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Economics and the Cult of Death in Late Medieval England: The Guild of St. George in Nottingham, 1459-1546

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the decline of the fraternity of St. George in Nottingham between 1459 and 1546. It uses the guild's accounts in conjunction with Nottingham's rich surviving documentary materials to investigate the financial management of the fraternity by its officers. It argues that the officers were adept at negotiating shifting economic conditions by switching between various revenue streams. However, this adroit management did not stem the tide of membership decline. It discusses the role of religious reform in the guild's ultimate demise. It investigates why the decline in membership started long before any moves towards state-sponsored religious reform in the 1540s. It examines the impact of key individuals upon the guild's history. It argues that, for a more nuanced view of the decline of fraternal organizations in this period, a recognition of individuals' impact upon institutions needs to be incorporated into our understanding of institutions' influences upon the economy.

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Introduction

William Hegyn, alderman of the guild of St. George in Nottingham, died in 1508. He was a wealthy Nottingham merchant and property holder – one of the richest men in the town – who had been the guild's principal officer three times between 1481 and 1502[1] In terms of civic office holding, between 1477 and 1501, Hegyn had been Justice of the Peace once and mayor of Nottingham four times[2] He was typical of the types of men who became the officers of an urban guild like St. George's in the late fifteenth century. His commitment to the guild and its patron saint is witnessed in his bequest of part of his significant

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[1]Hegyn paid 24s in tax on his Nottingham tenements at a rate if 12d in every pound. His entire (disclosed) property portfolio was assessed at £24 4s 11d, see, S. N. Mastoris, 'A Tax Assessment of 1504 and the Topography of Early Tudor Nottingham', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 89 (1985), 44; W. H. Stevenson, ed., *Records of the Borough of Nottingham: Being a Series of Extracts from the Archives of the Corporation of Nottingham, 1485–1547*. 9 vols. Vol. 2 (London: Quaritch, 1885), p. 289; W. H. Stevenson, ed., *Records of the Borough of Nottingham: Being a Series of Extracts from the Archives of the Corporation of Nottingham, 1485–1547*. 9 vols. Vol. 3 (London: Quaritch, 1885), pp. 256, 285, 317, 428, 431, 434–6; R. F. B. Hodgkinson, ed., *The Account Books of the Gilds of St. George and of St. Mary in the Church of St. Peter Nottingham* (Nottingham: Thomas Forman and Sons, 1939), p. 74..

[2]Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 2, pp. 426–32; Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 3, pp. 458–66.

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Nottingham property portfolio to the guild on his death[3] This was a timely and valuable legacy because at that time the guild was going through something of a crisis.

The guild of St. George was sited in a one-bay chapel at the east end of the north aisle of St. Peter's church in Nottingham. A later medieval guild, like St. George's was run like a business, albeit a non-profitmaking or charitable one. This essay asks how an institution like St. George's guild, a voluntary organization comprising Nottingham businesspeople, negotiated the shifting economic and religious sands of the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The answer is that, like other guilds, it did not survive[4] St. George's guild was finally wound down in 1546, the year after royal commissioners had begun their investigations into fraternities and chantries as part of Henry VIII's religious reforms[5] However, the guild's documents clearly reveal that decay had set in much earlier. Rental arrears were at their most severe at the tail end of the great recession, between the 1460s and 1480s, and membership numbers, and thus their fees and bequests, declined from the 1490s. This paper examines the interplay of economic and religious factors, and their consequences, upon a typical medieval fraternal institution. Furthermore, the paper asks how adept the aldermen and chamberlains of the guild, men like William Hegyn, were in navigating it through these challenging circumstances.

The key documents used to explore these questions are the Latin account books of the guild of St. George which run, almost uninterrupted, from 1459 to its dissolution in 1546. Thus, the surviving account books embody large parts of the guild's history. These are kept in the Nottinghamshire Archives[6] There exists a handwritten 1877 transcription of these records by Joseph Tollinton and a 1939 English translation of the guild accounts by R. J. B. Hodgkinson[7] Judith Mills is one of the few historians who has written about these documents[8] Her careful work examines the manuscript and what it can tell us about the guild, its accounts and its membership. She persuasively argues, for example, that the guild was founded in 1440 with John Hunt being the first alderman[9]

St. George's guild was a collection of individuals voluntarily bound together in pursuance of common goals. To a large extent, these were religious[10] This included embracing the medieval doctrine of the cult of the dead – the belief in the efficacy of prayers and other acts for the souls of departed guild members; dedication and devotion to the intercessory capacity of a particular saint – in this case St. George – and

[3]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 74.
[4]R. Whiting, *Local Responses to the English Reformation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 47–9.
[5]The commissioners were acting under the auspices of the Chantries Act of 1545, see, R. N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp, 356–7; E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 454–5.
[6]Nottinghamshire Archives (NA), PR 21,599/3. These contain other records as well, including sixteenth and seventeenth-century churchwardens accounts and late sixteenth-century accounts for the Guild of St. Mary, sited in St. Peter's church.
[7]NA, M 399; R. F. B. Hodgkinson, ed., *The Account Books of the Gilds of St. George and of St. Mary in the Church of St. Peter Nottingham* (Nottingham: Thomas Forman and Sons, 1939). There are errors in this edition's foliation.
[8]J. Mills, 'The Guild of St. George, the Parish of St. Peter's and the Town of Nottingham, 1459–1546', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 111 (2007), 73–87.
[9]Mills, 'Guild of St. George', 73.
[10]Swanson, *Church and Society*, pp. 280–84; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 143; G. W. Bernard, *The Late Medieval English Church: Vitality and Vulnerability before the Break with Rome* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 118–25.

importantly an appropriate burial and attendant prayers for its members. In a period of high mortality and sudden death, the idea that the sufferings of the soul in purgatory could be mitigated by the prayers and masses of the guild's chaplains and its members was a basic medieval tenet. Any member of a guild could safely expect that their soul would be given appropriate and meaningful assistance after they had died. No guild member would be left to die alone without friends or family to pray for them. For example, in 1479 the accounts note the burials of guildmembers Robert Hamson, John Berdenaycastel and Thomas Stapleton[11] Guilds held an annual feast – in St. George's case known as the 'breakfast' (*jantaculum*) – which all members were supposed to attend[12] This convivial feast, and the procession associated with it, was preceded by a mass intended to reinforce the prayers for deceased members.

The membership of St. George's, Nottingham, comprised businesspeople from the town. The guild accounts reveal that this included merchants, drapers, grocers, mercers – all leading distributive trades. These mercantile occupations account for 46 *per cent* of the recoverable later fifteenth-century lay membership[13] However, this was not a guild which restricted its membership to the distributive trades. As discussed below, members who joined in the sixteenth century were engaged in a wider variety of occupations, ranging from bell-founders and leatherworkers to shoemakers, pewterers and glovers. Thus St. George's was neither a merchant guild nor a craft guild, but rather a confraternity which attracted businesspeople, both men and women, regardless of their livelihood who shared a devotion to the patron saint. The guild certainly attracted female members. The accounts stipulate that the membership fees were collected from both brothers *and sisters* of the guild, that both paid the same membership fee, and that both attended the guild feast. Women members are occasionally mentioned in the accounts, as for example, in the 20d. bequeathed to the guild by Margaret Graunger in 1480 or relating the burial of Elizabeth Dalby in 1482[14]

The guild was presided over by an alderman, its principal officer, men such as John Hunt, John Squyer and William Hegyn (all three were also mayors of Nottingham). Aldermen generally served for two years and often returned to office several times. John Hunt, like William Hegyn, served three times (1459–62, 1464–66, 1468–69 – the year of his death). Beyond governance of the guild, the aldermen were also responsible for holding the guild's treasury, and some seem to have overseen special projects, such as the repairs to St. Peters church undertaken and accounted for by William Hegyn[15] The guild was also served by two chamberlains, later called wardens, who acted as accountants or treasurers of the guild. They tended to serve for one year although some were reappointed eight to ten years later. Their role was to collect fees, rents and other revenues and pay the wages of those employed by the guild and other costs[16]

[11]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 41. Many similar examples exist.
[12]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 45; G. Rosser, 'Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England', *The Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), 431, 438; G. Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250–1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 133–7.
[13]This total excludes chaplains and other religious. Furthermore, only those the occupations of members who were mentioned in the accounts, generally on the occasion of leaving a bequest to the guild, are recoverable here. This represents a relatively small proportion of the membership and is heavily weighted towards the guild's officers. In only 16.8% of members cited in the accounts can commercial occupations be discovered.
[14]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 42, 45.
[15]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 24–5, 68–9.
[16]Mills, 'Guild of St. George', 75.

