

To See The Light: Understanding the Armorial Bearings of the Tallow Chandlers

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FOREWORD

A year ago our Committee met to consider what type of contribution the Historical Group might make in recognition of the 550th year of the Company's Incorporation; this paper is the outcome. Many of us have admired and enjoyed the Grants of Arms and other charters on display in the Parlour and the Court Room, and through this well-illustrated paper we now have the opportunity to understand better the significance of the Grants and the development of their designs. Importantly, we can now also place them in their historical context.

Huge thanks go to Susan Higgins, our author, not only for her knowledge and in-depth research, but also for her infectious enthusiasm and clear enjoyment of the project. Our thanks go also to our Clerk, Brigadier Roy Wilde, for his ideas, and to the Secretary, Mrs Sheila Jackson, for her editing and layout skills, without which presentation would have been extremely difficult.

I can do no better than quote the words of Winston Churchill when he wrote:

"History with its flickering lamp stumbles along the trail of the past, trying to reconstruct its themes, revive its echoes, and kindle with pale gleams the passions of former days".

Let us hope that this reconstruction of the Company's past will not only improve our understanding of the legacies we have inherited over the last five centuries, but also offer interest and enjoyment in future years to all associated with the Tallow Chandlers.

Nick Hardy
Chairman
The Tallow Chandlers' Historical Group
24th June 2012
The Feast of St John the Baptist



Entrance to Tallow Chandlers' Hall from Dowgate Hill

To See The Light: Understanding the Armorial Bearings of the Tallow Chandlers.

Every visitor to Dowgate Hill, where the Tallow Chandlers have congregated since 1476¹, passes through a splendid set of wrought iron gates surmounted with a representation of the Company's armorial bearings. Few are aware that even before they have set foot in the impressive panelled Hall they have received a message from the past which tells us so much about the history of the Tallow Chandlers. The clues to understanding this history are to be found amongst the wealth of original documents still in the possession of the Company. Many are displayed around the Hall, often overlooked in the convivial surroundings and the enjoyment of meeting friends on the many occasions we find ourselves with a glass in hand in the Parlour.

The Smert Grant



The most beautiful and impressive of these documents is the oldest operative Grant of Arms still in existence in the City. In the fifteenth century twenty four Companies received such grants, but of the thirteen still using them the Tallow Chandlers are the only ones still in possession of the original document. Coats of arms originally made their appearance in the twelfth century as a conspicuous form of identification whether for battle, crusade or tournament in an age obsessed with chivalry. They were, as they still are today, the responsibility of the Herald², or Officers of Arms who, appointed by the monarch, confirmed new applications and established the rights to existing arms. On the 24th September 1456 the "Mystery and Company of Tallow Chandlers in the City of London" represented by John Prior, John Thirlow, William Blakman and Richard Grenecroft, applied for the honour of heraldic recognition. The Tallow Chandlers were given "their own arms, ensigns and blazon separate and distinct from the others" which they had asked for "with great insistence" from John Smert, Garter King of Arms.

Illustrated margin of the Grant of Arms designed in 1456 by John Smert for the "Mystery and Company of Tallow Chandlers in the City of London."

¹ The site was purchased in 1476 for the grand sum of £66 13s 4d . "Seven Centuries of Light" p.15

² I would particularly like to thank Windsor Herald, W.G.Hunt TD. for his assistance in preparing this paper.

The “blazon”, or heraldic description, written in Norman French, gave the precise details of how the various elements of the arms were to be reproduced in the language peculiar to the symbolism of arms. Smert, son-in-law and successor to the original Garter King, William Bruge, designed an “escutcheon” or shield divided, in his own particular style, into six pieces, in contrast to the more commonplace four. The Tallow Chandlers, together with the Glovers and Girdlers, are distinguished in possessing this style of shield. Possibly Smert was developing a distinctive stylistic variation to identify Livery Companies but the lack of records makes this impossible to prove. He specified that the shield should be “azure and argent” (blue and silver) with three doves, membered gules (with red legs), each holding in its beak “an olive branch or” (gold). The choice of a blue background may have been influenced by the traditional association between Our Lady and St John the Baptist. On the shield rested a helmet, wreathed in red and ermine, necessary to uphold the crest, which featured “an angel sitting on a cloud holding the head of St John the Baptist on a charger or.”



*Details from 1456
Grant showing an
“escutcheon of six
pieces azure and
argent” and crest
with “angel sitting
on a cloud holding
the head of St John
the Baptist”*



These images will seem familiar, if not completely right, to those who have stood waiting in the Lobby and noticed the Company’s arms woven into the carpet or displayed on a wooden panel on the wall. However, to survive the vicissitudes of history livery companies have had to change and adapt and the visual representation of the Tallow Chandlers is part of this story of evolution.

Unravelling The Mystery

To talk of a “mystery” may not seem to point to an obvious explanation of the Company’s historic origins, particularly as there is surely nothing very mysterious about the production of candles from tallow. However, the medieval meaning of ‘mystery’, sometimes written ‘mistry’, differed greatly from our modern understanding. More familiar perhaps in this context from the “Mystery Plays”, bible stories performed from the tenth century by the craft guilds, the origin of the word comes from the French ‘metier’ or trade. By the beginning of the thirteenth century it is clear that men who practised the same craft or “mystery” congregated together in ways which still exist today, if on a far smaller scale, with the meat traders in Smithfield and diamond dealers in Hatton Garden.

From as early as 1283 records show Tallow Chandlers working in just this way. Originally referred to by their Latin name of unctuarii, working as oynters or dealers in fats and oils, their trade was based on the rendering of the rough fat supplied by butchers. However, they also became known as candalarii or chandlers through their association with candle-making although their business could extend to the production of sauces, soaps and anything else they could manage to do without transgressing trade boundaries. Inter trade disputes were a regular feature of medieval life with different interest groups jockeying for power under the watchful eyes of the Guildhall and the Tallow Chandlers had regular run-ins with the Salters that persisted for centuries.

