

# The decline of guilds and their monopoly in English provincial towns, with particular reference to Exeter

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the decline of the craft guilds in early modern England by way of a case-study of the Tuckers' Company in Exeter. From the 1980s, this case figured prominently in the historiographical debate concerning guild decline; however, it has not been examined recently. The current study reveals the Tuckers' Company is not a case of decline in guild membership so much as a case of the loss of guild monopoly and a concomitant transition to charitable functions. On the basis of empirical sources, this study also reveals the mechanisms and context of this transformation in the post-Civil War politics of the city of Exeter. Specific attention is given to first, the decline of royal authority bolstering the guild against the city government and secondly, the shift of power in the guild with the ascendance of the merchant fullers. Finally, the historiographical implications of the article's findings are discussed.

## Introduction

It is well known that early modern English guilds did not enjoy the power to compel every trader in a region to join (as their Japanese counterparts often did, for example).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, exactly when and how the guilds in England lost this power remains a matter of contention. Classic works such as those by Unwin and Landes depicted the decline of guilds in the course of the seventeenth century – a model referred to in the following

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<sup>1</sup> For example, M. Miyamoto, 'Changing nature of stock societies and their decay', in M. Miyamoto (ed.), *Entrepreneurial Activities in the Edo Period* (Tokyo, 1977), 257–62, at 259 (in Japanese); T. Fujita, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Japanese Trade Associations* (Tokyo, 1981), 11–12 (in Japanese).

pages as the 'old orthodox chronology'.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of studies conducted since 1985, by contrast, Epstein argued for guild decline during the eighteenth century (the 'new orthodox chronology'). As a major provincial town, Exeter has attracted a number of classic studies, including those by Hoskins and Youngs.<sup>3</sup> However, these were published *before* the advent of the new orthodox chronology, and the current study aims to place the case of Exeter within the context of this more recent historiographical perspective.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section considers recent historiographical debates concerning the decline of English guilds, and stresses two trends inconsistent with the new orthodox chronology: a perspective emphasizing the transformation rather than the decline of guilds *per se*, and the recent appearance of a number of studies on workers outside the guild in London. As we shall see, these trends have not received due attention in relation to the case of Exeter.

The second section is a case-study of guild decline in Exeter based on established empirical sources. It combines the name data used in classic studies of the Tuckers' Company in Exeter.<sup>4</sup> First, it explores the relationship between citizenship and guild membership and examines the increase in the number of citizens operating outside the guild, namely citizens who were not guild members. More specifically, it shows how the increase in the number of citizens *outside* the guild outstripped increases in guild membership, despite the fact that most new citizens of Exeter were not migrants. It will be shown that this process occurred within the context of the decline of royal power, which had supported guild regulations favouring membership. Finally, we will discover that motivation to join the guild following its loss of monopoly proceeded primarily from its charities, which were founded first and foremost by the ascendant class of merchant fullers.<sup>5</sup> Amassing considerable wealth after the decline of the royal chartered company's monopoly on French trade, the merchant fullers became City Fathers and masters of the guild, and they supported

<sup>2</sup> G. Unwin, *Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1904); D.S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> W.G. Hoskins, *Industry, Trade and People in Exeter 1688–1800* (Exeter, 1935); W.B. Stephens, *Seventeenth-century Exeter: A Study of Industrial and Commercial Development, 1625–1688* (Exeter, 1958); W.T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter, 1540–1640* (Cambridge, MA, 1975); J. Youngs, *Tuckers Hall Exeter: The History of a Provincial City Company through Five Centuries* (Exeter, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Established as the Company of Weavers, Tuckers and Shearmen at some point prior to 1460, the cloth-workers' guild in Exeter was customarily referred to as the Company of Fullers after the royal charter of 1620. However, in modernity proper the company is known as the Tuckers' Company. M. Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 2002), 93.

<sup>5</sup> Fulling is the craft of cleansing and thickening cloth, although fullers were typically also engaged in finishing processes such as dyeing. 'Tucker' is a largely obsolete synonym of 'fuller'.

the policy of increasing the number of fullers in Exeter in order to lower the wholesale price of cloth.

### **The historiography of English guild decline: the 'old' and 'new orthodox' chronologies**

#### *Controversies concerning the decline of guilds in England*

Arguably one of the most important contributors to the recent debate about guilds, Epstein has noted that while there were no contemporary surveys of early modern English craft guilds or apprenticeship, a consensus has formed since 1985 which tends to push the decline of craft guilds forward into the mid- to late eighteenth century. He attributes the debate about whether the craft guilds began to decline in the latter part of the seventeenth century or afterwards to Snell's and Walker's works of 1985.<sup>6</sup>

As Snell's and Walker's works constitute something of a milestone, a brief review of them is in order here. Sharply criticizing the old orthodox chronology, Snell argued that limited evidence from London was being 'generalized to cover the whole country'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, differences in chronology between the mercantile guilds in the London livery companies and the craft guilds in provincial towns had been obscured. In Snell's view, despite the mid-seventeenth-century decline of London livery companies on which the old orthodox chronology had chiefly rested, most craft guilds in provincial towns persisted into the eighteenth century.

To reinforce this argument, Snell referred to Walker's work.<sup>8</sup> This dealt with eight guildated towns, including London and the main provincial towns such as Bristol and Exeter. Walker measured decline and guild control chiefly by using annual figures for guild membership from 1650 onward; he found that peak membership was reached around 1720.<sup>9</sup> He concluded that the experience of many London companies, apart from the majority of the Twelve Great Companies, was similar to that of the provincial guilds.<sup>10</sup>

According to Epstein's aforementioned survey, the current consensus is based not only on Walker and Snell but also on works by Berlin, Gadd

<sup>6</sup> S.R. Epstein, 'Craft guilds in the pre-modern economy: a discussion', *Economic History Review*, 61 (2008), 155–74, at 156.

<sup>7</sup> K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), 231.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 238; M.J. Walker, 'The extent of guild control of trades in England, c. 1660–1820', Cambridge, Ph.D. thesis, 1986. Snell's evidence concerned the decline of apprentices' terms and was based on settlement examination papers. In my experience, such evidence is very scarce for the seventeenth century.

<sup>9</sup> Following Walker, Snell (*Annals*, 238, 267) suggested that guilds tended to continue in the manufacturing trades rather than in distributive trades, and in the south rather than in the north.

