

THE ORIGINS OF THE COMPANY ITS AIMS AND COMPOSITION

The ancient Craft Guilds in the City of London developed alongside the framework of the Church. The origins of these Guilds were as much religious as for the protection of trade, and for this The ancient Craft Guilds in the City of London developed alongside the framework of the reason all ancient City Livery Companies have a religious foundation which finds expression in many of the Company mottoes, as in the case of the Plumbers' Company:

"IN GOD IS ALL OUR HOPE"

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the heart of the community in the City of London was the Parishes. From 1200 to 1900 there were 99 Parishes within the City. The average Parish covered an area of 3¹/₂ acres and had about 60 to 70 householders representing up to 300 parishioners. The Churches were the worshipping centres of small groups of the community, and many were dedicated to the Saints of trading countries, for example St Magnus and St. Olav of the Vikings and St Clements of the Danes.

The first Craft Guilds emerged in the twelfth century. The Guilds represented groups of men with a common profession. Thereafter they began to acquire Guildhalls. Initially the religious, social and charitable functions of the Guilds flowed together with the Parishes, but in the course of time the balance of power shifted from the Churches to the Guildhalls, and it was not surprising to find the Common Council established in 1376, to which each Craft elected between 2 and 6 men to consult with the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs.

The origins of the Fellowship of Plumbers are uncertain, but as early as 1365 the Fellowship was in a sufficiently strong position to prepare Ordinances which were presented to the Aldermen for their approval. The Ordinances indicated that it was the desire of the craftsmen that their work should be well done. The First Article provided that the plumber should submit himself to examination by the best and most skilful men in the trade in order that he might be certified so that "the trade might not be scandalised, or the commonalty damaged and deceived by folk who do not know their trade". In common with other Guilds, the Fellowship of Plumbers had two elements, the wider Guild and the restricted Livery, corresponding respectively with Freemen and Liverymen today.

From the earliest times the Church of the Company was St. Michael's, Crooked Lane, and for this reason the Patron Saint of the Company is St. Michael. It is now traditional for the Court to hold a dinner as close as possible to the feast of St Michael, the 29th September. The Company's Halls stood on a site in Chequer Yard, Bush Lane, close to the Church of St Michael's, Crooked Lane. This Church served as the Church not only of the Plumbers' Company but also of the Fishmongers' and Coopers' Companies.

The first of the Company's Halls in Chequer Yard was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. The Hall was rebuilt in 1669 and was occupied by the Company until 1863 when it was demolished 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 Plumbers' Apprentice was erected on the concourse in 2011 to celebrate the Company's 400th Anniversary of its Royal Charter. In the meantime, the Church of St. Michael's, Crooked Lane, had suffered a similar fate. That too had been destroyed in the Great Fire and rebuilt by Wren. During the construction of Rennie's

London Bridge in the years 1830/31, the Church of St. Michael's Crooked Lane was united with St. Magnus the Martyr in Lower Thames Street, and since that date St. Magnus has been the Company's Church. The Rector of St. Magnus is still also the Rector of St. Michael's. A finely carved fireplace from the Company's last Hall stands in the vestry of St. Magnus, and two of the windows in the Church display the Company's Arms.

The Company received its Grant of Arms by Letters Patent from Clarenceux King of Arms in the reign of Elizabeth I, and this bears the date 24 November 1588. This original Grant is held on the Company's behalf at the Guildhall.

Past Master Young presented to the Company in 1985 a facsimile copy, on vellum, of this Grant, the copy being certified a true and faithful copy by Sir Colin Cole, Garter King of Arms, on 18th October 1985. This facsimile is held in the Clerk's Office.

When Peter Lerwill was Master, he gave to the Company supporters to the Coat of Arms depicting a Master and Beadle *habited proper*. These supporters were presented to the Company at the Mansion House on the occasion of the Annual Banquet by Peter Gwynn-Jones, CVO, the Garter Principal King of Arms on the 17th March 2003.

One of the early activities of the Court of the Company was to see that no one should work as a plumber unless he had been apprenticed for seven years at the craft, and in this they were only carrying out a statutory requirement of the time of Queen Elizabeth I, which was not repeated until 1814.

In the Eighteenth Century, in common with many other Livery Companies in London, the Company took less interest in its craft, but there was a revival of activity in the Nineteenth Century, and in 1883 the Company inaugurated a voluntary system for the National Registration of Plumbers.

A Congress was held, over which the Master of the Company presided at the National Health Exhibition, and the registration scheme became established. A Register was instituted in 1886. The threefold object of the registration was to enable the public to recognise those plumbers who had qualified by examination and who had by signed agreement undertaken the obligation imposed upon them by their registration; to encourage the development of apprenticeship and technical education in accordance with modern conditions and to keep up the standard of plumbers' workmanship and practice in the interests of public health. Registered plumbers were entitled to place the letters "R.P." after their names - a privilege which was and is highly valued.

The Register was managed for the Company by the Registered Plumbers' Association, but when that body was merged with the Institute of Plumbing in January 1970, the Company readily agreed to relinquish its authority to issue Certificates of Registration and hand over its Register to the Institute.

The Company has retained its interest in the registration of plumbers by accepting an invitation to appoint two representatives to the Registration Council of the Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering each year.

Between 1975 and 1977 the Company strove to secure the Statutory Registration of Plumbers through the Plumbing Industry Working Group which was the inspiration of Past Master Ernest Haslam. Reluctantly the Company was obliged to accept that the climate for a scheme of Statutory Registration of Plumbers was unacceptable to the Government. However, through pressure from an all-party group of 40 Parliamentarians and the initiative of the Confederation for the Registration of Gas Installers in 1990 legislation was passed requiring that from 20th March, 1991 all gas fitters must be registered. The battle for the mandatory registration of plumbers continues, but with the support of the trade and industry a voluntary WaterSafe Installers Scheme was launched in 2013 under the chairmanship of Past Master Christopher Sneath.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, plumbing was limited to the provision of drinking water in London, as well as the provision of lead roofs and guttering. It was also responsible for checking the accuracy of lead weights, its officers empowered to search houses to check them. Over the intervening centuries, lead weights have been replaced by other metals. Plumbing has perforce adjusted its activities as the advent of the 19th century industrialisation posed its special problems. Plumbing nowadays embraces not only the provision of potable water, but its removal, sewage systems, public health, the gas industry and the water industry in all its modern complexities.