The Tallow Chandlers' first market place was in West Chepe, (modern day Cheapside) where they set up a colony of 'selds' or small stalls. In medieval London localism was more than a political catch phrase. People who worked together combined intense commercial rivalry with living together in the same neighbourhood. Worshipping in their local churches, their shared religious observance brought them together as a fraternity in a society which was bound by a belief in God and an awareness of heaven and hell that determined lifestyles and morality. Records³ indicate that the Tallow Chandlers originally had a hall in Bradstrete (Broad Street) and in 1472 the will of John Steward, a Tallow Chandler, who held the prestigious and powerful office of Sheriff, refers to the fraternity of "Our Lady and St John The Baptist" associated with the nearby Church of St Botolph, without Bishopsgate. He specified that the Tallow Chandlers were to use money from the rent of properties that he had left them to hold religious services in perpetuity for the benefit of the souls of his family and "all the brothers and sisters of the fraternity". Four years later, when the Company purchased land for the current Hall, the site was significantly opposite the Church of St John The Baptist⁴, who was the patron saint of all the Tallow Chandler guilds in Britain. It was an obvious association for those known as oynters to be linked with such a major religious figure as the anointer of Christ. The Gospel of St. John refers to the saint as the forerunner of Christ "a burning and shining lamp...willing to rejoice for a while in His light" (John 5:35), a most appropriate association for the patron saint of the Tallow Chandlers. In the biblically literate fifteenth century his image on the Company's arms served as both a literal and metaphorical trademark.



Trick of the 1456 Grant, held in the College of Arms, giving explicit instructions in respect of colour and symbols to be used.

As the College was established in 1484 and provision for records acquired only after 1555, this was undoubtedly a copy of the arms made by a later Herald and not Smert himself.

³ Patent Rolls, Edward IV, Dec 15th 1464

⁴ Later called St John's Walbrook, never rebuilt after 1666 and now the site of Cannon St. Station.

As well as providing spiritual comfort, membership of the fraternities conferred more tangible benefits in the early use of funds from fees, fines and endowments. In 1469 John Bracy's will specified an 'obit' or annual commemoration of his soul but he also left enough money for the distribution of 12 quarters of coal to the indigent of the parish. His bequest of a property known as le Nonne in Bradstrete⁵ laid the foundations of a property portfolio that continues to fund charitable giving to this day. The fraternities also provided a model for trade associations with their formal structures of admission, election of officers and regulation at a time when the weight and size of a candle was an important consideration for householders compelled by law to put a light outside their property. It was beneficial to have the endorsement of the Church for public transactions when tensions between the City and the Crown were ongoing and the mechanisms of self-governance were still evolving. Neither was the City itself a homogenous body, as shown by the struggles of the previous century between the Aldermen and the craft representatives who asserted their right to representation in civic governance structure. Church courts could also be used to settle disputes without resort to secular authorities. This could prove useful when the wealthy merchant traders constituted the ruling class and could not be guaranteed to share the priorities of the lesser crafts.

Unravelling the "mystery" therefore helps us to understand the religious iconography on the Smert achievement⁶. It confirms the association between the Tallow Chandlers and John The Baptist, whose decapitated head appears on the crest and whose words, "I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a Dove, and it abode on him" (John, 1.32), explain the ornithological imagery on the shield. The depiction of the doves bearing olive branches in their beaks is an obvious reference to Noah's Ark and a symbol of peace and forgiveness, no doubt relevant to the highly competitive environment of medieval London. There is no reference to a motto although a 'trick'⁷ held in the College of Arms refers to "Delight in God, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire", perhaps an early pun celebrating the use of candles. Later grants were to have more specifically religious references.

Candles and Kings

The next question we must ask ourselves is why would the Tallow Chandlers go to the trouble of acquiring the right to bear arms and the expense of creating such a beautiful illuminated document? Most obviously, formal heraldic recognition was required if the Company was to display Arms in any public situation. It undoubtedly facilitated the process of business to have a recognised 'brand' in the medieval marketplace and to place the Company alongside the ranks of the more established Liveries. Further inspection of the Grant itself, however, suggests a more overtly political motivation. Smert, initially appointed Chester Herald by Richard III in 1398, was a skilled diplomat much employed by the Court on overseas missions and had close links with the royal household by virtue of his appointment. So, whilst the Grant does not specifically refer to any royal authority, the portrait of Henry VI in such a prominent position tells us of the importance of royal endorsement. In 1456 the mentally fragile king had only just resumed control of the kingdom after a period in which his queen, the formidable Margaret of Anjou, had taken an active role in managing the affairs of state.

⁵ John Bracy was the Tallow Chandlers' Master from 1461-67. The deeds to this property, the oldest document in the company's possession, are displayed in the Court Room.

⁶ The 'achievement' embraces all elements of the armorial bearing.

⁷ A 'trick' is an open line drawing in ink with colours indicated by name usually produced by Heralds for recording purposes.

Nevertheless, this charming representation of the king, with his arms outstretched, seemingly moving towards us, reminds us that trade in London operated by virtue of royal permissions and that whilst the primary purpose of organising together as a Company was to maximise power and control over specific areas of trade, royal approval was essential.



*Detail of Henry VI
(1421-71) from the
1456 Grant of Arms.*

Kings had proved all too willing to get involved in the affairs of London, which was never allowed to develop into an independent city state like Venice, Genoa or Hamburg. In 1319 Edward II had decreed that admission to the Freedom, which granted access to the lucrative retail market, could only be obtained through the crafts or ‘mysteries’. This ensured that foreign or ‘alien’ merchants, even those from outside London, would be restricted to the wholesale business. As well as these valuable trading rights, only Freemen were permitted to have a say in the governance of the City, thus retaining a grip on political power. A later statute of Edward III provided that “handicraftsmen shall use but one mystery”, compelling trades to organise and form specialist groups. However, the city was mindful that what it achieved by royal assent could equally be lost in the same way. Thus, whilst the reign of Henry VI was “synonymous with military misfortune and domestic disorder”⁸, the City needed the Crown’s continuing approval of its activities.

