

OFFICIALS AND MONEYPERS AT THE TOWER OF LONDON IN 1433

JESSICA FREEMAN

THROUGH the careers and personalities of certain individuals it is possible to explore something of the political, civic and social world in which the mint officials and moneyers of the Tower of London operated during the early decades of the fifteenth century. I have explained previously that my interest in these officials and moneyers working at the Tower arose through my thesis, which looked at those who participated in the local government of fifteenth-century Middlesex.¹ They ranged from justices of the peace, drawn from the gentry elite, to the yeomen and artisans who served as jurors before them; from members of Parliament, with an annual income of at least £20, to the forty shilling freeholders who were among those entitled to attend the Parliamentary hustings, and elect two 'knights' to represent them in the House of Commons. These men then attested to the validity of the election through an indenture returned into Chancery. However, as Crown servants, moneyers not only had exemption from payment of certain taxes, but were also freed from the burden of service as jurors at the county court, and thus are not usually to be found attending the hustings. This means that they seldom appear in these Parliamentary records, except that in 1472, out of a total of forty-eight known attestors, eleven men (23 per cent) can be identified as moneyers at the Tower of London who lived in and around Shoreditch in Middlesex.² Their appearance in 1472 can probably be explained by the political situation, for the master-worker then at the Mint was William, Lord Hastings, the king's most trusted councillor. It is likely that Hastings took appropriate measures, through the attendance of at least eleven of his mint workers at the Hustings, to ensure the due election of Sir Roger Ree and Sir Robert Green, two strong Yorkists and knights of the royal household, as members of Parliament for Middlesex.

Since the publication of my original article, I have come across another snapshot of the coiner community, of some forty years earlier, and it is at these men that I would now like to look. By doing so I hope to illuminate the background against which the Mint at the Tower of London functioned.

Early in Henry VI's reign, in December 1433, a list was drawn up setting out what was evidently considered to be the Mint's establishment at the Tower of London.³ Henry Somer, then warden of the Exchange in the Tower of London, had been sent a writ ordering him to supply the names of workers of the Mint and other ministers in his service, almost certainly because the Exchequer wished to verify those who were exempted from paying tax as Crown servants. However, it is curious that this is the only such enrolment that has so far been found among these Exchequer papers (E159), even though, of course, taxes were always being collected. There had, however, been one distinctive tax – on knight's fees – in 1428 and it is possible that because this tax was unusual, Henry Somer was careful to have his answer officially recorded. The list reads:

Henricus Somer *custos cambii Regis* [Warden of the Exchange]

Willelmus Russe *magister monete* [Master of the Mint]

Johannes Hexham *campsor assaiatorum* [Assayer] *et contrarotulatum* [Keeper of the Counter-roll/comptroller]
monete Regis

¹ Freeman 2000.

² Calendar of Patent Rolls 1467–77, 138–9, 313–15; The National Archives [hereafter TNA], PRO, C219/17/2. The moneyer attestors in 1472 were John Herryyonge, William, Richard, John and Robert Hert, William Austen, William Sharpe, William Redec, John Rydec, Nicholas Toller and Thomas Sharp.

³ TNA, PRO, E159/210, Recorda rot. 43d. I owe this reference to Dr David Grummitt.

Johannes Orewell sculpator cunneorum [Engraver of the dies] *Regis*

Ricardus Herte senior	Thomas Savage
Johannes Hille	Hugo Sharpe
Johannes Margarete	Ricardus Lambard
Nicholaus Clerik	Willelmus Hyon
Johannes Aleyn	Ricardus Purdon
Johannes Everard	Ricardus Herte junior
Willelmus Brokke	Valentinus Toller
Johannes Chambre	Ricardus Fygge
Johannes Haveryng	Thomas Astoon
Johannes Hereyonk	Thomas Sharpe
Ricardus Pykeron	<i>monetarii</i>

Thus there were four officers and twenty-one moneyers or coiners responsible for producing the finished product, the coinage, at the Tower of London. The four officers represented separate facets of contemporary administration: two were Crown servants who, at different levels were part of central and royal government, while the other two were members of one of London's greatest livery companies, where their more immediate concerns would have been the City and trade.

