



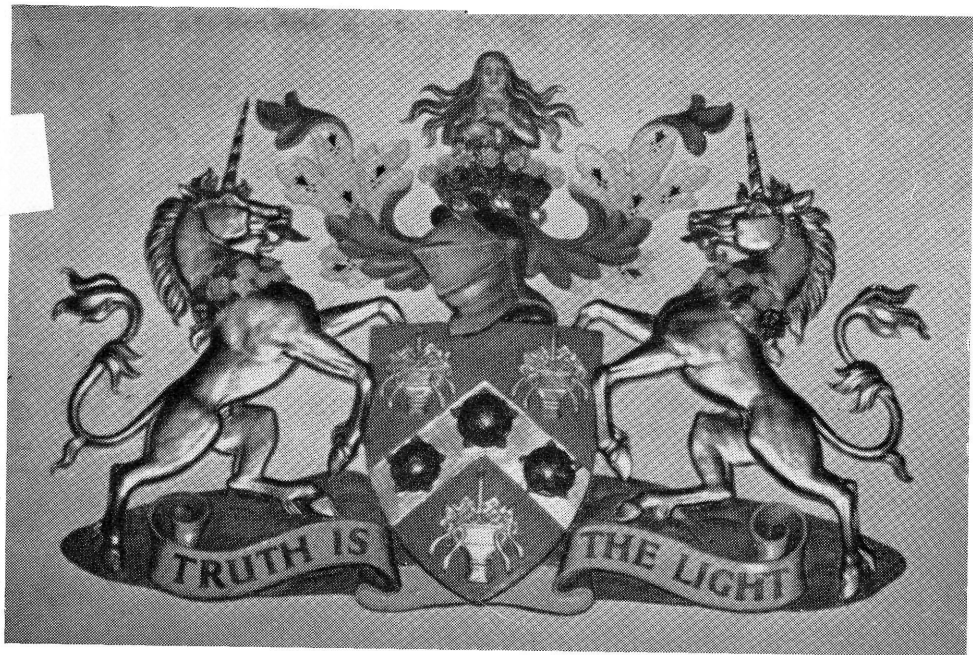
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**THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY  
OF  
WAX CHANDLERS**

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# THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF WAX CHANDLERS

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## INTRODUCTION

In the City of London there still exist eighty-one City Guilds, most of which were founded in the Middle Ages. On account of the distinctive dress (or livery) worn by their members in mediaeval times, they are known as the Livery Companies of the City of London. Institutions similar to these Livery Companies were at one time universal in Europe, but they have disappeared in most countries. In England, however, where we are perhaps more conservative, all but some eleven remain, although their functions have become very much changed.

One of the smallest, but also one of the oldest, of these Companies is the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers, which concerned itself with regulating those who traded and worked in beeswax. This account of the Wax Chandlers' Company is largely based on information kindly provided by the Clerk to the Company, Mr. C. G. Todd. It gives some indication of the detailed supervision the Company exercised in the Middle Ages over the beeswax trade, and to a lesser extent over beekeepers and their honey. The extracts from the Company's Charter and Ordinances give a vivid picture of the variety of wax lights in use, indoors and out, during the centuries when beeswax was the main 'quality' lighting material. (Tallow was used for cheaper, inferior lights, and the Tallow Chandlers' Company had similar authority over those dealing with tallow or animal fats.)

In common with other livery companies, the Wax Chandlers' Company has encountered many hazards during the seven centuries of its existence. Its last major setback was the destruction of its Hall by enemy action in 1940. For the past twenty years the activities of the Wax Chandlers' Company have as a result been severely curtailed, but the Hall is now rebuilt, and the Company's interest in beekeeping matters was signified by a reception given to the Central Association of Beekeepers on 25th October 1960.

## THE WAX CHANDLERS' COMPANY AND THE BRITISH BEE-KEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

The connection of the Company with the Central Association came about as follows.

The British Bee-Keepers' Association was founded in 1874, and the Baroness Burdett-Coutts agreed to become the Association's first Patron, 'a fact that elicited a joyous hum from those who had so long been queenless' (Cowan, 1924). Angela Burdett-Coutts was a granddaughter of Thomas Coutts, founder of the bank which still bears his name, and she succeeded to the bulk of his property. She spent her energies, and her great wealth, in public work of various kinds, in recognition of which she was made a Baroness by Queen Victoria in 1871. (Mrs. Rosamund Duruz, who was largely responsible for starting the Beekeeping Museum in this country in 1952, and who is now *Bee World* Correspondent for Victoria, Australia, is her great-great-niece.)

