

# The turners of medieval London

## Introduction

The turners of medieval London were a select but important group. They were responsible for making the official measures for both dry and wet goods as well as a wide range of household items and tools. Turners differed from other woodworking crafts because of the technique they used but in their everyday concerns and the provision they made for their soul after death they were typical of medieval craftsmen in London. The research for this paper was commissioned by the Worshipful Company of Turners of London to investigate the life and social environment of turners in the period before the Company's own records are extant.<sup>1</sup> Although the first set of ordinances adopted by the Craft date from 22 October 1479<sup>2</sup> the first volume of the Wardens' Accounts does not commence until 1593-4 and the first Book of Apprenticeship Bindings and List of Freemen even later, in 1604. In that year the Company was also granted its royal charter of incorporation by James I.<sup>3</sup> The Craft's own records before these dates have not survived. Nevertheless, the city of London is fortunate to retain numerous other sources, described by Professor Caroline Barron as 'remarkably rich, well kept, and well published', from which considerable detail about turners in the earlier period can be compiled.<sup>4</sup> These include the administrative records of the city itself such as the city's Letter Books and the minutes of the Court of Aldermen and Court of Common Council. This is the material that was used by the two Clerks of the Company who published Company histories in the twentieth century: *The Worshipful Company of Turners of London: Its Origin and History* by A. C. Stanley-Stone (1925), which was thoroughly revised and added to by Roland Champness in *The Worshipful Company of Turners of London* (1966). Both authors provided a valuable insight into

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Christopher Roberts, immediate Past Master of the Turners' Company, who read and commented on a draft of this paper. I also wish to record my thanks to Professor Caroline Barron for her many helpful suggestions during the course of this research.

<sup>2</sup> The Ordinances are recorded in the Journals of the Court of Common Council, Corporation of London deposited at the London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA), reference COL/CC/01/01/008, f. 217-218.

<sup>3</sup> The records of the Worshipful Company of Turners are kept at the Guildhall Library, reference CLC/L/TF.

<sup>4</sup> C. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2004), p. 3.

the craft of turnery in London. Champness's book was, in its turn, updated (in 1987) by Brian Burnett, a Past Master.<sup>5</sup>

Even so, there is still further material which can be exploited to add to the story of the London turners. Legal cases<sup>6</sup> and wills and testaments<sup>7</sup> provide useful information and these have been used extensively for this study. In addition, turners were concentrated predominantly in one particular part of the City for more than two hundred years. This was the parish of St Andrew Hubbard, for which excellent churchwarden accounts survive from the mid fifteenth century.<sup>8</sup> This research will draw on all these sources to reconstruct something of the lives of turners their families, friends and associates, and their place in the community.

### **The craft of turning and turned objects**

Turning or turnery (the two terms seem to be interchangeable although the latter when used as a noun can refer to a workshop) is the craft of using a lathe to fashion wood (more rarely metal, bone or another hard substance) into objects with a curved shape.<sup>9</sup> Turners belong to a category of woodworker that includes joiners and carvers who use fractions of timber unlike carpenters and millwrights who make use of whole trees.<sup>10</sup> Turning differs from most other forms of woodworking in its method of working. The wood itself is moved while a stationary tool is used to cut and shape it akin to the moulding of clay on a potter's wheel.<sup>11</sup> (In fact the makers of turned wooden ale measures in medieval London were referred to as 'the Potters').<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A. C. Stanley-Stone, *The Worshipful Company of Turners of London: Its Origin and History*, (London, 1925) and R. Champness, *The Worshipful Company of Turners of London*, (London, 1966, revised 1987).

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Dr Jonathan Mackman for his assistance in translating and transcribing material from the Court of Common Pleas: Plea Rolls in The National Archives (hereafter TNA). The Court of Common Pleas dealt with actions between one subject and another, i.e. civil jurisdiction.

<sup>7</sup> Contemporaries employed the words 'will' and 'testament' interchangeably and that convention will be used here. Strictly speaking a will disposed of land while a testament dealt with moveable property.

<sup>8</sup> The Accounts have been published up to 1570. *The Church Records of St. Andrew Hubbard Eastcheap c. 1450 - c. 1570*, ed. C. Burgess, (London Record Society, 1999). This volume also contains contemporary wills of parishioners including those of turners.

<sup>9</sup> 'Turning', definition 2 in *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://www.oed.com/>> [accessed 15 October 2010].

<sup>10</sup> J. Munby, 'Wood' in *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products*, J. Blair and N. Ramsey eds., (London, 1991), pp. 379-405 (p. 382).

<sup>11</sup> H. L. Edlin, *Woodland Crafts in Britain* (London, 1949), p.17; 'Woodturning', in *Wikipedia* <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woodturning>> [accessed 15 October 2010].

<sup>12</sup> *Liber Albus*, ed. H. T. Riley, (London: Longman, 1859), p. 233.

Turning is thus a relatively specialised technique set apart from the other woodworking crafts. As a group turners (often spelt ‘turnour’ or ‘tornour’ in the medieval period) were neither so numerous nor such an indispensable part of society as some of the other woodworkers. Carpenters, who erected houses and all manner of other buildings, for example, could be found living and working throughout the city of London and its suburbs. All residents would have needed the service of a carpenter at some point, if only to carry out repairs to their homes, and over 1,140 named carpenters have been traced for the period c. 1300 – c. 1530.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the work undertaken by turners being more specialised was less in demand, and so it is to be expected that there would be fewer of them. Information about the number of turners active at any particular period is not easy to come by but the 1381 Poll Tax for York, which lists 108 woodworkers gives an indication of the number working in each craft and thus the relative importance of turners in England’s second city.<sup>14</sup> The woodworkers consisted of: wrights (36), saddlers (makers of wooden bases for saddles) (23), bowyers (9), fletchers (makers of arrows) (9), coopers (7), sawyers (7), shipwrights (5), joiners (4), cartwrights (3), fusters (who made saddle-bows i.e. the arched front of the saddle) (3), and lastly turners (2).<sup>15</sup> As a result of research for this paper just over 100 turners have been identified working in London between the broad date range of c. 1250 – c. 1600 so it can be expected that, as in York, there were very few turners active at any one time in the capital.

Turning is an ancient craft that was known in the Near East from the eighth century BC and turned furniture is likely to have been made in northern Europe continuously from Roman times to the present day.<sup>16</sup> It has been suggested that the frequent appearance of three-legged turned stools in paintings means that they were common in Europe throughout the Middle Ages<sup>17</sup> but the quantity of turned furniture manufactured in England at least is likely to have been limited, largely on the grounds of cost, until the sixteenth century. By then London’s economy was booming and her population expanding and demand for the products of craftsmen such as

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<sup>13</sup> D. Leach, ongoing research for University of London PhD thesis.

<sup>14</sup> There is no comparable listing of individuals for London.

<sup>15</sup> Munby, ‘Wood’, p. 387.

<sup>16</sup> *A History of Technology*, Vol. II, eds. C. Singer et al, (Oxford, reprinted 1957), p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> *A History of Technology*, p. 249.

turners grew correspondingly.<sup>18</sup> During the seventeenth century, in particular, turners enjoyed considerable success. They were in demand for the production of: legs, rails and backpieces for chairs,<sup>19</sup> stools and tables, balusters for staircases, candlesticks, pestles and mortars, and numerous other items, including parts for ships, but in the earlier period the market for such goods was more limited. Examples do exist of chairs with highly decorated turned work from an earlier date but they are often unique, one-off pieces with a provenance of a prestigious setting, such as the twelfth century chair now in Hereford Cathedral which may have been the coronation throne of Stephen (1135-1154).<sup>20</sup> (Another example of a turned chair from a similar date appears in a carving at Chartres Cathedral).<sup>21</sup> Nothing is known about the makers of these items. Contemporary illustrations of interiors which show three-legged turned stools should not be taken to be typical of ordinary houses. The presence of a turned stool (or chair) in a work of art may be due more to the painter's choice of an interesting (and challenging) subject rather than an indication that such items were in common use. In other instances, such as the 'Death of the Virgin' by Peter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1584), the stool which has a prominent position in the foreground was undoubtedly placed there by the artist for symbolic reasons. The Virgin lies on a bed gazing at a crucifix resting on a pillow at the bed end but only the top of the cross can be seen from the perspective of the viewer of the painting. The turned wooden stool with its back forming a cross in the foreground is clearly meant to represent the hidden crucifix.<sup>22</sup> To help furnish the reconstructed medieval farmhouse, Bayleaf, the Weald and Downland Museum in Sussex have chosen to reproduce two types of stool i.e. one boarded and one turned (the latter based on the stool in the Bruegel painting) but it is likely that most households would have made

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, J. Oldland, 'The Wealth of the Trades in Early Tudor London' in *The London Journal*, 31 (2006), 127-155 (p. 127 and Appendix 4 which shows that turners increased their wealth ranking from 54 in 1487 to 53 in 1525 but by 1550 they had moved up to 48) and V. Harding, 'Employment and Opportunity: The Building Trades in London, 1450-1600' in *L'Edilizia Prima Della Rivoluzione Industriale SECC. XIII-XVIII*, 991-1011, (pp. 991-993).

<sup>19</sup> The so-called 'Brewster Chair' which is believed to have belonged to William Brewster (c. 1566-1643) the ruling Elder of the group who travelled to America on the Mayflower was once thought to have been crafted in England but it has now been established that it is made from a species of Ash native to America. Website of the Pilgrim Hall Museum <<http://www.pilgrimhall.org/brechair.htm>> [accessed 30 June 2010].

<sup>20</sup> P. Eames, *Furniture in England, France and the Netherlands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1977), pp. 210-211.

<sup>21</sup> Harris M. & Sons, *The English Chair* (London, 1946), pp. 6-8.

<sup>22</sup> *Death of the Virgin*, c. 1584, Peter Bruegel the Elder in The National Gallery on loan from Upton House, The Bearsted Collection (The National Trust).

do with the former.<sup>23</sup> The same applies to chairs. It was rare for an individual urban household to possess more than one chair and again they were likely to have been made from flat wood jointed together and thus constructed by a joiner or carpenter, rather than incorporating turners' lathe work. Naturally there were exceptions. Some individuals did possess turned furniture such as the six turned stools valued at 12d and one turned chair (8d) mentioned in an action for debt against a Richard Bye in 1440 and it is interesting to note here the relative value of stools to chairs.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, demand for turned furniture was likely to have remained relatively low throughout the middle ages and production of these items alone could not have supplied sufficient work to occupy many turners. Turners did, however, make other items besides furniture that were likely to be in regular use, even by the poor. These included drinking vessels, bowls and spoons, plus handles for tools.<sup>25</sup> On occasion turners' work was even in demand for military purposes. Henry V, for instance, ordered the London turners to construct 2,500 wooden cups for dispatch to Rouen during his campaign in France in 1418 (at a cost of 4s per 100) which must have been a welcome commission for the craftsmen concerned.<sup>26</sup> The cups may have been similar to the turned beechwood bowls or dishes discovered in the 1930s in the fourteenth century filling of a well on the site of the Bank of England.<sup>27</sup> A further royal commission occurred in 1485 when William Parken (or Parker) of London, turner, received two orders from Henry VII for three dozen 'shodde shovilles' (wooden spades with iron clad tips) at a cost of 15s for one order and 16s for the other. One lot of spades was for use on the ship called 'The Gracedieu' and the other for 'The Mary of the Tower'.<sup>28</sup> (Spades were an essential item on ships. They were used for clearing rubbish from decks and helping to offload cargo. The metal tip would have extended the life of the spade).<sup>29</sup> It is rare to be able to link the name of a turner with a contract of work in this way.

