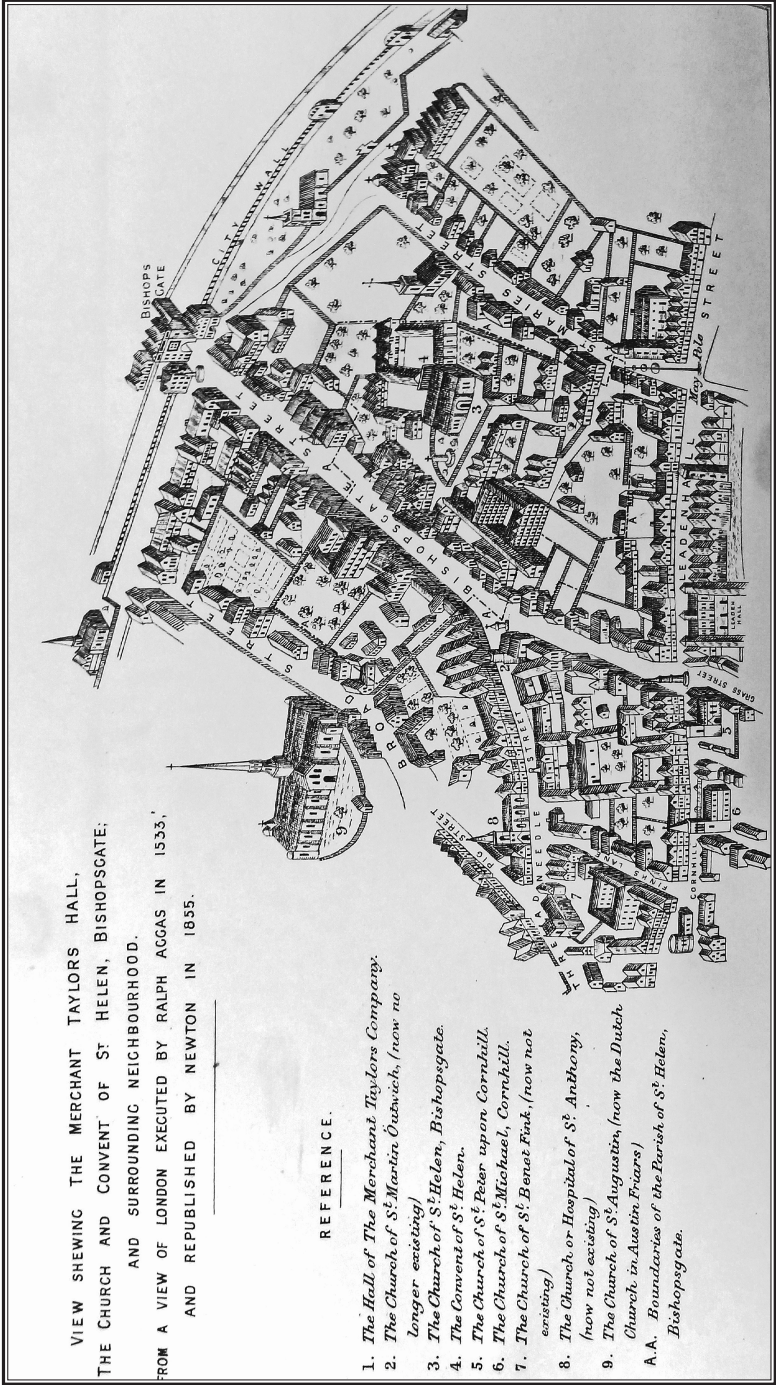




46. 'View showing the Merchant Taylors Hall, the Church and Convent of St Helen, Bishopsgate, and Surrounding Neighbourhood. From a View of London Executed by Ralph Aggas in 1533, and Republished by Newton in 1855'

(COURTESY CITY OF LONDON CORPORATION, LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

LONDON LIVERY COMPANY GARDENS: THE MERCHANT TAYLORS' AND THE GIRDLETS' GARDENS (1331 – 1666)

By Catherine Davis

For hundreds of years the City of London has been home to many livery companies. These powerful guilds were lawmakers, educators, maintainers of high standards and philanthropists as well as traders, craftsmen and manufacturers. The halls belonging to the companies were central to the business and social functions of the guilds. The gardens, which adjoined the halls, supported these activities by providing outdoor spaces for entertainment. The companies were wealthy and at their zenith in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Liverymen held key roles in the governing of London and, through Common Hall, elected the Lord Mayor every year. Consequently the entertainment of important and influential people including royalty was often on the agenda. This was the period when many companies developed their halls and gardens.

The Civil War and the disasters of the Great Fire of 1666 rang the death knell for many livery gardens as the companies struggled to survive whilst upholding their commitments to housing their tenants, caring for their almspeople and rebuilding their schools. Even as late as 1776 the Girdlers, after selling all their silver apart from twelve silver spoons, had a mere £2 19s 11d in hand on Audit Day while at the same time the almshouse bill was £1,167 0s 0d. As the price for land soared, many livery company gardens disappeared as halls were extended or the land was sold for building.

