



# Durham City Freemen



Elvet Bridge circa 1880

## Plumbers' 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, and sustaining the heritage of Durham City Freemen for future generations.

The trade guilds/companies and Freemen 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, Bridget Black, John Reeves and Eric Bulmer for their major contribution in researching the Plumbers' 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 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),

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

Fullers and Feltmakers (1565)

Curriers and Tallow Chandlers (1570)

Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviours, 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.



### Early Admission as a Freeman

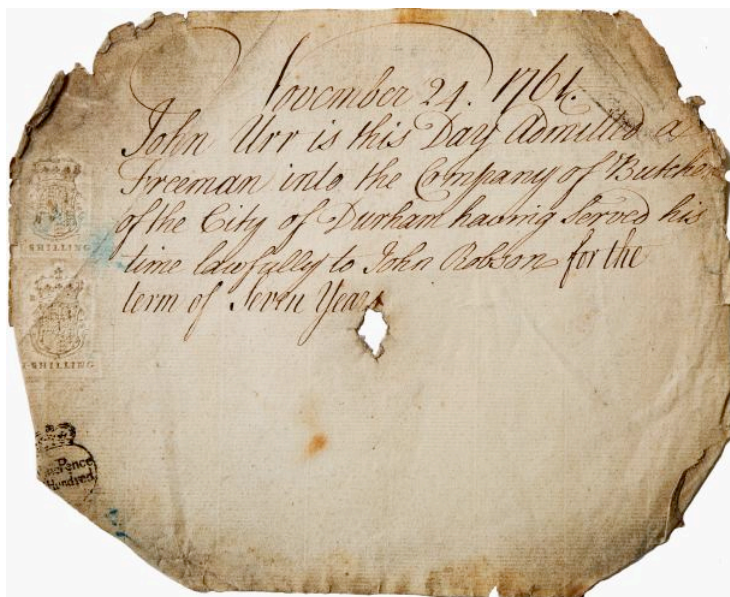
Initially, freedom (to become a Freeman) could only be obtained in two ways either by Servitude or Patrimony.

#### Servitude

Serving a seven year apprenticeship (now only three 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.

Example of an admittance document to become a Freeman



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.

## Example of an Indenture document for an Apprentice



## *PLUMBERS' GUILD*

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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. The 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.

### Arms of the Plumbers' Company

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



Crest incorporating the Companies of Plumbers, Goldsmiths, Putters, Potters, Painters and Glaziers.

*Displayed in the Guildhall, Durham City Town Hall*



Plumbers' Company Coat of Arms - depicted in the middle  
of the top row of the arms on the crest above

*Displayed in the main hall roof*

Arms : Or (Gold Background), on a chevron sable (Black). Above the chevron, Jacobs staff between two lead weights (Plumb Bobs). Also sable (Black) below the chevron a water level (Spirit Level). Two soldering irons on the centre of the chevron, between, on the dexter side (Left) a cutting knife and a shavehook the sinister side (Right) argent (Silver).

The arms are almost identical to those of the Plumbers Guild of the City of London.

### The Initial Charter

The Plumbers' Guild was part of a coalition that included Goldsmiths, Pewterers, Potters and Painters whose Charter (Ordinary) was confirmed by Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall on 22 May 1532.

Under the name of the Plumbers' Company this guild still exists. Tunstall's confirmation was written on a large sheet of parchment 10¾" x 25½" and part of his great seal is still attached to it. The charter sets forth that "*in the worship of God and the sustentation of the procession and play on Corpus Christi day in the city and suburbs of Durham after the old and laudable custom.....it is ordained, assented and agreed*" by the members of the six trades:-

Included within the rules of the Charter were the following;

- *If one refuses to pay forfeits or duties, or will not swear obedience to the rules and ordinances before the steward of the borough court, complaint shall be made to the bishop's chancellor, who shall compel the offender by imprisonment, if necessary, to do what he ought*
- *No member shall attempt to get another man's customers or work. (3/4)*



## PLUMBERS' GUILD

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On 3rd May 1660 the ordinary was again confirmed by Bishop Matthew, with a few additional rules that included:-

- *No man should be admitted to work in the city unless he was a good workman, and if he were not a member of the company he should not be allowed to remain for more than fourteen days.*
- *An alien or stranger, not being a freeman should neither secretly nor openly go abroad or offer to sell or exchange any wares belonging to any of the several sciences of the trade.*
- *A brother abusing another and not submitting to the will of the warden was to be fined 10d.*

Surtees, suggests with great probability that, the goldsmiths took part in the palatinate mint in the city of Durham, in which were manufactured the silver coins peculiar to the bishopric. Perhaps too, they made the "*bushel of silver pennies*" which Bishop Tunstall distributed each year to the poor of Bishop Auckland. The Durham mint, however, came to an end at the bishop's death, never to be revived. The number of Durham goldsmiths can never have been great, but now they would be lessened both in number and importance.

