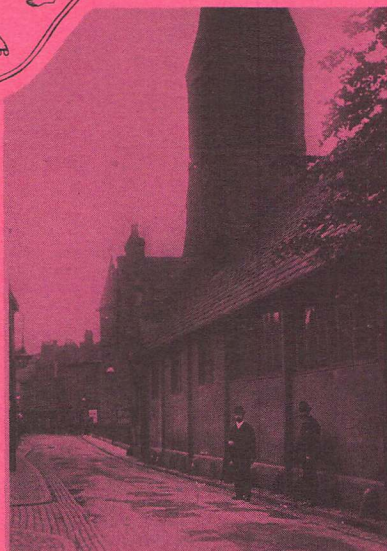
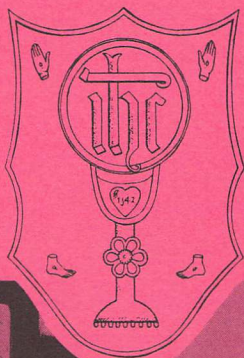


The Religious Gilds of Mediaeval Leicester

by

Jonathan Wilshere



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The items from "Painted Glass" are reproduced by permission of Mr. P. J. Boylan, B.Sc., F.G.S., F.M.A., A.M.B.I.M., Director of the Leicestershire Museums, Art Galleries and Record Services.

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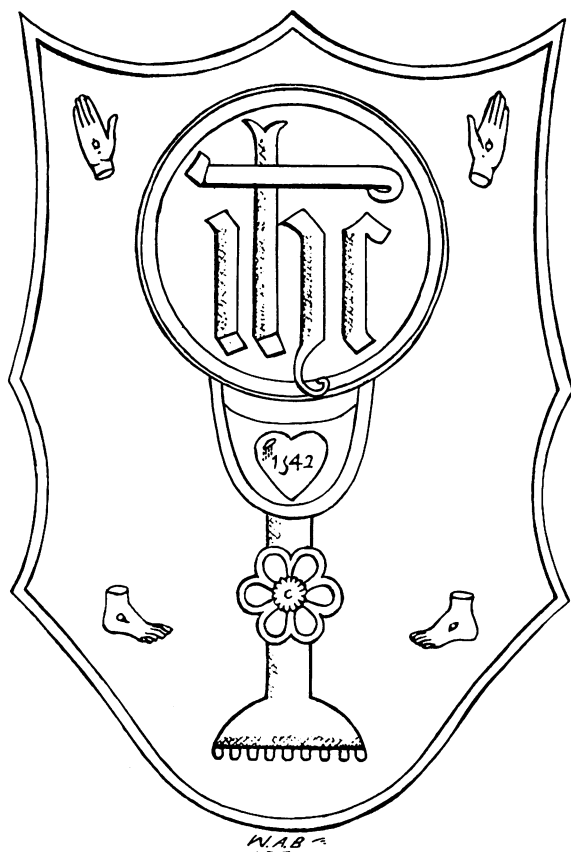


Plate 1

The badge of Corpus Christi gild, as it appeared on the Gild Roll for 1542.
*[Reconstruction by W. A. Barrett in North's Chronicle of the Church of
 St. Martin, Leicester, published 1866].*

INTRODUCTION

THE Social-religious gilds were an important part of Borough life between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries. Their religious objects were to maintain one or more chantry priests to sing mass for the souls of the founders, members and well-wishers (royalty often being included in this latter class) at a special gild altar, normally within a parish church. On the social side, in addition to an annual feast, brotherhood extended to mutual support, particularly in time of sickness or adversity. On the eve of the feast-day, *placebo* (or evensong for the dead) was sung; on the feast-day, the service of *dirige* (matins for the dead) preceded a full requiem, in many gilds' rituals.

In Leicester, unlike in some other places, the religious gilds were quite distinct from the older merchant gilds, which had their origin in the Anglo-saxon frith gilds. The strength of the merchant gilds was reduced locally by the large number of trades or "occupations", which had their own brotherhoods or "craft gilds" to attend to the interests of members of a particular calling. All gilds were suppressed under the Chantry Acts in 1548. Much of their remaining property came to the Corporation under Leicester's charter from Elizabeth I in 1589.

Leicester, despite a population of under four thousand, had six religious gilds of reasonable importance and one or two smaller ones. Membership was normally open to women and certainly the Corpus Christi membership contained many husbands and wives. Some gilds refer specifically to brethren and sisters (or sisteren). The Corpus Christi, founded in 1343, was by far the most important gild in Leicester, its influence extending deep into Borough affairs. Not only did Town Council meetings (known as Common Halls) take place in the Corpus Christi Guildhall from the late fifteenth century onwards, but occasionally, the same person was both mayor and master of the gild.* The gild of St. Margaret and St. Katherine, attached to St. Margaret's church, was founded in 1355 and that of St. John probably in the same year. There was also a gild of the Assumption or of "our Lady" in All Saints church. Augmentation Certificates of 1389 survive for three of these gilds (excluding St. John) and give reasonably detailed accounts of their foundations and endowments in response to a writ from Richard II requiring, under penalty of forfeiture, a complete return of the land and property of the religious gilds. Less is known about two later gilds. There is no known commencement date for St. George's, which, like the Corpus Christi, was attached to St. Martin's, Leicester's principal civic church (now Leicester Cathedral). The earliest certain reference to St. George's gild is as late as 1499. It lacked land endowments and consequently was very

*For example, Thomas Swyke and Robert Croft were masters of the Gild in 1493. Both served as mayor for the second time in 1492 and 1493 respectively.

poor, often being unable to carry out the prime object of its existence, which was of promoting the annual procession, known as "the riding of the George". In contrast, the rich, though parochial, gild of Holy Trinity, attached to the church of St. Mary-de-Castro, was founded as late as 1465. Evidence of other small gilds, notably those of St. Michael and of Our Lady "beyond the water", are scanty. Religious gilds in other Leicestershire towns have not been considered, although Melton Mowbray certainly had gilds of St. John and of St. Mary (also referred to as "Our Lady" or "Blessed Virgin"). Oakham had as many as four gilds — those of St. Mary, St. Michael the Archangel, All Saints and Holy Trinity. Hinckley also had a Holy Trinity Gild.

Some evidence of the regard in which gilds were held in pre-Reformation times can be gleaned from testators' wills, many of which request the supervision of a gild in the celebration of obits annually on the anniversary of the testator's death, and attendance at the funeral requiem. Some requested a trental (a daily requiem for thirty days after death), a few required a daily requiem for half a year or even a year. All seemed anxious for the good of their soul after death!