⁸ For more historical background to the fifteenth century see “The Historical Context of the 1462 Charter” prepared by Brig. Roy Wilde CBE for celebration of 550th anniversary of Incorporation.

Conversely, kings looked to the city companies for financial assistance and, between 1448-60, 14 out of 21 requests for 'loans' were agreed. They were also all too aware that dynastic disputes had given Londoners the power of endorsement. Indeed in 1461 Henry was forced to relinquish the throne when the city welcomed Edward IV as his replacement. A brief return to the throne in 1471 ended with his death in the Tower of London.

Thus monarchs looked to the city for political support whenever possible and this included confirming royal power and prestige by putting on a good show when required to do so. By the early 14th century civic pageantry was an important element of royal ritual and by the 15th century pageants for coronations, marriages and celebrations of military victories were commonplace. In 1432 Henry received a "joyous welcome" on his return from his coronation in Paris, where "the apathy had been deafening,"⁹ and whilst these displays were neither spontaneous nor voluntary, the growing middle class aspirations of the trade guilds meant that they did not want to be left out or fail in comparison with the display of the wealthier more established companies. The Grant of Arms gave the visible signs of special status with "banners, standards and pennons which they display at their important feasts and assemblies" and confirmed the Company in their sense of dignity and identity. "It defined a company's membership of London's corporate club whilst at the same time distinguishing itself from its peers."¹⁰

It may be purely coincidental but John Steward, of whom mention was made earlier, is the first Tallow Chandler to be mentioned in a list of mayors and sheriffs¹¹, who comprised the civic elite. Study of these records, dating back to 1190, illustrates the extent to which governance of the city was dominated by the merchant classes such as the Mercers, Drapers and Goldsmiths. A mere three days before the Company was given its Grant of Arms, on 21st September, Steward was elected as "one of the Sheriffs of London and Middlesex". The position of mayor alone was more important than the sheriff and the shrievalty was considered a necessary stepping stone before promotion to the mayoralty. In the words of John Carpenter, the city's common clerk and chronicler, the sheriff served as "the eyes of the Mayor"¹² and yet was also responsible for executing royal writs. As a result the sheriff was both a royal agent and a civic official, which must have proved exacting on occasion. The "three-cornered relationship between craft, city and crown"¹³ was the determining factor in shaping the economic and political face of London and so there can be little surprise that his promotion runs in parallel with his Company's rise in profile.

Incorporation

The 1456 Grant of Arms made sense to a Company wishing to formalise its procedures; it already had "Sworn Wardens and other officers...rules and good ordinances". No mention is made of a Master as formal records do not begin until 1461 although we know that as far back as 1299 Roger le Chaundler represented the Company in this capacity at the Assize of Candles in that year. The significance of the Grant was as a symbolic rather than legal recognition for a company which felt sufficiently confident to raise its official profile. As such it was a logical precursor to incorporation,

⁹ "London In The Later Middle Ages" Caroline Barron

¹⁰ Ian Gadd "Early Modern Printed Histories of the London Livery Companies" p37 in "Guilds, Society & Economy in London" ed Gadd & Wallis

¹¹ C Barron op. cit. p343

¹² "Medieval London" G. Williams p28

¹³ Matthew Davies "Crown, city and guild in late medieval London" in "London & Beyond. Essays in honour of Derek Keene"

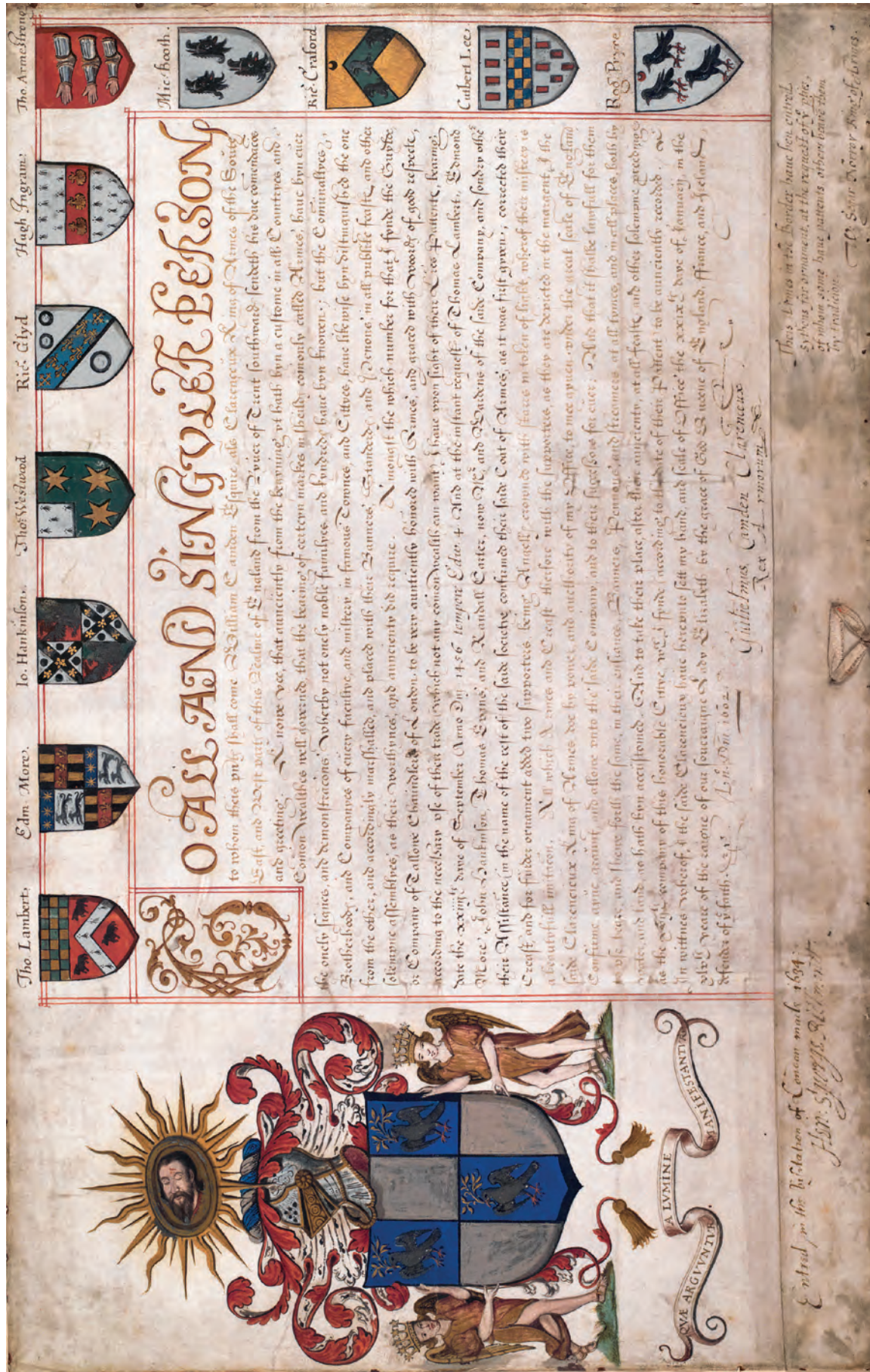
which took place in 1462, and transformed the Tallow Chandlers into a full-blown livery company. Incorporation conferred upon companies a legal identity which went beyond the lifespan of its members and gave them some security in the constantly changing metropolitan environment. Most importantly it gave a company the right to acquire property in perpetuity and confirmed the operation of trade regulation. Between 1462-1510 at least 16 of the ‘middle class’ crafts and trades of the city undertook the expense of a royal charter of incorporation. Only thirteen of the livery companies which exist today achieved incorporation before the Tallow Chandlers and intense rivalry developed over matters of precedence. Pitched battles and skirmishes between retainers were frequent and the term “at sixes and sevens” is said to derive from a dispute between the Skinners and Merchant Taylors, which resulted in an annual alteration of seniority. The Company is fortunate enough to have the original Charter of Incorporation, complete with attached seal, still in its possession and on display in the Parlour. For those of us whose Latin is not quite up to scratch, there is, happily, a translation.