## **17th Century Family - The Brocketts**

William Brockett – D.O.P 1688

Bond 1688 (DPR/1/3/1688B154)

With transfers of administration (14/7/1688)

William Brockett the elder of North Bailey in Durham – D.O.P.  
1693.

Inventory, total £19-5s-1p (31/3/1693)

With account, actual cost £19-5s-1p (with discharge £33-2s-1p  
(DPR/1/1/1693/B6/1-2)

William Brockett, Plumber of South Bailey in or nigh the City of  
Durham D.O.P. 18th July 1707

Administration, penal sum £300 (DR/1/3/1707/£80/1-2)

William Brockett, Plumber of North Bailey  
D.O.P. 15th May 1728

Will 25th February 1725 (DPR/1/11728/B10/1-2)

Registered copy of Will (DPR/1/1/12/PA60-461)

Will Bond penal sum £200, 15th May 1728 (DPR/1/3/1725/B74)



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A meeting held on 3rd February 1708 found Cuthbert Hilton guilty of a high crime and misdemeanour in converting part of the money of the company to his own use, in particular the money in which he received for the reckoning at Mrs. Elizabeth Brockett's house; and they fined him 6/8d. He refused to pay and the warden was ordered to arrange for his arrest.

Goldsmiths Company entered in their minutes: "*Remember that the head warden shall always pay his proportion to the expenses of drink to be expended on head meeting day.*" Surtees suggested, that the reason for this was the fact that Brockett, the warden, had decamped with £19 of the funds, so that till 1761 their finances were at a very low ebb.



Site of the former house of William Brockett 24 South Bailey, which contained a workshop at the rear.

It is believed the Brockets, a family of Freeman Plumbers resided in the Baileys for almost a century.



## *PLUMBERS' GUILD*

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Property in the Bailey area was owned in mediaeval period by those whose business was the manning and maintenance of the Castle and Cathedral. Initially, it would appear that people living in the Baileys' were of humble origins.

As time passed, the properties were leased to professional people and by the 17th century, South Bailey became a fashionable place to live.

In a deed of 28<sup>th</sup> September 1691 whereby Nicholas Corby of Durham granted to William Brockett, a plumber of Durham and William Snowden a burrage in the North Bailey, (on the site now occupied by number 24). Where they built a shop and workshop for their trade on the garden at the back.

By 1697 Snowdon died, and his half of the house and workshop had come to his executor George Snowden of Wearmouth, who sold it to the surviving partner, William Brockett.

Brockett died in 1705. His widow Elizabeth made her will on 9 July 1724. Clearly her husband had prospered, for in addition to the leasehold burgage on the site of which 24 North Bailey is partially built, his widow was the possessor of a freehold dwelling house and stable in the South Bailey. Elizabeth left this latter house to her son William Brockett and the North Bailey house with workshop and tools, she divided between her sons William and Francis, who had succeeded in the plumbing business.

William Brocket made his will in February 1725. From this it is clear that he had left the South Bailey House to Richard Brice and that he himself lived and carried on his business in the North Bailey

premises which were equally owned by himself and his brother Francis. William left his share to his brothers Francis and Lawrence Brockett. The latter is described as of Hilton, County Durham and in 1738 he was at Headlam Hall, a gentleman.

In that year he joined with his brother Francis still carrying on business as a plumber in North Bailey before conveying the North Bailey house to Thomas Rudd Esquire.

The streets excellent location, in close proximity to the Cathedral, meant that with time, it developed as a wealthy residential area as the need to defend the city declined, along with the power of the Prince Bishops. However, it was not entirely residential, as the present dining hall of Hatfield College was an Inn in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where carriages en route to Scotland would stop.

As time passed, the professions of tenants included, prebends to the Cathedral and lawyers. South Bailey became a fashionable place to live and county families with country homes occupied some of the properties, including the Bowes family. In the early 1800s, residents included landed proprietors such as, solicitors and ecclesiastical members. Robert Surtees in his History of Durham noted that a series of 18th century townhouses were almost entirely occupied by higher and wealthier classes.

