The painters of late medieval London and Westminster

by SONJA DRIMMER

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1. A. Borg: The History of the Worshipful Company of Painters, Otherwise Painters and Stainers, Huddersfield 2005, p.18

2. J.H. Harvey: ‘Some London painters of the 14th and 15th Centuries’, The Burlington Magazine 90 (1947), pp.303–05; E.W. Tristram compiled a list of painters who worked in various parts of England during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In contrast to the paucity of work on the late medieval period, the identities, working practices, materials and products of painters in the Tudor and Jacobean eras have been studied extensively, and the names and biographies of painters working throughout England between 1500 and 1640 have been compiled by Robert Tittler and Edward Town. This article supplements these labours by documenting the names of over ninety London painters who worked within the years 1376 to 1509. 1376 is a useful starting date because a document from that year records Gilbert Prince and William Larke as Common Councillors of the Painters’ Company, evidence of the painters’ increasingly professional organisation. Concluding with the end of Henry VII’s reign in 1509 is a matter of practicality, since various printed primary sources, such as the calendars of chancery rolls, are arranged according to monarch. The ‘professional painters’ considered here are those who are identified in legal and civic records, written both in Middle English and in Latin, as having the profession of painter, or individuals who were paid for work that is specifically referred to as painting. This includes painters who are named in documents as citizens of London, who were paid to conduct work within the City of London’s civic boundaries or received royal commissions and appear to have worked in Westminster. The following appendix is not exhaustive, but is the most comprehensive attempt to date to aggregate information about these artists, much of which comes from unpublished sources.

The first observation that can be drawn from this data is that there is no apparent overlap between individuals who worked in the manuscripts trade and those who participated in the other visual arts in London during the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This point may seem obvious, and indeed it was anticipated both by Paul Binski’s observation that ‘painters were usually not illuminators’ and C. Paul Christianson’s decision to omit painters from his Directory of Stationers and Book Artisans. However, the distinction between those who were described as painters (‘pictor’ in Latin and variations on ‘payntour’ in Middle English) and those who were classified as illuminators (‘limner’ in Middle English) can at times be unclear in modern scholarship.

This finding distinguishes working practice in London from working practice in France and the Low Countries, where illuminators and panel painters could be one and the same. Evidence for the isolated remits of painters and illuminators in London is found in commissions: all of those that required the services of a limner ask that he illuminate a manuscript, roll or a support that functions similarly to a manuscript; all commissions that required the services of a painter ask that he or she apply paint to walls, textiles, statues, panels (including commercial signboards) or ephemera produced for celebratory occasions such as ceremonial entries. There is no evidence of the same individual receiving commissions to both illuminate and paint.


7. The only receipt that would fit in this latter category dates from sometime after 1424, when the Master of the Brewers’ Company paid two pence to a ‘lomyno[ur]’ for gilding the letters of the Company’s brothers and sisters, which had been written on a wooden panel (‘estrich bordes’) by a textwriter (Brewers’ Company Masters’ Accounts, Guildhall Library, London, MS 5449, fol.102v). It is possible that these names were written on parchment and then laid on wooden panels, as was done at St Mary at Hill; see H. Littledales: The Medieval Records of a London City Church – St Mary at Hill, 1420–1559, London 1905, repr. 1975, p.132.
The fact that painters worked in all media except on manuscripts is significant because the Painters’ Company appears to have been a loosely regulated organisation before 1466, when it presented to the Mayor of London ordinances to strengthen its control over its members.11 It was, therefore, possible for much of the fifteenth century for them to work in a variety of media, which they did and which was a frequent source of contention between the Painters’ and other companies: as Alan Borg notes, members of the Painters’ Company ‘seem to have been prepared to work on all types of material, oblivious of any boundary between painting and staining’.12 In fact, so habitual were painters’ forays into staining textiles that, in 1502, the Painters’ and the Stainers’ companies merged. This is not to say that painters and illuminators never consorted: they may have shared materials or expertise. Richard Wylde, the ‘peyntour’ charged with ‘new peyntynge of seynct lukes chapell [in the parish church of St Nicholas Shambles] to taske’ for 165, 8d., 11 gills, for example, rented a tenement between 1472 and 1477 and again in 1487 on Paternoster Row, where numerous artisans in the book trade worked.13 But no documents attest to painters collaborating with illuminators.

