

Records of the London Carpenters' Company

By Peter Follansbee

I spent some time in London in the winter of 2004 searching for the origins of a seventeenth-century joiner, Henry Messenger, who migrated to New England and settled in Boston, Massachusetts. While essentially a needle-in-a-haystack undertaking, the trip did introduce me to a fascinating period source. A footnote in *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell*, a book of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century “surveys,” or plots, of properties in London, led me to *Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters*. These are published transcriptions of the records of the London Carpenters' Company. It turns out, of course, that these volumes are included in the library of NEHGS as well. [i]

The Carpenters' Company is among the oldest livery companies of London. Its existence is recorded from 1333, and its records survive from the early 1400s. Like all such guilds, the Carpenters' Company oversaw the works of its members by regulating prices and materials, and governed all aspects of the trade within the city limits of London. The companies also exercised many charitable functions, such as the maintenance of sick and aged members, widows of members, and gifts to poor people within London. It is primarily in this capacity that the Company functions still.

Six volumes of these books were published in the early twentieth century, with a seventh volume done in 1968. The original volumes of the Carpenters' Records are held at the Guildhall Library in London, but these transcriptions save a great deal of eye strain. The wealth of detail found in these records is astounding, and they provide matter of interest to social historians as well as genealogists. The content of the seven volumes is scattered; they do not proceed in chronological order. For instance, the first volume contains apprenticeship bindings for the second half of the seventeenth century, while volume two starts the warden's accounts with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century records.

The thousands of apprenticeship bindings in these records are engrossing. Marsh's introduction from 1913 indicates the usefulness of these records to those interested in the fabric of English life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: “...for while the greatest care in preservation of records may show an appreciation of their dormant value, publication reveals a more intelligent apprehension of their active value as original documents in the social history of London and England.” [ii]

The wealth of information contained in the apprenticeship bindings will be of great interest to the genealogist. The Carpenters' Company in their statutes of 1607 outlined the terms under which a master and his apprentices might set up their arrangements. These differed very little, if at all, from any of the companies of London. [iii]

Marsh's introduction includes some instruction found in the Carpenters' Company court book of 1600-1618:

Quere to be made when you bind an Appr.
what is the boys name who is to be bound
what is his Father's name if living and where
if dead where did he live and in what County or Citty
what trade doth he follow or was of when living
To whom is he to be bound
where doth the mr live
for what Time when to begin
at a tyme past or to come
md an Appr cant be bound for lesse than 7 years according
to law from the tyme of the binding
for 7 years from the date of these present Indentures
from the day next before the day of these presents & the date of
these presents

for 8 years from Xmas last past
for 7 years from the first of June next ensuing [iv]

Because most of the apprenticeship bindings usually do follow these guidelines, the genealogical benefit of these records is apparent. By providing the place of origin, as well as the father's name and occupation, these become very helpful in determining a family's English origins. Another insight provided by these detailed records is the incredible number of apprentices who came from all counties to London to try their luck at life in the city. Considering that these records are just one company of many, the number of men coming into London as apprentices was quite significant.

Friday the 6th day of October 1654

Richard Parrett son of Ro: Parrett late of Lillingston Luffin in the County of Oxon husbandman deceased hath put himselfe apprntice to Bartholomew Knight to serve for seaven yeares from the day of the date abovewritten; dated the day & yeare aforesaid.
[v]

November the third 1654

Alexander Reader the sonne of Wm Reader late of Saffron in the County of Essex Carpenter decd hath put himselfe apprntice to Thomas Woodhouse of the parish of Allhallows Staining to serve for Seaven yeares for the day of the date abovewritten dated etc. [vi]

Some entries even include the section of London the master lives in, as this one from July of 1655, in which Thomas Barnes of Harlington, Bedford, put himself apprentice to "Thomas Clarke of Pye-Corner for 7 yeares from the day of the date aforesayd." [vii]

These records show that most of the carpenter's apprentices were from outside of the city, but occasionally there are records of London citizens apprenticing their sons in the city. In this case, it is a carpenter enrolling his son as his own apprentice. Between August of 1660 and 1683 the entries were rendered in Latin:

29^o Octobr: 1660 Willielmus Stanfield filius Willielmi Stanfied Civis et Carpentar London per Indram po: se appren: eidem willo Stanfield Civie et Carpentar patri suo de Cowe lane pro 7 ann a 1^o die Novembr: prox sequen Dat eodem 29^o die Octobr: 1660." [viii]

The social history aspect of these records is evident in the typical payments made regularly by the Company. These include pensions and alms paid to widows of company members, as well as a scholarship to a student at Oxford. Also, payments were regularly made to those usually un-named people who prepared and cleaned the hall and the gardens for the numerous company dinners.

