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Between the thirteenth and the end of the eighteenth centuries, guilds, or livery companies, were central to the economic, administrative and social structures of Europe’s towns and cities. In major cities, craftsmen grouped themselves in companies defined by a common occupation, whilst in smaller towns, artisans and merchants came together in heterogeneous alliances designed to protect their social, economic, and (prior to the Reformation) religious interests. Guilds were central to urban life and ceremony, sponsoring and participating in dramatic performances, royal entries, and civic events. With close ties to local and national government, companies benefitted from rights, privileges and protection, but were in turn required to support and implement the interests of town and crown, not least through financial contributions to civic and royal projects.¹

The livery companies were instrumental in the production, quality control and distribution of a wide range of consumer goods, foodstuffs and materials. Objects made by craftsmen, and sometimes women, embodied not only company values and hierarchies, but the ‘skilled identities’ of the artisan.² The companies possessed extensive powers of search, licensing them to enter homes, shops, and warehouses to seek out unauthorised workers, illegal tools, or poorly crafted goods. The Weavers’ ordinances of 1577, for example, empowered the company to conduct searches four times a year, and to view ‘all manner of works, stuff, and wares whatsoever made or to be made ... whether the same is well and workmanly wrought and of good, sufficient, and lawful stuff’.³ Moreover, the guilds were themselves possessed of a rich material life, articulated in civic pageantry, costly funeral processions, elaborate halls and social rituals.

Given that the guilds were central to the practical and legislative operation of the majority of early modern English trades, it is surprising that they feature only occasionally in work responding to the current ‘material turn’ in literary and historical study.⁴ Recent work on gender and material culture has concentrated...
overwhelmingly on the representation and, to a lesser extent, the experiences of women. The livery companies, however, offer a rich site for the study of masculinity and material culture, not least as existing scholarship on the guilds emphasises the increasingly exclusive homosociality of company transactions and rituals. This chapter takes a dual approach to the study of gender and material culture, asking first how manhood was expressed, displayed and constituted in material forms, before going on to reveal women’s shaping presence in spaces hitherto assumed to be almost exclusively homosocial. My definition of material culture – or, rather, of materiality – is capacious, embracing not only individual artefacts but spaces and the built environment; institutions; ritual, ceremony and feasting; financial transactions; and embodied labours, including gardening, cooking and cleaning.

Gender and the Livery Companies

Within the City of London – by the end of the seventeenth century the largest city in Europe – masculine identity and guild membership were tightly linked. Company membership was a pre-requisite for full citizenship (possession of ‘the freedom’). The right to engage independently in economic activity, like the right to hold municipal office, was restricted to freemen. When a man completed his apprenticeship, usually after seven years, he was sworn in as a member of his Company, becoming a journeyman who hoped to ascend through the ranks to become master of his own establishment. Marriage to a prosperous widow, often possessed of considerable business skills as well as her husband’s stock and trade connections, was one route to promotion. By the middle of the sixteenth century, around three-quarters of adult males in the City of London were free-men, and members of a livery company. Whilst some Londoners became free by patrimony (as the son of a London freeman) or redemption (purchase), apprenticeship ‘was the route through which nine of every ten men in the capital became citizens and companymen in the sixteenth century’. Among the numerous companies of early modern London, the ‘twelve great companies’ – the Mercers, Grocers, Drapers, Fishmongers, Goldsmiths, Skinners, Merchant Taylors, Haberdashers, Salters, Ironmongers, Vintners and Clothworkers – were the richest and most powerful.

The seven-nineteenth century has been described by historians as a period of decline for the livery guilds. They faced a series of challenges, including an extended period of civil war, and the great fire of London in 1666, which destroyed forty-four livery halls, resulting in years and even decades of temporary accommodation, and ruinously expensive rebuilding projects.

Recent scholarship has begun to reveal the extent to which women participated in guild life, and to uncover the patterns of women’s employment at different historical moments and in diverse local and national contexts. England was unusual in that women were not officially barred from obtaining the freedom, though the numbers who did so were relatively low. In London, twenty women were admitted to the freedom of the Carpenters in the last twenty years of the seventeenth century; their professions included sempster, milliner and...
child’s-coat-seller. Many women worked alongside their husbands, while, in the capital, customary law allowed married women to run their own businesses.

