. While its formal aspects lent it a ritualized dimension, we should be wrong to segregate the guild dinner from the everyday lives of its participants. Rather than an emblem of peace, or a symbol of harmony, it makes better sense of the historical record to see the occasion as a distinctive social process, in the course of which novel interactions between members could be negotiated. The feast’s defining rhetoric of honourable equality and commensality enabled new relationships to be forged, often between participants of different background or economic status. Meanwhile, the element of formality—which, while it varied greatly in degree, was vital to the event: this was a *special* dinner—invested the occasion, and its accompanying social exchanges and expressions of religious ideals, with a dignity and prestige with which individual participants could dress themselves as they stepped back into the quotidian world.²²⁶

The annual dinners within the Taylors and other guilds serve relatively the same functions as during the Middle Ages, which causes each feast to engage the passage of time as something

224 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 119.

225 Interview with Richard Winstanely.

226 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 122.

circular, layered, rather than a linear progression. The dinners create a distinct Guild identity both in both their historicism, and their cultivation of fellowship, which subsequently enables the survival of the Company and promotes the continuation of other contemporary functions.

The discussion of Membership in the Taylors necessitates an investigation of one invented tradition: the admission of women. Throughout my conversations with the Taylors, Members had a tendency to discuss the admission of women both as a recent development in the Company, as well as an historic tradition. For example: “When I became a Member, and when I was Master, too, there were no lady Members. That doesn’t mean to say there never had been.”²²⁷ “I’m pretty sure it was 2006. But [Dobson had] hoped—he’d been Master the year before, and he’d hoped to do in his year. But clearly he was seeking to address this imbalance of the genders, and he told me at the time that he believed in medieval days there had been many Guildswomen, but that it had lapsed.”²²⁸ “But of course after ladies were introduced back into the guilds—because in the Guild, originally there were lady Members...of course what was found is all the texts of the original Ordinances of the Company, in other words the rules of the Guild didn’t apply any gender to it. So they were ‘Members,’ never referred to as ‘male Members’ or...it was open, and of course there were lady Members.”²²⁹ This tendency to explain modern Membership practices via historic precedent embodies the very fabric of Hobsbawm’s invented tradition, “responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations.”²³⁰ Rosser substantiates the Taylors’ claims that women were, at one time, admitted into the medieval guilds,²³¹ though he denies that women’s membership was entirely equal to their male counterparts.²³² However, the Members’ comments which historicise the recent adaptation of Membership policy shows the desire to both maintain tradition while responding to the contemporary atmosphere. Incorporation of women into previously male organisations is a conversation being had in other medieval companies, such as the Order of the Garter. Trigg describes Queen Elizabeth II’s admission of women into the Order in 1987, saying:

227 York Merchant Taylors Interview #13.

228 York Merchant Taylors Interview #5.

229 York Merchant Taylors Interview #1.

230 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 1-2.

231 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 111.

232 Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 177.

The changing status of women in the Order constitutes a substantial challenge to the Order's abiding conception of itself as an enduring company of chivalric brothers. Begent and Chesshyre's comments, however, encapsulate the insiders' sympathetic view of the capacity of Western ritual traditions and institutions...to 'evolve,' always in the direction of positive improvement, to reflect social change and answer the insistent imperatives of modernity for constant renewal.²³³

The modernisation of the Order and in guilds embodies a larger discussion about what is lost or gained through the evolution of social practices in an historical institution. While both the Taylors and Order express desires to remain current, they must balance contemporary adaptations with their historic identities. Trigg articulates: "Through much of the Order's history, the medieval is simultaneously called up into the present, as the authorizing foundation of traditions that can be practised now, and sent back into the past, as a history that explains the distant origins of current practice, and that can simply be superseded by newer traditions."²³⁴ I have to wonder if the same evolutionary practices regarding women's inclusion would occur in the Taylors if they lacked historical precedent. In one Taylor's memories of the changing policy, he described:

Remember membership is all linked to a big argument about women – the bringing in of female members. I did a lot of work on that, going through all the background; Barrie Dobson was a great help here, because he reads these ancient documents with ease and I can remember quite vividly, the triumph of suddenly realising that there is absolutely no sexual reference in any of the original documents about membership...In the end the dispute imploded because people realised that it was the Victorians who turned the Company into an all male club during the 19th century.²³⁵

The description of the policy change suggests that women were readmitted because of historical precedent, which also raises the question if this precedent had not existed, and if the Taylors had always been a strictly male institution, would the Taylors today have been able to modify their Membership practices? Would women be allowed into the Company today? One can only speculate. However, the Victorian's invented tradition of keeping women out of the Membership lacked historical precedence, and played on the social mood of the times. It seems possible, then,

233 Trigg, *Shame and Honor*, 167.

234 Trigg, *Shame and Honor*, 95.

235 "Some of John Baily's Memories."

that the Taylors' Membership today would opt for their tradition of remaining societally relevant by admitting women, though certainly being able to cite specific historical references may have allowed this adaption to happen more harmoniously.