In the 1851 census, professions are recorded as landed proprietors, solicitors, architects, land agent, teachers, most of whom had servants

Most of the Baileys today are occupied by the University and/or the Cathedral

### Medieval Durham

In medieval time, Durham was a small city so anyone working in gold or silver was brought in from Newcastle, York, or London. For less important work anyone in the guild was basically interchangeable as in: *'a craftsman of the guild carried out whitewashing and other tasks'*.

Plumbers main occupation was, working with lead (Latin, 'plumbum' for lead), this included roofing and leaded windows, but their main task was dealing with water and drainage. Technology at the time was borrowed from Roman engineering which was based on gravity flow and low-pressure systems of channels and pipes to rivers and the sea.

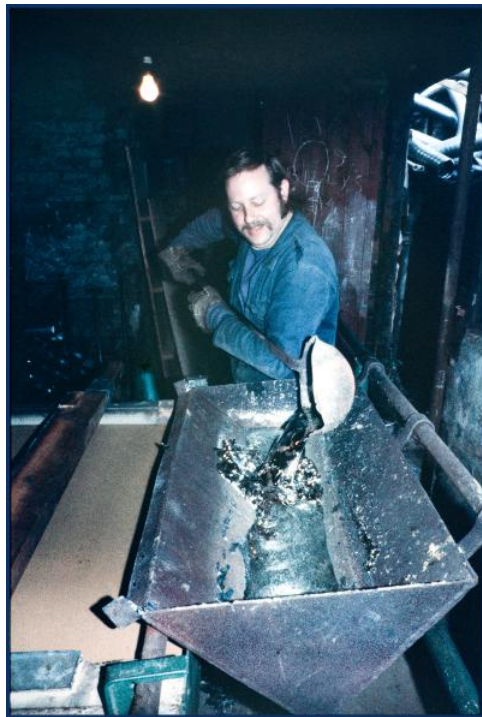
The first architectural use of leadwork in this country was probably by the Romans who recognised its advantages as a conduit for water.

Sand cast lead sheets have been used extensively as a roof covering since the Norman period and the development of parapets led to the introduction of parapet gutters and gargoyles to throw the water clear. The rainwater pipe was a natural development. One of the first instances of its use is identified in a letter quoted by Lawrence Weaver in his book *English Leadwork*. Accordingly, King Henry III wrote to the Keeper of the Works at the Tower of London in the year 1241 as follows: *'We command you to...cause all the leaden gutters of the great tower through which rainwater should fall from the summit of the same tower to be carried down to the ground, so that the walls of the said tower, which has been newly whitewashed, may be no wise injured by the dropping of rainwater nor be easily weakened'*.

By the late 15th century lead was growing more expensive as the more accessible sources of lead ore were being exhausted and deeper seams had to be found. Then, in 1539, the dissolution of the monasteries provided large quantities of recycled lead and gave fresh impetus to the development of leadwork. Elaborate ornamentation began to appear more frequently on lead rainwater hoppers and cisterns.

### **Traditional Process for Casting Lead**

Early leadwork was all ‘sand cast’. Sheets were made by pouring molten metal over a bed of moist sand which had been smoothed meticulously.



*Charlie Robinson Lead Casting*



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The thickness was made as even as possible by drawing a board or 'strickle' across the surface, supported at either side by rails set at the height required. The principal use of these sand cast lead sheets was in cladding roofs, but they could also be used decoratively by dressing the metal to an ornamental shape, usually over a timber or metal core to ensure that the object retained its form. Soldering the sheet afterwards produced a weather-tight seal.



*Charlie Robinson & John Walker (Fredrick Dennison Plumbers of Crossgate)*

*Lead Casting in the 1970s*

*John Walker on the right is a Durham City Freeman*

Sand cast lead sheets are still produced in relatively small quantities in the UK for conservation work. However, at the turn of the century milled or rolled lead sheet production began to take over from sand casting and rapidly emerged as the principal method of producing lead sheet.

In this method of production, which dates from the mid 18th century, lead is cast in a slab of about 125 mm thick, weighing two tonnes or more. When cooled, the slab is rolled out into sheets by passing it through heavy rollers repeatedly, to produce a progressively thinner sheet to a required thickness.