To start at the top, the Warden of the Exchange, the place where new coins were issued and bullion purchased for the Mint, was Henry Somer, a member of Parliament on six occasions, five times for Middlesex and once for Cambridgeshire. At the time aged about sixty, he was an important royal official – nowadays a very senior civil servant indeed – who accumulated numerous posts and a great deal of money and land during a career which covered half a century and four reigns.⁴ Little is known of his background, but it is likely that kinsmen at the courts of Edward III and Richard II helped Henry Somer to his first appointment when, as a young man in 1393, he was granted an annuity of £5 a year as a royal servant. In 1399 Henry Bolingbroke deposed his cousin Richard and took the throne as Henry IV, but Somer survived to rise in a series of Exchequer posts, where he was notable as one of the first laymen to act as clerk to the treasurer. This is important because it represents a shift by the Crown in preferring laymen rather than clerics as holders of offices in central government, particularly in the Exchequer.⁵ The Exchequer was part of the palace of Westminster along the river Thames, and lay off the Great Hall, at the heart of royal government. In 1408 Somer was deputy treasurer, in 1410 Chancellor of the Exchequer (which passed permanently into the hands of the laity), and within the next three years he was appointed to the lucrative keepership of the Exchange and Mint. These would have been challenging years, for Henry IV's reign was marked by expensive military campaigns against rebellious barons and the Welsh and Scots, and there was a perennial lack of money. Ten treasurers struggled to balance the books, but none succeeded, and the king and his servants had constant battles with the House of Commons over grants of taxes and customs dues. It was the king's right to control the issue of coins, which he did through his mints in London and the provinces and, for a time, Calais. But in March 1413, aged just forty-seven yet worn out and wasted by disease, the king died, and was succeeded by his eldest son Henry V, not only an exceptional soldier (his war against the French culminated in the battle of Agincourt in 1415), but also an able administrator.

Not surprisingly, the new king's chosen advisors were not those of his father, led as they were by an older generation, including Archbishop Thomas Arundel, Somer's patron, whose influence was already in decline. Henry V's main supporters, his brothers and his Beaufort half-uncles, Henry, Bishop of Winchester, and Thomas, later Duke of Exeter, were from the 'opposition' party in Henry IV's reign, and this placed Somer in a vulnerable position even before the old king's death. He was accused of misuse of public funds in February 1413, enquiries which were resumed at the first Parliament of the new reign. He was removed as Deputy Treasurer and one week later massive sureties of 10,000 marks were given by Somer himself and a group of important men, including seven London merchants, that he would 'stand and wait' to answer the charges at the

⁴ Roskell, Clark and Rawcliffe 1992, iv, 400–4.

⁵ Grummitt 2003, 149–62.

end of the next Parliament. But such an ambitious and able administrator was unlikely to be out of office for long, and the charges were either disproved or dropped. Somer was confirmed as Chancellor of the Exchequer and as Warden of the Mint, and remained in office when Henry V's early death in 1422 brought his year-old son, Henry VI, to the throne. The country was then governed by a council of regency until young Henry came of age in 1437. Somer eventually resigned on grounds of age in 1439, when he was probably over seventy.

Somer is that rare medieval figure of whom something is known of his personal qualities, for he was a friend of a well-known poet and literary figure of the time, Thomas Hoccleve, who however had to earn his living as a clerk in the Privy Seal Office. Hoccleve's works include an unusual amount of autobiographical material and within this he left a portrait in words of 'Glad cherrid Somer', who was known for his charm and conviviality: 'Thankid be thy freendly governance, And thy fressh look of mirthe and of gladnesse.' Both men belonged to the celebrated 'court of good company', a group of Exchequer and other royal officials who met regularly to dine and drink at the Temple (probably the Middle Temple), sometimes to excess. Hoccleve's poems were, however, often written with a purpose: on one occasion he reminded Somer that he had promised the members of the 'court of good company' a fine dinner on May day, over which he would preside. In another poem Hoccleve asked that his arrears of pay be forthcoming for although the Privy Seal clerks were paid an annuity, they also gained an additional income from fees and favours.⁶ Thus, as Somer had depended on his own patron, Archbishop Arundel, so others in turn looked to him for patronage and help.

