

Economic History

The London Weavers' Company

1600-1970

Alfred Plummer



ECONOMIC HISTORY

THE LONDON WEAVERS' COMPANY

BUSINESS HISTORY

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ALFRED PLUMMER

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The London Weavers' Company



The London Weavers' Company 1600-1970



Alfred Plummer

Honorary Librarian
to the Worshipful Company of Weavers



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To merry London, my most kindly nurse

Edmund Spenser, *Prothalamion* (1596)

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Preface



The history of the London Weavers' Company from the twelfth century to the close of the sixteenth century was written some forty years ago by Dr Frances Consitt. The present work continues the Company's history from 1600 to 1970, or, in other words, from the days of Elizabeth I to those of Elizabeth II. In this volume it has been my aim to present the Weavers' story not in isolation but in its historical setting, and to attempt to bring to life the small but pulsating world in which these London craftsmen lived and worked in good times and bad, through prosperous, cheerful days as well as through great public catastrophes and bitter private suffering. How far I have succeeded, if at all, the reader must judge.

I am grateful to the Worshipful Company of Weavers for the opportunity to undertake the research upon which this book is based, and in particular to Dr Lawrence Tanner, C.V.O., F.S.A., for taking the initiative during his term of office as Upper Bailiff in 1963-4, and thereafter for his unflagging interest in the progress of the work. My thanks are due to successive Upper Bailiffs and especially to the late John Patrick Early who, despite failing health, always gave the project staunch support. At a later stage Dr Tanner, Mr Richard Early and the Clerk of the Company, Mr Romilly Ouvry, read the completed draft and made some valuable constructive suggestions which I now acknowledge with thanks.

Among many other helpful people to whom I am indebted for their perfect courtesy and efficient service I must mention a number of librarians, archivists and keepers of records, such as those at the Guildhall Library, the Shoreditch Central Library, the Bethnal Green Museum and the Greater London Record Office. Also I must thank Miss Rose Dearman for permission to include among the illustrations the portrait of her father, Francis Dearman, who was one of the last of the Spitalfields silk weavers. Finally, I must thank the Company's Beadle, Mr John Jackson, and his wife for their active concern for my

Preface

comfort and sustenance whenever I was working at Weavers' House,
New Wanstead.

Woodford Green
Essex

A.P.

Abbreviations



Beaven, <i>Aldermen</i>	A. B. Beaven, <i>Aldermen of the City of London</i> (1913)
Bell, <i>Great Fire</i>	W. G. Bell, <i>The Great Fire of London</i> (2nd edn, 1951)
Brett-James, <i>London</i>	N. G. Brett-James, <i>The Growth of Stuart London</i> (1935)
B.M.Add. MS.	British Museum Additional Manuscript
Cal. S.P.	Calendar of State Papers
Campbell, <i>English Yeomen</i>	M. Campbell, <i>The English Yeomen in the Tudor and Early Stuart Age</i> (1942; English edn, 1960)
Campbell, <i>Tradesman</i>	R. Campbell, <i>The English Tradesman</i> (1747)
City of London Records:	
C.C.C. Proceedings	Minutes of the proceedings of the Court of Common Council
Journals	The Journals of the Court of Common Council
Remem.	The Remembrancia of the City of London
Repertories	The Repertories of the Aldermanic Bench
<i>D.N.B.</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
George, <i>London</i>	M. D. George, <i>London Life in the Eighteenth Century</i> (3rd edn, 1951)
<i>Hand-loom Weavers</i>	<i>Reports on the Condition of the Hand-loom Weavers</i> (1839-41)
H.O.	Home Office
Lardner, <i>Silk</i>	D. Lardner, <i>A Treatise on the Silk Manufacture</i> (compiled by G. R. Porter, 1831)
Maitland, <i>London</i>	W. Maitland, <i>The History of London</i> (1756)
P.C.C.	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
P.R.O.	Public Record Office
<i>Ribbon Weavers</i>	<i>Select Committee on Ribbon Weavers' Petitions</i> (1818)
S.P. Dom	State Papers Domestic

Abbreviations

Unwin, <i>Gilds</i>	G. Unwin, <i>The Gilds and Companies of London</i> (4th edn, 1963)
Unwin, <i>Ind. Org.</i>	G. Unwin, <i>Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries</i> (1904)
V.C.H.	<i>Victoria County History</i>

In London under James I



The London weavers in the seventeenth century lived in and around a crowded city, bustling and noisy, lying in a crude crescent along the north bank of the Thames from Wapping to Westminster. Its length was barely six miles and it was some two miles from north to south. Along the south bank of the river, linked to the City by London Bridge—the only bridge—lay Southwark, a pulsating extension of London, in shape like a finger and thumb pointing across marshes and meadows towards Kent and the Continent. The 'Stately Thames enriched with many a flood', gliding on 'with pomp of waters unwithstood', was then the City's main highway; the most safe and speedy of routes, much used by Londoners of all classes upon all occasions, commercial, social and ceremonial; and by visitors from abroad, many of whom came upstream from Gravesend by river ferry-boats.

The tidal estuary of the 'river of Thames', says Stow, is the best way, 'by which all kind of Merchandise be easily conveyed to London, the principal storehouse and staple of all commodities within this realm; so that omitting to speak of great ships and other vessels of burthen, there pertaineth to the cities of London, Westminster and borough of Southwark, above the number, as is supposed, of 2,000 wherries and other small boats, whereby 3,000 poor men, at the least, be set on work and maintained'.¹ All day and every day these small boats—the water-taxis of the seventeenth century—threaded their way between the busy hoys,² deep-laden lighters and moored merchant vessels, along and across the river, picking up and setting down passengers at the various stairs, piers and landing-stages. There were even ferries with platforms to take a coach and horses.

Elizabethan and Stuart London, though small by modern standards, was to the people of the seventeenth century an enormous city, both absolutely and relatively. By comparison with other cities and towns in the British Isles, London stood forth as fabulously rich and

In London under James I

populous. In 1597 a government document estimated that the City of London's rights to 'measurage of commodities' brought into the Port of London was worth as much as all similar rights throughout the whole of the rest of England.³ Another estimate is that, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, three-quarters of the country's foreign trade paid toll in the London customs house.⁴

At the turn of the century (*c.* 1600) London's population⁵—city, liberties and suburbs—was probably around 225,000 (or a quarter of a million if one includes Westminster, Lambeth and Stepney) distributed as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 *The population of London c. 1600*

<i>Area</i>	<i>No.</i>
The City within the walls	76,000
The suburbs 'without' the walls:	
(a) The Liberties of the City	113,000
(b) Out-parishes	36,000
(c) Westminster, Lambeth and Stepney	25,000
	250,000

No other city or town had one-tenth of that number of inhabitants. For instance, the City of Norwich with its out-parishes, a leading manufacturing centre in the seventeenth century, had, at most, 17,000 inhabitants,⁶ or less than one-fifteenth of the number in London and its environs. Furthermore, London's rate of growth was quite remarkable by comparison with the other cities and towns of the kingdom. Although the birth-rate in London was low and the death-rate appallingly high, because of frequent outbreaks of bubonic plague and other epidemics, the City and suburbs—especially the latter—were continually refilled by immigrants from the provincial towns and the countryside, far and near, and from continental countries, France and Holland in particular. The metropolis was a mighty magnet pulling people, including great numbers of young people,⁷ from every direction. It attracted men of status and substance as well as those seeking their fortunes; the affluent, the ambitious, the innocent boy-apprentices and the smart Alecs 'full of cozenage', as Shakespeare (the best eyewitness we could wish for) tells us:

Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such like Liberties of sin.

There were, also, refugees from persecution and from justice—'people of desperate fortunes'. 'At length they all to merry London came',

In London under James I

pushing and crowding in, 'an immense concourse of men and animals' multiplying the pressing evils of bad housing and primitive sanitation, pestilence, poverty and crime, and creating a perpetual nightmare for the authorities, both central and local. Only by continuous large-scale immigration could London's population have increased at such a rate that the estimated 250,000 of the year 1600 had become an estimated 320,000 by 1625, and 600,000 by the end of the century.⁸

In Elizabethan and early Jacobean times London remained essentially a medieval city in which noblemen, merchants, craftsmen and shopkeepers lived side by side, hard by the haunts of criminals and the hovels of the poor. It was just a jumble of buildings large and small, magnificent and mean; residential, industrial and commercial premises; public buildings; churches set in 'little green churchyard' burial grounds shaded by stately trees; and—to astonish the stranger—many 'fair gardens' like Sir John Hart's, where flowers and fragrant herbs and even fruit could be seen.⁹ All this (and much more) was tightly compressed within the ancient defensive wall, with its eight massive gates—Aldgate, Bishopsgate, Moorgate, Cripplegate, Aldersgate, Newgate, Ludgate and Bridge Gate. The monks and friars, it is true, had long disappeared from the streets, their great clusters of monastic buildings having been seized and turned to other uses.