Original Charter of Incorporation of March 1462, complete with attached seal of Edward VI (1461-83).



1456 Grant of Arms by "Garter King of Arms of the Kingdom of England", John Smert.



1603 Confirmation of Arms and Grant of Supporters and Crest by Clarenceux King of Arms, William Camden.



All and Singular

ALL and SINGULAR

to whom these Presents shall come. Sir Anthony Duck
and Maister Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Garter, Principal King of Arms
Sir John Darnley, Maister, Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Clarenceux
King of Arms and Maister John Topham Esquire, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Berry
and Maister King of Arms, Lord Girdling, Maister Randall Herbert Monier-Williams, Gentleman,
Bachelor of Arts of the University of Oxford, Doctor of the Supreme Court of Judicature and Clerk and
Secretary to the Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers of the City of London, hath represented unto the
Maister of the Bench, Maister Maister, John of York, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, Knight
Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order, Earl Marshal and Hereditary Marshal of England and One
of her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council that the said Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers
King of Arms on the twenty-fourth day of September 1456 and that on the twenty-ninth day of Jan-
uary 1612, William Camden, Clarenceux King of Arms did confirm the aforesaid Arms and Supporters thereto and did alter the aforesaid Crest. That for
upwards of two centuries the said Company have used and borne the aforesaid Arms and Supporters together with both the Crest as granted in 1456 upon the docket side
and the Crest as altered in 1612 upon the reverse side. That being now informed that this form of bearing is not duly authorized and being desirous of obtaining
due and lawful authority for its continuance he, as Clerk, hath requested the favour of this Grace's Marshal for the issue of Letters Patent of the Kings of Arms
whereby the said Company may now be authorized to bear two Crests, that upon the docket being assigned by Garter King of Arms in 1456 and that on the reverse
being the altered Crest granted by Clarenceux King of Arms in 1612 as may be proper to be borne and used by the Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers
of the City of London on such or otherwise the whole according to the Laws of Arms. And forasmuch as the said Earl Marshal did by Warrant under his
hand and Seal bearing date the Third day of July last authorize and direct this to confirm such Crests accordingly. Now in therefore
Clarenceux and Berry and Maister King of Arms in pursuance of this Grace's Warrant and by virtue of the Letters Patent of our several Offices to each of us respectively grant-
ed to us by these Presents confirm unto the Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers of the City of London the Crests following. That is to say, That upon the docket
On a wreath Argent and Azure An Angel issuant from Clouds proper holding a Platter Or thereon the head of St. John the Baptist also proper. And that on the
reverse On a wreath Argent and Azure On a Charger proper Damazie Or the head of St. John the Baptist also proper as the same are in the margin hereof more plainly
depicted to be borne and used for ever hereafter by the Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers of the City of London. And as otherwise the whole according
to the Laws of Arms. **An witness** Whereof We the said Garter, Clarenceux and Berry and Maister King of Arms have to these Presents subscribed Our names and
affixed the Seals of our several Offices the fourth day of September in the fourth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lady Elizabeth the Second by the Grace of
God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Her other Realms and Territories, Queen, Head of the Commonwealth Defender
of the Faith and in the year of Our Lord One thousand nine hundred and sixty-one.

Anthony R. Wagner.

Quarter.

L. D. Skelton - Armstrong

Charmoux

February 2 - Topspin

Norroy and Ulster

1961 Grant of Arms confirming the “Arms and Supporters together with the Crest as granted in 1456... and the Crest as altered in 1603”. Note the Herald’s addition of a scallop atop the shield.



ELIZABETH THE SECOND

by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland and of Our other Realms and Territories
Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith:
TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, GREETING!

