The Early History of Feltmaking in London 1250-1604

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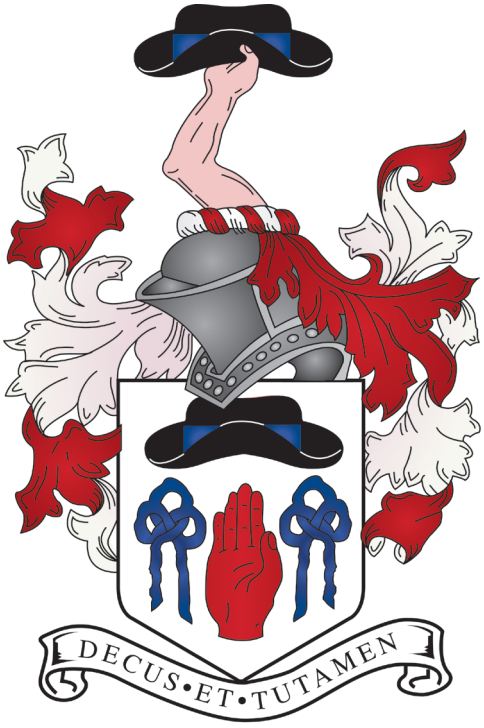

The Worshipful Company of Feltmakers

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A Research Paper

by

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Chapter 1

The Origins of English Felt Hatmaking, 1250-1439

Felting is believed to have been invented in the Near East, and came to Europe with the Crusades. In felting, unlike weaving and knitting, there is no need to spin the fibre into thread or yarn before it can be used. Instead, suitable fibres are deliberately tangled together, working the mixture with hot water until a smooth, even substance is obtained that can be formed into such objects as boots, caps or hats. The strength of the felt comes from the skill used in tangling the fibres, and from the choice of the fibre itself. Some kinds of fibres stick to each other much better than others. Plant fibres, made of cellulose, do not "felt", while animal fibres such as wool and fur, which are made of protein, often "felt" very well indeed.

The wools produced by different animals have very different felting properties. Long haired wools, known as "combing" wools, are ideal for spinning into yarn, but "felt" rather poorly. Wools that are naturally curly or crinkly, called "carding" wools, do not spin well until the individual hairs have been untangled and lined up by the process of carding. Such wools, on the other hand, are useful in felting. The best felting wools are those where the physical structure of the hairs includes protruding structures known as barbs, which help the hairs to stick together. Beaver wool, the favourite material for fine feltmaking and hat finishing, is the best example of this.

In western Europe, where the techniques of spinning and weaving were well entrenched early in the Middle Ages, felting was always secondary. In fact, felting may have been adopted there as a way of using up waste material from the spinning industry. The use of felted wool for hats in London dates from the middle of the thirteenth century, if not earlier.[1] In that early industry, carefully selected wool was used, but other materials were mixed in – scraps of waste wool called "flocks" (left over after wool had been carded and spun for cloth), and clippings and shavings from scrap fur. Sometimes these extra materials improved the felting, but often they must have been used just because they were cheap and made the more costly materials go further. Sticky fluids like urine or waste ale[2] were sometimes used to help the mixture hold together.

The matted material was then subjected to a process called fulling, in which it was squeezed and pounded in hot water so that the woollen strands tangled together more extensively.[3] The final product was formed into caps. These early caps were probably rough in texture, simple in shape, and not long lasting. As time went on, the shape and durability of caps were improved by felting and fulling on a knitted body, and stiffening agents were probably used to maintain the shape.

We can get some idea of what medieval capmaking involved from the complaints made against defective caps. The ordinances of the craft of Cappers were made in 1270 and confirmed by the Court of Aldermen in London in February 1310/11. These specified that caps were to be made of "good white or grey wool or black", and that old caps were not to be dyed black for resale "because in the rain they fall to pieces and lose colour". In that year (1311), representatives of the Cappers made a number of complaints to the Mayor and Aldermen. Caps were being imported from abroad, made of "flockes" mixed with wool. Caps of white and grey wool were being dyed black. Old caps were being refurbished and sold as new. Worst of all, the most deceptive caps were being worked with chalk or "cole", cheap stiffening and colouring materials that would not last very long.[4]

In November 1344, the Court of Aldermen learned that many cappers were re-dyeing "worn-out white and light-coloured furs" to a black colour, and that these furs were sometimes being sold as new. The testimony established that many cappers re-dyed old furs (though they denied that they resold them as new), and that they were most reluctant to stop.[5] The complaint against them was apparently made by the Skinners' Company, whose reputation in supplying genuine furs was at stake. The episode shows that the cappers were handling old furs, and it is natural to assume that these were useful in making caps.

A number of different terms were used for the makers of headgear in medieval London. The Latin *capellarius* and the French *chapeler*, both of which may be translated "capper" or "hatter", appear in London documents of the thirteenth century, sometimes simply as surnames, but often as trades.[6] Late in that century we find individuals with the surnames "le Hurer" and "le Hattere". Some of these men were practising other trades, but the surnames show that the trades themselves were already in existence.

In the year 1270, as already mentioned, "certain ordinances touching the craft of Cappers and the manner of making caps in the City of London" were confirmed by the City authorities. In 1311, as also mentioned earlier, the "good men of the craft of Cappers" obtained an order from the Mayor and Aldermen against the selling of "false caps" within the City.[7] Having thus asserted control over their trade, the Cappers of London went on to obtain letters patent from the King in 1318.[8] A generation later, in 1347, ordinances of the "Hatters", also called *Overours des chapeaux*, were approved by the Mayor and Aldermen, and a slate of six wardens was elected.[9] The terms capper (or "cappemaker") and hatter continue in parallel use in London throughout the fourteenth century, and no clear statement has been found to explain the difference between them.[10]

The third term for a maker of headgear, hurer, seems to have referred to the men who performed the "thicking" or fulling process on caps and hats.[11] In 1376, the Fullers of Cloth petitioned the Mayor and Aldermen for an ordinance to prevent the Hurers from fulling their caps in the fulling mills at Wandsworth and elsewhere. Their complaint was that the Hurers used "syge" or urine in their fulling process, and thus, apparently, were contaminating the fulling baths and damaging the woollen cloths.[12] According to a later record, the Hurers had ordinances for the government of their trade in 1362, which suggests that they felt themselves distinct from other hatmakers. Thereafter, the Hurers are regularly mentioned in City records until the end of the fifteenth century, when the term fades out, and they are spoken of as combined with the other hatting trades.[13]

The three trades of capper, hatter and hurer were nevertheless not fully distinct, for men might easily move from one to another, and even into the trade of haberdasher. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we find individuals who are described sometimes with one trade, and sometimes another. Richard de Byry and Roger Morel were called cappers in 1344, but in 1347 were elected Wardens of the mystery of Hatmakers.[14] Richard Lincoln was elected by the Cappers to serve on the Common Council in 1376, but in 1388 and again in 1394 was sworn in as one of the "Masters" [i.e. Wardens] of the Hatters.[15] Two of the men elected "Masters" of the Hurers in 1378, John Broke and Philip atte Vyne, were elected "Masters" of the Cappers in the following year. One of the "Masters" of the Hurers elected in 1382 was Thomas Depham, "cappere"; another, John Godechepe, was called a capmaker nine years later.[16] John Godeburgh was called a haberdasher in the 1390s, but a "hattere" some fifteen years later.[17] John Reynold is sometimes called a hatter, and sometimes a haberdasher, in various records between 1386 and 1400.[18] Walter Caustone was called a haberdasher in 1391 and 1394, but in 1394 is also referred to as a "capper". The executors of his will, in 1408, called him "citizen and merchant alias cappere alias hattere".[19] There are many other examples.

Given these inconsistencies, one wonders why the distinctions were being made at all. Perhaps the different terms actually represented different political factions within the larger trade, whose influence waxed and waned over the years. Some attempts were made to reorganize these trades under one heading, but these never succeeded in any lasting sense until Tudor times. A set of "Ordinaciones des Hurers" was brought before the Mayor and Court of Aldermen in 1398, but only six years later, in 1404, the same Court approved ordinances for regulating "the mystery of Hurers and Cappers". In 1416/17, the mystery of Hatters and the mystery of Haberdashers, acting together, complained against the mystery of Cappers, because the latter had seized some "longe cappes" belonging to one of the haberdashers.[20] We sense a world of shifting alliances, as different groups struggled for control of an increasingly profitable industry.

A chronic source of dispute among the trades was how "cappes, hures and hattes" should be fulled, whether by feet; in a fulling mill (as woollen cloths were); or by hand. The 1404 ordinances of the Hurers and Cappers, mentioned earlier, had forbidden fulling "by mills or by feet, or otherwise than by men's hands". In 1416/17, the Hatters and Haberdashers argued successfully for these ordinances to be annulled. This was on the grounds that fulling at a mill gave just as good a product as hand-fulling, but was cheaper; and because the practice was common both in England and abroad.

Despite this, the Fullers' ordinance of 1376, forbidding the fulling of caps and hats at a mill, because fulling was only to be done with hands or feet, was still being cited in prosecutions in the 1420s. The Hurers also obtained a confirmation of the same prohibition in 1437.[21] In the end, those who insisted on hand-fulling must have prevailed, for the first detailed descriptions of feltmaking, in the seventeenth century, clearly show that it was all done by hand. By that time, of course, the whole process of felt hatmaking had been greatly refined.

Some late-medieval cappers and hatmakers became reasonably well off, a process that must have involved moving from simple manufacturing to the wholesaling trades. In a few cases, these men sought to have their progress recognized by a formal translation from one art or mystery to another. In 1435/6, Geoffrey Boleyn, hatter (great-grandfather of Queen Anne Boleyn), told the Court of Aldermen that he had been admitted to the freedom of the City as a Hatter in 1428. However he "had long used, and was now using, the art of Mercery and not Hatter"; he prayed to be admitted as a Mercer. In 1437, John Flete, hurer, declared that he had been admitted to the freedom of the City as a Capper two years before, but was following the trade of haberdasher, and prayed to be admitted to that trade. In 1439 two men, one admitted as a Hurer and the other as a Hatter, likewise prayed to be admitted as Haberdashers instead.[22] All these petitions were granted, with the support of men in the new trade.