<sup>10</sup> Walker, 'Extent of guild control', 216.

and Wallis – namely, studies on London produced since the 1990s. If so, we must revise Walker's conclusion. While Walker contended that livery companies did not function in any practical sense in late seventeenth-century London, the studies of Berlin, Gadd and Wallis suggest that they extended their control into the suburbs, particularly via the integration of non-members into London guilds in the later seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the current consensus which pushes the decline of guilds into the eighteenth century is, so to speak, the 'new orthodox' chronology. On the basis of this chronology, Epstein argued that the craft guild guaranteed apprenticeship contracts and functioned as the chief conduit for the transmission of skills during industrialization.<sup>12</sup> Does this mean that industrial development in England grew within rather than outside of traditional guild control or monopolistic restrictions?<sup>13</sup>

A notable opponent of Epstein's perspective on this matter is Ogilvie, who portrays the stifling economic effects of guild regulations as an important contributing factor to the increasing disparity in early modern economic growth between Britain and the Low Countries on the one hand and the rest of Europe on the other. Following an old and influential liberal narrative, this disparity is ascribed by Ogilvie to the relative weakness of guilds in England and the Dutch Republic.<sup>14</sup> A key issue in this controversy is the definition of guild 'strength' and 'weakness'.<sup>15</sup> These are most often measured in terms of a guild's political influence, its ability to regulate its own craft and hence – according to Ogilvie – its ability to enforce the innovation-killing conservatism of entrenched rent-seeking interests.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Epstein also gauged guild strength in terms of the transmission of skills via craft apprenticeship. In his view, the combination of this function with the guilds' political inability to enforce restrictive legislation gave eighteenth-century England a technological edge over the Dutch Republic, where economic growth had been founded upon the suppression of

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 183; J.P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities, Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London* (Stanford, 1997), 20, 144; L. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1992), 210–11.

<sup>12</sup> S.R. Epstein, 'Craft guilds, apprenticeship, and technological change in pre-industrial Europe', *Journal of Economic History*, 58 (1998), 684–713, at 688–9. Evidently, this argument expresses the longer view of English industrialization, advanced by historians since about 1985, as a phenomenon preceding the Industrial Revolution proper. N.F.R. Crafts, *British Economic Growth during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1985), 57–8, 61.

<sup>13</sup> Snell, *Annals*, 231.

<sup>14</sup> In this context, Ogilvie refers to the 'little divergence', S. Ogilvie, 'The economics of guilds', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 28 (2014), 169–92, at 188.

<sup>15</sup> An anonymous referee advised me to contrast these two types of guilds in a European context.

<sup>16</sup> S. Ogilvie, 'Can we rehabilitate the guilds? A sceptical re-appraisal', *Cambridge Working Papers in Economics*, 0745, University of Cambridge (2007), 42–3; S. Ogilvie, 'Rehabilitating the guilds: a reply', *Economic History Review*, 61 (2008), 175–82, at 179.

endogenous industrial innovation threatening the import trade, and where industrialization consequently took place at a relatively late date.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, early modern guilds performed many functions. For example, they also served as religious fraternities, and in Exeter – as was the case in most English guilds – this function declined in the 1540s.<sup>18</sup> When considering controversies of chronology and guild strength in relation to the cloth trade of Exeter, this article will concentrate on the function of economic regulation, particularly as it concerns apprenticeship.

### *Another chronology and the workers outside the guilds*

Before turning to the case of Exeter, there are two further significant issues arising from the new orthodox English historiographies which should briefly be considered. First, Berlin – whose work is one source of the consensus Epstein identified – pointed out that there are somewhat incompatible chronologies pertaining to the early modern period.<sup>19</sup> By contrast to the old orthodox chronology, for instance, Slack emphasized the transformation rather than the disappearance of guilds: following Clark, he asserted that guilds were losing their economic rationale and becoming clubs by the early eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> This assertion was based on evidence from the ‘great and good towns’ or major county towns. If these are similar to the towns Walker called guildated towns, the first issue is: how does Slack’s and Clark’s chronology correspond to Walker’s guildated towns?

The second issue concerns workers outside the guilds. Studies on London since the 1990s have examined the suburbs and workers outside the guilds – subjects Walker and Snell did not sufficiently consider.<sup>21</sup> Were

<sup>17</sup> Epstein, ‘Craft guilds, apprenticeship, and technological change’, 698; Epstein, ‘Craft guilds in the pre-modern economy’, 155–7, 169–72.

<sup>18</sup> Youngs, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> M. Berlin, ‘Guilds in decline? London livery companies and the rise of a liberal economy, 1600–1800’, in S.R. Epstein and M. Prak (eds.), *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2008), 316–41, at 324.

<sup>20</sup> P. Slack, ‘Great and good towns 1540–1700’, in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. II: 1540–1840 (Cambridge, 2000), 347–76, at 372; P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580–1800: Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, 2000), 154. For his part, Barry depicts the emergence of private associations, clubs and friendly societies among the urban middling sort before the eighteenth century: J. Barry, ‘Bourgeois collectivism? Urban association and the middling sort’, in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), 84–112, at 92–3. Wallis’ one-stage model (on-the-job training) of apprenticeships also seems to imply the decline of the guild system in the seventeenth century: P. Wallis, ‘Apprenticeship and trading in pre-modern England’, *Journal of Economic History*, 68 (2008), 68–73.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Ward, *Metropolitan Communities*, 144; this type of worker in Exeter will be discussed infra. It was also after the studies by Snell and Walker that some researchers focused on the suburbs and non-freemen in London in the context of the population movement: M. Kitch, ‘Capital and kingdom: migration to later Stuart London’, in A.L. Beir and R. Finlay (eds.), *London 1500–1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (London, 1986), 224–51; C. Brooks, ‘Apprenticeship, social mobility and the middling sort, 1550–1800’, in Barry and Brooks (eds.), *Middling Sort*, 52–83.

there workers outside the guilds in provincial towns? And if there were, should we reconsider the meaning of the increase in guild members which Walker found in the later seventeenth century?

### **Citizen cloth-workers outside the guild and charity: the case of Exeter**

These questions may be addressed by examining the Tuckers' Company in the major provincial town of Exeter. We have already mentioned some classic studies above. Here, an attempt will be made to examine and compare their research by linking the name lists in the various documents they analysed.

#### *Citizens and guild members*

Walker's main argument with regard to English guild decline is that 'even the dominant industries of a major provincial city could remain under guild control throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth century'.<sup>22</sup> Exeter was certainly 'a major provincial city': it was the fifth largest town in England, with a population of more than 10,000.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the cloth industry was 'the dominant industry' in late seventeenth-century Exeter. As Hoskins has pointed out, in 1673 more than a third of the citizens were cloth traders.<sup>24</sup> In this historical context, citizens were not simply town residents but a select group of enfranchised citizens who enjoyed a monopoly on economic opportunity within the city; this 'freedom of the city' was primarily obtained by serving apprenticeships, by patrimony, by fee,<sup>25</sup> or by order of the mayor and town council. Institutionally, the distinction between citizens and non-citizens was clear-cut – the former were a minority (about 10 per cent of Exeter's local population during the period in question) with exclusive rights to carry on wholesale and retail trade.<sup>26</sup>

While Exeter's cloth-working was its dominant industry, did it in fact remain under guild control? As only Walker has come to this conclusion, it would be prudent to examine his evidence, which comprises the membership figures for the Tuckers' Company. This guild covered all the major activities of woollen manufacture and distribution, except perhaps

<sup>22</sup> Walker, 'Extent of guild control', 156.

<sup>23</sup> P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition 1500–1700* (Oxford, 1976), 83; cf. Slack, 'Great and good towns', 352.

