

The Barbers' Company. A University Guild

By J. L. BOLTON

THE struggle between Town and University was reflected in the organization of the craft guilds in Oxford. Only two guilds, the Cordwainers and Corvesors and the Weavers, had royal charters and were independent, or rather tried to be, of some sort of control by either of these bodies. The *Inspeximus* in 1260 of the charter of the Corvesors, or tanners, says that they came to Oxford some time in the reign of Henry I and were united with the Cordwainers, or bootmakers, by Henry II.¹ The Cordwainers asserted their freedom in 1574-6, when they took a dispute with the City Corporation before the Justice of the Assize.² The weavers, who numbered 60 in John's reign, gradually declined until by 1457 they had to be united with the Fullers, each being too weak to stand by itself.³ Disputes were common in other towns, but in Oxford there was the additional complication of the University, which claimed a large share in ruling the town. Thus, whilst most companies came under the aegis of the Corporation, the University formed and ruled others, and one or two were subjects for dispute. The Mercers, for example, were incorporated by the City in 1572, though there may have been an earlier gild,⁴ and the Glovers had their orders sealed by the City Council in 1562.⁵ Over the Brewers Company there was, inevitably, a dispute, since the University held the assize of bread and ale. It ended finally in 1575 with the abrogation of the City's 'pretended corporation of Brewers'.⁶ The Tailors' Company, another ancient gild, became involved in various disputes with the University usually with support from the Corporation, in spite of an agreement made in 1491 to stop and punish those who did tailoring work in the University without joining the Guild of Tailors. One case began in 1618 over a man called Harris, working in the University, free neither of the Guild nor of the City, and claiming

¹ *Cal. Charter Rolls, 1257-1300*, 34; H. E. Salter, *Medieval Oxford* (O.H.S. c), 61; J. Wilson, *Archaeological Jnl.* (1849), 150; see also *Pipe Roll 1130* (H.M.S.O. Facs.), 5.

² Bodl. MS. Morrell 20, ff. 42-45.

³ O. Ogle, *Royal Letters addressed to Oxford* (Oxford 1892), 14-15; Salter, *Munimenta Civitatis Oxonie* (O.H.S. lxxi), 220. For further information on the Weavers and Fullers gild see *Collectanea*, iii (O.H.S. xxxii), 99, 123; Salter, *Munimenta*, 108; Ogle, *Letters*, 49.

⁴ W. Turner, *Records of the City of Oxford, 1509-82*, 342; Oxford City Archives, G. 5. 4; Salter, *Munimenta*, 109.

⁵ Turner, *Records*, 288.

⁶ *Ibid.* 373.

THE BARBER'S COMPANY

to be a privileged person, and it ended only when the Company appealed directly to the Chancellor, the Earl of Pembroke, who ordered the Vice-Chancellor to hand Harris over for trial in the Mayor's court.⁷

Two gilds, at least, were formed solely by the University. One was the Association of Clerical Cooks in Colleges and Halls, first recorded in 1463, and still in existence in 1691.⁸ This concerned the University only, but the other, the Barbers' Company, involved those who followed the trade or mystery anywhere within the City. There was a Barbers' gild in 1348,⁹ and in 1484 their records were sealed by the University.¹⁰ The preamble to the charter of 1675 granted by the Vice-Chancellor¹¹ emphasized both the age of the gild and that it had always been under University jurisdiction :

'Whereas as well by ancient prescription whereof the memory of man is not to the contrary as by divers grants and letter Patents of Majesties predecessors Kings and Queenes of England ratified and enacted by Act of Parliament All Barbers as well within the said University of Oxford and the precincts thereof as within the said Town and the Suburbs thereof are notoriously knowne to appertayne to the Jurisdiction and Government of the said University and of the Chancellor thereof his Vice Chancellor or Commissary for the Time Being . . .'