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[1] Rosemary Weinstein, *The History of the Worshipful Company of Feltmakers 1604-2004* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co., 2004), p. 2, notes a record of an Alderman named Richard Thedr, "feltrarius", in London in 1180; as she points out, this feltmaker may not have been making hats.

[2] For an early use of waste ale in hatmaking, see the record of an inquest at Bedford in 1304, over the body of Henry, son of Philip le Chapeler, who had fallen into a vat full of "boiling ale from the second grout called 'grout sopes'", was badly scalded and died [*Bedfordshire Coroners' Rolls*, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, vol. 41 (1961), p. 110]. A *chapeler* (hatmaker) was unlikely to be boiling a large vat of waste ale in his house unless it was involved in his trade.

[3] Fulling is an essential part of the manufacture of all woollen cloth, and a special trade, that of the fuller, developed as part of the clothmaking industry. With weaving, the cloth as it comes

from the loom is flat and hard, all the fibre being tightly wound into the threads or yarn. Fulling loosens the structure, increases the bulk, and makes the final product soft and warm. With felted cloth, much or all of the fulling occurs as the felt object is made, as repeated treatment with hot water is part of the shaping process.

[4] Reginald R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letter-books of the City of London* [online at www.british-history.ac.uk]; Letter-book D, fo. cxxxix; Calendar, pp. 263ff. In the preamble to the record of 1311, the date of the Cappers' ordinances is vaguely given as "In the time of Sir Hugh Fitz Oto, late Warden of the City, viz., on Monday next before the Feast of SS. Perpetua and Felicitas [7 March], anno lij°, liij°, and liiij° Henry III". However the exact year is specified as 54 Henry III [1270] in the Liber Custumarum [H. T. Riley, *Liber Custumarum*, Part I (London: Longmans, 1860), pp. 101-2].

[5] A. H. Thomas, ed., *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London*, vol. 1 (1926), 1323-1364 [online at www.british-history.ac.uk]; Roll A.5, Membr. 24b.

[6] See Helena M. Chew & Martin Weinbaum, eds., *The London Eyre of 1244* (London Record Society, 1970), and Martin Weinbaum, ed., *The London Eyre of 1276* (London Record Society, 1976), entries for capper in indexes; both online at www.british-history.ac.uk; Sharpe, ed., *Calendars of Letter-books of the City of London* (1899-1912), see indexes.

[7] Letter-book D, fo. cxxxix, b [*Calendar*, pp. 263ff].

[8] The original letters patent in Latin, given at York, 6 Dec 1318, is in London Metropolitan Archives, amongst the records of the City Corporation, ref. COL/CH/01/024.

[9] Letter-book F, fo. cxlvii.

[10] Although there are examples of the trade of hatter through the rest of the century and into the next, it is curious that the list of those elected by the different trades to the Common Council of 1376 includes two for the Cappers and two for the Hurers, but none for the Hatters: Letter-book H, fo. xlvii.

[11] Weinstein (2004), p. 2.

[12] Letter-book H, fo. xlv, "Ordinacio Fullonum" [ordinance of the Fullers]. Urine contains soluble protein, among other things, which changes the surface properties of wool, and would have interfered with the subsequent dyeing of the cloth.

[13] See, for instance, records of appointment of their "Masters" [i.e. Wardens] in various years beginning in 1387; Letter-book H, *et cetera*.

[14] *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, vol. 1 (1926), Roll A.5/ Membr. 24b; Letter-book F, fo. cxlvii.

[15] Letter-book H, fo. xlvii, ccxxxv b, ccxcvii b.

[16] Letter-book H, fo. xc b, cxiii b; clvi b; cclx b.

[17] Letter-book H, fo. cclx b, cclxxxviii; *London Possessory Assizes, a Calendar* (1965), No. 216. Roll DD, m. 20 [online at www.british-history.ac.uk]; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry IV* vol. 4, pp. 11, 131, 334.

[18] *Calendar of Patent Rolls Richard II,* vol. 3, p. 185; vol. 5, p. 398; Court of Common Pleas, TNA, CP.40/559, rot. 305; Letter-book H, fo. cclx b, cclxxxviii.

[19] Letter-book H, fo. cclx b, cclxxxviii, ccxcix ; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry IV,* vol. 4, pp. 11, 131, 134.

[20] Letter-book H, fo. cccxviii (1398; no details of these ordinances are given); Letter-book I, fo. xxix (1404), cxcii, b (1416/17).

[21] For late prosecutions of makers of "longe cappes" for fulling them at a mill, contrary to ordinance, see Letter-book I, fo. cclviii (1420); Letter-book K, fo. 29 b (1424/5); fo. 45 b (1427). The 1437 confirmation of the ordinance against fulling of "hures" and "cappes" at mills is in Letter-book K, fo. 172. As in 1376, one of the concerns was for "grete harme … to other fyne clothes that were fulled with them".

[22] Letter-book K, fo. 158 b; 166 b; 181.

Chapter 2

Style, Innovation and Consolidation, 1439-ca 1500

Style and Innovation

All London hats in the fourteenth century, whether called caps, hures, or hats, were probably close-fitting, without brims or adventuresome shapes. A real breakthrough in hatmaking awaited the introduction of better methods and materials. What was needed was a supply of finely divided fibres that adhered very well to each other, and a method of mixing them thoroughly so that the resulting felt was smooth, regular, and strong.

The first signs of innovation in England were hats imported from the Continent near the end of the fourteenth century. We read, for instance, in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* of the merchant, one of the pilgrims, who wore "upon his head a Flaundrish bever hat". Such hats were very expensive, but they were stylish, the strong felt being shapeable into novel and attention-getting designs. Chaucer's merchant's hat was made in Flanders, apparently, and one of the innovations it represented was the use of beaver wool. The European beaver had been under hunting pressure for many years, and was soon to disappear almost completely. Thus, there was little opportunity for the manufacture of beaver hats to develop in the ensuing two centuries, until a new source of beaver was found in North America. The early beaver hats pointed the way, however. Once it was realized that hatter's felt could be made much better if materials were chosen carefully, the progress of discovery must have been rapid.

The Merchant woodcut in the Prologue to Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, published by Caxton in 1485. (British Library Board G.11586 f.18)

Another very significant innovation, which probably underlay the early success of the Flemish hatmakers, was the practice of "bowing" the fibres. This tangled them much more thoroughly than simple hand mixing could do. The introduction of the hatter's bow is difficult to document, but the general opinion seems to be that it had become standard in the feltmaking industry by the late 1400s, and perhaps much earlier. We have no detailed description of the technique until 1666, in the reign of Charles II, when Robert Hooke wrote one for a lecture to the Royal Society. It is believed that much the same method had then been in use in England for the better part of two centuries.

The feltmaker's bow was about six feet long, shaped rather like an oversized violin bow, but with a single string of catgut running the full length. The string was set to vibrate, and brought into contact with the starting material, a small pile of hatter's wool. By repeated application of the bow, and shaping and patting the wool by hand, the feltmaker created a triangular mass of tangled wool called a batt. This batt was then exposed to hot water, to shrink the wool and draw the fibres more closely together, strengthening the felt. To form a felt "hood", i.e. the crowned, roughly conical object from which a hat would be fashioned, two or more batts were put together. These were then hand-shaped on a wooden block, with further applications of hot water and chemicals, till a seamless single "hood" was obtained.[1] The work required skill and patience, and was practised in England and abroad for the better part of 500 years, mechanization having little impact until well into the Victorian era.

These improved feltmaking techniques must have arrived in England in the 1400s, and foreign immigrants must have brought them in. The first indications are found, not in London, but at York. There, in the early 1460s, the men granted the Freedom of the City include three "felthat makers", a trade not mentioned before. These men have what look like Dutch names, and their appearance probably signals the arrival of a group of immigrants practising new feltmaking methods. A number of other Freemen of the next few years, called more simply "hatmaker", also have Dutch-looking names.[2] York was not to be a particularly important centre of hatmaking in the future, but a few other early hatmakers in this part of the country, such as four mentioned at Nottingham in the 1470s and 1490s, may have learned the trade from the first arrivals at York.[3]

By 1483-4, when the Lay Subsidy records provide detailed lists of the aliens in London, including their trades, foreign hatmakers, hatters and cappers were living in the City, particularly in Castle Baynard Ward and Portsoken Ward, and in Southwark.[4] These three areas were all known concentrations of hatmakers in the future.

Reorganization and Consolidation

In London, a sea change in the hatting industry is signalled by the appearance, shortly after 1480, of tradesmen calling themselves "hattermerchants". At least some of these had formerly been known simply as hatters. The Hattermerchants managed to get themselves accepted as a separate trade, with its own regulations, in the year 1488.[5] They may have been only sellers of imported hats, or they may have been domestic manufacturers. The fact that they were recognized as a separate body shows that the demand for hats, as opposed to the old caps, was now much more important.[6]

In 1501, the Hattermerchants moved to control the domestic industry by uniting with the Company of Hatters and Hurers. This union was recognized by royal letters patent issued at Westminster on 27 April 1501.[7] These developments naturally led to a confrontation with the Haberdashers' Company, whose members had always included hats and caps among their wares. No doubt there were difficult negotiations, but an agreement was reached to combine the Haberdashers with the "Hurers or Cappers" and the Hattermerchants, under the name of the Company of Merchant Haberdashers. This consolidation was marked by new royal letters patent dated 6 July 1502, and a new grant of arms. The new name did not last, changing back to the Haberdashers' Company in 1510 after complaints from other companies. However, the new coat of arms is still in use today.[8]

The Letters Patent of the Merchant Haberdashers' Company in 1502. This "union" became known as the 'Fraternity of St Catherine of Merchant Haberdashers' and the Letters Patent carry a representation of St Catherine of Alexandria. The original is on display in Haberdashers' Hall. See enlargement at end. (Worshipful Company of Haberdashers, Guildhall Library MS 31602)

It was at best a partial union. It may even have been forced on the parties by the City fathers, and there is evidence that not all members wholeheartedly subscribed to it. About fifteen years later, the Haberdashers' Company was trying to get control of money received for a "great messuage" (substantial dwelling house) in the parish of Holy Trinity the Less. This property had been sold on behalf of the fellowship of Hattermerchants and Hurers, "since united with the Haberdashers", by Robert Hawkyns, one of that fellowship. Presumably Hawkyns, one of the most successful of the hattermerchants, had been holding on to the money since 1502.[9] A further indication that the different parts of the new Company of Merchant Haberdashers were not always working together is that in 1504 the Hurers and Hattermerchants subscribed separately from the Haberdashers to the new kitchens at Guildhall.[10]

Meanwhile, the foreign hatmakers in London were gradually establishing a domestic industry of their own. By about the year 1500, we can distinguish two groups of hatmakers in the metropolis. One was centred in the Blackfriars Liberty, south of St Paul's, under the jurisdiction of the Dominican or Black Friars. The other was in the Liberty of St Katherine's, east of the Tower, a precinct under the control of St Katherine's Hospital. Both districts were outside the jurisdiction of the Corporation of London, and foreign tradesmen could set up, free of the demands and restrictions that the Mayor and Aldermen would otherwise impose.