Unlike the position in some other towns, there was no hierarchy as such between membership of gilds. In Coventry, for example, the status of Corpus Christi was considered lower than that of Holy Trinity and membership graduated from one to the other. It is clear from details in Leicester wills that some testators belonged to two or more gilds and occasionally they left bequests to as many as four. Those gildsmen of substance usually left annual obits in perpetuity to either the gild of Corpus Christi or that of St. Margaret, with provision for transfer in case of default.

There remains the vexed question of spelling. "Gild" has been preferred throughout, since the Anglo-saxon 'gild' or 'geld' meant payment and religious, as well as other, gilds could only continue, if financially supported. However, at the risk of inconsistency, the word "Guildhall" has been allowed to remain, since a change to "Gildhall" would not be readily accepted by readers. No attempt has been made to modernise the old sterling currency or the names of gild founders and members.

November 1979.

Jonathan Wilsbere.

Note: "*The Religious Gilds of Mediaeval Leicester*" is a companion pamphlet to "*The Town Gates and Bridges of Mediaeval Leicester*", published in 1978.

The Gild of Corpus Christi

The gild of "The Precious body of our Lord Jesus Christ, St. Mary, and all saints" is universally referred to by the simpler title of "Corpus Christi". It was founded in 1343 with its annual feast and procession celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. The Corpus Christi procession was one of the great events in Leicester's year, a "scarlet" day when the mayor, Corporation and officials wore their official robes. It was perhaps a more solemn procession than the boisterous "Riding of the George". Corpus Christi was the most important and richest gild in Leicester, very much "a fashionable club" with its membership, which comprised many husbands and wives, based on the principal business men in the town. It became the leading property owner in Leicester, its revenue exceeding that of the Borough itself. Its chapel was the Lady chapel in the South aisle of St. Martin's church, (now Leicester Cathedral).

The founders of the gild in 1343 were Raulf de Ferrers, John Hayward, Gilbert le Avenor, John Porter, Geoffrey Kent, Roger de Knightcote, John Martyn, John de Elmesdale, Richard Leverych, Thomas de Beby, John Cui or Cook, the elder, John de Louseby the elder, and William Dunstable. Brief biographical details of some of these and other persons will be found at the end of this section, but it is interesting to note that the first four were officers or servants of the earl and are given precedence over the others, all prominent burgesses, several of whom had been mayors. The gild quickly prospered and within four years had two chaplains instead of the original one. In 1349, the year of the Black Death, six new admissions were made, those of William of Humberston, John de Peatling, William Wakefield, John Cook the younger, Richard Stafford, Robert Coventry and Roger Wainhouse.

The original rules or ordinances of the Gild may be summarised as follows:

- (1) A chaplain was to sing a public mass for all those of the fraternity and for all its benefactors and for the quick and the dead and especially for all those who first began this fraternity and for the souls of their ancestors and for all those who after this time shall sustain and maintain it so that the names of the founders be written on a table (i.e. tablet) before the chaplain and named every day at his mass and let the chaplain whosoever he may be henceforth be charged herewith.
- (2) Every one was to have a torch of pure wax to carry in honour of God and the solemn feast of the consecration of the blessed flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and that such torch be saved for the whole of the following year . . . and if any of the brethren . . . be called to God . . . everyone shall come to the dirige and likewise to the mass on the morrow with his torch.
- (3) The founders were not only responsible for the running of the fraternity, but had the right in the event of the death of any of them to elect "one of the community who is suitable and gracious" to take his place.

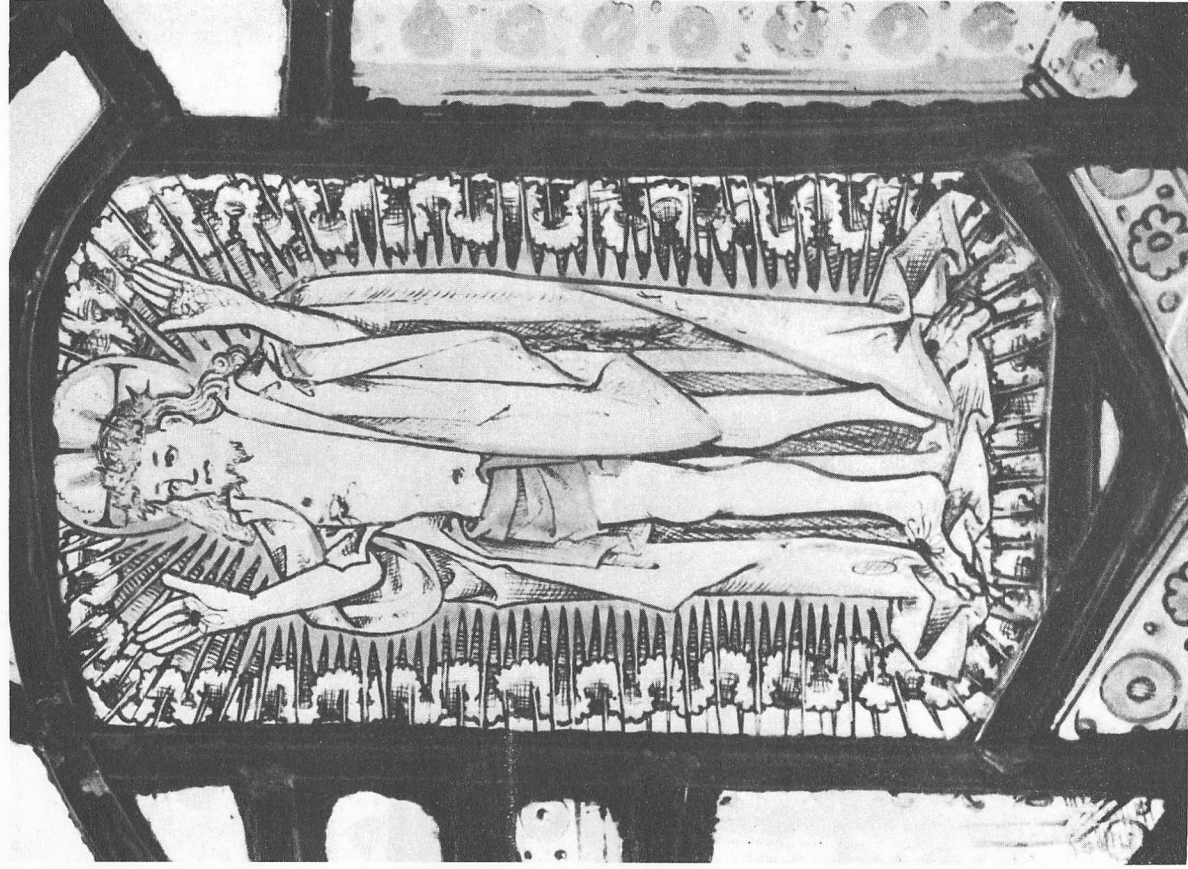


Plate 2.