The old walled city had overflowed to form a number of 'liberties'¹⁰ and suburbs which were for the most part nothing better than closely built, noisome slums, huddled immediately 'without' the walls,¹¹ extending outwards from the edge of the city ditch, which was originally some 200 feet broad and part of the medieval defences, but 'now of later time' (says Stow) '. . . is enclosed and the banks thereof let out for garden-plots, carpenters' yards, bowling allies and divers houses thereon built, thereby the city wall is hidden, the ditch filled up, [only] a small channel left, and that very shallow': in places it had become 'a filthy channel'.¹² The famous Dr William Harvey (1576–1657), discoverer of the circulation of the blood, lived in London during James I's reign and remarked upon 'the filth and offal . . . scattered about' and the 'sulphureous' coal smoke 'whereby the air is at all times rendered heavy, but more so in the autumn'.

Along the few main roads leading outwards from the City gates an unplanned riot of ribbon-development—houses, cottages, sheds and workshops of all sorts and sizes; many constructed of weatherboards—was slowly eating its way towards the nearest villages, such as Bethnal Green and Shoreditch to the north-east, Mile End to the east, and Bermondsey and Lambeth to the south. The result, on both sides of the principal thoroughfares, was a nightmarish maze of ill-paved or unpaved entries, yards, courts, alleys and tortuous, narrow lanes, in which all sorts of activities, legitimate, shady and downright criminal, were carried on. Some of the old mansions and larger houses,

In London under James I

abandoned to decay and dilapidation when, for any reason, their original owners moved away, were each divided into as many as twenty or thirty tenements, and soon became part of an unsavoury medley of ruinous rookeries, dirty lodgings, dram shops, inns, taverns and brothels. Coldharbour, the Earl of Shrewsbury's great mansion on the south bank, was demolished in 1600 and 'the site given up to small tenements at large rents'.¹³

In such liberties and suburbs—Cripplegate Without, Bishopsgate Without, Farringdon Without, Southwark—the majority of the respectable 'householders' were master craftsmen: weavers, felt-makers, tanners, wheelwrights, carpenters, coppersmiths, dyers, glovers and the like; each family, with servants and apprentices, all under the same roof, which usually covered their workshop and stores as well. The range and variety of London's crafts were a wonder to behold; and as the decades passed the demand for living and working accommodation was intensified by the incessant immigration of 'foreigners' from the provinces and 'strangers' (aliens) from the Continent.

One of the weavers' chief complaints was that 'most of the poorest sort of strangers are packed and thrust up with their whole families within divers . . . tenements . . . of very small and narrow compass. . . . Insomuch as the City and the Suburbs . . . are filled, pestered and much annoyed with many . . . troublesome and offensive Inmates.'¹⁴ All this resulted in rising rents which brought forth certain property 'developers'—carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers and chandlers—who saw a chance to make easy money by buying up the leases of premises occupied, often for many years past, by weavers and other craftsmen, and 'dividing of houses, erecting (upon new foundations) Sheds, Hovels and Cottages, putting into every room a family, to the great pestering of the City, Suburbs and places adjoining with Inmates, Aliens and Undersitters'.¹⁵

Such gross overcrowding in conglomerations of ill-ventilated wood-and-plaster dwellings, separated only by narrow lanes and alleys with kennels full of muck coursing down the middle; with polluted water supplies;¹⁶ with ditches and open sewers running this way and that, and laystalls heaped with rotting refuse in close proximity to the houses; all this was a terrible threat to public health, as the Weavers' Company told the Lord Mayor in 1632, for (they said) it 'brings with it an unavoidable danger to breed contagious and infectious diseases, if God should visit the same with any sickness or mortality'.¹⁷ They had, indeed, good reasons for their fears. The reign of James I was sandwiched between two severe outbreaks of bubonic plague (in 1603 and 1625) and there were a number of comparatively minor visitations in the intervening years. What neither the weavers nor anybody else knew was that the black rats that infested their houses and sheds

In London under James I

carried fleas, and these were the deadly distributors of 'the poor's plague', the 'great sickness', which so often struck down with swift 'spotted death' man, woman and child, regardless of rank or calling.

No doubt people's resistance and resilience were buttressed by the widespread interest in 'sports' and contests (accompanied, of course, by gambling), and by the nearness of the countryside. The London populace, high and low, gentry and journeymen, merchants and master craftsmen, loved a fight in any form: cock-fighting, bull- or bear-baiting, fencing with swords 'very little, if at all, blunter on the edge than the common swords are', or a furious fracas between traditional enemies such as men of rival occupations. The Thames watermen, toughened by their ancient trade and masters of the most lurid language, were in every way formidable opponents of those competing upstarts, the coachmen of the 'Hackney hellcarts' or 'four-wheeled tortoises' so detested by John Taylor, the Water Poet;¹⁸ the butchers had a reputation for truculence and a readiness to resort to violence (which is, perhaps, not surprising), and even the weavers occasionally had their militant moments.¹⁹

It was a community in which men and women alike ate and drank heartily whenever they could, and few were inhibited by prudery or over-conventionality. Laughter and song rose easily to the surface, but so, too, did 'a primitive delight in violence. . . . The physical conditions of life were not easy for anyone. Few anodynes were known and none . . . effective. . . . Familiarity with pain bred, in all classes, a certain stoicism, a deep acceptance of suffering as part of the necessary order of the world and a willingness to inflict it and to see it inflicted.'²⁰ But although the Cockney craftsmen were often quarrelsome and aggressive, they were not usually murderous either in deed or intent, and they rarely resorted to weapons more deadly than fists and sticks.

This was just as well, for there was everywhere much drinking and drunkenness. There were alehouses and taverns a-plenty, open at all hours. These—especially the taverns—were the pubs and clubs of the period, providing food and drink and a convivial setting for social intercourse, business deals and discussion of the politics of the day. There were noted houses such as the Mermaid, the Mitre, the Gaping Mouth, the Heaven and Hell, the Blew Postes, the Hole in the Wall, and a host of others of all sorts and sizes, fashionable, respectable, obscure, Bohemian, shady; most of them providing lodging chambers, dice-tables, shove-ha'penny boards, and boasting a generous kitchen and a well-stocked wine cellar.²¹

All medieval towns were naturally integrated with local agriculture and the neighbouring rural population. Town traders and craftsmen often hailed from farming families. Many a townsman of today was

but yesterday a boy roaming the fields and woods. The town craftsman knew something about tillage, and the countryman knew something of craftwork. The villages had their craftsmen as well as the towns. The London Weavers' records show that the sons of yeomen, husbandmen, market-gardeners and graziers 'of London', or Bermondsey, or Cripplegate, or Shoreditch or St Giles-in-the-Fields were often apprenticed to weaving. There was continual, day-by-day, hour-by-hour mingling of townfolk and country folk, many of whom were related. Hardly had the nightwatchman, with his dim horn-lantern, crept wearily homeward, when the early-morning street traders appeared, crying their wares—eggs, milk, butter and cream brought in from the nearby farms and fields by countrywomen, who either went from house to house or settled themselves with their baskets at every street corner and in any convenient niche. Then came the higglers bringing fresh vegetables, fruit and poultry.²²

But for this nearness of the countryside the state of public health would have been even worse than it was. On Sundays and the occasional holidays such as Whitsuntide, the young men with their sweethearts, and the older men with their wives and children, believing, like Thomas Tusser, that 'comfort with labour should sometimes be had', used to walk by pleasant rural paths to the 'villages out in the fields' to taste 'rural delights, such as cakes and cream and quarts of local beer', at 'Bednal Green' or Mile End or Islington; Paddington, Kennington, Battersea or Camberwell. Writing at the turn of the century, old John Stow tells us that 'on May day in the morning every man, except impediment, would walk into the sweet meadows and green woods, there to rejoice their spirits with the beauty and savour of sweet flowers and with the harmony of birds'.

In the eastern suburbs, as elsewhere, there were elm, poplar, lime, and other trees and a variety of wild flowers. The famous botanist and gardener, John Gerard, found pennyroyal growing wild 'in the common neare London called Mile Ende²³ about the holes and ponds thereof in sundry places from whence poore women bring plenty to sell in London Markets, and it groweth in sundry other commons neare London'. Other wild flowers were to be seen in and around Southwark, Bermondsey, Horsleydown²⁴ and Lambeth. But London was slowly spreading, and houses were pressing back, now here, now there, these rural fringes of the suburbs. Stow, writing of Hog Lane, which ran from 'Algate Without north towards St Mary Spittle without Bishopsgate', says that 'within these forty years²⁵ [it] had on both sides fair hedge rows of elm trees, with bridges and easy stiles to pass over into the pleasant fields, very commodious for citizens . . . to recreate and refresh their dull spirits in the sweet and wholesome air'; but it 'is now within a few years made a continual building throughout, of garden-houses and small cottages; and the fields on

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either sides be turned into garden plots, tenter yards, bowling alleys, and such like, from Houndes ditch in the west, as far as White Chappell, and further towards the east'.²⁶

The importance of fresh air, and 'free and open walks in the fields about the City', was recognised in Elizabethan times, and in 1593 an Act of Parliament forbade the enclosure (e.g. for building purposes) of any common or waste land within three miles of the City.²⁷ Moorfields, lying outside Moorgate, was then a swampy, smelly tract of waste ground, partly used as a tenter-ground for the drying of new-woven cloth. But during the decade 1605-15, the City Corporation, encouraged by the King, began to lay out Moorfields with paths and trees as a public open space 'of sweet ayres for Citizens to walk in'.²⁸

Against this backcloth and in this setting the London weavers lived and worked and made 'their exits and their entrances'. The Company's records, which give us a large number of weavers' addresses, show that they were congregated mainly in the liberties and suburbs. According to Stow, the weavers had gone from Candlewick Street, where at one time 'both sides the way was nothing but weavers' workshops',²⁹ their places having been taken by rich drapers and cloth merchants. But in Bishopsgate Without, sometimes referred to as the parish of St Botolph, Bishopsgate, weavers were very thick upon the ground, in alleys, yards and lanes with such picturesque names as Frying Pan Alley, Starlings Rents, Three Tun Alley, Black Bell Alley, Hog Lane,³⁰ Boar's Head Yard, Half Moon Alley, Wool-sack Alley off Gravel Lane, Chequers Alley, Bethlem, Primrose Alley and Petty France—a name which tells its own story.

