



Durham City Freemen



Butchers' Guild

500th Anniversary 1520 - 2020

BUTCHERS' GUILD

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Foreword

In 2016 the 'Freemen' established a History Group and embarked on a project to explore the history and heritage of their eight remaining guilds/companies, using a wide range of archive material, together with artefacts discovered and recovered from the bed of the River Wear beneath Elvet Bridge, by Gary Bankhead. The group comprised of both 'Freemen' and local people who had an interest and passion for the heritage of their city.

Their work does not purport to be an academic study, but has been created for the general public, with the aim of shedding light on the history of the guilds/companies, sustaining the heritage of the Durham City Freeman for future generations.

The trade guilds/companies and Freeman held power and influence and did much to shape the city and its heritage for over 300 years.

I hope you find the work of the History Group both interesting and informative.

Eric Bulmer
Chairman of the History Group

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to the members of the History Group and in particular, to Linda McAloon, John Reeves and Eric Bulmer for their major contribution in researching the Butchers' Guild.

The creation and production of this booklet could not have been achieved without the support of Liz Bregazzi, County Records Office,; Chris Caple and Gemma Lewis of the Archaeology Department, Durham University,; Francis Gotto from the Palace Green Library,; Roger Norris former Chairman of the Trustees of the Durham City Freeman and Gary Bankhead, for his guidance and access to artefacts he discovered and recovered from the bed of the River Wear beneath Elvet Bridge.

Finally, special thanks must go to Geoff Kitson the official photographer of the Freeman for providing images and John Booth, the Warden of the Butchers' Company and Freeman website manager, who assembled the research material for the production of this booklet.

Introduction

The guilds or companies of Durham City stretch back over 500 years and this year marks the special anniversary of the Butchers Company that was recognised with its right to trade in 1520.

There were historically 3 main types of guilds in the Middle Ages, merchant guilds, craft guilds and religious guilds, but only the craft guilds have survived. In medieval times groups of skilled craftsmen in the same trade formed themselves into guilds. A guild would ensure anything made by its members was up to standard and sold at a fair price.

The first Charter (granted to the citizens in 1179 by Bishop Hugh Pudsey) granting the citizens to be ‘free from’ in-tolls and out-tolls for their merchandise, hence the term ‘freemen’. The first recorded Charter granted to a guild was the Weavers and Websters in 1450 and by the late 15th century there were 16 guilds in Durham.

The two primary concerns for the guilds were with the trades, where they endeavoured to maintain standards of workmanship (now known as quality control) and keep a local monopoly of the trade for their own members, by control of the admission of apprentices.

An apprentice to a guild was trained by a guild member, who would expect to be paid for this by the boy’s parents. An apprentice could live with his master for up to 14 years, but seven

years was more common. The ultimate certification as a 'master of their craft' was the production of a 'masterpiece' at the end of his apprenticeship. Once an apprenticeship was over, the young person became a 'journeyman'. A journeyman continued to learn his craft but from different masters and was now paid.

All charters stipulated certain rules known as 'Ordinaries'. Common to all guilds was that, "*they must take part in the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi*" (1st Thursday after Trinity Sunday). The guilds, with their banners displayed, went in procession from the Market Place to Palace Green, where they enacted religious plays.

Another Ordinary stated that, "*no guild would permit a Scotsman to be an apprentice*", no doubt a reaction to the continuing conflict with our northern neighbour. This rule no longer applies.

Original 16 Guilds

The object of Guilds was to maintain high standards of workmanship through apprenticeships, and to engender good fellowship in society and religion. The following 16 Guilds were established in Durham:

Weavers & Websters (1450)

Cordwainers (1458)

Barber Surgeons, Waxmakers, Ropers and Stringers (1468)

Skinners and Glovers (1507)

Butchers (1520)

Goldsmiths, Plumbers, Pewterers, Potters, Painters, Glaziers and Tin Plate Workers (1532)

Barkers and Tanners (1547)

Drapers and Tailors (1549)

Merchants incorporating Grocers (1345), Mercers (1393),

Salts (1394), Ironmongers (1464) and Haberdashers (1467) (1561)

Fullers and Feltmakers (1565)

Curriers and Tallow Chandlers (1570)

Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviments, Plasterers and Bricklayers (1594)

Blacksmiths, Lorimers, Locksmiths, Cutlers, Bladesmiths and Girdlers (1610)

Saddlers and Upholsterers (1659)

Carpenters, Joiners, Wheelwrights, Sawyers and Coopers (1661)

Dyers and Listers (1667)

Of these only the Barbers, Butchers, Cordwainers, Curriers, Drapers, Joiners, Masons and Plumbers survive.