The documentary evidence illustrates the diversity of work executed by painters. Their commissions fall largely into four categories: the first and most common comprises ecclesiastical and parochial work, whether polychroming new works or freshening up old paintwork, decorating the walls of London’s many parish churches, adorning liturgical instruments or painting the faces on clock dials. Examples of such commissions include the record of payment of 9d. by the churchwardens of St Michael Cornhill in 1459 ‘to a peynout for clensing of the ymages of Seynt Mighell & Seynt George’,14 and the payment by the wardens of St Mary at Hill to Underwood (his first name is not given) in 1470/71 for ‘peyntynge & gylndynge of the Roode, the Crosse, Mary & Ioh is, the iiij Evangelistes & iiij dyadems’, all of which had been commissioned from sculptors (‘karvare[s]’) in the same year.15 Commercial signboards provided another reliable source of income, as in the 1460/61 payments to John Wardeswyk, painter, for painting the sign of the Castle, Wood Street, 26s. 8d. And to Ralph Reynold, painter, for painting the sign of Saint Christopher at Deptford, 10s.16 Higher up the social ladder, monarchs and nobles frequently requested the services of painters, and Gilbert Prince and John Serle are well known as the King’s Painters in the reigns of Richard II and Henry VII, respectively. Yet there were certainly others employed by the court who adorned the walls and furnishings of the kings’ residences, and who even did ‘downright house-painting’.17 Finally, both civic bodies and royal patrons commissioned many works of art to celebrate or commemorate people or events. This category includes the painting of ephemera for pageants and processions, which are some of the most detailed commissions that survive. Thomas Daunt, for example, was paid £8 by the wardens of London Bridge for painting images on the bridge for the entry of Catherine of Valois, wife of Henry V, in 1421.18 The same Thomas Daunt in 1435 was awarded £19 by the exchequer for 500 shields, with the arms of the Duke of Bedford, deceased, made for the exequies and funeral of the said Duke [. . .] and for six banners of the said arms [. . .] to place on the hearse aforesaid.19 It may be that the collaboration of painters and stainers for events such as these prompted their merger in 1502.

Finally, the names of three women appear in these records. The most remarkable of these is the painter Rose Tenterden who produced major decorations for a pageant held by Henry V. She was the wife of Robert Tenterden, who is referred to as the King’s Painter, also under Henry V. Agnes Breten, in contrast, was not a painter but rather donated £27 – an exorbitant sum – between 1487 and 1488 to the parish church of St Mary at Hill for the painting and gilding of the tabernacle to contain an image of the Virgin.20 Likewise, between 1479 and 1481 the unnamed wife of William Blase, a barber, gave 20d. to fund the painting of ‘an ymage of owre lady’ in the same church.21 While only one of these three women was a painter, recent work by Therese Martin has shown that the patronage activities of medieval women qualifies them as ‘makers’ of art.22 Women donors are not included in the Appendix, since they were not professional painters; but both Agnes Breten and the wife of William Blase are important to mention as patrons who funded works of art.

The Appendix is the most extensive collection to date of documentary evidence relating to professional painters who worked or lived in late medieval London and Westminster. It is to be hoped that the documents give rise to questions. They reveal that late medieval London hosted a flourishing community of painters, despite the fact that few of their works survive today.

13 For the commission to paint St Luke’s Chapel, see St Bartholomew’s Archives, London, St Nicholas Shambles Churchwardens’ Account (SNC/1), fol.121v; for the rents on Paternoster Row, see LMA, Bridgehouse Accounts, 1460–84, CLA/1007/FN/02/003, fols.203r, 205r, 270v, 271v and 281r (although the page is actually fol.280 because two consecutive folios were numbered 281). Later entries record vacancies left by Wylde, and he resumed renting a tenement on the same street in 1457, LMA, Bridgemasters’ Account Roll, 1441–1509, CLA/1007/FN/02/004, fol.62v. Other associations between painters and illuminators are noted in Christianison, op. cit. 1989 (note 7), p.103, note 9.
14 W.H. Overall, ed.: *Accounts of the Churchwardens of the Parish of St. Michael, Cornhill in the City of London from 1436 to 1668*, London 1871, p.15.
16 LMA, Bridgehouse Accounts, 1460–84, CLA/1007/FN/02/003, fol.15r; The same Ralph Reynold was also paid in 1461/62 ‘for painting the sign of the “Steeven’s Head” in Eastcheap, 13s. 4d. [. . .] for painting the sign of the “Crown” in Southwark, 20s.’, Ibid., fol.16r.
20 ‘Also, Maistres Agnes Breten did do giltte & paytate the tabernacle of our lady with in the que[e]chowe the which cost xxviij li.’ Littlehales, op. cit. (note 9), p.131.
21 Ibid., p.94.
23 Available online at www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/common-pleas/1399–1500, accessed 28th April.
24 ‘Items paid to Henry Barmell, painter, for painting the choir, pulpit and all
Brewer (Breuer), William. Receipts for work executed between 1493 and 1495, LMA, Wardens’ Accounts. All Hallows Staining, P69/ALHEB/008/MS04956/1, fol. 35r. 62, 74, 76.