Northwards, from Norton Folgate to Shoreditch, we find weavers, in gradually increasing numbers, in Coles Alley, Hore Alley and Swan Yard. Outside Aldgate and in Whitechapel weavers were working in Tongs Yard, Castle Street, Sixth Alley and Black Lion Yard. In Cripplegate Without both the 'freedom' part within the City's jurisdiction and the 'Lordship' part in the County of Middlesex were closely populated by weavers, who were to be found in such places as Blue Anchor Alley, Bloomer's Rents, Golding Lane, Bell Alley, Goat Alley, Grub Street, Three Leg Court leading off Whitecross Street, Red Cross Street, and spreading slowly along the south side of Old Street in the direction of Hoxton and Shoreditch.³¹ Around Moorgate weavers were to be found 'in Moor Lane backside Sugarloaf Court', in Cross Key Court and Little Moorfields.

Over the bridge, Southwark, otherwise known in civic circles as Bridge Ward Without, was administratively part of the City. It was London's popular amusement centre—a district of bear-baiting, fencing contests, inns, taverns and stews—'a naughty neighbourhood'. Here in 1614 arose, Phoenix-like, the new Globe Theatre described

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by John Chamberlain as 'the fairest that ever was in England'; and here in 1623 (as the same gossip reports):

The Spanish Ambassador is much delighted in bear baiting; he was last weeke at Paris Gardens, where they shewed him all the pleasure they could both with bull, beare and horse, besides Jackanapes; and then turned a white beare into the Thames, where the dogges baited him swimming, which was the best sport of all.³²

Southwark, however, played a more useful role, for it was an expanding industrial suburb, to which during many decades, cheap land and low rents had attracted weavers, feltmakers, shipwrights, sawyers, brewers, leather dressers, curriers, glovers and—in nearby Bermondsey—a colony of tanners.³³ Off the main streets were dozens of narrow alleys, some of them nameless; haphazard building had jumbled together tenements, workshops, storehouses, stables and wooden shacks in squalid confusion. Here was a large congregation of master weavers, journeymen and apprentices, natives and aliens, parents and children, some working and sleeping in a single garret or loom-shop.

The official lists of 1618 show fifty-four alien weavers—Dutch, French, German and even two Spaniards—in Southwark,³⁴ and there were, undoubtedly, much larger numbers of English weavers, both natives of London and its environs and 'foreigners' from the provinces, all engaged in various branches of the weaving trade. They were to be found at such addresses as Crucifix Lane, Barnaby Street, Wild's Rents in Long Lane, St Thomas's Court, Swan Alley, Deadman Place, Five Foot Lane, The Close in Maiden Lane, Horsleydown, and Swan Yard by St George's Church.³⁵ When, after a sharp internal struggle, the Weavers' Company revived and revised its Yeomanry in the reign of James I, the (reduced number) of sixteen young men 'below the Livery' were organised and allocated in the following districts or 'divisions': for Southwark, four; for Bishopsgate, Cripple-gate, Shoreditch and Whitechapel, three each. Later, under the Commonwealth, when 'representatives' of the Commonalty had to be chosen, the numbers attending from Southwark exceeded those from the other divisions.³⁶ In addition, nearly all the villages adjacent to London had a few weavers: Newington and Walworth, south of the Thames; and Mile End, Poplar, Hackney, Islington and Stepney to the north and east.

These seventeenth-century London weavers, working a twelve- or fourteen-hour day according to the season, manufactured a wide range of goods in wool, linen and silk. It was a time when weaving in the older materials, wool and linen, overlapped with the newer material, silk. The former had not yet 'gone out' of the trade, while

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silk had certainly 'come in' and was steadily increasing its share of the volume and value of the total output. In the heavy-woollen section there were some rug-makers, fustian weavers and feltmakers among the Company's members, although, strictly speaking, felt is not a woven material. There was always a steady demand for fustian, a cheap, hard-wearing, general-purpose woollen cloth, of which there were 'sundry sorts' (plain, corded, striped, chequered and tufted; some worn 'white' and some dyed), 'a thick, strong sort of goods' very suitable for everyday wear in warehouse or workshop, or by gentlemen who rode a great deal.³⁷

It is certain that a significant number of London fustian weavers—masters and journeymen—were at work at least as late as 1675–6.³⁸ Worsted weavers and weavers of linen—for example, towellings and tickings—are also mentioned in the Weavers' records early in the seventeenth century, and again early in the reign of Charles II, when the Weavers' Court ordered that the business (unspecified) concerning the linen weavers should be considered at the next Full Court. But a steady change-over to silk was probably taking place.³⁹ In 1611, in connection with the Company's need to raise money in order to subscribe capital for James I's proposed colonisation or 'plantation' of Ulster by non-Irish settlers, the Weavers' Company, by special arrangement with the City Corporation, sought to make free by redemption some thirty English weavers, 'foreign brethren' who (the record states) had served proper apprenticeships and had long 'used the craft' in the City and liberties. The records reveal the branches of the trade to which two-thirds of them belonged (see Table 1.2).⁴⁰

Excluding all the 'unspecified' weavers, and including the taffeta weavers in the silk group, we have: woollen, worsted, and fustian, four (no apprentices); linen, one (no apprentices); silk, fourteen (six apprentices). This serves to indicate, roughly, the trend towards expansion and specialisation in silk at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Some of the silk weavers specialised in broad weaving, while others made narrow wares such as ribbons, girdles, garterings, braids, and cords or laces, much used as fastenings for both men's and women's garments. Very light delicate fabrics, such as cobweb lawns and tiffanies—i.e. silk gauze—were made by some weavers, while others wove black heavy-dyed silk (commonly called London silk), taffetas and pure silk damasks for people of wealth and fashion—the *beau monde*.⁴¹ But this was not all. Before 1579 the sumptuary laws forbade any man under the degree of a knight's eldest son to wear a velvet jerkin, doublet or hose, or to use satin, damask, taffeta or grosgrain for cloaks, coats, gowns or other 'uppermost garments'. And no woman below the degree of knight's wife could legally wear velvet or silk embroidery or 'netherstocks of silk'. But increasing wealth among

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the minor gentry and major merchants led to some modification of the laws after 1580, followed by their gradual non-observance in the Stuart period, until, at least in the large towns, every wife felt free, as Thomas Fuller remarked, to set up 'a sail according to the keel of her husband's estate'.⁴²

Table 1.2 *The trend towards silk weaving*

<i>Master weavers</i>		<i>Apprentices</i>
Fustian	2	None
Worsted	1	None
Woollen	1	None
Linen	1	None
Silk	9	None
Silk	1	1
Silk	1	2
Silk	1	3
Tuft-taffeta	2*	None
Unspecified	1	2
Unspecified	10	None

* Sometimes written 'Tuftaffety'; a taffeta with a tufted pile.

The humble folk—tradesmen's wives and children, servant maids and the like—were not slow to imitate their 'betters', and the result was a large and expanding aggregate demand, not only for silks, but for various sorts of half-silks and slight-silks in which silk yarn was used, usually as warp, with cotton or worsted or linen as weft. In some of these fabrics the silk yarn was woven so as to create a decorative effect. Such generally useful and comparatively cheap materials—the prices reflecting the qualities and silk content—were much in demand for men's waistcoats, women's 'petty coats', children's clothing, and many sorts of linings and soft furnishings. They 'formed a large part of the London weavers' production and almost the whole of that of Norwich . . . even the cheapest (surviving) samples are pleasant to handle and are dyed in good colours'.⁴³

The proper manufacturing procedure in silk weaving, according to the customs of the City of London and the Weavers' Company, is described in the Company's records.

A Merchant Silkman may deliver silk [yarn] or other stuff unto any Master Weaver that is a freeman, or other which is admitted a Master by the Bailiffs, Wardens and Assistants of the Weavers' Company. And the silk or other stuff ought to be delivered by weight, and being wrought or fashioned, the owner may receive the same again by weight, and pay the weaver for

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the workmanship or fashioning thereof, either by the pound or by the dozen, as both parties can agree, allowing sufficient waste upon every pound.