Apart from his friendship with Hoccleve, and the literary interests that this implies, Somer was evidently known to Geoffrey Chaucer, who authorised Somer to collect his pension for him in June 1400 when he was ill. Like Chaucer, Somer moved in the highest royal and political circles: Thomas, Earl of Lancaster appointed him one of his attorneys when he went to Ireland in 1408, and Somer also had many dealings with Sir John Tiptoft, Speaker of the House of Commons in 1406. As might be expected, Somer married well, to a wealthy widow who was also the heiress of one of the richest merchants in Winchester, Mark le Faire. In 1405, Henry and Katherine, in an indication of their wealth and status, obtained a papal indulgence to use a portable altar and appoint a confessor of their own choice. Somer built up landholdings around Edmonton and Tottenham in Middlesex and then purchased an estate based on Grantchester, Cambridgeshire; by 1436 he is known to have enjoyed an income from land of £266 a year. However, he probably actually received two or three times this sum from royal annuities, and the rewards of office. His salary as Warden of the Mint, for example, was 2s. 6d. per day, and there were unofficial fees and 'bribes': the Exchequer also provided numerous opportunities to acquire leases, wardships and marriages on preferential terms, and to engage in money-lending, often to the king himself.⁷ Yet Somer devoted a substantial amount of his time to local affairs, sitting as justice of the peace for Middlesex for over forty-three years and subsequently for Cambridgeshire. At his death in 1450 his grandson and heir received 3,000 marks in cash, plate and outstanding debts, while his servants benefited from generous legacies.⁸

Although Somer was the nominal head of the Exchange and Mint, by this date the warden was overshadowed by the rise of the assayer-comptroller and the master-worker of the Mint, men who brought professional expertise to their posts. In 1431 William Russe, citizen and goldsmith, and thus a member of one of London's great livery companies, was the Crown's choice as Master-Worker. It was only comparatively recently that London goldsmiths had been filling this office, for earlier in the fourteenth century aliens had predominated. But in 1413 the London goldsmith, financier and influential politician Lewis John was granted the post; he was succeeded in 1422 by his fellow goldsmith Bartholomew Seman *alias* Goldbeter, and then by William Russe, followed by John Paddesley, both described as jewellers and goldsmiths.⁹ The office-holders did not always

⁶ Furnivall and Gollancz 1970, xiii, 58-9, 60, 66. The ballads have been misdated by the editor; Brown 1971, 260-81, especially at pp. 267 and 269.

⁷ Wylie 1914, i, 171.

⁸ Roskell, Clark and Rawcliffe, iv, 400-4.

⁹ Challis 1992, 156-7, 179.

find themselves making a profit; the trouble was that the loss from the waste and the loss of weight in the melting now fell on the master-worker and not on the bringer of the metal to the Mint. In addition, the Crown appointed exchanges separate from the mints, and this accounts for the importance that Seman and Russe attached to also holding the farm of the king's Exchange in London.¹⁰

Perhaps one reason for the appointment of goldsmiths was that by the nature of their trade they had an interest in safeguarding the standard of the gold and silver which were their raw materials. Yet other events which must have deeply concerned members of the Company often passed with little comment in their own records. The depreciation of the coinage in 1411, for example, when the value of the coins struck from a pound of silver was increased from twenty-five shillings nominal to thirty shillings, is not even referred to. English currency remained undervalued in relation to foreign coins since it was of a consistently fine quality even though the weight was reduced, and there was a perennial shortage of bullion, not helped by the demands of the army in France.¹¹ In the years 1420–30, when the king accepted the Commons' petition that no metal save silver might be gilded and there was a sustained agitation about the scarcity of coin, a recoinage was forced through. The master-workers, in this and succeeding years, were goldsmiths, but the losses can be found recorded not in the Goldsmiths' books, but in those of the Drapers' Company.¹²