Writing of the marginalisation of women, Ian Archer concludes that ‘women possessed very weak occupational identities; denied participation in guild structures, save as widows carrying on their husbands’ businesses, they lacked institutional means of expression’. Recent research, however, as well as taking a nuanced view of women’s involvement in guild life, has begun to attend more fully to the influence of women’s work within London’s informal economy. Natasha Korda in particular has argued that attention to diverse modes of work allows us to redefine ‘all-male’ sites as ‘network[s] of commerce between active economic agents of both genders’, an insight that this chapter extends to the material structures and practices of the London Companies.

If much work on the guilds has neglected women’s impact upon their economic, material and social structures, so too, guild historians, though describing transactions and relationships between men, have paid little attention to questions of masculine identity. It is only recently that scholars have begun to investigate the importance of work, guilds, and fraternities in shaping the experience of manhood. James R. Farr, for example, argues that artisans in early modern Dijon cultivated ‘a form of worker solidarity’ in ‘the growth of journeyman brotherhoods’, which offered a distinctly masculine culture and identity rooted in work. ‘Manhood’ was an aspirational, and often tenuous, condition. As John Tosh points out, masculinity distinguishes ‘not only between men and women, but between different categories of men – distinctions which have to be maintained by force, as well as validated through cultural means’. In the early modern period, full manhood depended on age, economic security, temperament, and the ability to maintain a household. Admission to the freedom was an important part of the life-cycle: few men in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries achieved citizenship before their twenty-sixth year, and since most delayed marriage and establishing a household until after they were made free, ‘that was also the minimum age at which most males became adults in Tudor London’. For Merry E. Wiesner and Cynthia Truant, it was journeymen’s insecure gendered status within the companies that led to the exclusion of women from the realm of male corporate labour.

Whilst Company membership was ‘a crucial component of a citizen’s identity, and the companies generated ... institutional loyalties’, those loyalties could be stretched or tested. A majority of men could not expect to achieve the mature masculinity manifested in the office of warden or under-warden, and divisions existed within the guilds: between apprentices, who had a reputation for unruly behaviour, journeymen, masters and members of the livery. As Paul Griffiths points out, a ‘deep sensitivity to age and authority could shatter the peace of institutions’, especially when members of the ‘younger sort’ were alleged to have been elevated or privileged above the ‘ancients’. The tensions between social and economic groups and individuals surfaces periodically in company court records. The very fact that the Haberdashers saw the need to agree, in November 1659, a penalty of ten shillings payable by any member who ‘by any abusive and uncivill words or gestures shall affront or injure any other member’ suggests the urgency of possible disagreements. In Coventry, Daniel
Whitehead, waiting for the award of his freedom, went to Stourbridge fair and purchased grocery wares to resell. The masters and wardens threatened to refuse him the freedom for his anticipation of its privileges, but quickly commuted their sentence to a fine ‘by Reason that the yongr men had theire voyces razzid’, a clear example of the power of potentially unruly youthful masculinity. In these examples we see how men who ‘did not have access to patriarchal manhood (such as the journeyman who never moved beyond dependence on wage labour), nonetheless found plenty of ways in which to assert their manhood’.

**Manhood and Material Culture in the Livery Companies**

The guilds were central to trade regulation, ensuring that workmen did not trespass on others’ rights, and that goods were produced according to agreed standards. In 1650, for example, the Tylers and Bricklayers’ Company found that Abell Barton had used ‘very bad mortar and insufficient workmanship’, whilst in 1663, its searchers instructed John Wallis to rebuild seven chimneys in a ‘workmanlike fashion’. Joseph Ward argues that ‘the language company officers used when disciplining members reveals ... the importance of reputation to freemen’. It also uncovers the ideal of ‘workmanship’ – a phrase that possessed clear connotations of skill and artistry in this period – as a constitutive category of masculinity. This form of manhood was both achieved through, and epitomised in, craft and the material processes of production.

The practice of search and seize could bring conflicting models of masculinity to the fore. The stationer Simon Stafford described an occasion in 1598 upon which Cuthbert Burby, Thomas Dawson, and others ‘did very riotously and wantonly and unlawfully enter into yor sayd subiect Simon Stafford his workinge howse in the parish of St Peters aforesayd within foure days after his wife was [...] in childbirth’, opposing the allegedly unruly masculinity of the searchers with the responsibilities of a husband and new father. In 1584, another stationer, John Wolfe, complained about a violent search in which, he claimed, John Day and several other stationers, ‘beinge in moste ryotous manner accompanied [sic] wythe sworde and daggers and othere such ... vnlawfullie and most ryotouslye assembled themselves together’ and broke into Wolfe’s house, ‘wrestinge his poore oulde father by the throate beatinge and threatenye his men’. Implicitly counterposing his orderly domestic space to the ‘riotous’ behaviour of the searchers, Wolfe draws upon the vulnerability of aged manhood and the importance of family ties in objecting to this violent incursion into household space.