This panel of painted glass, c. 1500, depicting the Risen Christ, surrounded by rays of glory, may possibly be symbolic of the Corpus Christi gild, since prominence is given to the five wounds.

(4) If a member should fall into poverty or sickness whereby he cannot earn his living he may be aided by the community until he is out of distress and the fraternity shall severally visit him to ascertain his position.

(5) Every year at the feast of the consecration an account was to be rendered of how much has been recovered by levy from the community, what has been spent, and what may remain. The election of wardens or receivers for the ensuing year was also to take place, but if election cannot be made on that day, it must be performed within a fortnight.

(6) The brethren were to assemble themselves "in a certain place according as they shall be notified" three times a year "to have converse about their common affairs, to wit at the feasts of All Saints (1 November), Christmas and Pentecost, each to bring his share".

(7) Anyone who is an evil doer, evil speaker or an offender against the articles of the foundation and who has been twice warned by the rules of the fraternity and will not submit to justice, then the third time he is to be convicted of trespass before the Company . . . and is to be removed from the fraternity for ever. Likewise there is a similar penalty for those who have been warned by one elected to make such warnings to come to their common assembly, but who does not come unless they have some reasonable impediment.

(8) No one was to be received into the Company except by consent of the founders or their successors. Where an impediment is brought it shall be heard on that day and adjourned to the next assembly, so that the cause can be openly discussed and tried and a majority verdict taken.

(9) At the common meal, each was to pay for his raiment and food.

The successive outbreaks of bubonic plague during the second half of the fourteenth century reduced the gild's prosperity.

The Letters patent from Edward II (19 August 1349) made provision for four chaplains although there is no evidence that the number was ever increased. There was power to assign to the chaplains and their successors lands, tenements and rents to the value of £20* annually, plus 6 messuages one shop and one piece of land to the value of £6-8-7 and 32s. of rent and the rent of one cock and 15 hens. The grant was confirmed by Richard II in 1392 when the gild was reformed, the property mentioned was 11 messuages, six shops and appurtenances valued at £11-6s. of rent. Nineteen names, other than those of royalty and friends, are mentioned in the confirmatory grant.

By the time Henry IV ratified the grant in 1401, the number of names directly associated with the gild had risen to sixty-four, evidently indicative of a new-found prosperity, although the number was probably inflated by the inclusion of wives.

It was about this time that the first part of the Guildhall was built,

**actually worth £19-16s. at the time.*

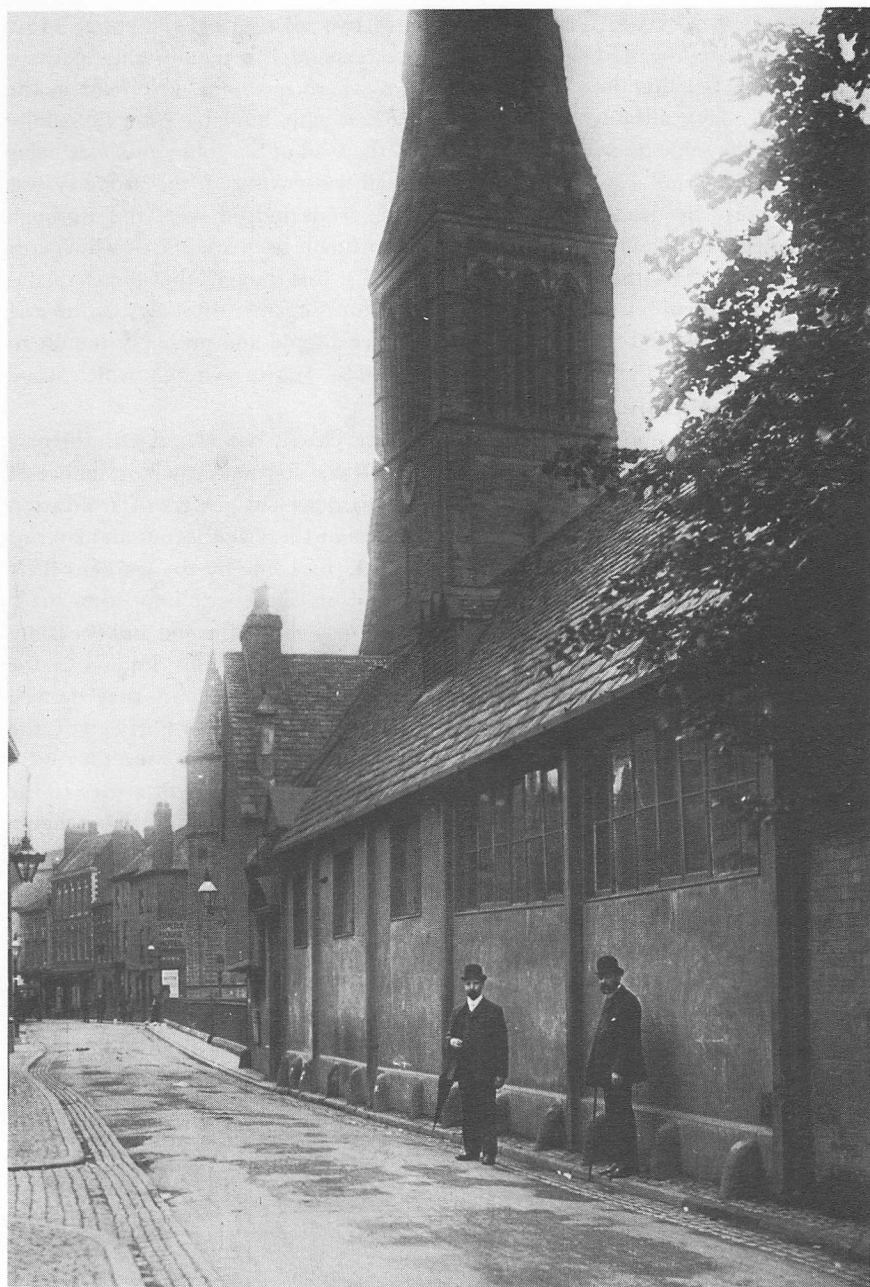


Plate 3. Exterior of the Guildhall. [From a post-card in the author's possession].

although it was extended by the addition of two western bays in about 1450, by which date the gild was continuing to expand the membership perhaps approaching one hundred. It is not known where meetings were held in the gild's early days, although a room over the East gate, built by Peter le Saddler (probably the same person as the founder of the Gild of St. John, *q.v.*) was being used in 1353/4 and 1365. When the Guildhall was envisaged, the property was held in trust by leading gildsmen and the deeds lodged with the Borough muniments. This avoided the high cost of mortmain licences, one of which cost the gild £20 and another 40 marks (£13-13s-4d.). It is thought that the chaplains occupied the premises, probably divided into four separate dwellings, at the east of the Guildhall, and these premises were later altered and probably rebuilt to house the Town Library removed in 1632 from St. Martin's church, which stood only a few yards to the east.

