

CRISIS OF THE GUILDS: THE LONDON WEAVERS' COMPANY AND ALIEN
WEAVERS, 1620-1640

by

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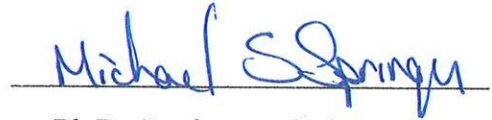
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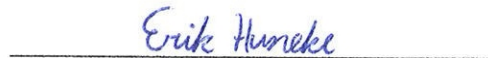
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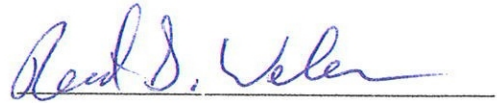
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Statement of the Problem or Issue

In the early seventeenth century London's livery companies' control over their respective trades was in decline, as the early modern economy brought new challenges such as population growth, rising immigration, increasing forms of mechanization, and the early development of factory-based industry. This thesis analyzes the companies' decline through the experience of the Weavers' Company in the 1620s and 1630s, focusing particularly on the challenges it faced in responding to the changing economy, and identifying the factors which weakened its hold on the City's weaving industry.

Especially important is the perspective offered in this thesis, which examines the issues from the viewpoint of company members who were common artisans plying the trade in England's capital city.

Brief Summary of the Literature

Increasing immigration in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century London is central to the discussion of the crisis of the City's livery companies, and historians have debated its meaning. Historians like Ronald Pollitt argued that xenophobia created tension between native and alien artisans, which weakened the companies by fostering an us-against-them mentality among English Londoners. Other historians like Andrew Pettegree and Laura Yungblut rejected that argument, asserting that such native antipathy

toward people from other countries was usually mild, pointing to the rareness of violent conflict between English and alien artisans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many other scholars like Jacob Selwood, Andrew Plummer, Joseph P. Ward, Lien Bich Luu, and Steve Rappaport, however, moved beyond the debate over whether tensions between English and alien artisans were rooted in xenophobia, focusing instead on the economic changes strangers introduced and the decline of the livery companies in the early modern period. These other historians have argued that strangers were central to the changes affecting the companies and English artisans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not because of the xenophobic sentiments they engendered, but because skilled alien artisans and merchants introduced new technologies and trade techniques to the City which boosted and expanded its industries beyond the control of the livery companies.

Thesis Statement

Using over forty petitions drawn by the Weavers' Company's artisan members during the 1620s and 1630s, which are bound in the company's memoranda book stored in London's Guildhall Library, this thesis adds to the scholarly conversation by arguing that the company's decline was due to a number of internal and external factors. Beginning in the early reign of Charles I (1625-1649), the company became embroiled in internal struggles as members and leaders clashed over how to control alien artisans, limiting its ability to respond to external challenges strangers posed. External factors weakening the company at the same time rested with alien artisans' cheap living spaces, allowing them to work for low wages on mechanized looms outside of guild membership, and bringing overbearing competition to native weavers who became increasingly unable to live by the trade following company regulations, and relying on less productive single looms. These

factors ultimately weakened the Weavers' Company's power over the trade and are key to understanding why its petitioning native artisans resented the alien weavers and their production methods.

Statement of the Research Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to examine the conflict between the Weavers' Company and alien artisans from the perspective of the company's members. The primary sources on which this thesis is based are forty-eight petitions written to City, Crown and company authorities dating from 1620 to 1638, held in the company's memoranda book, which is stored in the Worshipful Company of Weavers collection at the Guildhall Library in London. These average about one to two petitions per year, but it must be noted that the memoranda book contains no weavers' petitions dating in the years 1627-1629, and 1631. Although at least seven of these petitions are undated, and have neither been transcribed nor quoted in this thesis, they remain important because they have contributed to the overall understanding of the weavers' complaints. Even though the total number of petitions used might seem small and insufficient for understanding weavers' complaints in such a span of years, it must also be noted that together they cover between 300 to 400 pages of written content, or 116 single-spaced pages of digital text. In addition to sufficiency of content, petitions remain some of the only primary sources from which to gain an understanding of the voice of the lower order of guild members in early Stuart period (1603-1649). Few historians have focused extensively on the weavers' voice and their agency in the economic changes taking place in the seventeenth century. Other sources used in this research include James I's and Charles I's calendars of state papers domestic, alien returns, and Dutch Church consistory records. The qualitative methods

used in this research involve both textual and contextual analyses of the native weavers' petitions, while quantitative methods include statistical analysis of alien returns to determine where and how many strangers settled, lived and worked in 1618 and 1635 London and Southwark.

Brief Summary of Findings

The weavers' petitions to City, company, and Crown authorities reveal how the strangers created economic problems for English artisans. The petitions have shown that aliens' working and living tendencies allowed them a competitive edge over the company's members who had to abide by company restrictions on the scale of their business. They also show that such complaints were genuine concerns for the livelihoods which many English weavers were losing due to unfair competition with the strangers who used labor-saving engine looms and continued to work outside of the Weavers' Company and its trade restrictions. The petitions also show the internal struggles which the company faced starting in the mid-1620s. From the beginning of Charles I's reign to the years leading up to the English Civil War, company leaders and members clashed over how to control the strangers, which further obstructed the company's ability to effectively respond to the economic changes facilitated by alien weavers.

Confirmation, Modification, or Denial of Thesis

The conflicting views expressed in the historiography are not wrong, but what the weavers' petitions demonstrate is that a number of external and internal factors could lead to the decline of London's livery companies' powers over their respective trades. This thesis agrees with scholars such as Lien Bich Luu and Joseph P. Ward that strangers were central to the economic changes taking place in the early seventeenth century, and

recognizes the tensions, emphasized by Jacob Selwood, that such changes created between alien and English artisans. This thesis disagrees with Ronald Pollitt's argument that the tensions were motivated by xenophobia, and proposes that they were the result of complex economic issues. Where this thesis differs from most previous studies is in bringing their arguments together using the voice of petitioning weavers.

Statement of the Significance of the Findings

These findings are significant because they explain the livery companies' declining power in the seventeenth century due to internal and external challenges. Moreover, the findings give voice to English weavers and how they experienced the decline of the livery company. This thesis analyzes English weavers' expressions of resentment to French and Dutch weavers in their petitions to City, company, and Crown authorities, which were not rooted in xenophobia, but rather were caused by a complex set of circumstances. Economics were at the heart of the struggle.

The findings presented here contradict Pollitt's argument for a latent xenophobia among the English, but acknowledges anti-immigrant sentiments existed. Pollitt's conclusion resulted from his focus on the perspective of the Elizabethan Crown and the state papers regarding London authorities' attempts to suppress aliens' trades. He failed to consider fully a greater number of state records that point to the Crown's favor toward stranger artisans and its typical reluctance to carry out restrictions on strangers, which the Crown only sometimes allowed to alleviate tensions between English and alien artisans. This thesis reinforces arguments made by scholars like Pettegree and Laura H. Yungblut that the agitation of English artisans cannot be explained as xenophobic, but neither scholar focused extensively on native artisans' petitions and instead used the perspectives

of the strangers, City, and Crown authorities. By examining the native weavers' perspective, this thesis shows how the strangers' non-typical ways of living and working posed significant challenges to the Weavers' Company and its members, and facilitated tensions between alien and English weavers.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on other London livery companies, such as the goldsmiths in the 1620s and 1630s, can enhance our understanding of the strangers' influence on the changing economic landscape. English weavers were not the only artisans complaining of strangers in this period, and further research on how other companies reacted to alien artisans and what their members were saying might better explain the larger crisis of London's livery companies and shed further light on the contributions strangers made to the City's changing early modern economy.

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Chapter 1:

**Introduction to the Weavers' Company and Alien Weavers in Seventeenth-Century
London**

The 1590s was a tumultuous time in London, as a number of apprentice revolts laid bare native English complaints about poor wages, high taxation, and frustration with the City's leadership.¹ French, Dutch, Walloon, and Flemish immigrants, or strangers in sixteenth-century parlance, were among the targets of this dissatisfaction.² On the morning of May 5, 1593, someone posted an inauspicious poem on the wall of London's Austin Friars, the church used by Dutch migrants:

Ye strangers, yt doe inhabit this lande,
Note this same writing doe it vnderstand,
Conceit it well for savegard of your lyves,
Your goods, your children, & your dearest wives.³

Later that same year an anonymous author or authors circulated a letter threatening the strangers, "Doth not the world see that you, beastly brutes, the Belgians...and fainthearted Flemings; and you...Frenchmen, by your cowardly flight from your own natural countries....Be it known to all...it is best...to depart out of the realm of England," and claiming the apprentices would rise up and revolt against the "Flemings and strangers."⁴ Two years later, in 1595, a group of twelve to fifteen yeomen weavers

¹ Mihoko Suzuki, "The London Apprentice Riots of the 1590s and the Fiction of Thomas Deloney," *Criticism* 38, no. 2 (1996), 181.

² From this point forward, the words alien and stranger will be used interchangeably.

³ John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and Other Various Occurrences in the Church of England, During Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign: Together with an Appendix of Original Papers of State, Records, and Letters*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), 235.

⁴ The author(s) claimed they would "rise to a number of 2336," a significant number of rioters even by modern standards. Immediately after this letter was discovered, the City responded by ordering master artisans and merchants to keep strict a watch over their apprentices. The aldermen in their respective wards

presented a letter to the French Church accusing the alien tradesmen of enriching themselves “without any Christian regard of the native borne of our country and without respect of the liberties and priviledge graunted to the freemen of this honorable cittye.”⁵ The authors also charged French weavers of evading the rules of the Weavers’ Company, one of London’s livery companies, or early modern guilds. They accused aliens of keeping more looms than allowed, and of employing women and girls in their workshops.⁶ The complaints epitomize the tensions between English and alien artisans that challenged the London Weavers’ Company’s ruling officers in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The strangers further aggravated the problems plaguing the City’s livery companies in the following decades leading up to the English Civil War.⁷ Although casual observers of the examples above might characterize the conflict with the alien artisans as xenophobic, or rooted in their dislike of outsiders, the situation was far more complex.⁸ An examination of forty-one petitions submitted to the Weavers’ Company between 1624 and 1638 reveals other factors behind the tensions with immigrants

relyed this information to masters in secret, so as to prevent any further reactionary behavior by agitated apprentices. See Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol. 4, 234-5.

