The Moneyers of the Tower of London and William Lord Hastings in 1472

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In the summer of 1472 Edward IV, who had only recently regained his throne, felt secure enough to call his first Parliament for four years, to meet at Westminster on 6 October. Yet, judging by the parliamentary indenture for Middlesex, there was perhaps a lingering doubt as to the ‘correct’, that is Yorkist, composition of the forthcoming Parliament. For at this particular county election, held at Stone Cross in the Strand on Thursday 27 August, there was, among the parliamentary attestors, a group of moneyers, or coiners to use the term they themselves preferred. They worked at the royal mint in the Tower of London, but lived in and around Shoreditch, just to the north of London and then a Middlesex parish. Parliamentary attestors were the forty shilling freeholders who were entitled to attend the hustings and elect the two knights to represent them in the House of Commons, and who then attested to the validity of the election through an indenture returned into Chancery. That there were moneyers among these attestors was unusual because, as crown servants, those working at the Tower were freed from the burden of service as jurors at the county court, and are thus seldom found attending the hustings. But on this occasion, out of a total of forty-eight known attestors, eleven men (23%) can be identified as moneyers.

The appearance of moneyers at this specific election can probably be explained by the political situation, which provides an interesting insight into the relations that existed between moneyers, the master-worker of the Mint, and the king. Middlesex sent to Westminster, as the two knights of the shire, Sir Roger Ree and Sir Robert Green, both strong Yorkists and knights within the royal household. The master-worker was William Lord Hastings, the king’s most trusted councillor. It appears that Hastings took appropriate measures to ensure the due election of Ree and Green, by arranging for at least eleven of his mint workers to attend the Hustings. These were John Harryonge, William, Richard, John and Robert Hert, William Austyn, William Sharp, William Redee, John Rydee, Nicholas Toller and Thomas Sharp. It is noticeable that the list includes several men of the same surname. An additional factor in Hastings’ decision may have been that John Elrington, cofferer to the royal household, who had shared Edward’s exile and was subsequently promoted treasurer and later knighted, resided at Hoxton in Shoreditch.

An Exchequer listing of 1433, almost certainly compiled because the Exchequer wished to verify those at the Royal Mint who were exempted from paying tax as crown servants, strongly suggests that at this period the four principal officers of the Mint were the warden of the Exchange and Mint, the master-worker, the assayer or comptroller, and the engraver of the dies. The warden, usually a royal servant, was the senior official, holding overall legal authority and with responsibility for the Mint equipment, apart from the making of coin. However, during the fifteenth century, the master of the Mint became steadily more important because of the need for professional expertise; in 1433, for instance, the post was held by a prominent goldsmith, William Russe. Then, because of its high standing and the opportunities for gain, the office of master-worker was converted into a royal gift and held for life as a sinecure, hence the appointment of Lord Hastings in 1461. There was a chance of profit at each stage of production, for the master-worker bought all the bullion coming to the mint, oversaw its conversion into coin, and then paid it back as new money. As well, there were the normal benefits which accrued through the exercise of any office. Hastings, like his predecessors, entered into a series of indentures with the crown between 1461 and 1477 to regulate his

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2 CPR 1467-77, pp. 138-89, 313-15; The National Archives, PRO, C219/17/2, no. 56 (see Appendix).
4 Details of these moneyers can be found in Jessica Freeman, ‘The Mistery of Coiners and the King’s Moneyers of the Tower of London, c. 1340-c. 1550’, *British Numismatic Journal*, 70 (2000), pp. 67-82.
6 TNA, PRO, E159/210, Recorda rot. 43d. I owe this reference to Dr David Grummitt.
minting of the coin. But the appointment of such a high-profile royal servant meant that the expertise required had then to be provided by a deputy. In Hastings' case, this was (Sir) Hugh Bryce, another eminent goldsmith who was sheriff and then mayor of London, and who took care of the daily technical matters of production. During Hastings' tenure, the warden was Sir Thomas Montgomery followed by John Wode, while the comptroller was Humphrey Heywood and the engraver, Edmund Shaa, both goldsmiths.8

Yet to run the Mint required an establishment of not just appointed officers but also artisan workers, the men who fashioned the blanks and struck the finished product, the coins. As a group, the moneymen at the Royal Mint are amongst the most obscure, for they were not paid directly by the crown. They were responsible to the master-worker – Lord Hastings in 1472 – through their chosen representative, the provost of their own company of Moneymen, by whom they were organised and from whom they received their wages. As sub-contractors, the moneymen were paid, by the master-worker, at a flat rate of so many pence per pound of coin struck. In 1696 the mystery of coiners was summarized as men who 'live in the country, attend the mint whenever called, take apprentices, and form themselves into a government by electing one of them to be their Provost'. Thus moneymen seldom appear in official Tower records, and their own company archives have not survived before the later sixteenth century.9 It is only through other sources, such as wills and, particularly, exchequer records – which noted the exemption of moneymen, as crown servants, from payment of certain taxes – that their names have come to light.10