It is remarkable that many of these halls and gardens have survived for over 700 years in a rapidly developing city where land has always been at a premium. While some companies extended their halls and others sold the land to the detriment of their gardens, the Merchant Taylors' Company, despite fire damage in 1666 and bombing in 1940, has retained its original hall and garden (*fig. 46*). When the Girdlers' Company developed their bombed site post-war, they not only increased the size of their garden but made it visible from the street, thus contributing a green space to a busy city landscape.

The Merchant Taylors were originally known in the fourteenth century as the Taylors and Linen Armourers. The Linen Armourers made the padded tunics or gambesons worn under suits of armour and were an allied craft to the Tailors. By 1503 they were renamed the Merchant Taylors as many of its members had ceased to be craftsmen and had become merchants, trading abroad. The Girdlers' craft of making girdles and belts flourished until the end of the sixteenth century when girdles began to go out of fashion. Both the Girdlers and the Merchant Taylors now devote their energies to educational and charitable activities in addition to their governing roles in the City of London. For the purposes of this article I am focusing on these two companies and the development of their gardens between 1331 and 1666.

Some of the early guilds found ideal properties to purchase for their company halls in the City mansions of the fourteenth century, which had often belonged to wealthy merchants. As a result they already possessed the large halls required for ceremonies, feasts and meetings as well as additional buildings for offices. They also usually had courtyards and entrance archways leading from the street indicating the resident's high rank and almost always they had gardens. Sometimes the buildings were adapted and extended by the incoming guild but usually there was little change. Parlours, which were considered particularly important, were added if they were not already there and would overlook the garden through a bay or oriel window. These first halls were the models for the purpose-built halls that were to follow and the site plans for livery halls have remained much the same until the post-war rebuilding of the twentieth century.¹

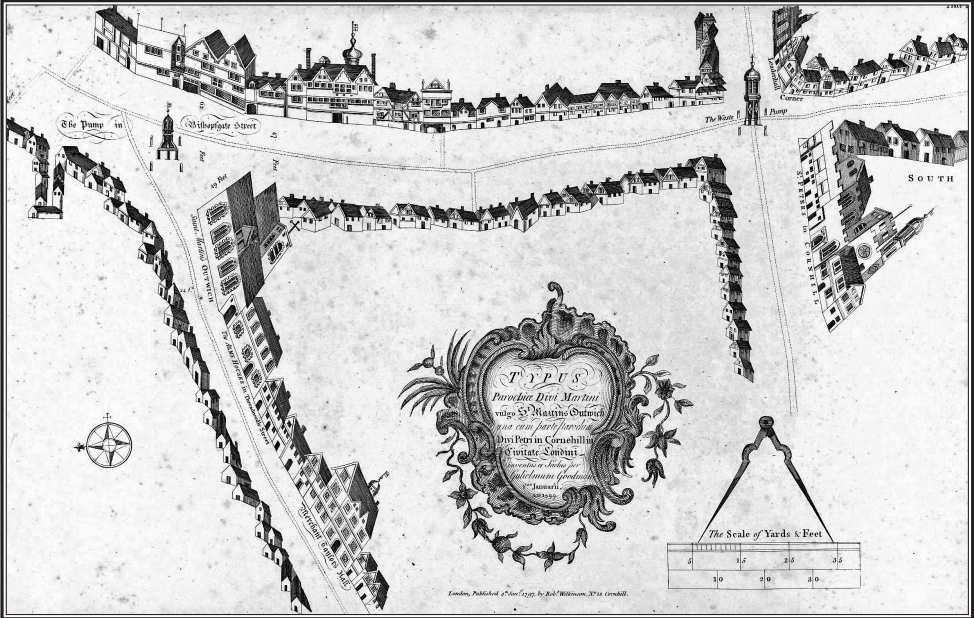
The Merchant Taylors' hall stands on the original foundations and walls of the mansion that was purchased for them in 1331 by John de Yakeslee, a pavilion maker to Edward III.² It had belonged to Edmund Crepin and is situated between Threadneedle Street and Cornhill (*figs. 47 & 48*). The mansion had a garden attached whose location can be seen on a plan dated 1669 that shows

1. John Schofield, *Medieval London Houses* (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 2003) p.44.

2. www.merchant-taylors.co.uk.



NORTH WEST VIEW OF THE ANTIENT STRUCTURE OF MERCHANT-TAYLORS HALL, AND THE ALMS-HOUSES ADJOINING IN THREADNEEDLE STREET.
HALL in the Year 1325 was the Mansion of Sir Oliver Ingham, under a gentleman of the Name of Crepin, who for a valuable Consideration, granted it to John de Takestey, King Edward III. then Mayor, for the use of this Company. It was then called New Hall, or Taylors Inn.
ALMS-HOUSES adjoining were very probably coeval with the *HALL*; but in consequence of the Will of Richard Hills, Master of the Company in 1539, & Found. MERCHANT-TAYLORS SCHOOL who gave certain Cottages in Rosemary Lane, and Alderman Ratcliffe, who gave one hundred Loads of Timber, the present *MS-HOUSES* for WIDOWS of that Company in Rosemary Lane, were erected.