Bryd, John. Party to a lawsuit, Westminster, 1411, CCR, 1409–1413, p. 223. 11

Butler (Boteley), John. Convicted of treason and sentenced to be hanged and beheaded, with his head set above London Bridge, Westminster, 1443, CCR, 1442–1445, p. 98.


Clakton, Henry de. Mentioned in a suit regarding a messuage and twenty-four shops in St Andrew upon Cornhill, 1576, Assizes, no. 179.


Coleman, John. Rental payments for tenements owned by the Grocers’ Company. c.1460, Guildhall Library, London, Grocers’ Company Records, MS 1577/1, fol. 65v and 69.

Doane (Dunacocke), Thomas. Plaintiff in a suit for detinue, London, 1410–12, CCR, 1409–1413, pp. 84, 127, 122 and 341; was paid £6 for painting image(s) at and over the stone gate for Henry V’s entrance (in reference to the coronation of Catherine de Valois), 1421, extensive and detailed instructions for the painting of banners and standards for the king, C.1420–22, TNA, E 161, mm. 0 front, 10 dorse, Harding and Wright, p. 85; payments for work executed for Henry VI, 1426, Esseque, pp. 457–58. 29


Deken, Clement (alias Clement Richard). Plaintiff in a case of detinue, London, 1410, CCR, s.v.; rested a tenant in the parish of St Dunstan between 1469 and 1480 and had a cella made in another tenement in St Nicholas Flea Shambles in 1482, BHA, fol. 161v, 154v, 151v, 207v, 220v, 250r, 251t, 266v, 281r, 298t, 308v, 312v, 2147, 3559 and 3565v, BHA, fol. 22v, 41t and 63t.

Eastwick, William. Will, St Michael le Querne, 1389, ITRC, p. 64.


Freer, John (ii). Will, Westminster, 1487, CCR, 1485–1500, p. 58. 11


Girdmiller, Henry. Party to suit brought before the King’s Bench, London, 1483, TNA, KB 27/955.

Gloucester, Thomas. Commissioned mayor and sheriffs to provide labourers to assist in the funerary preparations for Henry IV, Westminster, 1413, CCR, 1413–1416, p. 56. 11

Girdmiller, Henry. Party to suit brought before the King’s Bench, London, 1483, TNA, KB 27/955.

Gloucester, Thomas. Commissioned mayor and sheriffs to provide labourers to assist in the funerary preparations for Henry IV, Westminster, 1413, CCR, 1413–1416, p. 56. 11

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Girdmiller, Henry. Party to suit brought before the King’s Bench, London, 1483, TNA, KB 27/955.


Hoggekyn (Hodgkin). Paid for work executed at St Mary at Hill, 1428–29, Littlehales, p.76.


Hovell, John. Rental payment and record of late rental payment for property in Tower Street, 1448 and c.1450, Guildhall Library, London, Grocers’ Company Records, MS 1171/1, fol. 38 and 98.

Hulke, Peter / Percy. Witness to the will of Nicholas Boydefeld, leatherseller, Westminster, 1455, CCC, 1454–1456, p.96; receipt of payment for work done, St Nicholas Shambles, 1444: St Bartholomew’s Hospital, London, Churchwardens’ Accounts, SNC/1, fol. 32v.

Hunt, John. Plaintiff in lawsuit, London, 1460, CCP, s.v.; registered will, St Peter le Cheap, 1489, ITRC p.102.

Johnson, Hugh. Record of annual rent for property in St Clement’s parish by Candlewick Street, 1471, Churchwardens’ Accounts of St Martin Orgar, LMA, Pto/MTN2/B/001/MS00599/001, fol. 2r; registered will, St Clement’s Eastcheap, 1474, ITRC p.105; will proved, 1474, Hunting II, p.57.

Kayle (Keyle), John. Beneficiary of the will of John Jacou, brewer, Westminster, 1439, CCC, 1435–1441, p.239; Master of the Painters’ Company, 1434, Englefield, p.221.

Kent, Thomas. The King’s Painter under Henry IV. Harvey, pp.104–05.