WHEREAS by their humble Petition the Master, Wardens and Commonalty of the Mystery of Tallow Chandlers of Our City of London (hereinafter called "the Company") have represented unto Us:

First, that the Company was incorporated by Royal Charter (hereinafter called "the Charter of Incorporation") granted by His Majesty King Edward the Fourth on the eighth day of March in the year of Our Lord One thousand four hundred and sixty-two,

Secondly, that the Charter of Incorporation was confirmed by Letters Patent of Their Majesties King Henry the Eighth, King Edward the Sixth, King Philip and Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth the First and by the Letters Patent next in recital,

Thirdly, that by a Charter (hereinafter called "the Acting Charter") granted by His Majesty King James the First bearing date the sixth day of March One thousand six hundred and six power was conferred upon the Company or the greater part of it, assembled by Public Summons for the purpose (of whom the Master and one Warden were directed to be two) to make from time to time reasonable laws, statutes, ordinances, decrees and constitutions for the good regulation and government of the Company; and

Fourthly, that by a Charter granted by His Majesty King Charles the Second bearing date the twenty-ninth day of July One thousand six hundred and seventy-seven certain further powers were conferred upon the Company but not so as to add to, alter or detract in any way from the recited power to make Ordinances:

AND WHEREAS the Company has by its said Petition further represented unto Us that it would be to the advantage and benefit of the Company if the procedure for making Ordinances were revised:

AND WHEREAS the Company has by its said Petition humbly prayed that having regard to the circumstances therein set forth We would be graciously pleased to grant to the Company a Supplemental Charter for the purpose aforesaid.



New frontispiece for the eighth Charter of Incorporation granted to the Tallow Chandlers in 1962 by Elizabeth II on the 500th anniversary of their original Charter of 1462. This shows a return to a flat-topped shield.

From Chantries to Charities.

By the end of the fifteenth century there were probably fifty city companies in London which played a major role in the governance structure that had evolved around the Guildhall. To many commentators this represents the highpoint of London's ability to exercise effective self-government before the Tudors effectively took hold of the mechanisms of local authority and asserted the over-riding power of the monarch. However, incorporation made the city companies "as immortal as religious houses and, as events turned out, more so."¹⁴ For whilst they were caught up in the traumas of the Reformation through an attack on their charitable wealth by the Chantries Act of 1547, which confiscated all properties associated with "superstitious practices", they transformed their activities to ensure their survival. Moving away from an emphasis upon their religious origins, they maintained an undeniably powerful presence with "perhaps as many as three quarters of males in mid sixteenth century London...members of a company."¹⁵ The Tallow Chandlers, along with the other livery companies, continued to play a vital role in trade regulation whilst developing a growing involvement in the provision of welfare funded by a property portfolio based on their role as charitable trustees. Many of the almshouses associated with the livery companies date back to this period.

Edward VI (1547-53) continued to pursue the resources of the livery companies and his early death undoubtedly saved them from further royal interference. The experience must have left them acutely aware of the power of the monarch to threaten their continued existence and many companies' arms were discreetly altered at this time to play down or negate their specifically Catholic character. In 1536 the Bakers replaced their original triple crown of the Pope on their arms with sheaves of corn. The attempted invasion by the Spanish Armada in 1588 had resulted in renewed anti-Catholicism but the Tallow Chandlers did not seek any alteration to their armorial bearings until January 1603, shortly before the death of Elizabeth I on 24th March.



A new set of ordinances granted by Elizabeth I in 1588. Decorated with colourful birds and flowers and the arms of such notables as Lord Burleigh, it hangs to the left of the Master's Chair in the Banqueting Hall. It is the last official document to display the 1456 Smert Arms.

¹⁴ C Barron, op. cit. p225.

¹⁵ Gadd & Wallis, op. cit. p.5.

Camden Confirmation

The Company applied to William Camden, Clarenceux King of Arms from 1597-1623¹⁶ for a confirmation of their right to bear arms. At the same time the opportunity was taken to revise or update the appearance of the original fifteenth century crest. Camden was a celebrated antiquarian and historian and Headmaster of Westminster School before he took up his post at the College of Arms. He originally came from Chipping Camden in Gloucestershire but in 1609 he moved to a property in Kent, which he named Camden Place. A century later this was acquired by Sir John Pratt who, on becoming Lord Chancellor, was made a peer and took as his title Baron Camden. This distinguished gentlemen held land in the Parish of St Pancras where in 1791 they began to build houses in the area called Camden Town. Such are the unseen links that the everyday reveals about our history.

Camden's 1603 Confirmation of the Arms and Grant of Crest and Supporters is displayed in the Parlour. The illuminated document starts off by asserting the importance of arms by which "Companys of every faculty and mistery...have been distinguished one from the other ...as their worthyness and antiquity did require". He acknowledged that the "Company of Tallow Chandlers of London... be very anciently honoured with Arms" by virtue of the 1456 Grant. However, whilst confirming Smert's old grant, Camden proceeded to add his own touches as he 'for further ornament added two supporters, being Angels, crowned with stars in token of light, whereof their mystery is a beautiful imitation.' In heraldry the "shield and the design on it are, properly speaking, the arms"¹⁷ and all other additions are ancillary decorations. Supporters are human or semi-human figures, real or imaginary beasts or birds that are depicted on either side holding the shield up. Originally associated with the peerage, it was regarded as a further mark of prestige and briefly in the nineteenth century it was necessary to receive a Royal Warrant to qualify for such a grant.



Details of 1603 Confirmation and Grant. Camden's Supporters - "Angels, crowned with stars in token of light whereof their mystery is a beautiful imitation."

In the seventeenth century heraldry was indissolubly linked to status and in particular with the importance of showing family or corporate antiquity. Heraldry had become a means by which a new social class of gentry sought legitimisation and recognition. Heraldic catalogues, such as Benjamin Wright's engravings of 1596, were produced illustrating the arms of the London's livery companies. These proved so popular that in 1620 the Stationers' Company were ordered by the Court of Chivalry not to allow the printing of any book concerning heraldry without their specific license. A coat of arms, designed to express a Company's ancient heritage and worth, was transformed by the aspiring gentry into 'objet d'art' that reflected their own good taste and refinement. Thus Camden's addition of the two highly pictorial angels on either side of the shield gave the Tallow Chandlers both a visual pun with the reference to light and the extra kudos of upgrading their arms.