BUTCHERS' GUILD

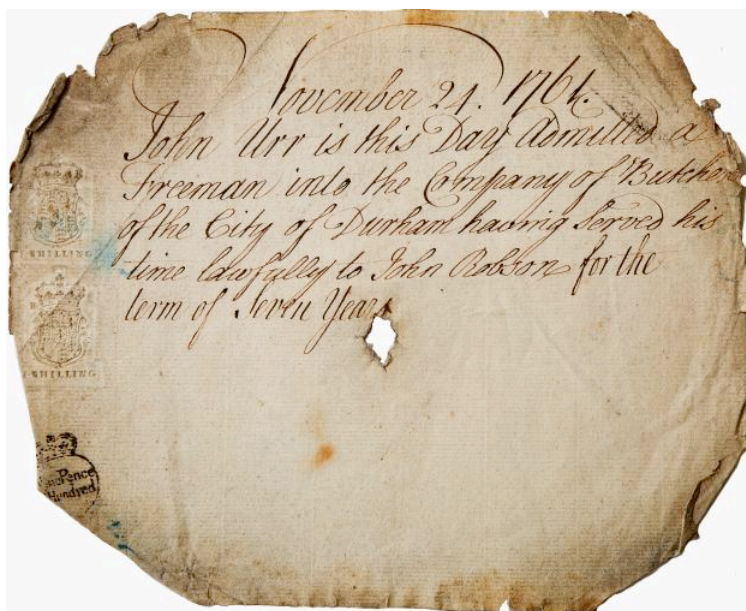
Early Admission as a Freeman

Initially, freedom (to become a Freeman) could only be obtained in two ways either by Servitude or Patrimony.

Servitude

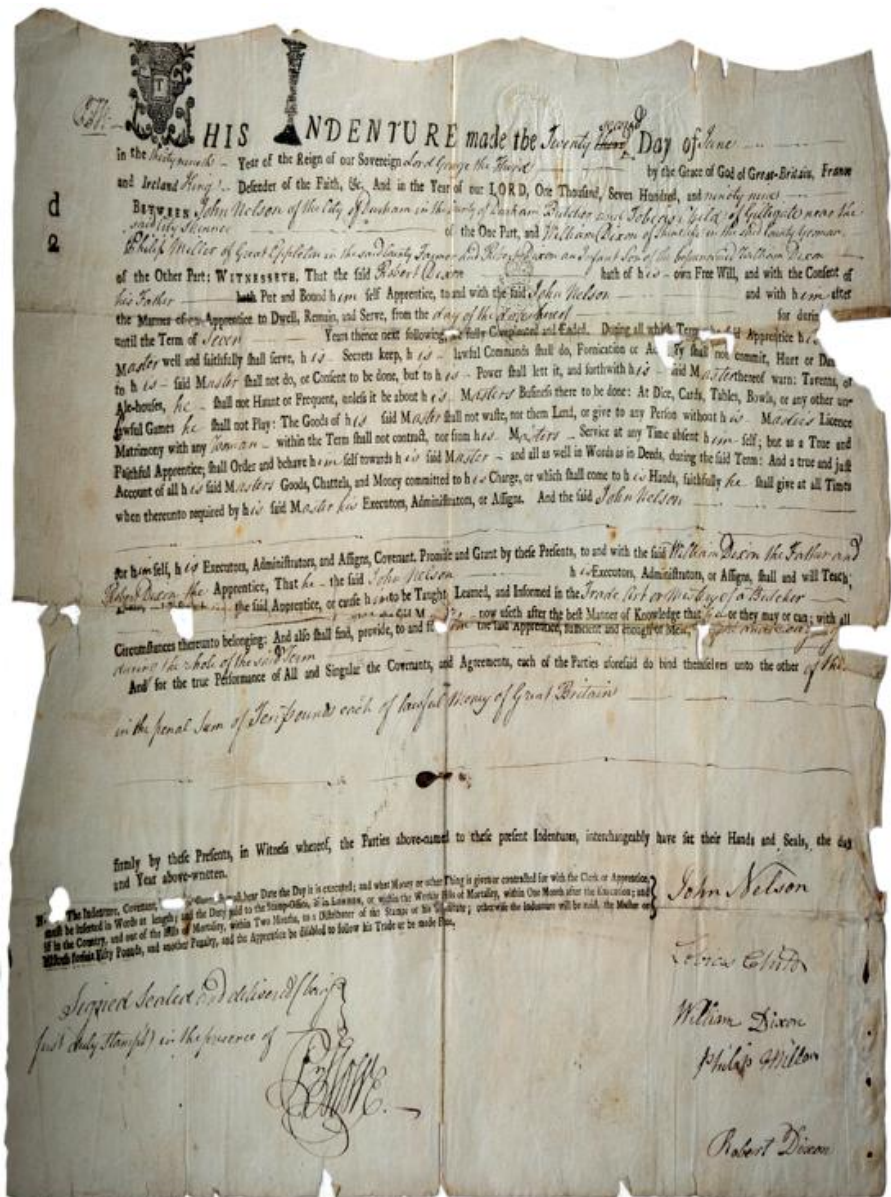
Serving a 7 year apprenticeship (now only 3 years).