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<sup>23</sup> D. Zeuner, *The Bayleaf Medieval Farmstead*, (Weald and Downland Museum, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Calendar of Plea & Memoranda Rolls 1437-1457*, ed. P. E. Jones (Cambridge, 1954), pp. 31-32.

<sup>25</sup> Edlin, *Woodland*, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> LMA COL/CC/01/01/001, under the date 15 September 1418. I am grateful to Professor Caroline Barron for this reference.

<sup>27</sup> G. C. Dunning, 'A Fourteenth-century Well at the Bank of England', *Antiquaries Journal*, XVII (1937), 414-8.

<sup>28</sup> *Naval accounts and inventories of the reign of Henry VII*, ed. M. Oppenheim, (Navy Records Society, 1896), pp. 15 and 22.

<sup>29</sup> I am grateful to Michael Boon for advice on this subject.

## The contribution of turners to the city of London

In addition to these activities, however, there was one unique contribution turners made to life in later medieval London. They were responsible for making the wooden measures that were used by city officials as a standard for a number of goods: both dry materials, such as corn; and also wine and ale. This must have been a vital component of most turners' work. Accurate measures were important to everybody, whether buyers or sellers, and if there was a problem with the measures the turners could be (and indeed frequently were) held to account by the mayor and aldermen. Turners were associated formally with the measurement of goods in the city from at least 1310 when six men (Henry the turner, of Wood Street, Richard the turner, John the turner in St Swithin's Lane, Candlewick Street, Robert the turner, dwelling at Fleet, William the turner, without the Gate of Bishopsgate, and Richard le Corveiser, dwelling in Wood Street) were sworn before the Mayor and Aldermen:

that in future they will not make any other measures other than gallons, *potells* [i.e. two quarts] and quarts<sup>30</sup>; and that they would make no false measures, such as the measures called *chopyns* [these probably held about one pint] and *gyllles* [holding half a pint].<sup>31</sup>

There is no indication whether these men were acting on their own behalf or in some way representative of the craft. Turners were strongly encouraged to bring any false measures they came across to the Guildhall and present them before the mayor. The injunction specified that this included any false measures both in the hands of 'foreigners' i.e. those who were not free of the city, as well as of freemen (men who had been recognised by the city authorities as qualified practitioners of their trade and thus able to practise their craft freely within the city boundaries and to train apprentices) which suggests that 'false' measures were quite common. In 1347, on the 'Wednesday before the Feast of St Peter in Cathedra' [22 February], the mayor again summoned the 'turnours' to appear before him 'by reason of the manifold falsities and deceits' found in liquid measures. When they duly appeared the craftsmen were enjoined to make such

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<sup>30</sup> The quart is the smallest ale measure mentioned in the *Liber Albus*. Riley, p. lx.

<sup>31</sup> *Memorials of London and London Life*, ed. H. T. Riley, (London, 1868), p. 235 and *Calendar of London Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall – A-L*, 11 vols. ed. R. R. Sharpe (London: 1899-1912), (hereafter, *CLB*). *CLBD*, p. 78.

measures in future from dried wood only, as opposed to unseasoned i.e. green wood which tended to shrink after manufacture. The measures were to be examined by the alderman in whose ward they would be used to ensure they were of the correct size.<sup>32</sup> The accuracy, or rather inaccuracy, of wooden measures was a common and enduring problem as Roland Champness explains:

... solid turned measures, although possessing the virtues of cheapness and ability to stand up to hard wear, were not ideal. Wood... changes its dimensions according to moisture content and ... needs very careful seasoning if it is to be subjected to the severe stresses and strains imposed by alternate cycles of wetting and drying. If 'green' a wood measure would soon be false and lying, but even if well seasoned it might shrink over a period and give a false measure.<sup>33</sup>

It is likely therefore that the mayor's criticism of the turners, while justified, resulted from a misunderstanding of the nature of their craft rather than from the fact that workers were deliberately producing poor quality items. The turners were probably doing their best with a challenging material, rather than carelessly using badly prepared wood which would inevitably result in inaccurate measures. In fact, it would have been very difficult for these craftsmen to carry out the mayor's injunction not to use 'any other wood than dried'. It is almost impossible to turn on a lathe, wood which has completely dried out. Turners therefore had no choice but to use green wood, at least for the initial work, with seasoning being undertaken before finishing<sup>34</sup> but, as Champness points out, the use to which the measures were put probably resulted in distortion of the wood over time no matter how well seasoned. On the occasion in 1347 seven men responded to the mayor's summons and their names are again recorded in the official records: Robert le Disshere of Wood Street, John le Turnour upon Lothbury, William Gidyheud (or Getenheved) of Eastcheap, William de Aylesbury, also of Eastcheap, Thomas le Turnour (or le Boure) upon Cornhill; Thomas le Turnour of Shoe Lane and John de Selham (or Selle), servant of Ralph le Disshere, of Wood Street. (In this case 'servant' probably indicates a journeyman turner rather than a menial assistant).<sup>35</sup> Although the Mayor's summons was to 'all the makers of

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<sup>32</sup> *Memorials of London*, Riley, pp. 234-235.

<sup>33</sup> Champness, *The Worshipful Company*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Munby, 'Wood', p. 384.

<sup>35</sup> *Memorials of London*, Riley, p. 235 and *CLBF*, p. 307. There are slight differences between the names of the turners given in the two sources.

such measures' it is not clear whether the seven who responded were the entire complement of turners working in the city or whether they were in some way representative, or at least the most eminent members of the craft, or indeed if there were other London turners who undertook work not connected with the production of measures. But, given the low number of turners found to be working in the city throughout the whole medieval period, these seven probably were the majority of active turners in 1347. Other contemporary sources have failed to produce any further names from this date.

Clearly all turners were not located in one particular area at this period, although two were from Wood Street (as were two of the 1310 turners), immediately to the north of Cheapside, the city's commercial district, and presumably a source of demand for their products. The name Wood Street also suggests it was the location for a central wood market making it a suitable base for turners.<sup>36</sup> A further two men lived in Eastcheap a district in the south-east of the city that was to become closely associated with the turnery craft in the course of the next hundred years. As an outcome of the 1347 meeting those turners present agreed that each of them would adopt their own identifying mark and that these would be placed on the bottom of every measure so that, if a measure 'in any tavern or brewhouse' was discovered not to be of the correct size it would be clear who was at fault and punishment could be administered accordingly.<sup>37</sup> What the turners thought about this is not recorded but there is no doubt that they complied with the injunction. They were ordered to return to the Guildhall the following month with examples of their marks and these marks were recorded in one of the city Letter Books.<sup>38</sup> The marks are all different and distinctive and would have easily identified the individuals concerned. To reinforce the recognised role played by the turners the mayor also ordered that no one who lived in the city or its liberties should sell measures to anyone other than the official makers of measures.

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<sup>36</sup> J. A. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, 'Fuelling the City: production and distribution of firewood and fuel in London's region, 1290-1400', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series XLIX, 3 (1996), 447-472, p. 452.

<sup>37</sup> One of the bowls recovered from the excavation at the Bank of England (referred to on p. 5) has a device cut on the underside of the base which may have been the maker's mark. Dunning, 'A Fourteenth-century Well', p. 418.

<sup>38</sup> LMA COL/AD/01/006 (Letter Book F).

Despite the obvious importance of turned items to life in the city there were no turners among the ‘immense Commonalty’ that came to the Guildhall in 1376 to present names of those elected by each ‘mystery’ to serve as a Council for the City. Forty-seven crafts were represented on the Council including the joiners and even the very modest pinner but the turners were not among them.<sup>39</sup> Although they had a vital role to play in everyday life turners were not included directly in the administration of the city and no turner ever held the position of mayor or alderman.

It would seem that, given the inherent qualities of wood, there were always going to be problems with incorrect weights and indeed concerns continued. By 1419 it was no longer sufficient for turners simply to mark their own work for in that year it was laid down that ‘wooden measures shall be sealed with the seal of the Aldermen’, (possibly the seal would have been attached to the handle of the measure by a parchment cord).<sup>40</sup> Anyone found to be using a measure without a seal was to be fined 40d for a first offence and the measure burnt in the principal street of the ward. Further offences would incur greater financial penalties. Individuals could also be placed in the pillory for using unstamped ale-measures as could local officials, such as the ward bedel, if he was discovered adding the Alderman’s mark to defective measures.<sup>41</sup> Because of the problems experienced with shrinkage it was decreed that there should be Aldermanic marking four times each year.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, despite the attempts of the authorities to protect the consumer, they are unlikely to have been successful and in fact problems with the accuracy of wooden measures continued throughout the centuries right up until 1907 when ‘solid wood, as opposed to steamed bent wood cubic measures, were no longer accepted for verification’.<sup>43</sup>

Concerns about the accuracy of measures raised by the medieval turners themselves centred mostly on antagonism towards the ‘foreign’ competition i.e. goods manufactured by craftsmen who were not free of the city. In 1435, for instance, two turners, John White and John

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<sup>39</sup> *CLBH*, pp. 41-44.

<sup>40</sup> I am grateful to Dr Elizabeth New for this suggestion.

<sup>41</sup> *Liber Albus*, Riley, p. 233.

<sup>42</sup> *Liber Albus*, Riley, pp. 233 & 290.

<sup>43</sup> Champness, *Worshipful*, p. 4.

Hyndon (sometimes spelt Hendoun)<sup>44</sup> complained to the Court of Aldermen that foreigners were making and selling measures within the city out of ‘sappe’ and green timber. They were selling them to freemen as well as other ‘foreigns’.<sup>45</sup> In their petition White and Hyndon were described as Wardens of the Craft of Turners so by this period some form of formal organisation had come into existence. The wardens asked that they be granted the ‘search and oversight’ of all such measures brought into the city before they were put on sale which indicates that the Craft did not have a monopoly over the production of measures. The petition was granted and to make this control easier it was agreed that foreign turners would only be allowed to sell their wares in the newly built covered area to the north of the Guildhall.<sup>46</sup> Apart from this one brief reference no details of the operation of the Turners’ Craft in the first half of the fifteenth century are known.