The entrance fee for St. George's reflects the middling status of the majority of its members. The annual membership fee was a relatively modest 13d., with small variations[17] As Gervase Rosser's studies of English medieval guilds observe, annual guild subscriptions were commonly around the figure of 1s but could be as little as 4d[18] Several wills survive for guildsmen from the 1470s and 80s[19] The cash bequests in these similarly reveal individuals who would not be counted amongst the town's wealthiest citizens. The mean cash bequest in these wills (which excludes the clothes and animals that were given away) was £9 16s 6d., suggesting their relatively limited liquid assets. Those members and officers who are locatable in contemporary tax records clearly fall into this 'middling' group. In the 1473 Lay Subsidy, five of the guild's officers can be identified[20] The mean tax assessment was 5s 10d. Two of the officers, John Hunt and John Payntor, were counted in the top 10 *per cent* of Nottingham taxpayers, the rest found themselves in the middle of the table. The 1503–4 Nottingham property tax, tells a similar story[21] Apart from William Hegyn, the four other guild officers who paid this tax held much less landed wealth than the £8 17s 4d. mean figure for the whole sample[22] Two of these men, John Williamson and Robert Northwod, are found just below the middle rank of landholders; the others, George Bredon and Alexander Elrington, are located in the bottom quarter of Nottingham taxpayers, paying 26s 8d. and 26s 4d. respectively. These men were not poor by any means, but they typify the middle rank of adherents that made up the majority of English guild members.

Decline

The evidence suggests that St. George's guild entered a long period of decline, particularly in terms of membership, from the last decades of the fifteenth century until its demise in 1546. St. George's was not unusual in this respect. The, albeit uneven, decline of English guilds after 1500 has been widely recognized[23] St. George's slowly diminishing membership generated financial problems for a guild whose activities hinged upon the cult of death. Along with periodic sundry fabric expenses[24] St. George's, like all guilds, needed to: pay for the chaplains to say mass for the members (its largest single financial commitment, comprising over 50 *per cent* of its outgoings in an average year);

[17]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 32, 36, 51, 55, 57, 59, 60, 62, 65.

[18]G. Rosser, 'Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages', in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350–1750*, ed. by S. J. Wright (London: Harper Collins, 1988), p. 35; Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, pp. 55–6; A. D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250–1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 135–7.

[19]Borthwick, Prob Reg 4. Folio 227 v, Prob Reg 4. Folio 34 r, Prob Reg 4. Folio 205 v, Prob Reg. 4. Folio 214, Prob Reg 5. Folio 121 r, Prob Reg. 5. Folio 105, Prob Reg. 5. Folio 104 v, Prob Reg 5. Folio 61 r, Prob Reg 4. Folio 123 v. My thanks to Dr Hannah Ingram for transcribing these wills.

[20]These are, Robert Shirwod, Richard Burton, John Hunt, John Payntor and John Squyer, see, Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 2, pp. 284–97.

[21]Mastoris, 'Tax assessment of 1504', pp. 37–56.

[22]These were John Williamson, Robert Northwod, George Bredon and Alexander Elrington and his wife Emma, see, Mastoris, 'Tax assessment of 1504', p. 39.

[23]J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation of the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 34–5; C. Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, ed. by C. Barron and C. Harper-Bill (Exeter: 1985), p. 25; C. Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 172; Brown, *Popular Piety*, p. 141; Whiting, *Local Responses*, pp. 47–9; D. J. F. Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire 1389–1547*, (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), pp. 52, 220–1; K. Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia, C.1470–1550* (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 154–5.

[24]See, for example, Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 68.

fund members' funerals, pay wages to bedels and to scribes to write up the accounts; buy candles, wax and books; maintain and repair vestments, images and altars, pay for repairing and maintaining their property portfolio; and, crucially for guild dedicated to St. George, pay a furbisher to clean the suit of the saint's armour used in its annual processions. These were expensive but necessary costs[25] The guild only had three ways of funding these various concerns. First, the bulk of their income (comprising around 80 *per cent* of their annual revenue in the later fifteenth century)[26] came from membership fees; second, through donations and bequests, usually from members granting assets to the guild in their wills; and third, through careful management of their property portfolio which produced rents. All were used to fund the guild's various activities[27]

Using 13d. as a viable mean annual membership payment, it is possible thereby to estimate the number of members in each year for which evidence exists. These membership statistics are shown in Figure 1 and, with the annual amounts collected in membership fees, shown in Table A1.

The solid black line represents the number of members in each year assuming a 13d. mean annual payment. The gaps in these data are the years in which either the amount collected in membership dues was combined with other items, such as the sale of corn, or the amount collected was not given by the accountants (as in 1484–5), or the accounts themselves are missing (such as in 1486–88)[28] The five-year moving average (dashed grey line) allows the downward trend to be observed over time despite these minor omissions. These data clearly demonstrate a period of notable popularity for the fraternity in the 1470s with a potential membership of over one hundred being sustained into the 1490s, followed by a longer period of lower – but perhaps more representative – enthusiasm for membership of St. George's (with between seventy and eighty members, albeit part of a decline trend) between the mid-1490s and early 1520s. This was followed by a decade of stability, at around fifty to sixty members, in the mid-1520s, followed by a final, sharp decline in the 1540s. By 1545, membership had dropped to just nineteen individuals (Table A1).

During the guild's apotheosis in the 1470s and 80s membership payments represented between 78 and 82 *per cent* of the guild's annual income[29] At this time they invested significant amounts into both in religious music and elaborate liturgy[30] For

[25]Swanson, *Church and Society*, p. 232; Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, pp.73–80; Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 184–92.

[26]This proportion changed from year to year. The 84.3% is a mean from the buoyant 1470s. This revenue stream was sometimes boosted by sales of corn given as alms (rarely more than 10% of total revenue), see for example, Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 25, 26 *et passim*. For the costs associated with Leicester's St. George's guild procession, which included a dragon operated by two men, see, J. Wilshere, *The Religious Gilds of Mediaeval Leicester* (Leicester: Leicester Research Section of Chamberlain Music and Books, 1979), pp. 20–22.

[27]There is no evidence that St. George's gained revenue by making loans at interest to members, see, Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, pp. 67–73. Unlike the Jesus Guild in St. Paul's, London, St. George's also did not farm out the collection of 'offerings', see E. A. New, ed., *Records of the Jesus Guild in St Paul's Cathedral, C. 1450–1550: An Edition of the Oxford Bodleian Ms Tanner 221 and Associated Material*, Vol. 56 (Woodbridge: London Record Society, 2022), pp. 7–8.

[28]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 19, 48–51.

[29]This is calculated by dividing the annual membership takings by the guild's total annual income, see, Hodgkinson, *Account Books*.

[30]M. Williamson, 'Quadring Cows: Resourcing Music in the Pre-Reformation Parish', in *Late Medieval Liturgies Enacted: The Experience of Worship in Cathedral and Parish Church*, ed. by S. Harper, P. S. Barnwell and M. Williamson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016), pp. 125–53.

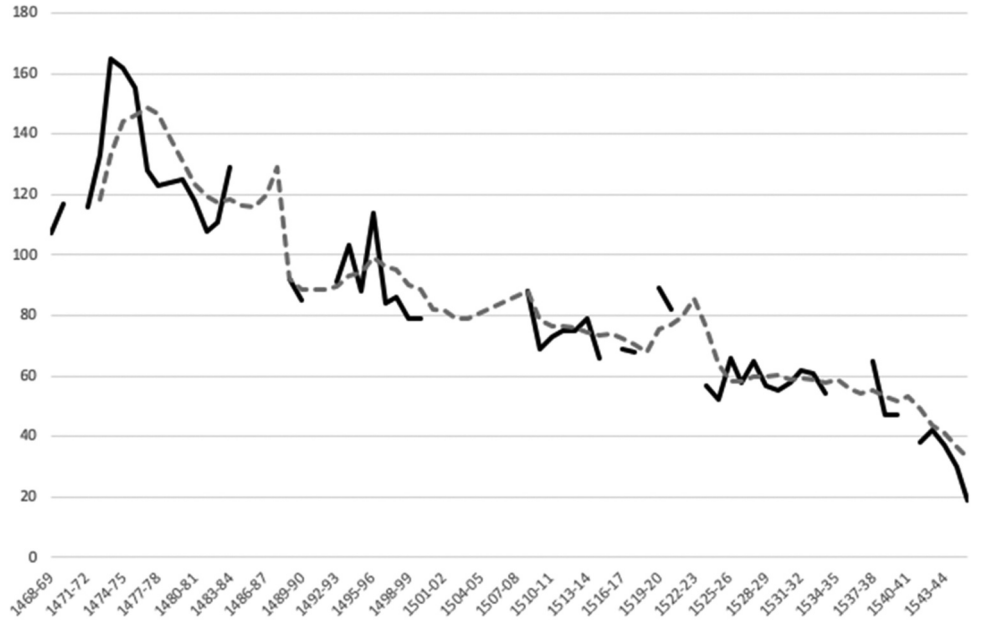

Figure 1. Membership numbers (at a mean of 13d. *per annum*), St. George's Guild, Nottingham, 1468–1546, with 5-year moving average (source: Hodgkinson, *account Books*).