The group in the Blackfriars was formed of tradesmen with Dutch or Flemish names. They called themselves hatmakers, and had established their own by-laws by the year 1501. Their book of regulations is still preserved among the papers of the Haberdashers' Company. In it, they called themselves the Fraternity of St James, "kepte in the Church of the fryre prechours (i.e. Black Friars) of the Cyte of London by the hatmakers dwellinge within and nigh the said City".[11] Intriguingly, all but the last two regulations in the document were written in two languages, English and Dutch.[12] Perhaps the hatmakers in Blackfriars were trying to position themselves, in a rapidly changing world, so that they could negotiate entry into one of the chartered City Companies.

The Blackfriars hatmakers succeeded in doing this in September 1511. In the second part of the same book of regulations is a copy of the agreement that they made with the Haberdashers' Company. The Fraternity of St James would continue to exist, and retain the right to elect two officers each year; but half of the entry fine paid by each new member was now to go to the Haberdashers' Company. The entry fine for a qualified hatmaker coming from beyond the sea was to be twice that for a man trained in the City; and hatmakers trained within the City of London were to be set on work before the strangers. The names of the four officers representing the hatmakers in 1511 were Gerard Rowse, Antony de Wyne, Antony Levyson and James Lees; these are probably Dutch names. Antony Levyson was still a leading hatmaker as late as 1531.

[1] Weinstein (2004), pp. xviii-xxi, gives a good summary of Hooke's account, and reproduces his interesting drawing of a felting workshop in action. According to him, 12 batts were needed to make the finest quality of felt hat. The task had been simplified considerably by the early 19th century, when only two large batts were needed for a hat: see the account of Victorian-era feltmaking in J. H. Hawkins, *History of the Worshipful Company of the Art or Mistery of Feltmakers of London* (London: Crowther & Goodman, Ltd., 1917), pp. 14ff.

[2] The list of Freemen at York is in Francis Collins, ed., *Register of the Freemen of the City of York, Volume 1. 1272-1558* (Surtees Society, vol. 96, 1897), available online at www.british-history.ac.uk. The three "felthat makers" were Nicholaus Wilde, Johannes Mogan, and Petrus Knyfe. Of these men, "John Mogan, Dutchman" was said in 1484-5 to be a freeman and denizen of York "by the space of xx yere and more" [L. C. Attreed, ed., *The York House Books, 1461-1490* (A. Sutton for Richard III & Yorkist History Trust, 1991), pp. 32-3]. Nicholaus Wilde may be the same as the alien of this name, a skinner, who was living in London ca 1470-90 [J. L. Bolton, *The Alien Communities of London in the Fifteenth Century* (Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, 1998), pp. 27, 56 n. 49].

[3] Reginald Swallow, hatmaker, was licensed to traffic at Nottingham in 1478-9 [*Records of the Borough of Nottingham, Vol. 2 1399-1485* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1883), pp. 298-9]; George Bredon and William Chaworth, hatmakers of Nottingham, are mentioned in 1495; and William Mellers, hatmaker, was licensed to traffic in the town in 1499-1500 [*Records of the Borough of Nottingham, Vol. 3 1485-1547* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1885), pp. 36-7, 60-61].

[4] Bolton (1998), see index under "Trades".

[5] City of London Letter-book L, fos. 258-259b, 5 July 1488; online at www.british-history.ac.uk. The ordinances, though brief, gave the Wardens control of entry to the membership, for all apprentices had to be presented to them at the start and end of their term. The Wardens were also granted the power to levy fines, and to appoint a Beadle to summon members. It is not clear if these ordinances were new and partial, or additional to earlier ordinances.

[6] The records of the petty customs at the port of London, between Michaelmas 1480 and Michaelmas 1481, show large quantities of hats being imported. The main types were "coppyn" hats (525½ dozen imported; believed to be a type of felt hat with a high crown, resembling a sugarloaf); straw hats (624 1/3 dozen imported); "felt hats" (98 dozen imported); and "St Omer hats" (22 dozen imported); besides 865 dozen of other hats. The records do not give the ports of origin, but the importing ships were mostly Dutch or from the port of London, with one ship of Calais. Most or all of the importing merchants were aliens [H. S. Cobb, ed., *The Overseas Trade of London: Exchequer Customs Accounts* (London Record Society, 1990); online at www.british-history.ac.uk]. The largest hat importer, Peter Segir, was not living in London; at least, he is not mentioned in the London Alien Subsidy Roll for 1483 [Bolton (1998)].

[7] This patent is referenced in the later royal letters patent by which the Haberdashers' Company amalgamated with the now-combined Hurers and Hattermerchants, the following year; see next footnote.

[8] On the amalgamation see I. W. Archer, *The History of the Haberdashers' Company* (Phillimore, 1991), pp. 16-17. The Haberdashers' Company retains the royal letters patent, a beautifully illuminated parchment document of two membranes; a high-quality photograph is among the Haberdashers' Company records deposited in Guildhall Library, MS 31602.

[9] TNA, C.1/424/25; undated pleading in Chancery, but addressed to Thomas Wolsey as Chancellor, and thus no earlier than 1515. Robert Hawkyns, citizen and hattermerchant of London, appears in many Chancery proceedings, usually suing someone for debt, between 1486 and 1518. Other documents concerning him, mainly receipts and quitclaims, are among the Ancient Deeds in The National Archives; these may have come there as exhibits in the Chancery proceedings. These documents show that his business was on a large scale, though, as usual for this period, nothing of substance is known about it.

[10] See Caroline Barron, *London in the Middle Ages. Government and People 1200-1500* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 218-9, 223. I am indebted to Stephen Freeth for this reference.

[11] St James is sometimes found as a patron of hatmakers in western Europe in the late Middle

Ages (Chris Heal, personal communication). The brief union of the London "Hurers or Cappers" with the Hattermerchants, in 1501, was also called the Guild of St James, according to the letters patent amalgamating them with the Haberdashers the following year.

[12] The little book is entitled "Bye Laws of the Hatmakers in 1500 (i.e. 1500/1) & Agreement between them and the Haberdashers Company 8th Sept 1511" [Guildhall Library MS 15838]. Its significance has been generally missed, perhaps because the earlier historian of the Haberdashers, William Herbert [in his *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London,* vol. 2 (London: by the author, 1836), pp. 537-8], mistook it as part of the agreement between the Haberdashers and the Hurers-Hattermerchants in 1502. The facts that the by-laws are bilingual, and that the date of the agreement recorded in the second part of the book is 1511 rather than 1502, show that this was a different agreement, with a different group.

Chapter 3

The Growth of Hatmaking in London under the Haberdashers' Company, ca 1500-1531

The Master of the Haberdashers' Company who negotiated the agreement with the Blackfriars hatmakers in 1511 was Robert Aldernes or Holdernes, who became Alderman for Billingsgate Ward in that year, and one of the City Sheriffs.[1] It must have been exasperating for him when yet another group of hatmakers emerged who were still not under his Company's control.

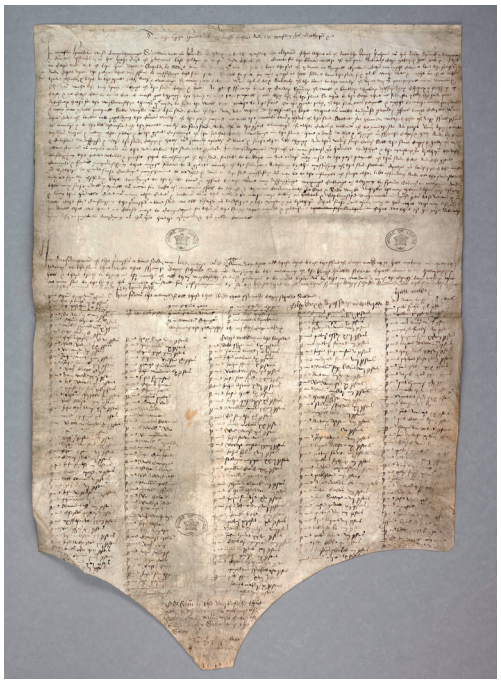
Two Chancery documents hint at this development. The first, dateable between 1511 and 1515, is a complaint by four haberdashers, John Ackynson, Robert Herd, Thomas Chayell and John Stoen. They claimed that they had been thrown into prison at the instance of Robert Aldernes, Alderman, and held without reason or justification.[2] We hear nothing further about this. A few years later, in a second Chancery document, "John Atkynson" was complaining again. He had been disenfranchised from trade within the city, and his shop shut up, at the instance of the Mayor, together with Robert Aldernes and other city officers. Atkynson's offence was buying hats from the inhabitants of the precinct of St Katherine's by the Tower.[3] How this dispute ended is again unknown. It shows, however, that another group of hatmakers had established themselves in St Katherine's, a district that remained a concentration of alien hatmakers well into the seventeenth century. The records of aliens living there around 1570 suggest that at that time, the bulk of the St Katherine's hatmakers were from Normandy, many of them Protestant refugees.