Probably for most of its life the Gild was closely associated with the government of the Borough, although it had no official status; A town ordinance of 1477 emphasised the position. The two gild wardens had powers of arbitration with the mayor in complaints between members of the Twenty-four and later of the Forty-eight. The mayor himself was liable to a fine by the wardens if he failed to execute judgment. The offender could be fined, with imprisonment in default. Many of the town's mayors were also masters of the gild and occasionally the two positions were held in the same year. The body, known as the Twenty-four, could perhaps be considered the mayor's brethren, they derived from the old body of jurats and in time ranked as aldermen. The Forty-eight, the common councillors, was a body which came into being in 1489 and they were elected by the commoners. About this date, an extension at right angles to the Guildhall* was built and this became known as the Mayor's Parlour. It was then a single-storied building. Among the fragments of panels of painted glass dating from this time will be seen various gild emblems, including the host and chalice of the Corpus Christi gild.

From surviving accounts of the Gild, receipts in the year from the feast of St. Jerome (30 September) 1493 to a similar date in 1494 receipts totalled £42-7s-0½d of which £33 came from rents left by bequest. Outgoings were £41-3s-6½d so the bare surplus was only £1-3s-6½d. It is a further indication of the close connection between gild and town that the mayor and his company could inspect the accounts of the gild. In 1493/94 the chantry priests cost the gild £21-6s-8d — more than half its income. Various small items of interest included these running expenses:

“For tallow candles for keeping the morrow mass 2s.

**The Guildhall dates from the late fourteenth century and was previously extended in c.1450.*

“For keeping of the altar (in the gild chapel) 3s.4d.

“For bearing of the fertur and for torches on Corpus Christi day 2s.6d.

The property of the gild, very few records of the acquisition of which survive, included various inns, of which the *Angel* in Gallowtree Gate was the most prestigious hostelry in the town in mediaeval times and received innumerable famous guests.* The *Talbot* in Belgrave gate and two High Street inns, the *Bell* and the *George* were the other inns in the gild's control for a long period. It is also worthy of note that in 1494 the Dean of St. Mary de Castro occupied a Red-cross Street house belonging to the gild.

The prosperity of Leicester was already in decline in the early sixteenth century and this is reflected in the gild's accounts for 1525/6 which show tenements only valued at £8, “due to decay”.

When the gild was dissolved in 1548, its income was reduced to £27-1s-7¼d although its outgoings were well down when compared with half a century previously at only £18-7s. This was because there were now only two regular chaplains, Henry Grynny (not Grimes as stated in some transcripts) and John Foster received stipends of £6 and £5-6s respectively. A third chaplain received 4s. for celebrating a mass called ‘Jesus mass’, presumably the principal mass of the feast day. Obits and alms accounted for £2-4s-2d. of the outgoings.

** Still remembered in Leicester to-day by the passageway known as the Angel gateway.*



Plate 4. Exterior view showing the east of the Guildhall (rebuilt Chantry Priest's quarters). [From a post-card, c. 1904, in the author's possession].

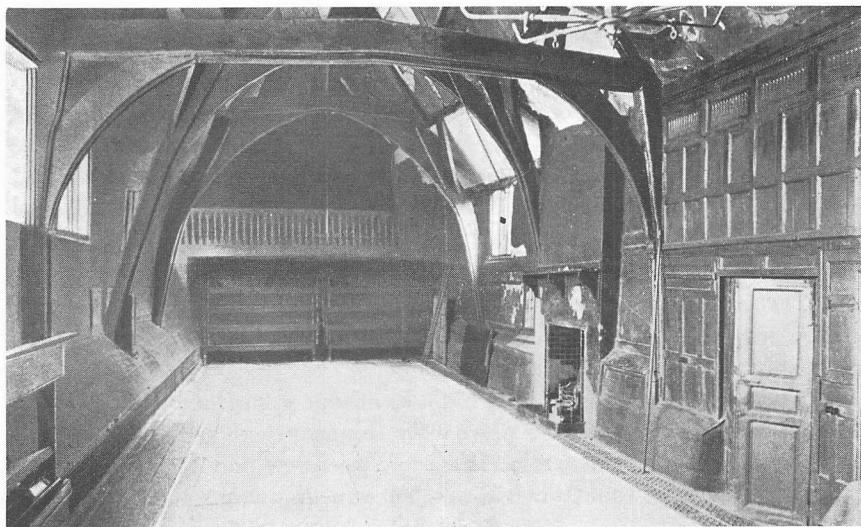


Plate 5. Interior of the Guildhall looking east, before restoration c. 1920.



Plate 6. Interior of the Guildhall looking east, after restoration c. 1925.

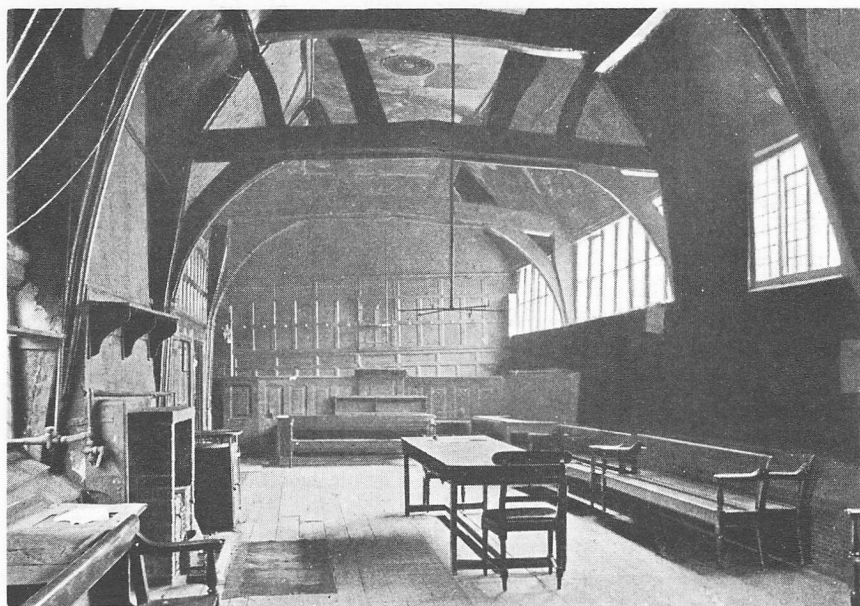


Plate 7. Interior of the Guildhall looking west, before restoration c. 1920.



Plate 8. Corpus Christi chapel, St. Martin's church, c. 1925.