This was usually confirmed in a deed (written contract) by which an apprentice was bound by indenture to a master. Once he had completed his apprenticeship he was admitted to the Company/Guild of his craft.



Document dated November 24th 1761 confirming John Urr's admission as a Freeman into the Company of Butcher's after serving a seven year apprenticeship to John Robinson.

DURHAM CITY FREEMEN



Robert Dixon Indenture 20th June 1799
Indentured Apprentice to John Nelson (Butcher of Gilesgate
near Durham for seven years.)

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Patrimony

Conferred on the eldest son of a Freeman (today all sons and since 2010, daughters can also be admitted).

Customary Freedom

Occasionally individuals (who do not qualify as above) are invited to become Freeman whose influence on behalf of the guilds is worth having.

During medieval times and until 1835, the Freeman had authority and power. They were the only citizens that could vote for or be elected as Mayor. Great Reform Act (1832) and the Municipal Corporation Act (1835) extended electoral franchise, removing the power of the Freeman overnight.

Although stripped of their authority, the Freeman have retained three historical privileges;

- To erect a stall in the marketplace free of charge.
- To graze their livestock on the Sands.
- The use of the Guildhall free of charge.

The functions of the Freeman and guilds today are largely ceremonial, notwithstanding their continuing support for the community and charitable causes.

Guilds - Company Arms

Evidence of the history and heritage of the guilds can be found in the Durham Town Hall. In the roof of the Main Hall on the hammer head beams are the painted coats of arms of the 16 original Guilds. In the Guildhall, (the historical home of the Guilds and Freeman) is housed a collection of silverware and 18th century watercolour interpretations of crests of a number of Guilds.



Crest of the Butchers' Company

Displayed in the Guildhall, Durham City Town Hall

BUTCHERS' GUILD

The winged bull of the crest and supporters allude to St Luke the patron saint of the Company, who is represented in the symbolism by a winged calf or ox. The bundles of Holly on the shield (in blue) are not true holly but 'knee holly' or butchers broom. The shoots of which were turned into bundles and sold to butchers who use them for sweeping their blocks.

The Company's motto is taken from Psalm VIII, 'Thou has put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen. Another example of the religious links with the Guild.

The bottom half of the shield depicts three bulls heads and crossed pole axes.



Arms of the Butchers' Company

Displayed in the main hall roof

The Initial Charter

The Initial Charter

The ‘Butchers’ are one of the oldest guilds throughout the length and breadth of the country.

The Ordinary of the Company of Butchers and Fleshhewers (Fleshers) in Durham, was dated 22nd June 1520 and it’s 500th anniversary coincides with the publication of this booklet.