### **Sources for the study of individual turners**

An important source of information is wills. Four main probate courts contain wills of London turners but only three men left sufficient real estate for their wills to be proved in the most senior of these, that of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. These were William Childerley (d. 1524), John Parkyns (d. 1568), and Thomas Weaver (d. 1587).<sup>47</sup> Those with more modest means could use one of the two ecclesiastical courts: the Archdeaconry and the Bishop of London’s Commissary. The records of both these courts survive from the last quarter of the fourteenth century but only those of the Commissary are complete and this is where the majority of extant turners’ wills can be found. A further option was the Husting Court which was primarily a court of real estate records.<sup>48</sup> Any beneficiary of property within the City of London could have a will enrolled there but often only the relevant part of the will relating to real property was entered on the rolls. A few turners’ wills have been identified in that court. For the purposes of this research twenty-six wills of male testators describing themselves as turners have

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<sup>44</sup> The same individual’s name can be spelt in a variety of ways in the records but for the purposes of this study one spelling only has been adopted.

<sup>45</sup> *CLBK*, pp. 193-4.

<sup>46</sup> Barron, *London*, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> TNA PCC: Prob. 11/21 ff. 171v-72 (1524), Prob. 11/32 ff. 188-88v (1568), Prob. 11/70 ff. 83v-84 (1587).

<sup>48</sup> See H. A. Miskimin, ‘The Legacies of London: 1259-1330’ in *The Medieval City*, eds. H. A. Miskimin, D. Herlihy and A. L. Udovitch (New Haven and London, 1977), pp. 209-227.

been identified, between the years 1319 and 1608.<sup>49</sup> Two other wills, now lost, are known because a probate clause survives for one and confirmation of administration for the other. In addition four wills of widows of turners<sup>50</sup> have been consulted making a total of thirty-two individuals.<sup>51</sup> Wills, however, also enable identification of additional turners who might otherwise have escaped notice. Such men might be recipients of bequests, or witnesses to the wills of their fellow craftsmen. Christopher Taylor, turner, for example, was a witness to the will of another turner, William Childerley,<sup>52</sup> and is also mentioned in the will of Childerley's wife, Marion, where she forgave Taylor and his wife the debts they owed her, at the same time bequeathing the couple 10s, with 12d to 'his' daughter.<sup>53</sup> Nothing is known about Taylor and his family.

Other records, including churchwardens' accounts, enable us to learn something about the people who were important to turners. For example, Richard Baggott, turner, paid for a knell for a Jaret Chauser in St Andrew Hubbard. Baggott was also one of the witnesses to the wills of a draper and a merchant tailor in the same parish.<sup>54</sup> The names of additional turners can also be gathered from administrative sources. In January 1453 Peter Alisaunder, turner, stood surety at one hundred marks (the usual amount) to enable a parish clerk, John Bentle, to purchase the freedom of the city.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in November of the same year another turner, William Ashcombe, stood surety for a cheesemonger, John Hall.<sup>56</sup> Turners naturally also stood surety for other turners to enable them to purchase the freedom. In 1441 William Frottesham had the support of John Barthelmew, Henry Erysy, John Heth and John Jaye, all turners.<sup>57</sup> Their confidence in William was clearly well founded because he progressed to become warden of the

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<sup>49</sup> There are no surviving wills for any of the turners who appeared before the Mayor and Aldermen in the fourteenth century in relation to the manufacture of measures.

<sup>50</sup> Married women did not usually make a will as in law they did not own anything to bequeath.

<sup>51</sup> The wills consulted are indicated in Table 1.

<sup>52</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 ff. 171v-72 (1524).

<sup>53</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/010 ff. 119v-120.

<sup>54</sup> Burgess, *Records*, pp. 155, 272-75.

<sup>55</sup> LMA COL/RG/01/022, m. 3. A John Bentley (d. 1479) was a member of the Fraternity of St Nicholas, the brotherhood of the parish clerks within London and his name appears on their Bede Roll. *The Bede Roll of the Fraternity of St Nicholas* eds. N.W. and V.A. James, (London, 2004), p. 120.

<sup>56</sup> LMA COL/RG/01/022, m. 1.

<sup>57</sup> LMA COL/RG/01/015, m. 5.

Craft of Turners in 1460.<sup>58</sup> Adding together information from all sources has enabled 110 individual turners (including apprentices) to be identified in the city of London during the period c. 1250 – c. 1600).<sup>59</sup> Of the 104 men on the list twenty-seven specifically referred to themselves as ‘citizen and turner’ indicating that they were freemen of the city.<sup>60</sup> The remainder simply referred to themselves as ‘turner’. Of the six women in the study at least three continued to work in turnery after their husband’s demise.

The earliest recorded turners pre-date the adoption of surnames and therefore they are usually known by their first name with the addition of ‘the turner’ as was the case with most of the men who appeared before the Mayor in 1310. Similarly in 1244 a Henry le Tornur was accused of killing a man and fleeing. The only other information recorded about Henry is that he ‘belonged to the household’ of Robert le Tornur, so possibly he was Robert’s apprentice.<sup>61</sup> It is characteristic of many records to tell us about individuals only when they were in some sort of trouble and they almost always present an incomplete picture of any incident, usually without an indication of the outcome, as is the case in this instance. Another record gives a rare reference to a female practitioner of the craft. When Alice la Turnure was the first to find the corpse of Nicholas ate Mulle, a gate-keeper of Newgate Prison, lying in the High Street of the ward of Farringdon Within after he had been murdered, Alice took the correct action and raised the ‘hue and cry’.<sup>62</sup> (Alice may have been a turner’s widow who had chosen to continue to practise the craft after her husband’s death). Early wills can also be less than informative. In 1319 Robert le Turneor left a tenement in the parish of St Botolph to a Roger de Stanes de Waltham and his wife, Cristina, at which point, Robert’s sister, Amicia, appeared and put in a claim to the

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<sup>58</sup> LMA COL/CC/01/01/006 f. 225v.

<sup>59</sup> A complete list can be found in Table 1. These numbers are broadly comparable to the approximately 130 joiners and their wives identified as working in the city of London between 1200 and 1550. See J. Lutkin, ‘The London Craft of Joiners, 1200-1550’, *Medieval Prosopography*, 26 (2005), 129-164, p. 132.

<sup>60</sup> These are indicated on Table 1. The London Freedom Registers which would have listed all those free of the city have not survived. The city of York has better evidence and there forty-four turners are recorded as being free of the city during the period 1291-1534. See the Appendix to *Building Craftsmen in late medieval York*, H. Swanson, (York, 1983, Borthwick Paper No. 63).

<sup>61</sup> *The London Eyre of 1244*, H. M. Chew and M. Weinbaum (eds.), (London, 1970), pp. 59-72.

<sup>62</sup> *Calendar of Coroners Rolls of the City of London 1300-1378*, ed. R. R. Sharpe (London, 1913), Roll D, 1325, pp. 121-22.

property.<sup>63</sup> Again, the outcome of the case is not known. When surnames were introduced they sometimes evoked a man's craft. Thomas le Turnour (or le Boure), one of the 1347 turners and John Bourer, a London citizen and turner, who is recorded in 1402 in a dispute about land in Billericay, Essex both bear surnames suggesting they were woodworkers.<sup>64</sup> Another turner with a wood-related surname was John Tymberden who was accused of refusing to return a horse to a Thomas Stryker who claimed to have entrusted it to Tymberden for safe-keeping.<sup>65</sup> Even as late as 1608 a turner called John Turnor was working in London.<sup>66</sup> No doubt several generations of John's family had been turners.

Later records may be more informative although this is not always the case and wills especially must be used with caution because they always present a partial picture. It is rarely possible to know what other arrangements testators had made during their lifetime for the transmission of property and goods following their death. If provision for a son or daughter had already been made, for instance, they might not be mentioned in a will. Despite these caveats wills are an important source of information about turners. They were usually drawn up when death was close as can be demonstrated by comparing the date of the will with the date it was proved. William Ashcombe, for instance, made his will on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1456 and it was proved on the 27<sup>th</sup> of the same month.<sup>67</sup> Richard Botlaye's will was also proved less than one month after his death.<sup>68</sup> Simon Tapycer the elder's will was proved only six days after it was composed.<sup>69</sup> Wills really were the last instructions given out by the testator. The first concern was always for a decent burial for the body and provision for the afterlife of the soul. Before the Reformation it was usual for testators to specify that they bequeathed their soul to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary and all saints as did the turners John Senesole in 1394<sup>70</sup>, Thomas Sparowe in 1406<sup>71</sup> and Thomas

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<sup>63</sup> *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London 1258-1688*, ed. R. R. Sharp, 2 vols. (London: 1889-90), (hereafter *Husting*), Roll 47(98).

<sup>64</sup> The reference to John Bourer can be found in TNA CP 40/566, rot. 108.

<sup>65</sup> TNA CP 40/646, rot. 434.

<sup>66</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/021 ff. 26-27.

<sup>67</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/05 ff. 188-88v (1456).

<sup>68</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/015 f. 346v (1569).

<sup>69</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/06 ff. 231v-32 (1478).

<sup>70</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/01 f. 383v (1394).

<sup>71</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/01 f. 161 (1406).

Clerk in 1462.<sup>72</sup> The religious changes of the mid-sixteenth century simplified such sentiments and testators began to put their trust in God and his son, Jesus Christ, alone although the texts themselves seem to have become more verbose rather than less. When John Yowarde, turner, made his will in 1552 he stated: ‘First and principally, I bequeath my soul to almighty God, my maker, saviour and redeemer, trusting faithfully believing that through the merits of Christ’s most precious death and passion my sins be clearly forgiven me’.<sup>73</sup> A few years later (1574) Thomas Wilkins began his will with similar sentiments: ‘First I give and bequeath my soul to almighty God the father and to Jesus Christ his only son, my only saviour and redeemer by whose blood shedding only I trust to have remission of all my sins and life everlasting’.<sup>74</sup>

Pre-reformation wills almost always contain bequests to the church, including money for ‘forgotten tithes’ and for masses for the soul. John Senesole’s will (made in 1394 but unusually not proved until 1396) was typical.<sup>75</sup> He wanted to be buried in the church of St Andrew Hubbard and the first half of his will is concerned with the arrangements for his interment. For his burial and the ‘work of the church’ he bequeathed the fairly respectable sum of 6s 8d. The church was also to receive more modest sums and these give some indication of the appearance and activities of the church in the late fourteenth century: 12d was given for his forgotten tithes and 12d for a light i.e. a candle or a taper on the rood beam before the Cross, 12d was to go to John the Chaplain and 6d to sustain the light before the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Senesole also requested a trental of masses i.e. 30, both for himself, and as was conventional, for all souls. One mass was to be held in the church of the Carmelite Friars<sup>76</sup> and another in the church of the Friars Minor i.e. the Franciscans.<sup>77</sup> (Being remembered by the friars was felt to be particularly advantageous for the soul). By now Senesole was more than half-way through his short will but only at this point did he turn to providing for his dependents. Most wills had a similar format. Money would be given to the church where testators were to be buried and to other religious institutions, if their means stretched to it. The place of burial would be specified, inside the church if it could be afforded, or outside in the churchyard for the less wealthy. Those

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<sup>72</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/05 f. 324 (1462).

<sup>73</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/09171/012 ff. 131-131v (1552).

<sup>74</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/016 f. 175v (1574).

<sup>75</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/01 f. 383v (1394).

<sup>76</sup> The house of the London Carmelites was in Fleet Street and thus some distance from St Andrew Hubbard.