The following are a few examples of bequests to the gild:

John Reynolds (died c.1464). Mayor of Leicester in 1434, 1439, 1450, 1458 and a representative in Parliament in 1429 and 1437. He granted a house in High Street (now Highcross Street) by the High Cross in 1461 on condition that the mayor for the time being should find a priest perpetually to sing for the souls of himself, his wife, his father and mother, his brother and all his benefactors. He was a member of the gild and rented one of their properties in the parish of St. Peter. His wife was buried with the rites of the gild.

Thomas Heyrick (d.1517), directed that there was to be a yearly dirige with mass of require for his soul, and those of his wife, father, mother, his friends and all Christians. 8s.4d. was left annually for the obit. Two of his sons, Nicholas and John were both mayors of Leicester.

Sir Thomas Glen (d.1521) left a gilded spoon.

Thomas Smyth (d.1522) draper, left 12 torches. He was mayor of Leicester in 1517. He also left 4d. each to the gilds of Corpus Christi, St. Margaret and Our Lady and other obits to Oakham and Burley churches for the souls of his father and mother.

Richard Ayre (d.1522), gentleman, mayor in 1509, left a close in St. Margaret's for an annual obit in St. Martin's with provision for St. Margaret's gild to take over in St. Margaret's church, if Corpus Christi gild should fail.

John Martyn (d.1524) left a house and two cottages to the gild for a yearly obit and 4d. to each chantry priest. After the death of his wife, his house in Belgrave gate and a close was to go to St. Margaret's gild for an obit, but if that gild should fail, it was to be taken over by Corpus Christi; if they should fail, it was to go to Ulverscroft.

Among other obits, **Thomas Swyke**, draper, mayor of Leicester in 1485 and 1492, left 4s.10d. **Thomas Davy**, grocer, mayor in 1488 and 1489, left 4s.5d. **Thomas Hurst**, pewterer, mayor in 1494, left 5s.9d. **John Parsons**, mayor in 1472 and 1479, left 15s. Other names mentioned included **William Bailey** (8s.9d), **John Whitwell** (5s), **William Chandler** (2s), 3s.8d for "Browning's mass every Wednesday" poses a slight enigma as to who Browning was.

Biographical Details of the Gild's Founders

Sir Ralph FERRERS (d.1392). The youngest son of William (d.1324/5) of Groby. Ralph married Joan, the widow of Sir William Harcourt of Market Bosworth and Ellenhall, Staffs and daughter of Sir Richard Grey of Codnor, Derbyshire. Ralph became "Captain of Calais" and Admiral of the Fleet "from the mouth of the Thames northward and westward". He was the longest survivor of the founders.

John HAYWARD alias Receiver (d.1361). As receiver, 1338-61, he was an

officer of the earl, being an under-Steward but really a treasurer. His salary was £5 a year. He was mayor of Leicester in 1347 and 1348, representing the borough in parliament in the latter year.

Gilbert le AVENER was the earl's bailiff, 1343-50. His surname means "horse provision merchant." He was a prominent jurat, auditing the mayor's accounts. **John PORTER** was the earl's clerk, under steward and receiver, guarding the castle prisoners, collecting certain rents and dues and rendering the annual account for the Castle. He had entered the gild merchant in 1329.

Geoffrey KENT was mayor of Leicester from 1340 to 1342, 1349, 1350 and 1354. He had entered the gild merchant in 1319.

Roger of Knightcote (KNIGHTON), mercer, was Mayor in 1353 and 1356 and a representative in Parliament in 1361. He had entered the gild merchant in 1341.

John MARTYN was mayor in 1334, 1339 and 1344, and he represented the Borough in parliament in 1337, 1353, and 1354. He had entered the gild merchant in 1314/5.

Most of the remaining founders, although of established Leicester families, were probably of less note.

Of those admitted in 1349, William de Humberston was a mercer, John de Peatling was mayor in 1355, and burgess in parliament in 1348, John Cook the younger was a wright, Richard Stafford, a cook and Robert Coventry, a mercer. Among those mentioned in 1389*, William Humberston, cutler, was mayor that year and burgess in parliament, 1378, Rauf Fisher, mayor in 1397, John Cook, burgess in parliament, 1388, and John London, Mayor in 1402, and burgess in 1401.

Note re origin of Corpus Christi day:

Observance of Corpus Christi day was commanded by Urban IV in 1264, the keeping of the feast becoming universal in the western church in the next century.

The Gild of St. Margaret and St. Katharine

This gild, whose name was often shortened to "St. Margaret", had a fuller title "in honour of Jesus (or God), St. Mary, St. Margaret and St. Katharine". It was founded in 1355/6 and was maintained by the substantial body of citizens living in the Bishop's Fee quarter of the town, which stretched from Humberstone Gate to the Abbey Meadow and lay outside the town walls.

There were thirteen founders of the gild - Richard de Beeby, Rauf de Shilton, Robert Parker, 'Master' John Porter, Henry Edmund, William Wain-

**William Humberston and John Cook the younger were wardens that year.*

house, Henry de Baddesle, William de Glen, John de Stokton, John de Knaptoft, John Deekne, John de Sleaford, Henry de Walton. There were to be two superiors to rule and regulate the gild and two priests were to be appointed to celebrate in the church of the Blessed Margaret of Leicester at the altar of the Blessed Mary and of the Saints Margaret and Katharine for all brethren, and sisters and benefactors. Of the founders, only two, John de Stokton and John de Knaptoft, were alive in 1389, when the wardens were Richard Thringston and Nicolas de Isle. The early rules of the gild can be summarised as follows:

- (1) The gild was to meet twice a year on the feasts of St. Margaret (20 July) and St. Katharine (25 November) to hear high mass and likewise to make offering and at the former feast all of the society who wish it "are clothed and eat" and on the morrow they meet to pay dues etc.
- (2) On the death of a member a hearse and torches are to be provided in the parish church where he dies and all brethren and sisters be likewise at obsequies and on the morrow they are to attend at the mass if they have been forewarned by the superiors.
- (3) No member of the brethren was to receive or make any brother or sister, without the consent of the founders, superiors or brethren of the whole society.
- (4) In poverty or infirmity or if loss occurred by robbers or by falsemen or by fire or by water, a member shall have the help of the society.
- (5) If one of the founders were to die, the other founders were to ordain a new founder to complete membership.
- (6) A priest was to celebrate mass in memory of the departed at noon.
- (7) Where a member died within twelve leagues (eighteen miles) of Leicester, the gild was to bring back the body in a procession, each member carrying his torch.

The land in St. Margaret's parish owned by the gild was granted to 12 fees and their heirs to evade the provisions of the Mortmain Act, which prohibited *inter alia* the sale of land to a religious body. The deed was witnessed by the mayor, John Cook the receiver, the earl's bailiff and five jurats. The income from the land was intended for the use of the gild, in St. Margaret's, clear from endorsement. St. Margaret's gild contributed £10, as did the Corpus Christi gild, to help pay for the Leicester Fairs' charter of 1540, which provided two additional fairs each year.