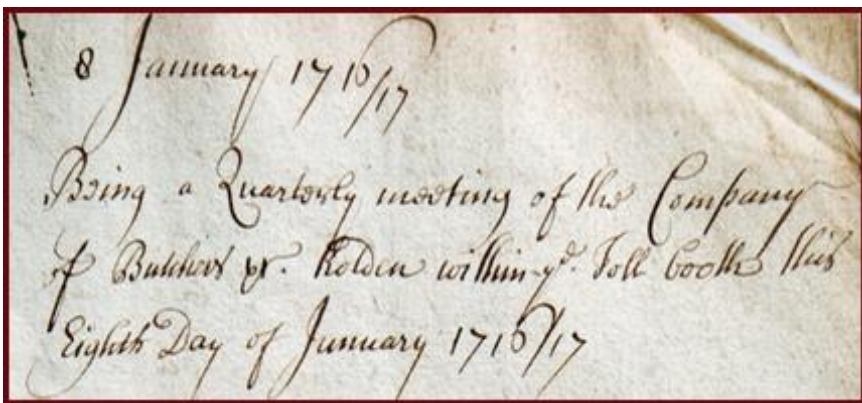
The Ordinary contained regulations under which the Company (the Freeman) were allowed to operate. The rule that apprentices were to receive their freedom only at the Lent meeting was modified by a clause “*except a freeman’s son*”. No member was to take a second apprentice till the first had served his full time. Other regulations were made in later years.

“No brother shall take an apprentice till he has himself been a freeman for two years” (12th January 1668).

One of the rules was that *"no brother should slay any flesh on Thursday after 12 o’clock nor on Sunday before 1 o’clock"*. Anyone contravening these rules were liable to fines, which were payable to both the Company and the Bishop.

BUTCHERS' GUILD

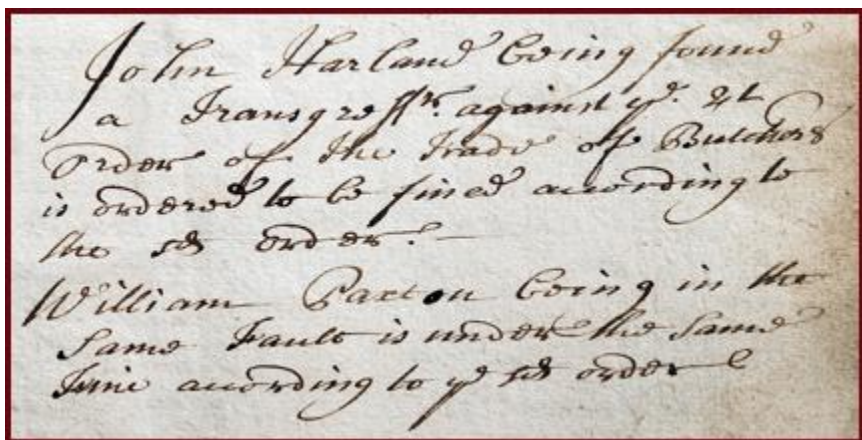
The following archive illustrates the practice, which transcribes as,



8 January 1716/17
Being a Quarterly meeting of the Company
of Butchers of Roden within y^e Toll booth this
Eighth Day of January 1716/17

“8 January 1716/17”

“Being a quarterly meeting of the Company of Butchers holden
within the Toll booth this eighth day of January 1716/17”



John Harland being found
a Transgressor against y^e 4th
Order of the Trade of Butchers
is ordered to be fined according to
the sd order.
William Paxton being in the
same Fault is under the same
fine according to y^e sd order

“John Harland being a transgressor against the 4th order of the
trade of Butchers is ordered to be fined according the said order”

“William Paxton being in the same fault is under the same fine
according to the said order”



"Trade of Butchers It is agreed by ye major part of ye Company, the said Michael Foster is to acknowledge his second offence before his admittance into the said Company as a Freeman."

:Memorandum that at ye same time Tho: Laybourne is fined for keeping open 2 shoppes.

2nd Day of Aprill 1717

Being a Quarterly meeting of ye Company of Butchers within ye Tolbooth in ye City of Durham."

The fining of Freeman who transgressed the rules assisted in maintaining standards, but also providing much needed funds to support the guild.

It was the custom of each company at the annual meeting for the outgoing warden to hand to his successor what funds remained in his hands, but in 1675 and several succeeding years all that there was to hand over consisted of "a copper sixpence and three bits of a broken groat". This at any rate was better than the state of affairs in 1823 when there was a balance due to the outgoing warden, and it was agreed that a shilling should be deducted every half year from each member's share of the moor rents till the deficit was paid off.

Butchers in Medieval Times

Butchers were one of the earliest crafts to be given the right/ permission to trade and eventually to be conferred with a Charter to operate within a given set of rules (ordinances).