The first mention found of the company itself is in 1457 when in his will John Aleyn of Shoreditch – in which he describes himself as 'coynour' – left 6s 8d to communi piciis misiere me de couors, 'the common box of my craft of coiners'.11 This indicates that the company had been in existence long enough to establish a fund for the benefit of members.12 The organisation of the Moneymen's Company is in fact known only from 1578, when their rules and regulations were 'newly written and set forth' by the then provost. Internal evidence does, however, suggest that these ordinances incorporated earlier material, and are in fact similar to those found in the religious and craft fraternity returns of 1388, such as the London Cutlers.13 The bequest of a gold ring in February 1486 by Johanna Underhill, widow of Islington, to Margery, wife of Robert Heryong of Hoxton, 'provost', is the first written evidence that the Shoreditch moneymen were an organised group with a recognised leader who had a specific title.14

Moneymen almost all lived in and around Shoreditch, and particularly its hamlet of Hoxton. St Leonard Shoreditch was a large parish, with 800 communicants in 1548, and still surrounded by fields in the fifteenth century.15 In his will Aleyn also made a bequest to the fraternity of the Virgin Mary in his parish church, as did six other coiners out of the sixteen who left surviving wills c. 1370-c. 1545, that is 44%. The earliest recorded was John Clopton in 1377, and the latest Richard Herryonge in 1545. In the late medieval period almost every trade guild had at its centre devotion to a particular saint and in London many craft associations developed from an existing parish or neighbourhood fraternity.16 Since the great majority of moneymen came

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10 In particular, PRO, E179/141/9, 12, 13, 16-20, 25-30, 32-4, 36, 46, 48, 50, 57, 65 and 78; 86/1, 123 and 164. I am indebted to Dr Mark Forrest for bringing this series of records to my attention.
11 Guildhall Library, London [hereafter GL], Commissary Court of London Wills, MS 9171/5, f. 228v. Aleyn left a son William, of whom there is no further record, whilst his wife Johanna, the widow of Nicholas Wightmore, had predeceased him. Aleyn's executors were John Rawlyn, chapman, and John Herryonge, coiner. Aleyn should not be confused with his namesake, warden of the Goldsmiths' Company, who fl. 1487.
12 The moneymen are said to have formed themselves into a fraternity by at least 1445, although no reference is given for this statement, Craig, The Mint, p. 90.
14 GL, MS 9171/7, f. 74.
16 GL, MS 9171/1, f. 48; PRO, PROB 11/30, f. 263. The others were Robert Herryonge, William, Richard and Robert Hart and John Hill.
to live either within or near the parish of St Leonard, it is likely that the roots of the Moneyers’ Company lie in a more exclusive craft fellowship which grew up under the umbrella of this parish gild of Our Lady. I have no idea why they lived at Shoreditch, about a mile from the Tower, except that the parish lay outside the city of London and, therefore, beyond the control of the civic authorities.

Many families provided moneyers for 200 years or more. Six generations of the Hert family, for example, can almost certainly be traced from William le Hert in 1340-41 to Richard Hert in 1472. In 1336 a grant of land at Shoreditch was witnessed by John, Roger and William Hert, and Hugh Hercen or Heriong, while Ralph Herihung was a witness at Hoxton before 1260. The John Herrionges of 1472 was no doubt a descendant of William Herionges, one of the monetarii regis of 1346-47, via one of the men of that name who were moneyers in 1371. John was a prominent figure amongst the coiners from 1452 to 1472, as was his contemporary Richard Hert. Hugh Sharpe, coiner, who died in 1444, was himself probably the son of John Sharpe, a moneyer in 1371, and he had two sons, William and Thomas (likely to be the attestors of 1472), and a grandson, Robert, who all followed the family craft. Likewise Nicholas Toller belonged to a family which had produced nine moneyers since 1371.

Moneyers were, however, by no means all cast from the same mould: they had differing careers, and were of varying degrees of wealth. The above mentioned John Aleyn, for example, who was listed on subsidy exemptions between 1414 and 1453, went to France in 1443 in the retinue of John Langton, treasurer of Calais. John (atte) Hill, described as ‘coignour’ in 1452, revealed in his own 1458 will the growth in material possessions of English yeomen and artisans. He could leave his daughter Clemence his best maser or drinking bowl, with a boss in the middle, his standing ‘belle cuppe’ of silver, and a great horn bound with silver and set on two silver-gilt feet, as well as lands in Newington and in Kent. Moneyers provided their own working gear, so that in 1435 the moneyer Richard Pylarne or Pyleron left his servant his tools: an anvil, all his best hammers, a pair of tongs and two pairs of shears together with the ship’s chest in which they were no doubt stored. Almost fifty years later Robert Hert bequeathed his apprentice Robert Sharpe an almost identical collection of the implements of his trade (together with half an acre in Walthamstow marsh), while his two Harryonge godsons received 3s 4d apiece. Relations were close between parishioners and clergy: both Stephen Pudle, chaplain, and Robert Welborne, clerk, for example, made John Redy, coiner, co-executor of their wills of 1467 and 1461. Indeed, Pudle left unum par de clavydulcis, a primitive piano used for teaching music, which raises the intriguing possibility that there was then a school attached to St Leonard’s, which the coiners’ sons may have attended.