Alternatively, the merchant or silkman might sell the raw material to the weaver at a certain price and buy back the woven fabric at a price high enough to recompense the weaver for his work.⁴⁴

Orris weaving was another important and, for the master weavers, lucrative section of the London weaving trade. This was the manufacture of the gold and silver lace and braid so lavishly used, except in the dullest days of the Commonwealth, to decorate the clothes of persons of rank and fortune—on hats and coats, and even 'shoestrings edged with gold, and spangled garters worth a copyhold'. It was an exceedingly ancient art, as we know from the discovery of a remnant of gold-wire lace, 'black and much decayed, of the old lozenge pattern', found in an Iron Age barrow near Wareham in Dorset.⁴⁵ In England gold and silver lacemaking reached such a high point of perfection in the early Stuart period that the customs officers confidently expected the revenue from imports to 'decay'. Indeed, in James I's reign English gold lace was actually exported to India.⁴⁶ The Gold and Silver Wire-Drawers' Company received its charter from James I in 1623, and thereafter, in this section of the trade, contacts between the Weavers' and Wire-Drawers' Companies were quite frequent. Finely drawn gold and silver wire spun upon silk, in proportions prescribed by Acts of Parliament, and made up into lace and braid became known as 'statute lace'.⁴⁷

Bone lace, so called either from the bone bobbins used by the lacemakers or because of the bone pins used in pricking out the lace, was a craft in which certain master weavers were interested, chiefly, it seems, as small capitalists supplying materials, employing poor women as lacemakers, and marketing the product. This was, probably, very largely an out-work trade, and those engaged in it were on much the same low income and social level as the multitude of poor people who clung precariously to the fringe of the London weaving trade, including large numbers of young children as well as 'divers ancient people spinners and workers of waste silk . . . a very great number' who had no other means of getting a living.⁴⁸

This, then, was the setting in which the Weavers' Company strove to carry out the functions of a craft guild; searching the craft, enforcing the Ordinances, putting down abuses, and discharging a medley of other duties, ranging from the formulation of high policy to the settlement of trifling disputes.

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NOTES

- 1 Stow, *Survey of London* (Everyman edn, 1956), p. 13.
- 2 The hoy was a small craft, usually sloop-rigged, used to carry passengers and goods—any job, in fact, for which a small coastal vessel was suitable.
- 3 Quoted W. M. Stern, *The Porters of London* (1960), p. 82.
- 4 R. H. Tawney, *Business and Politics under James I: Lionel Cranfield as Merchant and Minister* (1958), p. 75: cf. the estimates in P. Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688–1959* (2nd edn, 1967).
- 5 As there was no census before 1801, exact population figures before that date cannot be obtained. The best estimate, in very 'round figures', is that given above. The problem is fully discussed by N. G. Brett-James in his scholarly book, *The Growth of Stuart London* (1935), Chap. XX; but he reaches no firm conclusions.
- 6 A. L. Rowse, *The England of Elizabeth* (1950), p. 159.
- 7 See Chap. 4 on the recruitment of weavers' apprentices.
- 8 The estimated population of Norwich, the second city of the kingdom, in 1695, was 29,000, and Bristol, the third city, upwards of 20,000.
- 9 Stow, *op. cit.*, p. 201. A number of the City Companies had gardens adjoining their halls. The Drapers' Company in Throgmorton Street had not only a large garden, but a bowling green as well. Sir John Hart was elected Lord Mayor of London in 1589.
- 10 The liberties were areas under the City's jurisdiction although not within the walls.
- 11 London's large-scale extra-mural development had begun in Elizabeth's reign outside Aldgate, Cripplegate and Bishopsgate, and it is noted with some regret by old John Stow, then in his late seventies. Its momentum increased during the seventeenth century.
- 12 Stow, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 115–17.
- 13 A. L. Rowse, *op. cit.*, p. 188, quoting Stow's *Survey* (ed. Kingsford), I, p. 237.
- 14 MS. 4647, ff.231–2.
- 15 MS. 4647, ff.360–2.
- 16 After 1613 piped New River Company's water from Chadwell Spring could be had in London, but the majority of people long continued to use the old sources of supply. For the fortunes of Sir Hugh Myddleton and the New River Company see J. W. Gough, *Sir Hugh Myddleton, Entrepreneur and Engineer* (1964).
- 17 MS. 4647, ff.231–2.
- 18 For his biography see W. Notestein, *Four Worthies* (1956), p. 106.
- 19 Pepys tells us of a battle between the weavers and the butchers in the summer of 1664. 'July 26th Great discourse of the fray yesterday in Moorfields, how the butchers at first did beat the weavers (between whom there hath been ever an old competition for mastery) but at last the weavers rallied and beat them. At first the butchers knocked down all for weavers that had green or blue aprons, till they were fain to pull them off and put them in their breeches. At last the butchers were fain to pull off their sleeves,

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- that they might not be known, and were soundly beaten out of the field, and some deeply wounded and bruised; till at last the weavers went out tryumphing, calling £100 for a butcher.'
- 20 C. V. Wedgwood, *The King's Peace, 1637-1641* (1955), pp. 42-3.
 - 21 D. Davies, *A History of Shopping* (1966), pp. 157-8.
 - 22 Fish supplies came through the respectable, and often well-to-do, fishmongers and their traditional enemies, the hawking fishwives, any of whom could set up in trade with 5s., a basket and a piercing voice. They carried their shops on their heads and, although reviled 'for everything from their smell to their morals', they provided a useful service, especially in the poorer districts (D. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 89). Although the butter was generally of good quality, especially that from Hackney village, much of the milk was contaminated and diluted before it reached the consumers' doorsteps in the milk-maids' pails. See also E. Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution* (1967), pp. 177-80.
 - 23 Probably Mile End Waste.
 - 24 Horsleydown was at the end of St Olave's Street, Southwark, on the road from London Bridge to Rotherhithe.
 - 25 1560-1600.
 - 26 Stow, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
 - 27 Brett-James, *London*, p. 73.
 - 28 For a detailed account of the progress and cost of this first of London's public parks, see Brett-James, *London*, pp. 452-9.
 - 29 *England's Advocate, Europe's Monitor* (a pamphlet, 1699).
 - 30 Now Middlesex Street, commonly called Petticoat Lane because of its open-air market in second-hand clothes.
 - 31 *V.C.H., Middlesex* (1911), II, p. 128.
 - 32 R. R. Sharp, *London and the Kingdom*, II, p. 324; W. Notestein, *Four Worthies* (1956), p. 106; E. P. Statham, *A Jacobean Letter-writer* (1920), p. 211.
 - 33 Brett-James, *London*, pp. 405-6, 476; A. L. Rowse, *Shakespeare* (1963), pp. 287-8.
 - 34 *V.C.H., Surrey*, II, pp. 349-50, 359-61. In the Minories, too, Dutch immigrants had increased in numbers, so that there was even a 'churchwarden for the strangers' (E. M. Tomlinson, *A History of the Minories* (1922), pp. 391ff.).
 - 35 In addition to immigrant craftsmen, crowds of destitute persons, beggars, vagrants, vagabonds, and 'other loose persons' congregated in Southwark: indeed, they became so numerous that the City had to appoint a Provost-Marshal to deal with them. Strype says that Southwark had sixteen constables and six scavengers; and we may be sure that they were fully occupied all the time.
 - 36 Southwark 11, Bishopsgate 8, Cripplegate 8, Shoreditch 7, Whitechapel 4 (MS. 4655A/2, ff.6b, 20).
 - 37 The author of *Observations on the Case of the Worsted and Silk Manufacturers and of the Importers of Cotton Wool, and the Manufacturers thereof into Fustian* (c. 1728) complained that a new, inferior, slight stuff of wool mixed with cotton, made chiefly in Manchester, was being called fustian.
 - 38 MS. 4655/8, ff.73b, 79b. In 1673 a Southwark feltmaker was offered the Livery (MS. 4655/7, f.37b).
 - 39 MS. 4655/1, ff.26-8; MS. 4655/3, f.104b; and MS. 4655/4, 27 November 1666: 'Thos. Linsley served a Linen weaver now weaves

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- ribbon.' MS. 4655/7, ff.70b, 75b reveals linen weavers working in Southwark and 'Bethlem'.
- 40 MS. 4655/1, ff.8-9, May-July 1611.
- 41 MS. 4655/1, f.2; MS. 4655/2, f.173; MS. 4655/3, ff.23-4; MS. 4647, ff.169, 175.
- 42 Campbell, *English Yeoman*, p. 253.
- 43 Natalie Rothstein, 'The Calico Campaign of 1719-21', in *East London Papers*, vol. 7, no. 1, July 1964.
- 44 MS. 4647, f.161.
- 45 F. B. Palliser, *A History of Lace* (3rd edn, 1875), p. 3.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- 47 e.g. 9 Wm. III, c. 39 (1698); 15 Geo. II, c. 20 (1742). H. Stewart, *History of the Company of Gold and Silver Wire-Drawers* (1891), pp. 32, 83; cf. M. Postlethwayt, *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (2nd edn, 1757), II, art. 'Lace'.
- 48 MS. 4647, f.478.