Lincoln, Guy. Will, Westminster, 1446, CCC, s.v.; registered will, St Peter the Cheap, 1489, ITRC p.102.

Lyons, John. Plaintiff in lawsuit, Westminster, 1460, CCP, s.v.; registered will, St Peter le Cheap, 1489, ITRC p.102.

Miles (Mylys), Thomas. Registered will, St Mary Abchurch, 1441, CCP, s.v.; registered will, St Peter le Cheap, 1489, ITRC p.102.


Northfolk, John. Warden of the Painters’ Company in 1416, Harvey, p.105; Englefield, p.221.


Power, William. Registered will, St Lawrence Jewry, 1477; yeoman of the chamber of the Guildhall, ITRC p.149.

Prince, Gilbert. King’s Painter to Richard II, Harvey, p.104; Trintrim, p.288; Common Councillor of the Painters’ Company in 1376, Englefield, p.221.

Prince, Thomas. Defendant in lawsuit, London, 1402, CCP, s.v.; received payment as the King’s Painter under Henry VI, 1425, Eichheuter, p.201; possibly party to lawsuit, Westminster, 1425, ITRC p.141.


Redd (Rede), Thomas. Rental of a chamber and later three chambers in the parish of St Mary Woolchurch, between 1472 and 1484, BHA, fols.203v, 219v, 229v, 237v, 250v, 265v, 280v, 289v, 297v, 348v, 359v and 378v; Warden of the Painters’ Company in 1486, Englefield, p.221; recipient of properties, London, 1404–1500/01, M. F. Monier-Williams, ed.: Records of the Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers, London, 1597, pp.238–339; beneficiary of will of Thomas Glydered, skinseller, 1486, CCC, 1485–1500, p.24; paid for work executed for the Worshipful Company of Drapers, WA/02, fol. 48r; will proved, Canterbury, 1509, TNA, PROB 11/67/268.


Richer, Thomas. Warden of the Painters’ Company, 1416, Englefield, p.221; Harvey, p.105; mentioned in a memo transcribed in the Liber Dunthorne, along with the scribe, John Tanner, 1428, LMA, COL/CS/01/001, fols.424r–v.


Roon, John de. Registered will, St Mary Abchurch, 1383, ITRC, p.157.

Sayton, Thomas. Surety for defendant in lawsuit, Middlesex, 1466, CCC, s.v.


Sergeant, Thomas. Defendant in lawsuits, London, 1460 and 1468, CCP, s.v.

Skinner, John. Party to suit brought before the King’s Bench, London, 1483. TNA, KB 27/935.


Stratford, John (3). Payment of 26s. 8d. for painting the sign of the Castle, Woodwadeswyk, John.


Wekke, Henry. Extensive and detailed instructions for decorative works for pageants on several occasions between 1417 and 1421, TNA, E361/6, mm. 5 dorse, 9 front.

Welter, J. Referred to as both a stainer and a painter and was commissioned to perform various tasks in anticipation of Catherine of Valois’s entrance to London, 1421. Harding and Wright, pp.80 and 83.

Turnour, Simon. Paid 3s. 4d. to paint the clock dial, 1471 or 1472. C. Burgess: The Church Records of St Andrew Hubbard Eastcheap, c.1420–c.1570, London 1999, p.18.

Underwood [no first name given]. Payment for painting sculpture, St Mary at Hill, 1497–98. Littlehales, pp.224–25 and 229.

Vokke, Henry. Rental of a tenement in Southwark between 1472 and 1484. BHA, fol.218v, 234r, 249r, 258v, 306v, 322v, 339v, 340v, 357v and 370v, BAR, fol. 1r.

Wardeswyk, John. Payment of 26s. 8d. for painting the sign of the Castle, Wood Street, 1462/7. BHA, fol.13r.

Warren (Waryn), Thomas. Order to the sheriffs of London to be set free if bail is posted, Westminster, 1406. CCR, 1405–1409, pp.91 and 98.


Wright, Thomas. King’s Painter to Henry IV, Harvey, pp.104–5; instructions to provide decorations for pageants between 1409 and 1410. TNA, E361/6, m. 3 fhere.


Wyld, Richard. Rental of a tenement on Pater Noster Row, London, between 1472 and 1477, then in 1487. BHA, fol.18r, 203r and 209r; payment of 16s. 8d. for painting St Luke’s Chapel, St Nicholas Shambles, 1481. St Bartholomew’s Hospital, London, Churchwardens Accounts, SNC/1, fol.212v; plaintiff in a legal action against the mayor and sheriffs of London, 1502/03. TNA, C 1/275/12.


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