⁵ Thomas Deloney, William Muggins, and Willington, letter, June 1595, “To the Minister and Elders of the French Church in London, Grace and Peace in Christ Jesus,” Worshipful Company of Weavers, A/030/MS04647, ff. 125-6, Guildhall Library, London.

⁶ Deloney, Muggins, and Willington, letter, 1595, “To the Minister and Elders,” MS. 4647, ff. 125-6.

⁷ A livery company in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was most distinguished from its earlier guild form by its court through which it had an area of jurisdiction over its trade, and in which trade-related disputes were handled. The Weavers’ Guild became a livery company in 1497. In the earlier days of the guilds, trade affairs were handled entirely in City and royal courts. For convenient word usage, however, the term guild will still be employed here in reference to a livery company, since the former term remained in use during the seventeenth century. See George Unwin, *The Guilds and Companies of London* (London: Methuen, 1908), 158.

⁸ The question over whether English resentment could be explained by xenophobia ignores consideration of early modern conceptions of belonging as determined by one’s allegiance to the Crown. Though it may be undoubtable that the 1595 petitioning weavers saw the French weavers about whom they complained as non-English based on language and religious differences, resentment stemmed more from observations of aliens’ of disloyalty to the Crown and her subjects, which French weavers purportedly demonstrated by refusing to follow laws and contribute to the kingdom’s economy.

including the weakening guild system and a changing economic landscape. In these years the company faced both internal and external challenges that inhibited its leaders' ability to effectively respond to the changing economy, enforce ordinances or trade laws over the strangers, and promote fair competition between them and the English weavers. In addition to the threats posed by alien craftsmen, reflected in the struggles of the 1590s, the company wrestled with internal problems within the organization, and with new technologies introduced by strangers that undermined their ways of production. Around 1610, Dutch immigrants introduced engine looms, devices that allowed the employment of non-apprenticed wage laborers, and which produced goods at rates ten times higher than the single looms on which native weavers mainly worked. These challenges ultimately weakened the company's power over its trade and are key to understanding why its petitioning native artisans resented the French and Dutch weavers.

The methodology involved in studying the tensions between English and alien weavers includes examining petitions written by the company's native craftsmen to City, royal and guild officials. Of over forty-nine handwritten petitions found and transcribed in the Weavers' Company's memoranda book dating from 1577 to 1641, only those created from 1624 to 1638 have been selected here, because they alone highlight the Weavers' Company's weaknesses exposed by its internal and external struggles. The petitioning weavers became more concerned about the company's struggles starting in 1624 because their livelihoods had by then become increasingly affected by the economic changes strangers brought to London, and company leaders' inability to control them. Both textual and contextual analyses have been employed in order to specify what these struggles were, and then place them in the broader context of the weakening of London's

livery companies in the wake of economic changes facilitated by strangers. These petitions are important to study because not only can they reinsert the native weavers' voice into this wider, early modern context, but they also testify to the complicated economic factors which ultimately gave rise to tensions between the City's English and alien artisans.

Seventeenth-century Londoners often distinguished between two types of immigrants called foreigners and strangers. Considerably larger in number than the strangers, foreigners were mostly young English men and women born outside of the City, who settled into London on the prospect of living better economic lives. Strangers were immigrants born outside of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, most coming from Holland, Flanders, Wallonia, and France. Typically they were Protestants who had fled persecution on the continent and sought the safety of French and Dutch churches in London founded by Edward VI in 1550. In addition to London, other provincial towns attracted the newcomers who settled in Southwark, Canterbury, Sandwich, Norwich, Colchester, Halstead, Southampton and Maidstone.⁹ With its attractive economic activities, London's stranger population exceeded that of these towns, Norwich having the second largest population of Dutch, Flemish and Walloon immigrants since their arrival beginning in the late 1560s.¹⁰ Incessant warfare in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fueled this movement.¹¹

⁹ John Burn, *History of the French, Walloon, Dutch and other Foreign Protestant Refugees, Settled in England, from the Reign of Henry VIII to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, etc.* (London: Longman & Company, 1846), , 4-5.

¹⁰ Scott Oldenburg, *Alien Albion: Literature and Immigration in Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 26.

¹¹ That anti-Protestant hostilities of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries resulted in such a continuous movement of these exiles to Protestant-friendly countries like England is presumed in memory of the tragic outcomes of the French Wars of Religion (1562-1598), the Dutch Revolt (1568-1648), the

Although immigration from the Low Countries to London started to slow by the beginning of the seventeenth century, French Protestant or Huguenot artisans were settling into the City in growing numbers as a result of renewed hostilities with Catholic factions following the 1610 assassination of Henry IV. His death meant that the peace which he successfully maintained between Huguenots and Catholics could no longer be perpetuated, even as the Edict of Nantes remained in place until its official repeal on October 18, 1685.¹² Crown policy under Louis XIII (1610-1643) became exceedingly pro-Catholic, leading to Protestant uprisings. Beginning in 1620, the monarch led an eight-year campaign against Huguenots, which ended with the capture of La Rochelle in 1628.¹³ During these dangerous years thousands of French Huguenots perished while many others, fearing as much for their lives as for their religious liberties, sought refuge outside of France. Alfred Plummer, honorary librarian to the Weavers' Company in 1972, showed through a comparison of alien returns for the years 1571 and 1635-9, that immigrants from the Low Countries outnumbered French immigrants by eight to one in the late sixteenth century, while by the mid-1630s the ratio dwindled by two to one.¹⁴

Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), and Louis XIII's unrelenting campaign against France's Huguenot stronghold states in the 1620s.

¹² During his life as king of France, Henry IV kept peace between Huguenots and Catholics after his signing of the 1598 Edict of Nantes which guaranteed measures of civic and religious liberties for the Huguenots while prohibiting their religion outside of certain stronghold states reserved for them.

¹³ The campaign began in 1620, when Louis XIII led an army to capture the frontier state of Bearn, whose citizens and their leaders had earlier resisted the king's orders to restore Catholic Church lands. These were lands which Henry IV had previously dissolved. Following the king's bloody capture of the Bearnais capital of Pau on October 5, Bearn's status as a semi-autonomous Huguenot state ended. Louis went on to capture Montaubon, but its resistance prevailed after a two-month siege. The campaign ended when in November 1628, the fortified Huguenot town of La Rochelle opened its gates to Cardinal Richelieu's forces after a siege which lasted from October 1627. Richelieu reported to King Louis that more than 20,000 of the town's initial 25,000 inhabitants perished from starvation both during and after the siege. The fall of La Rochelle terminated the Calvinist political movement in France. See Otto Zoff, *The Huguenots: Fighters for God and Human Freedom* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1943), 287-9, 312, 314.

¹⁴ Alfred Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company, 1600-1970* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 173.

Like Plummer, Reformation historian Ole Peter Grell suggested a renewed migration to England in these years, showing that by the 1630s London's Huguenot population increased significantly, as much as ten to twenty per cent from the beginning of the century, in proportion to other strangers of Flemish, Dutch and Walloon origin.¹⁵

Unlike the foreigners who had certain rights, strangers and their English-born progeny were often prohibited from earning the freedom, or full citizenship, of the City during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, even upon completion of apprenticeship, the usual route through which to obtain such legal standing.¹⁶ Their only option was to become denizens, enjoying rights similar to freemen, including permission to own houses and work as master craftsmen, but requiring either an act of Parliament or letters patent from the Crown, something that usually involved a time-consuming application process.¹⁷ As a result of these difficulties, nearly half of all strangers in the City remained non-denizens during the first half of the seventeenth century.¹⁸ In the 1620s and 1630s the Weavers' Company's leaders allowed, with certain fees paid, non-denizen alien weavers to exercise trade rights like freemen, or as masters taking apprentices. This practice fueled the company's internal tensions between its leaders and its native members, who found it unfair that aliens who had not served their full seven-

¹⁵ Ole Peter Grell, *Calvinist Exiles in Tudor and Stuart London* (NY: Taylor & Francis Group, Routledge, 2017), 52-3; Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 173.

¹⁶ Despite a 1608 common law court ruling known as Calvin's Case, which decided in favor of strangers' English-born progeny being recognized as English subjects with full access to citizenship rights, City and guild authorities in practice often disregarded this rule, and continued through the century to deny those of non-English descent their freedoms. See Jacob Selwood, "'English-Born Reputed Strangers': Birth and Descent in Seventeenth-Century London," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 733-4.

¹⁷ Daniel Statt, *Foreigners and Englishmen: The Controversy Over Immigration and Population, 1660-1760* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 33-4.

¹⁸ Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 53.

year apprenticeships could work like masters in a shorter number of years than English artisans.

The practical powers which England's livery companies had long maintained over their trades were weakening considerably in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since the passing of its 1551, 1577, 1589, and 1594 ordinances, the Weavers' Company placed trade restrictions on alien weavers, such as the number of looms, apprentices and journeymen they were allowed to keep at one time. The ordinances, or company trade laws, were measures made precisely to safeguard the company's control over the trade of weaving and promote fair competition between English and alien weavers. Although they remained in place during the 1620s and 1630s, company leaders proved unable to effectively enforce such laws on strangers. As a result of these difficulties, petitioning members turned on their leaders, who meanwhile had been readily admitting growing numbers of strangers into the guild and loosening trade enforcements over them in exchange for fees collected for the company's funds. Petitioning weavers expressed increasing concern about the hardship caused by strangers, which threatened their livelihoods, and accused their officers of personal greed, fueling internal divisions within the Weavers' Company. These struggles at different times necessitated the intervention of City authorities who had been repeatedly urged by petitioners to order the guild's leaders to enforce ordinances on its new alien members.

Prior to the 1980s, historians tended to focus on the wider impact of early modern strangers on England. In a 1957 article, John J. Murray argued that the United Kingdom today owes a considerable debt to the influence of the Northern and Southern Low

Countries and its immigrants on Britain's early development into a modern nation.¹⁹ Focusing solely on Flemish and Dutch strangers who had arrived to London and provincial towns from the Low Countries, particularly after the Duke of Alva's arrival there in 1568, Murray excluded other migrants including the French Protestants, who came to London in the aftermath of the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. He claimed that English soldiers fighting side by side with Flemings against the Spanish forces in Flanders in the late 1560s and 1570s "took many Flemish customs – military and social – back to Britain with them."²⁰ Murray also showed the lasting Dutch influence on what might be regarded as English nautical terms, such as fly-boats, and discussed the impact which the Dutch had on English farming techniques in the early modern period. Among his further numerous examples, Murray argued that sixteenth and seventeenth century Anglican ecclesiastical history cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the Dutch influence on English religious thought. He traced this impact from Erasmus of Rotterdam and his relationships with Oxford reformers, to Archbishop William Laud's struggles to enforce Anglican uniformity in the late 1630s.²¹ Murray's study painted a picture of early modern English state-building heavily influenced by the Low Countries and its Dutch and Flemish immigrants, and presented a positive depiction of the relationship between the Flemish, Dutch, and English.