The relationships between gendered identity and the spaces of urban and civic life, most notably the guildhalls, were complex: urban sites ‘were never simply physical locations but continuously invented and reinvented by their myriad users’. In turn, the places of congregation, business, and display conferred ‘attitudinal and even behavioural aspects onto their users’. Within the halls, objects and furnishings – from wainscotting to windows – announced the largesse and perpetuated the memory of Company members and benefactors. The interior spaces of the livery halls were mutable, rearranged to suit the changing circumstances of the companies. Fishmongers’ Hall, for example,
was often let out as a private residence, bringing in an income, but reshaping the availability and function of the Company’s property.

As Jasmine Kilburn-Toppin points out, ‘within the late-medieval craft fraternities and early modern guilds of London, the gifting of material culture for display in livery halls, and use in company rituals, was a significant means for guildsmen to establish reputations in life and uphold memory within the craft community after death’. In 1606, for example, Richard Wyatt, George Isack, John Reave and William Wilson donated an octagonal table bearing the date and their initials to the Carpenters’ Company. This object at once celebrated the skilled trade of the Company, and commemorated the men’s service as Master and Wardens, giving a material and persistent form to their association. In 1632, Mr Avenon donated a silver cup and cover to the Goldsmiths’ Company. Its inscription emphasised its convivial and memorial functions, both recording and promoting masculine bonding: ‘When at your hall doth shine with plate, / and all your dishes served in state, / When mirth abound, and wine is free, / then (freely drinking) think on me’. Some guildsmen left tools and materials to the Company. Master Masons, for example, frequently bequeathed tools and instruments, alongside building ‘plots’ (plans), books and designs, creating a ‘cumulative resource’ of both use and symbolic value to succeeding generations.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, a new fashion for civic portraiture emerged. In July 1598, the Haberdashers’ Court ordered the Wardens to commission and display ten paintings of the company’s ‘ancient benefactors’. The Ironmongers and Merchant Taylors imitated their example in the first decade of the new century, whilst the Drapers, Brewers, and Grocers did likewise in the 1610s. During the 1620s portraits were commissioned by the Barber-Surgeons, Painter-Stainers, Carpenters and Goldsmiths; in the 1630s, the Leathersellers and Salters followed suit, as did the Ironmongers, Merchant Taylors and, once again, the Painter-Stainers. The emphasis placed by the Haberdashers upon the antiquity of their benefactors suggests that these portraits had a dual purpose: they expressed the wealth and status of the company, but also invested it with a sense of its own history. In a sometimes uncertain economic and political climate, the creation of a genealogy of benefactors and masters not only operated as a prompt to morality and beneficence for members – the Merchant Taylors’ portrait of Robert Dowe reminded viewers that ‘A vertuous lyfe is the fairest passage to a blessed death’ – but established the companies as long-standing elements of the civic fabric.

Portraits of male masters and benefactors detail the clothing and accessories of office, reminding us of the distinctions of rank and hierarchy conveyed by livery and aldermanic gowns. The portraits emphasise the ‘gravity and sagacity’ of their sitters, not least through the depiction of luxurious facial hair: in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, ‘the beard made the man’, and full beards were markers of age and wisdom. The gloves that many men hold in their portraits signify full membership of the freemanry: a newly elected freeman frequently celebrated his elevation by giving gloves to his fellows. Paintings did not only make statements about the position and prestige of their subject: they took on new meanings as they were incorporated into the
existing material milieu of the Company hall. Equally, the display of portraits and objects could serve to reinforce hierarchy. Towards the end of his life, John Vernon, a former master and generous benefactor of the London Merchant Taylors, had his portrait painted. In July 1616, he donated the picture ‘to the end that his faithfull true love borne to the Company might be had in remembrance’. Vernon suggested in performatively self-deprecating fashion that the Merchant Taylors might hang a portrait of ‘a lesse deserving’ man (himself) in the parlour – a more withdrawn and hence prestigious space than the main hall.