Russe had his own aristocratic and courtly connections, although at a commercial level. As a London alderman, he was one of the City's elite, and here his success no doubt reflected the fact that he had married the widow of his late master, the goldsmith John Whitwell. Isabel was a capable woman, apparently closely involved with both her husbands' trading activities, for her will, made after she was widowed for the second time, refers to two apprentices of her own.¹³ In 1427 William and Isabel, as executors of John Whitwell's will, were listed as creditors of Henry IV, for supplying 'necessaries of the chamber and garderobe', and in 1432 Russe and John Paddesley, his successor as master-worker, valued the plate and jewels of Cardinal Beaufort, seized at Sandwich on the orders of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. In 1439, John Cheseham, one of William Russe's executors, received £662 in settlement of a debt due by John, Duke of Bedford (who died in 1435), and at his own death Russe was also owed in excess of £336 by Charles, Duke of Orleans, a prisoner in England since 1415.¹⁴ These debts could have been for actual goods supplied or, perhaps more likely represent loans, with Russe's main business activities centering on banking and money-lending.

During these years Russe would have seen the emergence of one of London's major political disputes of the fifteenth century, which was led by a dissident member of the ruling oligarchy, Ralph Holland, a member of both the Drapers' and Tailors' Companies. Holland was elected as Russe's fellow sheriff in 1429, so that year they must have worked closely together, although just three years previously Holland had been committed to prison for criticising London's mayor, only being released on bail of £100.¹⁵ Russe's career in civic politics followed a more conventional pattern. In 1433 he was elected alderman of Bread Street ward, and thereafter attended meetings and elections, provided sureties for fellow citizens and was one recipient of a gift of goods and chattels by a London widow, in effect a chattel-mortgage, probably in connection with a business transaction.¹⁶ Shortly before his shrieval election, Russe had become one of four wardens of the Goldsmiths' Company and during the next few years took on three apprentices. Then in September 1431 came his appointment as Master-worker of the Tower, Calais, York and Bristol Mints, and farmer of the king's Exchange in London. He paid 100 marks a year for the Exchanges, meeting all expenses and providing his own cash float, i.e. the working capital. All his ten sureties

¹⁰ Reddaway 1975, 305 & 115; Challis 1992, 174–5; *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, iv, 177b; *Calendar of Patent Rolls* [hereafter CPR] 1416–22, 407.

¹¹ Bolton 1980, 73–5.

¹² Reddaway 1975, 110, 112.

¹³ Guildhall Library [hereafter GL], London, Commissary Court of London will, MS 9171/3, f. 393.

¹⁴ *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, iv, 324a; Stratford 1993, 180, 421, 423.

¹⁵ Barron 2004, 148–50.

¹⁶ Beaven 1913, ii, 7, i, 47; Sharpe 1909, 266; Sharpe 1911, 116; Thomas 1943, 241.

were goldsmiths, each bound in £100, whilst Russe gave £2,000. During his tenure gold coins denominated at 6s. 8d. (the noble), 3s. 4d. and 1s. 8d. were struck, and silver coins of 4d. (the groat), 2d., 1d., halfpenny and farthing.¹⁷