example, in 1476–7 they invested 6.7 *per cent* of their annual revenue on new liturgical texts and music, an investment that went well beyond the guild's usual spending on chaplain's wages, bread, wine, wax and candles for the chapel[31]

However, long-term falling membership must have caused concern about the financial viability of the guild. Indeed, in the sixteenth century, the proportion of annual income made up by membership fees dropped from 40 *per cent* in the 1510s to 35 *per cent* a decade later, finally falling to just 19 *per cent* in the 1540s. As discussed below, the aldermen and chamberlains sought other ways to shore up the guild's finances in periods of declining membership. Furthermore, in the sixteenth century not only did membership decline, but the guild no longer attracted Nottingham's leading citizens. In terms of occupational profile, after 1500, these individuals were rarely in the distributive trades as their predecessors had been, but rather made their livings as bakers, glovers, tanners, shoemakers, tailors and taverners[32] In terms of their tax profile, the later members fell well below the middling rank of their forerunners[33] In the lay subsidy of 1523–4 wherein the townsfolk were taxed on their moveable goods, the mean tax paid by all those assessed in the town was 3s 5d.; however, the mean tax paid by those guildmembers who appear in the subsidy was only 2s 3d. In a similar way, unlike those who had preceded them, only two member's wills can be found for the post-1500 period, compared to eleven from the later fifteenth century, indicating the

[31] 12s 3½d. of £8 18s 6d., see, Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 37; Swanson, *Church and Society*, pp. 232..
[32] Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 3, pp. 60, 84, 102, 122, 160, 168, 367, 384, 443; for a similar wide sixteenth-century occupational profile, see, New, *Records of the Jesus Guild*, p. 17.
[33] Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 3, pp. 163–80. Only the fair copies survive. There is no surviving evidence of rough, working copies of the accounts.

humbler asset portfolios of these later individuals[34] Thus, not only did guild membership decline, but the status of both members and officers became more modest.

Trouble can be discerned in the accounts. From 1500 to 1509 and in 1519 the fair copies of the accounts are not filled in at all[35] Other important changes were made at the same time. In 1509–10 when the accounts begin again after the nine-year abeyance, the guild has a new alderman, the draper, John Cost, and a new scribe to write up the accounts, William Carwell[36] In all previous years, the accounts had been rendered, perhaps unsurprisingly, on the feast of St. George (23 April). However, from 1509–10 the accounts were rendered instead on feast of the Conversion of St. Paul (25 January). There were further changes later on in the century. For example, between 1518 and 1522 St. George's armour, the guild's symbolic processional centrepiece, was no longer cleaned[37] In 1525, the officers in charge of rendering the accounts, previously known as chamberlains, were henceforth described as 'wardens (*gardianorum*)'[38] The accounts became more organized under this new regime and probably reflect new scribal practice. This reorganization occurred very shortly after, and thus might be linked to, the death in 1508 of the long-serving alderman, William Hegyn[39]

Furthermore, from 1510 the accounts suggest that the guild was running out of people willing or capable of becoming its officers. Men like William Cost, Robert Munte, Robert Stanley and John Alynson served as guild chamberlains at least twice or three times in that one decade[40] This was virtually unheard of in the fifteenth century with chamberlains rarely returning to the same office and, if they did, it was only after a gap of about ten years[41] Furthermore, between 1525 and 1538 the accounts make no mention of the guild's chief officer, its alderman. Might this suggest that the guild was drifting directionless with no alderman for thirteen years whilst being maintained in a holding pattern by two junior officers? In 1538–9 Robert Hesyllrygg (or Hesylbrigge) is recorded as alderman[42] He remained in this post until the guild's dissolution seven years later. A similar indicator of personnel problems at this time was the fact that in 1531 one of the men approached to take over the role of warden, John Colynson, refused to do so and was fined 2s. (he finally agreed to take on the role two years later)[43]

The pattern of bequests and monetary donations to the guild in this period tell a similar story to that of membership. This pattern has been identified in many other English guilds[44] Most of these bequests were monetary, with a mean of 7s 6d., but some

[34]J. Raine, ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York*. Vol. 5, *Publications of the Selden Society* (Durham: Seldon Society, 1884), pp. 136–7, 278–80.
[35]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 73, 88.
[36]Hodgkinson *Account Books*, pp. 73, 75.
[37]They started cleaning the armour again in 1523, see, Hodgkinson *Account Books*, p. 93.
[38]Hodgkinson *Account Books*, pp. 94. For a few years in the 1530s, they revert to being described as 'chamberlains', possibly due to a change of scribe, but then return to the use of 'warden', see Hodgkinson *Account Books*, pp. 101–3.
[39]A similar but more far-reaching overhaul of the Jesus Guild in St. Paul's in 1506 has been linked to embezzlement by some of that guild's officers, See New, *Records of the Jesus Guild*, pp. 8–10; see also, Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, p. 65.
[40]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 76–7, 80, 86–8..
[41]See, for example, Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 23, 29, 32, 40, 46, 73.
[42]Hodgkinson *Account Books*, p. 105.
[43]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 101–2.
[44]Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 77–8.

were in kind, with these donated objects being either kept or sold[45] For example, in 1484–5 the guild received 20d. granted in the will of Thomas Skynner and 3s 4d. from the legacy of Ellen Gull[46] In the guildmembers' wills that survive, individuals left a mean of 4s 5¼d. to the guild (usually one of a number of bequests to several Nottingham's guilds)[47] These amounts are similar in range to bequests given to guilds in Yorkshire, Wiltshire and East Anglia[48] Further anonymous donations to the guild were left in the 'casket of St. George', presumably kept in the guild's chapel. The annual sums collected therein were small, averaging 1s 8½d. per year. From 1471 onwards the guild only accounted for half of the takings from this box[49] It is not clear why this change was made. In 1484–5, the chamberlains accounted for '18d. for the moiety of the offerings found in the casket of St. George'.[50] Donations to the casket ended a year later (1485–6). These declining revenue streams are shown in Figure 2.

The shaded columns of Figure 2 represent the amount received annually in bequests from deceased members. The black columns indicate monies collected from the casket of St. George. The black, dashed line depicts the five-year moving average of the bequest figures in order to give a trendline for the available data. However, as with Figure 1, the decline in bequest and casket revenues begins in the 1480s and, apart from periods of limited recovery in the early 1490s and between 1514 and 1521, these revenues go into chronic decline for most of the first half of the sixteenth century. Considering the membership evidence discussed above, this is unsurprising. As members were generally the only people who left money to the guild, with fewer of them joining the guild, the amount of money bequeathed each year could do little else but fall. Furthermore, as David J. F. Crouch argues, this might relate to the falling taxable wealth of the members in the early decades of the sixteenth century resulting in far fewer and smaller bequests[51] The bequest and membership data, when taken together, clearly indicate both the possibility of financial distress for the guild in the sixteenth century but also that the perceived advantages of membership held less appeal to the people of later medieval Nottingham.