47. North West View of the Antient Structure of Merchant-Tailors Hall, and the Alms-Houses adjoining in Threadneedle Street', from a drawing by William Goodman, 1599 (© TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM)

48. Copy after an old plan from 1599, with bird's eye view of the houses in Bishopsgate Street, Threadneedle Street and Cornhill, Etching and engraving, published 1797 (© TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM)

the property purchased from Crepin in 1331³ (fig. 49). By the beginning of the fifteenth century it had a fountain and vines.⁴ In 1569 the beadle, Francis Yomans, was responsible for its upkeep and he employed two men and two women to keep the garden tidy with brushes and brooms.⁵ A year later he purchased a new watering 'Tubb', plants and seeds and 'wyre' to bind up the rosemary.⁶

In 1431, a century after the Merchant Taylors acquired their hall, Andrew Hunt bequeathed the Girdlers' Company two tenements and a piece of land in Basinghall Street⁷ and by 1505 Robert Belgrave had bequeathed more property, described as a 'Tofte of Lande a Solar and a Garden'.⁸ All that is known of the Girdlers' garden at this time is that the land bequeathed to them in 1505 contained a garden. Many of their early records were destroyed along with the hall and garden in the bombing of London in 1940.

By the sixteenth century the livery companies had become rich and important, as a consequence of which the entertainment of significant and influential people including royalty was often required. The gardens of the palaces built by the nobility along the Strand were beginning to reflect a new trend whereby the relationship between the house and garden was unified by symmetry and axis. However, the compactness of many of the livery company gardens and the arrangement of their buildings meant that they could not follow this new trend, and as a result they maintained the medieval or Tudor style garden well beyond the fashion. Even so the livery garden remained a valuable addition to the hall as a place of leisure and conversation, and as a shelter from the busy noise of the street close by.

In October 1572 the Merchant Taylors decided to develop their garden when a memorandum in the Court Minutes stated, 'Remember the Decaye of yo garden necessarily requireringe to be amended', and in April 1573 it was decided to develop the property by 'enlarging and beautiffyinge of their Garden and Hall Accordingly'.⁹ The

garden was to be laid out with a 'Bowling Alley, Terras and Knottes'; a full time gardener called Edward Clarke was employed and he 'made ye garden and Bowling Alley' and provided the 'Erbes'.

As to plants grown in the gardens, knots were often set out using thyme and hyssop, as was recommended by Thomas Hyll in 1558. Although there are no records of what plants the Merchant Taylors used for their knots, it is known that the Clothworkers' and Drapers' Companies both used thyme and hyssop so it is most probable that the Merchant Taylors did likewise.¹⁰ Other companies' lists have also to be relied on to deduce what else might have been growing in the Merchant Taylors' garden. The Carpenters boasted an arbour covered in roses in 1547, and by 1585 privet and honeysuckle were added. Seeds were a regular purchase and among them were beet, bugloss, camomile, chicory, clary, endive, gilly-flower, hyssop, langue-de-boeuf, lavender, lettuce, marigold, parsley, rosemary, sage, sorrel, spinach, stock, sweet marjoram and thyme.¹¹ Like the Carpenters, the Drapers grew some of their own food, notably strawberries and gooseberries, endive, basil and balm, and alongside these there grew columbine, lavender, roses and lilies. In 1570 they planted fruit trees and ordered one hundred damask roses. The gardener was not allowed to grow onions, garlic or teasels, 'and such like things not sightly',¹² but he was, however, allowed to sell his surplus produce to the public. By the 1660s the Girdlers were ordering 'gillyflower roots, roses, pinks, tulips and camomile'¹³ and they also planted gooseberry and currant bushes.¹⁴

A vine was one of the features of several livery company gardens in both the medieval and Tudor period. Vineyards were known to have existed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries but it is thought that the climate cooled between 1300 and 1530, which resulted in the reduction of large-scale cultivation of the vine.¹⁵ Vines were referred to as early as

3. Guildhall Library, MSS 34214/2.

4. Charles M Clode, *Memorials of the Merchant Taylors' Company* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1875) p.35.

5. Merchant Taylors' Accounts, Guildhall Library, MS 34048/5 p.26.

6. *ibid.*, p.137.

7. T C Barker, *The Girdlers' Company: A Second History* (S Straker and Son Ltd, 1957) p.35.

8. *ibid.*, p.37.

9. Guildhall Library, MS 34010/1, p.646.

10. John Schofield, 'City of London Gardens, 1500–c1620', *Garden History*, Vol.27, no 1, (Summer 1999) pp.73–88, p.78.

11. *ibid.*, p.79.

12. Penelope Hunting, *A History of the Worshipful Company of Drapers in the City of London* (London: Privately published by the Drapers' Company, 1989) p.44.