<sup>77</sup> The Franciscans were based close to Newgate.

with a spouse who had predeceased them frequently asked to be buried next to, or close to, them as did Thomas Sparowe who requested burial ‘near to his wife Johanna, near the font’ in St Benet Gracechurch.<sup>78</sup> Marion Childerley wanted to be buried within the choir of St Andrew Hubbard ‘there as my husband lies’<sup>79</sup> and Simon Tapycer asked to be buried in the chapel of Our Lady in St Andrew Hubbard, where the body of his late wife, Margaret, lay buried.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand a testator might leave it up to his or her executors to decide where his or her body should be interred, as did Thomas Weaver in 1587<sup>81</sup> and John Warde in 1602.<sup>82</sup> Sometimes the decision about place of burial was left to the Almighty himself. Robert Wylkyns (d. 1553) stated that his body was to be buried ‘where it shall please God for it to dispose’.<sup>83</sup> In a similar vein John Spratly (d. 1596) stated ‘my body to the earth to be buried where it shall please God to take it’.<sup>84</sup>

Ensuring that post-mortem wishes were carried out fully was a particularly important task in an age when many religious bequests were made in the belief that the donor would spend a lesser time in purgatory as a result. It was usual for a wife to be made executor of her husband’s will and often she was expected to take on this role single-handedly. The turners were no different in this respect. Most of the testators had been married (although some had been widowed by the time they made their will) and the majority of men named their wife as an executor. Barron has pointed out that, although the tasks of an executor of a will could be both skilled and laborious, they were not considered beyond the capabilities of women.<sup>85</sup> Turners obviously had confidence that their wives would be capable of carrying out their wishes after their death and could be trusted to do so. William Childerley asked his wife to arrange two trentals of masses, one to be performed at his burial and the other in the following month.<sup>86</sup> Richard Botlaye bequeathed his wife, Dorothy, all the goods and household stuff that he had,

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<sup>78</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/01 f. 161 (1406).

<sup>79</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/010 ff. 119v-120 (1528).

<sup>80</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/06 ff. 231v-32 (1478).

<sup>81</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/70 ff. 83v-84 (1587).

<sup>82</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/019 ff. 290v-91 (1602).

<sup>83</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/012 ff. 120v-21 (1553).

<sup>84</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/018 ff. 312v-13 (1596).

<sup>85</sup> C. Barron, ‘Introduction: The Widow’s World in Later Medieval London’ in *Medieval London Widows 1300-1500*, eds. C. Barron and A. Sutton, (London, 1994), pp. xiii-xxxiv, (p. xxx).

<sup>86</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 ff. 171v-72 (1524).

making her ‘my full and sole executrix of all such goods as I possess’.<sup>87</sup> Testators sometimes made arrangements for their widows to have support (nearly always from men) when carrying out their bequests, or in other practical matters. This might be provided by someone who held an official position such as a cleric or a churchwarden and who was therefore used to responsibility, or a close friend who could be relied upon. William Childerley bequeathed 40s to his ‘good lover and friend’, Geoffrey Hughes in the expectation that Geoffrey would help William’s wife recover any debts owing to him for ‘certain stuff and wares’.<sup>88</sup> Thomas Wilkins asked the turner Pearse Colton, to be the overseer of his will having referred to Pearse earlier in the will as his ‘wellbeloved friend, neighbour and lover’<sup>89</sup> and John Warde asked the local parson to assist his wife.<sup>90</sup> Testators’ ages are not known but the fact that wives were still alive when turners made their wills suggests that it was common for a man to be quite a bit older than his spouse. The men may have chosen to marry rather late in the life cycle possibly for financial reasons or they may have been married previously and had re-married on the death of their first wife although John White (the warden of the Craft referred to on p. 9) seems to have been exceptional in having been married three times.<sup>91</sup> Those who did not have a wife to act as their executor might ask another member of the family to take on the role. John Spratly asked his sister<sup>92</sup>, for David Maddockes and Robert Wylkyns it was their daughters,<sup>93</sup> Simon Tapycer asked two of his sons<sup>94</sup> and John Turnor named his ‘loving’ son-in-law, Edmund Scarlet.<sup>95</sup>

When looking outside the family for help turners naturally called upon fellow turners but it was just as likely that they would ask men of other trades. The witnesses, supervisors, overseers and executors of turners’ wills include a wide range of occupations. Unsurprisingly the largest grouping is that of turners but what is surprising is the breadth of other trades which occur. With the exception of clerics and scribes who appear frequently, other occupations only receive a single mention suggesting that turners had a wide group of friends rather than

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<sup>87</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/015 f. 346v (1569).

<sup>88</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21, ff. 171v-72 (1524).

<sup>89</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/016 f. 175v (1574).

<sup>90</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/019 ff. 290v-91 (1602).

<sup>91</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 ff. 245-46 (1448).

<sup>92</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/018 ff. 312v-13 (1596).

<sup>93</sup> LMA DL/AL/C/002/MS09051/004 f. 102 (1576), LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/012 ff. 120v-21 (1553).

<sup>94</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/06 ff. 231v-32 (1478).

<sup>95</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/021 ff. 26-27 (1608).

moving in a restricted circle. Some of the occupations recorded are connected with the building trade e.g. carpenter, joiner and plumber, but a whole range of other craftsmen also appear – barber, brewer, cook, clothworker, draper, dyer, goldsmith, ironmonger, skinner, (painter) stainer, surgeon, tailor, tallowchandler and tawyer (someone who prepared leather) amongst others. This shows that turners were well-integrated into the local community and despite many choosing to live in close proximity to other members of their craft (considered in detail in the next section) they did not live in isolation and were happy to ask others to perform this important role for them. A man's status could be enhanced by the number of individuals who could be called upon to be present at his deathbed. William Childerley may have made his wife his sole executrix and one of his sons the lone overseer of his will but his last act was undertaken in a very public manner. Five witnesses to his will are noted by name but also present when the will was compiled were 'divers others especially called and desired to the premises'.<sup>96</sup> William's bedchamber must have been very crowded on 1 May 1524.

It was the custom of London that a citizen's goods should be divided into three equal parts: one third for the widow, one third to support any children and the remainder reserved to the testator to dispose of as he wished, often for the benefit of his soul. Some of the turners' wills mention this arrangement. John Parkyns explicitly stated that his possessions should be divided into three equal parts. One third was to go to Audrey, his daughter, one to Agnes his wife 'for her full part and portion due to her of my said goods and chattels by the laudable custom of the city of London' and the last third Parkyns retained for himself to 'accomplish this my will and the legacies herein contained'.<sup>97</sup> Thomas Weaver's will contains similar sentiments. One third of his 'goods, chattels and leases' were to go to his wife Anne, one third was to be divided equally between his three sons, Anthony, Thomas and Richard while Weaver was to retain one third for his own bequests.<sup>98</sup> John White stated that his wife, Elizabeth, was to have her dower and the customary part of his goods and that his executors were not to take anything from her share of his goods.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 ff. 171v-72 (1524).

<sup>97</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 ff. 188-88v (1568).

<sup>98</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/70 ff. 83v-84 (1587).

<sup>99</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 ff. 245-46 (1448).

## **Geographical location: The connection with St Andrew Hubbard<sup>100</sup>**

Wills do not usually furnish a precise address for testators although they sometimes specify the name of the parish where they lived such as that of John Warde who stated that he dwelt in the parish of St Andrew Hubbard.<sup>101</sup> However, as we have seen, testators almost always indicated where they wished to be buried and this was commonly in the parish church (or the adjoining churchyard) where they had worshipped unless they expected to die a long way from home, or were exceptionally wealthy with property in more than one location. (Neither situation seems to have applied to the turners in this study). A fairly reliable indication of the home location of testators can therefore be gained from wills and this has been particularly interesting for this research on turners. We have noted already that two of the seven turners active in the city in 1347 were from Eastcheap; that, in 1394, John Senesole requested to be buried in the church of St Andrew Hubbard Eastcheap; and as late as 1602 the turner, John Warde, was living in the parish. Evidence from other wills shows how the connection with this part of the city developed over time. The majority of testators in this study were inhabitants of this one particular parish, St Andrew Hubbard, Eastcheap, and a further three lived in adjoining parishes.<sup>102</sup> When information from other sources such as the City's administrative records is also considered it can be seen that, of the 110 individuals included in the study, over forty had a close connection with St Andrew Hubbard or the Eastcheap area. Often several turners were resident in the parish at the same time as can be seen in Table 1. A number of other turners, who are known to have lived in London, cannot be located in a particular parish from the evidence available and it is therefore possible that some of these also had a connection with St Andrew Hubbard. This is a remarkable finding and one which has not previously been noticed.

Located in the south east corner of the city within Billingsgate ward, St Andrew Hubbard was one of the smallest of the one hundred or so parishes within medieval London. It could be found by crossing into the city via London Bridge and walking up New Fish Street. A short

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<sup>100</sup> Hubbard or possibly Hubbert may be derived from the name of an early church benefactor.

<sup>101</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/019 ff. 290v-91 (1602).

<sup>102</sup> A list of testators and their parishes can be found in Table 1. The neighbouring parishes were St Benet Gracechurch, St Leonard Eastcheap, and St Mary at Hill.

distance along on the righthand side was the thoroughfare known as Eastcheap<sup>103</sup> and a little way along that in an easterly direction lay the parish of St Andrew Hubbard. The church was situated in the centre of the parish at the meeting point of the four main roads.<sup>104</sup> St Andrew Hubbard seems to have been the centre of the London turning trade for well over two hundred years. There is no obvious reason why turners should have chosen to settle in St Andrew Hubbard in the first place although it is not too far from the Thames-side wharves which would have been a source of supplies of wood. Once established there it was obviously convenient for them to continue to live close together where no doubt they could enjoy mutual support.<sup>105</sup> (By contrast joiners were generally to be found in the wards directly alongside the Thames, particularly that of Vintry).<sup>106</sup> Although the concentration of turners in St Andrew Hubbard appears to have arisen gradually by chance it is interesting to note that from the mid fifteenth century onwards the Carpenters' Company held land and property in Lime Street, a road running northwards from Philpot Lane.<sup>107</sup> It was in Philpot Lane (within the parish of St Andrew Hubbard) in 1591 that the Turners acquired their first Hall<sup>108</sup> so perhaps there was a woodworking connection in that part of the city that is no longer apparent. It is certain that there were turners working in St Andrew Hubbard by 1347 and this connection continued well into the seventeenth century.

For the historian of medieval London this otherwise unremarkable parish is of great interest because it has a virtually unbroken series of churchwardens' accounts, from 1454 to the 1620s. It is thus fortunate for the purposes of this research that St Andrew Hubbard saw a concentration of turners because the accounts can provide valuable additional details to supplement the other sources of information. The accounts record money spent each year by the elected agents of the local community i.e. the two churchwardens, on repairs to the church and

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<sup>103</sup> Eastcheap is famous for being the location for the Boar's Head Tavern, frequented by Shakespeare's Falstaff.

<sup>104</sup> The church was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 which started in Pudding Lane close by. St Andrew Hubbard was not rebuilt and the parish was united with St Mary at Hill.