Gild Governance I



Dr Frances Consitt has written the history of the London Weavers' Company from the twelfth century to the close of the sixteenth century. The story begins in the reign of Henry I with a Pipe Roll entry dated 1130, which proves the existence of a gild of weavers in London before that date, and substantiates the Weavers' claim to be the oldest of all the London gilds. The Weavers' status was greatly enhanced in 1155 when the gild received from Henry II the first royal charter ever granted to any London craft.¹ In good times and in bad, despite internal stresses and external struggles (chiefly against the City authorities and alien immigrants), the Weavers not only held their own during medieval and Tudor times but actually made headway, especially in the 'new era of prosperity' in the sixteenth century, when many London weavers ceased to weave linen and woollen fabrics and turned to silk. By 1603, at the beginning of a new century, a new reign and a new dynasty, the gild of 'Bailiffs, Wardens, Assistants and Commonalty of the Trade, Art and Mystery of Weavers of London' (to give the Worshipful Company its full title), although far from wealthy, appears to have been both vigorous and vigilant. The executive body was, of course, the Court of Assistants, and the control-centre the Weavers' Hall in Basinghall Street.

The Ordinances for the regulation of the Weavers' gild, as ratified in 1577, provided for a body of sixteen men—two Bailiffs, two Wardens (usually referred to as 'the Officers' or 'the Four in Place') and twelve Assistants. The four Officers held office for one year and were seldom re-elected to the same office in the ensuing year. The day of St James the Apostle, 25 July, was (and still is) election day, on which the two present or out-going Bailiffs nominated a person to be the Upper Bailiff, or Master, of the Company for the coming year; and the Wardens and Assistants, usually with some forty or fifty Liverymen assembled in a Common Hall, nominated another person for the chief office. Whichever candidate had the 'most voices' in the assembly

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was accepted as 'chief and principal Bailiff to rule and govern for one whole year then next ensuing'. The unsuccessful candidate, it seems, with another nominee of the two out-going Bailiffs, was then put before the Common Hall for election to the office of second or Renter Bailiff. Next the two out-going Bailiffs, with the assistance of any 'ancients that were present and which have been Bailiffs',² proceeded to choose from among the Liverymen two new Wardens—an Upper and a Renter Warden—to serve for the ensuing year. Usually, but not invariably, the Bailiffs' nominees were elected; but if the Liverymen were displeased with the out-going Bailiffs, or a major issue was causing dissension within the Company, the discontented Liverymen could show their teeth by rejecting the Bailiffs' nominees and voting for other candidates.

The sixteen had self-renewing powers, for they or 'the most parte of them' were enjoined to fill any vacancy among the Officers or Assistants by electing a member of the gild within fourteen days. This Court had to perform a variety of administrative, financial and even judicial functions, some important, some trifling; some calling for technical knowledge, others for wisdom in human relationships. It had to ensure good order and governance within the craft and to check encroachments and illegal practices from without. Its jurisdiction extended two miles from the City gates; an area which included not only Cripplegate, Clerkenwell, Bishopsgate Without, Norton Folgate, Spitalfields, Bethnal Green, Shoreditch and Whitechapel, but also Hoxton, Haggerston, Hackney, Homerton, Old Ford, Stepney, Cambridge Heath, Shadwell, Southwark, Bermondsey, and much of Islington and Canonbury.

The development of silk weaving during the Tudor period gave to the London weaving industry a new impetus, strongly reinforced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by newcomers from overseas, who swelled the numbers of weavers in the liberties and suburbs, and by their artistic talents and special skills in the weaving of figured silks, helped to raise the silk industry to a position of importance in the national economy. But the influx of foreigners and strangers was a never-failing source of new or revived disputes and discontents, with many of which the Weavers' Court of Assistants had to cope.³

Over the years the Company had come to accept the impossibility of excluding foreigners and strangers. Some gilds of native craftsmen joined forces in an attempt to keep the strangers out;⁴ but the London Weavers, with greater wisdom, evolved several different membership grades or categories to meet the circumstances of various types of craftsmen 'using the art of weaving' (see Table 2.1). The highest grade was, of course, the freeman who had served a full term of legal apprenticeship, or had been admitted by patrimony or redemption.⁵

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Such freemen, when they had become also freemen of the City, could use the proud description—‘Citizen and Weaver of London’. The lesser grades, usually referred to as ‘admissioners’ or ‘foreign brethren’, seem to have been three in number:

- 1 Foreign Masters,⁶ whose qualifications were fully approved by the Company and who were allowed to take apprentices;
- 2 Foreign weavers allowed to work independently but not to set up as ‘householders’;
- 3 Journeymen; weavers who had proved their apprenticeship or capability in the craft, but were not permitted to work except as journeymen.

All such admissioners were sworn to obey the orders of the Company.

A master weaver’s status and seniority determined the number of looms, journeymen and apprentices he might legally employ, though the evidence suggests that infringements were neither few nor infrequent, especially in times when trade was good.

Table 2.1 *Grades of gild membership*

	<i>Single looms not exceeding</i>	<i>Number of: Journeymen Apprentices not not exceeding exceeding</i>	
<i>Denizens or foreigners</i>			
in first year after admission	5	1	1
in second year after admission		2	2
in third and subsequent years		2	3
<i>Strangers (aliens)</i>			
in first year after admission	4	1	1
in second and subsequent years		2	2
<i>Liverymen</i>	6	not stated	4

Bailiffs, Wardens, and past Bailiffs and Wardens were each allowed to have not more than seven single looms⁷ and five apprentices. The omission of a limit on the number of journeymen to be employed by Officers past and present and by Liverymen may well indicate the possibility that they could employ an unlimited number of journeymen as out-workers. As the putting-out system became more and

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more prevalent, so did the employment of unqualified journeymen and apprentices, many of whom worked 'secretly' in obscure holes and corners, difficult for the Company's officers to locate. Many of the admitted journeymen weavers could scarcely rank as skilled craftsmen, for they could not do more than throw a shuttle on plain work. Some hired a loom and 'loom-standing', or helped another journeyman at busy times. Their earnings were, one need hardly say, among the lowest in the trade. At the other extreme were the highly skilled intelligent craftsmen-householders. The weaving of flowered or figured silks, damasks, brocades and velvets called for a high degree of knowledge and skill possessed by comparatively few, whose earnings were consequently high, and could be very high in the busiest times, when the weavers commonly worked a fourteen-hour day.

Amid the ever-increasing *mêlée* of the metropolis the Company's officers had the task of maintaining its position and status as a craft gild by enforcing its ordinances and trying to preserve high standards of craftsmanship and fair dealing. They had, moreover, to strengthen the Company by securing internal harmony as far as possible, adding competent craftsmen to its membership,⁸ and combating the erosive activities of unqualified interlopers and all other types of non-members, English and alien. They had to maintain and, if possible, enhance the Company's prestige, and work in close co-operation with the Lord Mayor and City authorities on a basis of mutual loyalty and support, so that recalcitrant and hostile persons might find themselves confronted not only by the Weavers' Court of Assistants, but ultimately by the more powerful Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen. The Weavers' Court requested the help of the Lord Mayor when its authority had been challenged or flouted, or when for any other reason it needed to be reinforced by a superior authority.⁹

Members of the Company, on the other hand, could appeal to the Lord Mayor if they felt they had been harshly or unjustly treated by the Weavers' Court. The City of London records contain a statement, written in 1781, of the policy and powers of the City authorities *vis-à-vis* the Livery Companies, conventions which had evolved and gained acceptance through the centuries:

It appears, that, from early times down to the present century, the Court of Aldermen (which is a court of record) have claimed and exercised a power of superintending and controlling, in many instances, the proceedings of these guilds or companies, which practice the companies appear to have uniformly acknowledged and submitted to. And, by their entries, it appears that the court have created several of the companies . . . livery-companies; have increased and enlarged the livery of others, . . . have translated a member from one company to

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another; have claimed and exercised a right of calling before them the masters, bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, to answer complaints of abuse of their trust, oppression of their members, and disobedience and contempt of the precepts and authority of that court (that is the Court of Aldermen); and, for these and such like offences, have imposed pains and penalties, and even committed to prison, . . . and . . . such proceedings of the court of aldermen have been approved and allowed by the judges of the court of King's-Bench.