13. Guildhall Library, MS. 5814A.

14. W Durnville Smythe, *An Historical Account of the Worshipful Company of Girdlers* (Chiswick Press, 1905).

15. Scholfield, *Medieval London Houses*, *op.cit.*, p.89.

1408 in the Merchant Taylors' records and there follow frequent entries referring to the expense of pruning them.¹⁶ The Grocers had new vines planted in 1437¹⁷ and the Carpenters had a frame made for their vine in 1491.¹⁸ There was already a vinery in the garden of the mansion in Harp Lane that the Bakers purchased in 1506. It must have been well maintained and propagated because in 1632 six new vine saplings were given to a member for his new garden in the country.¹⁹ The Clothworkers planted a vine as late as 1530 and this was regularly pruned, and it was recorded that by 1611 it had covered one of the walls.²⁰

The vine was one of the features of the medieval garden that the livery companies preserved long after the time vines had disappeared from the larger country gardens.²¹ The companies' sheltered urban sites would have preserved the atmosphere of the enclosed medieval garden and provided a warmer microclimate than the countryside for the cultivation of the vine. Thomas Tusser remarked in 1557 that the British climate was not suitable for the cultivation of the vine and that 'and we have it more for delight, pleasure and prospe&t, than for any peculiar profit'. Only by 'industry' will they 'prosper in our English gardens'.²² The livery companies proved this to be the case.

In the early seventeenth century, James I planted a mulberry orchard in St James's Park with the aim of encouraging the silk industry in this country. Many landowners followed his example, and the Girdlers, Drapers, Clothworkers and Skinners were all proud owners of at least one mulberry tree. It was alleged that the Drapers planted a mulberry orchard but there is no indication of one in the Drapers' records. Today, the mulberry trees grown in their small garden in Austin Friars uphold the tradition of growing these trees on Drapers' Company land. In 1722 Thomas Fairchild described the mulberry trees situated outside Clothworkers' Hall, which 'stood there

many years and bear plentifully and ripen very well'.²³

Today, the Girdlers' tree drips mulberries over the railings into Basinghall Avenue (*fig. 50*). Its history has been well recorded. Its ancestor is said to have been planted when the post Fire hall was built in 1681,²⁴ although another source says it was planted in 1750.²⁵ Rather fortunately, Kew Gardens took cuttings from this tree in 1937, as the tree suffered the same fate as the Girdlers' hall during World War II but the cuttings survived. One was planted with great ceremony in the Girdlers' garden in 1962, while another had been planted in 1952 in the Port of London Authority's Seething Lane garden, which had been designed by Brenda Colvin in 1947.²⁶

Another feature in livery company gardens was the terrace. The purpose of a terrace in an Elizabethan garden was to view the patterns of the knots in the garden below. Medieval terraces were usually situated at the bottom of the garden, providing a view back to the house. As no record for the purchase of rubble and stone can be found for the building of a new terrace, it is more than likely that the Merchant Taylors would have retained and repaired a previous medieval terrace situated at the southern end of their garden. Mr Lymbe and Thomas Peacock paved it in 1573²⁷ when they worked together assembling the rails and banisters. Before they could start, the turner trimmed 35 wooden posts at 2s per 'pece' and 236 small 'barresters' costing 2d each.²⁸ By 1621 the rails were utterly decayed and new ones had to be made.²⁹ As well as paving the terrace, some of the alleys were also paved in 1573 and 'certain steppes of free stone'.³⁰ By 1577 the 'South Alley being now unpaved and after anye rayne noisome to goe throughe shall be pavid with Purbeck stone...'.³¹ It was not until 1597/8 that the western alley below the King's Chamber was paved with the stone 'laid diamond wayes'.³²

23. Thomas Fairchild, *The City Gardener*, 1722.

24. Girdlers' Company, *The Rebuilding of Girdlers' Hall 1961* (S Straker and Sons Ltd., 1989), p.64.

25. Frederick Cleary, *The Flowering City* (London: The Carlos Press, 1982, Centenary ed).

26. Historic Buildings, Architects Report for Thomas Enterprises Inc., November 2008, Seething Lane Garden.

27. Guildhall Library, MS. 34048/5 p.208.

28. Guildhall Library, MS. 34048/5 p.207.

29. Guildhall Library, MS. 34010/6 p.68.

30. Guildhall Library, MS. 34048/5 p.208.

31. Guildhall Library, MS. 34010/2 fol.62v.

32. Guildhall Library, MS. 34048/7 fol.281v.

16. C.M. Clode, *Memorials of the Merchant Taylors' Company* (London: Harison and Son 1875), p.62.

17. Bridgid Boardman, 'The Gardens of the London Livery Companies', *Journal of Garden History*, vol 2 no 2 pp.85-116, p.96.