They also formed some of the largest guilds throughout the country and in Durham in 1762, they had 181 members.



Butchers in Medieval Times

It was during medieval times that the profession of butchery came into the fore, as preparing the animal and cutting the meat into proper cuts without waste whilst providing high levels of hygiene was paramount to the tastes and demands of customers. Whilst butchery had become popular around the world and evidence found in ancient Rome that showed how the Romans carved and dressed meats, the earliest reference in recent history was in London, with The Worshipful Company of Butchers' Guild which was formed as early as 975AD.

Come the onset of the Middle Ages, butchery as a trade and institution, again made a step forward. Medieval butchers were headed by the Butcher's Guild and regulated by assizes. Selling poor quality meat, or falsifying weights, was punishable, with severe penalties. Butchers found selling rotten meat would be dragged through the streets, covered in excrement, made to drink sour beer and slammed in the stocks, although there is no known evidence of this occurring in Durham.

A feudal system meant that meat was largely procured for nobility and those with wealth. If you were a peasant, it was largely pottage and porridge. With perhaps scraps of bacon. For those who could afford it, there was a vast amount of meat available, with a strong emphasis on game and exotic birds, such as starlings, peacocks and swans. They would eat it all.

In terms of the art of butchery, some in the trade enjoyed the same level of respect that a physician or doctor would expect, given their superior knowledge of anatomy. But, paradoxically, they were also seen as slightly shady. Given the unhygienic state of most cities and towns in the Middle Ages, the butcher's reputation was also constantly under fire.

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With the rapid development of towns and increasing populations moving in from the countryside, there was a significant shift toward wholesale procurement, whole carcass, butchery and secondary, small scale processing to meet demand. Butchery suddenly became commercial and the butcher's shop was born.

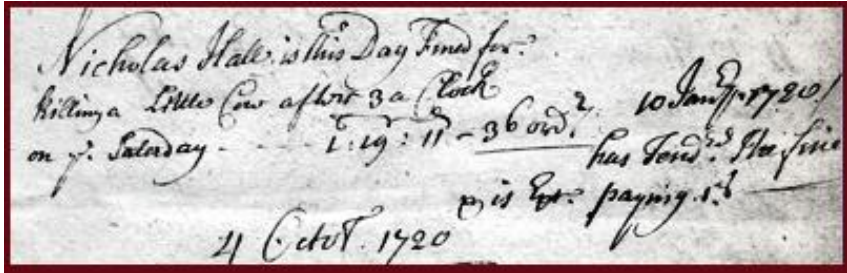


There was an emphasis that nothing was wasted but according to the archaeological and historical record, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that distribution was undertaken by various specialists, alongside regular meat merchants, you would have your butcher who dealt specifically with heads and hooves. Some butchers would sell nothing but bone marrow, others just offal.

DURHAM CITY FREEMEN

Butchers were often referred to as Fleshewers (Fleshers), and their name became interchangeable within their trade.

Killing of animals often took place within the street, adjacent to where the booths(shops) were situated, therefore strict rules were applied regarding when the slaughter of animals could take place and stringent fines were applied to those Freeman who transgressed.



An entry in a document from a meeting of the Butchers and Fleshewers Company in 1720 states that “*Nicholas Hall is this day fined for killing a little cow after 3 o'clock on a Saturday £1.19 11p*”.

There was evidence of an abattoir at the top of Vennel Passage in what is now Saddler Street, which supports this theory as the slope would discharge any fluid matter directly into the street.

The booths from which they operated had sloping floors which allowed for the drainage of blood and offal to run into the gutter in the street. These sloping floors can still be seen in the shops in the ‘Shambles’ in York.



The Vennel Saddler Street Durham City

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Not only would Fleshewergate in Durham City be an unpleasant place to walk, the smell must have been appalling, especially in hot weather.