Only occasional glimpses appear of the moneyers’ lives. In a much later dispute (of 1589) over the ownership of two houses in Shoreditch, Richard Austyn, moneyer, no doubt related to the 1472 William Austyn, deposed that forty-two years ago these cottages had been used for ‘a merreymente and to make good Cheere’ by the parishioners of St Leonard. It was ‘accompted a Credytt by many in those days’, Richard said, to belong to the brotherhoods of St Christopher and St James, and of Our Lady, and to ‘spend their monneys amongst them’. Under the master-worker – responsible overall for matters affecting the Mint – the moneyers had formed themselves into a tightknit, family-related group, valued by the crown for the services it provided. Their particular way of working was probably due in part to security considerations, with kinship reinforcing the bonds of trust necessary when working with gold and silver, as well as to the privilege of tax exemption. Even in 1848 the company agreed that it recommended as apprentices members of their own families and immediate connections, and this was no doubt true 400 years earlier. The Moneyers’ Company was always a small, inward-looking group, probably numbering no more than fifteen to twenty men at any one time. There was, perhaps surprisingly, little interaction with senior mint officials through, for example, employing their services as executors or witnesses, perhaps because these officials were royal appointees who often served for just a short period. Yet moneyers were fully involved in parish life and local administration, particularly, as

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19 Freeman, ‘Mistery of Coiners’, pp. 80-82.
21 GL, MS 9171/5, f. 52v (will of William Wyllum of Shoreditch, smith); PRO, PROB 11/4, ff. 97-97v.
22 GL, MS 9171/3, f. 389v; /5, f. 8.
23 GL, MSS 9171/6, f. 20; /5, f. 313v.
24 PRO, E134/31Eliz/East18, mm. 3-4.

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appears above, in times of political confusion.

Appendix

TNA, PRO, C219/17/2, no. 56 - Middlesex Parliamentary Indenture, dated 27 August 1472, attesting to the Election held at Stone Cross, Strand, of Sir Roger Ree and Sir Robert Green as the two knights of the shire for Middlesex.

Attestors listed: Richard Turnaunt, armiger [of Tottenham]; John Elrynnton, armiger [of Shoreditch; cofferer in Edward IV’s household; MP]; Thomas Ive, gentleman [of Kentish Town, Chancery clerk]; Thomas Luyt, gentleman [of Isleworth; clerk of the King’s Bench; undersheriff; MP]; Robert Shordych, armiger [of Chelsea, Ickenham and Hackney; clerk of the Spicery]; Thomas Cooke, armiger [of Fulham]; John Randolph, armiger [of Westminster; usher of the Exchequer]; Simon Elrynnton, gentleman [of Hackney; filazer in Court of Common Pleas, undersheriff, coroner]; John Ebmede, gentleman [of Staines; coroner]; Walter Stokker, gentleman [of St Giles without Cripplegate; lawyer]; John Stokker, gentleman [of Stoke Newington; undersheriff]; William Spenser, armiger [of Westminster; lawyer]; William Thurlby, armiger [of Westminster; lawyer]; Robert Warner [of Kentish Town; yeoman]; Giles Eustas [of Highgate, in Haringey; bailiff to the bishop of London]; John Hamond [of Stratford at Bow; baker]; John Leylond [of Stratford at Bow; baker]; Thomas Burgeys [of Westminster; vintner]; Nicholas Norton [of Westminster; clerk]; Robert Norton [of Westminster; gentleman]; Henry Marabyl [of Westminster; yeoman, gentleman]; John Robert de Wyllesdon [of Willesden; husbandman]; John Yonge de Chelchethith [of Chelsea; husbandman]; John Yonge de Pallyngwyk [of Paddenswick, in Fulham; husbandman]; Ivo Chalkhill [of Kingsbury; yeoman]; Thomas Basse [of Highgate, in Haringey; yeoman]; Robert Sanney [of Finchley; yeoman]; Thomas Hayne [of Finchley; husbandman]; Thomas Bygmore [of Finchley; yeoman]; Alexander Brok [of Hackney; salter]; John Herryyong, William Hert, Richard Hert, John Hert, Robert Hert, William Austyn, William Sharp, William Redee, John Rydee, Nicholas Toller, Thomas Sharp [all of Shoreditch; coiner]; John Hunneslon [of Enfield; maltman]; Richard Englonde [of Islington; yeoman]; Stephen Englonde [of Islington; yeoman]; John Rogers [of Harrow on the Hill; gentleman]; William Jardyn [of Westminster; tailor and innkeeper]; William Combe [of Westminster; baker]; William Combe [of probably of Tottenham; yeoman].

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[25] The information contained within square brackets is derived from other sources. All places are in Middlesex; offices mentioned were not necessarily held in 1472. For further details see Jessica Freeman, ‘The political community of fifteenth-century Middlesex’, unpublished University of London Ph.D. Thesis, 2002.