18. Schofield, 'City of London Gardens', *op.cit.*, p.79.

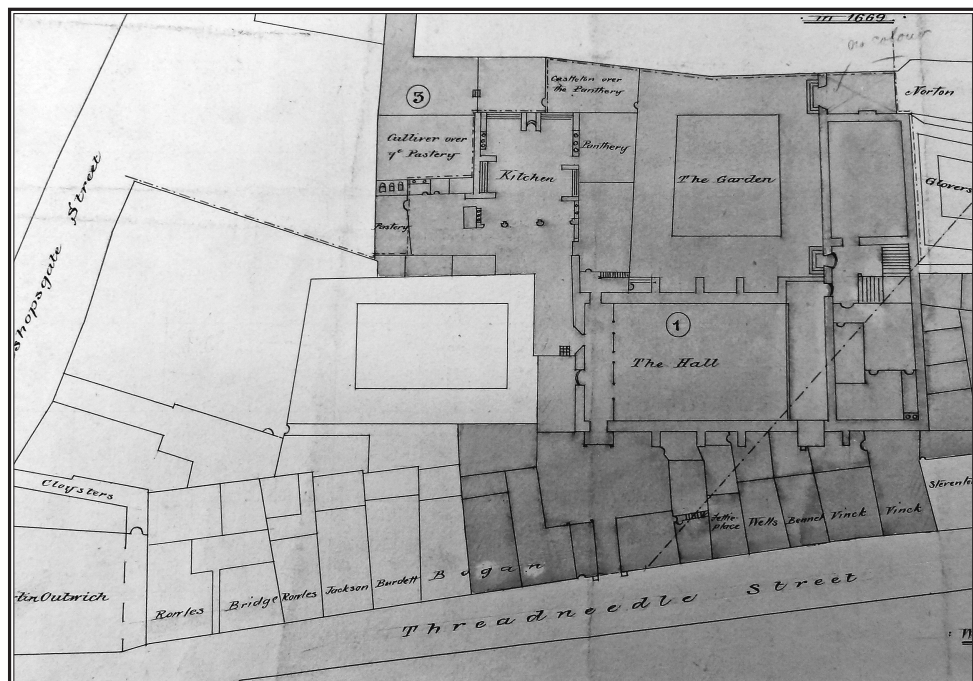
19. Boardman, *op.cit.*, p.101.

20. Schofield, 'City of London Gardens', *op.cit.*, p.79.

21. Boardman, *op.cit.*, p.112.

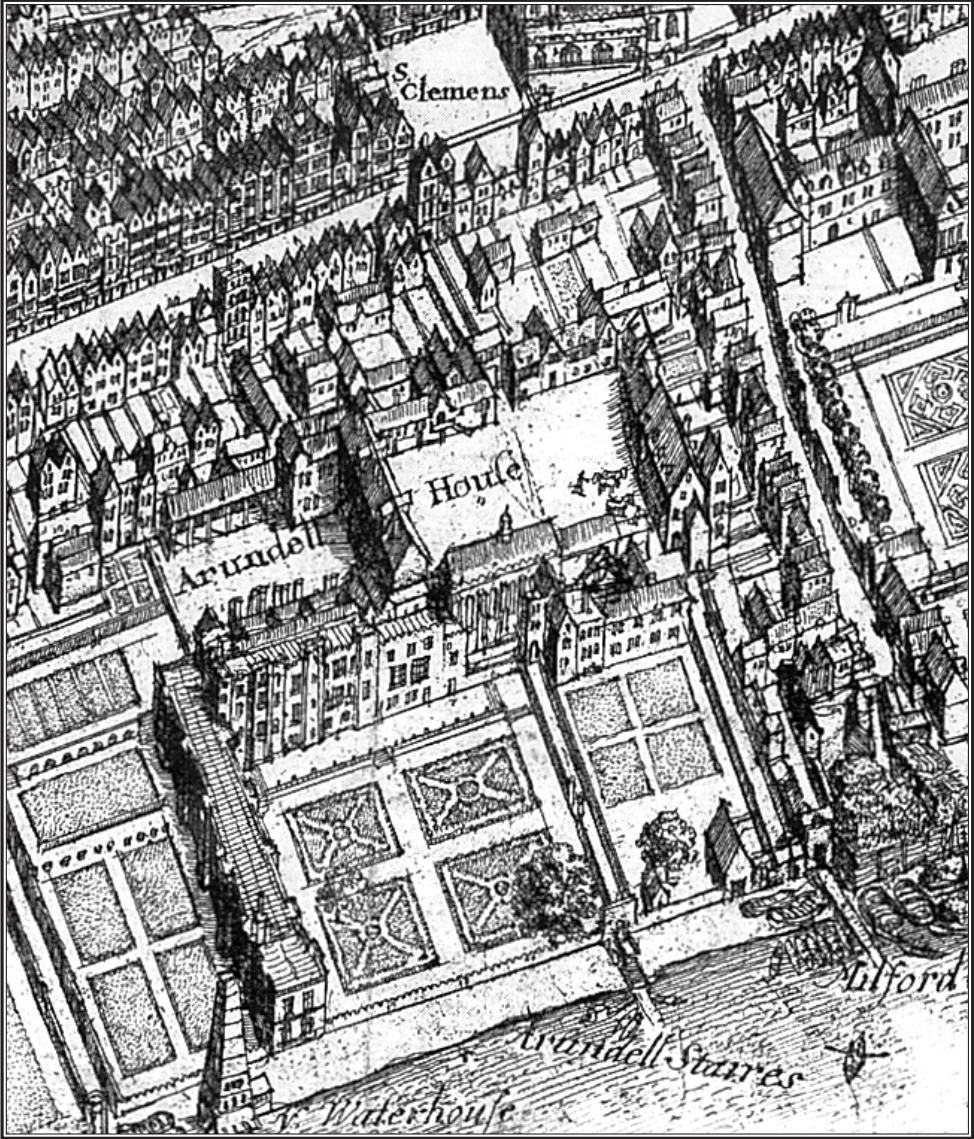
22. Thomas Tusser, collated and edited by Dorothy Hartley, *Thomas Tusser: 1557 Floruit; his good points of husbandry* (London: Country Life Ltd., 1931) p.133.

