

## The Sergeants

By Past Steward John Carnaby and Past Master Peter Brunner

No, not the Sergeant Plumbers, such as Abraham Greene and John Embree, but instead a family containing two generations of women plumbers.

Joseph Sergeant, the son of a draper, was apprenticed as a plumber in 1656. He was admitted by the Company to the freedom in April 1664, and by 1674 he had become, and was paying quarterage as, a shopkeeper. (This entitled him to take an apprentice.)

He married Sarah, probably around 1664 to 1667, and they had three children. Of particular interest to us is the third child, also called Sarah, who was born in 1675.

By 1692 Joseph had his plumber's workshop at No 16 Frying Pan Alley, which was within the parish of St. Giles', Cripplegate. The Alley was situated to the west of the present St. Alban's Tower, Wood Street and is now called St. Alban Court.

Joseph died in 1697. Under his will he left twenty pounds to his son Thomas, five pounds to his married daughter Mary, and forty pounds, a very significant sum, to his daughter Sarah.

Joseph's apprentice Thomas Watson was turned over to his widow Sarah on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1698. This accorded entirely with normal practice. Sarah duly paid quarterage to the Company as a shopkeeper's widow.

What was perhaps unusual was that Sarah took a string of apprentices: Andrew Phillips in June 1704, Samuel Gray in September 1711, William Aldritt in December 1714, and John Urmeston in June 1721.

The land tax records show that Sarah Sergeant lived in Frying Pan Alley from 1710 to 1723, after which the premises were occupied by her daughter. Later still they were occupied by two of those apprentices, William Aldritt and John Urmeston.

In 1723 Sarah, the widow, died of old age. She was buried at St. Giles' Cripplegate on 9th June 1723. What is of especial interest is that her then apprentice, John Urmeston, was not quickly turned over to another master, as would have been the normal practice. This suggests strongly that he was already effectively working for Sarah, the daughter.

On 20<sup>th</sup> September 1724 Sarah, the daughter, at the ripe age of 49, entered the stamped book of the Company's freedoms, by patrimony. See the attached Freedom Certificate. The

significance of this is that she was the first woman to have been admitted to the freedom since the Court records began, in 1621.

A year later, on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1725, Sarah paid the standard 40 shillings and was admitted by the Company as a shopkeeper.

Why did Sarah take these steps, of applying for the freedom by patrimony and subsequently admission as a shopkeeper? Probably to regularise her position within the Company.

Sarah died on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1726, whilst living in Frying Pan Alley. Her will of 1726 demonstrated that she was clearly a wealthy woman. Among several bequests she left ten pounds to her “servant” John Urmeston, for mourning.

Within three weeks of her death John Urmeston was turned over to William Aldritt for the remainder of his apprenticeship.

Act infra Lib  
St. Gilberts Cyp



L. J.

### Chamber of LONDON.

*Sarah Sijpant* - the <sup>Daug<sup>r</sup></sup> Son of *Joseph Sijpant* - Citizen and *Plumber* of LONDON, desires to be admitted into the Freedom of this City by Patrimony, in the Company of *Plumbers* - ; the Father's Copy is in the Book Mark'd with the Letter , and bears Date the 27 - Day of *April* - in the 10<sup>th</sup> - of *Cha<sup>r</sup>l<sup>s</sup> 2<sup>d</sup>* - and in the Year of our LORD, 1664  
46.

WE declare, upon the Oaths we severally took at the Time of our Admission into the Freedom of this City, That *Sarah Sijpant* is the <sup>Daug<sup>r</sup></sup> Son of *Joseph Sijpant*, Citizen and *Plumber of Lond*; and, That he was born in lawful Wedlock, after the Admission of his Father into the Freedom of this City; and, That he is his Son so reputed and taken to be, and so we all say,

*Ch<sup>r</sup> Ford* } *East Cheap*  
*Thos Walklate* } *Plumber*  
*Robert Nockell* } *Beadle*  
*Godard* } *Smith, foild Barer*  
*Willm. Hall* } *Goldsmith, Little Brittain*  
*Phillip Harris* } *Ward; " Boarwick Lane*  
*Dan Dinsley* } *Plumber, —*