Although the production of milled lead has developed over the years, the making of cast lead has changed little over the centuries. Cast lead was the means of production in mediaeval times and is still the preferred option for the replacement and restoration of lead works in conservation building works.

There is little difference in performance between well made sand cast and milled lead sheet. The principal difference lies in the less regular appearance of sand cast lead.

It was the introduction of cast iron which finally heralded the demise of lead rainwater systems. In the 19th century cast iron systems generally copied the design of leadwork.

The development of plastic rainwater products in the middle of the 20th century, in turn displaced cast-iron.



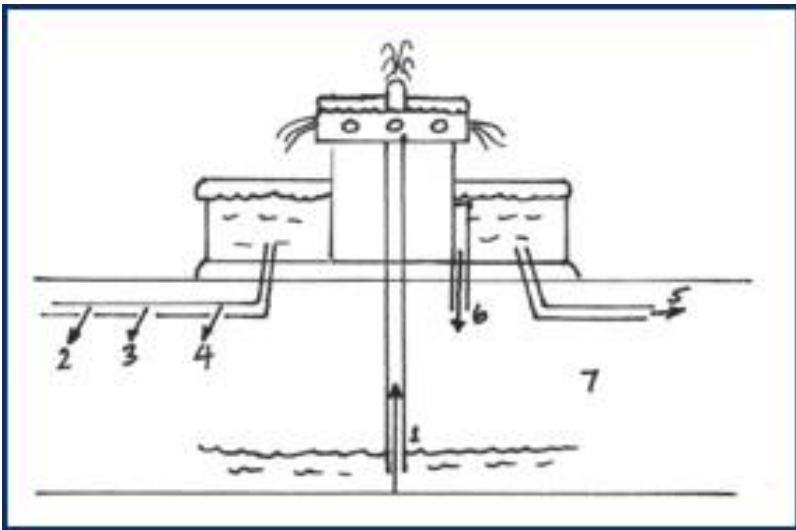


*Geoff Kitson Fitting a lead hopper head made in his workshop*

*Geoff is a Durham City Freeman*

### Lead pipes designed to convey water for washing

In the 12th century, monks started building stone or wooden lavatories over rivers. Some even had stone chutes leading to the sea that allowed the water to flush away the sewage. In the fancier monasteries, the lavatoriums would have running water that was supplied in lead pipes and sometimes even fountains. The monks greatly valued cleanliness, and they were required to wash their hands before each meal, putting a lot of time and thought into building their lavatories.



*French Abbey's laver similar to that of Durham*

- 1) Intake pipe, 2) Branch pipe, 3) Branch pipe, 4) Branch pipe,  
5) Branch pipe, 6) Overflow, 7) Vaulted drain.

Monks were scrupulously clean, washing their hands at the laver fountain before going into the refectory.

The Durham Account Rolls, described women water carriers hauling water from the River Wear because the Abbey's pipes were frozen or fractured. Fountains were known as conduits or conduit houses and along with lavers were made of marble, tin, copper and zinc.

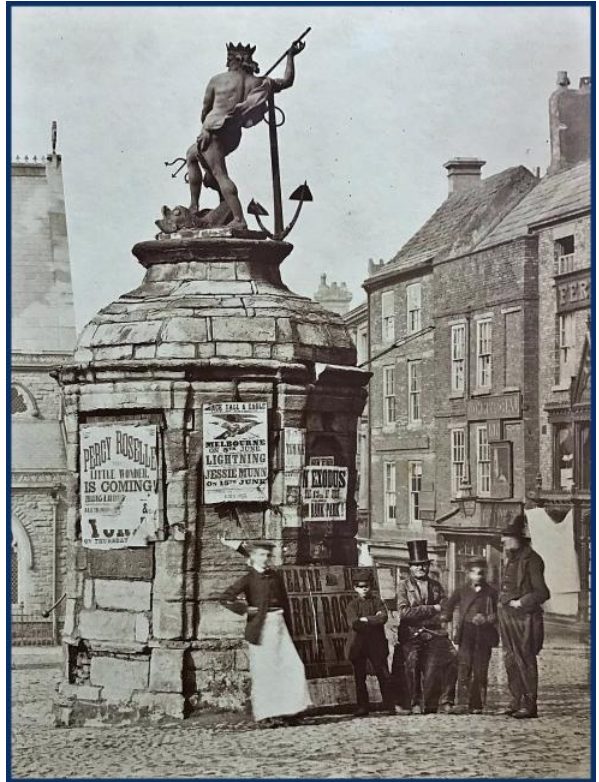
Durham Abbey Accounts (1432-33) state that construction of a new laver required the services of several artisans. Expenses were for Lawrence the latoner (a Spout maker) and Thomas the plumber for installing pipes.