The Masters and Wardens of the Company ruled it by :

'Such good rules and orders as they had or should receive to that purpose from the said Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor or Commissary and Convocation from time to time.'

and the purpose of this new charter is clearly stated in the next sentence :

'Till by reason of the late Troubles in this nation the same hath been of late yeares neglected or omitted by reason of which omission and neglect to choose such master and wardens as aforesaid greate evils inconveniences and disorders have arisen as well by divers using exercising and occupying the said Trade mistery or manuell ocupacion of a barber who according to the lawes of the land or the Statutes Customes and priviledges of the said University ought not soe to doe as by others using exercising or occupying the same unduely or disorderly.'

The Charter then proceeds to reform the Company, orders new rules to be made for it,¹² and states quite clearly that no-one was :

'to use . . . the Trade . . . of Barber within the precincts aforesaid before he be duly Matriculated in the said University . . . (under the terme of Barbers comprehending also the makers Sellers and Trimmers of Periwigg's Borders

⁷ Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, 63 ; Bodl. MS. Top Oxon. e 277 ; Bodl. MS. Morrell 8, ff. 4-6.

⁸ Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, 65 ; Bodl. MS. Top Oxon. d 3, f. 4.

⁹ Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, 64 ; for their orders of 1348 see Salter, *Munimenta*, 109-17.

¹⁰ *Epistolae Academicæ*, ed. H. Anstey, ii (O.H.S. xxxvi), 495 ; Bodl. MS. Top Oxon. c 254 : Neale 'Notes on Oxford', 1431-1530, p. 202.

¹¹ Bodl. MS. Oxford Barbers 3, f. 6 ; the original charter of 1675 is largely illegible : *ibid.* 1.

¹² For these see Bodl. MS. Oxf. Barbers 2 ; all other orders made for the Company had to be signed by the Vice-Chancellor and the Proctors.

J. L. BOLTON

Artificial heads of hair and others exercising the like imployment about Cutting Trimming and ordering the hair . . .)

As with all other gilds, this prohibition was to become increasingly difficult to enforce towards the end of the 18th century. What makes the prosecutions in this cause undertaken by the Company interesting and unique is that, since this was a University gild, they were heard in the Vice-Chancellor's rather than in the Mayor's court. Such a case was heard there against one Jonathan Thatcher of St. Mary Hall Lane :

' for using, exercising or occupying the Trade . . . of a Barber within the said precincts, contrary to the known laws of the land and in Defiance and Contempt of the Charters, Customs and Privileges of the said University '.¹³

Thatcher had married secretly in 1773 Frances Faulkner, widow of Willis Faulkner, a matriculated barber, who had carried on her late husband's business for some time in St. Mary Hall Lane according to the rules of the Company. After the marriage Thatcher took over the business and ' received sums of money from Scholars and other matriculated persons of the said University for business done as a Barber '.¹⁴ He had even sued a fellow of New College, a Mr. Bingham, for a bill of £11.¹⁵ A Richard Baxter claimed that Frances Faulkner had turned over her late husband's business to him, and that Thatcher worked for him as a journeyman at his shop in Butcher Row. This was completely disproved, for Baxter was not admitted to the Company till May 1775 and Thatcher sued Bingham in October 1775 at his own cost, after the business was supposed to have been turned over to Baxter. Thatcher was sentenced to be discommoned and, though his proctor lodged notice of appeal, no attempt was made to follow it up.¹⁶

The records of the Vice-Chancellor's court would probably show an increasing number of such cases, for all the Oxford companies were making a determined, but unsuccessful effort, at this period to enforce their privileges.¹⁷ The Barbers' Company was to survive till 1859, for as a University gild it did not come under the terms of the Municipal Corporations Act. But, like the new ordinances of 1846, it had long ceased to have any effective power, for anyone who had been in business in the City for two years, whether or not he had served an apprenticeship, could now be admitted. Finally in 1855 the Master and Wardens were forced to petition the Vice-Chancellor to dissolve the Corporation.¹⁸ It was the end of Oxford's last gild and the only one effectively organized by the University.

¹³ Bodl. MS. Oxf. Barbers 4 : ' The New Order Book ', f. 69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* f. 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* ff. 72-76.

¹⁷ This particularly affected the Mercer's Company : see Oxford City Archives, F. 4. 3 ; G. 5. 4.

¹⁸ Bodl. MS. Oxf. Barbers 5, ff. 8-16, 18-19.