The way the officers circumvented the slowly evolving membership crisis was by using the guild's property rental income to finance the guild's activities[52] It was usual for guilds to hold property, often large portfolios, commonly bequeathed to them by wealthy members in their wills. For example, St. George's guild namesake in Chester, similarly based in a church dedicated to St. Peter, had three shops attached to the church and at the dissolution and a total annual income from rents of *c.*£12[53] In Coventry, many of Trinity Guild's extensive

[45]The bequests found in surviving wills are also recorded in the accounts (the executors do not always forward the full endowment) and so have not been counted twice, See for example, Prob Reg 4. Folio 227 v., Prob Reg 4. Folio 34 r.; Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 20, 29.
[46]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 48.
[47]Borthwick, Prob Reg 4. Folio 227 v, Prob Reg 4. Folio 34 r, Prob Reg 4. Folio 205 v, Prob Reg. 4. Folio 214, Prob Reg 5. Folio 121 r, Prob Reg. 5. Folio 105, Prob Reg. 5. Folio 104 v, Prob Reg 5. Folio 61 r. This excludes the 7-mark outlier, Borthwick, Prob Reg 4. Folio 123 v.
[48]Most wills left bequests to several guilds, Swanson, *Church and Society*, p. 225; Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 78, 81–3, 109; Brown, *Popular Piety*, pp. 135, 142; Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, pp. 92.
[49]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 45.
[50]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 48.
[51]Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 120, 188.
[52]Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, pp. 187–8.
[53]J. Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City: Chester 1275–1520* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), p. 118; for St. Mary's Guild in Hull, see, Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 206–11; for the Jesus Guild, London, see New, *Records of the Jesus Guild*, pp. 24.

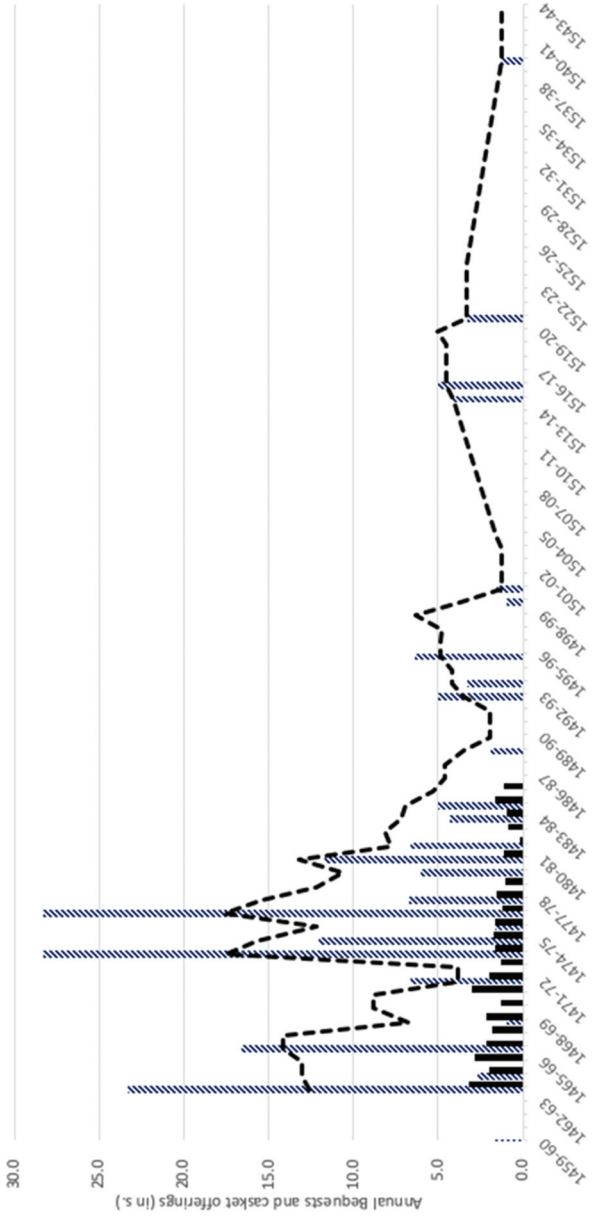

Figure 2. Annual donations (in s.) from bequests and the casket of St. George, 1459–1544, with a five-year moving average (source: Hodgkinson, *account Books*).

city properties, with rents totalling £320 9s 2d. in 1485–6, were donated by Holy Trinity guildmembers such as the draper, Thomas Bond, who bequeathed lands worth £50 *per annum* to the fraternity[54] Whilst the scale and value of Trinity Guild's Coventry assets were of a far greater magnitude than those of Nottingham's St. George's guild, the formula of guildmembers bequeathing property to their chosen guild is the same.

The annual rental income in shillings (solid black line) for Nottingham's St. George's guild is represented in Figure 3. This includes annual rental arrears, also in shillings (dashed grey line), that is rents that remained unpaid when the accounts were drawn up. The chamberlains considered that these unpaid rents would be recoverable eventually (even if they didn't record actually receiving them). 'Losses', a feature of the sixteenth-century accounts, refers to those rents that were considered unrecoverable[55] These data tell a very different story to that of the membership figures (Figure 1). Throughout this period there is a clear growth in rental income collected by the guild and a proportional reduction in the amount lost due to arrears. The growth in the amount of property owned by the guild, and thus the amount of rental income accrued as a result, can be attributed to property being bequeathed by members of the guild upon their death. For example, in 1467 John Thrompton bequeathed a tenement in Hungate ' … for the welfare of the souls of his parents' and an enclosure in the fields outside Nottingham called 'Ingersteynour', was granted to the guild in 1489 by the mayor and community of the town. The guild then rented this enclosure to a butcher called Thomas Breedon[56] This asset appreciated in value whilst they held it – approximately twenty-one years – from 36s 8d. in 1488–89 to 40s. in 1497[57] Bequests like this by former members meant that the amount of property held by the guild increased as it matured as an institution, particularly in the sixteenth century. Indeed, as the membership declined the proportion of funding shifted from membership fees to rents. In the 1470s and 80s rental income constituted only about 9 *per cent* of the guild's revenues. This leapt up in the 1490s to 31 *per cent* and by the 1540s this had risen to 50 *per cent*. An increasing dependency on property rents over other guild revenues is seen again in York's Corpus Christi Guild where the percentage of income gained from their tenements increased from around 30 *per cent* in *c*.1500 to nearly 60 *per cent* forty years later[58] What this indicates is that the St. George's officers understood the challenges facing them and, over time, shifted, or were forced to shift, their asset portfolio from membership fees to property. The result of the increase in their property portfolio was that the guild's aggregate finances, comprising membership fees, bequests and rents, remained fairly stable throughout the period (see Figure A1).

[54]G. Templeman, ed., *The Records of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine of Coventry, Vol. 2*, *Publications of the Dugdale Society*, 19 (Oxford: The Dugdale Society, 1944), pp. 53, 69; see also, Brown, *Popular Piety*, pp. 141.
[55]Hodgkinson *Account Books*, p. 73.
[56]Hodgkinson *Account Books*, p. 53.
[57]Hodgkinson *Account Books*, p. 65.
[58]Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 188–9.

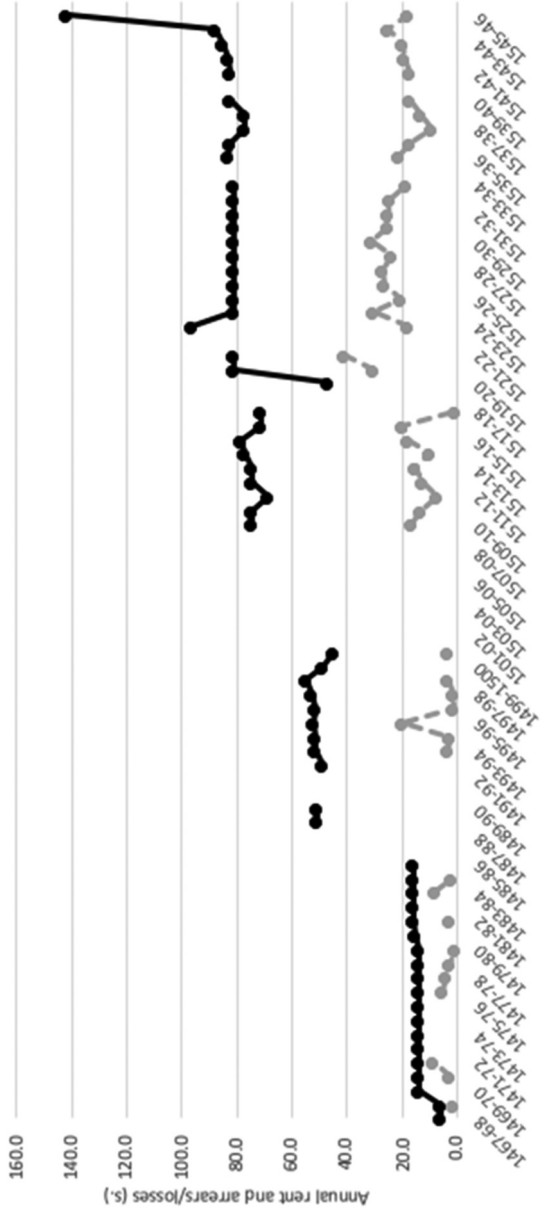

Figure 3. Annual rents and rental arrears and losses, St. George's Guild, Nottingham, 1467–1546 (source: Hodgkinson, *account Books*).