Whilst the Rites of Durham (16th century) describe the round cloister laver: "*It had many little conduits or spouts of brass with 24 cocks of brass about it*". It contained cocks which were normally closed but could be opened to empty the setting tanks for maintenance and cleaning. Branch pipes are thought to represent standpipes terminating in taps which allowed the user to draw water at various points, such as the kitchen.

There was little systematic maintenance, with payments usually made only during emergencies such as the Great Freeze of 1495-96, when 18 men were hired to help de-ice an aqueduct.

### Lead pipes designed to convey water for drinking

In 1450, Thos Billingham, of Crook Hall, Durham City, conveyed a supply of water from a spring within the Manor of Sidegate, which supplied a pant/fountain in the market place, the pipes being in 3 foot lengths, seamed butt jointed and burnt and tafted ends, the lead being virgin lead containing silver from the Bishops mines in Weardale.



*The Pant in Durham Market Place c.1860*

The first Pant, source of water piped from Fram Well since before 1729. Replaced in 1863 and again in 1900 by the last fountain which was demolished in 1923, the Neptune statue being moved to Wharton Park.

### Decorative Lead Work

Lead's impermeability, low melting point and soft malleable nature makes lead ideal for sculptural decoration and ornamentation. The principal use of sand cast lead sheets was in cladding roofs, but they could also be used decoratively by dressing the metal to an ornamental shape, usually over a timber or metal core to ensure that the object retained its form. Soldering the sheet afterwards produced a weather-tight seal. Examples of cast lead ornament can be found in many cathedrals and churches throughout the country, including the decoration of rainwater pipes and hopper heads.

In the Middle Ages, no branch of art was neglected and plumbers used their skills by introducing, "*shields of arms, fleur-de-lis and other devices for the enrichment of spires and pipes*" which carried water from the roof.



*Lead Decorative Embellishments on the Rainwater Pipework at Durham Cathedral*

## **Plumbing and Glazing**

### **Leaded lights**

We tend to think of leaded lights as windows with stain glass in religious buildings such as cathedrals, churches, palaces and stately homes etc, but originally windows with clear glass would be used for opening, for the transmission of light and the exclusion of the elements.

For many years glazing was often an addition to plumbers work and companies often describe themselves as Plumbers and Glaziers even up until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is not so surprising when you consider that in mediaeval times glass was only produced in very small pieces which then had to be assembled by fixing them together with shaped profiles of lead called ‘comes’ that would have been moulded by the plumber, who would also have assembled the windows.

The word ‘comes’ comes from the Latin Calamus meaning reed, as the origin for moulding these lead profiles was created by pouring molten lead onto a flat bed of reeds.

### **Lead and Glazing Windows.**

The advantages of lead in window glazing are several and significant: it is malleable; it can be formed to almost any shape, it solders well and it can survive for centuries with little or no maintenance.

The earliest lead ‘comes’ were cast but by the end of the 16th-century, almost all lead ‘comes’ were milled, which took less time

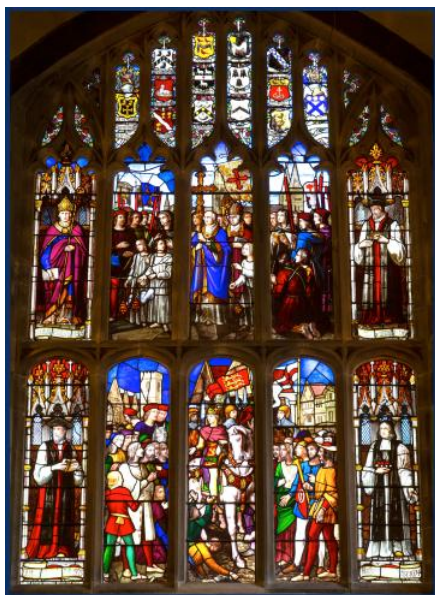


## *PLUMBERS' GUILD*

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than casting, but yielded a thinner, less substantial came. Lead 'comes' today are made in a variety of sizes and shapes: round, flat, high or low heart, wide, narrow etc.