Company charity formed a crucial strand in the ‘informal network of social organisations and individuals which provided support for many of the poor people who lived in early modern London’ and beyond. Members’ charitable acts were frequently commemorated and incorporated into the companies’ culture of ceremony and display. In 1652, the Haberdashers’ Assistants ordered that details of the Company’s diverse charities should be hung on tables (framed boards) around the Hall, ‘whereby the memory of their worthy deeds may bee preferred and made knowne in honor to themselves and encouragement to and example of others whose hartes God shall stir upp and incline to workes of this nature’. Bequests might also be the objects of elaborate display at the moment of benefaction. The gift and charitable economies of the guilds helped to perpetuate ideals of brotherhood and masculine collaboration, but also allowed men to testify to the extent to which their identities were interwoven with Company structures and rituals, and display their status and legacy within Company space.

The livery halls were also the setting for annual and quarter-day dinners, which served ‘to solemnize and give legal weight to [companies’] most mundane business decisions’. The elaborate material culture and expressive hierarchies of feasting made a powerful statement to members and guests about the status and prosperity of the Company, and served to reinforce ideals of brotherhood and fellowship. In 1633, the Salters’ Assistants decided to invite liverymen to the quarter day dinners, for the ‘increase and continuance of love’; in the same year, the Vintners, who had earlier introduced two quarter-day dinners to increase ‘love and affection’ among their members, punished Raphael King for his ‘rude and unbrotherly behavior’ towards a fellow Assistant, which included bad language, throwing food, and ‘many uncivil touches with his knife and trencher’.

Company feasts were elaborate and frequently, particularly in the earlier part of the period, excessive occasions. They were also one of the moments at which social differentiation was most overtly expressed: the dinners were usually restricted to the livery, and ‘the obligations of individuals to the corporate body were underlined by the table service of the younger members and the part financing of the feasts by the wardens’. The busy dinners served to reinforce ideals of brotherhood, but also to mark out space between the livery and the yeomanry. In 1614, for example, the Fishmongers recorded that ‘the yonger lyverey ... sete downe in the parlor’, separated from their more senior associates; in 1617, one hundred and seventy six members ate in the great hall, whilst eighty dined in the parlour.

Distinctions between Company members were also played out at funerals and in civic pageants and processions. When the Haberdashers processed to
celebrate one of their members becoming Lord Mayor, the progression was fronted by up to one hundred and forty poor men followed by between ninety and one hundred yeomen bachelors, then the livery, with the younger members in front and the ‘ancients’ behind. Each group was differentiated by dress, and music, banners and whifflers (ushers) marched between each group and the next to fully articulate these social and economic distinctions.\textsuperscript{47} The procession thus announced the inclusiveness and beneficence of the brotherhood at the same time as it reinforced its hierarchies.

The rich round of dinners, bequests, and funeral pomp was largely limited to the livery; Ian Archer argues that ‘among the wills of the artisans there is much less evidence of this kind’, and far fewer ‘material demonstrations of their loyalty’.\textsuperscript{48} The material culture of the livery companies thus articulated an ideal of masculinity that was inaccessible to the majority of guild members, but which nonetheless served to shape those members’ identity through a careful balance between aspiration and exclusion.

**Women’s Work**

Women were routinely among the guests at company feasts; their presence marking the mature masculinity of the married livery, as well as, on occasion, the status of the Company in playing host to gentry and nobility. In 1638–1639 Thomas Steed, Renter Warden of the Founders’ Company, recorded numerous payments for laundry, including nine shillings for washing of linen the day after the Lord Mayor’s feast, ‘having all the Livery & wifes’.\textsuperscript{49} In 1640, John Falkener spent eighteen pounds and three pence on ‘the Lord Maiores dinar, having all the Company & there wives at dinar and the Master and Wardens & Stewards there wives at supar nex day at night’.\textsuperscript{50} The Vintners’ 1622 resolution to establish quarter-day dinners specified that the events would include the Assistants and their wives, as well as the widows of Assistants. In 1595 ‘much speech was used’ as the Fishmongers’ Company debated how to make their great chamber ‘fit to receive gentlewomen at any time of assembly’.\textsuperscript{51} Women are routinely mentioned in accounts for the Fishmongers’ dinners, especially in the earlier part of the period; in 1596, the Clerk took particular note of ‘some Gentlewomen in [unfashionable] frenchoods at the high table’.\textsuperscript{52}