<sup>24</sup> Youings, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 90; Hoskins, *Industry, Trade and People*, 123–4. Based on citizen lists, MacCaffrey (*Exeter*, 163) also described the Exeter economy in the early seventeenth century.

<sup>25</sup> The obsolete term used in the primary sources is 'fine', i.e. a fee or charge paid for any privilege.

<sup>26</sup> MacCaffrey, *Exeter*, 73–4.

wool-combing.<sup>27</sup> While there were several guilds for the various cloth-working occupations in early seventeenth-century Exeter, their boundaries were not clearly demarcated, and the Tuckers' Company was the only one to receive a royal charter.<sup>28</sup>

Looking at Figure 1 below, the solid line indicates the membership trend of the Tuckers' Company.<sup>29</sup> As one can see, annual admittance to the company increased in the late seventeenth century, while the old orthodox chronology would predict the opposite trend. Clearly, the guild did not decline in the late seventeenth century – but does this mean that the cloth industry remained under guild control during this period?

Certainly, membership was an important element of the guild's control, but control also meant other things. In particular, it meant the ability to regulate quality and price, even among non-members. This regulation depended upon the extent to which members held a monopoly on their crafts, as Youings asserted.<sup>30</sup> And here, it is worth considering a further piece of evidence concerning Exeter citizens in the cloth trade. It is not new evidence, and it has already been analysed by Hoskins and others: some citizen cloth-workers were guild members but some were not, and from time to time the guild took action against citizen cloth-workers outside the guild.<sup>31</sup>

In Figure 1, if the solid line representing annual guild admittance is 'Walker's line', then the dashed line by contrast is 'Hoskins' line', showing the annual number of cloth-workers granted citizenship. In the late seventeenth century, both lines increased, but the dashed line increased more dramatically. As a result, although the number of guild members

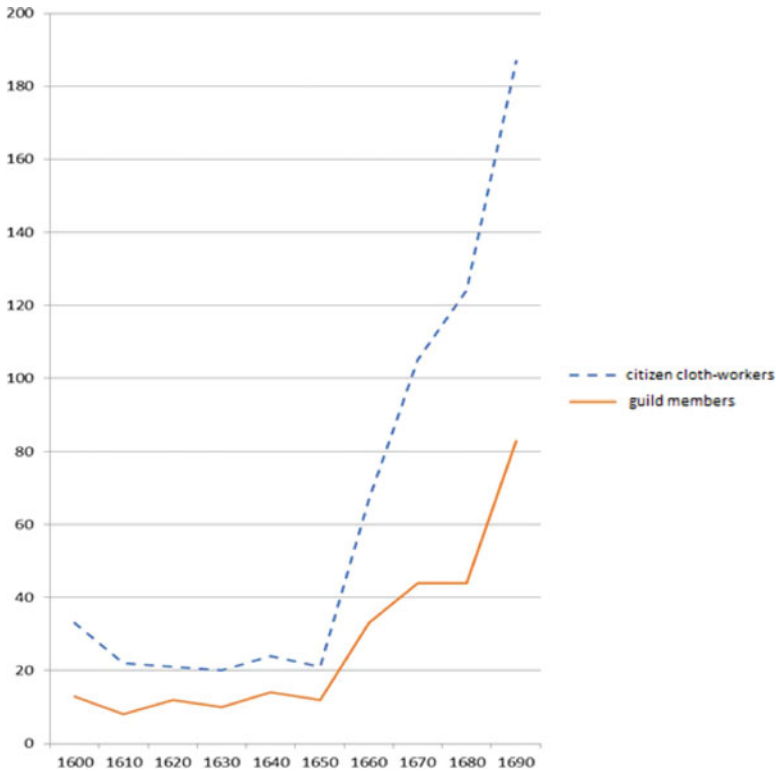
<sup>27</sup> Walker, 'Extent of guild control', 158. Until the early seventeenth century, the Tuckers' Company was just one of a number of associations of craftsmen in the city, but according to Stephens, only the records of this guild and the merchant tailors' guilds remain in Exeter (Stephens, *Seventeenth-century Exeter*, 76). However, Youings mentions the worsted combers' guilds (Youings, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 61–2). In 1660, the Tuckers' Company exposed a worsted comber who worked as an illegal fuller (B.F. Cresswell (transcr.), *Minute Book 1618–1698 of the Worshipful Company of Weavers, Fullers and Shearmen of Exeter* (Exeter, 1927), 132). In the eighteenth century, some wool-combers joined the Tuckers' Company with poor weavers and agitated for better pay and conditions; these workers also sought incorporation of their own 'clubs' and led the Exeter riots of October 1717 (Youings, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 108, 174–5; A. Randall, *Riotous Assemblies: Popular Protest in Hanoverian England* (Oxford, 2006), 138–9).

<sup>28</sup> Youings, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 53.

<sup>29</sup> Here, I will leave aside the question of the reliability of the sources used in Figure 1, and merely use them to explore the debate concerning the decline of Exeter's guild, as these are the figures used by the debate's participants (namely Hoskins and Walker). The solid line represents the number of guild members who were also citizens, but it does not include non-citizen guild members. Therefore, it represents the citizens who were part of the guild (see Figure 2 below). Walker based his work on members of the guild who paid quarterage. According to Youings, only guild members on their own account paid the quarterage and became citizens (*Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 63, 89). As a consequence, I have used the list of guild members who were citizens for comparison with other name lists (see Figure 2).

<sup>30</sup> Youings, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 118.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.



**Figure 1:** (Colour online) Citizen cloth-workers and guild membership  
 Sources: Rowe and Jackson, *Exeter Freeman*; Cresswell, *First Minute Books*;  
 Cresswell, *Minute Book 1618–1698*.

grew, they represented less than half the number of citizen cloth-workers in the late seventeenth century.<sup>32</sup>

Does this mean there was a decline in guild control? As the upper row of [Table 1](#) shows, the monopoly rate (i.e. the percentage of citizen cloth-workers who were also guild members) dropped, but not significantly. Let us focus the discussion on specific occupations. Citizens – both guild members (inside the guild) and non-members (outside the guild) were engaged in a variety of cloth-working occupations such as fulling, weaving

<sup>32</sup> It seems that some citizen cloth-workers outside the guild were enrolled as citizens in the cloth trade in name only, as they were not actually cloth-workers: Clark and Slack, *English Towns*, 139–40. Some historians (e.g. J. Jurica, *A Calendar of the Registers of the Freeman of the City of Gloucester 1648–1838* (Gloucester, 1991), xx) have speculated that they became citizens just for the elections; but they did in fact engage in actual trade, as the guild had the power to punish such citizens (see [Table 3\(c\)](#)), some of whom appear as leading merchants in the port book (for details, see *infra*). Youngs referred to them as ‘interlopers’, a term which nevertheless fails to clarify their status vis-à-vis citizenship or the guild (*Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 118–19). An anonymous referee advised me to pay attention to this point.