After 1980, social, economic, and church historians began writing more extensively on the tensions which existed between alien and English craftsmen in the Tudor and Stuart periods. In his 1980 article "Refuge of the Distressed Nations,"

¹⁹ John J. Murray, "The Cultural Impact of the Flemish Low Countries on Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England," *The American Historical Review* 62, no. 4 (1957): 854.

²⁰ Murray, "The Cultural Impact of the Flemish Low Countries," 837.

²¹ Murray, "The Cultural Impact of the Flemish Low Countries," 845.

Perceptions of Aliens in Elizabethan England,” Ronald Pollitt discussed these tensions from the angle of London and Crown authorities in their attempt to maintain social stability.²² Pollitt was concerned with the negative attitudes and anxieties exhibited by English merchants and artisans on the one hand, and city and crown authorities on the other, with regard to Protestant immigration to London in the late sixteenth century.²³ Pulling from a variety of sources such as the Lansdowne and Cotton manuscripts, public and state records, contemporary polemical works and artisan petitions, he argued that until the last decade of Elizabeth I’s reign, the crown stood in disfavor of the Protestant immigrants seeking refuge in England for the threat they posed to national security and social stability.²⁴ He explained that in addition to the widespread fear of a potential Catholic invasion among English subjects in the wake of the 1571 Ridolfi Plot, a failed Catholic plot to assassinate the queen, some of Elizabeth I’s councilors, most notably William Cecil, also exhibited this concern and, like the public, he thought papal agents, conspirators, assassins, and other potential threats to the Crown were hiding under the guise of one of the many lately arrived Protestant refugees.²⁵ Pollitt’s explanation for English xenophobia rested with his implied assumption that England’s precarious

²² Ronald Pollitt, “‘Refuge of the Distressed Nations,’ Perceptions of Aliens in Elizabethan England,” *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 1 (1980): 1004.

²³ Pollitt, “‘Refuge of the Distressed Nations,’” 1004.

²⁴ Pollitt, “‘Refuge of the Distressed Nations,’” 1018.

²⁵ The Ridolfi Plot was a conspiracy organized by Florentine banker Roberto Ridolfi, and backed by Philipp II, Pope Pius V and the Duke of Norfolk, to get Elizabeth I’s Catholic subjects to overthrow her and install Mary, Queen of Scots as England’s new monarch. The discovery of the plot by William Cecil and Francis Walsingham, and the events which followed made it the first instance in which the perceived threat of a Catholic invasion became fully realized by the queen’s independently acting councilors who eventually orchestrated Mary’s fatal trial upon this and the 1586 Babington Plot. See Andrea Clarke, *Tudor Monarchs: Lives and Letters* (London: The British Library, 2017), 185; Pollitt, “‘Refuge of the Distressed Nations,’” 1015-6.

situation as a potential point of invasion for the Catholic League fostered popular distrust of immigrants by the English subject population.

The rise of social history brought new scholars who studied London's Protestant immigrants and disagreed with Pollitt's argument by emphasizing the City as remarkably stable in the wake of widespread alien immigration in the late sixteenth century. Reformation and social historian Andrew Pettegree, for example, showed that the stranger churches played a considerable role in maintaining social stability between aliens and natives in Elizabethan London.²⁶ Writing in his 1986 monograph *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London*, Pettegree attested to the dependence which Crown and City authorities had on the alien churches for their ability in both directing and regulating their respective communities, and in diffusing tensions between immigrants and English inhabitants of London.²⁷ He analyzed the history of Protestant immigration in the Elizabethan period within a social context told from the angle of the French and Dutch churches.²⁸ Contradicting Pollitt, Pettegree asserted that the potential skill which many craftsmen among these newcomers possessed for improvement of London's industries and luxury crafts far outweighed any latent xenophobic feeling or national security concerns with regard to the immigrant situation that some Crown and City authorities might have had.²⁹ Moreover, he expressed his skepticism over the notion of the Tudor English as xenophobic, saying that arguments of that nature "are all too often evidenced by the single example of Evil May Day," a

²⁶ Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 262.

²⁷ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 262.

²⁸ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 262.

²⁹ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 301.

notoriously violent riot against strangers in 1517.³⁰ Using Dutch Church consistory records and taking advantage of the numerous publications of the Huguenot Society of London, Pettegree argued that the stranger churches played a considerable role in the economic and social life of the immigrant communities of London.

Like Pettegree's book, social historian Ian W. Archer's 1991 monograph *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* focused on the topic of London immigration and social stability in the sixteenth century, but from the angle of the City's authorities.³¹ When he sometimes considered royal authorities, he downplayed any concern they had about the considerable numbers of immigrants coming into London and England; and in agreement with Pettegree's earlier analysis he, too, contended that at least at the top level of government, authorities rather encouraged skilled artisan immigrants to settle into London and provincial towns to help improve underdeveloped, or dying luxury crafts and industries.³² As Archer further argued, the trade restrictions that Elizabeth I and her privy council sometimes placed on London's immigrant merchants and craftsmen during the 1570s served as immediate solutions to temporary tensions between English and alien artisans and were neither vigorously carried out by the Crown, nor willingly and effectively enforced by City authorities.³³ As Archer and Pettegree maintained, royal measures were made in response to mounting pressure from London authorities receiving numerous petitions by English artisans and merchants complaining of the unfair economic competition the newcomers brought to the City.³⁴

³⁰ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 282.

³¹ Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan England* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 9.

³² Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 137-8.

³³ Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 9, 137.

³⁴ Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 32, 137; Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 301.

Archer rejected Pollitt's notion that the Elizabethan government favored her subjects over strangers, and maintained that social instability between aliens and natives in London never escalated to more than a few violent episodes because the unification of City authorities allowed an adequate measure of success in preventing such escalation.³⁵

Some more recent scholars challenged the assumption of a shared national identity among Tudor subjects that contributed to their xenophobic attitude toward immigrants. In his 2009 article "Toward a Multicultural Mid-Tudor England," literary scholar Scott Oldenburg emphasized the complex attitudes that Marian English Londoners exhibited toward Protestant newcomers.³⁶ Showing that these attitudes were contingent along multiple lines such as guild affiliation, religion, and even family ties that "all might come into play in one's relationship with an immigrant neighbor," Oldenburg argued that "shared religious conviction or guild solidarity often bridged the cultural and linguistic gap between native-born and immigrant in early modern England."³⁷ Rather than completely refuting the idea that Tudor subjects shared an identity along national lines, however, Oldenburg proposed instead that this identity was not clearly exclusive of Protestant immigrants.³⁸ He called for historians to consider sixteenth century London as a multicultural society where alien and English identity were not as clear-cut as can be so easily assumed today.³⁹ In contrast to the historians discussed above, Oldenburg focused his study on Marian England, and analyzed the pageantries which were performed by both strangers and English during Mary I and

³⁵ Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 9.

³⁶ Scott Oldenburg, "Toward a Multicultural Mid-Tudor England: The Queen's Royal Entry Circa 1553, the Interlude of Wealth and Health and the Question of Strangers in the Reign of Mary I," *English Literary History* 76, no. 1 (2009): 101-2.

³⁷ Oldenburg, "Toward a Multicultural Mid-Tudor England," 101-2.

³⁸ Oldenburg, "Toward a Multicultural Mid-Tudor England," 122.

³⁹ Oldenburg, "Toward a Multicultural Mid-Tudor England," 122.

Philipp II's processions through London.⁴⁰ He showed that many of the first performances which Mary and Philip encountered were performed by strangers, and despite Mary's anti-alien proclamation in 1553, "the supposedly xenophobic English did not act" against aliens when they learned of underground Protestant congregations in which many strangers were involved.⁴¹ Oldenburg's focus on Marian England, a period when the political situation made it more feasible for English subjects to express their xenophobia freely, considerably supported his point, shared here, that any resentments which English citizens sometimes had against strangers were not simply due to the latter being non-English.

Conducting a study on the causes and consequences of Elizabethan immigration policy in the 1996 monograph, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us*, social historian Laura Hunt Yungblut found that the Elizabethan government maintained a favorable attitude to the Protestant aliens migrating to England because many possessed superior handicraft skills, particularly in the luxury trades.⁴² Looking at Elizabethan policy, she demonstrated that policy-makers often encouraged skilled alien craftsmen to teach their skills to English artisans and apprentices in order to boost England's manufactures, especially the textile trades.⁴³ London in the late sixteenth century was a city which remained industrially backward in comparison to the more advanced cities of Northern Europe, in particular Antwerp from which skilled alien craftsmen, especially silk weavers came into the City as religious and political refugees. By allowing and further encouraging skilled

⁴⁰ Oldenburg, "Toward a Multicultural Mid-Tudor England," 112.

⁴¹ Oldenburg, "Toward a Multicultural Mid-Tudor England," 112.

⁴² Laura Hunt Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us: Policies, Perceptions and the Presence of Aliens in Elizabethan England* (NY: Routledge, 1996), 102.

⁴³ Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here*, 103.

alien craftsmen to establish themselves in London, teach their skills to native craftsmen, and bring London's industries up to date with the rest of Europe, Yungblut maintained that Elizabeth I and her Privy Council's concern to maximize the economic benefits alien immigrants brought to London far outweighed any policies they sometimes directed against the commercial activity of alien artisans and merchants.⁴⁴ Furthermore, like Pettegree, Yungblut also argued that the English were not generally xenophobic as Pollitt had contended, saying that the "majority of the English who had to live and deal with the aliens on a daily basis viewed them with mild antipathy, which occasionally escalated into more violent expressions of xenophobia."⁴⁵ She showed that City or Crown restrictions on alien handicraftsmen emerged only in periods of real or perceived economic downturn, but more considerably in response to petitions being sent at the same time to the lord mayor and aldermen of London by low-ranking native craftsmen expressing grievances of unfair competition with strangers who disregarded guild regulations, and kept their occupational and business ties exclusively amongst themselves and their communities.⁴⁶

Lien Bich Luu, writing in her 2005 monograph, *Immigrants and Industries of London*, maintained a position similar to Yungblut in regard to the favor of Elizabethan policy makers toward Protestant immigrants. She demonstrated that the establishment of new industries in London during the second half of the sixteenth century, such as the silk industry, "owed much to the arrival of refugees, particularly the Walloons."⁴⁷ In contrast to Yungblut's main focus on Elizabethan policy, Luu focused more on the economic

⁴⁴ Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here*, 95.