However, Russe cannot have been in good health for in the summer of 1433 he made two wills and a codicil and had died by July 1434, probably still a relatively young man. From both his will and that of his wife Isabel, we know there was a private chapel in his house and that the establishment included a chaplain, cook and several servants; Russe also remembered his surgeon with a modest legacy. Much of his cash and recoverable debts were bequeathed to his London churches of St Michael Cornhill and St Katherine Creechurch to found chantries (that is, to say masses for the dead), and to maintain the fabric and altars.¹⁸ His chantry within St Michael was still in existence in 1450, when the church kept certain monies in 'Russes cheste', complete with four locks and keys.¹⁹ The church also received a luxury item, a cope embroidered with pearls and with the nine orders of angels. His time at the Mint and Exchange of London was recalled by a small bequest to the parish church within the Tower, but otherwise his will mirrors the usual concerns of London's mercantile elite. He left legacies to kinsmen, to the various orders of friars, to fraternities supporting poor priests and parish clerks, to the inmates of London's prisons, hospitals and lazar-houses and, in the sentimental bequest favoured by London's merchants, towards marriage portions for poor maidens. Further legacies, including the repair of highways around London, depended on recovering 'desperate' debts owed by the Duke of Orleans and the executors of Richard Whittington, one-time mayor of London.²⁰ In a reminder that the war against France was still ongoing, his widow Isabel was assessed in 1436 to pay 6s. 8d. towards the costs of the troops sent by London to Calais, under threat from the French after the defection of Burgundy. She died the following year. Like her husband, many of her bequests were to churches, particularly in Sussex, probably her place of origin; and, following in her husband's footsteps, Isabel appointed her cousin, William Sydney esquire and later knight, one of her executors.²¹

Thirdly, there was John Hexham, the Assayer, Campsor or Comptroller. Assaying had always been significant, but had lately grown in importance, for 'accurate determination of fineness was crucial both for the initial purchase of the bullion and for quality control of newly struck coin.'²² Apart from regular checks on production it was usual for samples of new coin to be tested before issue, that is on delivery by the Mint, as well as at the more formal and ceremonial Trial of the Pyx. Surviving assay rolls show that most samples corresponded with the standard. Hexham also tested the blanks for weight before passing them on to the moneyers. From the time of Edward I the Assayer had had to keep a counter-roll, recording the amounts of bullion purchased in the Exchange and passed to the Mint. He arbitrated in disputes about fineness, and also kept an eye on both the warden and the master-worker.²³

John Hexham was a contemporary of Henry Somer and, like him, a royal servant, but of lesser eminence. Again, his origins are obscure, although he may have come from Hampshire or Sussex.²⁴ He had probably joined the king's service by October 1399 if he was the man then granted maintenance from the Abbey of Hyde by Winchester.²⁵ His way of life as a young clerk working his way up the ladder was no doubt similar to that described in verse by his fellow clerk, the poet Hoccleve: commuting from his lodgings to his office at Westminster on foot or by boat on the Thames. At Westminster he would have ate and drunk at one of the many cook-shops and

¹⁷ Reddaway 1967; Challis 1992, 709.

¹⁸ Sharpe 1889-90, ii, 482-3; GL, MS 9171/3, ff. 385-385v and 393.

¹⁹ Sharpe 1889-90, ii, 527-8 (will of John Lufkyn).

²⁰ Russe was a member of the Parish Clerks' fraternity, James and James 2004, i, 9.

²¹ Jefferson, 2003, 482; GL, MS 9171/3, f. 480.

²² Challis 1992, 152.

²³ For the assay of five forms of silver money by Hexham on 27 October 1432, and trial of the pyx by William Russe, 1 December that year, see *CPR 1429-36*, 256, 258-9; Challis 1992, 153-5.

²⁴ John Hexham was co-executor for the parson of Havant, Hampshire, in 1416. The same year Henry fitzJohn of London and Beatrice his wife conveyed to John Hexham and Joan his wife, one-third of the manor of West Thorney, Sussex; in the early 15th century Walter Fuyst and Joan his wife, widow of John Exham of Chichester, were sued in Chancery over the rent of the manor of Notebourne, Sussex, *VCH Sussex*, iv, 195; PRO, C1/9/337.

²⁵ Calendar of Close Rolls [hereafter CCR] 1399-1402, 101.

taverns serving the workers and visitors and then in the evenings gathered with his friends to drink in the ale-houses and eye up the girls.