The Gild of the Assumption combined with St. Margaret's gild in 1542, but by this time, although there were two chaplains, who benefitted from the land endowment, it seems that the gild had no livery and probably was not meeting at all. Final dissolution took place in 1550 when its income was £20.10s. 1½d. A clear profit of £7 remained after the deduction of the chaplains' stipends of £10-13s-4d. and other expenses. At a fairly early date, the gild had also rented a hall in (Lower) Churchgate next to the vicarage. The two chaplains each had a chamber in that building, which also possessed a garden and orchard.



Plate 9.

St. Margaret. [*From Painted Glass, c. 1500*].
 St. Margaret, patron of religious learning and women in childbirth,
 carries a book as the symbol of learning and pierces, with a long
 cross, the dragon sent to terrify her into renouncing her faith.



Plate 10. St. Catharine (or St. Katharine). [*From Painted Glass, c. 1500*]. The patroness of secular learning, St. Catharine was both princess and martyr, and she carries a book in addition to a sword, which was a symbol of martyrdom. The spiked wheel was the instrument of her death. Thus, the gild of St. Margaret and St. Katharine was in honour of two saints representing religious and secular learning respectively.

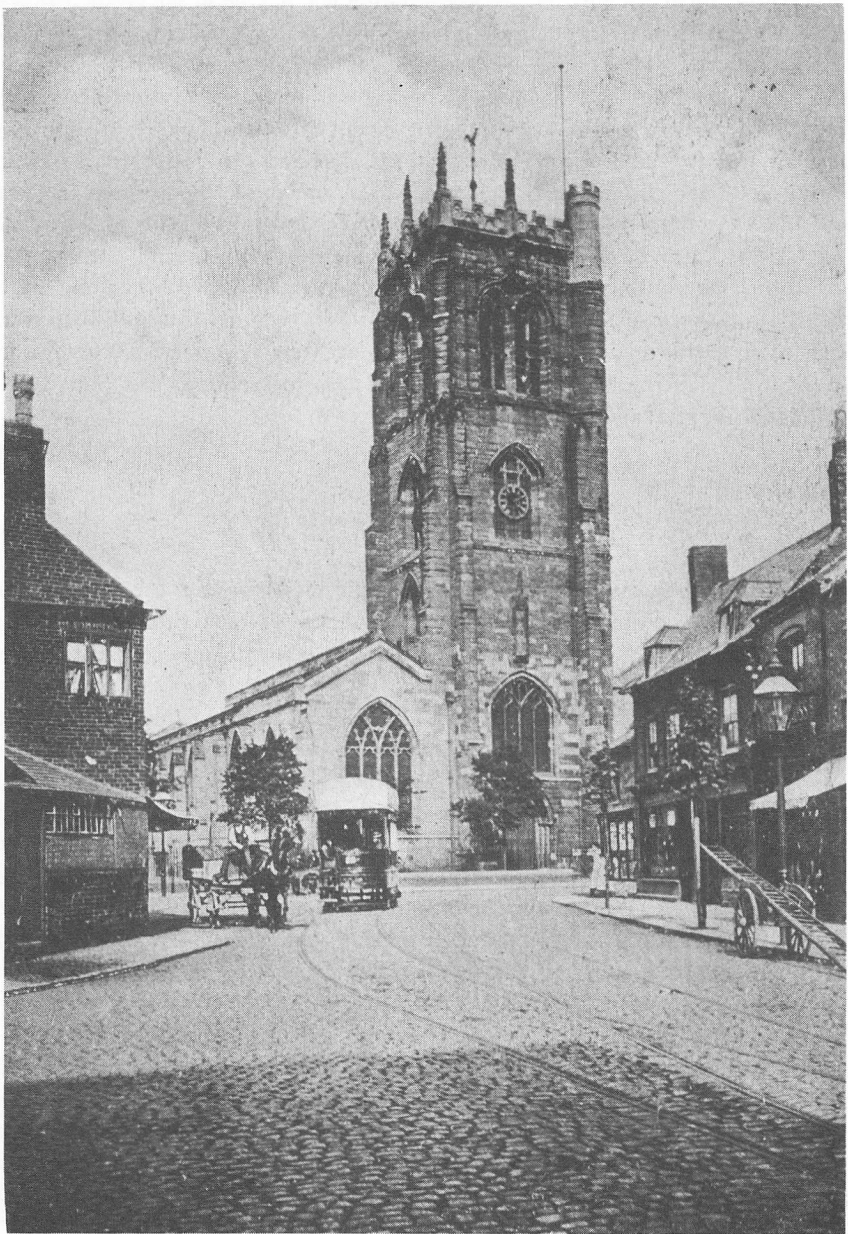


Plate 11.

St. Margaret's church.
[From a post-card, c. 1910, in the author's collection].

Unfortunately, only one pre-Reformation will proved in the Peculiar Court of St. Margaret's survives, but undoubtably, many testators would have left small bequests to the gild. Thomas de Beeby, died 1383, was mayor of Leicester in 1362, and 1368 and was an opulent mercer whose will, proved at Lincoln in 1384, made bequests both to St. Margaret's and St. Michael's gilds. He had also been an M.P. for the Borough in 1351, 1355, 1360 and 1361. Richard de Beeby, a founder of the gild and also a mercer, had represented the Borough in 1341 and 1348. His relationship to Thomas is not clear. Under the will of John Martyne (died 1524) a provision was made that after the death of his wife, his Belgrave Gate House and close as to be transferred to St. Margaret's gild for an obit, each chantry priest receiving 4d. but if they failed, it was to go to Corpus Christi gild. Richard Ayre, mayor in 1509, left a close in St. Margaret's parish for an obit in St. Martin's church, but St. Margaret's gild was to take over the obit if the Corpus Christi gild failed to keep it.

The Gild of St. George

Very little is known about the founding of this gild and it may only have come into being in the fifteenth century; indeed, there is no written reference to it before 1499, apart from a later addition, probably unauthentic, to a town ordinance of 1467. The gild was attached to St. Martin's church, and had its chapel (now used as a Regimental chapel) at the west end of the south aisle. It may have originated as an off-shoot of the Corpus Christi gild, but could not compare in importance with it, and it remained a poor and unimportant body, save for its apparent *raison d'être*, the civic and religious procession, known as the "Riding of the George," which was in reality a dramatic presentation of the St. George and the dragon legend. This took place not on 23 April as might have been expected, but on any day between then and Whitsunday, the date to be announced in advance by the master of the gild. In contemporary words he had cause "for the George to be ridden according to ancient custom between St. George's day and Whitsunday." The altar of the chapel had a vowe or canopy over it and the life-sized figure of St. George (steel-clad), mounted on his richly-clothed steed was a focal point of the chapel, which also had a hanging painted cloth, and/or possibly a reredos, depicting the saint slaying the dragon. This cloth was also thrown over the coffin of a deceased member of the gild during his funeral. For the riding of the George ceremony, the figures of the Saint and horse were mounted on a moveable platform while the dragon, green with red jaws, was large enough to be "occupied" by two men. Members of the gild probably carried banners depicting the cross of St. George and the whole affair, often attended by county gentry who were given gifts of wine, was one of the



Plate 12.