⁴⁵ Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here*, 116.

⁴⁶ Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us*, 101

⁴⁷ Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and Industries of London, 1500-1700* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2005), 226.

impact of immigration from the beginning of the sixteenth century up to the close of the seventeenth. As an economic and social historian turned economics professor around the time her monograph was published, Luu sought to understand how the British Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came to be. Showing how earlier economic or industrial developments led to the revolution, she accepted at face-value that these earlier developments indeed made it possible.⁴⁸ Accepting as well, like Pettegree, Yungblut and Murray, that immigrants played a vital part, Luu was more determinedly concerned with the economic contribution of immigrants rather than how the Elizabethan Crown or the stranger churches might have facilitated or even mitigated immigration.⁴⁹ The body of literature on migration to London has focused largely on the Tudor period, but this study builds on that work by looking at relations with strangers under the early Stuart monarchs.

Historian Steve Rappaport drew on studies of London's livery companies. In his 1989 analysis of London's growth and its guilds in the sixteenth century, he showed that the City underwent considerable industrial growth as a result of unprecedented immigration, but, like this study with the Weavers' Company, revealed that its guilds proved too structurally inflexible to lead such developments.⁵⁰ When considering the guilds' immense authoritative powers which the Crown often granted them in their charters, he nonetheless pointed out that "the difference between what companies were empowered to do and the actual extent of their control was considerable."⁵¹ Rappaport's

⁴⁸ Luu, *Immigrants and Industries*, 17-8

⁴⁹ Luu, *Immigrants and Industries*, 30.

⁵⁰ Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23.

⁵¹ Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 46.

main contention was that London's livery companies were ultimately powerless in the face of the challenges that metropolitan expansion posed to their control over their trades, but unlike this thesis, he tended to overlook the economic contributions of strangers.⁵² In this way, Rappaport's view was of two distinct worlds in perpetual conflict between each other: that of the freemen living lives according to medieval social tradition within the walls of the city, and an ever-increasing mix of non-free and non-denizen foreigners and strangers living in the suburbs. Such a view, in short, is of the old, medieval world preserved behind walls separating it from a newer, culturally blended, and growing modern one outside the City.

In 1997, Joseph P. Ward challenged Rappaport's view, proposing a less separated, and conflicted, yet more complicated relationship between these two worlds. He argued that the City's companies, "rather than being swept aside by developments...adapted to them and, to a great extent, helped to shape their courses."⁵³ His whole view was not of two distinct worlds, but of a large metropolitan community in which individuals, free and non-free, both those living within the walls as well as those living outside of them, identified with each other based on a multitude of personal allegiances involving, most importantly, guild or religious affiliations.⁵⁴ Jacob Selwood, too, challenged Rappaport, demonstrating in his 2010 monograph that the Weavers' Company was perhaps the most flexible institution in response to such social changes brought by metropolitan expansion.⁵⁵ He proposed a more complex relationship between the free and non-free.

⁵² Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 46.

⁵³ Joseph P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 3.

⁵⁴ Ward, *Metropolitan Communities*, 5-6.

⁵⁵ Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and Difference in Early Modern London* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 63.

Selwood, however, argued that although the Weavers' Company showed remarkable flexibility by admitting an exceedingly greater number of strangers and foreigners into their ranks than the other London companies, such a flexible response was made out of shared concern by both its rulers and commonality that the non-free, particularly the highly skilled and tightly knit communities of strangers, posed a threat to their power over their trade.⁵⁶ Through the seventeenth century, the Weavers' Company continued to struggle to control the weaving trade, so that their ability to adapt was far from perfect, and perhaps always a little late in coming about. Selwood, then, also shared Rappaport's contention that in practice the city guilds remained in decline during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He argued that "while the company's government mounted a defense of the admission of strangers that was indeed assimilationist in nature, the yeomen and commonality brought accusations of alien infiltration that raised concerns both about the presence of immigrants and the influence of workers born in England of alien parentage."⁵⁷ In short, Selwood showed that the petitioning weavers of the Early Stuart Period were concerned that the strangers were occupying an influential fifth column in the Weavers' Company, a proposal which agrees with the findings in this study.⁵⁸ At the same time, however, in his discussion of the tensions between English and alien artisans, Selwood elided any consideration whether such conflicts had xenophobic roots, even when begging the question.⁵⁹ This current study intends to answer that question by showing how the tensions expressed in the weavers' petitions cannot be simply explained away as ones rooted in xenophobia.

⁵⁶ Selwood, *Diversity and Difference*, 63-4.

⁵⁷ Selwood, *Diversity and Difference*, 64.

⁵⁸ Selwood, *Diversity and Difference*, 59.

⁵⁹ Selwood, *Diversity and Difference*, 69-70.

Only two modern scholars studied extensively the history of the London Weavers' Company. Frances Consitt provided a broad history of the company from its foundation in the twelfth century to the end of the sixteenth century, with a particular interest both in its internal politics and in the role that it played in the city.⁶⁰ In her discussion of the sixteenth century, she provided what was arguably the first modern study on the impact that strangers had on the internal politics of the company, and on London's weaving industry in the second half of that century. She used extensive Weavers' documents such as its court records, memoranda, freedom registers and other company manuscripts now stored in London's Guildhall Library. Consitt argued that by the closing decade of the century, for the company's native artisans "two bugbears were economic inequality amongst guild members and the presence of foreign craftsmen in London."⁶¹ This current study agrees with Consitt's argument, though she never explained why native weavers were resentful toward alien artisans, something which this thesis will answer. Alfred Plummer's 1972 monograph on the history of the Weavers' Company from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries showed that the tensions between English and alien weavers were complicated. He argued that "although the native London weavers were, on the whole, good-tempered, they could not always bring themselves to take a dispassionate and tolerant view of the strangers' incursions into their preserves."⁶² Plummer also fell short of explaining this relationship, which this current thesis will do. Like Consitt, Plummer mainly focused on explaining the company, its functions, its internal structure, and its relationship with City government.

⁶⁰ Frances Consitt, *The London Weavers' Company: From the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), v.

⁶¹ Consitt, *London Weavers' Company*, 150.

⁶² Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 147.

The two separate threads given in the above historiography included the history of the strangers as Protestant refugees in England, and the history of aliens in the context of the London Weavers' Company. By blending these two threads, and by giving a voice to the petitioning weavers of the 1620s and 1630s, this study offers a better understanding of the important role which strangers played in the changing economy, as perceived by the English artisans, and how these changes, and the internal struggles they instigated, weakened the Weavers' Company in the early seventeenth century. Like almost all of the studies considered here, excluding Pollitt's, this thesis asserts that the resentments which English artisans had against strangers in these two decades were not xenophobic, or an expressed dislike of immigrants born outside of the realm. Their resentments were not only against strangers, but against their own leaders as well, because their voices were not being heard by either group. Rather than wishing the strangers to abandon weaving, they instead desired fair competition and demanded that, in order to promote fairness, they needed a greater voice, or power, in the company. To the petitioners, more power meant more control over their labor which remained continuously threatened by alien weavers using job-reducing engine looms and unfair production methods. The petitioners' desire for more power in the 1620s and 1630s reflects the increasing trend towards enfranchisement of commoners that precipitated the English Civil War, and the breakdown of medieval political order that led to the war is mirrored in the Weavers' Company's internal political struggles.

Because it is largely a study of ordinary people, English and alien, this thesis owes its existence to the Annales school of history founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in 1929. Its main actors, however, are not individuals but groups. Methods of

prosopography have been employed in research, using alien returns, or census records, to determine where stranger weavers lived, their relationship to their communities and churches, and how many joined the company. Sir Lewis Namier's use of prosopography in his 1929 multivolume study on members of Parliament in 1760, which focused mainly on members' familial, economic, and social ties with colleagues, constituents, and other people, effectively demonstrates the utility of collective biography for analyzing human agency in political developments. Comparing his study of Parliament and its members to ants running along various paths leading to the same ant-heap, Namier's primary interests concerned neither the heap nor the insects' personal lives, but movement, "the pathetically intent, seemingly self-conscious running of individuals along beaten tracks."⁶³ Like Namier, this thesis is not interested in the impact of individual strangers, but seeks to understand how their living patterns, religion, and close ties with each other in London and abroad challenged the Weavers' Company's internal stability and power over the trade, and created economic hardship for company members. It will show, for example, that in the early Stuart period alien weavers tended to concentrate in certain areas of London, a finding which helps to validate complaints made by petitioning weavers about strangers keeping business and trade networks exclusively within separate communities. The use of prosopography will be most necessary where it clarifies or disproves certain stereotypes proposed by petitioners.

This study on the London Weavers' Company, and the tensions between its English members on the one hand and the French and Dutch weavers on the other, will be drawn mostly from hand-written petitions by native weavers to City, company and

⁶³ Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), xi.

Crown authorities between 1624 and 1638. Chapter two will examine the functions and internal organization of the Weavers' Company, a necessary step before explaining the petitions and the desires outlined in them which their writers wished to be fulfilled regarding what to do with strangers. In the following two chapters the petitions will be analyzed. Chapter three will focus on petitions complaining about the Weavers' Company's officers, while chapter four will address those complaints about strangers which accused them of usurping the trade of weaving from English artisans. This thesis argues that in addition to strangers' impact on London's early modern economy, alien weavers contributed significantly to the waning power of the Weavers' Company in the early seventeenth century. Petitioning weavers' attitudes towards strangers were shaped by changing economic circumstances influenced by aliens, and these external forces combined with internal divisions to weaken the power of the company over its trade.