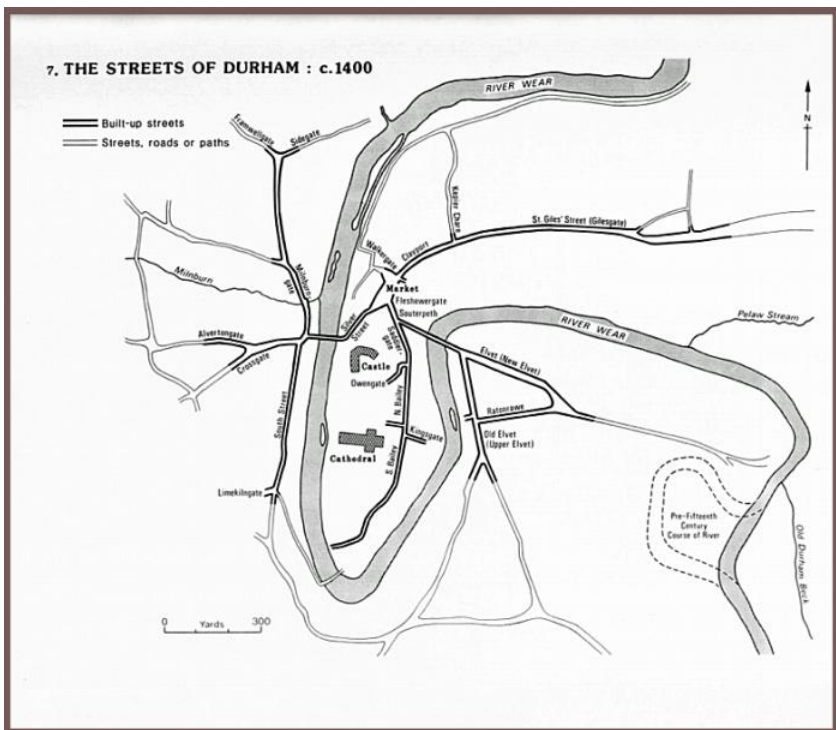
Even in the 1960s animals were still offloaded at the junction of Elvet Bridge, New Elvet and Old Elvet and corralled through a passage to an abattoir behind the Half Moon Inn.

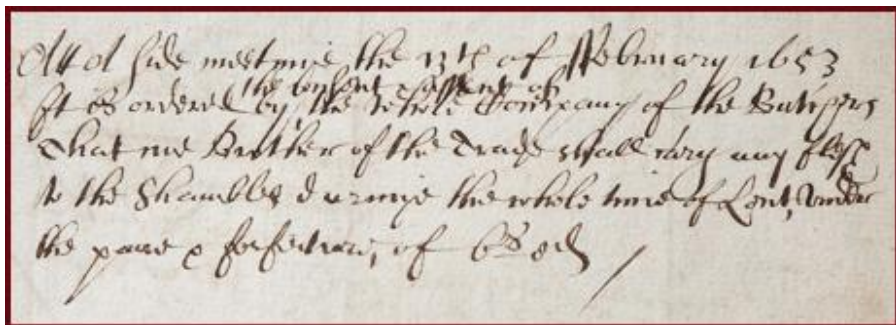


The Half Moon Inn Old Elvet Durham City

Medieval Streets of Durham

Saddler Street as we know today was previously known as Fleshwergate (the street of flesh hewers - Fleshers) and was sometimes referred to as the ‘Shambles, the ‘street of butchers’, acknowledging it as the home of the Butchers' Guild. ‘Shambles’ is derived from the mediaeval ‘Shamel’ or booth, because butcher shops had benches outside to display their meat. Perhaps the most famous shambles locally is that in York, although it is no longer the street of butchers.





The Shambles in Durham were recorded in a document dated 1653 where the following rule was stated, *"At a Guild meeting the 13th of February 1653 it is ordered by the consent and agreement of the whole Company of Butchers that no brother of the trade shall carry any flesh to the Shambles during the whole time of Lent, under the pain and forfeiture of 6s.8p"*

Fleshewergate - Fleshergate - Saddler St

Fleshewergate changed in time to become Fleshergate and eventually Saddler Street. In Pigott's Directory of Durham 1829 there were listed 20 butchers in Durham, of which 4 were in Fleshergate. By 1834 there is no mention of Fleshergate in the directory and 3 of the 4 butchers were listed in Saddler Street.

Fleshewergate extended from the Market Place to where now stands the Magdalen steps. Keep to the right and you enter Saddlergate where the saddlemakers traded and turning left, takes you towards Elvet Bridge via Souterpeth the place of the shoemakers (Souters) which were part of the Cordwainers Guild.



Entrance to Saddler Street formerly Fleshergate leading from the Market Place



The junction at the Magdalen steps - keep to the right and you enter Saddlergate where the saddlemakers traded and turning left, takes you towards Elvet Bridge via Souterpeth the place of the shoemakers (Souters) which were part of the Cordwainers Guild.