Though dinners were curtailed by most livery companies as the sixteenth century progressed, in part because of royal and neighbourly complaints about their excesses, and then because of the expense of rebuilding after the Fire, some regained their social energies early in the eighteenth century: in 1735, for example, Fishmongers’ court members invited their wives to a ‘diversion on the river’ in the Company’s elaborately decorated barge, followed by a supper at the Hall.\textsuperscript{53} Yet ideals of civility and good order, expressed through the display of marital prowess, were always uneasy. Gender divisions were both enacted and, to some degree, subverted at the Fishmongers’ election dinners during the seventeenth century, where the ‘wyves and widdowes’ of the Company were seated at a side table, emphasising their separate and subordinate role; the women evidently exploited the opportunity for gendered sociability, as recurring complaints noted that they grew ‘very disorderlye’.\textsuperscript{54}
Women as well as men contributed to the Companies’ material goods, whether as executors passing on the gifts of their deceased husbands, or exercising their own agency through gift-giving. In October 1605, for example, Eustatia Skelton gave a pair of gilded silver spoons to the Founders. Two years later, ‘Mistres Grethed and hir daughtor’, the surviving family of Oswald Grethed, a former under-warden and auditor, gave sixteen shillings towards the cost of a new carpet, a valuable and prestigious item to be prominently displayed on a cupboard or table. In 1608, the Stationers’ Court records note that ‘Mystres Bysshop’, widow of the bookseller George Bishop, ‘hathe of her owne motion & voluntary good will freely gyven to the Company. A table cloathe, A towell, and Twoo Dozen of napkyns, wrought with white Lady woorke / The whiche were Delyuered to mr Seton and mr Standish Wardens, at a court holden this daye /’. When Mary Bishop’s will was read out on 4 October 1613, she ‘did give and bequeath to the Company of Staconers in London being at her funerall, ten poundes foure arras wrought cushens a cubberd cloth and two long flaxen table-clothes of her owne spinning’. The entry insists that these gifts are the products of Bishop’s own labour, distinguishing them from comparable presentations by male stationers. They were also valuable: in her study of the Drapers’ Company, Lena Cowen Orlin notes that ‘the most valuable of the Company’s goods were textiles – napery, table carpets, and cushion covers’. Moreover, these goods suggest that Bishop established herself as an enduring presence through the presentation of gifts which had both a useful and a livery function, proclaiming the status of both giver and Company.

Ian Archer notes that ‘it is striking how many donors arranged for the distribution of their requests to the [Haberdashers’] Company’s poor at the St Katherine feast at which the election of the new Master and Wardens was published before the Livery’. Florence Caldwell timed her gift of six gowns for poor members of the Haberdashers’ Company so that they were ready for the recipients to wear when they waited on the Master and Wardens as they progressed to church on the day of the election feast, a very public statement of her own generosity and her material incorporation into the life and ceremony of the Company.

Women’s work had a profound effect upon the shape, and hence practices, of the livery hall. When the Fishmongers repaired their hall in 1639, they employed the widowed Anne Barsey as their master plumber. Twenty-seven years later, the hall was destroyed by the great fire, and the Company employed another woman as master plumber for their new premises: the widow Elizabeth Heard. Margaret Pierce, ‘widow, the painter’ was paid one hundred and forty six pounds for painting the new woodwork inside and outside the hall, whilst Isabell King, another widow, was in charge of rubbish disposal; the contract for leadwork was held by the widows Peirce and Heard. The employment of women as master craftsmen in the building trades continued into the next century, when five of the nine masters employed to build a beadle’s house for the Company were women. In 1627, officers of the Grocers’ Company permitted Mary Stroude, a plumber’s widow, to ‘continue the plumber’s work to this Hall during her widowhood and for so long time as she shall carefully, honestly, and
at reasonable rates perform the said work'.\textsuperscript{66} Each of these cases suggests the probability that husbands and wives worked together to organise and run their trades, leaving the widow fully qualified to take over the business.