Chapter 2:

**The Alien Weavers and the London Weavers' Company in the Late
Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries**

In the early seventeenth century London's livery companies struggled to enforce their powers over strangers. In 1622, James I created a royal commission headed by the lord keeper, the custodian of the Crown's great seal, to consult with several companies, listen to their complaints against strangers, and devise a way to effectively enforce trade regulations on alien artisans.¹ After the meetings, the commissioners sent a brief report to the king expressing agreement with the companies' assertions that stranger artisans lived and worked "here more freer from publique charge then the natyves."² After drawing up a list of eleven statutes passed by previous monarchs, the commissioners questioned several alien craftsmen and ordered those convicted of breaking the laws to discontinue their trades.³ Representatives of the French and Dutch churches submitted a written request to the privy council, asking them to restore the privilege to ply their trades because they were religious refugees holding special rights allowed by the Crown "to exercise their vocations" free from company regulations.⁴ In response, the king's councilors ordered the commissioners to suspend the proceedings.⁵ The commission's

¹ King James Stuart, letter of order, 1622, "A Coppie of the Commission Concerninge Strangers," Worshipful Company of Weavers, A/030/MS04647, f. 327, Guildhall Library, London.

² Lord Keeper John Williams, letter, 1622, "Maie yt Please Your Most Excellent Matye Accordinge to Your Royall Pleasure Signyfyed," MS. 4647, f. 322.

³ Williams, "Your Most Excellent Matye," MS. 4647, f. 322.

⁴ Jan Hendrick Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, vol. 2. (Delhi: Facsimile Publisher, 2017), 1301.

⁵ No other documentation has been found giving information for the events which followed the commission's suspension. See Hessels, *Londino-Batavae Archivum*, vol. 2, 1301.

lack of success using these measures to enforce the livery companies' powers on strangers illustrates the complex problem facing the Weavers' Company in seventeenth-century London. Ambiguity about who could set the rules governing alien artisans, and a history of exemptions granted to religious refugees in the preceding century, made it difficult for the company's leaders to regulate stranger craftsmen.

The growing stranger populations in the 1620s and 1630s presented a considerable challenge to the company because of the immunities to company ordinances, or trade regulations, which aliens belonging to the French and Dutch churches possessed.⁶ Since the immunities exempted strangers' houses from company searches for trade infringements, alien weavers could get away with hiring and instructing non-apprenticed workers who were unassociated with the alien congregations. Another major challenge, however, rested with difficulty in finding strangers. Many poor, newly-arrived aliens tended to settle in London's expanding, confusing suburbs, living cheaply as inmates, or lodgers in squalid, divided dwellings consisting of multiple groups or families. These structures allowed alien weavers to work invisibly. The Weavers' Company, however, proved structurally weak in attempting to meet these challenges and enforce its power over the trade. Here the living spaces of strangers will be discussed, as well as the structure of the company, in order to set the stage for the internal and external challenges the company faced.

⁶ Since the reign of Elizabeth I, all strangers living in the city, both denizens and non-denizens, who were members of the French and Dutch Churches, were allowed to "worke and labour in their seuerall handycrafts and vocations for the releif of them and theirs in the Citty of London and elsewhere within this Realme ... without anie further suites, troubles, arreastes or proceedinges ... for vsing their Trades and Vocacions." This information was gathered from a letter by Charles I confirming this privilege in November, 1626, found in Hessels, *Londino-Batavae Archivum*, vol. 3, 1325-6.

Strangers in London

London authorities and guild leaders struggled to keep track of the growing foreign population, as can be seen in the returns, or official records by the City and Crown recording the population numbers and occupations of strangers. As London's suburbs expanded rapidly in the early seventeenth century, the people recording the returns expressed difficulty providing accurate numbers for aliens living and working outside London's walls. These suburban areas were not just labyrinthian and difficult to fully traverse, but strangers settling in them tended to dwell in buildings divided into apartments where entire families and lodgers lived cheaply as roommates. A 1607 return, for example, listed several "houses mightily pestered with numbers of foreigners" in Southwark's parish of St. Magnus, where twenty-four Dutch people were reported to have lived under the same roof, one being "a merchant, with his wife and children; another, a shereman; another, a tapestry-maker; another, a dyer; another, a linen-weaver."⁷ A 1618 return described the suburbs of Bishopsgate Without as a place where "many strangers are resident and dwelling, of whose names wee cannot make any certificate."⁸ That conductors of these returns found it impossible to record certain numbers of aliens dwelling outside of city walls strongly suggests one challenge the Weavers' Company faced was regulating trade in an area that was hard for City authorities to manage.

⁷ John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and Other Various Occurrences in the Church of England, During Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign: Together with an Appendix of Original Papers of State, Records, and Letters*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), 572-3.

⁸ R.E.G. Kirk and Ernest F. Kirk, eds., *Returns of Aliens Dwelling in the City and its Suburbs of London from the Reign of Henry VIII to that of James I* (Aberdeen: The Huguenot Society of London, 1902), vol. 10, pt. 3, 180.

In the early seventeenth century, the highest number of alien weavers reported in the returns lived in an area surrounding the City's northern, northeastern, and eastern walls. Many others lived south of the City, in the borough of Southwark across London Bridge, where strangers began to expand into as the City's population grew. As shown by a September 6, 1618 return, one hundred thirty-five stranger weavers lived around Bishopsgate Ward, in the northeastern part of London.⁹ Many probably lived just outside of the gate, in Petty France, others further beyond in the northern fields of Shoreditch, possibly northeastern Spitalfields, and east in Whitechapel, which was developed in the early seventeenth century.¹⁰ The second highest number of alien weavers lived around the City's northern walls, in Portsoken Ward, where thirty-two were recorded, followed by Coleman Street Ward, east of, and adjacent to Bassinghall Ward in which Weavers' Hall stood.¹¹ On average the twenty-three other wards listed about one to three weavers, showing that strangers practicing this trade concentrated in certain areas. According to two late September 1618 returns, Southwark held a considerable concentration of alien weavers, numbering seventy-six, but most of the strangers listed here had failed to provide their occupations so that the actual number was likely greater.¹² By 1635, significant concentrations of alien weavers could still be found in Southwark, and in east and north-eastern London, on both sides of the City's walls. A July 18 return made that year recorded 534 strangers living in suburban areas adjacent to London Tower,

⁹ Kirk, *Returns of Aliens*, vol. 10, pt. 3, 187-94.

¹⁰ After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, many Huguenot weavers settled into Spital Square, in the south-east corner of Spitalfields, and it became London's main silk-weaving district through the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It remains uncertain, however, whether alien weavers settled here before 1685. See Walter Thornbury, *Old and New London: Volume 2* (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878), 150; C. L. Kingsford ed., *A Survey of London. Reprinted From the Text of 1603* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), 163-75.

¹¹ Kirk, *Returns of Aliens*, vol. 10, pt. 3, 195-7, 209-13.

¹² Kirk, *Returns of Aliens*, vol. 10, pt. 3, 218-27.

Finsbury, and Holborn divisions, making vague mention that weaving was the trade occupied most by them.¹³ According to a return conducted in Southwark on November 20 of the same year, the highest concentration of alien weavers recorded there lived in the parish of St. Savior's, whose fifty-five alien householders were "mostly weavers."¹⁴ The numbers above are not fully representative of the population of strangers living in these areas, since, as already shown, people making these returns expressed difficulty in recording aliens who dwelled in packed and divided buildings.¹⁵

Increasing numbers of both foreigners and strangers living disorderly as inmates, or lodgers in close, shared spaces in Southwark and London's suburbs in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries raised periodic concerns at the Crown level about poverty, idleness, and social instability. Elizabeth I, in particular, made sundry attempts to tackle these issues starting in the late 1590s, as England underwent notorious food shortages that led to growing numbers of young, poor foreigners migrating to the City and seeking to eke out a living through dishonest and unproductive means. In 1597, Queen Elizabeth passed an act ordering justices of the peace to direct rogues, vagabonds, and beggars to parish workhouses "to labour as a true subject ought to doe."¹⁶ As the

¹³ These areas included "Whitechapel, East Smithfield, Norton Folgate, Hollowell Street, Spitalfields, Ratcliffe, Limehouse, St. Katherine's, Bethnal Green, Mile End, Stratford by Bow...Grub Street, Golden Lane, Whitecross Street, Charter House Lane, and Turnmill Street...High Holborn, Saffron Hill, Field Lane, St. Giles's Fields, and Chancery Lane." See John Bruce, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1635* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1865), 280.

¹⁴ Bruce, *Calendar of State Papers*, 489.

¹⁵ This might explain why so few strangers appeared in the 1618 returns when compared to the earlier 1593 return when suburbs were far less expanded, but the later year's numbers remained considerable. According to a 1593 return, the number of aliens, their children and servants living in the City, its suburbs and Southwark totaled 5,259. According to two 1618 returns, the total number of strangers living in London and Southwark were recorded as 1,090, suggesting that London's alien population might have diminished by the early seventeenth century; however, these returns excluded aliens living in the City's fields and expanding suburbs. See Kirk, *Returns of Aliens*, vol. 10, pt. 3, 180-231.

¹⁶ Elizabeth I, *An Acte for Punishment of Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdie Beggars* (London: Deputies of C. Barker, 1598), 1.

problem of idle and criminal people in the City persisted, in 1600 she issued a proclamation ordering the “great multitude of base and loose people,” who “lie priuily in corners and bad houses,” to leave the City “upon paine of death by marshall lawe.”¹⁷ In a June 22, 1602, proclamation, Elizabeth expressed further contempt for immigrants living cheaply as inmates “smothered with many families” in “small roomes” of divided dwellings in the City’s expanding suburbs.¹⁸ She forbade both the further dividing of houses, and the construction of new ones within three miles beyond the City’s walls.¹⁹ Although these particular acts and proclamations never singled out the strangers, as will be shown, petitioning weavers expressed the same kinds of resentments toward alien weavers whom they accused of living in ways similar to the foreigners. Elizabeth I’s concerns about poverty, crime, and social instability resounded in the minds of the following two monarchs, as these issues continued to plague London through the early seventeenth century.

In his proclamations, James I made similar remarks about the challenges which persistent immigration, and the consequent expansion of the City’s suburbs, presented for maintaining order. Such overcrowding and disorderly growth led to rising prices in food and other provisions, higher rents, and growing numbers of criminals, vagabonds, and other idle or potentially dangerous persons existing outside the framework of the existing social order that was traditionally maintained at the household level or in the parish workhouse. James also viewed overcrowding in the City as the root cause for its periodic

¹⁷ Elizabeth I, *By the Queene. Whereas Aduertisement is Giuen Vnto vs, That There is at This Time Dispersed Within our Citie of London, and the Suburbs Thereof, a Great Multitude of Base and Loose People* (London: Robert Barker, printer to the Queenes most excellent Maiestie, 1600), 1.