¹⁶ Clarenceux is one of three Kings of Arms along with Garter and Norroy and Ulster. See Gordon Phillips "Seven Centuries of Light" p.62

¹⁷ R. Denys "Heraldry & The Heralds"

No blazon or written description appears in the grant, which relies upon an interpretation of the painting depicted in the margin of the grant and upon records in the College of Arms¹⁸. Camden's "correction" of the crest took away the single angel, which had been holding the head of the saint on a small plate, which had rested atop the shield in Smert's Grant and instead substituted the head of St John the Baptist displayed on a gold platter. This has variously been ascribed to an aesthetic simplification, with the preference for a symmetrical image uncluttered by a veritable host of angels, or to a diplomatic desire to appear more secular in an era still riven by religious dissent. Notwithstanding this, the emblems displayed in the Company's arms remain wholly religious; a distinction shared with three other Livery Companies, the Mercers, Drapers and Girdlers.



*Detail of 1603 Confirmation and Grant of Crest and Supporters to Arms.
Camden's corrected crest, "on a wreath argent and azure the head of St John the Baptist
proper in a charger proper, radiated or".*

¹⁸ College of Arms MS. EDN. 57/446

A note at the bottom of the document explains that the Arms in the borders that decorate the top and right hand side of the page were put there “at the request of the parties of whom some have patents, others have them by tradition.” These shields, and the names that accompany them, are a window back to the Tallow Chandlers of the time who were evidently glad to have an opportunity to display their own armorial bearings. Of the eleven signatures of these eminent company men, eight were Masters between 1589 and 1636 with the result that their names are now on the Record Roll displayed in the Lobby of the Hall. One, Thomas Armstrong, must have hit hard times as we know he later became a beneficiary of company charitable giving. The note is signed by William Segar who, as well as being Norroy¹⁹ King of Arms, was a celebrated portrait painter in the Court of Elizabeth I.



Detail of 1603 Grant with arms of Lambert, More, Hankinson, Westwood, Glyd, Ingrams, Armstrong, Booth, Craford, Lee and Pryce. These prominent members of the Livery were no doubt proud to be able to display their own arms with those of their Company.

Shining Light on Muddy Waters.

The Grant also contains a reference to light in the motto, “quae arguuntur a lumine manifestantur”, written on a flowing scroll beneath the shield. This Latin inscription, obscure even to classical minds today, is apparently reminiscent of Ephesians 5:13 – “all things when they are exposed to the light are made manifest.” In English heraldry a motto does not form part of the achievement and may be changed at will. The current motto “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” may have been in use before the Reformation and the Company may have felt it prudent to substitute it with something a little less overtly religious in 1603. However, this is a subject of debate,²⁰ which unfortunately cannot be said to be the case with the matter of precedence brought

¹⁹ Norroy and Ulster King of Arms covers all territory North of the Trent and Ireland.

²⁰ See James Loch’s study of Company Mottos in Historical Group Occasional Paper series.

to our attention in the Grant. As mentioned previously, the issue of precedence was one that concerned both hearts and minds and Camden sees fit to muddy the waters by referring to the Tallow Chandlers as the “xviith company of this honourable City, which I find (according to the date of their Patent) to be anciently recorded.” Unfortunately this record is no longer in existence and cannot be used to over-rule an order of precedence laid down in 1516 which, for the purpose of “crafts and mysteries for their Goings... in all processions...for the business of the City”, placed the Tallow Chandlers as twenty first next after the Wax Chandlers. In 1672, when there was a “great contest between several companies of the city touching precedence in their standings and places upon the Lord Mayor’s Day”, the Company tried to assert Camden’s claim but with no success and so had to accept the position of twenty first, which persists to this day.

One Crest or Two?

The issue of records continues to be of interest as although Camden’s grant changes the Company’s arms there is evidence to show that this new set did not immediately replace the old. A trick, or outline drawing, dating from 1613 by Augustine Vincent, a Clerk of Records in the Tower of London, clearly shows the old Smert Grant of 1456 was still being used. Vincent, Windsor Herald



Trick by Augustine Vincent dated 1613.

Consequently storage of earlier grants may have relied upon other authorities and standardisation may have been hampered by this and the ongoing rivalries between feuding Heralds²¹. However in 1634 “the Master and Wardens of the Company of Tallow Chandlers” were summoned to appear at the Guild Hall “on the 8 day of November by nine of the Clock in the morning....for the registering and recording of the arms crests and supporters...of your Corporation”²², Camden’s arms were duly confirmed and a memo to that effect appended to the Grant. Yet despite this it would appear that the Company fell into the practice of combining both the Smert and the Camden crests in a highly irregular manner.



Record of 1634 Visitation of Inspection by Henry St George, Richmond Herald.

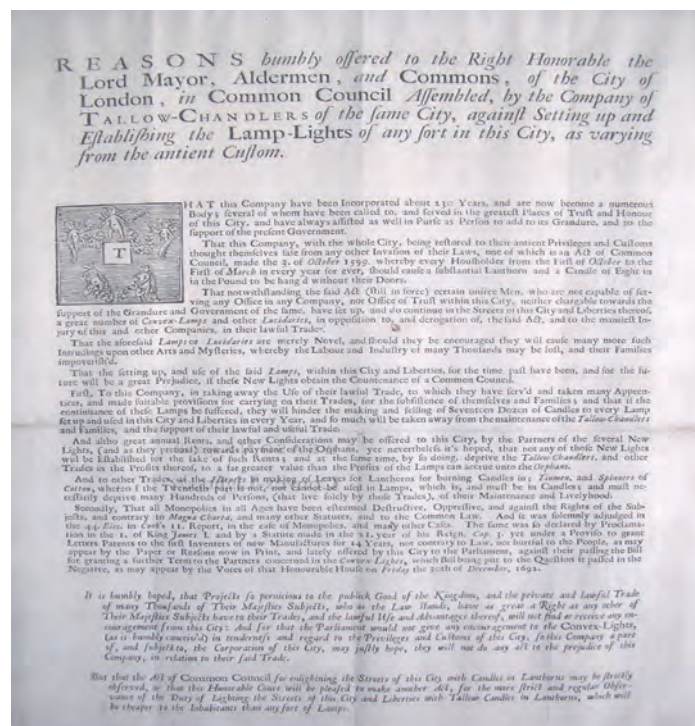
²¹ In 1602 the argumentative Ralph Brooke, an Office of Arms, accused Camden of making grants to “mean men”, including John, father of William Shakespeare.