Economics

This overall stability is impressive, but it does suggest that the guild was vulnerable to the economic ramifications occasioned by the great recession of the fifteenth century[59] The guild was founded during the depths of this recession and the accounts do show that during its formative years it suffered from its effects. Figure 3 clearly identifies that the gap between rental income and arrears was at its smallest between 1467 and 1486 at the tail end of this economic upheaval. This indicates that it was in these years that the guild had the greatest struggle renting its properties and the largest proportion of its properties remained vacant. In 1471, rental arrears constituted over 60 *per cent* of annual rental portfolio in that year[60] The guild's plight was not unusual. In 1485–6, 135 out of the 387 houses and cottages held by Coventry's Trinity guild were standing empty, these vacancies representing a third of its portfolio and a loss of 22 *per cent* of its potential rental income in that year. Increasing arrears and vacancies can be seen in the accounts of the religious landlords of Newcastle upon Tyne, Oxford and Canterbury particularly between the 1450s to the late 1480s[61] A very similar pattern of property vacancies is seen in the 1490s for Coventry's Corpus Christi guild which accounted for an even higher percentage of lost revenue for that guild[62] Falling property rents reflect a plunging demand for urban tenements and are a sensitive indicator both of economic recession and one of the principal causes of that recession: population stagnation.

The historiography of this recession is well known, and few historians dispute its severity[63] Most historians date this recession, roughly, to between the 1440s and the 1470s, with the lowest point falling in the 1450s and 60s[64] Nottingham was not immune from this long period of recession. Any contraction in the level of economic or commercial activity had serious consequences both for those engaged in commerce and for landlords. As Goddard has argued elsewhere, the contraction in the economy of Nottingham is seen in the falling volume of commercial transactions that used credit, both in the town itself and by merchants from Nottingham, in the fifteenth century[65] Nottingham appears to have been hardest hit by recession between the 1470s – interestingly when the guild's membership was at its highest – through to the early 1500s when the volume of credit transactions fell to their lowest point[66] This contraction in economic activity echoes very precisely the period in which St. George's guild experienced its greatest shortfall in property rents (see Figure 3). Thus, combined with the

[59]J. Hatcher, 'The Great Slump of the Mid-Fifteenth Century', in *Progress and Problems in Medieval England*, ed. by R. Britnell and J. Hatcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 237–72; R. Goddard, *Credit and Trade in Later Medieval England, 1353–1532* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 109–19; Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 78–81, 120, 188; Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, pp. 160–62.

[60]See, for example, Hodgkinson *Account Books*, p. 31–7.

[61]A. F. Butcher, 'Rent and the Urban Economy: Oxford and Canterbury in the Later Middle Ages', *Southern History*, 1 (1979), pp. 34, 36–7, 41–2; A. F. Butcher, 'Rent, Population and Economic Change in Late-Medieval Newcastle', *Northern History*, 14 (1978), 69–71, 76.

[62]C. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 36–8.

[63]Hatcher, 'The great slump', pp. 237–72; Goddard, *Credit and Trade*, pp. 109–19.

[64]Hatcher, "The great slump', pp. 241–4, 246, 249–50, 271; M. M. Postan, 'The Fifteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, 9 (1939), 160–67; S. Broadberry, et al., *British Economic Growth, 1270–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). p. 191.

[65]Goddard, *Credit and Trade*, pp. 9–16; 158–62.

[66]Goddard, *Credit and Trade*, pp. 148–53. The evidence for debts pleas in Nottingham's borough court is more fragmentary.

demographic crisis brought about by recurrent and lethal epidemics of bubonic plague, particularly between the 1460s and 90s and into the early sixteenth century which reduced demand for tenements. This economic slowdown added to landlords' problems by curbing immigration thereby making new tenants even harder to find[67]

However, the guild's financial situation was reversed in the sixteenth century as the guild acquired more property[68] Figure 3 unmistakably shows how the gap between rental income and arrears widened from the 1490s into the sixteenth century. For the guild this meant that arrears became relatively insignificant and lost rents became a considerably smaller component of their annual rental income. At this time the guild had a larger property portfolio, but importantly also had the tenants to fill it. It might be argued therefore that the guild was carried along by the currents of global economic change and in particular the economic recovery and rising population noted in the first half of the sixteenth century[69] This recovery in population levels and immigration to towns like Newcastle and York, particularly by the 1540s, led to real increases in rental income for these towns' landlords[70] From the 1520s, the guild benefited from the period's rising prices as, each year, it collected and then sold a quantity of grain[71] As prices slowly rose, their revenues increased, particularly in 1520–1 - probably as the result of famine – when the price they received for their barley more than doubled to 9s per quarter[72] As can be seen in Figure 3, the guild's property portfolio benefited both from this gradual population increase and gently recuperating commercial environment.

There are therefore two stories concerning the decline of St. George's guild, when it is viewed from a business perspective. On the one hand the guild, in purely financial terms, was affected by global economic factors – fifteenth-century recession and sixteenth-century (partial) recovery – that were beyond the control of its officers. However, despite the adroit shift of the guild's revenues from membership fees into property, the dwindling membership numbers and bequests of the sixteenth century continued *despite* any potentially ameliorating commercial conditions. The guild of St. George found it increasingly difficult to attract people to its chapel in St. Peter's church and, those that did join, were no longer the town's leading citizens.

[67]C. Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 368–74.

[68]For a similar policy in Salisbury and York, see, Brown, *Popular Piety*, pp. 151–2; Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 188–9.

[69]Goddard, *Credit and Trade*, pp. 127–9, 160–2; M. Bailey, 'Demographic Decline in Late Medieval England: Some thoughts on recent research', *The Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), 16; B. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100–1540: The Monastic Experience* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 112–45; J. Hatcher, A. J. Piper and D. Stone, 'Monastic Mortality: Durham Priory, 1395–1529', *Economic History Review*, 59 (2006), 667–87; B. Dodds, 'Estimating arable output using Durham Priory tithe receipts, 1341–1450', *Economic History Review*, 57 (2004), 245–85.

[70]Butcher, 'Rent, Population and Economic Change', p. 76; D. M. Palliser, 'Epidemics in Tudor York', *Northern History*, 8 (1973), 45–63.

[71]J. Craig, *The Mint: A History of the London Mint from AD. 287 to 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 413–14; N. J. Mayhew, 'Prices in England, 1170–1750', *Past and Present*, 219 (2013), 5, 26. The guild, having been dissolved in 1546, did not suffer the effects of the excessive inflation arising from the Tudor debasements of the mid-1540s.

[72]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 90; for evidence of famine see, Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, p. 59.

Religion

To what extent did shifting religious circumstances of the early sixteenth play a role in the decline of St. George's guild? The orthodox credentials of the guild can be seen most graphically in the late fifteenth century. In 1476–7 – the period of the guild's highest membership figures – when St. George's paid 12s 3½d. for a '*priksong*' book and twelve sheets of a processional work ('*pro uno libra de Priksong. 12 quaternionibus unius processionarii*')[73] *Priksongs* were liturgical books for sung parts in services and the processional work was a liturgical book used in processions, one of the central features of guild membership. By 1481, they employed an organist ('*lusori organa*') at 5s per year, a stipend which by 1517 had risen to 6s 11d., a pay rise apparently at the behest of 'the greater part of the parishioners', suggesting that the guild was funding, and thus sharing, the church's organist[74] They also had a choir ('*cantantes chori*') in the sixteenth century[75] However, this late-fifteenth-century religious investment went further still. Beyond paying for a chaplain to sing daily St. George mass, they also paid a clerk to sing the '*le Salve*' - probably the Marian antiphon '*Salve Regina*' - and celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi[76] Furthermore, a new '*paxbrede*' (an object kissed during the mass by the celebrants) was purchased in 1483[77] Similarly, they bought wax from London to be made into candles, they had the chapel's lectern constructed and painted, they paid for the polishing of all the candlesticks and for the cleaning of the vestments. They also bought new vestments, one of which, purchased in 1499, was a very expensive green vestment of '*sarsenett*' (a very fine and soft silk material) costing 20s[78] These examples should be seen as an attempt to keep up with evolving demands of an expanding and increasingly elaborate liturgy of the period[79]