On the death of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts in 1906, the Worshipful Master of the Company of Wax Chandlers succeeded her as Patron of the

B.B.K.A. This was Mr. Herbert C. Todd, whose nephew is now Clerk to the Company. He was unable to be present at his election, and he was represented by the Renter Warden, the Reverend J. R. Dummelow, who became Master in 1910 and whose son is the present Master.

In 1945, the British Bee-Keepers' Association was reorganized as a federation of county associations, and the private members of the Association reconstituted themselves into a body now known as the Central Association of Beekeepers, 'inheriting' the Master of the Wax Chandlers' Company as their Patron.

#### THE COMPANY'S POWER IN THE MIDDLE AGES

An ordinance in the reign of Edward II (1307-1327) required every citizen of London to be a member of some trade or mystery\*, and henceforward, for many years, the companies wielded great political and municipal power in the City of London.

The Wax Chandlers' Company was concerned with beeswax from its foundation, the exact date of which is unknown; the first document still in existence relates to property in Aldersgate in 1199. In the documents relating to the Company the word 'wax' is consistently used to denote beeswax; the harder, cheaper waxes were designated not as wax, but as tallow.

By 1343 the Company had nominated Members who were 'sworn to make scrutiny to prevent inferior waxes'. It was laid down on 24th June 1359 that 'those within City or suburbs, either [citizens] or foreigners, who make torches, tapers, prickets†, great candles, *etc.*, shall make them of as good wax within as without, all the same, and shall not put tallow or resin in wicks, or any kind of liquor, or old wax within and new wax without; wicks not to be so heavy as to sell wick for wax; if any offend against this order, all faulty goods on his property to be burned before the offender's door, and he to be imprisoned till he pays a fine at the discretion of Mayor and Aldermen for damage done to common people; for second offence, goods to be burned and offender set on pillory; for third offence, he shall forswear City and occupation; two or more of the "most loyal people of the said Mystery" to be sworn before Mayor to present all defaults.'

Bye-laws regulating the craft were granted as a result of a petition to the Court of Aldermen in the City of London from the Fraternity of Wax Chandlers in 1371. In return for the granting of their petition, each Member of the Company was ordered to give wax annually for candles at the north door of St. Paul's Church; this order is still carried out, 590 years later. The church then standing was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666, and the beeswax candles are now burned in the Cathedral built after the Fire by Sir Christopher Wren.

#### THE COMPANY'S CHARTER

The Company was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1483, in the reign of Richard III; the original Charter is still in the possession of the Company. The Charter gives much insight into the powers and purposes

\* The word 'mystery' comes through Old French *mestier*, modern *métier*, and means a trade or craft; it has nothing to do with the word 'mystery' meaning a hidden or secret rite.

† A pricket was a spike to stick a candle on; the word here is used to denote the candle used on such a 'candle stick', the thicker end being hollowed out to receive the spike.



of the Company in the Middle Ages. The extracts below are taken from the Charter under which the Company now acts, which was that granted by Charles II on 23rd November 1663, but this Charter is very similar to the earlier ones.

'The King, on petition of the Master, Wardens and Commonalty of the ancient Company of Waxchandlers, for the better rule and government of all and every person and persons using or exercising the said art or mystery of a waxchandler within the City of London or ten miles of same, and for the benefit and advantage of the said art, and the reformation of inconveniences and abuses frequently used and practised therein, to the public damage, has confirmed to the said Company all Charters, liberties and privileges granted to their predecessors.

'All persons using said art or mystery in London or within ten miles thereof to be one body corporate and politic, by name of Master, Wardens and Commonalty of the Art or Mystery of Waxchandlers of the City of London. . . . They may meet from time to time in any convenient place within the City to elect one of their number to be Master of the said Art or Mystery and two to be Wardens, also twenty to be Assistants to help Master and Wardens in their business. Master, Wardens and Assistants, or a majority of them of which Master and one Warden must be two, may constitute, ordain, make and establish from time to time any reasonable laws, ordinances, orders and constitutions in writing which seem fit to them for the good rule, governing and correcting of the freemen and members of the Company, and for the reforming, amending and bettering of the works and workmanships thereof, and to set and impose such pains, penalties and punishments by fines and amercements on all offenders as they or a majority of them may think fit. They may have, recover, levy, receive and take the said fines and amercements by distress and other lawful means to their own use without hindrance by the Crown or rendering any account. Laws to be observed as far as they are agreeable to the laws and statutes of the Realm and the liberties and customs of the City of London.