The achievement of the Haberdashers' Company in consolidating most of the hatting trade under its own banner was of great importance for the future of that Company. The name of Robert Aldernes, who may have been the guiding hand, perhaps deserves more prominence in the Haberdashers' history. In the reign of Henry VIII, the Companies were placed in order of precedence, with the top twelve having special status. The Haberdashers' Company was included in the "Great Twelve", something that it would probably not have achieved had it not strengthened itself by bringing in the Hattermerchants, Cappers, Hurers and Blackfriars hatmakers over the preceding few years.

The formal attachment of the hatting trades to the Haberdashers' Company may have been a political success, but the body was really quite diverse. Some members – the "real" haberdashers, in the sense of retailers of hats, tailor's supplies and articles of personal adornment – were making themselves rich. They were doing so by importing clothing, tapestries, and other luxury goods for the striving personalities of the Tudor Court. But at the other end of the list were the working hatmakers. Like working men throughout history, they were not rich. They would have had little influence in

Company affairs. They must have retained a keen sense of their own identity and separateness.

The unconsolidated nature of the hatting trade in London, midway through the reign of Henry VIII, is illustrated by a petition from the London trade to the king in 1531. It is one of a coordinated set of petitions sent by hatmakers throughout the kingdom. The purpose of these petitions was to ask for proper enforcement of an Act of Parliament, 21 Henry VIII c. 9, the most recent attempt to prevent the importing of cheap hats into England.[4] Petitions were also sent by cap and hat makers in Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth, Bristol, Gloucester, Bewdley, Stafford, and Lichfield, but the petition from the Borough of Southwark is especially interesting.[5]



The Southwark Petition to Henry VIII of 1531. The columns are, as mentioned, different groups of people. The similarity of writing throughout indicates one hand. Note the careful planning to allow the full hide to be used. See enlargement at end. (Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/3/178/4)

The Southwark petition has many signatures, organized under four headings: haberdashers, cappers, "thickers", and hatmakers. The 35 names on the hatmakers list are mostly foreign-looking. They lead off with Anthony Levyson, one of those who had acted for the Blackfriars hatmakers in their negotiations with the Haberdashers in 1511. These hatmakers, then, were probably the lineal successors of those hatmakers of Dutch or Flemish origin who had written down their bilingual by-laws some 30 years before. Although they had joined with the Haberdashers soon after, they were still being distinguished as a separate body.

The other actual makers of headgear who signed the petition were 35 cappers and 34 "thickers" (those who fulled the caps). These were probably the successors of the "Cappers or Hurers" who had amalgamated with the

Hattermerchants in 1501. The way in which the signatures on the Borough petition of 1531 are organized, therefore, preserves the history of the disparate groups that the Haberdashers' Company had acquired in 1502 and 1511.

Though the petition of 1531 was formally from the Borough, the 82 haberdashers who signed it can often be recognized as men living on the other side of the Thames, within the City walls. Apart from the Blackfriars Liberty, there is no evidence for actual hatmaking within the walls at this time. We should probably therefore regard these men as wholesalers and capitalists, rather than actual manufacturers. The Wardens of the Haberdashers also signed as a separate group, to emphasize the Company's support. This apparent solidarity across the whole of the Haberdashers' Company is impressive; for some members of the Company must have been importing foreign hats, the target of the legislation that the petitioners wished to see enforced.

Many of the signers of the Southwark petition of 1531 also wrote down the number of people whom they employed. Some had fewer than ten; others as many as two hundred. Not all the numbers are legible, but those signing as haberdashers reported that they employed at least 1,814 individuals. Some of the hatmakers also had large numbers of employees, such as Anthony Levyson, with 100 persons employed. The hatmakers declared a total of at least 785 employees, and there must have been many more than this, as many of the figures they declared can no longer be read.

Even though these are partial figures, they should be taken seriously. They must have been provided by the employers themselves. The grand total, including employees declared by the cappers and thickers, is almost 2,700 – again a minimum, as many figures are no longer legible. This number compares well with the estimate of "more than 3,000 of Her Majesty's subjects" involved in hatmaking, according to a feltmakers' petition to Queen Elizabeth I in late 1579 or early 1580.[6] So hatmaking in London was already a very large industry by 1531.

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[1] Robert Aldernes or Holdernes, haberdasher, was Alderman of Billingsgate 1511-1521, when he was discharged, and Sheriff, 1511-12 [A. B. Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London*, vol. 2 (London, 1913), p. 23]. He was among the haberdashers recorded as exporting English cloth in 1480-1 [Archer (1991), p. 20]. "Robard Holdernes, merchaunt haberdasher", was tenant of a house in Thames Street, parish of St Mary at Hill, in 1507. He is also mentioned in the accounts of that parish between 1507/8 (when his two daughters were buried) and 1525/6 (when "Mestres Aldernes", presumably his wife, was buried) [Henry Littlehales, ed., *The Medieval Records of a London Church* (Early English Text Society, vol. 128; 1905), see index of names; online at www.british-history.ac.uk]. No will has been located for him.

[2] TNA, C.1/277/12. Petition to William (Warham), Archbishop of Canterbury, as Chancellor of England. Undated, but must fall between 1511 (when Robert Aldernes became Alderman) and December 1515 (the end of Archbishop William's term as Chancellor).

[3] TNA, C.1/462/38. Addressed to Wolsey as Chancellor, so after December 1515. The document

is only partly legible, but the gist is clear.

[4] An earlier law to prevent importation of foreign hats had been passed in Henry VIII's first parliament: see *Journal of the House of Lords*, vol. 1, pp. 7-8, 14; Archives of Parliament, HL/PO/PU/1/1511/3H8n15, Public Act, 3 Henry VIII, c. 15, "An Act concerning Hats and Caps". This act was frequently overridden by licences granted to individuals to import foreign caps and hats: see *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vol. 1 (1920), Nos. 1732 (Grants No. 19, 29), 3107 (Grant No. 27), 3582 (Grants No. 13, 21, 28); — vol. 2 (1864), No. 404, 1129, 1502, 3873, 3946; — vol. 3 (1867), No. 206, 1151, 3289; — vol. 4 (1875), No. 390 (Grant No. 26), 464, 1298, 5510 (Grant No. 21), 5906 (Grant No. 29). In some cases the licence was probably for luxury goods intended for the Court, but the selling of such licences must also have been profitable for the Crown.

[5] The petitions are in the Archives of Parliament, HL/PO/JO/10/3/178/1-8; the petition from the Borough of Southwark is Piece 4.

[6] Weinstein (2004), p. 9; Archer (1991), pp. 64ff. See also Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Where the London Hatmakers Lived and Worked

Many of the medieval trades of London were concentrated in particular streets or districts. The earliest hatting district was the western suburb outside the city walls – the ward of Farringdon Without, around Fleet Street. In the spring of 1319, it was complained that the Cappers, armed with their new letters patent, were restricting capmaking; the complaint named 13 *capellarii* or cappers of Fleet Street.[1] In the London subsidy rolls of the same year, the taxpayers of Farringdon Ward Without include several hatters or cappers, while hardly any are listed elsewhere in the City.[2] In 1344, when four cappers were charged with re-dyeing old furs, the matter was referred to a jury "of the neighbourhood outside Ludgate, where a large number of cappers dwelt". This almost certainly refers to Fleet Street.[3]

Plenty of water was always one of the main requirements for hatmaking, and the location outside Ludgate would have given ready access to the Fleet River, not yet contaminated as it became in early modern times. Significant numbers of hatmakers were still living here, particularly in the Bridewell Precinct, in the early seventeenth century. However the Great Fire of 1666, which burnt through the whole area, seems largely to have ended the industry in this part of London.

It has already been explained that new groups of hatmakers, foreigners from Flanders or France, had begun to appear in London during the fifteenth century. They tended to settle in three specific areas where they would not be subject to control by the City fathers:

- the Blackfriars Precinct, south of St Paul's;
- the St Katherine's Precinct, just east of the Tower; and
- Southwark, also called the Borough, the suburb at the south end of London Bridge.

A small part of Southwark, called Bridge Ward Without, was indeed within the City's government. Most of the area, however, consisted of two great manors, one belonging to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other to Bermondsey Priory (upgraded in 1399 to abbey status). Many of their tenants were religious houses, to which the king had sometimes granted special immunities.[4] After the Dissolution of the Monasteries, much of this property was seized by the Crown, and then sold or granted to lay owners. None of these proprietors, church or lay, would have interested themselves in the protectionist policies of the City of London. The political characteristics

of Southwark therefore made it easy for new or expanding trades to take root and grow with little interference from the City fathers. Felt hatmaking was the most important of these new trades in Tudor times.

Southwark in 1588. In that year William Smith drew a view of London from the south which included much of Southwark. A section of it is shown here. The bridge is London Bridge and on the left are bear pits, the Bishop of Winchester's Palace and St Saviour's Church. Running from the bridge is Borough High Street. The church to the right is St Olave's. Tooley Street runs parallel to the Thames into the beginning of Bermondsey Street (then known as Barnaby Street). The building on the far right, encircled apparently by a moat, is probably "the Cage", the local lock-up. The crowded and increasing mass of houses is where the hatters lived. See enlargement at end. (British Library Board, Sloane MS 2596 f.52)

Southwark quickly became the dominant hatmaking area in London. Its special importance is shown, for instance, by the petition of 1531, discussed in the previous chapter, which was described as coming from "the Borough", the usual alternative name for Southwark. While we do not have a complete list of hatmakers throughout the metropolitan area in Tudor times, there are several indications that most of them lived in Southwark. For one very small subset of Elizabethan hatmakers and feltmakers, those whose wills were proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (or PCC), the great majority gave their parish as St Olave Southwark.[5] There are only 19 wills for hatmakers or feltmakers in London or its suburbs in the PCC registers between 1558 (the accession of Elizabeth I) and 1604 (the granting of the Feltmakers' Company charter) inclusive. Of these, 15 testators gave their parish as St Olave Southwark; two gave it as St Katherine's; one gave the adjacent parish of St Peter ad Vincula (in the Tower of London); and one gave it as St Andrew by the Wardrobe, close to the Blackfriars Precinct. The distribution does not change significantly in the period 1605-1650, when the PCC has 32 feltmaker wills. Of these, 27

were from St Olave Southwark; one from Rotherhithe, the next parish to the east; two from St Katherine's; one from St Benet Paul's Wharf (again, near the Blackfriars); and there is one for which no parish is given. From these admittedly modest statistics, we may cautiously suggest that about 80% of the London feltmakers in this general period lived and worked in the single parish of St Olave Southwark.