This orthodoxy can be seen again in the surviving wills of the late fifteenth-century members of the guild. Whilst we need to be circumspect when assigning lay piety in medieval testamentary evidence, the wills of the 1470s and 80s all dedicate the departed souls to God and the saints, commonly St. Mary and all saints, and most expressly bequeath funds for prayers to be said for their soul[80] For example, in 1474, Robert Smyth allocated money to each of the chaplains, priests and clerks saying prayers at his burial and 7 marks (£4 13s 7d.) for an annual obit to be celebrated for his soul and all the faithful [members] now deceased; in 1481 Hugh Cook granted 20s so that the prior and convent of Lenton Priory pray for his soul for the following ten years[81] This fifteenth-century spirituality hinged upon the doctrine of patron saints, purgatory and prayers for the dead and can be seen most clearly in another investment made by the

[73]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 37; Williamson, 'Quadring cows', pp. 128–9, 133.
[74]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 44, 86.
[75]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 99; Williamson, 'Quadring cows', pp. 136–43; for music at the Jesus Guild, London, see, New, *Records of the Jesus Guild*, p. 10.
[76]See, for example, Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 44–7; Williamson, 'Quadring cows', pp. 130–1.
[77]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 48.
[78]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 43, 69.
[79]R. W. Pfaff, *New Liturgical Feasts in Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 129; Swanson, *Church and Society*, p. 255.
[80]See, for example, Borthwick, Prob Reg 4. Folio 6 r-6 v; Prob Reg. 4. Folio 214; Prob Reg 5. Folio 121 r; Prob Reg. 5. Folio 105; Prob Reg. 5. Folio 104 v; for medieval testamentary evidence, see, C. Cross, 'The Development of Protestantism in Leeds and Hull, 1520–1640: The Evidence from Wills', *Northern History*, 18 (1982), 230–38; J. D. Alsop, 'Religious Preambles in Early Modern English Wills as Formulae', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40 (1989), 19–27.
[81]Borthwick, Prob Reg 4. Folio 123 v; Prob Reg 5. Folio 61 r.

guild in 1481. In that year they paid the archbishop (10s) for letters of indulgence which were then copied (4d) and hung from the pulpit[82] Indulgences were papal letters that granted the holder (in this case the guild's membership) partial remission from the rigours of punishment in purgatory for a period of time in order to gain salvation more quickly. Whilst the length of remission granted in these particular documents remains unknown, these indulgences protected *all* the members, both living and dead, of St. George's guild and, as such, represented a convincing inducement to membership[83]

Much recent scholarship has argued for the enduring vitality of traditional religion between *c.*1500 and 1530[84] This is reflected in Nottingham. All of the other five recorded religious fraternities remained in operation in the sixteenth century and most were only dissolved in the 1540s[85] The continued general popularity of both houses of Nottingham friars (Francians and Carmelites) in the early sixteenth century is attested by the frequency of small bequests made by lay donors in the 1520s[86] At Nottingham's principal parish church, St. Mary's, bequests to gild the rood loft there and purchase a new crucifix and new images also continued into the sixteenth century, and a new rood screen was funded by the laity and erected in the church in 1512. The church's tower was completed early in the reign of Henry VIII[87] In 1513, a free school, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was founded by Nottingham widow and vowess, Agnes Mellers, to celebrate the obit of her late husband[88] Furthermore in this period, there is little evidence of widespread religious dissent in Nottingham, as seen in cities like Coventry and London. Following the Oldcastle revolt in 1414, and unlike in neighbouring midland counties, individuals from Nottingham were notably absent from the arrests and accusations levelled at the time[89] This lack of engagement with heresy by individuals from Nottingham continued into the sixteenth century, despite the continued persistence of Lollardy in the midlands, re-enforcing the impression of an enduring local popularity of traditional religion on the eve of the Reformation.

Religious reform after *c.*1530 has been discussed at length[90] Attacks on the guild's principal tenets, purgatory, the intercessory role of saints, the use of images and lights, indulgences, and particularly masses for the dead, became more virulent in the 1530s. Bequests for chantry purposes declined in England after 1535[91] Across the kingdom offerings to images contracted sharply after 1536 and churches' lights likewise rapidly

[82]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 44; for similar spending in York, see, Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, p. 190.
[83]Swanson, *Church and Society*, pp. 227–8, 283, 292–4.
[84]Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*; Haigh, *English Reformations*; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*; Whiting, *Local Responses*; Brown, *Popular Piety*; R. Hutton, *'The Local Impact of the Tudor Reformations'*, in *The English Reformation Revised*, ed. by C. Haigh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 114–38.
[85]Holy Trinity, St. Mary's, All Saints and St. Katherine's in St. Mary's p church and St. Mary's in St. Peter's church, see, Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 3, pp. 4, 26, 44, 56, 128, 134, 136, 138, 186, 435; R. Goddard, 'Medieval Social Networking: St. Mary's Guild and the Borough Court in Later Medieval Nottingham', *Urban History*, 40 (2012), 3–27; Mills, 'Guild of St. George', p. 14.
[86]*VCH Nottingham*, Vol. 2, pp. 144–7.
[87]H. Gill, 'Architectural Notes on The Church of St. Mary the Virgin Nottingham', *Thoroton Society Transactions*, 20 (1916); F. A. Wadsworth, 'Notes on the Tombs, Chapels, Images, and Lights, in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Nottingham', *Transactions of Thoroton Society*, 21 (1917), 47–71.
[88]Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 3, pp. 140, 443, 453–56.
[89]J. A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards, 1414–1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 5, 12, 95–7, 100, 106–7.
[90]Classic works include, A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: Batsford, 1964); P. Hughes, *The Reformation in England*. 3 vols (London: Hollis & Carter, 1950–4); Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 379–477; R. Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 61–77; Marshall, *Reformation England*, pp. 51–2; Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, pp. 153–65; Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*. pp. 219–43.
[91]A. Kreider, *English Chantries: The Road to Dissolution* (London: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 155–64, 211–13.

disappeared after 1538[92] Saint's cults received similar treatment and many shrines dedicated to patron saints, like St. George, were removed from churches.

Crouch argues that important political events such as the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 and its bloody and rumour-filled aftermath frightened and demoralized the English population into accepting religious reform, suggesting that this might explain declining guild memberships[93] Certainly the people of Nottingham could hardly have remained oblivious to the Pilgrimage as the earls of Shrewsbury, Rutland and Huntingdon's 40,000-strong force sent to crush the rebels gathered at Nottingham in October 1536[94] Likewise, The Cluniac priory of Lenton (2.5 km southwest of Nottingham), a major regional Benedictine institution, was dissolved in March 1538[95] The prior with eight of his monks and four priory labourers were indicted for treason and hanged (five of them were also drawn and quartered for good measure) in Nottingham's marketplace with the quartered body parts being displayed in front of the priory[96] To what extent did these prominent events, combined with reformist preachers condemning the core practices of the guild, result in members abandoning the guild in great numbers? Some East Anglian guilds certainly disappeared from the records in the 1530s. However, as Farnhill asserts, linking cause and effect during the Reformation is extremely difficult and a number of other guilds, continued to survive until the late 1540s[97] In fact, for nearly two decades, between 1523 and 1540, membership of St George's remained relatively stable at about fifty-seven (see Figure 1). Indeed in 1537–8, following the Pilgrimage of Grace, guild membership actually rose to sixty-five (see Table A1). As Duffy argues, religious reform was being imposed upon an unwilling laity and that traditional, orthodox religion of the type represented by St. George's was therefore difficult to suppress[98] Those remaining members maintained their devotion to St. George and continued to uphold the religious practices they had been brought up with. From 1523, after a gap of a few years, St. George's processional armour continued to be cleaned until the bitter end. From 1538 this task was being undertaken by an armourer called John Fryth[99] The fact that this man is also described as the 'bearer of the wand' – a silver wand made in 1464 (costing 11s 4d.) used in the annual procession – suggests that the processions also continued until the guild's dissolution[100] John Williamson was alderman of the guild from 1510 until his retirement in 1525[101] He died in 1531 and his will demonstrates his traditional pious sensibilities.[102] Whilst remembering that testamentary evidence needs to be used with caution, his will suggests a desire to dedicate his soul to God and the Virgin Mary and all the 'celestial company of heaven'[103] He wished his body to be interred in front of the rood screen in St. George's chapel in St. Peter's. He left five marks a year in wages for an able priest to sing mass every day at St. George's altar, plus a *De Profundis* mass

[92]Marshall, *Reformation England*, pp. 53–4..
[93]Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 192–3, 232–6.
[94]R. W. Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 194, 286–7.
[95]*VCH Nottingham*. Vol. 2, pp. 91–100.
[96]J. Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10* (London, 1887), p. 514; J. Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 12* (London, 1890–91); *VCH Nottingham*. Vol. 2, p. 100.
[97]Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, pp. 157–9.
[98]Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 380, 382, 384–92, 395–406, 410, 415–20, 422, 424, 428–32, 437, 440–1, 445.
[99]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 106–12; John Fryth performed a similar role for the town's chamberlains, see, Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 3, pp. 385, 443.
[100]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 22, 68.
[101]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 76.
102*Testamenta Eboracensia*, pp. 278–80; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 505–9; Whiting, *Blind Devotion*. p. 263; Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, pp. 223–4.
[103]Cross, 'The Development of Protestantism', 230–38; Alsop, 'Religious Preambles', 19–27.

for his soul and all Christian souls (perhaps a concession to reformist ideas), he left money for priests and strangers who attended his burial, and he requested an obit every year for the souls of his parents (and all Christian souls).