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At the entrance to Fleshergate from the Market Place was '*Poultry Corner*'. Other street names in the centre of the city were associated with tradecraft these included Walkergate (cloth workers) and Silver Street believed to be associated with the jewellery trade.

It is interesting to note that the leatherworkers were adjacent to the butchers, where hides provided the basic material for their craft. The Curriers, another guild that processed the animal hides, were based elsewhere, no doubt due to the foul smell created by the process of preparing hides.

The suffix-gate is derived from old Norse, 'geata', for street.



Silver Street looking towards the Market Place from Framwellgate Bridge

Notable Freeman of the Butchers Company

Sir John Duck, the Butcher Baronet of Durham (1634-1691)

He began life in Durham as a butcher's apprentice. Initially no one would employ him because he could not give any details of his place of birth (it is believed that he was a Yorkshireman). He came to the city of Durham, to be a butcher's apprentice and even this humble situation, he seem to be the denied; for there is an order in one of the old books of the Incorporated Company of Butchers of the City of Durham, to the following effect:- *"Md. (Memorandum) that on Tuesday the 12th January, 1656-1657 being one of the quarter meetinge daye, Robert Blunt and Clement Ladler, wardens of this Company of Butchers, gave John Heslopp warning that from henceforth hee forbear to sett John Duche on work in the trade of butcher upon payne default 39s, 11d."*

Previous to this, however, he had married his master's daughter. In the parish register of St. Nicholas church in the City of Durham, among the marriages, dated 30 July, 1665, the entry – *"John Duck and Ann Heslopp, both of this parish of St. Nicholas in Durham"*.

The legend is that his fortune is said to have been founded after he had been cast out by the Guild of Butchers and was walking dejectedly by the River Wear when a raven dropped from its bill a gold coin (sometimes called a golden Jacobus crown) at the young John Duck's feet.

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A painting depicting the legend believed to date from the 17th Century was discovered concealed behind wood paneling over a fireplace in Luke's café at the top of Silver Street, on the left hand side as you entered the marketplace, that was the former home (mansion) of John Duck.



Image reproduced with permission of Andrew Ward

Jack Luke ran the café, based in John Duck's former mansion in Silver Street from 1943-63. It was part of a family business which also included bakery shops and a restaurant.

The Silver Street house was demolished in 1963 and the painting was found concealed behind wood panelling over the fireplace. The fascinating painting shows the raven with the coin and John Duck by the river, with his mansions in the background.

John Duck as a butcher certainly rose to the top of his trade and subsequently became a very successful businessman with fortunate investments, in houses, land and collieries, and rising to become the wealthiest burgess in Durham to be numbered among the landed proprietors of the County of Durham.

In 1680 he served the office of Mayor of the City of Durham. The same year the rejected apprentice of 1656-7 received the freedom of the Butcher's Company. The record of his admission to the Company is not dated, but it was in the period of 1680-1681 and is to the following "*John Duck, esq., Mayor of the city of Durham, is admitted with the consent of the Company a freeman of the Fraternity of Butchers, and have paid for such his said admission 13s. 4d*". Through marriage he also acquired the estate of Haswell. For loyalty to the Jacobean Government he was rewarded with a Baronet in 1687 and awarded the prefix of Sir (John Duck of Haswell on the Hill).

He died on 26th August 1691 aged 59, and was buried in the middle aisle of the chancel of St Margaret's church, Crossgate, Durham City.

Duke of Northumberland

In 1762 the receipts of the company came to £46 16s. 6½ d, In 1770 they were only £2 15s. 11½ d. Being in difficulties in the following year, due to heavy expenses at that time they sold their plate, three

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silver cups, known as the bull, the cow and the calf, and three silver tankards, the six pieces weighing 91 oz. 3 dwt., for £23 10s. 11d. But a benefactor was at hand.

In 1781 Hugh the second Duke of Northumberland was admitted as a member of the company.



Hugh Percy, 2nd Duke of Northumberland (1742-1817)

At the Duke's request the warden, Richard Summers, went to Alnwick Castle on 27th August 1781 and received a generous present of twenty guineas to buy new plate. In 1792 the Duke of Northumberland was made head warden, and in 1803 he was steward.