Though the Carpenters were fortunate in that their hall survived the fire, it still required redecorating by the late seventeenth century. The Company borrowed three hundred pounds from one of their tenants, Mrs Purefoy, to help meet the costs of the project; a reminder that materiality in the sense of objects and buildings is inextricably linked to material concerns in the sense of finance and embodied labour. Purefoy, in return, was assured of an annuity for life of thirty-six pounds, making this a mutually beneficial arrangement, and one that ensured close ties between the Company and a benefactor who also occupied their property.\textsuperscript{67}

Women’s rights in property could clash with the interests of the companies, especially given the ‘dense social lives’ of buildings in the capital ‘with its urgent issues of proximity and jurisdiction’.\textsuperscript{68} The guild halls, which usually consisted of an agglomeration of buildings and properties, especially before the fire, overlapped with and extended into domestic space. For some employees, especially the Beadle, the hall was home as well as workplace. When the Lady Dawes, widow of the former Prime Warden, moved out of Fishmongers’ Hall, she left the Company thirty-six chairs, gilded and tin-plated sconces for candles, and iron firebacks, contributing significantly and visibly to the furnishing of the great chamber and great parlour.\textsuperscript{69} But the overlap between company and domestic space could lead to tensions: in 1644 the Beadle’s wife refused to leave her home in Carpenters’ Hall, after it was alleged she had been in contact with a plague victim; in 1653 she, her husband and son were threatened with eviction if they engaged in any further ‘disorderly and uncivil behaviour’ towards the Clerk.\textsuperscript{70}

Such ‘uncivil’ behaviour was closely tied to ideologies of gender, contradicting the ideals both of feminine obedience and of masculine civility. In the late sixteenth century, the Fishmongers employed Widow Garland as their gardener, and periodically complained about her ‘disorderly’ behaviour, including allowing ‘the common drying of clothes’ and games of bowling by strangers.\textsuperscript{71} Negotiations over the use of the garden, and the newly-built garden parlour, in 1644–1645, reveal more of the social and behavioural distinctions between men: Alderman Penington, newly elected as Governor of the Turkey Company, whose own house was not suitable for court meetings, requested the use of the garden house, with the important assurance: ‘those who would come being civil men’. The following year, the bowling alley was closed, due to the ‘great disorders & abuses’ surrounding its use; the keeper and his wife (suggesting a marital working partnership) were to open the gate each day for the ‘civil’ recreation of walking, and the keeper himself was warned against being ‘taken drunke’.\textsuperscript{72}

Family and company loyalties could come into conflict: in 1626, the Carpenters applied to the Court of Chancery for a decree confirming that lands at Bramshott bequeathed by their former Master, Richard Wyatt, were intended to support almshouses for ten poor men. Wyatt’s career had been advanced by marriage to his own Master’s daughter, Margaret, in the early 1580s, and his generous legacy also included land at Henley-on-Thames to support thirteen
poor women. Wyatt’s son, Henry, challenged the Company’s title to the Bramshott lands, but was proved to have withheld rent from the Company. It was Richard’s widow, Henry’s mother, who stepped in to reimburse some of his debts, and gave a further forty pounds ‘to provide ten new coats once in every three years for the Almsmen, with the letters R. W. on each coat’. The widow Wyatt’s material commitments took two forms: her financial largesse was celebrated and memorialised on the bodies of the almsmen, who would have been required to take part in Company processions on ceremonial occasions.

Portraits of women as well as men hung in the livery halls. In 1616, the Merchant Taylors acquired a portrait of Elizabeth I, an intriguing statement of nostalgia for a previous age and monarch. The Cutlers acquired a portrait of Margaret Crathorne, widow of one of their members, in 1569, whilst in 1640 the Cutlers’ Court commissioned a portrait of their benefactress Margaret Dane, and the Brewers displayed a portrait of Dame Alice Owen, from c. 1610. Owen, a wealthy widow, two of whose three husbands had been Brewers, established a school at Islington. The rules and orders governing the school, drawn up on 20 September 1613, shortly before her death, left the governance of the school in trust to ‘My trusty and well-beloved friends the Master, Wardens and Assistants of the Company of Brewers of London’, suggesting Owen’s close identification with the Company.

In 1571, at the beginning of a substantial project to rebuild their hall, the Carpenters’ Company commissioned a series of paintings celebrating ‘the story’: biblical scenes which highlight the role of carpentry. Alongside figures in traditional biblical costume, the frames include representations of ‘full-bearded senior male figures’ wearing contemporary livery dress, inserting the carpenters as witnesses of the biblical past, whilst insisting upon the antiquity of their trade. Celebrating the ‘artisanal masterpiece’ that was the newly-modelled Hall, these paintings drew attention ‘to the senior craftsmen who had undertaken the rebuilding project and commissioned the wall paintings’. The third of these images, however, includes a woman, watching Joseph’s work and holding a spindle. Her dress situates her somewhere between the biblical figures and contemporary costume, and her work equally stresses the centrality of biblical tradition to women’s domestic work: according to Proverbs, frequently cited in discussions of women’s behaviour in the early modern period, the virtuous woman ‘seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. ... She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff’ (Proverbs 31.13, 19).