As discussed above, the guild itself ceased to function as a consequence of the Henrician religious reforms, in the period of the Chantries Act of 1545. The Chantries Act decried the misappropriated endowments of poorly governed chantries, guilds and stipendiary priests, amongst others, and allowed the crown to appropriate these institutions' revenues. Those religious elements under scrutiny in this act, especially prayers for the dead, and perhaps more importantly for the lay membership, the rituals associated with them, were the *raisons d'être* of a guild like St. George's. Indeed, the impact of this act and the increasing pressure of these reformist ideas in the mid-1540s can be discerned in the membership data. Figure 1 clearly shows a dramatic fall in membership in 1545–6 of 37 *per cent* to just nineteen members. The Henrician reforms of the 1540s were generally greeted by most with popular compliance, passivity and ultimately acceptance. This was due in large part to a prevailing sense of duty and obligation to authority in the face of state-sponsored religious change[104] As Peter Marshall points out, people recognized that the move away from established Catholic traditions did not cause hordes of vengeful angels to wreak bloody havoc on Earth[105]

The religious reforms of the 1540s led to a natural and widespread apprehension about investing in fraternities but, as with the economic data discussed above, evidence of local orthodoxy and guild membership stability in the 1520 and 30s indicates that a wholly religious explanation for the demise of guild is also inadequate[106] As shown above (Figure 1), the decline of the guild began at least forty years before the Henrician reforms had any impact in the 1540s. How might this be explained?

Individuals

Whilst St. George's guild was neither a craft nor merchant guild, it comprised local businesspeople bound together in mutual support. As such it might be considered, in economic terms at least, as an institution. Historians are encouraged to think about the impact of institutions upon the economy[107] However, historians have thought much less about the impact of individuals upon institutions[108] The actions of wealthy later medieval merchants such as Richard Whittington and William Canynges are considered to have had considerable and lasting effects upon the cities – London and Bristol – they served as mayors[109] The guild was, after all, an association of real-life, flesh-and-blood, men and women, each of whom, in some way, contributed to the continued survival of the guild. We are suggesting here that individual endeavour needs to be incorporated into explanations of institutional change. When the actions of these

[104]Brown, *Popular Piety*, pp. 233–49; Whiting, *Local Responses*, pp. 126, 130, 136, 139, 165–6; Whiting, *Blind Devotion*. pp. 64–82, 172–87, 259–68.
[105]Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 55.
[106]Whiting, *Local Responses*, pp. 143–4; Whiting, *Blind Devotion*, pp. 63–70, 107–11..
[107]S. Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); S. Ogilvie, *The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
[108]The influence of individuals upon guilds, usually in terms of maladministration, has been noted by some historians, see, Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, p. 65; New, *Records of the Jesus Guild*, pp. 8–9.
[109]C. Barron, 'Richard Whittington: The Man Behind the Myth', in *Studies in London History*, ed. by A. E. J. Hollaender and William Kellaway (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), pp. 197–250; J. Sherborne, *William Canynges, 1402–1474* (Bristol: Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1985).

individuals are factored into the narrative, a clearer picture can be perceived, particularly in terms of the chronology of change.

One member's devotion to the guild, and to St. George, had a significant impact upon the guild's history, especially during its difficult years at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This was the guild's alderman, William Hegyn, alluded to in the introduction. Whilst nowhere near the same elevated status as merchants such as Whittington or Canynes, he was the guild's chief officer three times between 1481 and 1502. He was a merchant who dealt in, amongst other things, timber and other building materials. He was also a Merchant of the Staple. This indicates that he was engaged in international commerce, particularly the export of English wool via the staple port of Calais. In the years between acting as guild alderman he took on the role of mayor of Nottingham (in 1480–1, 1486–7, 1493–4 and 1500–01)[110] Between 1500 and 1502, he undertook both roles simultaneously. In 1500 he and the town council even met in St. Peters Church to settle an arbitration dispute[111] He was a wealthy man. According to the 1503–4 taxation of lands and tenements in Nottingham, he was the second richest person (or institution) in the town, positioning him quite far above most of the other guild members in terms of wealth. He held tenements throughout town and regularly bought and sold property[112] Hegyn's impact can firstly be seen during his aldermanship of the guild (1481–83, 1489–90, 1495–1502). The evidence suggests that during his periods of leadership there were several jumps in guild membership – albeit part of an overall declining trend – particularly in 1482, 1489 and 1495–6 (see Figure 1 and Table A1). There is no evidence to indicate whether this was the result of a deliberate policy of guild promotion in the 1480s and 90s, but this might suggest something about the dynamism of his governorship temporarily slowing down contraction. However, more pertinent to the religious credentials of the guild was the acquisition of the letters of indulgence for the members and the employment of an organist in Hegyn's first year as alderman. During his following few years in office, as discussed above, the guild purchased the new '*paxbrede*' and wax from London; they paid for a number of building projects, including the chapel's new lectern and the maintenance of candlesticks and vestments, again suggesting a particular pious vigour during Hegyn's time in office in the 1480s. The fact that Hegyn rendered the accounts for many of these projects himself indicate that these were projects under his personal supervision[113] Furthermore, Hegyn's used his mayoral connections to support St. George's guild. As seen above, the town granted some meadowland outside Nottingham called 'Ingersteynour' to the guild in the late 1480s[114] Having just vacated the mayoral office, he used his political influence to have this valuable land transferred to his guild, who then rented it out in order to diversify its financial portfolio. Whilst Figure 2 reveals that Hegyn's aldermanship witnessed an ongoing decrease in deathbed bequests to the guild, a temporary improvement was seen from the early 1490s, during the latter part of his tenure. This was noticeably followed by a sharp decline after the end of Hegyn's term in 1502. No further bequests were left to the guild for the next twelve years. Importantly in the final two years of his tenure, perhaps due to old age or incapacity, and

[110]Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 2, p. 432; Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 3, pp. 459–60.
[111]Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 3, p. 303.
[112]Mastoris, 'Tax assessment of 1504', p. 44; Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 2, p. 289; Stevenson, *Nottingham*, Vol. 3, pp. 256, 285, 317, 428, 431, 434–6; Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 74.
[113]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, pp. 44, 48, 68–9.
[114]Hodgkinson *Account Books*, pp. 53, 65.

for seven years after his retirement, no guild accounts were rendered at all, again suggesting some internal breakdown or crisis following his departure.

Hegyn's commitment to the guild is seen particularly in his 1508 deathbed bequest of a portion his Nottingham property portfolio to the guild[115] He donated this land on condition that the brothers and sisters of the guild pray for the souls of his mother and father in order to speed their passage through purgatory[116] Property donations to the guild of one or two properties were not unusual, but none were on this scale[117] He granted the rents from a messuage in '*Stoneystrete* (Stoney Street)' (8s.), a close called '*Colyer Barnes*' (20s.), a garden in '*Goosegate* (Goosegate)' (18d.), three more gardens in Stoney Street (7s 8d.) and an acre and a half of meadowland in Nottingham's fields (4s 8d.)[118] In one fell swoop Hegyn's one bequest more than doubled the rental return from the guild's property portfolio[119] As discussed above and eloquently demonstrated in Figure 3, this donation lifted the guild out of the revenue crisis caused by shrinking membership numbers and bequests. This shift from membership dues to rental revenues resulted in the guild's financial position remaining stable throughout the rest of the guild's existence (see Figure A1). Hegyn's gift was a targeted form of funding by a man who, as alderman, had understood the financial obstacles facing his guild and so had set in place a revenue stream which he considered would keep the fraternity functioning (literally) until judgement day. We know this because the accounts tell us that these rents were assigned to St. George's 'for the support and profit (or advantage - *proficum*) of the aforesaid guild'[120] Without William Hegyn's devotion to St. George and the guild, and his wealth, the guild would have been unable to sustain itself for as long as it did.