In respect of the different trades, arts, or mysteries of these companies, or their rules or ordinances for the better regulation thereof, the greater body does not at all interfere, the different companies themselves being the only proper judges in those matters; but in all other cases . . . either respecting the police or government of each company separately, or . . . of the whole body at large, they (the City) have, from the earliest times, from time to time, interposed.¹⁰

Year in, year out, the Company augmented its ranks by admitting all suitably qualified persons as either freemen or admissioners. In the Weavers' Company, as in the other London Livery Companies, the freedom was usually acquired after serving a formal apprenticeship of not less than seven years, followed by two or three years as a journeyman. This would bring a young man to about the age of twenty-four after which it was open to him to apply to take his freedom, if he had both the inclination and the resources. The son of a freeman, however, had the right to be made free by patrimony, although he might know little or nothing of the art of weaving, and might, indeed, get his living in a totally different trade. Before the middle of the seventeenth century applications for admission by patrimony had to be supported by six citizens (not necessarily weavers) who could testify as to the facts.¹¹ Later in the seventeenth century only four 'compurgators' were required, and in the eighteenth century two sufficed.¹² Frauds were occasionally detected, such as the one attempted in 1670, when 'Tristram Baker, son of John Baker, weaver, upon report of a merchant taylor and three clothworkers, was made free by patrimony, paid a fee of 3s. 10d. and gave 10s. in lieu of a silver spoon.' But, says a marginal note, 'This was suspected to be a cheat and was therefore put off and not sworn and afterwards the money [was] return'd.'¹³ Another cheat was attempted in August 1684, when, according to the minutes, 'Uriah Skipp, son of Thomas Skipp, Weaver, (Hog Lane), upon report of Wm. Daniell, Turner, Randolph Hall, Merchant Taylor, Thos. Horsnaile, Fishmonger, and John Poper, Salter, [was] made free by patrimony. MEMO: A cheat, and to be put out of the Books.' Three months later 'the said Uriah

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confessed he was not [Thomas Skipp] his son', and that the fraud was contrived at the Bell Inn in St John's Street by one Jones, who had been paid 10s., 'and so had three other Reporters—10s. a piece'. Just what induced Uriah to confess is obscure, but we do know that a year later all was forgiven and he was made free, this time by redemption by order of the Court of Aldermen. He seems to have had powerful friends.¹⁴

Redemption, or purchase, was another path to the freedom of the Company. Redemptioners were not, as a rule, qualified weavers, and before the nineteenth century their number was strictly limited, usually by the custom of restricting the right of nomination to a few eminent persons. Thus the Weavers' minutes record that on 20 June 1611.¹⁵

. . . upon Certificate made to this Court under the hand of the minister and divers of the parishioners of the Town of Wingham near Sandwich in Kent that Francis Mott the father of John Mott was born in the said town in the year 1551, whereby this Court was satisfied that the said John Mott is the son of an Englishman born and capable of the freedom of this City. It is therefore ordered upon the nomination of the [City] Chamberlain that the said John Mott or Lamott shall be admitted into the freedom of this City by redemption in the Company of Weavers paying to Mr Chamberlain to the City's use the sum of Twenty pounds.

And when John Mott duly received his freedom from the Weavers he presented to the Company a gilt cup with a cover, valued at £5. 10s. Five months later John Howe, weaver, was made free by redemption at the request of the City Swordbearer;¹⁶ and in the same year we have the record, already noticed, of no fewer than thirty freedoms by redemption granted by the Weavers' Company as a means of raising the money required to be invested in the Ulster colonisation project.¹⁷ This, of course, was a special case, and the admission of such large numbers of redemptioners is unusual.

There is, however, the admission of William Beckford, a poor weaver, at the request of Sir Henry Yelverton, H.M. Solicitor-General, who asked that Beckford might be 'admitted into the freedom of this City by redemption in the company of Weavers, as one of . . . ten persons to be made free at Michaelmas next'. Sir Lionel Cranfield put forward a similar request in April 1617 on behalf of Richard Hassell, who gave to the Company 'for his admission two silver spoons'.¹⁸ In the following year Richard Child was made free of the City by redemption in the Weavers' Company at the request of the Earl of Pembroke, Lord Chamberlain of H.M. Household, 'the said Richard Child having been apprenticed to William Cooper of

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Andover by an indenture dated 27th June 1570'.¹⁹ Also in 1618 the Provost-Marshal of the City presented one William Stevens, 'as the last of two yearly allowed him' by the Weavers' Company to be made free by redemption; and another redemptioner was admitted on a 'report' by the City Chamberlain.

A somewhat surprising entry appears on 16 April 1618, on which day

six young men in the Lord Mayor's house presented unto the [Weavers'] Court Robert Wright to be made free of this City by Redemption as the last of Three to them granted in the mayoralty of Sir John Loman. . . . Whereupon at the request of the said six young men the said Robert Wright was admitted a freeman of the Company of Weavers *gratis*.²⁰

From various redemptioners, who were usually men of substance, the Company received many a silver spoon and piece of plate.²¹

A rather curious situation is recorded in 1655, when

upon the humble petition of Edward Houghton, who marrying within half a year of the expiration of his apprenticeship is denied his freedom by service, it is ordered by [the Court of Aldermen] in compassion to the petitioner being a poor man and intending no other use of his freedom than to be a Street Porter, that he shall be admitted into the freedom of this City by redemption in the Company of Weavers paying . . . to the use of the City 46s. 8d.

He was 'lovingly received' by the Weavers 'for a fine of 4s.'²²

It was very unusual, though not entirely unknown, for women to be granted freedom by redemption. During 1668–9 there were, surprisingly, three such admissions. On 23 November 1668 Jane Sutton, Spinster, 'by order of the Court of Aldermen . . . was admitted a free-woman by redemption and paid 16s. 8d.' A week later Mary Rawstone was similarly made free, and in the following April Elinor Stone was admitted; but another entry of this sort does not occur until October 1674, when Mary Skutt 'by order of the Court of Aldermen . . . was admitted a freewoman p.Redemption, & paid 11s. 4d.'²³

In the 1690s, the Company granted about 150 freedoms a year, of which approximately 86 per cent were taken by servitude, 11½ per cent by patrimony, and slightly over 2 per cent by redemption. During the eighteenth century the total freedoms taken decreased appreciably, while the number and percentages of persons in the three categories show remarkable changes. In the 1790s not more than twelve freedoms were taken each year, on the average. Of these, those taken by servitude represented some 52 per cent, while freedoms taken by patrimony had risen to 17 per cent and by redemption

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to over 30 per cent. By the end of the eighteenth century the trend was even more markedly in the same direction, less than two-fifths of the freedoms being taken by servitude (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 *Methods of qualification, late eighteenth century*

	<i>Qualified by</i>	%
Freemen admitted	servitude	39·8
	patrimony	26·5
	redemption	33·7

Thus we see how seriously redemption and patrimony together had eroded the centuries-old craft foundations of the Company.

It is well known that by the so-called 'custom of London', members of a gild could not claim an *exclusive* right to their craft or trade. A London citizen free of a particular company could not, it seems, be prevented from engaging in the craft or trade of any other company. Hence the designation 'mercier', 'fishmonger', 'brewer', 'weaver', after a name, indicates only the company to which the person belonged, not necessarily his actual occupation. From this usage sprang many fantastic incongruities: stationers were freemen of the Fishmongers' Company; men free of the Company of Cooks worked as weavers,²⁴ and freemen of the Weavers' Company worked as masons, shoemakers, jewellers and booksellers. There were even paviours in the Goldsmiths' Company. The master carpenter who helped to rebuild Weavers' Hall after the Great Fire was free of the Weavers' Company, and, indeed, served as a Warden in 1668-9. For hundreds of years this illogical but persistent custom was a never-failing source of disputes and discontents among gildsmen, especially the handicraftsmen. Its chief advantage was that it allowed the London citizens freedom of enterprise and mobility of capital. Its main disadvantage was its tendency to weaken gild control over master craftsmen and the quality of their products.²⁵ The gilds, therefore, strongly advocated some tightening of existing rules and practice. The City Corporation, too, favoured a policy of rationalisation and would bid, order, recommend and exert pressure in particular cases, but they would never attempt any general compulsion, nor would they officially repudiate the custom of London.²⁶ In 1620, the Weavers having complained that sundry freemen of other companies were using the art of weaving but would not be governed by their orders, the Court of Aldermen ordered that all such persons, 'as well silk-weavers as others, shall be subject to the search, government and correction' of the Weavers' Company, and suggested that officers of the other companies in-

volved should, if they so desired, accompany the Weavers' Officers on their searches. Two years after this the same court expressed the opinion that enforcement of translations of weavers who were free of other companies would result in much bad blood, many lawsuits and set a bad example to all the companies. The Court favoured amicable voluntary arrangements between the companies concerned.²⁷