Table 1: Monopoly rate (guild members/citizen cloth-workers)

	1620s	1690s
Monopoly rate (guild members/citizen cloth-workers)	50%	36%
Fuller monopoly rate (guild member fullers/citizen fullers)	84.6%	41.4%

Sources: Rowe and Jackson, *Exeter Freeman*; Cresswell, *First Minute Books*; Cresswell, *Minute Book 1618–1698*.

and wool-combing. However, during the seventeenth century, around half of the citizen cloth-workers were fullers, while only approximately 15 per cent were weavers.<sup>33</sup>

Looking at the fullers, the lower row of Table 1 shows that the guild lost many of its most important members during this century. Fullers were the most important traders in the guild because they controlled the industry financially and owned fulling mills.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, many masters of the guild were fullers.<sup>35</sup> The guild's declining monopoly rate was a result of the expansion of citizenship into a wider pool of Exeter residents, and reflects the specific policy of the city authorities spearheaded by the merchant fullers (cf. *infra*). Hence, citizenship in Exeter saw a fourfold increase (from 122 to 491) in the course of the seventeenth century, yet there was a sevenfold increase in citizen fullers (from 41 to 292) in the same period, while the increase in non-fuller citizens was significantly less (81 to 199). Through the declining proportion of fullers in the guild relative to the overall number of fullers among Exeter's citizenry, it is likely the guild lost control of the cloth trade.

Even if the Tuckers' Company still enjoyed substantial growth in the late seventeenth century, it is evident its power over the cloth trade diminished significantly, contrary to the new orthodox chronology. Still, the problem remains as to why the number of citizen cloth-workers outside the guild increased, and why there was a decrease of guild control. A consideration of previous studies of Exeter citizen cloth-workers outside the guild will help to clarify these issues.

### *Citizen cloth-workers outside the guild and migrants*

The growth of citizens outside the guild is a key to understanding guild transformation in early modern Exeter. Though Youngs did not specifically address this issue, she had the impression that there were few citizens outside the guild, and that most were migrant country craftsmen.<sup>36</sup> In the case of London, we know from studies since the late 1980s that the

<sup>33</sup> M. Rowe and A. Jackson, *Exeter Freeman 1266–1967* (Exeter, 1973).

<sup>34</sup> Youngs, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 77, 94.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

capital's population growth in the late seventeenth century required high levels of migration, and that there was a steady increase in the number of apprentices.<sup>37</sup> We also know that even though membership of one of the livery companies was required in order to be granted the freedom of the city, it is very probable that significant numbers of people were migrating to the city but not joining guilds.<sup>38</sup>

Can we assume that a similar situation occurred in Exeter in the seventeenth century? As Walker and others have noted, the population of Exeter grew rapidly in the late seventeenth century: it was 9,400 in 1662, 10,650 in 1672, about 13,000 in 1688 and about 15,000 in 1750.<sup>39</sup> However, the factors underlying Exeter's growth were quite different from those in Stuart London. First, as Galley has pointed out, there were substantial natural increases in the population of Exeter in the seventeenth century.<sup>40</sup> A count – based on the abridged (decadal estimate of) parish registers – reveals a natural increase of approximately 5,000 people in Exeter over the century,<sup>41</sup> whereas there was a natural decrease of 512,000 people in London over the same period.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, in London one can observe an increase in the sex imbalance (m/f) in burial registers as apprentice immigration increased.<sup>43</sup> It is difficult to find similar data for seventeenth-century Exeter – based on the sex ratio of just two parishes, the numbers of men and women are nearly the same in the parish burial registers throughout the century<sup>44</sup> – but we can use the poll tax returns of 1660.<sup>45</sup> Based on these returns, the sex ratio of males to females was 0.93.

<sup>37</sup> The number of immigrant apprentices can usually be determined from the apprentices' register. However, as Youings noted, no register of apprentices has survived in Exeter, and only about 30 indentures were reprinted in the Tuckers' Company's minute books. See Youings, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 78–9; B.F. Cresswell (transcr.), *The First Minute Books of the Worshipful Company of Weavers, Fullers and Shearmen of Exeter, 1561–1610, 1584–1618* (Exeter, 1924); Cresswell, *Minute Book 1618–1698*.

<sup>38</sup> Kitch, 'Capital and kingdom', 226; Brooks, 'Apprenticeship, social mobility and the middling sort', 63.

<sup>39</sup> These figures are based on Walker, 'Extent of guild control', 156; they are comparable with the more recent figures (11,500 in 1660, 20,500 in 1801) given by J. Barry, 'England: south west', in Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. II, 67–92, at 71–3.

<sup>40</sup> C. Galley, *The Demography of Early Modern Towns: York in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Liverpool, 1998), 19.

<sup>41</sup> R. Pickard, *The Population and Epidemics of Exeter in Pre-Census Time* (Exeter, 1947), 14–15; in early seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Exeter, the population declined due to plague and natural decrease (Galley, *Demography*, 19). However, natural increases accounted for 3,030 individuals among Exeter's net population increase of 3,600 between 1662 and 1688. About 5,500 cumulative natural changes are evident between 1600 and 1700 (Walker, 'Extent of guild control', 156; Pickard, *Population and Epidemics*, 14–15).

<sup>42</sup> Galley, *Demography*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> R. Finlay, *Population and Metropolis: The Demography of London 1580–1650* (Cambridge, 1981), 140.

<sup>44</sup> The two parishes were St Paul and All Hallows, Goldsmith Street.

<sup>45</sup> W.G. Hoskins, *Exeter in the Seventeenth Century: Tax and Rate Assessments 1602–1699*, vol. II (Exeter, 1957).

Table 2: *Percentage of entries paying the basic fees*

Decade	1600	1610	1620	1630	1640	1650	1660	1670	1680	1690
Percentage	44.8	56.3	50.6	67.3	69.6	56.9	75.8	75.9	89.6	85.2

Sources: Cresswell, *First Minute Books*; Cresswell, *Minute Book 1618–1698*.

This indicates a surplus of females, a common situation in pre-industrial towns.<sup>46</sup>

Hence, while some citizen cloth-workers outside the guild may have been immigrants, as Youings asserts, most of them probably were not. And contrary to Youings' view, citizen cloth-workers outside the guild were not 'few' in number in the late seventeenth century, as Figure 1 shows. That being the case, we must determine the reasons why the citizens outside the guild increased in number after the middle of the century.

### *The guild and royal authority*

By its charter from the city in 1602, the Tuckers' Company required basic entry fees (2s 6d) from apprentices, but extra fees from *underqualified* (for example, short-term) apprentices. If the extra fees were too expensive (sometimes more than 10s, over four times the basic fee), the apprentice had the right to appeal to the mayor, who would assess the amount according to his discretion. However, after the royal charter granted to the guild in 1620, the city chamber's right to regulate these extra fees was nullified, and apprentice appeals to the mayor ceased after that year.<sup>47</sup> As a consequence, the percentage of apprentices paying the basic entry fee increased markedly in the course of the seventeenth century, apart from a brief return to 1620s levels during the 1650s (see Table 2).