This figure, less overt than a portrait of a female benefactor, or an initialled carpet, nonetheless makes women present within the scene of manufacture, positioning carpentry within a productive domestic economy. Masters were responsible for the material well-being of their apprentices, providing food, clothing and lodging: tasks which very frequently involved the labour of the master’s wife and other female members of the household. When two apprentices complained to the Weavers’ Company that they had ‘lain in one pair of sheets three months or more’, the Court of Assistants ordered the master to provide clean sheets every month. For the purposes of this chapter, the Carpenters’ ‘story’ stands in for the forgotten labours of women, which worked to efface their own
materiality (particularly in the case of the ‘invisible’ work of cleaning and laundry), but nonetheless structured and maintained the spaces and ceremonies of the livery hall, as well as of the household.  

The Founders’ Company accounts contain numerous payments for domestic work. These range from ‘cleenenge the halle’ (evidently a major annual undertaking) to ‘skouringe the brasse & pewter’ and ‘washing lynnen for the Courte dynner laste’. In 1612, Upper Warden Ezekiel Major recorded a payment of four shillings ‘to Widdo Judrey for skowringe the vessel, & bromes’. In 1614, Judrey received payment ‘for makinge the hall (cleane) the yere past’. A similar payment was made in 1615, and again in 1616, when the Company also paid to mend the windows in the hall, parlour and ‘Goodwyfe Juderis howse’, and paid a shilling and fourpence for the widow’s communion bread and wine. In 1620, her diverse tasks included cleaning, providing candles for lanterns, and washing linen for the Company quarter-day and Lord Mayor’s day dinners. Judrey’s status as the widow of a former Beadle suggests the complexity of relationships between the guilds and their domestic workers, with the payments occupying a space somewhere between wages for work done and charitable support, even as Judrey’s diverse efforts maintained and shaped the physical and social fabric of the hall.

Such tasks were not always women’s work: in 1622, after Judrey’s death, John Falkener began to receive payment for cleaning the hall. From 1628 to 1629, the work of Mrs Falkener was also acknowledged and remunerated. The entries are usually vague: she received payment ‘for her pains’, or ‘for hier extraordinary paines this yeare’. In 1633–1634, the nature of those pains is made more explicit: Mrs Falkener was paid one pound ‘for heere paines for dressing of sartaine diners for the Master & Wardens at myttings’ (her maid received two shillings ‘for heer paines’), and in 1644, she received a pound ‘for dressing of dinars the hole yeare’. In 1641, the Grocer’s Company granted Mary Knight the same allowance that had previously been given to her late husband for polishing the company’s pewter.

From 1617, Mistress Tiffin took on the job of Founders’ Company cook, succeeding her husband John Tiffin until her own death in 1630. This rare instance of a woman employed as a professional cook in this period, prompts the question of how many women were engaged in culinary employment alongside their husbands, as Mrs Tiffin probably was, gaining the knowledge and experience to continue alone in the role. More humble fare was provided by Mrs Mitchell in 1678–1679: she was paid one pound eight shillings and seven pence ‘for beere, ale, bread and cheese at severall tyme’. This may well be evidence of catering for Company members beyond the livery, asserting the inclusiveness of the brotherhood, whilst reiterating the distinctions between livery and yeomanry.

The kinds of labour described above are routinely ignored in Company histories and in more recent critical work on the guilds, in part thanks to a longstanding bias that separates the productive and public work of making and regulation from the self-effacing ‘domestic’ or ‘private’ work of cleaning, maintenance and repair. Women’s work, however, constituted part of the essential rhythm of operations of the guilds and their memberships, and underpinned the companies’ capacity for the civic and social display of ‘brotherhood’.
Conclusion

Broadening the purview of ‘material culture’ to include the overlapping operations of finance, embodied labour and physical objects and structures, this chapter has briefly surveyed how masculinity was constructed and expressed through material engagements, whether in ‘workmanlike’ building, elaborate clothing or the donation of an engraved silver spoon. Yet it has also demonstrated that women were more active, and more visible, in the material lives of the guilds than previous scholarship has acknowledged. Gifts, objects and spaces at once enacted ideals of brotherhood and community and reinforced hierarchies and exclusions, whilst women’s labour was instrumental in shaping and maintaining the declaredly ‘masculine’ space of the livery halls. The performance of economic and guild status, and of mature, civic masculinity, was structured by and depended upon the effaced labours of numerous women and men, whose material contribution to the smooth running and to the ceremonial existence of the guilds remains to be fully recovered.