¹⁸ Elizabeth I, *By the Queene. A Proclamation Concerning new Buildings and Inmates, in or About the Citie of London* (London: Robert Barker, printer to the Queenes most excellent Maiestie, 1602), 1.

¹⁹ Elizabeth I, *Buildings and Inmates*, 2.

outbreaks of plague, and for this reason issued a proclamation during the 1603 epidemic forbidding construction of new buildings and dividing of houses, and prohibited any further inmates from inhabiting London, or “within foure miles” from its walls.²⁰ For years afterward, however, both foreigners and strangers continued to migrate to the City, and in 1621, apprentice-led riots broke out targeting the strangers in particular. Although reasons remain unclear as to why only strangers were targeted, violence had risen to such a “degree, to the great scandall of our government” and “to the dishonour of our nation,” that King James decided to intervene, and issued a proclamation ordering it to be suppressed.²¹ He scolded the lord mayor, aldermen, and City sheriffs for their negligence in suppressing the riots, and declared his sympathy and undying support for the strangers “to whom all courteous respect and hospitality is due.”²² The Crown never accorded like sentiment to the foreigners, especially those James called the “wandering poore,” and in 1625, he ordered all English and Irish immigrants found living in London as “inmates...uagabonds, rogues, and such like,” to either be returned to their places of origin, imprisoned, or pressed into the navy.²³

Despite such orders by the Crown, immigrants continued to arrive to the City, and like the two monarchs before him, Charles I issued a proclamation in 1630 forbidding the construction of new “houses & buildings” to prevent any further overcrowding that

²⁰ James I, *By the King. A Proclamation Against Inmates and Multitudes of Dwellers in Strait Roomes and Places in and About the Cities of London, and for the Rasing and Pulling Downe of Certaine new Erected Buildings* (London: Robert Barker, printer to the Kings most Excellent Maiestie, 1603), 1.

²¹ James I, *By the King. A Proclamation for Suppressing Insolent Abuses Committed by Base People Against Persons of Qualitie, Aswell Stranger as Others, in the Streetes of the Citie and Suburbes of London, With the Parts Adiacent* (London: Bonham Norton and John Bill, printers to the Kings most Excellent Maiestie, 1621), 1.

²² James I, *Proclamation Against Inmates*, 2.

²³ James I, *By the King. A Proclamation for Restraint of Disorderly and Vnnecessary Resort to the Court* (London: Bonham Norton and Iohn Bill, printers to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, 1625), 2.

would aggravate the City's problems with poverty and order.²⁴ Specifically, he demanded no buildings to be erected on new foundations within three miles outside London's gates and Westminster palace, and renewed a commission led by "divers honorable persons," with orders to search for, arrest, and force offenders to tear down their buildings.²⁵ In order to further mitigate the "surcharge of people, especially of the worst sort," and "the breeding and spreading of infection," the proclamation commanded the aldermen and deputies to search for inmates in both strangers' and foreigners' houses and force discovered lodgers to leave the city.²⁶ In the following year, King Charles "for safety and good order" commanded the lord keeper to appoint a special commission of six individuals to diligently carry out and oversee certain orders including one intended for special daily and nightly watches in the City, suburbs, and surrounding countryside to apprehend rogues and vagabonds.²⁷ Like his father before him, he also exhibited special concern about London's deteriorating public health in the midst of continued immigration and overcrowding, especially since six years earlier London had faced another major plague outbreak like the one in 1603. Despite the various attempts made by the above three monarchs to combat these problems, they continued unabated through the 1630s, as tensions between immigrants and Londoners, crime, idleness, and an additional 1636 disease epidemic, posed threats to social order and public health in the City.

²⁴ Charles I, *By the King. A Proclamation Concerning New Buildings, in and about the Citie of London* (London: Robert Barker, printer to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, 1630), 1.

²⁵ Charles I, *Proclamation Concerning New Buildings*, 5.

²⁶ Charles I, *Proclamation Concerning New Buildings*, 5.

²⁷ Charles I, *Orders and Directions, Together With a Commission for the Better Administration of Iustice, and More Perfect Information of His Maiestie, how, and by Whom the Lawes and Statutes Tending to the Reliefe of the Poore, the Well Ordering and Training vp of Youth in Trades, and the Reformation of Disorders and Disordered Persons, are Executed Throughout the Kingdome: Which His Royall Maiestie Hath Comanded to be Published and Inquired of, by the Body of his Priuie Councill, Whom he Hath Made Principall Commissioners for This Purpose* (London: Robert Barker, printer to the Kings most Excellent Maiestie 1631), 28.

The Crown and London authorities were not alone blaming immigrants for the City's growing social, economic and health issues in the early seventeenth century. As with the yeomen weavers in the 1590s, these issues aggravated English artisans in these years, who often expressed resentments not only against foreigners living cheaply and dishonestly, but against alien craftsmen as well, whom they accused of living in similar, problematic ways. At times, such native antipathy toward aliens led some English artisans to specifically blame the strangers for living as inmates, overcrowding the city and its suburbs, "raysinge" rents, enhancing "prices of victualls," and increasing the chance of "contagious infection yf God should visitt yt."²⁸ In 1632, poor members of the Weavers' Company petitioned the lord mayor complaining of the "the great troopes and infinite numbers of strangers," who:

duly...resort to this cittye...wch suffereth...beyond all tolleracion for most of the poorest sorte of the said straungers, are pacte and thrust upp with their whole ffamilyes within divers houses tennements and roomthes of very small and narrow compasse...insoemuch as the cittie and the suburbes of the same, together with many other partes of this kingdome are filled pesterred and much anoyed wth many and sundrye troublesome and offensive inmates against the customes and free usages of this honorable cittye, and against the lawes and statutes of this land.²⁹

In another petition, dated April 12, 1636, similar issues were again addressed, but the process by which dwellings became available to strangers and their families was also explained. Its authors wrote that "carpenters bricklayers and plasterers, aloe chandlers alehouse keepers and divers other tradesmen," for personal gain:

²⁸ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, June 1635, "Grievances which the Generallity of the Native Born, Being Weavers of London doe Susteine, Haveing Served their Apprenticeshipps Accordinge to the Lawes of the Realme," Worshipful Company of Weavers, A/030/MS04647, f. 303, Guildhall Library, London.

²⁹ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 1632, "The Complaite of the Weavers English Borne and Freemen of London. Against the Weaver Strangers and Aliens," MS. 4647, f. 232.

have engrossed and taken by lease...ffoure, six, eight or tenn houses a peece over the heads of the auntyent tennants (whoe have dwelt longe therein) of the messuags, tennents houses & grounds lyeinge and beinge wthin the cittye of London, liberties and places adioyninge.³⁰

Houses were divided, sheds, hovels and cottages were built upon new foundations, entire families of strangers were put into as many rooms as could be made, and rents continued to rise. This 1636 petition paints a mental picture of the poor, overcrowded, and unsanitary spaces of seventeenth century London. These were the spaces in which considerable numbers of strangers lived and worked, and such living arrangements presented a challenge to the Weavers' Company's ability to control the alien weavers.

The London Weavers' Company

Although weaving was an important trade and the Weavers' Company had considerable influence over it, the guild was neither profitable nor wealthy, it never ranked in the twelve great, or richest livery companies of London, and the only property it had was its hall. Like the City's other livery companies, the weavers' existence as a City institution was maintained by its charter, a document originally granted by Henry I establishing it as a guild in or around the year 1155.³¹ By 1497, under a new charter authorized by Henry VII, the former Weavers' Guild was transformed into a livery company, distinguished from its earlier form by the addition of a court of assistants that served as a leadership council comprised of one to two masters, two to four wardens, and

³⁰ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 12 April 1636, "To the Kings Most Excellent Matie," MS. 4647, ff. 360-2.

³¹ Frances Consitt, *The London Weavers' Company: From the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 1.

twelve to twenty-four assistants.³² By the early seventeenth century, unlike the rest of London's livery companies, the weavers' maintained four main masters, referred to not as such but as bailiffs and wardens, who were its only elected officials, each serving terms of office lasting for one full year.³³ Just under the Weavers' Company's officers were its twelve assistants, former bailiffs and wardens appointed for life by the presently acting bailiffs and wardens. The assistants' main duty on the company's court was to act as advisors to the four elected officers, though as a rule, the bailiffs and wardens were not allowed to make any decisions related to company affairs without the assistants' advice and unanimous consent, serving to prevent the four officers from consolidating the court's power exclusively amongst themselves.³⁴ At all times during the Early Stuart period, the Weavers' internal and external decisions related to both trade and policy were meant to be decided by its court, which acted as a singular body of sixteen executives.

³² A livery company in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was most distinguished from its earlier guild form by its court through which it had an area of jurisdiction over its trade, and in which trade-related disputes were handled. In the earlier days of the guilds, trade affairs were handled entirely in City and royal courts. See George Unwin, *The Guilds and Companies of London* (London: Methuen, 1908), 158.

³³ Elections took place on July 25 (the day of St. James the Apostle) at Weavers' Hall, located on the east side of Basinghall Street. Election for bailiffs began with the nomination of two persons from among the livery. One candidate was chosen by the two outgoing bailiffs while the other was selected by the liverymen, the out-going wardens and the assistants. Votes were made by voiced approval. Whichever candidate received the "most voyces of the said Bailives, Wardens, Assistants and Comonaltye" at Weavers' Hall was determined upper bailiff. The losing candidate could still contend for the position of the renter bailiff, but had to compete with another candidate nominated by the two outgoing bailiffs. The two candidates for the office of upper warden were selected and nominated from among the liverymen by the two outgoing bailiffs, and voted in by the said liverymen, assistants, and outgoing wardens and bailiffs, the same way that the upper and renter bailiffs were elected. The losing candidate became the renter warden. See Alfred Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company, 1600-1970* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 15-6; Valerie Hope, *The Worshipful Company of Weavers in the City of London* (London: Worshipful Company of Weavers, 1994), 6; Nicholas Bacon, Christopher Wray, and James Dyer, letter of ordinance, 25 June 1577, MS. 4647, ff. 9-10.

³⁴ Before the bailiffs and wardens made any of their executive decisions, both internal and external, the advice and assent of all the assistants was required. This was meant to ensure that the court of assistants acted unanimously at all times, while putting a check on the power of the four elected officials. See Consitt, *London Weavers' Company*, vol. 1, 116; Hope, *Worshipful Company of Weavers*, 6.