For the trades practised in Southwark from the time of Elizabeth I onwards, we have the great good fortune that the baptism registers for the two largest parishes specify not only the names and fathers of the babies baptized, but what trades their fathers followed. From this source it is clear that there was a great concentration of hatmakers or feltmakers in the single parish of St Olave, to the east and south of the foot of London Bridge. The St Olave registers begin in 1582, and from 1584 onwards the father's trade is almost always given in the baptism entries. Between 1584 and 1627 (when a 12-year gap in the registers begins), there are 3,193 baptisms of children of hatmakers or feltmakers, about 20% of all baptisms within the parish. Later in the 1600s, and well into the 1700s, the proportion is still around 15%. There are, of course, many other trades to be found in these registers, but the dominant presence of the feltmakers is very striking.[6]

Two other lists of feltmakers, neither of them very long, can also be used to test the dominance of St Olave Southwark for the industry. One is the group of 23 men who signed the feltmakers' petition to the Queen in January 1579/80, to be discussed in Chapter 5. From wills, parish registers, and also a group of tax records called the Lay Subsidy Rolls, it has been possible to identify only ten of these names, but all were residents of St Olave Southwark.[7]

The second list is the names of the 17 feltmakers who were appointed Master, Wardens, or Assistants in the Feltmakers' Company charter of 1604. Only twelve of these men have been located with confidence, of whom six lived in St Olave Southwark, three in or near the old Blackfriars Precinct, two in St Katherine's, and one in St Bride Fleet Street, as follows:

- *St Olave Southwark*: John Harrison (Warden), Lewes Price (Warden), Richard Ford (Assistant), John Tutt (Assistant), Anthony Hutchins (Assistant), Robert Browne (Assistant)

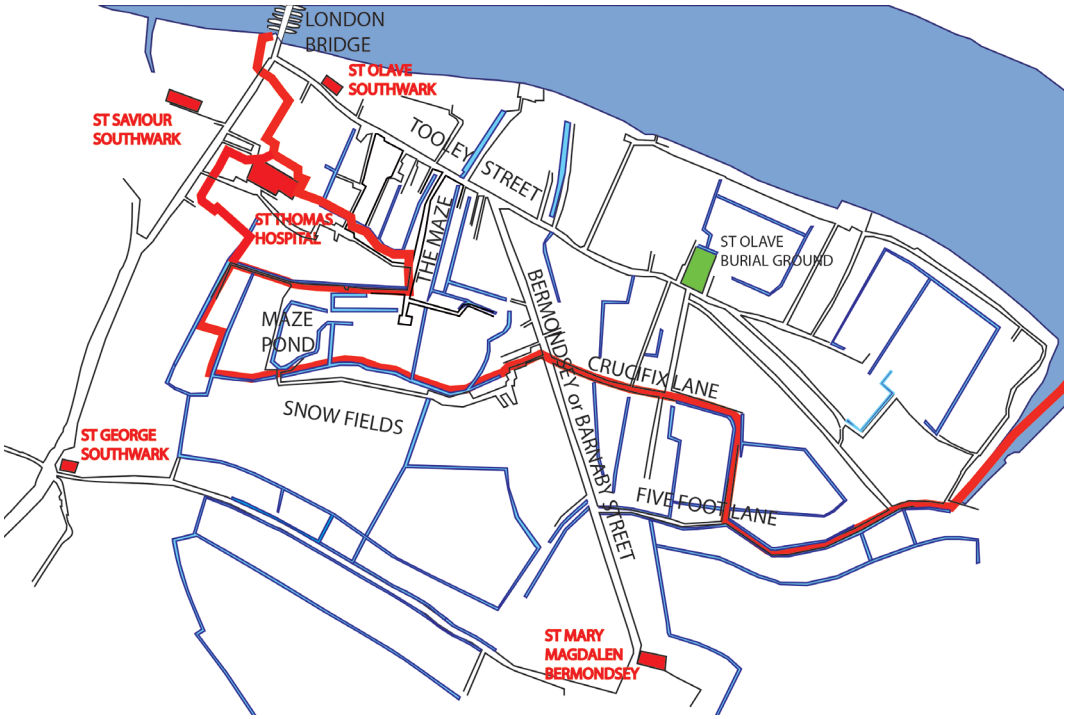
- *Blackfriars Precinct and vicinity*: John Sondes (Master; parish of St Andrew by the Wardrobe); Richard Banister (Warden; parish of St Ann Blackfriars); Robert Sadler (Assistant; parish of St Andrew by the Wardrobe)

- *St Katherine's*: John Tomlin (Warden), Abraham Lambert (Assistant)

- *St Bride Fleet Street*: Hugh Phillips (Assistant)
- *Unknown*: James Wonford, John Lowe, John Watson, Owen Davies, Thomas Lee (all Assistants).

The Southwark men are not so dominant here, but it is likely, in appointing the first group of officers for the new Feltmakers' Company, that efforts were made to get representation from all districts in which feltmaking was significant.

The accompanying map shows the feltmakers' district in Southwark. Coming across London Bridge, a visitor entered the parish of St Olave by Tooley Street. (The name is a corruption of St Olave.) He soon found the parish church on the left, the side towards the river. Small courts and yards ran off the street on either hand. On the right was a street called the Maze, which ran south, connecting with a cross street called Maze Pond. The Maze was not named from its confusing lanes and courts, though that would have been appropriate. Rather, long ago, when the Prior of Bermondsey owned this land, there had been a private garden with a maze here. The Maze Pond had once been a large body of water where hatters could fill their boiling kettles.



The feltmakers' Southwark, based on a map in John Strype's Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster (1720; see endnote 8). The five parish churches existing in Elizabethan times, and the boundaries of the parishes of St Olave and St Thomas Southwark, are shown in red. The network of ditches and watercourses in 1720 is in blue. As explained in the text, this was the remnant of much more extensive ponds and streams used by the feltmakers as their source of water in Tudor times. Drawn by Harry Duckworth.

Continuing east-southeastwards along Tooley Street, one soon encountered Bermondsey Street or Barnaby Street, branching off to the right towards the village of Bermondsey. There were hatters all the way along Bermondsey Street, beyond the boundary of St Olave's parish and into the parish of St Mary Magdalen Bermondsey. More were to be found in the lanes, courts and yards running off it, notably Snow Fields, to the right, and Crucifix Lane, to the left.

During the Middle Ages, much of St Olave's parish had consisted of watery meadows, very attractive for hatters with their great need for water. By the early 1700s, most of the area was built over, but there were still several open canals or ditches running behind the houses, as shown in the map. These canals must have been the remnants of a much more extensive system of ponds, streams, and ditches, a natural source of water for the feltmakers, in Elizabethan times.[8]

In spite of considerable odds, the feltmakers achieved notable political successes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. First, they won their own ordinances from the Haberdashers in 1578, as described in Chapter 5. Later, in 1604, they obtained a royal charter granting independence from the Haberdashers, and in 1650 this charter was eventually accepted by the City. It must have been enormously useful during these campaigns for independence that most feltmakers were living and working within a few hundred yards of one another in Southwark.

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[1] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward II Vol 3*, pp. 369, 374.

[2] E. Ekwall, *Two Early London Subsidy Rolls* (1951), pp. 81ff, 305-14. The editor's footnotes to the Farringdon Ward Without roll identify three hatters (*chapelers*) and three cappers, plus the daughter of a hatter who had recently died, among the 108 names on this list.

[3] *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls,* vol. 1 (1926), Roll A.5/ Membr. 24b.

[4] For the complex administrative pattern of Southwark in the Middle Ages, and the City's struggle to exert control in the early modern period, see David J. Johnson, *Southwark and the City* (Oxford University Press for the Corporation of London, 1969), especially chapters 2 and 3.

[5] The registers of wills proved in the PCC (now held at TNA, PROB 11), have been completely indexed. The index is freely available online at the TNA website, and one of the search terms available is the testator's trade. Thus, it is easy to extract all the hatmakers and feltmakers who described themselves as such. Testators whose wills were proved in the PCC tended to be prosperous, or at least were bequeathing property in more than one diocese; but there were also some more humble folk. The wills now deposited at London Metropolitan Archives, and proved in the probate courts in London and Surrey, also include many feltmakers. However they and their indexes are not yet on-line, and have not yet been searched in detail.

[6] In the reign of Elizabeth I, and for some years after, there were only four parishes in Southwark: St Saviour (now Southwark Cathedral); St Olave; St Thomas (a small area associated with St Thomas's Hospital); and St George the Martyr. All their parish registers are now held at London Metropolitan Archives. The baptism registers of St Saviour, like

those of St Olave, give the father's trade consistently from 1584 onwards. Between that year and 1627 there are only 65 baptisms of children of hatmakers or feltmakers, in contrast to 3,193 at St Olave. The baptism registers of the other two parishes, St Thomas and St George the Martyr, do not specify the fathers' trades at this period.

[7] Only scattered evidence for the residents of Southwark has been found as early as the year 1580, but the St Olave Southwark registers begin only two years later, and there are Lay Subsidy rolls for 1589, 1593-4, 1598-1600, which have been transcribed and indexed, and are currently available online at Prof. A. H. Nelson's website at http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/SUBSIDY/subs.html [last accessed Feb 2013]. The ten signers of the feltmakers' 1579/80 petition who have been identified, and who lived in Southwark, were Tho: Bradforde, Tho: Cawnton, Christopher Fletcher, Rychard Ford, Jhon Gy, John Mare, Jhon Medeway, Rychard Parkens, Rychard Pygat, and Gorg Wynsor. The other thirteen, who have not been identified, were Thomas Bedams, Davyd Craike, — ?Francis? (or Fromer?), Wallers Handson, Thomas Holdesworthe, Bryent Melbanke, Thomas Nole, Edward ?Obferrt?, William Rees, Honfre ?Smy?, John Thurlowe, John Worke, and Steven Wryte.