Yet his experience was not confined to Westminster for, described as the 'king's clerk', Hexham travelled extensively between 1417 and 1443. In these twenty-six years he attended, in a clerical capacity, at least ten musters of men-at-arms and archers at Barhamdown, Gravesend, and other Kentish ports before their embarkation to France. It was at these musters that the soldiers were formally inspected and their names set down. On nineteen occasions he was one of those commissioned to 'arrest' ships in the port of London, and at Sandwich and elsewhere along the coast, to carry troops and supplies from England to Aquitaine, Normandy and Ireland. His accounts for the payment of mariners to convey commanders and their retinues to France still survive.²⁶ Hexham would have met all the prominent military leaders of the age, not just Henry V and his brother John, Duke of Bedford, but those of Henry VI's reign, such as Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, Richard, Duke of York, John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury and John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset. Reflecting his financial expertise, he was appointed Escheator for Sussex and Surrey in 1432, and in 1439 he served on the same commission as William, Earl of Suffolk and Sir Ralph Cromwell, the king's treasurer, to enquire into evasions of the king's rights.²⁷ His career was thus concerned with financial and audit control on the Crown's behalf, and these were the skills which he brought to the Mint and Exchange.

However, few royal rewards apparently came his way. In 1432 Hexham surrendered a manor back to the king after holding it for only two months, and in 1433 a royal grant for twenty years of another manor near Winchelsea (Igham [?Icklesham] by Winchelsea) was annulled after just two years.²⁸ But shortly beforehand he had acquired a wealthy bride, Agnes, the heiress daughter of Thomas Hayton, who brought substantial lands in Kent and Surrey with her; their income increased by one-third when Hayton's widow died in 1434 and her dower reverted to Agnes. But by 1450 Hexham was dead for, although no will has survived, in that year Agnes remarried for the third time.²⁹

The fourth member of the Mint establishment in 1433, the Graver of the dies, was John Orwell, also a goldsmith, although probably older than Russe. He was one warden of the Goldsmiths four times between 1426 and 1456, took on thirteen apprentices during his working life and was busy in the Company's affairs, such as acting as arbitrator. Orwell had an early financial connection with the Exchequer, for he and Robert Day were deputies to Sir Roger Salvayn (died 1422) when he was Treasurer of Calais in 1413, although the Mint there closed in 1411, not reopening until 1422. It then became in effect an outlying branch of the London Mint.³⁰

Appointed Graver to the Tower and Calais Mints in November 1431, some of the early issues of Henry VI's reign were probably engraved by him. Engravers by now had become more involved with the preparation of the punches since very little incising was needed in this way of working. Orwell received a salary of £20 a year together with a house in the Mint at the Tower, a condition of service due to the high security required. Orwell was succeeded in November 1445 by Thomas Withiale, his apprentice in 1439 and so only recently freed, who, however, had his master arrested for debt. Orwell was either exceptionally long-lived, or else he has been confused with a namesake, possibly his son, for a goldsmith of this name did not die until 1473, when the Engraver would have been almost ninety years of age, since he was apprenticed as long ago as 1402. Whatever the case, in a will dated 1473 a certain John Orwell left a house at York, no doubt his place of origin, to the monastery of St Mary without the Walls there, while his house on Cheapside went to the Goldsmiths Company, subject to heavy annual charitable payments.³¹

²⁶ CPR 1416–22, 1422–9, 1429–36, 1436–41 and 1441–6, *passim*; TNA, PRO, E101/51/7 & 10: 54/4.

²⁷ CPR 1436–41, 314–15. The Escheator was the official who collected feudal dues owed to the king.

²⁸ Calendar of Fine Rolls [hereafter CFR] 1422–30, 84–5; CPR 1429–36, 329; his co-grantee on both occasions was George Trome.

²⁹ CFR 1422–30, 77–8, 166, 197, 226; CCR 1429–35, 149, 276–7; *VCH Surrey*, iii, 256. Thomas Sayer was Agnes' third husband; by her first husband, Thomas Carew, who died 31 October 1430. Agnes had two daughters, Mercy the wife of Richard Ford, and Joan, the wife of William Sander.