²² “Records of The Tallow Chandlers” p. 35

Hard Times.

In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the direct control exercised by the livery companies over their original trades was significantly reduced by virtue of the expansion and growing complexity of markets. Legal challenge saw the disappearance of the right of search and inspection and regulatory powers were taken over by central government. Finances were further weakened by royal demands for money including investment in the Plantation of Ulster and the development of the East India Company as a joint stock company. The Great Fire of London in 1666 had led Parliament to set aside the exclusive rights of some guilds to forestall labour shortages and opened up trade to 'foreigners'. The position of the Tallow Chandlers was further impaired by inventions and discoveries which superseded the need for tallow candles. In 1692 a last gasp attempt at protectionism saw a Petition proclaiming the dangers of oil lighting as a replacement for candles being presented to the Lord Mayor. However, by 1694 the City of London had given the sole right of lighting to the Convex Oil Company for twenty-one years and it was obvious that the days of candle light were over. By 1807 gas had replaced oil and by 1847 gas lighting was installed at the Tallow Chandlers Hall.

1692 Petition Against Lamp Light displayed in the Court Room.



*"Reasons
humbly offered
...against
Setting Up and
Establishing
Lamp-Lights of
any sort in this
City, as
varying from
the ancient
Custom."*

Moreover, it became obvious that it was possible to prosper in the City without being a Freeman, which became an honorary and social recognition rather than a means by which to trade, and so the relevance of the companies became less apparent. For the Tallow Chandlers, as for many others, these were challenging years when membership declined, finances were difficult and their very existence threatened. Under such circumstances the companies did not appear to be in a strong position to respond to the most overt threat to their existence since the Tudors. The 1870's saw a series of challenges mounted by the Liberal Prime Minister, Gladstone, who perceived the companies as bastions of privilege, gentlemen's dining clubs masquerading as organisations for the benefit of trade and charitable giving. In November 1875 he made an impassioned speech calling for London's Livery Companies to "not only have dinners once a year, once a quarter or once a month but to fulfil the purpose for which they were founded". It must be remembered that the City held on to the advantage of electing four Members of Parliament even after the 1832 Reform Act

and so there was a significant element of playing politics in this outburst. As bulwarks of perceived Tory support, the radical Liberals ordered a series of Royal Commissions to investigate the activities of the companies. Faced by this threat the Livery Companies, experienced “the great awakening,”²³ which roused them from their complacency and made them re-evaluate their role in the city’s governance structure and their obligations as charitable institutions and trustees of surplus revenue accruing from their property interests. A review of income saw a more equitable matching of assets with donations to charitable causes and educational support in particular. They turned to their craft roots and gave assistance to the growth of technical education with the formation in 1878 of the City and Guilds Institute.

Echoes of the Past

In the twentieth century the effects of two World Wars and the decline of the trade from which the Company had grown, saw the Tallow Chandlers re-evaluate their identity in line with modern developments. Tallow, now refined by highly sophisticated technology into the raw materials for a range of industries, had long since left behind its primary association with candle making. In line with these changes the Company sought to develop its links with those industries seen as natural successors to the ancient trade. The 1970’s saw the admission of members of the Federation of Oils, Seeds and Fats Association (FOSFA) to the Freedom and later the Livery and connections with the National Edible Oils Distributors Associations (NEODA). After a period of consultation dating back to the 1940’s, in 1977 the work of Past-Master Tom Wilmot and the Livery Liaison Group resulted in a strong connection with the petroleum industry. The 1980’s saw similar arrangements being put in place with the gas industry and British Gas. In many ways going forward in this manner was highly reminiscent of the days when Tallow Chandlers were also known as unctuarii or oyntners and the boundaries between the different trades had yet to be determined. As Clerk Emeritus Michael Woodhead pointed out “We started life as chandlers...Our link with the BP... has given us a new interest in trade, which is where we started.”²⁴



Eminent Tallow Chandlers, such as Stanley Wells, whose portrait hangs in the Banqueting Hall, have played their role as heirs to the legacy of John Steward in the governance of the City. Together with Peter Boulton, he was also responsible for the sponsorship of the 290 (City of London) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, Territorial Army. The defence cuts of the late 1960s led Brigadier Nick Thompson to re-focus support for the military reservists upon the oil installation experts of the 503 Specialist Team Royal Engineers.

Stanley Wells CC, Sheriff 1949-50.

The broadening scope of association, necessitated from a decline in finances as much as numbers, was accompanied by a change of fortune which also had its roots in our historic beginnings. The 1980’s saw a property boom in London which greatly assisted the revival of the Company’s fortunes. The Company’s property portfolio had its origins in the bequests of men such as John Steward, who in 1472 had left four houses in Bishopsgate and a property in Cornhill. In

²³ Richard Champness quoted in F W Law “The Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers.”

²⁴ Quoted *Seven Centuries of Light*, p.250.

1987 the sale of 274-280 Bishopsgate enabled the Livery to increase its promotion of charitable objectives in line with its origins as a fraternity. The result has been a thriving membership that is able to take pride in the considerable charitable work that, amongst other things, the Company undertakes through educational trusts, vocational award schemes, medical research and care of the disabled.



A Return To Arms.

We cannot end without addressing the fact that the Tallow Chandlers seemed to have got away with the use of two crests on their arms rather than adopting the simplified Camden version authorised in 1603. Everything, from the mats on the table when we sit down to enjoy the hospitality of the Hall to the Master's highly ornate Badge of Office, displays this combined image and over the years this has caused considerable disquiet.