Hugh Percy, 3rd Duke of Northumberland (1785-1847)

The third Duke of Northumberland later became a member and gave £5 a year to the funds. In 1833 it was decided that this money should be distributed to the members by the warden before he vacated office, and that he should render an account of the same, but in 1837 they agreed that the warden, on receipt of the Duke's annual donation, should call a meeting *"to decide as to the best method of distributing the same according to the Duke's charitable intention"*.

By a resolution of 7th October 1841 the head meeting for that year agreed that the annual expenses of the trade should be paid out of the Duke's annual donation; what remained should be voted to such of the poor of the trade as might lie agreed on by the head meeting, and that £1 10s. 0d. should be spent out of the cash in hand. The subscription is last heard of in 1846; the Duke died in the following year.

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The roll of Freemen in the Butchers' and Fleshers' Company of 1762 included the Duke of Northumberland. Below is a copy of the register of Butchers' and Fleshers' on June 29th 1762 showing the Duke of Northumberland Hugh Percy's entry.

Freemen of the Company of Butchers and Heshers of the City of Durham June 29. 1722					
Edward Jackson	Byron Norton	Mr Ralph Harrison	Thomas Macclesley	Robert Rishmond	Robert Dashing
Joseph Kestop	James Gelling	Joseph Chignast	George Wille	John Haddleton Junr	John Mwanoo
William Searns	William Ashm-	William Jackson	James Tootes	John Lee	Jacob Jackson
Sam. Gerrard	son. Haddleton	William Dobson	Thomas Wilson	Joseph Mawson Junr	John Parns
Thomas Gorton	John Hargreaves	John. Ransom	John Ingam	John Mawson	John Sawwell
William Gorton	Stephen Gorton	John. Ransom	Philip Maccard	Robert Mawson	Thomas Coway
Robert Bartlett	John. Gorton	John. Ransom	George Mawson	Henry Mawson	William Mawson
John. Ranswidge	Thomas Gorton	Robert Mawson	Thomas Mawson	John. Mawson	John. Mawson
Robert Henson	Samuel Gorton	John. Mawson	William Mawson	John. Mawson	John. Mawson
John. Henson	Richard Gorton	John. Mawson	Thomas Mawson	John. Mawson	John. Mawson
Joseph Henson	John. Gorton	John. Mawson	John. Mawson	John. Mawson	John. Mawson
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The register of the Freemen of the Company of Butchers' and Fleshers' of the City of Durham on June 29th 1762. The document shows a total of 181 Freemen registered to the Company at that time. Today there are 16 members in the Durham City Freemen Butchers' Company.

Robert Tobson William Reive.	John Beres Junr. Hugh Hopper	Hugh Earl Percy Duke of Northumberland.
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The register showing the Duke of Northumberland entry.

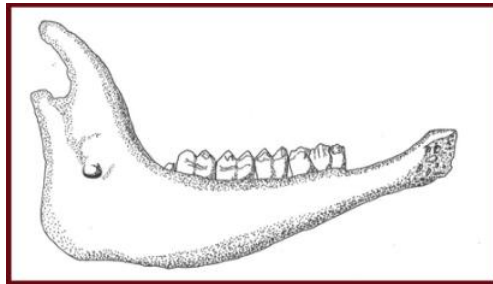
Artefacts from beneath Elvet Bridge

The River Wear below Elvet Bridge has been constantly sampling the material culture of Durham throughout its occupation.

Everything that was washed, dropped, thrown or fell into the river was a potential artefact and could be linked to the lives of Durham people.

After its construction, the bridge became a vital link between the commercial centre of medieval Durham and the surrounding countryside. Freeman, artisans and merchants, as well as pilgrims would have crossed the bridge every day.

There are many objects/artefacts recovered from the riverbed that clearly relate to some of the 16 guilds that formed the heart of the commercial centre of everyday life within the city. As well as butchered animal bones (see below), these would have included objects associated with the evolution of trade and industry, e.g. lead trade weights, lead tokens, jettons, hammered silver coins, cloth seals together with leather, wood and metal working tools.



Jawbone believed to be that of a sheep recovered from below Elvet Bridge

The riverbed below Elvet Bridge, through the endeavour of Gary Bankhead, has released artefacts that have provided evidence of the work, life and society in which the trade guilds of Durham help shape and develop the city.

Further Reading

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DURHAM CITY FREEMEN



BUTCHERS' GUILD