³⁰ Wylie 1914, i, 42; Challis 1992, 152; Jefferson 2003, *passim*.

³¹ Reddaway 1975, 300; Forrer 1902–30, iv, 327; Challis 1992, 155–6.

On the subject of the dies, there had once been an official known as the keeper of the dies, but the post and salary disappeared in the early 15th century when it was absorbed in the warden's duties. Before then it seems to have been a sinecure, granted for life, with a salary of 6d. a day. In 1404 John Barnardcastle of West Smithfield in the parish of St Sepulchre without Newgate was imprisoned in his house by a gang of ruffians, and so 'did not dare to attend to the business of the lord king in his office of keeper of the dies of the king and constable in the said county as much as for his own business'. He, or a namesake, had held this office of '*custos cuneorum Reges infra Turrim*' since at least 1382, served as a bailiff of the king and on the commission to collect the tenth and fifteenth for Middlesex in 1407, was a Parliamentary attester, and in addition carried on his own business as a brewer.³²

Lastly on the 1433 list there were the twenty-one moneyers and, if this followed contemporary practice of naming in order of importance, then Richard Herte senior was their Provost, or chief officer and warden. As noted above, because they were Crown servants, the moneyers working at the Tower of London had exemption not only from payment of certain taxes, but also from attendance at the county court. However, their appearance as Middlesex attestors in 1472 confirms that coiners as forty shilling freeholders formed part of a Parliamentary franchise sufficiently wide to make the elections the concern of more than simply the gentry. It suggests that the more prosperous yeoman and artisan – such as a coiner – was considered to have a legitimate interest in who represented him in the House of Commons and who, on his behalf, agreed to grants of taxation and the passage of new statutes.

In identifying these coiner attestors of 1472, I suggested that the Company of Moneyers had probably originated in a fraternity, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, and attached to the church of St Leonard Shoreditch. At this time the parish lay outside the city of London and, therefore, outside the regulatory control of the civic authorities. However, there is little surviving evidence as to who was a moneyer, for they were not paid directly by the Crown, but were responsible to the Master-worker – in 1433 William Russe – through their chosen representative, the Provost, by whom they were organised and from whom they received their wages. Thus moneyers seldom appear in official Tower records, and their own Company archives have not survived before the later sixteenth century. It is only through other sources, such as wills, enrolled deeds, and, in particular, Exchequer records, that their names are revealed.³³ The first mention I have found of the Company itself is in 1457 when, in his will, in which he describes himself as 'coynour', John Aleyn of Shoreditch left 6s. 8d. to '*communi pixidis mistere mee de conours*' ('the common box of my craft of coiners').³⁴

A comparison of the moneyers listed in 1433 and 1472 shows that five of the names on the earlier list – Austen, Harryonge, Herte (Hart), Sharpe and Toller – appear on the later list. Many families provided moneyers for a century or even longer. John Havering, for example, was no doubt descended from Ralph Haveryng, coiner in 1347. Six generations of the Hert family can almost certainly be traced from William le Hert in 1340–1 to Richard Hert in 1472. In 1336 a grant of land at Shoreditch was witnessed by John, Roger and William Hert, and by Hugh Herican or Heriong, while Ralph Herihung was a witness at Hoxton before 1260. John Harryonge, probably a descendent of William Herionges, one of the '*monetarii Regis*' of 1346–7, via one of the men of that name who were moneyers in 1371, was a prominent figure amongst the coiners from 1452 to 1472, as was his contemporary Richard Hert.³⁵ The bequest of a gold ring in February 1485/6 by Johanna Underhill, widow of Islington, to Margery, wife of Robert Harryonge of Hoxton, 'provest', is the first written evidence that the Shoreditch moneyers were an organised group with a recognised leader who had a specific title.³⁶

Although invariably drawn together because of their location (although Thomas Austen lived in Hackney), moneyers were by no means all cast from the same mould: they had differing careers,

³² PRO, KB9/193, m.4b; E179/141/27; KB9/185/1, m.47; CFR, 1405–13, 93; PRO, C219/10/6; Moore 1918, ii, 57.