Many translations by mutual consent took place, some without the intervention of the City authorities, others after a hearing before the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen. The Weavers seldom raised any serious objections, even when they were losing a member, and men translating to them were often admitted gratis. Thus on 9 October 1610 'William Upton, Citizen and Free of the Carpenters (using the art of weaving) is this day admitted & sworn a brother of this gild, gratis, paying only the Officers' fees.'²⁸ Two similar translations—one from the Innholders and the other from the Whitebakers—took place in 1618–19.²⁹ In July 1618 a wax chandler 'using the trade of a weaver' was translated to the Weavers by consent of the two companies,³⁰ and a little later a cutler, free of the Weavers by patrimony, was translated to the Cutlers' Company. But such translations were not always effected smoothly, as we see from the case of Arthur Pattison, a freeman of the Merchant Taylors who was working as a weaver. Early in 1618 a delegation from the Weavers' Company to the City authorities, 'concerning the translation of such freemen of other Companies using the art of weaving within the liberties of this Gild', complained that Pattison had 'denied and withstood' the Weavers' bailiffs and wardens when they wished to search and had flatly refused to be subject to the Weavers' Company and its rules. During the ensuing inquiry in the Mayor's Court the Weavers produced the inspeximus of 21 Henry VI in support of their case, and the Court decreed that Pattison should be translated to the Weavers' Company immediately, and for the future all craftsmen similarly situated should be translated so as to come under the rules and government of that Company. But the Court hastened to add that this decision must not be taken as a precedent by other companies 'unless they can show forth a grant by authority of Parliament . . . as the Weavers' have done'. Another case at this time was that of John Gadesby, Citizen and Carpenter of London but 'using the trade of a Weaver', who was convicted by the City authorities for keeping more looms and apprentices than the Weavers' ordinances allowed, and promptly thrown into Newgate prison, 'there to remain until he shall conform himself . . . or other order be taken for his enlargement'. Gadesby, it seems, had argued that as he was not a member of the Weavers' Company, their ordinances did not apply to him. The 'other order' referred to was probably his formal translation to the Weavers, for on 28 July 1618 the Carpenters' Company signified their willingness

to translate Gadesby to the Weavers 'on Thursday next before the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen with six Assistants of the said Company these to be ready to perform the translation and thereupon . . . Gadesby to be released out of Newgate'.³¹ The Weavers' Company followed up these successes by taking similar action against the Clothworkers and the Wax Chandlers;³² and when Lawrence Hendricke, a stranger naturalised by royal letters patent, was accused of keeping five apprentices, using seven looms and refusing to pay a fine of £3 'taxed upon him for his offence', the City stood firmly by the Weavers and authorised the taking of proper legal action against Hendricke 'and others in that kynde offending'.³³ But there was apparently little or no improvement in the situation as a whole, for an order in Council, dated 26 June 1622, refers to 'divers obstinate and wilful persons, freemen of other Companies' who utterly refused to conform, thus weakening the position of the Weavers' Company and perpetuating the manufacture and sale of inferior goods. Those who henceforth ignored the Order would do so at their peril—and it seems that many did, for after an interval of sixteen years the Weavers' Company felt impelled to appeal to the highest authority. Towards the end of 1638 a Privy Council presided over by King Charles I heard the Weavers' complaint that the 'Tallow Chandlers, Fishmongers and other Companies delay and refuse to translate weavers free of their Companies contrary to their Charter confirmed by Act of Parliament, His Majesty's proclamation³⁴ and two several orders of the Court of Aldermen'. The King in Council instructed the City Recorder to see that the ancient Company of Weavers should 'freely enjoy the benefit granted to them', and in their response the Court of Aldermen repeated their view that all weavers of silk, wool, linen, or any other material in London, Southwark, and 'other places pertaining to London', ought to submit to 'the power, jurisdiction, search, supervision and government' of the Weavers' Company, whether they are freemen of the City of London or not, and, notwithstanding that they are free of another company, should be translated to the Weavers.³⁵ In practice, translations to and from the Weavers' Company continued to be piecemeal and spasmodic. The two years 1662–3 were exceptional, for fifteen men, all 'using weaving', were translated to the Weavers from various other companies, against the loss of only one weaver (translated to the Innholders).³⁶ In October 1672 Nathaniel Collett, 'an ancient member' of the Weavers' Company but an oarmaker by trade, was translated at his own request to the Shipwrights because they were threatening to sue him;³⁷ and 'Wm. Bugdon, by Trade a Barber-chirurgion, lately by order of the Court of Aldermen made a freeman of the [Weavers'] Company', presented his 'humble request to be Translated from this to ye Barber-Chirurgions' Company inasmuch as the said Compa. do arrest & other-

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wise molest him for not being a freeman thereof'. The Weavers agreed to release him on payment of £2.³⁸ An even more handsome 'golden handshake' was received by the Weavers from Nicholas Wye when he paid his 'Livery fine and to be translated to the Brewers' Compa., £10'.³⁹

Very few translations, however, were so lucrative for the Company. Some, indeed, were costly, especially when resort was had to legal proceedings. A case in point was that of George Stone, a weaver by trade but free of the Broderer's Company, who was prosecuted in the Court of Exchequer by the Weavers' Company 'in order to force him from the Broderers to the Weavers'. The Broderers' Company appealed to the City, but without success, for the Court of Aldermen ruled that Stone 'ought to be translated to the Weavers, and . . . ordered that six [members] of each of the said Companies do attend' before the Court, according to custom, to witness the formal translation. The Weavers usually sent the Four in Place and two Assistants on such occasions, for their attendance signified the Company's consent to the translation. This was usually given, but might be withheld if the candidate was in debt to the Company for unpaid fines, arrears of quarterage and the like.⁴⁰ Such attendances usually meant one or more visits to a tavern or coffee house, as we see, for example, from the Renter Bailiff's accounts relating to the translation of Isaac March from the Clothworkers to the Weavers, 'he being a weaver by trade' (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 *Extract from the Renter Bailiff's accounts*

		£	s.	d.
20 July 1708	Expended attending Court of Aldermen about ye translating Mr. March	16	3	
27 July 1708	-ditto-	1	3	0
September 1708	Expended on ye Committee on attending Court of Aldermen on ye translation of Isaac March	1	10	0
	Expended at ye Tavern & Coffee house attending Court of Aldermen	5	6	

The attendances and arguments continued so merrily that by the middle of 1709 the case had cost the Weavers' Company over £15 and was still *sub judice*.⁴¹ Even more protracted and expensive was Provey's case in 1781. Samuel Provey, Citizen and Clothworker, was made free of that company by servitude, and in due course became a Liveryman. Some time after this Provey was summoned to take up the freedom of the Weavers' Company, because, they said, he was in business as a weaver. This he consented to do, and was duly sworn in.

When, however, 'after the expiration of several years', the Weavers called upon him to join their Livery and pay the usual fine of £10 'on being clothed', he refused, saying that, as they already knew, he was a Liveryman of the Clothworkers' Company and 'he could not have any additional privilege by becoming a liveryman of the said Company of Weavers'. The latter, having taken the opinion of the Attorney-General, started a test case against Provey, who, advised by the Clothworkers, appealed to the City authorities. In due course the Court of Aldermen decided that the Weavers ought to have applied to the City to have Provey translated (for which there were many precedents), but since this had not been done, Provey was upheld in his refusal to pay a second Livery fine. This case cost the Weavers' Company at least £70.⁴²

Simultaneous membership of more than one company, while not at all usual, was certainly not unknown. For example, in 1673 George Harvey, hatmaker, was a member not only of the Weavers' Company but of the Feltmakers' Company in which he 'hath borne all Offices'; and in the following year it is recorded that 'Jasper Curtis, Citizen and Clothworker of London, having also served to ye trade of a Weaver in Wiltshire as per certificate and having married Widow Maynard of this Compa. was admitted a foreign Master and paid 11s. 10d.' A similar case was that of Philip Poles, another citizen and clothworker, who had married the widow of William Wheatley, a linen weaver and 'foreign member' of the Weavers' Company. After he had been arrested as 'an Offender', on the initiative of the Weavers' Company, Poles asked that he might be admitted as a foreign master to exercise the trade of linen weaving, and after careful deliberation his request was granted.⁴³ Charles Cooling, on the contrary, wished to get away from the Weavers, for, having been twice proposed for the Livery and twice rejected, he took umbrage and asked to be translated 'to any other Company'.⁴⁴

Although Assistants and Liverymen were privileged in respect of the numbers of looms and apprentices they might have, it would be a mistake to suppose that every freeman was anxious to join the Livery or to secure a seat on the Court of Assistants. It is true that some were public-spirited men who had the good of the Company and the trade at heart. Others enjoyed the enhanced status and influence, the prestige and privileges. For an ambitious man, acceptance of the Livery might be an important upward move. As a Liveryman he might get his chance (e.g. by serving on a special committee) to impress the Officers and Assistants, and this could eventually lead to a place on the Court of Assistants and, perhaps, in course of time to the Upper Bailiff's chair. But ambition did not beckon some men in this direction; not everyone was willing to sacrifice time and money by accepting the Livery or serving on the Court of Assistants. Some,

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indeed, looked upon such calls as nothing but an expensive nuisance, and the records reveal a variety of reasons or excuses for not wishing to serve. In 1663, for instance, two freemen 'warned to be of the Assistants' asked to be excused because they were 'thick of hearing'.⁴⁵ (None so deaf . . .!) Ten years later, when the number of Assistants was much depleted by infirmity and death, an attempt was made to fill the vacancies; but there was, apparently, no great keenness to serve, several of those selected urging physical disability, 'distance of habitation', and pressure of business as reasons for their unwillingness to accept nomination.⁴⁶ Small wonder that control of the Company's affairs tended to become concentrated in the hands of a few senior members.