St. George. [From *Painted Glass*, c. 1500].
 St. George, the patron saint of England, slew a dragon and rescued a Christian princess, according to legend. In this 'realisation' he is raising his sword to slay a two-headed dragon, which he has already transfixd with his lance.

most festive days in the Leicester calendar.

It is with regret that, year after year, one finds that the George was not ridden, and the cause must have been partly financial. The procession involved substantial outlay on equipment and clothes and repairs and maintenance often had to be put in hand each year. The resources of the gild were slender and they clearly looked to the town for assistance, yet the Borough itself had precious little surplus. However, in 1538 the town did pay four shillings for "dressing the dragon". Other items of expenditure also appear in the Churchwarden's accounts of St. Martin's, suggesting that the parish was also looked to for support. Between 1531 and 1543 the George was not ridden in five of the thirteen years. The elected Forty-eight members of the town council had to pay towards the expenses of the procession from 1499. The annual subscription was 6d. for those who had been chamberlains and 4d. for those who had not held that office with the added exhortation to pay more if they were able. It is not clear what amount the mayor and the Twenty-Four were to pay. A further enactment in 1523 required the mayor to levy a heavy fine on the master of the gild, if default was made in not riding the George within the required dates. If the mayor himself was negligent, he and his chamberlains were liable to be fined 26s.8d and 6s.8d respectively which was to go to the benefit of the gild; there was a further retrospective charge of 26s.8d. on each master negligent since the George was last ridden. In 1531 the Corporation agreed that for "dyveres considderasion Master Kyristian Clughtt shud nott Ryde ye George" that year, but he was still required to pay the fine of 26s.8d. Two years later, Mr. Garsett was also charged, but a few years later Mr. Thomas Cressy was required to pay 40 shillings and a similar amount was paid on 5 October 1543 by "Mr. Mey".

Robert Goldsmyth mended the gild's "chalis and pix" for 16d. in 1544, but three years later with the first change of religion, the horse was sold for 12d and Simon Nix, a churchwarden that year, paid 3s.10d for the floor "and the vente" that the George stood on (presumably the moveable platform). With the return of the old religion the various items sold were probably reclaimed because there is mention of the dressing and mending of the harness in 1553. There is however no record of whether the George was ridden again.

The gild is known to have possessed some sort of hall to the east of St. Martin's church "beyond the Maiden Head". The Maiden's Head or Queen's Head was a hostelry. Some older writers associated Roger Wygston's presumed house (18 Highcross Street), which is now a Costume Museum, with the Gild, but this seems highly improbable.

The Gild of the Assumption of the Virgin (Blessed) Mary

This gild, sometimes referred to as "Our Lady's gild" or simply as "The gild of the Assumption" was founded prior to 1346. Its main object was to provide a chaplain to officiate at the gild's altar in All Saints church, Highcross Street.

Amongst the gild's ordinances were:-

- (1) Each member was to make a contribution to any member troubled by infirmity and unable to support himself for his sufficient sustenance.
- (2) If any member be despoiled by robbers or impoverished by fire or other misfortune, so that he could not by his own goods be relieved "they would all make contribution for the relief of the impoverished," unless it had arisen by his own fault or negligence.
- (3) If any of the brethren should die within the town all and singular will be present at his funeral and mass and make offering for his soul. And everyone of them was to pay one penny to be bestowed upon the poor for his soul. And if he should die outside the town then within three days after his death has been intimated they will cause mass to be solemnly celebrated and to pay as declared. And because many were too remiss in their payments whereby others were overmuch burdened . . . everyone should be sworn faithfully to pay their contribution.
- (4) Two were to be elected to hire suitable chaplains and collect their salaries and other payments and to faithfully account for receipts and expenses.
- (5) All and singular were to be present at mass on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary (15 August) and there make offering and eat and drink together and to pay dues.

Since there were no lands attaching to the gild and the yearly contributions were found burdensome, it became common practice for members to own jointly acquired tenements and the rents were assigned with the tenants paying rents direct to the collectors, each member then only having to find the balance of his dues.

William Morton and Geoffrey Clerk were wardens of the gild in 1389 at the time of the Augmentation Certificate, when it was stated that only three of the original twenty founders were still alive. These were Henry Leadbeater, Robert Poutrel and William Edelyn. The original founders' intent was that "seeing that except the vicar there were no chaplains in the church, they agreed among themselves that every one of them would give one penny every Sunday until they should have a vestment (i.e. a set of vestments) a "challis" and a missal and other ornaments of the altar . . . one chaplain was to celebrate for them and for the souls of the departed". Each was to pay a proportion of his salary. So many entered the gild that they were able to support two chaplains.

On 20 June 1361 the owner of a messuage in St. Margaret's parish paid 3d. to Sir John the Barker, chaplain, John de Peckleton, John de Stafford, Robert Poutrell, David the Leadbeater, Henry the Leadbeater, their heirs and assigns for use of St. Mary in the church of All Saints."

Although the gild was still in existence in 1528, it was later combined with that of St. Margaret and St. Catharine.

Geoffrey Clerk (alias Okeham) was a mercer and mayor of Leicester in both 1391 and 1392. He represented the borough in parliament five times between 1384-94 and William Morton served with him in parliament in 1388.

One of the most notable persons associated with this gild was the bell-founder John de Stafford, mayor of Leicester in 1367, 1370, 1371 and 1381 and four times Burgess in parliament.



Plate 13.

St. Mary de Castro church.
[From a post-card, c. 1908, in the author's collection].

The Gild of Holy Trinity

This parochial gild, with its altar in the south aisle of St. Mary de Castro, was founded at a late date, not much before 1495. The gild chapel in that year was provided with "new desks with little images before them for the expense whereof collections were made of the parishioners every Sunday successively that year."

The gild, though small, was relatively rich, due to the involvement of local gentry such as Henry, Lord Hastings (who provided venison for the feast in some years), George Villiers of Scraftoft and Thomas Ashby of Quenby. William Wigston acted as a witness in 1518/9 and had given 10 shillings for prayers for his father's soul in 1512. One of the gild's stewards in 1519 was Richard Brokesby, dean of Hastings, chaplain to King Henry VII.