[8] All these features, including the canals, are clearly seen in the map of the parishes of St Olave Southwark and St Mary Magdalen Bermondsey included in John Strype's *Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (a greatly updated edition of John Stow's *Survey of London*, of 1598), published in 1720. This map and the rest of the contents of Strype's Survey are available online at www.hrionline.ac.uk/strype/. The sketch map accompanying this paper reproduces the canals as they were in 1720, but as noted in the main text there must have been much more water available in Elizabethan times.

Chapter 5

The Move for Independence, 1577-1604

The Haberdashers Consolidate their Control of Hatmaking

Queen Elizabeth's first Parliament, in 1563, enacted a far-reaching law, which would come to be known as the Statute of Artificers. This law brought together into one statute a large number of older laws on various aspects of the working man's life. Henceforth, it would regulate training, wages, and the contractual relationship between master and man. Thirty named trades were included, one of them that of the "hatmakers or feltmakers".[1]

It was this law that standardized the length of an apprenticeship at seven years, and the minimum length of a contract between a master and a journeyman at one year. It also required the use of the testimonial, a document that a man had to take with him on leaving one town for another, and had to show a new master before he could be set to work. The law signalled that the national government was willing to take action in areas hitherto the province of town governments and local communities.

At Elizabeth's second parliament, in 1566, a law was enacted that dealt specifically with the making of hats and caps.[2] The preamble presented the bill as a remedy for those Englishmen whose trade was the making of knitted woollen caps, and were now "impoverished and decayed by the excessive use of hats and felts". Mention was also made of "great plenty of strange commodities without necessity consumed, and great number of people enforced to depend upon the having of foreign wools". In plainer language, the framers of the law claimed to be reacting to the shift in fashion from caps to hats, to the prevalence of foreign hats ("strange commodities"), and to the dependence of domestic hatmakers on imported wools.

On a closer reading, however, it becomes evident that the real purpose of this law of 1566 was to stop some new hatmaking practices, and to put all capmaking and hatmaking in London under the control of the Haberdashers' Company. First of all, no one was to "make or work any felt or hat of or with any foreign wool or stuff" unless he had completed a seven-year apprenticeship. This confirmed what the Statute of Artificers already required. An exception was made for those already in the trade, as was reasonable for an emerging industry. But it would only be a matter of time before an apprenticeship of standard length was required throughout the trade, and with it the usual record-keeping, and testing of skills, which would fall to the existing livery companies.

Second, certain new products and practices in the capmaking industry were forbidden – the making or selling of caps (as opposed to hats) of felt, or of "wool not knit", and the use of cheaper materials to dye them. A clause, evidently aimed at protecting the old trade of cap thickers, sought to require the capmakers to employ men to do a portion of cap thicking or fulling by hand or foot, before taking them to a fulling mill. Expensive caps of velvet, or covered with velvet (which would have been imported), could not be worn, unless the wearer was a man of rank.

The final provision of this Act, the most important, was that the Haberdashers' Company of London was to have the regulation of the hatting and capping trades within the City of London and three miles outside. A gesture was made towards the separate interests of the cappers and hatmakers. The Act directed that when inspections of products were to be carried out, or fines levied, one representative of the "company of cappers", and one from among "the makers of hats", were to be included. But the Haberdashers' Company would be in charge.[3]

This law served one special interest, and the national government may eventually have regretted involving itself to such an extent in the management of a rapidly changing industry. It put the Haberdashers' Company in control of the whole of the hatting and capping industry of London and its suburbs. It thus confirmed by statute the arrangements that the Haberdashers' Company had made with the hatting trades about sixty years before. It ignored, however, or tried to override, a growing problem – that the working feltmakers were unhappy to have the control of their trade lodged with the Haberdashers' Company.

The Haberdashers' Company, by including the hatmaking trades within it, had created a body with two distinct types of members. The first group, the "real" haberdashers, had achieved great wealth, and some political influence within the City, during the century ending around 1550. Those who imported luxury goods for the Court may have made the greatest fortunes, bringing to England from Italy, France, and the Low Countries, rich items of costume and luxurious furnishings for grand houses. But the demand for all kinds of items of dress, and all the little objects connected with the clothing industry, was now coming from much deeper within English society. To make real money it was no longer essential to have customers at Court. Many people wanted gowns, bodices and underclothes, doublets and hose, capes, hats and caps. Still more wanted pins and needles, buttons, hooks and eyes, lace, and so forth. So this prosperous group made up one part of the Haberdashers' Company. On the other hand, also officially a part of the Company, were the workers in the hatting trades. It was certainly possible to make a living as a hatmaker, but even the most prosperous could not aspire to the wealth and influence of a successful haberdasher. Most hatmakers lived week to week and were never far from financial ruin.

The richest and most powerful members of the Haberdashers' Company could aspire to the Common Council of the City, to the Court of Aldermen, and to the Mayoralty. Even if they took no political office, they could count on regular access to the City's governors. These men lived in the City, increasingly along Fleet Street, close to their richest customers. In contrast, most of the Company's working feltmakers were living and working in Southwark. Few persons of quality and influence ever ventured to Southwark, unless, near the end of the reign, they wished to attend a play or other entertainment. Much of Southwark fell outside the areas of immediate City control and interest. The working feltmakers must have felt isolated from the City business world, and even exploited by their richer haberdasher brothers. The conditions were right for the emergence of a new political organization, whose purpose would be the formation of a separate Feltmakers' Company.

The Feltmakers Try to Get their own Charter[4]

The feltmakers' first recorded attempt to break away from the Haberdashers' Company was a petition to Lord Treasurer Burghley, dated 21 February 1576/7. It was a simple request that their trade be granted letters patent as a distinct Company of the City of London. Such a request would have required repealing portions of the Act of 1566, in which control of the capping and hatting trades was lodged with the Haberdashers. Burghley referred the matter to lawyers, and after a year's delay, a new agreement between the Haberdashers and the feltmakers (described as "hat or feltmakers") was hammered out. Dated 29 January 1577/8, it was recorded in the Court of Star Chamber, the judicial arm of the Privy Council, whose deliberations Burghley would have controlled. It maintained the status quo, effectively rejecting the feltmakers' request. The feltmakers would remain under the "searche, ruill [rule] and governaunce" of the officers of the Haberdashers' Company.

But a significant concession had been made. A book of ordinances for the felting trade was to be drawn up, and it was to be used. The Star Chamber agreement also specified that these ordinances should be made, ratified and allowed according to the tenor of the statute concerning ordinances to be made by corporations, i.e. the statute 19 Henry VII, c. 7 (1504). This required all new livery company ordinances to be approved by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Treasurer, and Chief Justice of each bench (King's Bench and Common Pleas), or any three of them. The status of the working feltmakers will have been much increased by this tacit admission of their "corporation", which afforded them the same legal supervision as an independent livery company, albeit within the Haberdashers. We know that the required ordinances were agreed, ratified by the Lord Treasurer and the two Chief Justices, and put into execution within three years.[5]

At the same time, the Star Chamber document vividly illustrates how powerful a body the feltmakers were taking on. There are three groups of signatures. First are the Privy Councillors. Second, labelled "Theis be hatmakers" are six names, headed by Thomas Bradforde and Thomas Cawnton (or Caunton), who were to lead the feltmakers' attempts at independence over the next six years. Both were from the centre of the feltmakers' industry in Southwark. The other four, John Westley, Richard Wattes, Thomas Payne, and John Pooke, are less familiar.[6] Particularly telling, for understanding the struggle to come, are the thirteen names headed "Theis be haberdasshers". This group is headed by George Barne, Alderman of London, and Master of the Haberdashers' Company in that year. Also included were Nicholas Woodruffe (who would be elected Lord Mayor in 1579); Thomas Blancke or Blanke (Lord Mayor in 1583); and George Bond (Lord Mayor in 1587), the principal importer of the feltmakers' most important hatting material, Spanish wool. The feltmakers were taking on the political elite.

In this up-hill struggle, they were probably also up against the era's well-defined perceptions of class and privilege. How Lord Burghley and his circle regarded the haberdashers and the feltmakers in private is surely illustrated by a letter to Burghley of 1596. This was from his informant, the merchant Thomas Nichols. Code words were used to disguise the meaning of many terms. The word "haberdashers" was used to mean "gentry", while "felt makers" was used to mean "commons". Whatever the mood in which these code words were chosen, the perceived inequality between the two groups is clear.[7]

The Feltmakers Complain of the Quality of their Wool

Rebuffed at their first request, the feltmakers now began a more subtle campaign, led again by Bradford and Caunton. In late 1579/early 1580, they and their colleagues made two petitions, one to the Queen, and the other to the Lord Treasurer (Burghley), complaining about the quality of hatters' wool. This was all imported, particularly from Spain, as methods had not yet been devised for using the less feltable domestic wools. Spanish wool was expensive, and only a great London merchant had the capital to import it in quantity, retailing the wool in small amounts to the working feltmakers.

In the petition to Burghley, the feltmakers requested that they not be forced to buy foreign wool, unless it be first picked and cleansed. Spanish wool, as they explained in the petition to the Queen, came in large closed bags which, when opened, proved to be "unwasshed and very full of sande dust filthe drosse corrupte and unlawfull stuffe most deceiptfully packed up in sackes and other close thinges and wounde up in Fleeses". It was difficult or impossible to tell the condition of the wool, or even its true weight, until it was opened on the shop floor. This was in clear contrast to export-quality

English wool, which was subject to well-established standards of cleanliness. In addition the ordinances granted since the Star Chamber agreement of 1578 had proved useless. Although five feltmakers now took part in Haberdashers' Company searches of foreign wools, the major importers were haberdashers, who therefore had a conflict of interest. The petitions were headed by Bradford and Caunton, and the one addressed to the Queen bore the signatures or marks of a further 21 feltmakers.[8]

The implication in these petitions was that the Haberdashers' Company was not doing enough to protect the feltmaking industry from abuses. If the feltmakers could but control their own affairs, they would also manage their wool supply much better, for the general good of their trade.