In the seventeenth century a conscientious member of the Court of Assistants would attend the monthly and quarterly 'Full Courts' and, in between, the weekly 'Private Courts'. The business of the latter was the binding and turning-over of apprentices and the granting of freedoms. The Full Courts summoned and elected Stewards and Liverymen; elected freemen to fill vacancies on the Court of Assistants; directed the management of the Company's property; appointed the Beadle and Under-Beadle; received the Auditor's reports on the Company's property and charities, and on the annual accounts submitted by the Bailiffs and Wardens. In addition there was the General Court or Common Hall on St James's Day (Election Day), 25 July, attended by the Officers, Assistants and Livery to elect Officers and Auditors for the coming year. Other Common Halls might be summoned to transact special business, such as the consideration and approval of proposed new by-laws and ordinances, or the draft of a petition to Parliament. Usually three or four Officers were present at every meeting, but the Assistants' attendances varied between two and eleven, five or six being a normal number. On Oath Day in August of each year, however, when the new Officers were sworn in, the attendance was usually thirteen or fourteen; and a similar attendance was usual on Audit Days. In and after the last quarter of the eighteenth century regular weekly courts were not held all the year round. From November to March, which was usually the slack period, Private Courts 'for binding and making free' were held fortnightly, weekly Courts being resumed when 'the trade begins to stir again' in April. Quarterly Courts were held on the first Tuesday after each quarter day, except the one in December, which was held on the Tuesday next before Christmas Day.⁴⁷

Candidates for the Livery were chosen by the Bailiffs, Wardens, and Assistants, or 'the most part of them' for the time being, from the body of freemen; and every freeman accepting 'the Clothing' had to pay a 'fine' of £5 to augment the funds of the Company. From 1616 to 1619 twenty-nine new Liverymen were chosen and accepted 'the

Clothing', but others were reluctant, urging various reasons for wishing to be excused.⁴⁸ Later, in 1664, four members agreed to 'be of the Clothing' and pay their fines, but twice that number would neither accept nor pay.⁴⁹ A Liveryman could be sued by the Company for non-payment of his fine, but this seldom happened: the threat of legal proceedings or some other form of pressure usually sufficed.⁵⁰ Acceptance of the Livery was usually marked by a celebration. For example, in February 1690 the Renter Bailiff 'paid for wine 3 worthy persons accepting the Livery, 9s.', and in the summer he 'paid for Canary, Mr. Lamb & Mr. Dent accepting the Livery, 4s.'

Not all Liverymen were prosperous. In 1694 the Court of Assistants resolved that a Liveryman who had 'failed in the World' could have all outstanding fines cancelled and, at his own request, be discharged from the Livery.⁵¹ During the following half-century a number of Liverymen surrendered their Livery gowns and were struck off the Livery, and in cases of need their Livery fines were refunded. In 1752 a Renter Warden-elect pleaded inability to serve and was allowed to resign his gown.⁵² Moreover, certain freemen were forced to decline the Livery by reason of their poor circumstances. Thus, when Ivon Le Nain was 'summoned for the Livery' in 1751, he pleaded on behalf of himself and his father, who also had been similarly summoned, that his father 'was quite Superannuated and destitute of all support & provision but what he found for him'; that he could barely pay his way, and therefore he asked that they both might be excused. The Court consented, provided that 'the Representation . . . now given should be found to be true'.⁵³ The plea of Thomas Handyside, in 1742, was quite different, for he based his refusal to become a Liveryman on the ground that he was not a freeman of the City. The Company, having first taken the Solicitor-General's opinion, sued Handyside in the Court of Common Pleas and won the case.⁵⁴

From 1556 onwards the Bailiffs were empowered to choose two Liverymen 'to be Stewards, which shall provide for the . . . Company's dinner yearly . . . and yearly the said Bailiffs shall appoint such as hath not been in the said Stewardship before time, till it hath gone through the whole Livery, and then to begin again'. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this was the principal burden which a Liveryman might have to bear, and it was usually quite heavy, for, although each Liveryman paid a shilling or two for his dinner ticket, much of the cost of the feast fell upon the Stewards. If a Liveryman chosen in any year 'to serve Steward' wished to be excused, he had to pay a heavy fine—a factor which deterred many a freeman from accepting the Livery. As early as 1610 the records show that Richard Leafield was fined 40s. because he refused to serve as a Steward; and in 1613 John Dorrell was chosen to serve with Gabriel Stone, 'but forasmuch as John Dorrell dwelleth out of the Liberties' viz., at

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Loose, near Maidstone in Kent,⁵⁵ 'it is ordered . . . that the Beadle shall notify [him] . . . and bring answer to the Court. If a refusal is received, Mark Lyles is appointed in his place and the said Dorrell will be fined according to the Ordinance.' Dorrell paid his fine but asked to be discharged from the Livery.⁵⁶ In the second half of the seventeenth century the fines were much heavier, partly because the value of the monetary unit had fallen. Thus in 1669 the Renter Bailiff 'Recd. of Mr. Thomas Bush his fine to be discharged of Steward agst. the Ld. Maiors Day, £12' and 'of Mr. William Winter the like: £12'.⁵⁷ In 1704 the Court of Assistants listened sympathetically to Mr Thorp, a freeman, who asked to be excused from 'holding Steward' because 'he had lost £1,000 in nine months last past'; but in the following year the Company brought three rebellious members before the Court of Aldermen for refusing to hold the office of Steward or to pay a fine of £14 a head in lieu. The Court of Aldermen found for the Company and urged the three defendants to do their duty according to the Company's rules.⁵⁸ This pattern is repeated throughout the next half-century. Pleas of poverty or serious business losses were usually accepted; but if a man could afford to pay but would not, the Court might take a strong line, as when £20 was 'recovered by Execution on the goods of Jonathan Rigg for his Fine for refusing to serve Steward'.⁵⁹

Inevitably one is brought to the conclusion that, as the decades passed, the Company felt obliged to seek its new Liverymen among the well-to-do: a view supported by the practice, which emerged towards the end of the seventeenth century, of allowing a Liveryman to purchase exemption from the holding of any office in the future by paying a combined fine of £20. Ultimately, in June 1739, the Court of Assistants approved a standing order to this effect.⁶⁰ An eminent Liveryman of the Weavers' Company at this period was Thomas Penn, 'Lord Proprietor of Pennsylvania', who was asked 'whether it will be agreeable to him to be Elected a Member of this Court'. He politely declined the invitation but offered to pay a fine of £20 'to be excused from serving all further Offices'.⁶¹ Another eminent freeman (who was free, also, of the Fishmongers' Company) was Alderman John Kirkman, who, having served his apprenticeship to weaving with his father in Coventry, established himself in the London weaving trade about the middle of the eighteenth century. He became a City Alderman in 1768 and a freeman of the Weavers' Company at the end of the following year. Six months later he was 'clothed', paying not only his livery fine but, at his own request, £30 as a composite fine for all other offices. On St James's Day 1770 he was elected to the Court of Assistants in the morning and became Upper Bailiff in the afternoon. He was elected Sheriff of London in 1776, and M.P. for the City in 1780, using Weavers' Hall as his

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committee rooms. Unfortunately, he died on the last day of the poll, 18 September 1780.⁶²

Apart from the occasional Stewardship, the duties of the Liverymen were certainly not onerous. By customs handed down from the Middle Ages and later written into the Ordinances, the Livery were required to assemble to hear a sermon at least once a year, and they were in duty bound to attend the funeral of deceased Liverymen or their wives.⁶³ They must assemble when summoned by the Court of Assistants, through the Beadle, in Common Hall on the Company's business, or to take part in the election of the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs, Members of Parliament (Burgesses) for the City, or on other important civic occasions. The Renter Bailiff's accounts throw some light upon these functions (see Table 2.4).

The number of the Livery seems to have been about 100 during the greater part of the seventeenth century. Certainly, in 1662, the Court of Assistants 'ordered and agreed' that for the future the upper limit should be 100, and nobody should be admitted to the Livery without the consent of a Full Court.⁶⁴ By 1695, however, the number of Liverymen on the books had risen to 149, although the normal attendance at Common Halls was between thirty and fifty. But when some highly important or controversial question was on the agenda the attendance might suddenly swell to a much greater number. In the second half of the eighteenth century the Liverymen's interest in the Company seems to have declined, for despite the raising of the maximum permitted number to 300 in 1724,⁶⁵ with actual numbers on the books of 236 in 1730 and 294 in 1740, the attendances seldom exceeded thirty to forty. In addition of course, the Four in Place were present with, perhaps, eight or nine of the Assistants (see Table 2.5).

On the annual Election Days throughout the first half of the seventeenth century the new Bailiffs and Wardens chose four of the Assistants to act as auditors for the ensuing year. During the Commonwealth period, however, the number was raised, by statute, to eight—four Assistants and four from the Livery—to be chosen by the Commonalty. This new arrangement was not, it seems, entirely satisfactory, for in 1655 the Court of Assistants desired 'that it be propounded to the Representatives that when they elect eight Auditors, four of the eight be of them that were chosen the year before, to the end they may be instructed in the manner and way of auditing'.⁶⁶ It seems that normally the more literate members were chosen, for the records show that almost every auditor could write, some quite stylishly; whereas many a master weaver could only make a mark. The auditors' duties were not confined to the examination and certification of the Officers' accounts, for they had to check the inventory of property and utensils and see to the replacement of lost or worn items. Old linen was usually given away, but old pewter and