Master's Badge of Office

In March 1950 a Court Meeting acknowledged that according to the records of the College of Arms the armorial bearings over the Dowgate Street entrance were incorrect and that endeavours should be made to ensure that the College of Arms would recognise this aberration. However, it must have been that the prospect of the five hundredth anniversary of Incorporation in March 1962 that focussed minds because it was not until 9th November, 1961 that regularisation was eventually sought for the unique distinction among livery companies of the bearing of two crests. At the same time the Company received a Grant of Heraldic Badge or Device in the form of the freestanding representation of the dove holding an olive branch. Whilst arms and crests have distinct individual and corporate ownership, badges may be worn by adherents or members associated with an organisation. Today it is, perhaps, the most familiar image associated with the Tallow Chandlers.

The new Grant of Arms stated that the Clerk, Randall Monier-Williams²⁵, "desirous of obtaining due and lawful authority" applied for permission from the three most senior Kings of Arms, Garter, Clarenceux and Norroy, to present the Tallow Chandlers' case to the Duke of Norfolk, the premier duke in the peerage of England and Earl Marshal, responsible for all matters relating to arms, ensigns of nobility and chivalry. By comparison to the earlier grants, this was rolling out all the

²⁵ The Monier-Williams, Uncle Monier and his nephew Randall, were Company Clerks from 1884-1978.

big guns. Sir Antony Richard Wagner, whose signature is the first in line with the others, was Garter King of Arms from 1961-75 and described when he died in 1995 as the “most eminent scholar at the College of Arms in the last two hundred years. The Grant contained a hint of rebuke in the mention that “for upwards of two centuries the said Company have used and borne the ...Arms and Supporters together with both the Crest as granted in 1456 ...and the Crest as altered in 1602”. Redress however, was at hand as “being informed that this form of Bearing is not duly authorized” the Company had done the right thing and sought the assistance of the Heralds to correct matters. A very clear description is given in relation to the position and description of the Crests with the Smert on the “dexter” (right) and the Camden on the “sinister” (left). No doubt for the avoidance of further controversy, there is in the margin a beautiful painting of the whole ‘achievement’. This was in contrast to the Charter of Incorporation granted the following year which, unlike its ancient predecessors, was a type-faced document unadorned with any images of the arms that had been so graciously confirmed. Historically it was always the responsibility of the Companies to supply any artistic adornment to documents and in difficult times this was not a priority, as evidenced by the Patent granted by James I displayed in the Banqueting Hall. The Company is pleased to have recognised the 550th anniversary of Incorporation by commissioning a new frontispiece for the eighth Charter to be granted to the Tallow Chandlers. The document includes a splendid illumination of the Company’s arms.

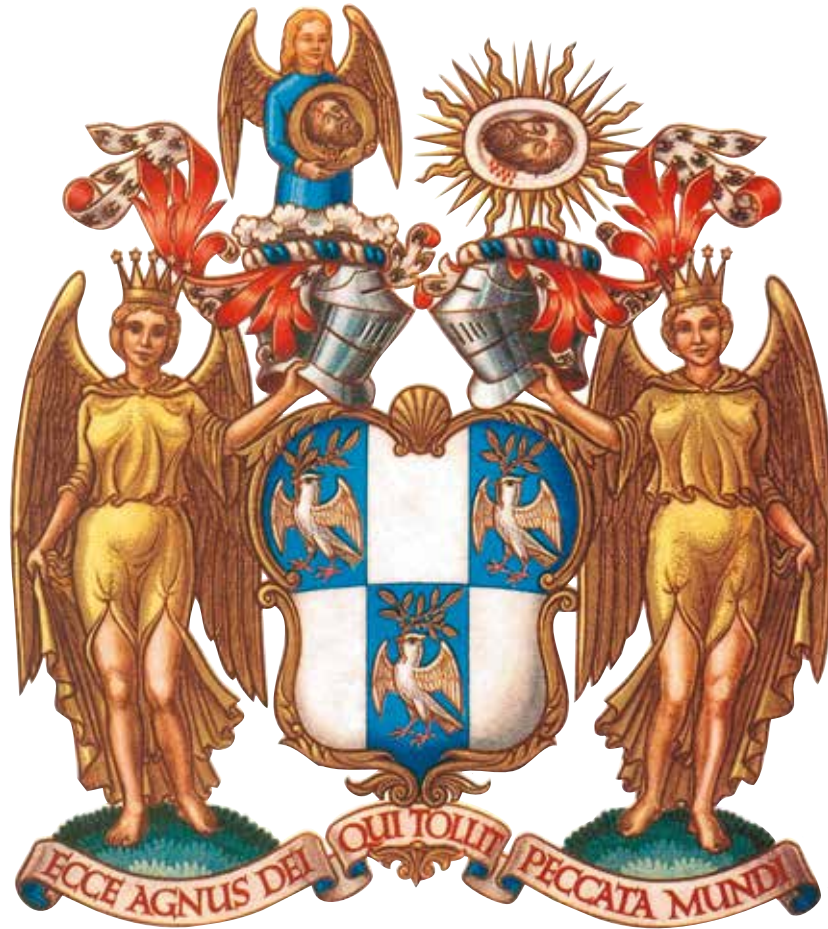


*Detail from new frontispiece to the 1962 Charter of Incorporation illustrating the regularised Coat of Arms.
The Tallow Chandlers are unique amongst Livery Companies in their possession of a double crest*

The 1961 Grant is a bridge that links the history of the Tallow Chandlers from the fifteenth century to the present day. It embodies the connection with the thriving network of one hundred and eight companies that are now in the City, promoting and supporting their relevant trades and endorsing a wide range of charitable objectives. The Coat of Arms that it confirms is the most visible and familiar sign of the Company’s history. It is part of the unique expression of London’s character expressed by the livery companies that developed from their medieval origins in the craft guilds. To understand its import and significance is to understand the ‘mystery’ of the Tallow Chandlers.

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To See The Light:

Understanding the Armorial Bearings of the Tallow Chandlers

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