Stephens argued that the guild reduced the amount of the basic entry fee in the middle of the century in an attempt to attract fullers, who were increasing in number with the expansion of the industry; in his view, this led to a weakening in the apprentice system, as the guild stopped requiring extra fees from non-guild and underqualified apprentices, leading to an influx of such entrants.<sup>48</sup> While guild membership clearly increased in the late seventeenth century, Walker rejected Stephens' thesis, arguing instead that the rapid expansion of the cloth trade from the middle of the century was the cause.<sup>49</sup> In support, he cited Youings to the effect that

<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, linking poll tax returns to freemen's registers reveals that cloth-working parishes had a low sex ratio (m/f). For example, St Mary Major Parish was the parish where most cloth-workers lived, but its sex ratio was 0.92 (m/f).

<sup>47</sup> Youings, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 47–56.

<sup>48</sup> Stephens, *Seventeenth-century Exeter*, 78 (for example, the increase in the number of underqualified apprentices).

<sup>49</sup> Walker, 'Extent of guild control', 158.

Table 3: *Tabulated version of answers from the recorder of the city council to the Tuckers' Company in 1651*

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- (a) Even the eldest son of a freeman (member) has to serve as an apprentice.
  - (b) Guild jurisdiction is only over members.
  - (c) The guild may punish any citizen cloth-workers outside the guild without an apprenticeship at quarter session by the Statute of Artificers.
  - (d) The guild can only suppress a citizen with an apprenticeship by petition to the *lords of the Council* or suit in the Star Chamber for the contempt of the king's authority in the charter.
  - (e) The guild can only compel guild freemen (members) to make their apprentices freemen of the guild.
- 
- 

Source: Cresswell, *Minute Book 1618–1698*, 605.

all members admitted in the late seventeenth century must have served apprenticeship.<sup>50</sup> Walker also refuted Stephens' view on the grounds that the records only show the amount of the fee paid, making it impossible to distinguish between freemen who entered the guild by underqualified apprenticeship and those who entered by the basic entry fee alone.<sup>51</sup>

As Table 2 shows, the basic entry fee became the standard for guild entrance in the late seventeenth century. If Stephens' interpretation concerning an influx of underqualified entrants were correct, entry to the guild should have become easier, and the number of citizen cloth-workers outside the guild should have decreased. However, as noted above, citizen cloth-workers outside the guild actually increased in the late seventeenth century. Behind this trend lies the fact that some apprentices did not become guild members, but instead simply became citizens.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the number of citizen cloth-workers outside the guild increased at the same time as the extra fees charged by the guild decreased, as evidenced by Table 2.<sup>53</sup>

Inevitably, the Tuckers' Company complained to the city. Just after the Civil War, the guild made a petition to the city council on the matter of membership. Table 3 presents the answer provided by the recorder of the city council to the guild in 1651. It indicates that there were serious disputes between the city and the guild concerning citizen cloth-workers outside the guild and apprenticeship. It is likely that factions within the guild wished to reduce the number of citizen cloth-workers outside the guild.

<sup>50</sup> Youngs, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 89.

<sup>51</sup> Walker, 'Extent of guild control', 159.

<sup>52</sup> Youngs, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 47. In fact, such apprentices presented the correct paperwork/fees to the city authorities and became citizens – only for those entering by fine was there an element of negotiation (personal communication from Professor J. Barry).

<sup>53</sup> The decline of the power of the guild and the royal authority underpinning it made guild control of apprenticeship difficult, leading to an increase in the percentage of entrants paying only the basic entry fee.

Table 4: Cloth-workers' mode of acquiring citizenship (1650–91)

Mode	Apprentice (%)	Fine (%)	Son (%)	Order, others (%)	Total (%)
Citizen cloth-workers	354 (67.8)	16 (3.1)	50 (9.6)	102 (19.5)	522 (100.0)

Sources: Rowe and Jackson, *Exeter Freemen*; Cresswell, *First Minute Books*; Cresswell, *Minute Book 1618–1698*.

Under law, the guild had several options available to achieve this aim (see points (c), (d) and (e) in Table 3).<sup>54</sup> However, in practice it only had recourse to option (d). This is because nearly 70 per cent of citizen cloth-workers gained the city freedom through their apprenticeship during the period 1650–91, as Table 4 reveals. What is more, nearly the same percentage of citizens inside the guild as those outside the guild became citizens in this way. As option (c) only permits the guild to punish citizen cloth-workers outside the guild who do not hold an apprenticeship, those with an apprenticeship (i.e. the majority) were not affected by this regulation.<sup>55</sup>

As for option (d), this rested on an appeal to royal authority, and was thus problematic after the Civil War. Petitioning the courts would probably have been in vain, for although the Interregnum courts continued to accept the legal validity of royal charters, they preferred royal charters confirmed by an act of parliament. While the Restoration period saw the highpoint of the role of royal charters, particularly during the 1680s, this role became increasingly politicized as royal authority faltered, and may have reflected a decline in interest in enforcing monopoly *per se*.

Thus, in the late seventeenth century, non-apprentices and the apprentices of citizen cloth-workers outside the guild could remain outside the guild, avoid paying the entrance fee and simply set up trade as citizen cloth-workers. This was an option that had not been open to them in the early seventeenth century, when royal authority and the means of penalizing non-members was still intact.

This implies that the reduction in the amount of the basic entry fee cited by Stephens may have been a result rather than a cause of the decline in guild apprenticeship after the middle of the century – while the primary cause may have been the declining effectiveness of the royal

<sup>54</sup> In Table 3 (a) is distinct from (b)–(e). This might be taken to mean that the city prohibited guild citizenship admission by patrimony – but as Table 4 shows, about 10% of citizen cloth-workers were admitted by patrimony.

<sup>55</sup> Although punishable in accordance with the Statute of Artificers, contracts with citizen cloth-workers outside the guild who did not hold apprenticeships were not necessarily illegal.

charter obtained by the guild in 1620.<sup>56</sup> This is why the number of citizen cloth-workers outside the guild increased and guild control decreased. Following the Civil War, not only the effectiveness of guild membership policy but also the policy itself changed drastically. As Youngs points out, merchants generally favoured the expansion of the number of craftsmen in the cloth industry in order to keep the wholesale price of cloth as low as possible. Until the middle of the century, merchants controlled the city chamber only, while craftsmen controlled the guild and favoured a limit to the number of craftsmen.<sup>57</sup> However, in the late seventeenth century, certain rich merchants – chief among them being the merchant fullers – became masters of the guild and wanted an increase in craftsmen in the city, even if they came from outside the guild.

One more question remains: why did any cloth-workers join the Exeter cloth-workers' guild once it had lost its monopoly after the middle of the seventeenth century?