Prior to the English Civil War the company's jurisdiction over the weaving trade covered the City and suburbs within two miles of its walls, including Southwark.³⁵ The company had the right to enforce its ordinances not only on its members, but on all weavers living and working within its range of authority, including those who were members of other livery companies. By September 1638, when Charles I generously authorized the extension of its power to include all parts of England and Wales, this London institution became the prime authority of every weaver and weavers' guild or company operating in the towns within these lands.³⁶ Despite having considerable powers over weaving, the company struggled to enforce compliance on transgressing weavers. In practice, the institution lacked the kind of administrative machinery, let alone the manpower, necessary for carrying out its ordinances over transgressing artisans, especially those who lived outside of City walls where many alien weavers worked. The weavers' maintained a hierarchical structure that ensured its decisions were made exclusively from the top. Few voices were heard from among its rank and file, that is, its ordinary members. Internal struggles were a common feature of the guild in the early seventeenth century, particularly in the two decades leading to the English Civil War years.

³⁵ It appears this area of authority was first established when the Weavers' became a livery company in 1497, and the earliest mention of it is found in the guild's 1577 ordinances, which implied it was already in place. See Bacon, Wray, and Dyer, letter of ordinance, 25 June 1577, MS. 4647, f. 27.

³⁶ Charles I, letter of patent, September 1638, "A Graunte: Whereby his Majestie Doth Conferme to the Weavers of London Theire Auncient Chatres & his Matie Beinge Informed Aswell by the Mercoles as Silke Weavers of London of Sundery Abuses Practized in Weavinge of Tishewes Gould & Silver Stuffes Pulshes and Other Broade Silkes and Stuffes of Forraigne Materialls for Reformacon Therein & the Better Regulatunge Hereafter of the said Trade of Weavinge Those Silkes & Stuffes his Matie Doth Hereby Extende the Corporacon of the sd Weavers of London Throughout England & Wales wth Power to Them to Make Ordinances Wthall Other Incidents to a Corporacon," MS. 4647, ff. 494-5.

In their role as the company's chief bearers of authority, the leaders took on its most important yet difficult task, maintaining chartered privileges and upholding the company court's jurisdiction over the art of weaving in London. Fulfilling these general responsibilities included managing company property, directing its finances, maintaining good relations with City and Crown authorities, and calling court meetings for a variety of legislative, ceremonial, and judicial purposes such as settling disputes amongst its members. They invited members into the livery, or special ranks, admitted new members, granted freedoms, bound apprentices to their masters, appointed yeomen, clerks, and beadles, collected quarterly payments from members for company funds, administered some of those funds to newly set-up masters and deceased members' widows, fixed journeymen's wages, organized annual officer-election dinners, drafted and presented new ordinance proposals to the lord mayor for ratification, and orchestrated, and sometimes carried out, searches of weavers' shops and houses for transgressions against the company's ordinances, or laws, four times a year.³⁷

Just under this small governing body in the Weavers' Company were the liverymen, special citizens who possessed exclusive rights of political participation in the City. They participated in Common Hall, and voted in the annual elections for lord mayor, and two of London's four members of Parliament. Liverymen were allowed to keep up to five apprentices at one time, according to a 1594 company ordinance, and

³⁷ A clerk was appointed for life by the company court to learn and record its ordinances, by-laws and memoranda. A beadle, appointed in similar fashion, was responsible for summoning members to any court-related events demanding the latter's presence. See Bacon, Wray and Dyer, ordinance, 1577, MS. 4647, ff. 20, 22. For admission of new members, granting freedoms (including by patrimony and redemption), and keeping healthy City relations, see Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 18, 19-22. For all other court duties listed, see Consitt, *London Weavers' Company*, vol. 1, 97, 120-1, 123; MS. 4647, ff. 17, 24-5, 32-3, 39-40, 53-6.

possibly they could maintain even more looms than ordinary members.³⁸ The majority of the liverymen were relatively older, more experienced, and more prosperous than the other masters under the livery, however, sometimes, as London custom allowed, men of substantial wealth who had earned their freedom through patrimony or redemption, and who never involved themselves in the art of weaving, could be accepted into the livery in order to increase the company's quarterly revenue.³⁹ The monetary contribution of liverymen, then, was vital for the continuance of the company's banquets, charities, and other social functions. The only way to become a liveryman was by being called to join by the bailiffs and wardens, and paying a fee of "ffive shillings of good and lawfull money of England," before being officially accepted.⁴⁰ If he refused his call, however, he faced a fine of anywhere between twenty shillings, and fifty-three shillings and four pence, which was left to the discretion of the bailiffs and wardens.⁴¹ As Alfred Plummer had shown, before the English Civil War, a small master was not called into the livery until having gained on average about ten to fifteen years of experience, by which time he would have accrued enough wealth in property or movable goods to afford such a status. From the beginning to the end of the seventeenth century, the average number of liverymen existing in the company was anywhere from fifty to a hundred individuals, but it remains uncertain how many there were specifically during Charles I's reign.⁴²

³⁸ John Harte, letter of ordinance, 1589, "Ordinaunces Sett Downe by Sir John Harte and Divers Other Aldermen, Thought Convenient to be Observed," MS. 4647, f. 121; Richard Martin, and John Mosely, letter of ordinance, 1594, "Articles Sett Downe by Sir Richard Martin and Mr. Alderman Mosely by the Appointment of Sir John Spencer, Knight Lo. Maior," MS. 4647, f. 122.

³⁹ Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 26-7, 30.

⁴⁰ Bacon, Wray, and Dyer, letter of ordinance, 25 June 1577, MS. 4647, f. 17.

⁴¹ Bacon, Wray, and Dyer, letter of ordinance, 25 June 1577, MS. 4647, f. 17; Weavers' liverymen, letter of petition, 1633, "The True Causes, Whie Wee of the Livery are Unwillinge to have any of the Auncients that Formerly Have ben Bailiffs to be Chosen Bailiffe or Warden againe," MS. 4647, f. 255.

⁴² Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 41.

Being a liveryman of the company had certain obligations. Each year in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the wardens chose two from among the livery to serve as the company's stewards for the year. Stewards were responsible for the expenses involved in mayoral and company election dinners, and although most of the money was to be collected from the other liverymen, generally in the form of attendance fees, any remaining expenses were also to be paid out of the two stewards' pockets. Wardens chose the men in rotation, "until yt hath gone through the whole Livery, and then to begine againe orderly in their course," to ensure that no liveryman was made to serve this position more often than others. If someone refused to serve as steward, he faced a forty-shilling fine.⁴³ To be a steward was probably not desirable for most liverymen; although they enjoyed special privileges in the city and company, their status came at a personal cost.

Under the livery were the ordinary members, collectively called by petitioning weavers as the generality or commonality, and it was by far the largest body in the Weavers' Company. It consisted of ordinary members, which included not only the non-householder journeymen, but also the small masters, young householding weavers who trained apprentices and employed journeymen, and who operated on a smaller scale than the older, wealthier masters in the livery. The journeymen and small masters were the members of the company on whose behalf petitioning weavers wrote, and who, according to their petitions, were most affected by, and resentful of the strangers' encroachments on company ordinances, or laws over the weaving trade. The highest sub-rank in the commonality was the freeman, who was a citizen of London. Most freemen were English

⁴³ Bacon, Wray, and Dyer, letter of ordinance, 25 June 1577, MS. 4647, ff. 20-1.

craftsmen, and were either householding small masters, or journeymen not yet able to afford houses and become masters. As native members of the commonality, this was the specific group on behalf of whom petitioners wrote their complaints which will be examined in this study.

In addition to the freemen, the commonality had one other sub-rank within it, which included the foreign brethren. This group was formed with the passing of the company's 1577 ordinances in response to London's growing population of alien weavers during Elizabeth I's reign.⁴⁴ Instead of denying any strangers admission, the rulers of the Weavers' Company made room for them in their ranks, either because of the benefit they saw some of these skilled newcomers could bring to their emerging silk-weaving industry or because of the desire to bring them under their control and prevent unfair competition. Like the freemen, the foreign brothers consisted of both masters, or denizen strangers, and journeymen, who were typically under the age of twenty-four, the age at which to become free or denized, or were at least twenty-four years of age but had yet to become denizens.⁴⁵ Since neither type of foreign brethren were freemen, they remained subject to company laws which placed trade restrictions limiting the number of looms, apprentices, and journeymen they could keep at one time.⁴⁶ According to the company's 1589 ordinance, which remained in place during Charles I's reign, English

⁴⁴ Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 16-7.

⁴⁵ Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 16-7.

⁴⁶ Technically, these restrictions also applied to members of the French and Dutch Churches, because although at the Crown level they enjoyed the right to exercise their trades without being subject to local trade regulations, at the City level, guild and London authorities often disregarded these royal laws. In the years 1622, 1626 and 1635, for example, the Privy Council urged the London authorities to respect the aliens' special privileges in response to complaints addressed to royal authorities by the alien churches in these years. This conflict between City and Crown laws likely persisted up through the English Civil War. See Hessels, *Londino-Batavae Archivum*, vol. 3, pt. 2, 1301, 1335-6; Charles I, letter of order, 26 May 1635, MS. 4647, ff. 334-7.

freemen could keep up to four looms and three apprentices after their first three years as masters, while foreign brothers could only have one apprentice and three looms at any time.⁴⁷ As petitioners made abundantly clear in their complaints to City and company authorities, however, by this later period the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants failed to enforce these laws effectively enough, as strangers continued to “kepe more loomes then they are allowed...some of them twice as many.”⁴⁸

Within the commonality also existed a yeomanry. In other London livery companies in this period, the word yeoman was commonly used as an umbrella term which referred to small masters and journeymen who were born into gentry families. In the case of the Weavers’ Company, it referred instead to a special body of sixteen freeman annually appointed by the bailiffs and wardens to serve as the main voice of the commonality. Since their establishment by a 1594 company ordinance, the yeomanry frequently met together to discuss all issues affecting ordinary members and the trade.⁴⁹ Like company leaders, they also held rights of search and bringing law violators to the court of assistants for questioning and correction. Their responsibilities mainly rested with ensuring that the trade was conducted fairly, and that any issues affecting the commonality were both understood and resolved by the court of assistants. The job of the sixteen yeomen was important for the welfare of the commonality, because its existence

⁴⁷ Harte, ordinance, 1589, “Ordinaunces Sett Downe,” MS. 4647, f. 121; Martin and Mosely, ordinance, 1594, “Articles Sett Downe,” MS. 4647, f. 122.