The rituals and ceremonies performed in the Taylors are surviving elements of genuine tradition that prove to be as important as invented traditions in providing stability and historical validity to the Company. Again, Hobsbawm says of genuine tradition: "where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented."²³⁶ Therefore, the ceremonial aspects of the guild which solidify fellowship have remained pertinent and effective methods of unification, largely due to the spiritual foundations of the Guild which enable Members to trust each other, as well as the social network the Guild provides. Conversely, the description of the admission of women by the Taylors and other similar institutions shows how invented traditions are used to facilitate modern changes. Additionally, Hobsbawm's articulations of genuine and invented tradition are complicated as genuine traditions, such as patrimony and performance of historic rituals, are used in new ways, such as to connect modern Taylors to their familial past and future, and allow Members to become living history. Therefore, fellowship in the Taylors both validates and expands Hobsbawm's definitions of tradition.

Conclusion: The Merchant Taylors and the Capacity for Change

"The Livery Companies are part of that foundation, the fabric of British society that is an insurance policy against disruptive, violent and damaging change. Because of that, Livery Companies can never be ahead of change in society; they've always got to be reflective of society, but they can never be trendsetters, if you like, so they'll always be perceived as being somewhat behind the times...I like to express it that their values, their ethos are timeless."²³⁷

Within the York Merchant Taylors, as well as other guilds and Livery Companies, there is a tension between the organisation as a steadfast and consistent historic institution, and its ability to adapt to the changing needs of the modern day. The balance between tradition and innovation, between antiquated and germane, is something that must be continually evaluated and discussed within the guilds. But this begs the question: do guilds have the capacity to change

²³⁶ Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 8.

²³⁷ Interview with Paul Jagger.

and evolve, or does evolution negate their fundamental identities as historic and stable institutions? In part, Members agree to the traditional and potentially restrictive rules and regulations by swearing their oath and electing to be part of this voluntary institution. Alfred Kieser enforces this point. He says:

Changing goals or practices is extremely difficult...In exchange for money and other incentives, the members of the organization agree to accept the organization's rules...When the members of formal organizations do not react by leaving—by withdrawing their resources—they implicitly accept organizational procedures that may not correspond directly to their needs...Formal organizations are effective because they use exchange relationships to link the individuals' aims of maximizing utility and the organizational goals in a flexible yet highly stable manner.²³⁸

Members pay a fee to the Taylors, pay to attend events, and donate their time, knowledge and resources for the benefit of the Guild. In doing so, and by continuing to provide these resources, they are implicitly accepting the rules and regulations of the Guild, even if these practices may seem antiquated. Further, the historic stability that the guilds provide would be negated if these organisations were subject to easy and quick change. Their strength is in their immovability, particularly given the survival of several genuine traditions, in addition to Hobsbawm's articulation of the popularity of invented tradition during times of great turmoil.²³⁹ Within the guilds, this sentiment was echoed: "I think they just like the tradition more than anything else, and the history that goes with it. Because they haven't changed really that much—of course, in outward appearances they have, but they are still fundamentally all quite old fashioned membership organisations, and they are very ancient, and a lot of people are attracted by it."²⁴⁰ Another Member articulated specifically the tension that exists between innovation and stability: "The Company's been around 600 years...and it shouldn't change quickly because otherwise it—as things in today's life change quickly, then things are lost forever. So it's a really good thing that the Company takes a long time to decide on certain things, because it means then that there's not a knee-jerk reaction to anything in particular."²⁴¹ The tradition and unchanging nature

238 Alfred Kieser, "Organizational, Institutional, and Societal Evolution: Medieval Craft Guilds and the Genesis of Formal Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 34 (1989): 547.

239 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 4-5.

240 Interview with Jonathan Bourne-May.

241 York Merchant Taylors Interview #9.

of the guilds is its appeal and its safeguard against destruction. The Members' statements show the value and appeal of the traditional structure, and the investment of Members' resources enters them into a social contract by which they accept the nature of the Guild, whether or not their traditions are suitable for the modern era.

Trigg specifically discusses the problems that may arise from making changes within a medieval organisation. As it pertains to the Order of the Garter, she says: "Every time the Sovereign or a chapter of the Garter considers making changes to its practices or traditions, he or she must confront or displace its problematic medieval origins."²⁴² Changing the nature of the guild has the potential to undermine its historic origins, which are its very foundations and guiding principles in the modern day. The appeal and survival of medieval guilds and Livery Companies are in large part because of their historic origins and capacity to memorialise members within an historic institution. The preservation movement, too, idealises the unaltered nature of historic landmarks as authentic sites of national identity. Further, the Guild's history provides them with guiding principles for their contemporary functions such as charitable engagement. To disrupt these principles with modern adaptations runs the risk of disrupting the very structure of the guild, and displacing identity. One Taylor articulated: "I felt there was no reason for change for change sake. Change should only be introduced if there was really good reason. I much preferred the Company to run on traditional lines. As an ex-Clerk, you always know that tradition works, and that change may not."²⁴³ In this way, the very nature of the guilds is resistant to change and innovation, as it gleans its strength from authentic tradition.