<sup>105</sup> The concentration of turners in a small area of London can be compared with evidence from Viking-age York where excavation on the site now known as Coppergate revealed that it was the centre of the turning trade in the tenth century. Coppergate literally meant 'street of the cup makers' or 'turners' street'. R. A. Hall, '10<sup>th</sup> century woodworking in Coppergate, York', in *Woodworking Techniques before A.D. 1500* (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, Archaeological Series No. 7, ed. S. McGrail, BAR International Series 129 (1982), pp. 231-244 (p. 232).

<sup>106</sup> J. Lutkin, 'The London Craft', p. 139.

<sup>107</sup> B.W.E. Alford & T.C. Barker, *A History of the Carpenters Company*, (London, 1968), pp. 48, 49-50 etc.

<sup>108</sup> Champness, *Worshipful*, pp. 33-34.

purchases and maintenance of items required to carry out the services in the correct liturgical manner. They enable us to view some of the activities and concerns of turners in their own locality. The St Andrew Hubbard turners did not simply live and work within the parish. The church was an important part of their lives (and eventually of their deaths), and turners took an active part in its running. Several are known to have served as churchwardens, sometimes more than once. Simon Tapycer served between 1459-1464 and 1472-1474<sup>109</sup> and Richard Baggott also served twice. John Childerley served in 1533-35 and again in 1543-44.<sup>110</sup> He also stepped in half-way through the year in 1558 when one of the serving wardens died.<sup>111</sup> On occasion both churchwarden posts were held by turners e.g. in 1521 William Childerley was accompanied by Robert Wylkyns. Clive Burgess has discussed in detail the division of labour between Childerley and Wylkyns when they acted together as wardens.<sup>112</sup> Childerley was on the whole responsible for building repairs whereas Wylkyns looked after 'lights, washing, cleaning and material repairs'.<sup>113</sup> Clearly the two men needed to work in close cooperation to ensure that all the necessary tasks were covered but dividing up the workload between themselves was no doubt a sensible approach. When they were not serving as churchwardens turners often audited the churchwardens' accounts. John Horner, turner, acted as auditor when Richard Baggott was churchwarden in 1554 and Baggott was himself an auditor a few years later. John Childerley audited the accounts when he was not a warden. Another turner who acted as churchwarden was Thomas Hamlyn who also contributed to the running of the church in other ways. In the period 1480-1482 he was paid by the churchwardens for producing a board 'that the tabernacle of St Andrew stands upon and for workmanship' while his wife received several payments for washing items of church fabric.<sup>114</sup> Turners were therefore deeply involved in the running of this small parish over a long period and for much of this time they were the most dominant group.

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<sup>109</sup> Burgess, *Records*, pp. 8-12, 20-24.

<sup>110</sup> Burgess, *Records*, pp. 134-137, 150-154.

<sup>111</sup> Burgess, *Records*, p. 178.

<sup>112</sup> Burgess, *Records*, pp. 110-112.

<sup>113</sup> Burgess, *Records*, p. xxiii.

<sup>114</sup> Burgess, *Records*, pp. 37-38.

Within the church of St Andrew Hubbard in the late medieval period there was a brotherhood or fraternity dedicated to St Katherine.<sup>115</sup> This would have been a focus for worship and spiritual support as well as providing a link between the living and the dead. There is no information about its origin but the choice of St Katherine (tortured on a wheel although eventually executed by being beheaded with a sword), by the Turners' Company as their patron, may reflect the interests of the turner parishioners.<sup>116</sup> William Cuffele, turner, bequeathed a torch to the altar of St Katherine 'to burn at the time of the dawn mass'<sup>117</sup> while another turner William Ashcombe, also bequeathed a torch (worth 6s 8d) to the fraternity but, in addition, requested a chaplain to 'celebrate divine service for my soul and the soul of all the faithful departed' at the altar for one year following his death.<sup>118</sup> Marion Childerley bequeathed 3s 4d to the brotherhood of the Holy Trinity and St Katherine.<sup>119</sup> Other turner testators however make no mention of the fraternity. Marion's husband, who predeceased her by only four years, did not refer to it in his own will. (William may, of course, have supported the fraternity during his lifetime but his religious interests appear to be broader than those of his wife. Although he left money to the church of St Andrew Hubbard, including 10s towards the battlements, thus demonstrating his close concern with the fabric of the building, he also gave 13s 4d to the 'new works' of the Crossed Friars).<sup>120</sup> Nor did Simon Tapycer mention the fraternity despite desiring to be buried in the church.<sup>121</sup> Like William Childerley, Simon had other religious interests outside the parish for he bequeathed 6s 8d to the house of Whitefriars where he stated that he was a brother.<sup>122</sup> The fraternity would have been abolished at the time of the Dissolution of the Chantries in 1548. Nonetheless, interest in St Katherine was maintained through her adoption by the Turners' Company as their patron saint.

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<sup>115</sup> C. Burgess, 'London Parishioners in Times of Change: St Andrew Hubbard, Eastcheap, c. 1450-1570' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (53) 2002, 38-63, (pp. 51-52).

<sup>116</sup> St Katherine of Alexandria was also adopted as a patron saint by other craftsmen who used a wheel such as wheelwrights, spinners and millers. See *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, ed. D. H. Farmer, (Oxford, 1979), pp. 69-70.

<sup>117</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 f. 115 (1442).

<sup>118</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/05 ff. 188-88v (1456).

<sup>119</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/010 ff. 119v-120 (1528).

<sup>120</sup> TNA PCC PROB 11/21 f. 171 (1524). The house of the Friars of the Holy Cross or Crossed Friars was in Hart Street in the east of the city. At the time William Childerley made his bequest in the 1520s the friary church was undergoing rebuilding. Like St Andrew Hubbard this church also had a Brotherhood of St Katherine. M. Reddan, 'The Crossed Friars' in *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, eds. C. Barron and M. Davies, University of London, 2007), pp. 139-142.

<sup>121</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/06 ff. 231v-32 (1478).

<sup>122</sup> The house of the Carmelites or White Friars was in Fleet Street, some distance from St Andrew Hubbard.

Turners buried their relatives in the church or churchyard and in their turn they were buried there also. A meeting of leading parishioners (which included three turners) in January 1546 agreed a list of prices for burials that included various amounts for bells ranging from 8d for a knell for a child to 3s 4d for ‘every knell with the great bell’ although a small bell would be rung without charge to mark the passing of those lacking financial resources. The cost of burial in the choir remained at 6s 8d<sup>123</sup> which is what William Childerley paid when he purchased ‘a pit in the church’ during the accounting period 1509-1510<sup>124</sup> as had Simon Tapycer when burying his wife in the church sometime between 1476-1478.<sup>125</sup> The fact that these men could afford to bury their loved ones inside the church probably shows that they were men of means. Indeed William Childerley was buried in the choir, a very prominent position, where he could expect to be remembered and prayed for by later parishioners.

What of the turners who had no connection with St Andrew Hubbard or the Eastcheap area? They do not seem to have differed significantly from their Eastcheap colleagues. It has not been possible to identify a location for all turners who appear in the records but those who can be pinpointed precisely outside St Andrew Hubbard are scattered around the city. In the early fourteenth century there seems to have been a small grouping around St Botolph without Aldgate, just beyond the eastern city walls.<sup>126</sup> Another fourteenth century turner, William, lived ‘without the gate of Bishopsgate’ while another William lived at Aldersgate so, in the early period, there seems to have been some preference for living close to the city gates, perhaps this was convenient for the transport and storage of wood. Nevertheless there does not seem to have been another part of the city that attracted turners in the same way that St Andrew Hubbard did, and as time went on most turners can be found in this one parish.

### **Evidence for literacy amongst turners**

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<sup>123</sup> Burgess, *Records*, p. 159

<sup>124</sup> Burgess, *Records*, p. 93.

<sup>125</sup> Burgess, *Records*, p. 27.

<sup>126</sup> That is Elena and John le Tornur, Husting Roll 57 (124) (1329), and Philip le Tornur, Husting Roll 55(18) (1327).

The turners do not mention books in their wills, and few London craftsmen did so. However, this does not mean that they could not read. The belief that few people were able to read in the middle ages is a misconception. Written texts were everywhere and this would not have been the case if reading was confined to a small elite. Churches in particular had writing on walls and in windows and many London churches are known to have contained books, usually chained. Writing was also visible in other public spaces e.g. those convicted of perjury or sex offences had their names put on tablets in the Guildhall, an area to which all Londoners had access. Even individuals in the pillory might be accompanied by a written list of their offences.<sup>127</sup> London turners would therefore be part of this constant exposure to the written word. The fact that several turners held office within their parish reinforces the supposition that they could read. Certainly the men who audited the churchwardens' accounts in St Andrew Hubbard would have needed to be comfortable not only with figures but also with the accompanying text to check how the money had been spent. The churchwardens may have employed a scribe to write up their accounts rather than writing them out themselves but they would have been capable of reading what was recorded on their behalf. There is also a hint that, as time went on, churchwardens were beginning to take on the writing themselves rather than employing someone else to do it for them. Burgess, in considering the format of the St Andrew Hubbard accounts, suggests that the decline in penmanship in the sixteenth-century may be due to the accounts being written by the churchwardens themselves rather than by a professional scribe.<sup>128</sup>

Reading and writing were regarded as quite different skills in the middle ages and an ability to read should not be taken as confirmation that an individual could write. This becomes obvious when the skills needed for writing are considered. As Michael Clanchy has pointed out writing with a quill pen on parchment is more difficult than writing with a modern ballpoint on paper.<sup>129</sup> In fact it is clear that many of the turners could not write. When it came to signing off the accounts in 1552 John Childerley and Thomas Wylkyns were able to make only their marks whereas other non-turner auditors signed their names.<sup>130</sup> Another turner who audited the

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<sup>127</sup> C. Barron, 'Literacy in London', inaugural lecture given at Royal Holloway, University of London, 21 October 2002.

<sup>128</sup> Burgess, *Records*, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>129</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford, 1993), p.115.

<sup>130</sup> Burgess, *Records*, p.171.

accounts may have been encouraged by his experience to learn to write his name. In February 1568 there were six auditors, all of whom who were able to sign their name except for the turner, Thomas Weaver, who made his mark. In January 1570 Thomas Weaver was again one of the auditors but this time he was able to sign his name.<sup>131</sup>

When David Jones made his will in 1597 he could only authenticate it with his mark but other turner testators were able to write their own name.<sup>132</sup> The will of John Warde says that it was ‘signed and sealed by the saide John Warde as his last will & testament’<sup>133</sup> and John Parkyns stated quite firmly: ‘In witness whereof I the said John Parkyns to this my present testament and last will have subscribed my name with myn own hand and set my seale’.<sup>134</sup> It was quite common for turners to possess personal seals and they were able therefore to authenticate their wills by the addition of a wax impression of their seal in addition to their mark or their signature. Sometimes a seal was the only indication of authenticity without any written accompaniment. In 1485 Thomas Hamlyn concluded his will by saying: ‘In witness whereof I have set my seal’.<sup>135</sup>

In the majority of cases, not just that of turners, an individual’s last will would have been composed on his behalf by the local priest or sometimes a professional scribe (who may of course have influenced the content) and where a clerk or scrivener is mentioned as a witness to a will it is likely that he was the person who actually wrote it, even if this is not stated explicitly. William Childerley’s will was probably composed by Everard Effamat, a scrivener who is listed among the witnesses.<sup>136</sup> Thomas Clerk also had a ‘scriptor’, Robert Spaldyng, as one of his witnesses.<sup>137</sup> Richard Botlaye’s will was probably written for him by the parson, James Taylor, who is listed as the first witness.<sup>138</sup> Sometimes official documents even state explicitly by whom they had been written. In 1596, James Welshe, turner, gave a large sum of money to a fellow

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<sup>131</sup> Burgess, *Records*, pp. 208 and 210.