However, with Hegyn's death, membership continued to fall, the guild was less able to attract senior local people to its ranks, they suffered from a shortage of officers, the accounts were not always rendered properly and were presented differently by new kinds of officers. These changes suggest much about Hegyn's controlling influence over St. George's. After his death, the guild's accounts suggest its officers were implementing structural changes and efficiency drives whilst trying to wrestle back control.

Conclusion

We are not arguing here that individuals like William Hegyn were solely responsible for the stability or survival of St. George's guild. The piety and fortitude of the remaining members, many of whom were much less visible than Hegyn, must also have played a role. What we suggest instead is that, where the evidence allows, the actions of undistinguished individuals and officers like these can significantly influence the histories of institutions and organizations. Despite falling membership and bequests, the guild diversified its income streams – not least as a result of William Hegyn's 1508 donation – by moving to a position whereby it derived a higher proportion of its income from its maturing property portfolio. What this suggests is

[115]Hodgkinson, *Account Books*, p. 74.
[116]Hodgkinson *Account Books*, p. 74; for a similar circumstances in Walsingham see, K. Farnhill, 'The Guild of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Priory of St Mary in Walsingham', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of the 2002 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by C. Burgess and E. Duffy (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), pp. 138–9, 142.
[117]See, for example, Hodgkinson *Account Books*, pp. 24–25, 53.
[118]Hodgkinson *Account Books*, p. 74; Mastoris, 'Tax assessment of 1504', p. 44.
[119]The donated rents represented 56.1% of the guild's portfolio.
[120]NA, PR 21,599/3, f 28; Hodgkinson *Account Books*, p. 74.

that the chamberlains, wardens and aldermen were adept at navigating global economic circumstances over which they had no control. The same cannot be said about religious change. Perhaps unsurprisingly for an orthodox institution, the guild made no attempt to shift their devotional focus to accommodate reformist doctrine in the 1530s. Thus, whilst the officers might have been able to adapt to changing commercial circumstances, the Chanties Act of 1545 effectively ended the guild's existence. The protracted decline of St. George's guild needs to be seen as a combination of the loss of dynamic leadership (after *c.*1510), combined with a quiet acquiescence to the evolving state-sponsored religious reform (after *c.*1540) that made what the guild offered increasingly unfashionable. This allows for a more precise chronology to be observed. The evidence suggests that a turning (or 'tipping') point in the fortunes of the guild followed the death of William Hegyn in 1508.

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Appendix

Table A1. Collected membership fees and membership numbers, St. George's Guild, Nottingham, 1468–1546 (Source: Hodgkinson, account books).

Year	Amount collected in membership fees	Membership (at 13d. *per annum*)
1468–69	£5 15s. 7d.	107
1469–70	£6 6s. 3d.	117
1470–71	-	-
1471–72	£6 5s. 8d.	116
1472–73	£7 4s. 7d.	133
1473–74	£8 18s. 4d.	165
1474–75	£8 15s.	162
1475–76	£8 7s. 10d.	155
1476–77	£6 19s.	128
1477–78	£6 12s. 10d.	123
1478–79	£6 14s. 2d.	124
1479–80	£6 15s. 1d.	125
1480–81	£6 8s.	118
1481–82	£5 16s. 9d.	108
1482–83	£6 0s. 3d.	111
1483–84	£7 0s. 2d.	129
1484–85	-	-
1485–86	-	-
1486–87	-	-
1487–88	-	-
1488–89	£5	92
1489–90	£ 11s. 9d.	85
1490–91	-	-
1491–92	-	-
1492–93	£4 18s. 9d.	91
1493–94	£5 11s. 8d.	103
1494–95	£4 15s. 4d.	88
1495–96	£6 3s.	114
1496–97	£4 10s. 9d.	84
1497–98	£4 13s. 2d.	86
1498–99	£4 5s. 5d.	79
1499–1500	£4 5s. 11d.	79
1500–01	-	-
1501–02	-	-
1502–03	-	-
1503–04	-	-
1504–05	-	-
1505–06	-	-
1506–07	-	-
1507–08	-	-
1508–09	£4 16s. 4d.	88
1509–10	£3 14s. 8d.	69
1510–11	£3 18s. 7d.	73
1511–12	£4 1s. 8d.	75
1512–13	£4 0s. 10d.	75
1513–14	£4 4s. 5d.	79
1514–15	£3 11s. 5d.	66
1515–16	-	-
1516–17	£3 15s. 1d.	69
1517–18	£3 13s. 7d.	68
1518–19	-	-
1519–20	£4 15s. 11d.	89
1520–21	£4 8s. 11d.	82
1521–22	-	-
1522–23	-	-
1523–24	£3 1s. 5d.	57
1524–25	£2 15s. 11d.	52

(*Continued*)

Table A1. (Continued).

Year	Amount collected in membership fees	Membership (at 13d. *per annum*)
1525–26	£3 11s.	66
1526–27	£3 2s. 8d.	58
1527–28	£3 10s.	65
1528–29	£3 2s.	57
1529–30	£2 19s. 7d.	55
1530–31	£3 3s.	58
1531–32	£3 7s. 3d.	62
1532–33	£3 5s. 10d.	61
1533–34	£2 18s.	54
1534–35	-	-
1535–36	£2 11s.	47
1536–37	-	-
1537–38	£3 9s. 11d.	65
1538–39	£2 6s. 3d.	47
1539–40	£2 6s. 3d.	47
1540–41	-	-
1541–42	£2 1s. 1d.	38
1542–43	£2 5s. 11d.	42
1543–44	£2 0s. 4d.	37
1544–45	£1 12s. 6d.	30
1545–46	£1 0s. 5d.	19

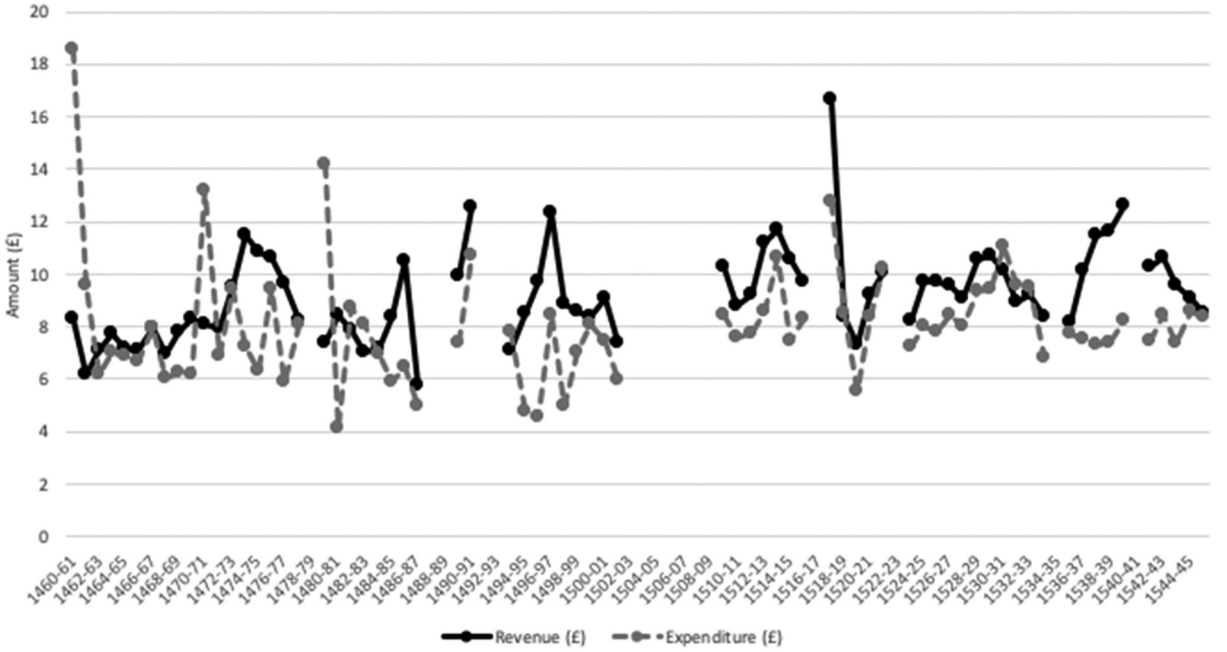

Figure A1. Total annual revenue and expenditure (in £), St. George's guild, Nottingham, 1460–1546 (source: Hodgkinson, *account Books*).