### *Charities and merchant fullers*

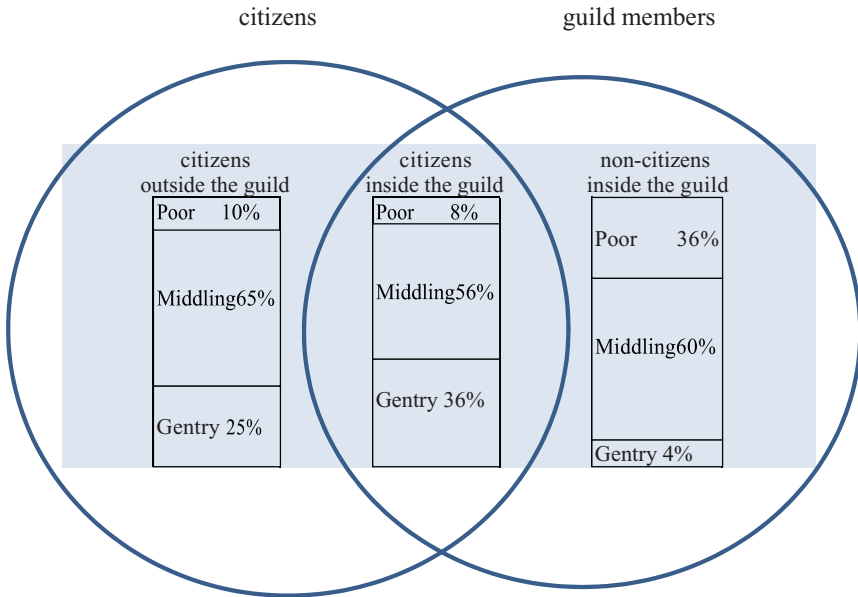
A comparison of the types of citizens who joined the guild with those who did not provides a useful starting point. As [Figure 2](#) shows, there were in effect three categories of cloth-workers: citizen cloth-workers outside the guild, citizen cloth-workers inside the guild and non-citizen cloth-workers inside the guild.<sup>58</sup> It is possible to compare these three categories with three social strata – poor, middling and gentry – identified on the basis of the number of hearths.<sup>59</sup> A comparison of their social status reveals that the proportion of those of 'middling' status is effectively the same in all three groups, but that the non-citizens inside the guild included many

<sup>56</sup> It seems rather strange that the city chamber did not oppose the guild's receipt of a royal charter in 1620, as London guilds required the city's permission to obtain a royal charter (G. Unwin, *Gilds and Companies of London* (London, 1908), 237). While it is true that the Exeter city authorities were not informed of the charter until it was a *fait accompli*, given the increase in the number of citizen cloth-workers outside the guild, this attitude on the part of the city may also reflect the decreasing importance of guild membership at this time. By contrast, the effective monopoly of 1620–50 is evident not only in the 80% fullers' monopoly rate (see [Table 1](#)) but also in the low number of entrants paying the basic fees (see [Table 2](#)).

<sup>57</sup> Youngs, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 42, 50.

<sup>58</sup> A fourth category – that of non-citizens outside the guild – is not comparable with the other three, as such non-citizens rarely left records of their activity.

<sup>59</sup> The classification used in this article follows the 1671 Hearth Tax data, with zero to one hearths defined as poor, two to five hearths as middling, and six or more hearths as gentry. For social positions (poor, middling and gentry) and their hearths, see K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village 1525–1700*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1995), 34–5. This method was originally developed in research on rural districts, and the proportion of the three sorts of some towns was not far from the national average estimated by Gregory King: 'gentry' (about 10%), 'middling' (about 30%) and 'poor' (about 60%). Hearth numbers might constitute one possible method of comparing urban populations during this period, even if King's social tables were not reliable: see J. Thirsk and J. P. Cooper (eds.), *Seventeenth-century Economic Documents* (Oxford, 1972), 780–1; J. Barry, 'Introduction', in Barry and Brooks (eds.), *Middling Sort*, 1–27, at 13.



**Figure 2:** (Colour online) Social positions of citizens and guild members  
 Sources: Rowe and Jackson, *Exeter Freeman*; Hoskins, *Exeter in the Seventeenth Century*; Cresswell, *First Minute Books*; Cresswell, *Minute Book 1618–1698*.

more 'poor' and almost no 'gentry', while the largest proportion of 'gentry' numbered among the citizens inside the guild.<sup>60</sup>

Who were the 'gentry' within the guild? A number of studies<sup>61</sup> have shown that the privileged royal chartered overseas trading companies declined from the mid-seventeenth century, and that certain merchant fullers of Exeter began to export cloth and became very rich as a result. Most of these merchant fullers were citizen cloth-workers inside the guild, and by the late seventeenth century they comprised about a third (17/52) of the guild's masters.<sup>62</sup> As they also comprised about half

<sup>60</sup> Many individuals were suddenly granted citizenship during election months, although no propensity as to the types of citizens is apparent. Regarding the elections, see J.J. Alexander, 'Exeter members of parliament, part III: 1537 to 1688', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, 61 (1929), 193–215; 'Exeter members of parliament, part IV: 1688 to 1832', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, 62 (1930), 195–223. The 1688 intake from a purge among nonconformist and Whig associations was not significantly different from the citizenry in general in regard to the percentages of guild and non-guild members.

<sup>61</sup> For example, Youings, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 92–4; Stephens, *Seventeenth-century Exeter*, 137–40.

<sup>62</sup> Linking freemen registers to the port books made it possible to identify 31 merchant fullers. All of them were city freemen: in the 1680s, 15 were guild members and 8 were citizen cloth-workers outside the guild (which means that some citizen cloth-workers outside the guild worked in the actual cloth trade). Of the guild members, 10 were masters of the guild.

Table 5: *Drake charity recipients (1640–90)*

	Members	Drake recipients	%
Citizens outside the guild	227	5	2.2
Citizens inside the guild	230	20	8.7
Non-citizens inside the guild	378	46	12.2

Sources: Rowe and Jackson, *Exeter Freeman*; Cresswell, *First Minute Books*; Cresswell, *Minute Book 1618–1698*.

(21/50) of Exeter's mayors in the same period, they formed an oligarchy with considerable political and economic power; indeed, in a few cases merchant fullers became both mayors and masters. In the 1680s, we can identify 23 merchant fullers, of whom 15 were citizens inside the guild.<sup>63</sup> These are the individuals who may be classified as gentry within the guild in accordance with the 1671 Hearth Tax data (see [Figure 2](#)).

The social stratification of the Tuckers' Company reflects its status as a site for the reconciliation of competing interests within the cloth-working sector and – more broadly – for the management of inequity and disharmony within the fabric of Exeter's urban life.<sup>64</sup> Hence, several of the wealthy merchant fullers entrusted their funds to the guild in the form of charity. Charity had always been a significant feature of guilds in the Middle Ages, but it was usually dispensed by the guild officers.<sup>65</sup> In the late seventeenth century, there was a proliferation of charity funds, and the Tuckers' Company administered at least six.<sup>66</sup> [Table 5](#) is based upon a charity founded by one of the merchant fullers, and it implies that about half of the guild's members were recipients of such funds. These recipients were both poor non-citizen guild members and also wealthy citizens inside the guild. Because as a rule guild members were not wage earners but traders,<sup>67</sup> these forms of charity were different from the poor

For the port book of 1676, see Stephens, *Seventeenth-century Exeter*, 179. For a transcription and interpretation of the port books of 1666 (The National Archive (TNA), E190/954/7) and 1680 (TNA, E190/958/8), I am indebted to the personal communications of Dr D.B. Stephens. If there was conflict or co-operation in the export trade between merchant fullers and other merchants, it may well have corresponded to conflict or cooperation between guild and non-guild labourers.