'As great deceits and abuses are often used, committed and done by divers persons using the trade of Waxchandler in the City of London, and others bringing and sending commodities of bad and insufficient stuff, and work them deceitfully, and as much white wax is brought from abroad which is mixed, corrupt and not fit to be wrought, made up or sold, all of which deceits and abuses are to the detriment of the public, for reformation thereof Master and Wardens, with two or more others, may as often as they think fit by all lawful means search houses, shops, *etc.*, privileged or not privileged, have rule, correction and government by those who use said trade and are members of the Company, having, bringing or putting to sale any such corrupt, mixed or bad wax as aforesaid, or make or sell any bad or corrupt wax lights, tapers, burning links, flamboys\*, prickets, hard wax, soft wax or any other sort of work in wax, such work to be seized and condemned.

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\* Torch of several thick waxed wicks.

'For better discovery of faults, deceitful and insufficient works of things, wares and commodities belonging to said Art, it is ordained that henceforth no one in the City of London or within ten miles of it may use and exercise the Art of a Waxchandler unless first he or they shall serve as apprentice or apprentices for at least seven years. . . .

'All Justices of the Peace, Mayors, Sheriffs, Bailiffs, Constables and other officers shall assist Master and Wardens or any two of them in carrying out provisions of this Patent.'

#### ELIZABETHAN TIMES

In the reign of Elizabeth there was clearly a great production and trade in both honey and beeswax. The small side-line beekeepers were also apparently sufficiently numerous to warrant special provisions. Some of the dealers still seem to have been regrettably dishonest, and penalties for 'using deceit by mixture in melting of wax' were fixed in 1581 :

'This land yields great plenty of honey and wax not only for home consumption but also for export, but much wax has lately been found corrupt by reason of deceitful mixture, also makers and sellers of honey have put it in casks of deceitful assize and used deceitful mixtures.

'It is therefore ordered that after Whitsuntide next anyone concerned with trade who shall mix wax with resin, tallow, turpentine or other substance for sale, or shall offer it for sale, shall forfeit said corrupted wax. If any shall have been actually sold, the person responsible shall forfeit 2s. for each pound sold, whereof half shall go to the Crown, half to the person injured or any who shall sue for it.

'To enable offenders to be traced, every melter and maker-up of unwrought wax shall have his own stamp or mark the breadth of six pence, graven with his initials, and shall stamp every piece of wax [in a] triangle in three places, on the outside of the upper part, on pain of forfeiture of each piece unmarked.

'No one shall melt, mix, work or sell any wrought wax, stuff or wares wrought with wax, such as lights, staff torches, red wax or sealing wax, book candles, cering candles\*, cering of corpses†, links‡, green wax, red wax, *etc.*, except with good, wholesome, pure and convenient stuff. Those working or selling wax must have a mark to set on wares, so that offenders may be traced, those working or attempting to sell corrupt and deceitful produce to forfeit same, one half to the Crown, one half to the party deceived or any who shall sue for it.

'Every barrel, kilderkin or firkin filled with honey by maker and filler shall be marked with his head of cask on pain of 6s. 8d. for each barrel, *etc.*, not so marked; anyone selling or trying to sell a barrel of less than 32 wine gallons [about 350 lb.], kilderkin of less than 16 wine gallons, firkin of less than 8 gallons to forfeit 5s. for each half-gallon lacking; anyone corrupting honey with deceitful mixture to forfeit vessel and honey, half to the Crown, half to any that may sue for it.

\* Used for impregnating cloth with wax (see next note).

† Cloths impregnated with beeswax (cerecloths) were used as winding sheets preparatory to burial.

‡ Torches used for lighting people along the streets.

'The Act concerning the marking of wax is not to apply to those selling wax of their own bees in the open market in small pieces, or to any servant corrupting wax by his master's orders if he confess the same.

'No one to counterfeit a mark, or use another's mark without his consent, penalty £5 for each offence, half to the Crown, half to the party injured or any that should sue for it; pillory and imprisonment for refusal to pay fine.

#### THE COMPANY'S ORDINANCES

In the reign of Charles II, the Company's powers were set out in a series of ordinances. These were drawn up on 13th May 1664, and approved by the Lord Chancellor and Chief Justices on 28th July. They include the following clauses :

'5. Each Master, Warden and Assistant shall on Election Day on reasonable summons given or left in print or writing at his dwellinghouse or shop by the Beadle of the Society make personal appearances in Livery gown at Common Hall by nine of the forenoon, and at Court or meeting give his voice or hand in writing who shall be Master and Wardens for next two years or as required, and not leave without permission; everyone so warned and coming late to pay 2s. If one does not come at all to pay 5s.