These petitions elicited a number of replies, hostile and indignant in tone, but also containing a good deal of information. All Spanish wool, it emerged, came into England under a licence granted to a court physician and merchant of Portuguese origin, Dr. Hector Nuñez. Nuñez was Lord Burghley's own doctor, and an occasional source of foreign intelligence. He had obtained letters patent from the Queen in 1573, granting him a monopoly of the importing of Spanish wool for 15 years; in 1577 this was extended to 20 years. In these grants, Nuñez was given the credit for suggesting that Spanish wool would be useful for feltmaking, but, it was noted, he had "received small profit therefrom".[9] Nuñez did not import the Spanish wool himself, but licensed a London merchant to do so – none other than George Bond, citizen and haberdasher, one of the representatives of the Haberdashers' Company who had signed the Star Chamber agreement in 1578.[10] Except for some smaller amounts of Spanish wool being imported into West Country ports, also under Dr Nuñez's licence, George Bond had an effective monopoly of the trade. The feltmakers would have had to deal with him. Bond was extensively involved in foreign commerce, including the Levant and the Baltic as well as Spain, and would become Lord Mayor in 1587.[11]

The most bombastic response to the feltmakers' complaints about the quality of Spanish wool came from the London and West Country merchants trading to Spain. They began by observing that

> "Bradford and Caunton … are two of very slender credit, and of the worst sorte of felters, haunters of tavernes, where they enter into devises not to doe any good to the common weale, but to mainteine theire idle life with other men's goods. And to that ende heretofore they went about to sew [sue] to make them selves a corporacon to be severed from the governaunce of the haberdashers to which they were subiected by act of parlament. And for that sute they gathered contributions of poore men to mainteine theire busy laboring therein, which sute of theires was mislyked and overthrowne by your Lordships."

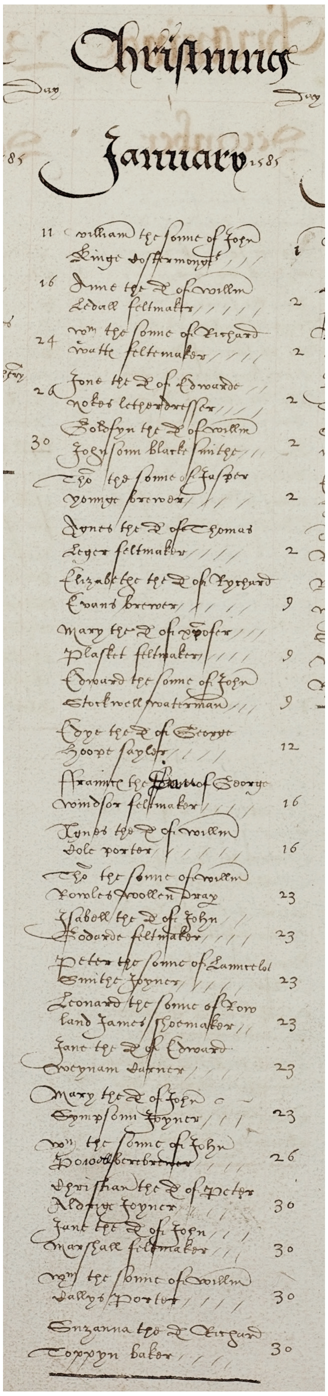
The merchants went on to suggest that some of those represented as having signed the petitions had never given permission for their names to be used. Apart from these personal attacks on the dignity and honesty of those who had prepared the petitions, the merchants' document repeated the point that if the Spanish wool arrived dirty, that was simply the way it was prepared for shipping in Spain. This document was signed with twenty names, including three Aldermen of London.[12]

Another response, dated 25 March 1580, came from the haberdasher Nicholas Woodruffe, now Master of the Haberdashers' Company and also Lord Mayor. He referred to Bradford and Caunton again as "two light persones", and reminded Lord Burghley of the powers of search for defective wools, recently confirmed to the Haberdashers.[13] Once again the Haberdashers were using their political power in the City against the feltmakers.

The central point of the feltmakers' complaint in 1579-80 – their desire for independence – was probably lost amid the wrangles over the details of the Spanish wool trade, not to mention the character of the suppliants. Nevertheless, the feltmakers made another attempt to get some control of their affairs in 1583. They persuaded Master Thomas Seckford, one of the Masters of the Court of Requests (intended to handle the causes of ordinary men), to present another petition to the Queen. In this, the feltmakers complained that, despite the statute of 1566, there were still many in their trade, particularly in the country, who had never completed the standard apprenticeship of seven years. These more cheaply run workshops, they declared, were driving the London feltmakers out of business. What was needed was a new patentee, with powers to prosecute the illicit hatmakers, receiving as a reward the fines imposed, what they called the "forfeitures".[14]

The government of the Tudors had no central agencies to monitor whether laws like the Statute of Artificers were being obeyed. Instead, the authorities depended on complaints being laid by individuals who would then bring a prosecution in a court. There had to be some inducement to encourage these activities, and a common strategy was to reward prosecutors or informants with a portion of the fines collected when the court process was concluded. In their proposal, the feltmakers may well have hoped that the patentee would be one of their own, or under their control, and that the arrangement would generate money that would help in their struggle for independence.

The feltmakers' actual proposal was reasonable enough, and it included an explicit request that the existing powers of the Haberdashers should not be infringed. This time, the Haberdashers were careful to be polite. Thomas Blanke, another Haberdasher wealthy enough to be combining in this year the offices of Lord Mayor and Master of the Haberdashers' Company, replied on



Christning

January

St Olave's Register of Christenings, January 1585/6. Of these 24 christenings, 7 have fathers described as feltmakers. (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives)

their behalf. He wrote to Seckford, the feltmakers' agent, commending the proposal, but mentioning gently the rights of the Haberdashers to regulate the hatting trade, under the Act of Parliament of 1566. Blanke also suggested that, whenever the patentee found occasion to prosecute an offender within the limits of London, half of the "forfeitures" should go to the Haberdashers' Company, for the relief of poor people in the feltmaking trade. He also asked that the Company might be allowed to peruse the patent in draft.[15]

Master Seckford, according to his scribbled endorsement on the feltmakers' proposal, presented it to the Queen at Greenwich on 3 July 1583. She at once referred it to Lord Treasurer Burghley.[16] This probably was the end of it. The Lord Treasurer must have seen it for what it was – a further attempt by the feltmakers to get control of their industry. He may also have been reluctant to turn some new patentee loose on a rapidly growing body of hatmakers in the countryside. At any rate, no patent was granted, and we hear of no more attempts at independence by the feltmakers as long as Queen Elizabeth was alive. The political momentum faltered, perhaps because both their leaders, Thomas Bradford and Thomas Caunton, died soon after.[17]

The Feltmakers Polish their Image

Thwarted at national level, the feltmakers seem to have done what they could to raise their profile in other ways. In the St Olave Southwark parish register, in the autumn of 1585, there is an abrupt change in the word used for men in the trade. Up till then, the term "hatmaker" is always used, but afterwards it is replaced by "feltmaker".[18] It is tempting to see this as a deliberate act, in which the group of hatters formally adopted the new name for themselves to emphasize their distinctness, whether they had official recognition or not.

Shortly afterwards, as Queen Elizabeth was passing down Holborn Hill in 1588 on her way to Tilbury to confront the Spanish Armada ....

> "[she] saw in the valley a great congregation of well-dressed men wearing polished beaver hats; these were the hatters from Blackfriars and Southwark … Her Majesty was so struck with their lusty demonstration of loyalty, as well as their superior appearance, that she inquired who "those gentlemen were?" and being told they were the journeymen hatters from Southwark, replied, "Then such journeymen must be gentlemen".[19]

Like the striking introduction of the term "feltmaker" into common use in Southwark in 1585, it is tempting to see in this display a calculated attempt to show off the feltmakers as a distinct and respectable body that deserved the Queen's support.

The Feltmakers Succeed

Not until the next reign, that of James I, would the feltmakers finally achieve what they wanted. In 1604 they at last received letters patent from the King, recognizing the "seaven thousand persons of the said trade" as a separate Company, with powers to control standards, own property, and so on. The Court of King James was a very different place from that of Elizabeth. The new monarch was open to conferring new favours, particularly when he could add to his own income by doing so. Much lobbying, and considerable money, estimated as around £500, must have been needed to achieve the incorporation of the Feltmakers' Company in 1604. It is an unsolved question where the influence and money came from. But evidently there was plenty of both, including enough money, a few years later, to set up an ambitious scheme to buy hatters' wool in quantity and sell it to members of the new Company. The establishment of the Company itself, and the story of the Wool Adventure, must be the subject of another paper.

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[1] 5 Eliz c. 3. This is one of the earliest usages of the term "feltmaker" that I have seen in England.
[2] 8 Eliz c. 11. An Act for Uttering of Caps, and for True Making of Hats and Caps.
[3] Apart from this bill, there are other indications that Parliament was concerned about the development of the hatting trades in the 1560s. At the Queen's first Parliament, in 1563, the Commons considered a "Bill touching Hat-makers and Felt-makers to buy Spanish and Ostriche Wool" [*House of Commons Journal*, vol. 1, Mar 8 1562/3, Apr 8 1563], which was not passed; its provisions have not been discovered. "Ostriche" is an old term for the southeast shores of the Baltic, where a lower grade of felting wool came from. At her third Parliament, in 1570, an Act was actually passed to enforce all persons (except those of rank) to wear upon a Sunday or holiday "a cap of wool knit, thicked and dressed in England, made within this realm, and only dressed and finished by some of the trade of cappers". Such a sweeping law, evidently enacted to keep a dying industry on life-support, was clearly unenforceable, and it was repealed before the end of the reign.
[4] The chief source for the struggle between the feltmakers and the Haberdashers' Company in the late sixteenth century is the Burghley papers among the Lansdowne MSS in the British

Library. The relevant items are Lansdowne MSS 24/7 (1577); 28/28-31, 29/22-27 (both 1579-80); and 38/4-5 (1583). The Lansdowne MSS were collected by William Petty, 1st Marquess of Lansdowne, who died in 1805. They were purchased by the British Museum in 1807. Who owned the papers concerning the feltmakers before Lord Lansdowne got them is unknown, but John Strype evidently drew on them for the account of the London feltmakers in his expanded edition of John Stow's *Survey of London* (published in 1720). See Strype II.v.238-40, available on-line at <www.hrionline.ac.uk/strype/>. J. H. Hawkins, *History of the Worshipful Company of the Art or Mistery of Feltmakers of London* (London: Crowther & Goodman, Ltd, 1917), pp. 33-42, repeats Strype.