Notes


5. In an influential collection, V. de Grazia and E. Furlough (eds), The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), two of thirteen chapters address questions of masculine identity. For recent work on women and material culture, see especially J. Batchelor and C. Kaplan (eds), Women and Material Culture, 1660–1830 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Much work on material culture sidesteps questions of gender or sexed identity altogether. Giorgio Riello, for instance, calls for ‘a type of historical analysis that gives as much space to materiality as has previously been given to economic or political forces, kinship or gender’, implicitly suggesting that these fields do not coincide. See G. Riello, ‘The Material Culture of Walking: Spaces of Methodologies in the Long Eighteenth Century’, in T. Hamling and C. Richardson (eds), Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 41–56, at p. 42.

6. Rappaport, Worlds within Worlds, p. 24. J. P. Ward, however, notes the extension of City and guild interests into the suburbs and liberties, arguing that ‘livery companies were metropolitan by nature’, Ward, Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds,

7. A 1501–1502 list of ‘the Crafts of the City’ includes 78 livery companies.


9. Rappaport suggests that by the end of the seventeenth century, ‘economic and other restrictions imposed upon the unfree population – then the majority of the city’s inhabitants – became unenforceable. The freedom lost much of its meaning and the system of privileges based upon it collapsed,’ Rappaport, Worlds within Worlds, p. 60. See, however, Ward, who argues for ‘the ability of London’s livery companies to evolve in response to economic and social change’, Ward, Metropolitan Communities, p. 3. P. Gauci argues that in the mid- to late eighteenth century ‘the livery retained its appeal as a prerequisite for advancement up the civic ladder, and as the qualification for the parliamentary vote in the City’ and that the guilds ‘provided the clubbable atmosphere in which professional and personal ambition could be advanced in a semi-public fashion’, Gauci, Emporium of the World: The Merchants of London, 1660–1800 (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), pp. 74–75.


17. Rappaport, Worlds within Worlds, p. 49.

27. TNA, Star Chamber Proceeding, 26 Eliz., Bundle W 34, no. 23; cited in H. Hoppe, ‘John Wolfe, Printer and Publisher, 1579–1601’, *The Library*, 4th series, XIV (1933), 256–257.
32. Ibid., pp. 156–157.
44. SHA DI/1/1, fol. 95r, and GL MSS 15201/3, p. 74, cited in Ward, *Metropolitan Communities*, pp. 95–96.
50. Ibid., p. 313. A similar payment occurred in 1642 (p. 315).
52. Ibid., p. 33.
53. Ibid., p. 81.
54. Ibid., p. 33.
56. Ibid., p. 238.
58. Ibid., p. 62.
61. Ibid., p. 75.
63. Ibid., p. 71.
64. Ibid., pp. 71, 80.
65. Ibid., p. 80.
72. Ibid., p. 42.
73. See Alford and Barker, *A History*, pp. 102–104.
79. Ibid., p. 179.

82. D. Callaghan reminds us that: ‘the invisibility of women’s work as well as the creation of an absolute distinction between aesthetic and productive labor is a relatively new phenomenon, and one which certainly postdates the Renaissance’, ‘Looking Well to Linens: Women and Cultural Production in Othello and Shakespeare’s England’, in J. Howard and S. Shershow (eds), *Marxist Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 78.

83. These examples are found together at Founders Company, *Wardens’ Accounts*, pp. 240–241, but recur throughout in different forms.


85. Ibid., pp. 256–257.

86. Ibid., pp. 260, 263, 273. Further payments occurred in 1617 (p. 266); 1618 (p. 269); 1619 (p. 271).

87. Ibid., pp. 278, 282, 321.

88. Ibid., pp. 291, 316, 318.

89. Ibid., p. 300.


92. See also Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, pp. 118–119, on the provision of bread and cheese for the yeomanry.
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