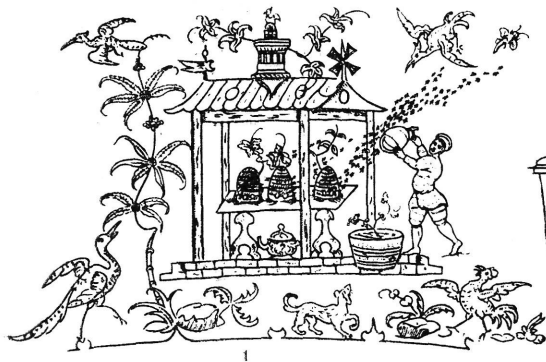
'14. Because decent and comely apparel is to be worn and used by the citizens of so noble a City as London, and meetings are to be in an orderly and comely manner, every Master, Warden and Assistant shall sit at monthly and other Courts in gowns and not in cloaks; everyone in Livery coming to Common Hall for Court or other reason shall come in a gown and not in a cloak; no one of the Art shall come to Common Hall before Master or Wardens for Court, Assembly or Quarter-day "with his apron about him"; all attending meetings are to come in "decent and meet apparel"; offenders to forfeit 1s. to Master, Wardens and Society, those coming in aprons to pay 4d. to the Beadle.

'20. Wares and commodities of the Art, *viz.* torches, tapers, prickets, flamboys, *etc.* shall be of good and perfect wax and good wick, not mixed or corrupted with turpentine, resin, tallow, *etc.*, except the casting of torch staves which cannot be done without; every small torch to be a yard long in the wax besides a convenient snuff, every large torch an ell [ $1\frac{1}{4}$  yards] long, with like snuff; every yellow link to weigh  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lbs., every black link  $1\frac{1}{4}$  lbs., both yellow and black to be a yard and a half-quarter long; all book candles, "searing candles"\* and soft wax to be made good and clean, all hard wax to be made of good stuff clean wrought and of good colour as good within as without, offenders to forfeit 20s. for each offence or such less sum as Master, Wardens and Assistants shall think fit.

'27. Every apprentice of a Freeman shall within three months after his term has expired (if there be no reason otherwise) be made free of the Company by presentation of his former Master or Mistress†; persons so made free to pay 3s. 4d. to buy napery, *etc.*, for Society,

\* = cering candles (see page 66).

† Women could thus apparently be members of the Company, but none are known to have been.



CUP 21" HIGH



FACSIMILE OF DRAWINGS ENGRAVED  
UPON AN ANCIENT SILVER CUP  
IN THE POSSESSION OF THE  
WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF  
WAX CHANDLERS, LONDON.

DATE ABOUT 1683.



1. FROM THE BOWL  
2. " " "  
3. " THE COVER  
4. " THE BASE.

Fig. 1. Some of the engravings on the Normansell Cup

Photo Eric Greenwood

3s. to Clerk and 2s. to Beadle; any delaying to present himself without good cause, or refusing or delaying to take oath or pay fees, to forfeit £10 or such less sum as Master and Wardens shall think fit.

'32. No one using said Art in the City of London or within ten miles thereof, or any other Freeman of Company, shall strike, beat, abuse or in any open audience jeer, mock, revile, misuse, slander, hurt or speak evil of any member of the Society, on pain of forfeiting up to 20s. at discretion of Master, Wardens and Assistants or majority of them, no member shall affirm anything in Court that is not truth, whole truth and nothing but truth. . . .

These Ordinances seem soon to have been put into operation, for a book in the possession of the Company notes that 'on the 11th October 1664, Master, Wardens and others searched houses of Bryan Ayleff, tallow chandler, in Old Bailey, and Giles Longe, sackman in Bread Street; faulty goods were found, seized and taken to Guildhall and on trial condemned to be burned; this was done publicly before the Royal Exchange, in Leadenhall Market and Cheapside [*i.e.* in three separate places]. Ayleff subsequently indicted the Master and others for riot, for unlawful entry and for seizure of candles. On trial before the Lord Chief Justice on 18th February, 1665, the Master and others were acquitted, 'with abundance of satisfaction unto the Company'.

#### LATER HISTORY OF THE COMPANY

As trade became less local, many of the livery companies lost their homogeneity as associations of practical craftsmen and traders in the commodity each represented. The companies tended to become hereditary and exclusive, and many of their members might have nothing to do with the craft of the company they belonged to. And as they lost their industrial character, many of the livery companies also lost their power.