[5] The petition to Burghley is Lansdowne MS 24, No. 7. The Star Chamber agreement is Lansdowne MS 28, No. 29. The latter is labelled "copia vera", i.e. true copy, so the signatures at the bottom are not originals. Lansdowne MSS 28, No. 28 and 29, No. 27 make it clear that this copy was prepared in 1579-80. They also tell us that by that date the required ordinances had been agreed and ratified, and that joint searches of foreign wools had begun. These were being carried out by a team from the Haberdashers' Company which included five representatives of the feltmakers.

[6] Bradford and Cawnton or Caunton are both mentioned in the parish register of St Olave Southwark, the great hatting parish, where they are described as hatmakers or feltmakers. Caunton may have been a descendant of John Caunton, citizen & hurer of London, mentioned in 1499 [H. C. Maxwell Lyte, ed., *Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds*, vol. 1 (1890), C.715], and of John Cawnton, citizen & haberdasher, Alderman for Bishopsgate Ward 1523-28 [Alfred B. Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, vol. 2 (London: Eden Fisher & Co, Ltd, 1913)]. If this is so, Caunton's family had been involved in the London hatting trades for at least 80 years before he became a leader of the feltmakers' independence movement. John Westley is recorded as a hatmaker in the parish of St Andrew by the Wardrobe, in the City, in 1567 and 1571 [R. E. G. & E. F. Kirk, *Returns of Aliens Dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London from the Reign of Henry VIII to that of James I* (Publications of the Huguenot Society of London, vol. X, Part 1 (1900), p. 320; Part 2 (1902), p. 87]. The other three names are otherwise unknown.

[7] Letter to Lord Burghley, 26 Nov 1596, calendared (and the code words explained) in R. A. Roberts, ed., *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Vol. 6*: *1596* (1895), pp. 479ff.; online at british-history.ac.uk. In the same document, which to the uninitiated reads like a routine business letter, "wool" means intelligence, "ginger" means religion, "sugar" means heresy, and "John Eston" means England!

[8] The names of the feltmakers signing this petition are given in Chapter 4, endnote 7. The petition to Lord Burghley is Lansdowne MS 28, No. 31. The petition to the Queen is Lansdowne MS 29, No. 23. Bradford and Caunton complained that the new search regime was ineffective in Lansdowne MS 28, No.28.

[9] For Dr Nuñez (abt 1520-1591) see *Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History,* p. 727, and articles cited there. See also the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* The first patent to Nuñez, dated 8 June 1573, was to take effect on August 24 following; it is TNA, C 66/1096/136; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Eliz I, Vol. VI, 1572-75* (HMSO, 1982), p. 30. The second patent extending Nuñez's monopoly to 20 years is dated 25 Jun 1575; it is TNA, C 66/1151/1421, *Cal Patent Rolls, Eliz I, Vol. VII, 1575-78* (HMSO, 1982), pp. 206-7. The full texts of both patents are printed as an Appendix to Charles Meyers, "Debt in Elizabethan England: the Adventures of Dr Hector Nunez, Physician and Merchant", in *Jewish Historical Studies. Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England,* vol. 34 (1994-6), pp. 125-40. The second patent states that Nuñez's proposal to use Spanish wool for feltmaking in England was made during the reign of Queen Mary I.

[10] The system in place for the Spanish wool imports, "under D[octor] Hectours licence", is explained in an anonymous document, evidently written by someone well informed on the subject, Lansdowne MS 28, No. 30. The writer further states that the Spanish wool sent out for feltmaking in England was "sent out as refuse wull [i.e. wool] without searche or packinge".

He suggests, reasonably enough, that if clean wool was needed for feltmaking, this should be specified when the orders were sent to Spain.

[11] For George Bond and his trading interests, particularly as a charter member of the Eastland Company, which obtained an English monopoly of the Baltic trade, see Henryk Zins, *England and the Baltic in the Elizabethan Era* (Manchester: the University Press, 1972), pp. 96-7.

[12] Lansdowne MS 29, No. 25.

[13] Lansdowne MS 29, No. 27. Another document responding to the feltmakers' complaints about Spanish wool imports, and making the same general points, is Lansdowne MS 29, No. 26.

[14] Lansdowne MS 38, No. 4. This is evidently a draft. The lines are widely spaced, there are crossings-out and insertions, and the name of the proposed patentee is left blank. It also has Seckford's own scribbled note on the outside about how he presented the petition to the Queen at Greenwich in July 1583. The version actually presented to the Queen must have been different.

[15] Lansdowne MS 38, No. 5.

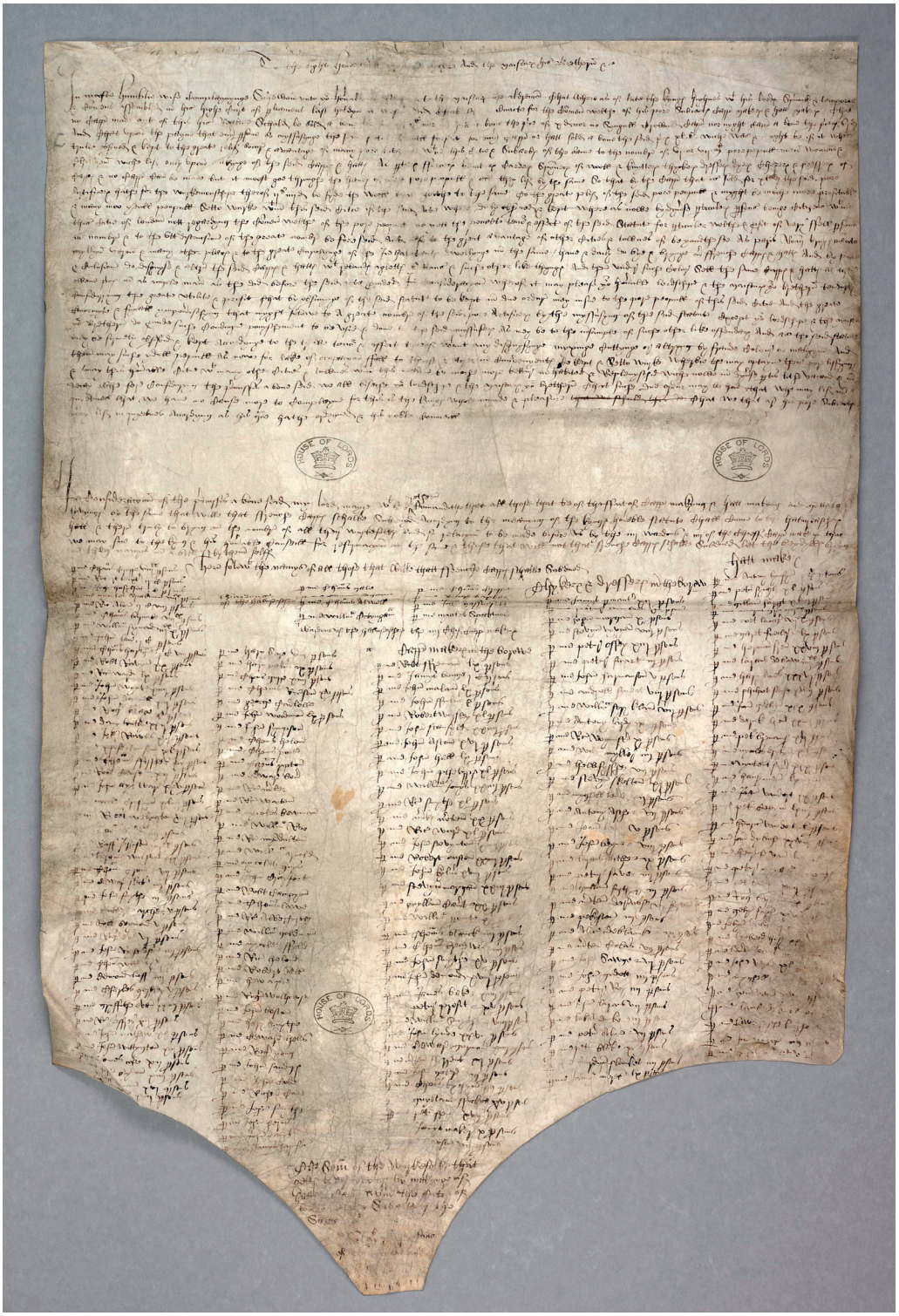
[16] Lansdowne MS 38, No. 4.

[17] St Olave Southwark register: "Thos Caunton in Horseydownne, hatmaker", was buried 10 Aug 1584. "Thos Bradforde, feltmaker", was buried 16 Apr 1586.

[18] The term "hatmaker" appears consistently in the St Olave Southwark register up to a baptismal entry of 10 Oct 1585, and "feltmaker" first appears in an entry later that month; thereafter, except for a couple of instances of "hatmaker" in December, "feltmaker" is always used. In the register for the adjacent parish of St Saviour Southwark, the transition is not as marked. "Feltmaker" appears first in March 1585, and "hatmaker" is still occasionally used as late as 1603.

[19] Quoted from Hawkins, *Feltmakers*, page 20, who gives the anecdote as the origin of the traditional phrase "gentlemen journeymen hatters". The tale has anachronistic features – it is unlikely that the Southwark hatters were making smooth-surfaced beaver hats as early as 1588, and the South Bank district of Blackfriars did not acquire that name till after the opening of Blackfriars Bridge in 1769. However its core may well be correct.

Merchant Haberdashers' Letters Patent 1502



Southwark Petition 1531

Southwark in 1588