<sup>63</sup> Rowe and Jackson, *Exeter Freeman*.

<sup>64</sup> Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism?', 89–90.

<sup>65</sup> Guild charity had a particular appeal for nonconformists, and nonconformism was one pillar of the guild, though many citizen cloth-workers outside the guild were also nonconformists. For nonconformists in Exeter, see the prosecution and licence of meeting lists: A. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter 1650–1875* (Manchester, 1962).

<sup>66</sup> This form of charity in particular stimulated identity among guild members, as it was not poor relief but mutual aid. Furthermore, as Barry has noted, mobility was often an obstacle to identity. However, there were comparatively few migrants in late seventeenth-century Exeter, and the guild was based on internal recruitment (Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism?', 91, 95).

<sup>67</sup> While most guild members were not wage earners, there is a single piece of evidence dated to 1655 to the effect that about 10 journeymen tuckers of Exeter met together to discuss their



relief provided by the city. Rather than providing handouts of money, the bequests administered by the guilds were generally loan schemes.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, the guild charities also benefited the middling sort of guild members, as well as the masters and parents of apprentices. For example, the merchant fuller Thomas Crispin – a strong nonconformist who was both a mayor and a guild master – established a charity in 1689 to provide five pounds every year for two poor boys (sons of tuckers or weavers) to be apprenticed for eight years in their fathers' trades. After satisfactorily completing the apprenticeship, each was provided with a further five pounds to set them up in their trade.<sup>69</sup> In the course of 100 years this charity helped 200 boys to be bound as apprentices.<sup>70</sup> This amounts to nearly all freemen cloth-workers inside the guild who were admitted during the same period.<sup>71</sup> Thus, apprenticeship was clearly still influenced by the guild framework; however, this influence was not based on a trading monopoly. Rather, the guild controlled apprenticeship through premiums and funds to set up in a trade.

It could thus be said that voluntary charity rather than corporate monopoly forged the functioning of the guild in the late seventeenth century.<sup>72</sup> Although there were many types of charity bequests in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Exeter, most of the charities in question were founded after the mid-seventeenth century (see Table 6), and many of the founders were merchant fullers who had become rich through exports to France.<sup>73</sup> The Restoration was a particularly crucial period for this growth in the guild's charitable function amid the decline of its monopoly.<sup>74</sup>

weekly wages. R.J.E. Bush, 'The Civil War and Interregnum in Exeter, 1642–1660', *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries*, 29 (1963), 136.

<sup>68</sup> T. Bailey, 'Destitute or gentleman? The voices and identity of the poor cloth-workers of Exeter's "Golden Age"', research paper delivered at the Devon and Cornwall Record Society AGM, May 2013, 8.

<sup>69</sup> TNA, Prob. 11/396. According to another will of 1641, Augustine Drake entrusted 50 pounds to the guild to lend five pounds each to six weavers and four fullers for four years (TNA, Prob. 11/186). Boys had to be able to read and write, and if any boy ran away or was ungovernable, he received no money. While they were encouraged to be 'Protestant models of pious charity' (Bailey, 'Destitute or gentleman?', 7), troublesome apprentices were very common in this period (P. Wallis, 'Labor, law, and training in early modern London: apprenticeship and the city's institutions', *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), 791–819, at 804, 813).

<sup>70</sup> Exeter City Muniments, Exeter Library, 58/7/9/3, cf. Youngs, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, xi. An inquiry into charity in 1821 stated that Mr Crispin's fund for the binding out and setting up of apprentices was no longer meeting a real need among the young craftsmen of Exeter (Youngs, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 165).

<sup>71</sup> In the 1710s, there were 26 cloth-workers (including fullers, serge makers and wool-combers) who were admitted as citizens by apprenticeship and by becoming guild members. According to Crispin's will, during this period 20 boys may have been apprenticed and set up in the cloth trade.

<sup>72</sup> Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism?', 102.

<sup>73</sup> Stephens, *Seventeenth-century Exeter*, 74.

<sup>74</sup> Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism?', 98.

Table 6: *Establishment of charities*

Names of charity	Year of establishment
Drake*	1642
Pinche	1678
Bawden	1679
Reed	1687
Crispin	1689
Newcomb	1695

\* According to Stephens, *Seventeenth-century Exeter*, 137–8, Drake was an exception because he was permitted to export to Spain only and not to the French company's monopoly area.

Source: Youings, *Tuckers Hall Exeter*, 137–40, 159.

In short, Exeter's merchant fullers controlled not only the city chamber but also the Tuckers' Company during the late seventeenth century. However, their policies were sometimes contradictory; for instance, in order to increase the number of craftsmen it was necessary to keep wholesale prices lower. Certainly, they were able to control the guild and thus control the quality of cloth, but given its actual worth for the merchants in the late seventeenth century, the guild itself lost a great deal of power. It also lost its monopoly of traders, and royal support was declining. In this context, the institution of apprenticeship functioned to maintain the quality of cloth by charity association, a disciplining process which put apprentices under permanent scrutiny for the adequate expression of bourgeois self-management.<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusion: some historiographical implications

This article has examined the decline of craft guilds in early modern England via a case-study of Exeter's Company of Weavers, Tuckers and Shearmen, otherwise known as the Tuckers' Company. It has been shown that although the guild's membership increased in the late seventeenth century, citizenship in Exeter increased even more rapidly, meaning that the proportion of citizens who belonged to the guild actually declined. More importantly, the Tuckers' Company seems to have lost its monopoly over Exeter's cloth industry in the second half of the seventeenth century, as the proportion of fullers who were members of the guild declined from 84.6 per cent in the 1620s to 41.4 per cent in the 1690s. Yet both

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 102. Similarly, Humphries states that an apprentice could win the reputation of a trustworthy and dutiful man by completing an apprenticeship: J. Humphries, 'English apprenticeship: a neglected factor in the first industrial revolution', in P. David and M. Thomas (eds.), *The Economic Future in Historical Perspective* (Oxford, 2003), 73–102, at 90.

wealthy fullers and less wealthy cloth-workers continued to join the guild in the second half of the century. This trend is explicable by examining the charitable support offered to guild members, which seems to have been the primary motivation for joining the guild. Thus, the Tuckers' Company in Exeter did not decline in the late seventeenth century, even though its monopoly did.

As the background of this transformation of guilds from bodies of monopoly to bodies of charity, two features of post-Civil War Exeter have been stressed here. One is the decline of royal power which had underpinned the guild in the early seventeenth century. The other is the shift of power in the guild from (craftsmen) fullers who supported its monopoly to merchant fullers who supported increasing the number of craftsmen in the city in order to decrease wholesale cloth prices.