On the other hand, modern manifestations of ancient guilds use their history as the basis for adaptation through invented tradition. Hobsbawm explains: "adaptation took place for old uses in new conditions and by using old models for new purposes. Old institutions with established functions, references to the past and ritual idioms and practices might need to adapt this way."²⁴⁴ Hobsbawm also suggests that since the 20th century, people may be more inclined to adapt traditions to meet the needs of modernity, being less rigorously committed to "what is done" than previous generations.²⁴⁵ Consequently, organisations today may be more inclined to turn to invented tradition to balance the past and present, rather than strictly adhering to the ways

242 Trigg, *Shame and Honor*, 196.

243 York Merchant Taylors Interview #17.

244 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 5.

245 Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 11.

of the past. The Drapers' Clerk explained: "This Company, I think, is able to be so forward-leaning because it takes great comfort in the tradition it finds itself in."²⁴⁶ By this assessment, these organisations' traditions are the very foundation that allows them to be innovative, adaptive, and progressive. Invented tradition provides precedent and foundation for change, rather than inhibiting adjustment for modern situations. According to Trigg, the balance between past and present is layered, not simply an oscillation between medieval and modern. She explains:

The medieval content of the fetish and its rituals actually lives on today as tradition, but that it is at the same time reformed in terms of modern sensibilities and temporalities. It is thus both synchronic *and* diachronic. The Order of the Garter sometimes appears in medieval guise, then, but for most of its history, its clothes, feasts, and processions offer a layered mixture of inherited tradition, contemporary fashion, and deliberate revivalism. Amid such contradictory markers of multiple temporalities, the medievalism of the Garter is manifested as a kind of 'paramedieval' whereby its medieval origins sit 'alongside it and within it as a trace, a simultaneous presence and absence.'²⁴⁷

In the Taylors, identity as a medieval institution in the present day is, by its very nature, a product of adaptation. The Taylors are not solely a medieval institution, or solely a modern institution. They are part of an on-going negotiation of the culmination of their history until this point. Their traditions, functions, historic identity and modern identity provide stability and the capacity to be transformed in the context of their social, political, and economic atmospheres. In summation, even if the Taylors may appear at one moment in time to be resistant to change, this is not indicative of their fundamental character but rather the modern manifestation of their historic character.

Ultimately, there is a great deal of testimony to the fact that guilds and Livery Companies are more adaptive in their traditions than one might assume at first glance, which has subsequently enabled their survival. The Livery Committee phrases it thus:

However conservative they may have appeared to outsiders, they have proved to have the inner strength and wisdom to renew themselves and adapt to changing times, without losing their essential characteristics: concern for others and the desire to maintain the best of their traditions. They have found strength in

246 Interview with Richard Winstanley.

247 Trigg, *Shame and Honor*, 12.

diversity, each company having a life of its own, whilst sharing common values of fraternity and fellowship.²⁴⁸

The fundamental values of the guilds and Livery Companies, combined with their historic stability, have allowed them to transform to the times in which they are situated. And rather than modernise the Company beyond recognition, the adaptations often reinforce and emphasise the history itself. The Livery Committee goes on: “ If they were to survive, they would have to embrace the modern world and its ‘altered circumstances and necessities’, as a radical MP put it. This led to many of the companies renewing contact with their former trades and crafts. The wheel had come full circle.”²⁴⁹ Therefore, even in its innovations, the Taylors manage to pay tribute to their history. Tradition is a fundamental component of medieval guilds, but invented tradition allows them to maintain their historic ties while responding to the needs of the day. Today, the Taylors must balance the pressures both of preservation as well as public access, and come to terms with modernising their Membership in accordance with contemporary socio-political demands. The Taylors, like other historic institutions, grapple with the extent to which their genuine traditions provide stability, and where they inhibit progress. Where these types of traditions fail, invented traditions respond to demands for change in order for the Company to survive and continue to perform its historic functions for Members, the public, and the nation itself. Invented tradition provides an illusion of continuity, allowing the Taylors to survive as an historic organisation. Historic institutions prove to be necessary social organisations, by providing Members with a social network and historic contextualisation.

One can only examine the contemporary character of a medieval guild at a moment in time. The modern manifestation of the guild is a reflection of the contemporary atmosphere in which it is situated, as well as how that particular society relates to the past more generally. The Merchant Taylors at the beginning of the 21st century have stabilised their Membership, repaired their Hall, and established a contemporary identity that depicts them as an active and business-focused institution. Their connection to tailoring is not inherent, but chosen. The Taylors’ historic identity provides guidance for their modern manifestations of charity, and presents them with, as the Clothworkers’ Clerk termed it, “a honed forward-focus.”²⁵⁰ The Guild’s ability to

248 *City Livery Companies*, 9.

249 *City Livery Companies*, 6.

250 Interview with Jocelyn Stuart-Grumbar.

innovate and make itself adaptable to the modern era is vital in enabling its survival. Invented tradition therefore allows the Taylors, as well as other organisations in similar quandaries, with precedent to make the necessary adjustments while maintaining stability in eras of vast societal change. Therefore, the York Merchant Taylors, as well as the other ancient guilds and Livery Companies in England prove to be both stable and traditional institutions that maintain relevancy in the modern era.

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