<sup>132</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/018 ff. 430v-31 (1597).

<sup>133</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/019 ff. 290v-91 (1602).

<sup>134</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/32 ff.188-88v (1549).

<sup>135</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/08 f. 103v (1485).

<sup>136</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 ff. 171v-72 (1524). Effamat is known to have been working as a scrivener in London from at least 1514. His unusual name reflects his probable descent from one of two brothers from Constantinople who were working as wire drawers in the city of London in the fifteenth century. I am grateful to Laura Wood for the additional information about Effamat.

<sup>137</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/05 f. 324 (1462).

<sup>138</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/015 f. 346v (1569).

London citizen and haberdasher. The Deed of Gift confirming the transfer concludes with the words: ‘By me written, Robert Andrews, scriptor’.<sup>139</sup>

### **Families, households, apprentices**

We have seen already that the majority of testators had been married. Most of them also mention children in their wills with a total of fourteen sons and seventeen daughters recorded. Many of these were minors at the time the wills were drawn up and parents were naturally concerned to make provision for their children’s future and, in particular, for their marriages. Thus, William Ashcombe bequeathed 20s each to William and John, his two sons, for when they reached the age of twenty-one or when they married, if that was earlier.<sup>140</sup> If one boy died before this was achieved then his share was to go to the other. If they both died the money was to pass to Ashcombe’s wife. John Senesole left 40s for the marriage of his daughter, Ellen, but prudently the money was to remain with John’s wife, Isabelle, until Ellen either reached the age of twenty-one or was ready to marry. Again, if Ellen died prematurely Isabelle could keep the money.<sup>141</sup> John Yowarde gave a very generous £10 each to his two daughters, Alice and Margaret, with a similar arrangement although in his case if both daughters died his wife was to have only half of the money while the other half was to be given to the poor.<sup>142</sup> One of Thomas Weaver’s sons was to have a shop and ‘a certain chamber covered by the same lease’ but the yearly rent from this property was to go to one of Thomas’s two daughters while she remained unmarried.<sup>143</sup> Some turners were in a position to make abundant provision for their children. After making bequests to a number of other family members, Robert Wylkyns left his daughter, Ellen, the residue of his goods which included ‘messuages,<sup>144</sup> lands, tenements, edifices, buildings, rents, reversions and services’ located in Philpot Lane or elsewhere in London provided that she (or her heirs) paid £3 twice yearly to Robert’s son during a twenty year period.<sup>145</sup> Robert Wylkyns appears to have been a significant landholder in this part of the London. His is a rather puzzling bequest. It

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<sup>139</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/13 f. 160.

<sup>140</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/05 ff. 188-88v (1456).

<sup>141</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/01 f. 383v (1394).

<sup>142</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/09171/012 ff. 131-131v (1552).

<sup>143</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/70 (1587).

<sup>144</sup> A messuage was a house with associated buildings and land.

<sup>145</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/012 ff. 120v-21 (1553).

suggests that Robert had greater faith in his daughter's ability as a manager than that of his son, perhaps the boy was handicapped in some way or the daughter may have been significantly older.

There is no suggestion in his father's will that the younger Robert Wylkyns would work as a turner and this seems to be typical for, despite the stability of the craft expressed by the continuing presence of turners in one particular location, there is little indication of sons following their fathers into the same line of work (and there is no evidence at all for female turner apprentices). Simon Tapycer's son, also Simon, was one of the few exceptions. In the late fifteenth century both men could refer to themselves as 'citizen and turner of London' but this is a rarity. Turners with the same surname across generations are unusual suggesting that the men who entered the trade were the sons of practitioners of other crafts or, if sons of turners, they were first generation migrants to the city. Sometimes another relative would be favoured when there was no son to take up the craft. John Childerley the younger, for example, was William Childerley's 'cousin', a term which could refer simply to a relative and did not have the precise meaning it has today.<sup>146</sup> William had a brother, referred to in William's will as John the elder, but he was a joiner rather than a turner. William and Marion appear to have had a daughter but no son. This was obviously to the advantage of the younger John as he received a fortunate boost to his career. William bequeathed him £3 6s 8d in cash and the same amount in 'wares' from William's 'shop of my occupation' and this was followed four years later by a bequest from Marion of the lease of her house and all 'wares' that belonged to 'the occupation'.<sup>147</sup>

It is not known where John Childerley the younger received his training as a turner. Information about the background of apprentice turners is extremely limited and it is not possible to establish their place of birth nor the occupation of their fathers. Evidence from the surnames of London turners suggests that, if sons went into the trade at all, it must have been outside the city. There is a hint of this when a William Clerk, 'alias Turnour, son and heir of Thomas Clerke, late citizen and turner of London' appears in records in connection with tenements in St Albans,

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<sup>146</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 f. 171v-72 (1524).

<sup>147</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 f. 171v-72 (1524), LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/010 f. 119v-120 (1528).

Hertfordshire.<sup>148</sup> London was a magnet for migrants but those who did well might move out again. It was also quite normal for sons not to follow the same trade as their fathers.<sup>149</sup> This might be for a number of reasons. In a period when child mortality, particularly from infectious diseases, was extremely high, especially in towns, boys might well die before reaching an age to be taken on as an apprentice. Sylvia Thrupp in her study of medieval London merchants (a group who might be expected to do better than many others) found that a large percentage of men died without leaving a male heir.<sup>150</sup> This was the position for some of the turners although there were exceptions. Simon Tapycer the elder and Thomas Weaver were particularly fortunate in that each referred to three sons in his will. (Thomas Weaver also had two daughters). In fact Tapycer's sons all seem to have survived to adulthood. Two were married and one at least had a daughter of his own.<sup>151</sup> Even if sons did survive childhood fathers might have other ambitions for them outside the turning business. Vanessa Harding has suggested that there was probably an element of 'trading up' where a father apprenticed his son into a trade of high status than his own.<sup>152</sup> A young man might even decide for himself that a life of turnery in London was not for him and choose a more exciting life. The son of the turner John Spratly was accompanying Sir Francis Drake on what was to be the latter's last voyage when his father came to make his will in 1596. The younger Spratly may have joined the expedition out of a desire to seek his fortune in which case he is unlikely to have been successful. Presumably the son sailed with the explorer from Plymouth in August 1595. Drake had intended to attack Panama but was strongly repelled by the Spanish and died of dysentery on 29 January 1596 while anchored off the coast of Porto Bello. Many of Sir Francis's men were also sick and the expedition was abandoned with each vessel making its own way home as best it could.<sup>153</sup>

Testators were just as likely to refer to siblings in their wills as they were to mention the younger generation suggesting that they had retained close family ties. Where there were no

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<sup>148</sup> TNA REQ 2/5, Records of the Court of Requests, between 1492-1547.

<sup>149</sup> V. Harding, 'Sons, apprentices, and successors in late medieval and early modern London: The transmission of skills and work opportunities' in *Generations in towns*, eds. F-E Eliassen and K. Szende, (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), pp. 153-168.

<sup>150</sup> S. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, (University of Michigan, 1948). See Table 13, p. 200.

<sup>151</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/06 ff. 231v-32 (1478).

<sup>152</sup> Harding, 'Sons, apprentices', p.154.

<sup>153</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/018 ff. 312v-13 (1596). Harry Kelsey, 'Drake, Sir Francis (1540-1596)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/index.html>> [accessed 28 November 2010].

surviving children (and sometimes even when there were) brothers and sisters often enjoyed useful and sometimes valuable bequests. David Jones, for example, gave sums of money to each of his three brothers: Fulke, Thomas and Edward.<sup>154</sup> William Cuffele gave his executors discretion to distribute the residue of his goods between his two sisters so that they might pray for him.<sup>155</sup>

It was usual for a master to have one or two apprentices at any one time although a more senior member of the craft such as a warden might be allowed more and this pattern is borne out by the turners. Only one man, Richard Botlaye, is recorded as having three apprentices.<sup>156</sup> The apprentices would have lived in and been part of the household along with other servants. Marion Childerley referred to her apprentice, Richard Garnett, 'that lieth in'.<sup>157</sup> Although the names of fifteen apprentices can be identified from wills (see Table 2 for a complete list) only one of these is definitely known to have become a turner himself.<sup>158</sup> Harding has suggested that apprentices 'were in a real sense their masters' true successors, far more than their sons'<sup>159</sup> but this was not the case for the turners whose apprentices do not seem to have carried on the business, at least within the city, any more than their sons did.

It was customary in London for widows to take over the running of their husband's business including responsibility for his apprentices and we can see this in action in the case of the turners. In his will William Childerley released his apprentice, Christopher Barres, from the debts and duties that Christopher owed him specifying that this was 'to the intent that he be true to my said wife in the business of my occupation'.<sup>160</sup> Frequently a woman would remarry after the death of her husband and if the new spouse's occupation differed from that of her previous husband she was obliged to make arrangements for any apprentices to be placed in suitable new positions. Although William Childerley's wife, Marion, did not die until four years after her husband she chose not to remarry but continued with the business even though, as the widow of a

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<sup>154</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/018 ff. 430v-31 (1597).

<sup>155</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 f. 115 (1442).

<sup>156</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/015 f. 346v (1569).

<sup>157</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/010 f. 119v-120 (1528).

<sup>158</sup> This was Thomas Hamlyn apprentice of William Ashcombe.

<sup>159</sup> Harding, 'Sons, apprentices', p. 155.

<sup>160</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 ff. 171v-72 (1524).

wealthy turner, she must have been an attractive marriage proposition. When Marion came to make her own will there was no mention of Barres who had presumably completed his training by then. In the meantime, however, Marion had acquired another apprentice and she released that young man from his terms.<sup>161</sup> There are further examples of turners bequeathing the terms of an apprenticeship to their wives. John Senesole left his wife, Isabelle, the terms of his apprentice, Thomas atte Water. Senesole wanted Thomas to have 10s when he completed his training but specified that the apprentice could have it earlier if Isabelle agreed.<sup>162</sup> Thomas Wilkins had two apprentices and released them both from one year of their terms in his will but asked that they ‘should be good and diligent and true servants to my wife’.<sup>163</sup> It was very common for a master to shorten the outstanding terms of his apprentice at his death. Simon Tapycer the elder forgave Roger Dre and Thomas Baker a year of their service while John Parkyns was even more generous releasing his apprentice from three years of his terms.<sup>164</sup> This would have been of financial benefit to these young men but it still does not seem to have enabled them to set up in business for themselves in London.