THE MERCHANT TAYLORS' AND THE GIRDLETS' GARDENS (1331-1666)



49. 'Plan shewing portion of Merchant Taylors Hall and Offices Purchased of Edmund Crepin,
Founded on a Plan made by Mr Oliver the City Surveyor in 1669'
(GUILDHALL ARCHIVES, REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE MERCHANT TAYLORS' COMPANY)

50. Mulberry Tree, Girdlers' Company Garden, 2011
(PHOTOGRAPH CATHERINE DAVIS)



51. Extract from print with bird's-eye plan of the west central district of London by Wenceslaus Hollar, c.1658, showing Arundel House with bowling alley
(© TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM)

Bowling was a popular sport in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and is said to have dated back to the thirteenth century.³³ Bowling greens, requiring space, were mostly to be found on country estates, whereas alleys were established in urban situations where less space was needed. Alleys were also installed in the royal palaces and homes of the gentry around London. The main attraction of bowling was betting on the outcome of the match. Public bowling alleys were known to be the centres of vice like brothels and gambling houses and were physically broken up by instructions of the Mayor and Sheriffs on several occasions during the sixteenth century.³⁴ John Stow bemoaned the fact that bowling had replaced archery, mainly because of the enclosing of common ground. '...our archers, for want of room to shoot abroad, creep into bowling alleys.....where they have room enough to hazard their money at unlawful games.'³⁵ He regretted that the gardens of Northumberland House had been made into bowling alley and dicing houses, 'common to all comers for their money, there to bowl and hazard'.³⁶

Despite the disapproval of its leading citizens, bowling alleys were very popular with the livery companies. The Drapers had two alleys, the Clothworkers owned two off Coleman Street³⁷ and the Goldsmiths, the Carpenters, and the Grocers all owned bowling alleys. The Merchant Taylors had a bowling alley built during their 1573 alterations but nothing is known as to how it looked, so again it is useful to look at other examples. The alley at Arundel House had a roof and no sides (*fig. 51*), and Thomas Hyll's was overhung with vines, roses, cucumbers, gourds and jasmine, 'to provide shadow and keep heat and sun away'³⁸ (*fig. 52*). All that was required of the Merchant Taylors' alley was a surface made from a combination of soap ashes, house ashes, founder's earth and sand.³⁹ It had to be repaired

two years after it had been built⁴⁰ and again in 1579, when it was 'Ordered that the Bowling Alley in the Hall garden shall be reformed and made agayne'.⁴¹ The length of alleys varied: the alley at Hampton Court measured 230 ft, Whitehall's was 160 ft, the longest of the Clothworkers' was 110 ft and the Merchant Taylors' was 86 ½ ft.

In 1571 the Merchant Taylors' banqueting house was an object of dispute between the Grocers and the Merchant Taylors.⁴² The Grocers owned land bordering the southern boundary of the Merchant Taylors' land and they both laid claim to what they called the 'Ypocras House'. Ypocras was a form of sweetened mulled wine. The Merchant Taylors eventually won their claim and their tradition of taking ypocras there continued. Their accounts for 1594/5 reveal the grocery order for ypocras as follows:

3 gallons red wine
20LBS sugar
1LB 3 OZ cinnamon
2OZ nutmeg
2OZ cloves
1 ½ oz long pepper with greyness
Coriander seed⁴³

Writing in 1632, Gervase Markham suggested bruising the spices before adding them, together with rosemary flowers, to the wine. Sugar was added after it had steeped overnight; it was then strained through a woollen bag.⁴⁴ Because of the expensive spices its association with rich living caused ypocras to become a celebration drink. The Bachelors of the Merchant Taylors' upheld a tradition of sending a 'pottle' of 'ypocras' to the newly elected Master and Wardens and such an auspicious occasion warranted that it be drunk in the Ypocras House.⁴⁵ The Girdlers also drank ypocras at this important event.⁴⁶

The Merchant Taylors had another use for their banqueting house: here they kept their allotted supply of gunpowder.⁴⁷ Livery companies were expected to store various

33. Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1831), p.226.

34. John Stow, *A Survey of London* (London: 1598) introduction by Antonia Fraser, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2005).

35. Stow, *op.cit.*, p.105.

36. Stow, *op.cit.*, p.141.

37. John Schofield, ed., *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell* (London Topographical Society Publication no. 135, 1987).