Only three years after the Charter granted by Charles II, the Hall of the Wax Chandlers' Company was destroyed in the Great Fire of London. It was rebuilt, but the Company seems to have declined, for by 1708 the new Hall was being let to Mr. Preist, a dancing master, and at other times it was put for even stranger uses, storing corn for sale in times of scarcity and — antithetically — fattening swans for banquets. (The Company's own swans on the River Thames had been sold in 1606.)

The Hall was reported to be 'in ruinous condition' by 1791, and was rebuilt in 1793. In 1852 it was again rebuilt, the architect being a member of the Court, Charles Fowler, who also designed the present London Bridge. This Hall was destroyed in an air raid on 29th December 1940. The present Hall was opened on 7th October 1958, on the same site at the corner of Gresham Street and Gutter Lane, which the Company had owned since 1298.

#### THE COMPANY'S TREASURES

In common with the other livery companies, the Wax Chandlers' Company has managed to preserve at least some of its treasures through the hazards of war and peace.

The most famous is the Normansell cup, which is described as follows (Cowan, 1908): 'A large straight loving cup and cover (silver) . . . The cup is engraved over the whole surface with subjects and articles relating to the production and manufacture of wax. On the bowl is a man tingling a swarm of bees (Fig. 1, 1) and another is hiving the same from the bough

of a tree (Fig. 1, 2) . . . On the cover are a naked figure kneeling at a desk, at the side of which is a large taper which he appears to have just lighted (Fig. 1, 3); a robed female with basket on her head, and with a sickle cutting cotton for the wicks from a tree; on the foot are . . . bee-hives on stands (Fig. 1, 4) . . . The plate mark is the small black letter *f*, of 1563.' The cup is believed to have been given to the Company by their tenant R. Normansell about 1660, on quittance of some obligation.

The beadle's staff, probably made about 1670–1680, is 'covered with a design in high relief incorporating the Company's arms and motto. Below this is a representation of a bee-hive and bees, illustrating the trade of wax-making.' (Cowan, 1908)

The plate is now housed in a special case, framed by a carving attributed to Grinling Gibbons from the Company's former property in Aldersgate Street to which the document of 1199 related.

#### THE WAX CHANDLERS' COMPANY AND THE BEE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Many readers will know that this year the Bee Research Association is launching an International Appeal for funds, to establish and maintain adequate headquarters for its work. The inauguration of this Appeal will be held on April 20th in the Hall of the Wax Chandlers' Company, with the Association's President, The Hon. Sir David Bowes Lyon, K.C.V.O., in the Chair.

In common with many other City Guilds, the Wax Chandlers' Company has long since ceased to exercise its mediaeval power; it no longer upholds the standards of beeswax and honey, or regulates the lives and trade of those dealing in hive products. But, again in common with other City Guilds, it has now recognized a wider field of activity, and beekeepers and bee research workers in all countries will be pleased at this token of the Company's interest in furthering bee research on an international scale.

And as we start this new venture, to enable us to build for the future benefit and advantage of bee research and beekeeping, we should spare a moment's thought for our past heritage, and remember those unnamed Englishmen who met in the very same place, more than seven hundred years ago, to establish their Company of Wax Chandlers, 'for the benefit and advantage . . . of the said Art or Mystery'.

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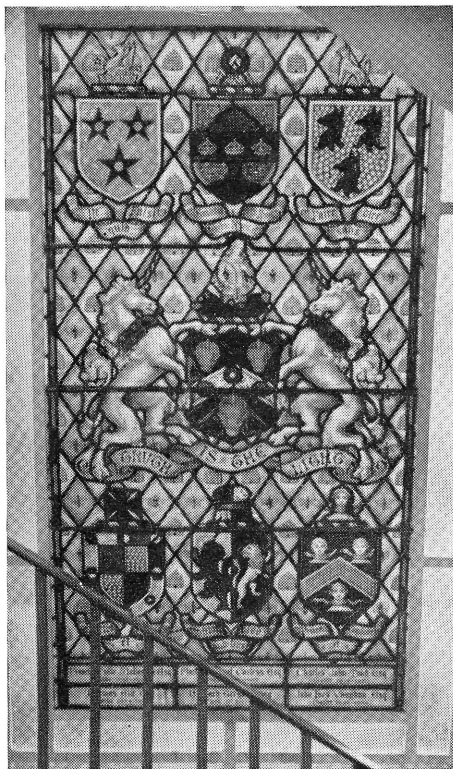


Fig. 3. Stained glass window on the staircase of the Wax Chandlers' Hall

*Photo British Bee Journal*

Fig. 2. (cover i) The coat of Arms of the Worshipful company of Wax Chandlers

*Photo British Bee Journal*

