

MICHAEL V COOPER

6: THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF PLUMBERS

Its connections to the churches of St Magnus the Martyr and St Michael Crooked Lane

The church of **St Magnus the Martyr** is the church which the Worshipful Companies of Fishmongers and of Plumbers regard as their own. The connection is made clear by the modern stained-glass windows on the north side of the church by Alfred L Wilkinson (1899-1983), which bear the arms of these two companies.

Alfred Wilkinson trained at St Martin's School of Art in London before working with his father, Horace Wilkinson (1866-1957), who was frequently employed by the architect William Douglas Carøe (1857-1938). Carøe was Master of the Plumbers' Company no less than 10 times (from 1905 to 1907 and 1913 to 1920). The windows were dedicated by the Bishop of London on 30 October 1959, a month before the death of The Revd Henry Joy Fynes Clinton (1875-1959), who was Rector of St Magnus from 1921 to 1959 and Master of the Plumbers' Company from 1941 to 1943. His successor as Rector, The

Revd A J Colin B Gill (1905-1983), was also Master of the Company (in 1975/6). The patronage of the living, however, is in the hands of the Diocesan Patronage Board, not the Plumbers.

The current Cardinal Rector, The Revd Philip Warner, is also both a liveryman of and the chaplain to the Company, which holds its annual Election and Carol services in the church. The Company also attends the Sunday Eucharist closest to the feast of its patron saint, St Michael the Archangel, as well as services to mark special occasions. One such was on 16 March 1973, when the Court attended a service at St Magnus to mark the opening of the new London Bridge by HM The Queen. Another was on 3 March 2009, when the Bishop of London consecrated a new ring of 12 bells cast by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. The treble bell, dedicated to St Michael and inscribed *sancte michael ora pro nobis*, was the gift of the Plumbers' Company.

An older stained-glass window bearing the arms of the Plumbers' Company can also be seen on the north side of the church, at the western end. This dates from 1671 and came from the post-Fire Plumbers' Hall in Chequer Yard, Bush Lane, which was demolished in 1863 to make way for Cannon Street railway station. A commemorative plaque was placed at the main entrance to the station in 1983, and a statue of a Plumber's Apprentice was erected on the station concourse in 2011 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the granting of the Company's Royal Charter. A fireplace from the old Hall was re-erected in the Vestry House of St Magnus.

From the earliest times the Company worshipped at **St Michael Crooked Lane**. The Company was officially granted arms in 1588, including a crest comprising 'a fountain argent garnished on the top with an Archangel holding a sword and balance'. These charges also appear on the Company's heraldic badge granted in 1925. The Company historically regulated weights used by plumbers in the City and marked them with the figure of St Michael.

When St Michael Crooked Lane was demolished in 1831 to make way for the new London Bridge, the parish was united to that of St Magnus, which became the Company's church. However, the Company retains ➔



a strong link with St Michael: the Company's year ends at Michaelmas and its highest award to liverymen is the St Michael Medallion, instituted in 1951.

The origins of the plumbing craft can be traced back to Roman times when lead was used for piping, culverts and conduits. In the Middle Ages, plumbers were active in ensuring that the roofs of cathedrals, castles and other large buildings were waterproofed by lead. Stow records that Leadenhall belonged in 1309 to Sir Hugh Nevill, and a legal document of 1321 records that:

'The jurors present that Richer of Refham [and 17 others], since the summons of the Eyre, made an assembly at the Leaden Hall on Cornhill [Aulam Plumbatam super Cornhull (sic)], and leagued themselves together mutually to maintain the confederacy made previously in the City by John of Wengrave.'

The recorded history of the Plumbers' Company and its members predates even the award of Ordinances in 1365. The Corporation of London's early 14c Letter Books record the enrolling of apprentice plumbers, and the following complaint was lodged against plumbers in the parish of **St Clement Eastcheap:**

'A complaint made to the Mayor, Recorder and Aldermen, by John Walkot, Richard Scut, Thomas Clencke and others of Candelwykstrete and of St Clement's



Lane in Estchepe, of noxious fumes arising from certain plumbers carrying on smelting operations in a place called 'Woodhawe' in the parish of St Clement and proceeding thereon.'

Arrangements for the governance of the Plumbers' Company are also recorded:

'24th Jan, 38 Edward III [1364-5] Richard atte Dycke and Thomas Beauchamp elected to survey and examine the mistery of Plumbers and see that it be well governed and present misdoers to the Mayor and Aldermen without concealment.'

The word 'mystery', meaning a guild of craftsmen, is itself of 14c origin, being derived from the Latin ministerium (occupation) and minister (official).

The Company had a Hall in Anchor Lane from 1532, when it was a tenant of the Vintners' Company. The first separatist congregation, who called themselves 'Puritans' or 'Unspottyd Lambs of the Lord', was discovered at Plumbers' Hall on 19 June 1567. The Company moved to its own Hall in Chequer Yard in 1638



Peter Cheesman and Phil Mead (right), both recipients of the St Michael Medallion for their service to the Company

and, notwithstanding the Great Fire of 1666, occupied that site until 1863.

In November 1898 a memorial service was held at St Magnus for Alderman Sir Stuart Knill Bt (1824-1898), head of the firm of John Knill and Co, wharfingers, Lord Mayor (1892/93) and Master of the Plumbers' Company (1886/87 and 1892 to 1895). This was the first such service for a Roman Catholic taken in an Anglican church. Sir Stuart's son, Sir John Knill (1856-1934), also served as Alderman for the Ward of Bridge Within, Lord Mayor (1909/10) and Master of the Plumbers' Company (1902 to 1904 and 1909/10). Dame Fiona Woolf DBE DL, the present Master of the Company (2018/19), is also a past Lord Mayor.

A new lead planter for St Magnus has been cast by Peter Cheesman, Phil Mead and Jane Palmer (all Liverymen) and Deborah Cheesman and Eddie McCourt at the Plumbers' Company lead craft facility at Amberley Museum in West Sussex. Plumbing is often thought of in terms of pipework for drinking or waste water, but historically it is the complex craft of working with lead. The term dates from ancient times and is derived from the Latin word for lead, *plumbum*. ♁

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