³³ Ruding 1840, ii, 466. For a listing of moneyers, see Freeman 2000, 74–82.

³⁴ GL, MS 9171/5, f. 228v. Aleyn left a son William, of whom nothing is known, whilst his wife Johanna, the widow of Nicholas Wightmore, had predeceased him. Aleyn's executors were John Rawlyn, chapman, and John Harryonge, coiner.

³⁵ Freeman 2000, 76–8; British Library: Addl. Charter 40489; Forrest 1922, 81.

³⁶ GL, MS 9171/7, f. 74.

and were of varying degrees of wealth. The abovementioned John Aleyn, for example, listed on subsidy exemptions from 1414 to 1453, went to France in 1443 in the retinue of John Langton, treasurer of Calais. In his will he was sufficiently prosperous to leave instructions that his executors were to sell all his lands and tenements to pay his legacies and then to put the remainder towards pious and charitable uses.³⁷ John (atte) Hill revealed in his 1458 will the growth in material possessions of English yeomen and artisans: he bequeathed his daughter Clemence his best maser or drinking bowl, with a boss in the middle, his 'belle cuppe' of standing silver, and a great horn bound with silver and set on two silver-gilt feet. Richard Lambert of Islington was not so affluent, but could still refer to 'two of my best gowns', two silk belts bound with silver, an otter pelt, and leave twenty shillings towards the repairs of the well standing near his house.³⁸

Only occasional glimpses appear of the lives led by the moneyers. In a much later dispute (of 1589) over the ownership of two houses in Shoreditch, Richard Austen, moneyer, perhaps a descendant of the 1472 William Austyn, deposed that forty-two years ago these cottages had been used as places of 'merreymete and to make good Cheere' by the parishioners. It was, said Richard, 'accompted a Credytt by many in those days' to belong to the brotherhoods of St Christopher and St James, and of Our Lady, and to 'spend their monneys amongst them'. Another moneyer witness, Thomas Haddon, said that in past times the houses had also provided lodgings for a schoolmaster nominated by the vicar and parishioners of Shoreditch to keep a school in the parish.³⁹ Most moneyers would have belonged to these parish brotherhoods, including one particularly associated with the Moneyers' Company, and they probably also attended the parish school.

Coiners had their brushes with the law. Richard Purdon, 'coynour' of Shoreditch, together with a clerk, Robert Martyn, were presented by a jury in 1449 for placing a post in the middle of the king's highway at Tollers Lane, a road leading from Shoreditch towards Stepney, and thereby obstructing the traffic. This lane may well have been named after another family of moneyers who included John Toller of London, moneyer in 1379, Hugh Toller, 'money-maker' in 1397, John Toller and Nicholas Toller, moneyers in 1428 and 1453–56 respectively, as well as the Valentine Toller in the 1433 list.⁴⁰

This brief look at four officials of the Mint and Exchange at the Tower of London who were in office in 1433 shows that they were drawn from men with wide experience of both royal and civic government and with definite areas of expertise. However, although the warden was responsible for matters affecting the Mint, the three other officials were independent of him, so that there was a constant check on the trustworthiness of each office holder. Further down the ladder, the moneyers themselves had a background of involvement in parish life and local administration. Overall, the problems of the Exchequer, the lack of money and scarcity of bullion, the continuous wars with France leading to the raising of armies and the supply of ships, artisan discontent within the City of London and rebellious barons within the realm, provided a social and political background against which the Mint and Exchange had to function.

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³⁷ Freeman 2000, 68–70 (Aleyn should not be confused with his near contemporary, the goldsmith John Aleyn); GL, MS 9171/5, ff.228v–229.

³⁸ TNA, PRO, PROB 11/4, ff. 97–97v; GL, MS 9171/4, f.82.

³⁹ TNA, PRO, E134/31Eliz/East18, mbs 1–4.

⁴⁰ TNA, PRO, KB 29/80 rot. 31d; Freeman 2000, 81–2.

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