

The London Upholders' Company and its place in furniture history

Of the 77 surviving ancient London livery companies, the Upholders' and the Joiners' were the two with a distinct trade interest in furniture making and dealing. However, in reality neither Company enjoyed exclusive powers. In 1614–15 the case of John Tolley, a wool packer who desired to trade as an upholder, started in the Lord Mayor's Court but owing to its importance was moved to the Court of King's Bench. The court upheld his argument, which claimed that a custom 'used time out of mind' allowed that every Citizen and Freeman of London who had been apprenticed for seven years in any trade might lawfully relinquish that trade and practice any other trade he wished (Calthrop, Court Report 83, Vol. 8 and W. Bohun, *Privilegia Londini*). This is an interesting example of the common law of England triumphing over statute law, in this case the 1563 Statute of Apprentices. Some economic historians have speculated that the court's decision might have been subsequently applied unevenly with transfers being more readily facilitated into the buying and selling trades rather than into trades requiring specific manual skills. Whatever the truth of the matter, links between companies and their trades certainly weakened.

The upholders' trade interests were seemingly never limited to upholstery and soft furnishing but included second-hand dealing, appraisal and auctioneering (all of which might include furniture), cabinet-making, furniture renting, undertaking, pawnbroking, and acting as sworn or licensed brokers. These occupations might be pursued on a single or multiple basis.

Karin M. Walton lists about 1,100 of the Freemen of the Upholders' Company in the period 1678–1803 (*Furniture History*, vol. IX, 1973), with many addresses shown. The listing has been carried forward in J. F. Houston, *Freedom Admissions to the Upholders' Company of London 1804–1923* (unpublished paper, 2000, copies with Guildhall Library, FHS & RFS), giving addresses of most of the 424 listed. Cliff Webb extracted details of 1,319 apprenticeships in the period 1704–72 from the Company records (Society of Genealogists, 1998).

Michael Scott's *Apprenticeship Disputes in the Lord Mayor's Court of London 1573–1723* (British Record Society, 2016) refers to around 16,000 apprentices, opening up a wealth of information on upholsterers and other trades. The names of 46 upholders from this source are listed below.

The Upholders' Company continues to advocate the upholstery and soft furnishing trades. It works closely with the Association of Master Upholsterers & Soft Furnishers (especially in promoting technical qualifications and apprenticeships) as well as the Guild

of Traditional Upholsterers. Prizes and awards are available to students and apprentices; an annual travel bursary has recently been introduced. The Company's historical records may be consulted at the Guildhall Library or at the London Metropolitan Archives (CLC/L/UA). They include the surviving royal charter of 1668, the earliest known bylaws of 1679, registers of freedom admissions and livery lists. For further details see J. F. Houston, *Featherbedds & Flock Bedds: The Early History of the Worshipful Company of Upholders of the City of London* (The Three Tents Press, 2010).

John Houston

former Hon. Archivist and current Court
Assistant of the Upholders' Company
o39hare.john@yahoo.com

	<i>Circa</i>
Charles Anderton	1682
Randolf Baron	1696
William Brian	1627
Christopher Broughton	1697
Richard Camfield	1676
John Coney	1668
Henry Constance	1627
Andrew Dandy	1677
Nathaniel Derrett	1704
John Elwood	1684
John Fern	1690
Thomas Ferrers/Fferrers	1698
Richard Fettiplace	1706
Thomas Hilliard	1654
Thomas Huckle	1685
William Humphries	1708
William Humphreys	1712
Richard Hutchinson	1663
John Jeanes	1655
Timothy King	1681
Edward Lewis	1645
Daniel Linton	1652
Richard Malkin	1681
Henry Martin	1691
Thomas Mayott	1688
Phillip Mervyn	1708
James Milner	1686
Thomas Parphey	1667
Nicholas Patrick	1702
Samuel Pitts	1689
John Prior	1698
William Randoll	1662
Christopher Redknap	1676
Nathaniel Reyes	1681
Nathaniel Reynes	1682
Jeremy Simons	1683
Joseph Swanwick	1687
Robert Sweathland	1608
John Tomlinson	1627
Arthur Tooker	1687
Abraham Trunckett	1683
Thomas Ward	1680
John Woodburn	1705
Richard Wyatt	1681
Richard Wyatt	1696
James Yorke	1663