At the time he made his will (December 1448) John White’s apprentice was a Henry Bate, to whom White remitted one year from his apprenticeship.<sup>165</sup> However, a few years earlier White had had an apprentice, called Roger White (who may of course have been a relative). The elder White clearly felt called upon to support the younger one by becoming involved in a legal case on his behalf. John White claimed that a shepster (dressmaker), Constance ate Naldyr, forcibly abducted Roger (in the parish of St Andrew Hubbard) at Michaelmas 1420 and again in September 1422. Constance denied the accusation. There are no further details about this case so it is not possible to know what lay behind it.<sup>166</sup> One explanation could be that Constance was trying to poach manpower in a period when there was a considerable shortage of labour.

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<sup>161</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/010 ff. 119v-120 (1528).

<sup>162</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/01 f. 383v (1394).

<sup>163</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/016 f. 175v (1574).

<sup>164</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/06 ff. 231v-32 (1478), TNA PCC Prob. 11/32 ff. 188-88v (1549).

<sup>165</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 ff. 245-46 (1448).

<sup>166</sup> TNA CP 40/648, rot. 218.

Only a few men (all from the later sixteenth century) made gifts to the Company of Turners in their wills. Thomas Wilkins left 20s.<sup>167</sup> John Turnor gave the same amount but stated that it was ‘to be spent among them on the day of my burial’.<sup>168</sup> Thomas Weaver bequeathed the Company ‘whereof I am a member’ the lesser sum of 10s for a drinking or commemoration.<sup>169</sup> John Spratly, whose son Joseph was with Sir Francis Drake, requested that the residue of his goods be sold and the money raised given for safe keeping into the custody of the Company of Turners ‘whereof I am free’ to be held for his son. If the young man did not return from the voyage the money was to go to John’s sister, Thomazine Thorne.<sup>170</sup>

Men who had been successful craftsmen themselves sometimes made provision in their will to help the younger generation. William Childerley left a very generous bequest of 53s 4d ‘to the poor young men of my occupation of turners to help them towards their living’. The money was to be distributed by William’s wife Marion and the wardens of the fellowship [of the craft] ‘for relief and comfort as they shall think best’.<sup>171</sup> There is no evidence how this bequest was allocated or indeed if it was fulfilled at all.

### **Giving to charity**

In the middle ages intercessionary prayers by the poor were felt to be particularly beneficial to the soul on its journey through purgatory and this was probably part of the reason behind some of the turners’ bequests, alongside a genuine desire to help those in need. John Hyndon left 3s 4d to a ‘certain man called Lambourne’ (who may have been a pauper or possibly an anchorite) asking that Lambourne pray for his soul.<sup>172</sup> Thomas Sparowe left money to the Abbess of the Minories outside Aldgate to pray for him but he also left a separate sum to Lady Margery ‘who has been in that house for many years’ to have him in her prayers as well as devoting the residue of his possessions to good works, the poor and pious uses.<sup>173</sup> John White

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<sup>167</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/016 f. 175v (1574).

<sup>168</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/021 ff. 26-27 (1608).

<sup>169</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/70 (1587).

<sup>170</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/018 ff. 312v-13 (1596).

<sup>171</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 ff.171v-72 (1524).

<sup>172</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 f. 107v (1442).

<sup>173</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/0/1 f. 161 (1406).

remembered the poor in a very practical way. He made arrangements for twenty quarters of coal to be distributed in the January following his death ‘for the most needy poor in the parish of St Andrew Hubbard’. The money to pay for the coal was to come from an unusual source. White rented out a boat to a William of Woolwich at a cost of 26s 8d per year and from this rent 16s was to be spent on the coal ‘and other pious purposes’. The residue of the rent was to go towards keeping the boat in repair.<sup>174</sup> John Turnor also left money to the poor of the parish of St Andrew Hubbard ‘to be distributed amongst them at the discretion of the parson and the churchwardens’.<sup>175</sup>

Having made provision in his will for his two sons, his wife, his mother, his apprentice, and his god-children William Ashcombe also wanted to help his servant, Joan Nicholl, towards whom he clearly felt a sense of parental responsibility. Joan was to have a generous 40s towards her marriage’ ‘if the said Joan will be advised in her marriage by my wife Alice’ (Ashcombe’s sons were to receive only 20s each when they married). Even so Aschombe did not forget the poor as he allocated 3s 4d to be distributed at ½d to each poor person.<sup>176</sup> It is clear that, on occasion, turners were the source of vital support to some needy folk whom they may have regarded as part of their family. William Childerley asked his wife to keep Emma Green, widow, for the duration of her life in ‘meat, drink, washing and bed’ in the same way that he had kept Emma up to the time of the making of his will (there is no indication of his relationship to Emma).<sup>177</sup> John Parkyns gave money (in 1549) to St Bartholomew’s Hospital for the maintenance of the poor and, reflecting changes in religious practice, he also left a sum for twelve sermons to be preached after his death.<sup>178</sup> John Yowarde’s will, made in 1552, also shows differences in welfare provision brought about by the Dissolution of the Religious Houses, for he bequeathed 5s ‘to the setting up of the houses for the poor’.<sup>179</sup> Thomas Wilkins gave 20s to the poor householders ‘of the parish wherein I dwell’.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 f. 245-45v (1448).

<sup>175</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/021 ff. 26-27 (1608).

<sup>176</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/05 ff. 188-188v (1456).

<sup>177</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 f.71 (1524).

<sup>178</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/32 ff. 188-88v (1549).

<sup>179</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/09171/012 ff. 131-131v (1552).

<sup>180</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/016 f. 175v (1574).

## Workshops and household goods

It is not possible to pinpoint the exact location of any of the houses or workshops of the turners within St Andrew Hubbard or elsewhere in the city and only occasionally is it possible to gain a hint of the kind of property they occupied. John White, bequeathed to one of his executors, Simon Tapycer, all his interest in two tenements one of which, The Key, in the parish of St Andrew Hubbard, John actually occupied.<sup>181</sup> John Brewster rented two tenements in the parish of St Andrew Hubbard between c. 1477 - c. 1485, although it is not known whether he occupied one or both himself or sub-let them. It is likely that they consisted of a wooden frame with wattle and daub infilling as the churchwardens' accounts record that a 'dawber and his labourer' were paid for working on the buildings. At least one room was heated, with a chimney probably constructed from stone, as a mason was paid for three workmen to undertake repairs on it and two sacks of lime were purchased, all of which suggests that it needed considerable work.<sup>182</sup> John Brewster was buried in St Andrew Hubbard sometime between Michaelmas 1491 and Michaelmas 1492.<sup>183</sup>

In one case information about workspace can be gleaned because an individual was in trouble for causing a nuisance. In Southwark in 1550 a man described only as 'Old Peverell' annoyed his neighbours 'by day and night with the continewall noyse of his tornyng whele' and was ordered to move the wheel to the back of his house.<sup>184</sup> Peverell clearly had more than one room in which he could undertake his work and the fact that he was ordered to move his wheel into the rear of his house suggests a reasonably well insulated building for it not to be heard there by the complainants. This is the only evidence we have about working conditions although William Childerley referred in his will to the 'wares' in his 'shop of my occupation'.<sup>185</sup> David Jones's house was large enough to contain a 'garrett' which housed his second bedstead which he bequeathed to his brother Edward.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 ff. 245-46 (1448).

<sup>182</sup> *The Medieval Records of a London city Church (St Mary at Hill) 1420-1559*, ed. H. Littlehales (London, 1905), pp. 74, 85 and 105.

<sup>183</sup> Burgess, *Church Records*, p. 60.

<sup>184</sup> M. Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, (London, 1996), p. 246.

<sup>185</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 ff. 171v-72 (1524).

<sup>186</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/018 ff. 430v-31 (1597).

Wills, particularly those of women, are a good source of information about the furnishings of turners' homes. Married men when making their wills usually left most of their household goods to their wives but when wives were close to death they tended to make arrangements for the disposal of the goods, and the breakup of the household. Marion Childerley is a good example. She bequeathed to Elizabeth Jenkinson, her husband's former maidservant (who had presumably continued to live in and serve the household after his death), a long list of items 'for her good and diligent service'. These included: a featherbed (which was in the great chamber and thus probably the principal bed) with the best blankets, coverlet, celure (an ornamental canopy over the bed), tester and curtains all of which belonged to the bed plus the hangings of the outer chamber. Elizabeth was also to have half a 'garnish' of vessels (a set of items for the table usually of pewter), a pot, a pan and a salt cellar, a chafing dish, two candlesticks, a gown furred with gray, a kirtle of scarlet (probably made from the type of cloth of this name rather than a reference to the colour), a pair of linen sheets and a sum of money. Elizabeth must have been a friend as well as a servant as she was extremely well provided for and the range of items would have enabled her to set up home independently. Marion's will also mentioned a male servant but his only bequest was to be forgiven the debts he owed his mistress. The bed given to Elizabeth Jenkinson was not the only one in the Childerley house. Robert Hadnell was to have 'the little bed standing by my bed as it is' and Robert Warde was to have a mattress although there is no indication if there was a bed associated with it. Marion's cousin was to have 'a little brass pot and chafer and a little pan'.<sup>187</sup> Marion's house seems to have been reasonably well furnished but this was nothing compared to the home of Agnes, widow and sole executrix of the turner, John Parkyns. Agnes lived for twenty-six years after the death of her husband, clearly in some comfort. Her will disposed of four beds and a number of mattresses, bolsters, sheets, coverlets and blankets plus numerous goblets, cups, spoons, pots, a salt [cellar] with a cover and a storage chest. Some of the items were pewter but others were of silver. They were to be distributed amongst her kin and friends.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/010, ff. 119v-120 (1528).

<sup>188</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/016 ff. 220-221 (1575).

One of the most common items to appear in wills apart from household goods and furniture is that of clothing as demonstrated by the kirtle of scarlet that Marian Childerley gave to her maidservant. Clothing was a relatively expensive item and would be passed down through the generations. William Childerley appears to have owned several attractive outfits: to his brother John, he bequeathed his best gown and a doublet of tawny damask, to Joan Lee he left his tawny gown lined with ‘satin Cyprus’ and to Margaret Taylor he gave his russet gown with fox. William left it to the discretion of his wife to dispose of his other garments between his two brothers.<sup>189</sup> William Cuffele who lived in the neighbouring parish of St Leonard Eastcheap left his best furred gown and best hood to his brother.<sup>190</sup> Simon Tapycer gave one of his daughters-in-law a gown of furred mustervillers (a highly prized cloth)<sup>191</sup> and John White gave his brother a cloak of the same material lined with otter fur.<sup>192</sup> Thomas Wilkins bequeathed his best gown, jacket and doublet to his turner neighbour Pearse Colton.<sup>193</sup> Agnes Parkyns again seems to have outdone all the other testators in the amount of clothing she was able to distribute to her friends at her death. These included gowns, kirtles and smocks.<sup>194</sup>

### **Tools and raw materials**

It is surprising and perhaps disappointing that tools are rarely mentioned in turners’ wills and even when they are referred to they are often not described in any detail. This may be due to the limited nature of wills rather than the lack of ownership of tools. Men may have made arrangements well before their last illness about the disposal of their tools and felt no need to reiterate these on their deathbeds. As previously mentioned William Childerley’s bequest to John the younger included ‘such wares as I shall leave in my shop of my occupation’ but he did not feel it necessary to spell out what these were. No doubt this bequest did not come as a surprise to the young man who may have been employed already in the ‘shop’. John Hyndon was only slightly more informative when he left to his servant, Peter, the tools relating to his craft to the

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<sup>189</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/21 ff. 171v-72 (1524).