The analysis presented here has a number of historiographical implications. First and foremost, it supports the 'new orthodox chronology' proposed by Epstein and assumed in recent discussions at least until around 2009, which brings guild decline forward into the eighteenth century. On the other hand, it does not support Walker's argument concerning guild control after the late seventeenth century, as the Tuckers' Company lost control of apprenticeship due to the decline of its monopoly.<sup>76</sup> Despite this fact, the guild was still able to monitor contract compliance via premiums and the provision of funding to set up apprentices as independent traders, and to that extent it still administered skills transmission on the basis of the master–apprenticeship contract.

Thus, the case of Exeter confirms Epstein's emphasis on the critical technical role of early modern guilds in the absence of compulsory schooling and efficient bureaucracies. With regard to the controversy concerning the decline of guild regulation, the shift of power in the guild from craftsmen fullers to the merchant fullers in Exeter shows clearly how guild 'weakness' in Ogilvie's rather political sense goes hand-in-hand with continued 'strength' in Epstein's economic and technical sense.

On another note, it has recently been argued (contra Epstein) that English apprenticeship was much more diverse and flexible than previously thought, resembling training in some other parts of Europe (which normally involved shorter terms followed by several years as a journeyman).<sup>77</sup> The development of training by self-management in Exeter's charity apprenticeships confirms this new perspective.

In the context of comparative urban history, Exeter counts among those southern regional centres with 5,000 or more inhabitants whose growth rate far outstripped London and the northern manufacturing centres

<sup>76</sup> One may suppose that guilds never had complete control over apprenticeship in England; Epstein's ideas were of idealized types based on Japanese history (personal communication with one of Epstein's close friends).

<sup>77</sup> C. Minns and P. Wallis, 'Rules and reality: quantifying the practice of apprenticeship in early modern England', *Economic History Review*, 62 (2012), 556–79, at 574.

during the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>78</sup> Why was this the case? On the whole, these southern towns were guildated, and it is well known that the main function of guilds shifted from trade regulation to charitable and education trust during the eighteenth century. Although craft companies often lost their vocational unity as the economic interests of their members diversified, they remained as wealthy social clubs lending prestige to an oligarchic elite.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, freedom of the city had often lost much of its economic justification by the late seventeenth century, as non-citizens increasingly evaded civic control.<sup>80</sup> While this may well have been the situation in many of the southern guildated towns, Exeter was rather different in some respects. As I have shown in this study, its transformation was more positive, as it managed to outcompete other English towns.

It is often remarked that, in comparison with the Continent, English provincial towns did not acquire a strong position because of the strength of the English government and the resulting reduced independence of English urban centres.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, royal power was periodically challenged by town corporations.<sup>82</sup> As we have seen, by the late seventeenth century, the royal charter received by the Tuckers' Company in 1620 had become ineffective.<sup>83</sup> In Exeter, a divorce between city freedom and trade has also been emphasized,<sup>84</sup> and certainly some freedom was admitted immediately prior to parliamentary election. However, merchant fullers preferred to increase the number of craftsmen fullers; they controlled the city chamber, and wished to maintain some relation between freedom and trade in order to increase the number of citizens outside the guild. This resulted in a decline of monopoly. Even if they were fully controlled by the merchant fullers, the guilds themselves were powerless

<sup>78</sup> L. Shaw-Taylor and E.A. Wrigley, 'Occupational structure and population change', in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, vol. I: 1700–1870 (Cambridge, 2014), 53–88, at 76–7.

<sup>79</sup> This elite became dominated by gentlemen and professionals: P. Clark, 'The civic leaders of Gloucester 1580–1800', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns: 1600–1800* (London, 1984), 311–45, at 315.

<sup>80</sup> P.J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700–1800* (Oxford, 1982), 88; Clark and Slack, *English Towns*, 116.

<sup>81</sup> J. Lucassen, T. De Moor and J.L. van Zanden, 'The return of the guilds: towards a global history of the guilds in pre-industrial times', in J. Lucassen, T. De Moor and J.L. van Zanden (eds.), *The Return of the Guilds* (Cambridge, 2008), 5–18, at 13–14. Many powerful provincial guilds received royal charters similar to the one granted in 1620 to the Tuckers' Company of Exeter, which nullified the city chamber's right to regulate entrance fees: for example, the Salisbury weavers (C. Haskins, *The Ancient Trade Guilds and Companies of Salisbury* (Salisbury, 1912), 92, 102) and the mercers of York (D.M. Palliser, 'The trade guilds of Tudor York', in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500–1700* (London, 1972), 86–116, at 90).

<sup>82</sup> R. Sweet, *The English Town, 1680–1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 2014), 62–3.

<sup>83</sup> In Norwich, the merchant adventurers received a royal charter; however, other companies were under direct control of the municipal council during the late seventeenth century: Clark and Slack, *English Towns*, 55.

<sup>84</sup> Rowe and Jackson, *Exeter Freemen*, xxv.

without a monopoly and royal support. In this situation, the charity apprenticeship was the most appropriate means of maintaining the skill of cloth-workers – and in this case, too, voluntary association succeeded apprenticeship.<sup>85</sup>

With regard to citizens outside the guild, Exeter's situation was not unique among regional English urban centres. York and Salisbury also had citizen cloth-workers outside the guild, and although York's merchant tailors and Salisbury's tailors survived, their monopoly had come to an end before the early eighteenth century.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, this situation was the exception rather than the rule. In the case of another regional urban centre – Gloucester – the municipal authorities had taken over the monopolistic enrolment of apprentices from the guilds by the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>87</sup> And although more than half the urban population lived in small towns, most of these did not possess functioning guilds by the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>88</sup> As for London, membership of a livery company was required in order to be granted the freedom of the city. Thus, these urban centres require separate attention, as they did not possess citizens outside the guild – the criterion which has formed the basis for this study.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism?', 102. There were similar projects in York: D.B. Smith, 'Inexorable decline or successful adaptation? The York Merchant Tailors' Company, 1662–1776', in R.B. Dobson and D.M. Smith (eds.), *The Merchant Tailors of York: A History of the Craft and Company from the Fourteenth to Twentieth Centuries* (York, 2006), 73–138, at 90.

<sup>86</sup> Concerning York, Smith has recently pointed out that there were citizen cloth-workers outside the guild in the early eighteenth century: Smith, 'Inexorable decline or successful adaptation?', 55–6, 80. Concerning charity apprenticeship projects in Norwich, see W. Hudson and J.C. Tingay (eds.), *The Records of the City of Norwich*, vol. II (Norwich, 1910), cxiv–cxv; concerning traders outside the guilds in Salisbury, see Haskins, *The Ancient Trade Guilds*, 194–5.

<sup>87</sup> P. Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester, 1547–1720', in N.M. Herbert (ed.), *The Victoria History of the County of Gloucester*, vol. IV (Oxford, 1985), 73–123, at 80.

<sup>88</sup> P. Clark, 'Small towns in England, 1500–1850: national and regional population trends', in P. Clark (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), 90–120, at 90; Clark, *British Clubs*, 24.

<sup>89</sup> Sweet, *English Town*, 37.