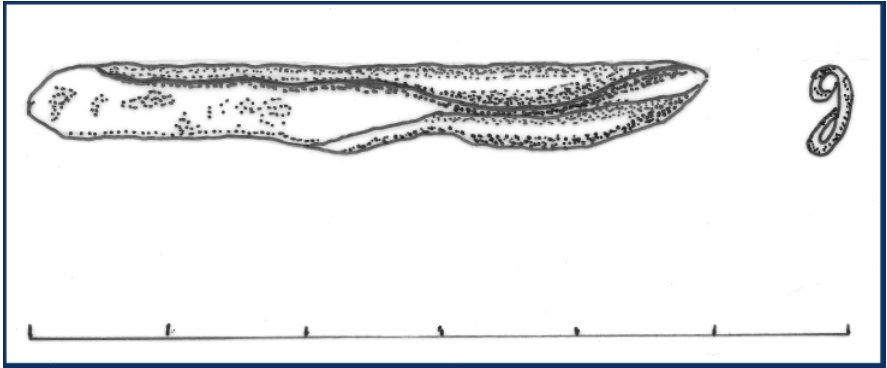
Three leaded lights in the middle row of the stain glass window in Durham Town Hall depicts the annual mediaeval Corpus Christi procession of the city trade guilds on the Palace Green. Taking part in the event was an 'Ordinary' set out in all the charters granted to the guilds by the Bishops.



## **Artifacts from beneath Elvet Bridge**

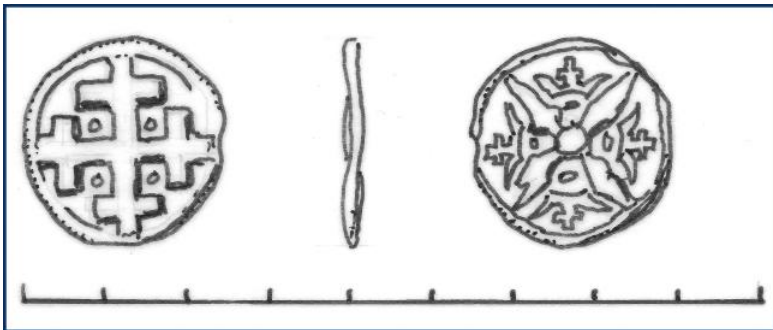
Below is an example of a 'Came' together with other lead artefacts discovered and retrieved from the River Wear by Gary Bankhead.

### **Lead Glazing Came**



### **Medieval Lead Tokens**

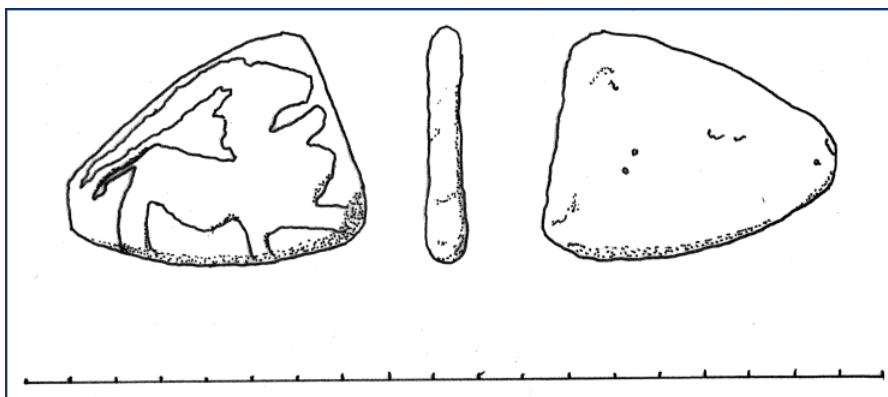
A lead alloy token probably moulded by plumbers and similar to objects found in the vicinity of Finchale Priory, Durham. On one face is a cross crosslet with a central pellet and a pellet in each angle. On the other side is a cross or flower with lentold arms or petals. In each angle is a crown with an annulet or a rounded letter below.





### **Medieval Lead Weight**

A typical lead weight which was recovered from the River Wear and would generally have been moulded by plumbers. Although one side appears lacking in decoration the face could appear to have depicted a rampant lion, but given the locality of below Elvet Bridge, in the heart of the dyeing district of the city, it could reasonably have been depicting a ram which then would tie in with the woollen industry.



## **Further Reading**

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## *DURHAM CITY FREEMEN*

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## *PLUMBERS' GUILD*

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