The gild had been founded by Sir Richard Sacheverel, died 1553, knight, of Grange House (which stood on the south side of the Newarke) and Ratcliffe-on-Soar, Nottinghamshire, and "the good lady Hungerford" his wife, who also gave the Chapter seal. There was a steward and two wardens but the number of the latter was increased to four after 1511, in which year John Whatton, ironmonger, Richard Morgan (see *infra*), Thomas Grene, farmer and John Marston, sherman officiated.

There were four annual gatherings, largely for dealing with expenses, of which the priest's stipend totalling 4 marks (54s.8d) was the biggest item. A dinner and supper (attended by 56 and 40 persons respectively in 1514), was given annually on Trinity Sunday with breakfast next morning not as well attended, after which the accounts were presented and new officers chosen. The cook for the various meals received a payment (5 shillings in some years), out of which he had to pay for any help he had employed. Among the items of food and drink (in modernised spelling) were:-

A dozen ale 20d.	15 capons 5s.	A gallon and a quart
A fat wether 2s.4d.	12 capons 4s.	of honey 10d.
7 lambs 7s.	30 chickens 1s.11d.	Half a qt. of malt 2s.
14 goslings 4s.8d.	2 gallons of	A bushel and a peck
14 geese 4s.3d.	of cream 8d.	of wheatmeal 4s.3d.
	4 gallons of milk 4d.	

At the 1509 feast there was an item "bayffe and leggs of moton for pyes" and a quarter of lamb and mutton was provided for the breakfast. When the founders attended the dinner in 1514 they gave £20 and vessels "to place on the table" were borrowed from other gilds - The Lady gild, St. John's and St. Margaret's. That same year a table (i.e. a tablet) was ordered to be made with the names of all the brothers and sisters of the gild, quick and dead. This was to stand on the Trinity altar, so that the priest could pray for each by name. In 1511 it was recounted that each of the brethren and sisters should be charitable and loving to all "since (they said) God was charity, and he who remained in charity, remained in God, and God who granted that would rule and conquer for ever". The gild's funds increased from a surplus of £9-13s-4d in 1511 to £20 by 1517.

It was only to be expected that many testators from St. Mary's parish

would leave money and other gifts to the gild. Richard Morgan, d. 1529, servant of Lord Hastings, left £6-13s-4d. to the priest. Alice Chamberlayne, widow, died 1525, left two pewter plates and a dish, whereas Sir Robert Stacy, died 1531, left his best silver spoon and candlesticks, a broad cloth five yards long, a towel "white with blue thread", a wool jacket and a pewter plate. Margaret Hering died 1518, left a towel. Pure monetary gifts included 12d. each from William Jackson, slater, died 1517 and Richard Ingulward, died 1528 and 6s.8d. each from Richard Boldman, died 1520 and George Bockley, died 1526.

OTHER GILDS

The Gild of St. John

The full title of this gild was "The Gild of St. John the Baptist" or, as it was very occasionally given, "The Gild of St. John the Evangelist and St. John the Baptist". It was attached to the Hospital of St. John, which was sited in Free-school Lane. The gild was founded by the foeffees of Peter le Sadler and his wife for the benefactors of the Hospital in 1355. Robert, son of Robert de Sutton, the gild's chaplain, in his will of 1442/3 directed to be buried in the church of John the Baptist. A reconstruction of the ground plan of the church was possible when the Town Gaol, which later stood on the site, was demolished in 1792. The suggested length of the name was 41 feet by a width of 17 feet 4 inches which would have made the church bigger than many village parish churches.

Richard Wigston was a steward of the gild in 1478, agreeing with Sir Robert Sileby and the brethren of the hospital that he and his successors "would find . . . a good and able priest to say or sing mass in the gild chapel "and on two days in the week in the chapel of St. John "at the town-end". This referred to the Spital-house on the Belgrave Road. The priest was to pray every holy day, especially for the souls of Peter le Sadler and his wife and was to have board or forty shillings in lieu, and such balance of salary as the steward agreed. William Walton the 'curate' was assessed on income of £4 when the property of the hospital passed to the Corporation in 1589.

Initially the chaplain was appointed in full Portmoot by the mayor on the master's recommendation and the charter was kept by the town. However, by 1484 the dean and canons of St. Mary in the Newarke are referred to as the proprietors or guardians of St. John's hospital.

The Gild of St. Michael

This gild was attached to the unimportant parish church of St. Michael, which was sited between the parishes of All Saints and St. Peter. The gild was



Plate 14

Mediaeval wall-painting (now lost) in St. Catharine's chapel, St. Martin's church, Leicester.

[Reconstruction by W. A. Barrett in *North's Chronicle of the Church of St. Martin, Leicester*, (published 1866)].

founded before 1361 when a house in Belgrave Gate was conveyed to Sir William of Birstall and Robert of Belgrave, two brethren of the gild.

Thomas Beeby, who died c1383, left money to this gild and to that of St. Margaret. Thomas, late chaplain in the church, was charged by the full Portmoot in 1378/9 with trespass and distraint took place "by a tabard and slop and a bed price 20 shillings". The church had no vicar by 1487 and probably disappeared very soon after.

The Gild of Our Lady beyond the Water

Very little is known of this gild, which is believed to have been attached to the Austin Friars on the very edge of mediaeval Leicester beyond West Bridge. Leicester Museums have carried out extensive excavations on the site of the Friary over a period of years, and the foundations of a larger than expected church was discovered. Occasional references to this gild occur in pre-Reformation wills including that of Thomas Smyth, draper, mayor of Leicester in 1517, who died in 1522.

Most references to "Our Lady's Gild" without the expression "beyond the water" probably relate to the Gild of the Assumption in All Saints' church.

The Gild of St. Katharine

Doubt must be expressed as to whether there was ever a separate gild of this name (as a few early writers thought) or whether the name was used as an alternative to St. Margaret's gild, of which full title St. Katharine comprised a part, from the foundation of that gild.

St. Martin's church had a St. Katharine's chapel and a mediaeval wall-painting depicting the saint was discovered during restoration in 1847, although it was not preserved.

The Gilds of St. Cross and St. Thomas

These gilds, as well as those of Corpus Christi and St. Katharine are mentioned in the will of John Loveday, mayor of Leicester in 1400, who died in 1419/20, but nothing is known about them. An older dedication of St. Martin's church was to St. Cross or Holy Rood.

The many good histories of Leicester have tended to dismiss the religious gilds in a single paragraph or in a couple of pages, whilst other more detailed accounts concentrate on individual gilds and are clearly not intended for the general reader. It is hoped therefore that the present modest effort will fill a much-needed gap. Previously the only reasonably concise comprehensive coverage was to be found in the introduction to Volume II of the Borough Records (see Bibliography), published in 1901.