<sup>190</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 f. 115 (1442).

<sup>191</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/06 ff. 231v-32 (1478).

<sup>192</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 f. 245 (1448).

<sup>193</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/016 f. 175v (1574).

<sup>194</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/016 ff. 220-221 (1575).

value of 6s 8d. (Peter was probably a journeyman or junior employee of Hyndon).<sup>195</sup> David Jones gave his brother, Edward, all his 'ware and working tools belonging to my occupation of a turner' plus all the rest of his working apparel but again he does not feel it necessary to describe these in any detail.<sup>196</sup> John Spratly bequeathed his drawing table to his servant but does not mention other tools.<sup>197</sup> The only man actually to list tools in his will was Simon Tapycer the elder. These were: a broad axe and a hatchet, three augers and a bent saw but they could be the tools of any woodworker not specifically a turner. There is no mention of a lathe in any of the turners' wills. The lack of tools in the wills of craftsmen is not unusual. In her work on joiners Jessica Lutkin examined thirty-eight wills, only seven of which referred to tools.<sup>198</sup>

There is no mention of raw materials in any of the turners' wills and it is not clear where wood supplies were obtained. Perhaps there was a convenient area in St Andrew Hubbard where wood or timber landed at one of the river front wharves could be brought straight to the parish for storage. None of the testators refers to wood and it seems none had a store of raw materials to bequeath. Records of disputes however indicate that some London turners did sometimes act as middlemen in the supply of wood. Rather than waiting to purchase supplies that had been brought to the city by woodmongers or carpenters they travelled out to the hinterland around London to obtain it for themselves. In 1468, for example, Richard Jones, turner, and another man were accused of breaking into a close in West Wickham, Kent and cutting and taking away three hundred oak trees, three hundred ash trees and fifty carts of underwood, together worth £38, as well as destroying the grass with their beasts.<sup>199</sup> These numbers are so large that it is quite likely that the figures were inflated by the protagonists and in fact the defendants contested both the number of trees and their value. A few years later Jones himself brought an action against a husbandman of Croydon in relation to the prevention of cutting of wood 'at an unseasonable time of the year'.<sup>200</sup> Jones was not the only turner to be in dispute over obtaining supplies. Thomas Purchas was involved in a complicated case concerning wood and underwood at several locations in Middlesex, including sixty elm and oak trees growing in Feltham and willow,

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<sup>195</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 f. 107v (1442).

<sup>196</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/018 ff. 430v-31 (1597).

<sup>197</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/018 ff. 312v-13 (1596).

<sup>198</sup> Lutkin, *The London Craft*, p. 135.

<sup>199</sup> TNA CP 40/828, rot. 351.

<sup>200</sup> TNA C1/60.

whitethorn and blackthorn in other places. For a payment of £10 Purchas was to have access to the trees for his servants, carts and horses for two years which suggests a substantial enterprise.<sup>201</sup> In another case an action was brought against William Wylkens, turner, in relation to the price of wood called ‘appes’, which he was due to pay for partly in cash and partly in turnery.<sup>202</sup>

## **Levels of wealth**

On the whole the turners seem to have increased their prosperity steadily over time and some men in the sixteenth century were very successful with plenty of money and possessions to pass on to their heirs. William Childerley must have been the same person as the turner designated in 1525 as ‘William Childerton’ who was assessed for a contribution to the Amicable Grant at the enormous sum of £40. Although William Childerley had actually died the previous year the tax assessors were probably working from an out of date list as it has not been possible to trace any further reference to a William Childerton in the parish.<sup>203</sup> John Childerley’s will does not survive but with his auspicious start we can be certain that he did well for himself. John Parkyns, the husband of Agnes, refers in his will to two messuages and tenements with their appurtenances called the Ox Keys in St Andrew Hubbard that were previously occupied by John Childerley and it is likely that Childerley had bequeathed them to Parkyns.<sup>204</sup> Simon Tapycer the elder was able to leave his eldest son some fine items: a girdle harnessed with silver, a tapestry coverlet depicting a lion under a tree plus various household goods including a mazer with a band of silver gilt and an image of St Andrew in the bottom. But his other two sons were not forgotten and both received household goods including a featherbed each, one of which had a tapestry coverlet.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> TNA CP 40/664, rot. 302.

<sup>202</sup> TNA C1/591 1518-1529. William may have been the father of the St Andrew Hubbard turner, Robert Wylkens, who died in 1553. LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/012 f. 120v.

<sup>203</sup> Three other turners, William Johnson, William Parkyn and Robert Wylken, were assessed for the grant, all in St Andrew Hubbard, and all for the sum of £5. Oldland, ‘The Wealth of the Trades’ and personal communication from Professor Oldland.

<sup>204</sup> TNA PCC Prob. 11/32 ff. 188-88v (1549).

<sup>205</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/06 ff. 231v-32 (1478).

Other turners were not as successful and had much less to bequeath. Thomas Clerk making his will in 1462 gave only 4d to the high altar of St Margaret Moses plus 4d for the church generally.<sup>206</sup> The only items mentioned in his will are two mazers made from maple wood with a silver gilt banding and a ‘borsell in the base’ (a borsell was a boss or a knob)<sup>207</sup> which were to go to his two daughters. Mazers seem to have been a popular item to bequeath to offspring. Could it be that they were family heirlooms, manufactured by one of the turner family members? Thomas Hamlyn left one each to his three daughters on the occasion of their marriages. These mazers were to be accompanied by four spoons and a useful 40s each.<sup>208</sup> John Fryth dying in 1413 seems to have had little to leave. Requesting burial in the cemetery of St Michael Cornhill, John gave 20d for forgotten tithes and a further 2s to the common box of the fraternity of St Michael in the church. For a trental of masses soon after his death he gave 2s 6d and the residue of his goods (not specified) were to go to this wife, Anabile.<sup>209</sup>

### **Geographical origins of turners**

Many of the men in this study must have been first or second generation immigrants. William de Aylesbury (one of the 1346 turners) is an example of a newcomer who had found employment in the city. They may have enjoyed successful careers, possibly never having returned to their birthplace but when they sensed the hour of death approaching some chose to remember their origins. In 1442, for instance, William Cuffele left a torch to the altar of St Katherine in the church of St Leonard Eastcheap but he left another torch to the church of North Mimms, Hertfordshire.<sup>210</sup> Likewise John White asked that his executors purchase three chalices. One was to be given to the church of St Andrew Hubbard but the other two were for churches in Bedfordshire – at Stoughton and Bysshmede (presumably Bushmead). White also left money for the chaplains in the church of Bysshmede to pray for him daily for one year and a further sum for them to say *Placebo* and *Dirige* on his behalf.<sup>211</sup> White clearly had a strong link to Bedfordshire. However, he also bequeathed money for the repair of the road outside the house of ‘Sharpe’ in

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<sup>206</sup> St Margaret Moses was situated close to the east end of St Paul’s Cathedral.

<sup>207</sup> *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Hans Kurath (University of Michigan Press, 1956), p. 1057.

<sup>208</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/08 f. 103v (1485).

<sup>209</sup> LMA DL/AL/C/002/MS09051/001 f. 307 (1413).

<sup>210</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 f. 115 (1442).

<sup>211</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/04 ff. 245-46 (1448).

Enfield suggesting connections with Middlesex as well. John Turnor left money to the poor of the parish of Cheshunt (Hertfordshire) and Edmonton (Middlesex). He also bequeathed a sum to ‘Master Turner, minister and preacher of the parish of Cheshunt’ who was presumably a relation still living in the area of John’s origin.<sup>212</sup> In 1402 John Bourer, citizen and turner of London, together with his wife Alice, was in dispute with a London saddler, Richard Coksale about rent due for a messuage and 34 acres of land in Billericay, Essex suggesting that he may have originated from that county.<sup>213</sup> In 1484 Richard Jones, another citizen and turner of London, formally passed some of his goods and chattels to Thomas Ravynsdene, prior of the house and church of Stoneley (Huntingdon) suggesting that Jones may have moved to London from that area.<sup>214</sup> All of these counties were close to London indicating that turners had not migrated very far when they had set out to seek a new life.

## **Conclusion**

This study has considered the evidence for turners in London in the later medieval period and what it can tell us about these craftsmen as individuals. Membership of the craft was never large but by their manufacture of the official measures for a variety of staple goods turners made an important contribution to life in the city. Although in many ways they were a typical part of late medieval society in two important aspects they were quite unusual. The stability of turners in one part of London for such a long period is striking. Most London crafts began in particular areas but, after the Black Death which resulted in a greater availability of land in the city, the topographical coherence declined sharply, and members of the same craft can be found scattered throughout the city. This was not the case for the turners who were very unusual in their maintenance of a tight-knit community, centred on one parish over at least two centuries. Turners would have had a significant influence on this area, St Andrew Hubbard, where they chose to live and work. They took an active part in the parish and while in frequent contact with other members of the craft they were also well integrated within their neighbourhood.

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<sup>212</sup> LMA DL/C/B/004/MS09171/021 ff. 26-27.

<sup>213</sup> TNA CP 40/566, rot. 108 – Trinity 1402.

<sup>214</sup> *Calendar of Close Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office*. Great Britain, Court of Chancery, 1476-1485.

Another distinctive feature of the turners is their continuation as a separate craft. Many of the smaller craft associations did not last into the sixteenth century but were forced by changing demand for their goods and/or poverty to merge into larger groupings.<sup>215</sup> But the turners managed to survive as a distinct entity. They became more prosperous during the course of the sixteenth century because the growth of wealth in London resulted in more purchasers for their goods. Some turners did very well and were able to pass on property and possessions to their children although none was wealthy enough to be able to request a commemorative brass or other monument. Nor did any testator leave money for the setting up of a chantry, and only the wealthiest turners could afford a series of post-mortem masses. Other men were less successful; but all made their contribution to London society.

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<sup>215</sup> For example, in 1479 the wire drawers amalgamated with the chapemakers (chapes were metal tags on the end of laces) to become the craft of wiremongers and at the end of the fifteenth century the wiremongers merged with the pinners to form the wiresellers. At a later date the wiresellers were absorbed into the girdlers (belt-makers). *The Pinners' and Wiresellers' Book 1462-1511*, ed. B. Megson (London Record Society, 2009), pp. xxiv-xxvii. See also Barron, *London*, pp. 229-30 for a number of other examples of amalgamations between small manufacturing crafts.