38. Thomas Hyll, *The Profitable Art of Gardening* (London: 1572).

39. John Schofield, *Medieval London Houses* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003) p.91.

40. Guildhall Library, ms. 34048/5, p.405.

41. Guildhall Library, ms. 34010/3, p.43.

42. Guildhall Library, ms. 34010/4, p.593.

43. Guildhall Library, ms. 34048/7, fol. 134v.

44. Gervase Markham, *Country Contentments, or The approved Booke called The English Housewife* (London: 1623) p.112.

45. Guildhall Library, ms. 34010/3 p.436.

46. Guildhall Library, ms. 5814A p.58.

47. Guildhall Library, ms. 34010/6 p.68.

necessities for their own security and for the benefit of the community, and gunpowder was one such necessity. Within such a restricted area of the Merchant Taylors' hall complex, there were few spaces where it could be stored safely. Weaponry was stored in the gallery above the King's Chamber in 1593. The Company was also expected to provide for the storage for corn after 1590.⁴⁸ There is no record as to the appearance of the Merchant Taylors' banqueting house. Robert Lee's banqueting house in Leadenhall Street was paved with green and yellow tiles.⁴⁹ Sir Paul Pindar's in Bishopsgate Street Without was rebuilt about 1600 and stood in a 340ft long garden and measured 20ft by 40ft (*fig. 53*). It was 3½ stories high, timber-framed and embellished with four stucco panels representing Spring, Summer, Peace and Plenty. Inside were additional plaster ceilings and a sixteenth-century fireplace.⁵⁰ It must be assumed that the Merchant Taylors' banqueting house was destroyed in the Great Fire as records after this time do not mention it again.

Garden buildings were popular in city gardens during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The livery companies were no exception and the Grocers, the Goldsmiths and the Drapers all boasted at least one, the Drapers' four being replaced very quickly after the Great Fire.

From the late sixteenth century onwards the decline of the livery company gardens can be observed. By March 1598 the Merchant Taylors had decided to convert their garden to grass plots and alleys. They said that the knots were being spoiled by 'the greate multitude of company' which paid its rent on 'Quarter days'.⁵¹ It appears the Merchant Taylors' garden was not always a retreat from the hustle and bustle of street life: it was a valuable open space in an area where urban dwellings were so tightly packed that there was often no room for a garden or even an outside yard. Noise, odour and smoke would have caused many to seek the relatively peaceful and cleaner air of the garden. Drying of washing was also a

problem for those with no outdoor space. With Moorfields outside the City walls being the nearest public area for drying clothes, the livery company gardens proved to be convenient drying places and their fragrant knots provided both good support for drying the washing whilst perfuming the linen at the same time. The Girdlers recorded that their napery was dried this way and that children were allowed to play in the garden.⁵²

It was about this time that the Drapers' Company started complaining about servants and apprentices and 'children running, leaping,.....young men and maids in wanton and uncivil manner dallying and disporting themselves',⁵³ and more than one company complained about children stealing fruit. By 1675 the Merchant Taylors had ordered that an 'open hatch' was made in the hall gate next to the street 'to prevent all common people from coming into the Hall and garden'.⁵⁴

It was not just people who ruined the gardens. Between 1586 and 1588 the Merchant Taylors had the roof to the hall repaired and the windows re-glazed. With such limited space to store scaffolding, building equipment, roof tiles, timber and glass, the garden would have taken the brunt of the disruption. It is more than likely that the garden would have been in ruins by the end of the operation and the 'great multitude' of people would have completed the destruction.

By 1638 the Merchant Taylors' garden was given over to the exercising of arms in preparation for the ensuing Civil War.⁵⁵ On the eve of the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the Drapers reported that their garden was 'exceedingly much decayed' and 'not in such a form as is for the honour of the Company'.⁵⁶ The Merchant Taylors' garden would have suffered similar destruction.

The Great Fire of 1666 burned for five days. Twelve thousand homes were destroyed and sixty thousand inhabitants were made homeless. There was also the additional loss of public buildings and churches. The Merchant Taylors' hall was gutted but the medieval walls

48. Clode, *op.cit.*, p.34.

49. Schofield, *Medieval London Houses, op.cit.*, p.234.

50. *ibid.*, p.164.