Paid to the Scavenger iii^s

Paid to the Parson v^s

Paid to Joane Rapley here Yeares pencion xvj^s

Paid to Anne Morris her Yeares pencion xiiij^s iiij^d

Pd to Joane Preistly her yeares pencion x^s

Pd to John Abbott a Schollar for his halfe yeares pencion ending at Christmas 1608 – xl^s and paid him more at the feast of Thannunciation of our Lady 1609 according to an order of Court one Yeares pencion aforesaid being iiij^{li} which was sent to him to Oxford upon his letter soe paid him in all vj^{li}

Geven in Charitye at Michaelmas to Alice Griffyn xvij^d, to Alice Hay Ward xvij^d, to Hamblett Deane vj^d, to Hellen Biggens xvij^d, to Margaret Martyn xvij^d, to Robert Hutchinson xvij^d, to John Curtys xvij^d

Geven in Charity at Christmas to 3 poore people v^s

Geven in Charity att Midsomer to severall poore people of this Companye vj^s ij^d

Paid for making cleane the hall, washing the linen, and scouring the pewter xxij^s

Paid for weeding and watering the garden vij^s

Paid for hooping and mending the Tubbs this Yeare ij^s iiij^d [ix]

A basic function of the company was to regulate members' goods, services, and attendance at company functions. One important aspect of the London trades was the employment of "foreign" craftsmen. These "foreigners" in London were not just workmen from beyond England, but even English carpenters from outside of London, or those who were not members of the company. While their frequent presence in the records indicates that they were a regular part of London work, they were regulated closely and not officially tolerated. In 1567, the company recorded a fine of ten shillings "...of Stephen Furnes a fine for settinge a forrein on worke in his house." Likewise, "Receaved of Robert Piggot for not gevinge knowledg of a forrein wch did worke in his yard" a fine of three shillings four pence. Apparently one could use foreigner carpenters, by paying for a "license" from the company, as in this record: "Res of Richard bolt bowyer a fine to have lycence to sett two forreins on worke for a wek." To use these non-company carpenters cost Bolt three shillings four pence as well. [x]

The company also regulated attendance and behavior of its members. There are cases where members were fined for slander: "...Robert Cawsey a fine wordes spoken against certaine worke done by Mr Abbottes svauntes" was fined 2 shillings 6 pence. Members were also required to attend funeral services for other members or their wives, Roger Rainoldes was fined twelve pence "for not cominge to the buryall of John Holdgattes wyf".

Materials were inspected at the "water syd" for size and quality and penalties were given if said goods did not measure up.

Receaved for fines at the water syd viz

Receaved of Henrye Strodwike a fine for iiij C of planche board iiij^s

Res of Thomas Huet for that his bordes did not beare measuer ij^s vj^d

Res of () Kinge for lath not kepinge the Lengthe ij^s vj^d

Res of mr Ebdgrave for two hundred of bordes & two pale bordes wch was forrein bought & forrein sold at harmans [Harman brookes] wharf viij^s viij^d [xi]

Each volume in this series contains a few detailed indices; usually a name index, a general index, and, in some volumes, a place-name index. Each volume also includes an appendix or two. These vary in their content; some are lists of masters, wardens, or apprentices. Others include leases and deeds concerning company properties, wills of carpenters, etc. Appendix I in volume 2 is a transcript of the company' ordinances from 1486/7.

My original starting point in this London research was a reference that indicated Anthony Messenger was first a warden

of the Carpenters' Company in 1615, 1617, and 1620. He became master of the company in 1622. I decided to focus on records pertaining to him, in an effort to make a connection between Anthony of London and Henry of Boston. I have so far not been able to make any such connection, but along the way, came up with many records concerning Anthony. The first mention of him is his apprenticeship in 1577:

John Jackson ys admitted to have as his apprentice Anthonie Messenger of the age of Nyntene years the sone of John Messenger of Walton in the countie of Comberland husbandman for the terme of seaven years begyninge at the feaste of the Purification of St Marie the Virgin laste paste before the date hereof [xii]

Anthony Messenger was made free of the company in 1584, and took his first apprentice in 1592:

Anthonie Messenger presented to be his apprentice Thomas Okey of the age of xix years the sone of William Okey of Dowtswell in the county of Glouc husbandman for the tearme of seven years begyninge at the feast of St Michael next ensuing (18 Tewsdaie ... xxixth of Awgust 1592) [xiii]