51. Guildhall Library, Ms. 34010/3, p.390.

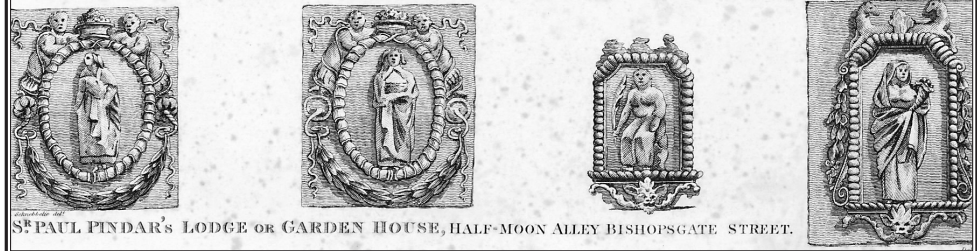
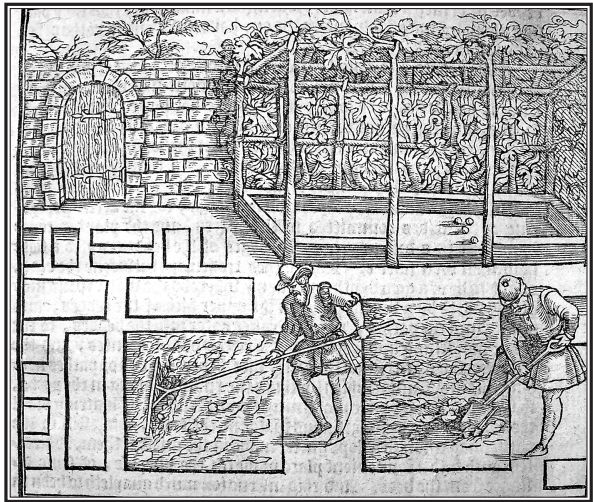
52. Durnville Smythe, *op.cit.*, p.228.

53. Penelope Hunting, *A History of the Worshipful Company of Drapers in the City of London* (London: Privately published by the Drapers' Company 1989), p.46.

54. Guildhall Library, Ms. 34010/9 p.212.

55. Clode, *op.cit.*, p.579.

56. Hunting, *op.cit.*, p.46.



52. Bowling Alley, from Thomas Hyll's *Gardeners Labyrinth*, 1577

53. 'Sir Paul Pindar's Lodge or Garden House, Half Moon Alley, Bishopsgate Street', *Londina Illustrata*, published 1819
(© TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM)

remained standing. Most likely it was at this time that the banqueting house was destroyed. The Girdlers' hall was completely demolished. The rose trees they planted that August would certainly not have survived.⁵⁷ The Drapers reported that their garden was covered in a thick layer of ash, fragments of charred paper and 'peices of Ceiling and plaster work'.⁵⁸ This would have been the state of all the livery gardens at the end of 1666.

In summary, the livery company gardens of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were considered important assets to the way of life of the people who lived and worked in the livery hall complex. These grounds were used as venues for entertainment and relaxation; they produced flowers, fruit, vegetables and herbs; they provided sweet smelling support for the drying of washing and they offered quiet, peaceful locations for many people away from the hustle and bustle of the streets outside. The companies appreciated their value and as a result of their investments the gardens developed and expanded, and were maintained to a high standard throughout the period. The costs of the Civil War depleted many of the companies' coffers and the City's and the King's further demands reduced the companies' finances even more. The effects of the Great Fire completed the disastrous situation and it was many years before most livery companies could contemplate financing the upkeep of their gardens in the same way again. In Part II of this paper I will look at the development of the livery company gardens after the Great Fire to the present day.

'SWEETLY EMBOWERED IN A PLANTATION': THE LANDSCAPE OF STONE HOUSE, LEWISHAM

By Olivia Horsfall Turner

At Garraway's Coffee-house, Change-alley, Cornhill at noon on the 25th of June 1795, would-be owners of an 'ELEGANT VILLA and LANDS, near BLACKHEATH' had an opportunity to purchase a freehold estate that, the particulars assured them, 'in point of Structure and beauty of Prospects, far exceed description'.¹ The property had been the residence of George Gibson senior and junior. It was not merely the elder Gibson's residence but also his creation, for he was an architect who, according to his economical biographer, 'had travelled in Italy, studied architecture in Rome, collected many curiosities in Art and deposited them in a singular Villa that he built on Loam-pit Hill, Lewisham, long known ... by the name of the Comical House.'²

Constructed in c. 1771-1774, the Comical House, later known as Stone House, was located in the parish of St Paul, Deptford (figs. 54 & 55). This centrally planned, neo-Palladian oddity stands on the road from Deptford to Lewisham, just where Loampit Vale shifts its identity to Lewisham Way and begins its descent down the old turnpike road (fig. 56). Nowadays the inquisitive often obtain their first glimpse of the well-known and yet rather mysterious local landmark not from a carriage but from the top-deck of a bus as they travel along the teeming thoroughfare of the A20. The landscape history of the estate tells a tale of transformation from rural idyll through early industrial hotspot to densely built district, and is an object lesson in aspirational sub-urban living.

Deptford was an ancient Roman settlement, possibly with Iron-age antecedents; 'deep ford' alludes to a crossing place in the Ravensbourne River. The Ravensbourne rises at Keston, south of Bromley, and feeds into the Thames at Deptford Creek. It was discovered, tradition has it, by one of Caesar's armies,

57. Guildhall Library, MS 5814A p.222.

58. Lisa Jardine, *The Curious Life of Robert Hooke* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004) p.138.

1. *Morning Post and Fashionable World* (London, England), Saturday, June 13, 1795; Issue 7291.

2. H. M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects, 1600-1830* (4th edn, New Haven and London, 2008), pp.425-6. The description of Gibson is by James Elmes (1782-1862) in an autobiographical passage prefaced to a memoir of his son Harvey Lonsdale Elmes (R.I.B.A. Collection).