His next apprentice was contracted seven years later, thus presumably when Thomas Okey was made free:

Res of Anthony Messenger for presentinge of Henry Yeomans son of John of Godstowke in County Northampton laborer for eight years from our Lady Day 1599 ij^s ij^d [xiv]

In 1604 Anthony Messenger took two apprentices: "William Ballett sonne of John Ballett of Wells in the County of Somersett yeoman deceased for seaven yeares from the feast of Phillipus and Jacobus Thappostles 1604" and "John Bawden sonne of George Bawden of Worsoppe in the County of Nottingham cooke deceased for seaven years from Michaelmas 1604" [xv]

In undated records that seem to also be from 1604, Anthony Messenger has "translated" or turned over to him "George Jackson late Apprentice to Patrick Reddye Deceased." Perhaps to accommodate George Jackson, Messenger turned over his new apprentice, William Ballet, to John Ballet. By 1606 William Ballet had been turned over again, this time to Thomas Freeborne. [xvi]

In 1608 Messenger presented as his apprentice "Andrew King sonne of Andrew King of Ashbury in the County of Berks husband(man) Deceased for 7 yeares..." At that point, Messenger paid a fine of five shillings to the company for having an "apprentice extraordinary viz one Andrewe King." Andrew King was the third apprentice that Messenger had at the time, when he was only allowed two. Members of the company could have an extra, or "extraordinary" apprentice by paying a fine for each one over the limit. [xvii]

Apprentices continued to come and go regularly through Messenger's shop. George Jackson was made free in 1608, leaving him with Andrew King and John Bawden. He took a new apprentice in 1611: "Thomas Harker the sonne of William Harker of Halsopp in the Countye of Lancaster husbandman for Seaven yeares from Thannunciacion of our Ladye 1611." Again, he was in a position where he had to pay a fine "for the goodwill of the howse to have an Apprentice extraordinary viz Thomas Hawker." [xviii]

Anthony Messenger died in 1634 and was buried at St Alphage, London Wall. His final apprentice, perhaps a relative, Anthony Messenger, was turned over to Thomas Rushall:

Anthony Messenger, son of James of Cumbd yeo appd 14 Jan 1631/2 to Anthy Messenger, then to Thos Rushall Made free 28 April 1640 [xix]

About the author: *Peter Follansbee has studied traditional woodworking since 1978, and has been the joiner at Plimoth Plantation since 1994. In addition to his work in the shop, he has written or co-written several research articles on seventeenth-century New England furniture for the Chipstone Foundation's American Furniture journal, Historic New England's Old Time New England, and other publications. An avid student of probate and court records, he learned genealogical research while tracing owners and makers of early furniture. Along the way, he came across both his father's and mother's early New England ancestors, including Thomas Follansbee, a seventeenth-century carpenter who arrived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in the 1660s and eventually settled in Newbury, Massachusetts; and David Fiske, who arrived in Watertown, Massachusetts, in the late 1630s.*

[i] John Schofield, ed., *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell* (London: London Topographical Society, 1987) and Bower Marsh, A.M. Millard, editors, *Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters* 7 vols.; (Oxford: printed for the Company at the University Press, 1913-1968.) In the NEHGS research Research library Library, the call number for the Carpenters Records books are is #DA 686/M37/1913

[ii] Marsh, *Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters* , 1:v.

[iii] see Margaret Gay Davies, *The Enforcement of English Apprenticeship: A Study in Applied Mercantilism, 1563-1642* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956) particularly appendix I concerning the "Statute of Artificers" of 1563.

[iv] Marsh describes this as "a rough note made probably for the guidance of the Clerk at the end of the Court Book, 1600-1618"; volume 1:ix, x

[v] Marsh, *Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters* , 1:1

[vi] *ibid.*; 1:2

[vii] *ibid.*; 1:7

[viii] *ibid.*; 1:49

[ix] Millard, *Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters* , 7: 342, 343.

[x] Marsh, *Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters* , 4:192-194

[xi] *ibid.*; (4:192-194)

[xii] *ibid.*; 6:86

[xiii] *ibid.*; 6:303

[xiv] Millard, *Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters* , 7:104

[xv] *ibid.*; 7:190, 198

[xvi] *ibid.*; 7:256

[xvii] *ibid.*; 7:312. For the number of apprentices, see the Statutes of the Company from 1607 recorded in the introduction to volume 1:vi-viii.

[xviii] 7:420, 310, 383, 391

[xix] from Lists of Freemen, Ms 21,742/1 (transcript, modern index cards) Guildhall Library, London