⁴⁸ John Counley, and William Counley, petition, 1624-1625, “Grievances Which the Generalitie of the Companie of Weavers doe Susteine by Theis Severall Meanes. Followinge,” MS. 4647, f. 158.

⁴⁹ The Weavers’ Company’s yeomanry was established in 1594 according to a petition addressed to City authorities by members of the commonality in April or May of 1632. See Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, April-May 1632, “To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior and the Right Wor:ll the Aldermen his Brethren of the Cittie of London. The Humble Petition of the Greatest Part of the Younge Men of the Company of Weavers Appointed to Search and Find out Abuses Comitted in or Amongst the Said Companie,” MS. 4647, f. 244.

ensured that the weavers living and working within the jurisdiction of the company were following ordinances and by-laws and competing fairly.

This body of sixteen desired, perhaps more vigorously than other members of the commonality, a greater voice in the company. In the two decades preceding the English Civil War, the yeomen wished for greater enfranchisement and more say in the company's governance, but they also wanted tighter regulation of existing ordinances, arguing that better enforcement according to old regulations, rather than any new ones, was the best way to alleviate the precarious economic situation of the poor, native weavers suffering from the growing, superior competition that strangers were bringing to the weaving trade. Such desires by this body were reflected in the company's internal struggles of the 1620s and 1630s. During these years the yeomen acted as the main voice of opposition to the court of assistants, authoring many of the petitions written on behalf of the poor masters and journeymen to City, company, and Crown authorities. They were the ones mainly responsible of accusing their leaders of being reluctant and unwilling to enforce ordinances on strangers out of personal greed.

This, then, was the setting in which London's weavers made their petitions during the 1620s and 1630s. The overcrowding of the City and suburbs considerably weakened the ability of the Weavers' Company to enforce its rules over the weaving trade. Because of the guild's lack of effectiveness in controlling the craft, an increasing number of weavers in its commonality faced economic hardship. Its members looked at the strangers, with their economic liberties as refugees, and their cheap, squalid living arrangements, as a nuisance to London's social and economic order, and they blamed alien weavers for economic troubles resulting from such factors. As will be discussed in

the next chapter, however, the strangers were not the only ones the petitioners blamed for their troubles. Indeed, several of the petitions located in the company's memoranda book attest to a growing resentment the commonality and its yeomanry had against the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, who were often accused of allowing strangers to live and work in disregard of company ordinances. It is now time to turn to them.

Chapter 3:

Internal Divisions Within the Weavers' Company in the Reign of Charles I

As it appears from surviving weavers' petitions, when compared to Charles I's reign, the Weavers' Company in the reign of James I faced little internal dissention among its leadership, and its commonality and yeomanry, over how to control the strangers. Writing on behalf of the company in the early 1620s, yeomen John and William Counley addressed the ministers and elders of the French and Dutch churches, showing that the company's leaders and commonality cooperated in attempting to unite alien weavers under trade regulations. The Counley's accused alien weavers of eating "upp the bread wee arhvisted" by ignoring company rules and refusing to comply with bailiffs', wardens', and yeomen's searches of their houses.¹ By the middle of the decade, company leaders no longer stood with the commonality.² Yeomen petitioned City authorities on March 8, 1626, accusing the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants of deliberately obstructing their tasks of search and allowing alien weavers to continue abusing the trade.³ The details provided in the two brief petitions hint to the internal divisions that arose in the company by the mid-1620s. The commonality and yeomanry, the main authors of

¹ William Counley and John Counley, letter, undated, "To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders of the French and Dutch Congregations," Worshipful Company of Weavers, A/030/MA04647, ff. 146-7, Guildhall Library, London.

² For sake of sentence length, commonality will sometimes be used to refer to the yeomanry as well, since all of the company's yeomen in this period were members of the commonality. In their petitions, little can be differentiated between the interests of the commonality and yeomanry.

³ Weavers' yeomanry, letter of petition, 8 March 1626, "This is the True Coppie of the Peticon Upon Which the Order in Anno Julie 1627 was Made. To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London. And to the Right Worshipfull the Aldermen his Bretheren. The Humble Petition of ye Company of Weavers," MS. 4647, f. 183.

weavers' petitions in these years, often accused their officers of allowing the strangers to abuse the trade motivated by personal greed.⁴

Even through its more internally stable years the Weavers' Company had always struggled to enforce its ordinances. The petitions drawn from 1595 up to 1624 made clear to City officials, alien churchmen, and Crown, and company authorities, that trade infringements remained an ongoing problem for the company and its poor. Only two petitions dating before 1625 complained of company leaders, but they emphasized the officers' ineffectiveness and not their unwillingness to carry out ordinances or punish abusers. From the mid-1620s, and up through the 1630s, members started to complain of company leaders either being reluctant or outright refusing to enforce ordinances over a growing number of immigrant weavers conducting their trade outside, or in disregard of the control of the company. The guild's internal divisions caused a split between its commonality and its officers which weakened its ability to address the challenges it faced. The petitions suggest the company's court had moved away from strict enforcement of the ordinances which led to increased tensions between the leadership and the commonality, as well as the eventual restriction of the yeomanry's right to meet and conduct searches to identify and punish abusers.

To the yeomen, and to certain other freemen of the company petitioning on behalf of the commonality, the discouragement or voiding of their right to search led only to a continuation in, and subsequent rise of the number of abuses already being committed in the City's weaving trade. As long as the company's ruling body hindered them, they continued to plea to City authorities that many more freemen would suffer or be forced to

⁴ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, undated, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London, and the Right Wor:ll the Aldermen his Bretheren of the Same Cittie," MS. 4647, f. 278.

leave the trade in pursuit of lesser, servile or criminal labors. From the mid-1620s, English weavers were becoming increasingly upset about the unfair competition that a growing number of unqualified immigrant artisans were bringing to the trade. While the commonality expressed increasing worry about the issues which law-violating strangers created for the native artisans' ability to earn their livings as weavers, the leadership became concerned with the threat that strangers posed to the company's power over the trade. These differences in concern resulted in clashes between the two contending parties over how to handle the strangers, dividing the guild and further weakening its control over the weaving trade.

The company's court records for the years 1610-1619 show that before the mid-1620s its leaders were active in rooting out abuses, fining, or threatening imprisonment of a number of strangers, foreigners, and even London natives using the weaving trade in disregard of the ordinances. A stranger named Arnold Atsons, for example, faced a fine of three pounds on April 16, 1611, "for keeping above the number of looms," and on December 12, 1616, a master weaver named Samuell Witt was fined for employing two strangers, Jacob Kekulhouse and Stephen Fountannell.⁵ On the same day, another person named Robert Ball faced a fine, apparently having been found harboring three additional alien journeymen for Witt, "neither paying nor feeding them."⁶ Another master weaver, John Trowle, was also fined on the same day for keeping three journeymen strangers, though no connection to Witt was noted. On March 9, 1618, strangers Nicholas Doutone, Nicholas Desquien, Oliver Wewart, and foreigner John Beverley, all of whom were

⁵ William Chapman Waller, ed., *Extracts from the Court Books of the Weavers Company of London, 1610-1730* (London: Huguenot Society of London, 1931), Guildhall Library, microfilm S; 33, pp. 3-6.

⁶ Waller, *Court Books of the Weavers Company*, 6.

found weaving without license were “ordered to depart within 14 days, or be arrested.”⁷

The court records are not clear on whether the yeomen or the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants conducted these investigations, and are missing for the 1620s and 1630s, leaving the petitions as the only sources which show at some point in the middle of the 1620s the company’s rulers began to loosen their enforcement of company ordinances.

Part of the reason why the Weavers’ Company faced internal divisions over the question of how to control the strangers can be explained by the strong possibility that London silk-weaving was, from the sixteenth century, an art first organized by strangers.⁸ Before the sixteenth century, English silk-weaving was a trade performed primarily by women, rather than by men, but they never organized into a guild or livery company. Sometime in the first half of the sixteenth century, skilled Flemish artisans might have formed the first organization in the trade.⁹ As Frances Consitt pointed out, the Weavers’ Company’s records made no mention of silk-weavers in its ranks until the passing of its 1551 ordinances, which issued the first wage rates for them.¹⁰ Later in the reign of Elizabeth I, as England underwent periodic immigrations of Protestant refugees, London’s silk-weaving industry, still in its infancy, began to welcome a considerable number of newly-arrived workers, often more skilled in weaving than the City’s native artisans, many of the latter still working with woolen and other materials rather than

⁷ Waller, *Court Books of the Weavers Company*, 7-8.

⁸ Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London, 1500-1700* (NY: Routledge, 2005), 211.

⁹ The earliest known instance of a silk-weaving organization in England came from a Flemish colony which settled into Canterbury sometime in the first half of the sixteenth century under special license granted by the Crown to freely govern their craft. See William Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants to England* (London: Cass, 1897), 177.

¹⁰ These ordinances were also the first ones to forbid women from practicing any form of the weaving trade. See Frances Consitt, *The London Weavers’ Company, From the Twelfth Century to the Closing of the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 128, 135.

silk.¹¹ Through the rest of the sixteenth century and into the next, silk weaving gradually displaced the older methods.

By the early seventeenth century, London's silk-weaving trade grew considerably with the rising popularity of the new draperies. Compared with the old draperies, which were often heavier, more costly, and made of pure woolen materials suitable for colder climates, the new draperies were designed for warmer, more southern climates, made lighter, cheaper, and mixed with both woolen and silk materials. These newer fabrics came in a variety of designs, including bays, serges, says, grosgrains, rashes, moccadoes, barracans, callimancoes, stammets, and bombazines.¹² Beginning in the late sixteenth century, London, along with other key English manufacturing towns such as Colchester and Norwich began to compete with other northwestern European cities for the manufacture and sale of new draperies in the southern markets of Europe, as the flourishing days of the cloth-producing cities of Italy – days which they enjoyed through the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries – had come to an end. Venice, having been able to maintain its prominence in the southern cloth markets up through the first half of the seventeenth century, proved the one exception to this trend, though by the end of the century its output, too, was losing out to northern European producers.¹³ In the period covered here, a slow geographical shift was taking place, from cloth manufacturing in Italian cities, to cloth production in Northern, particularly North-Western, Europe.¹⁴ England's relatively late emergence by the beginning of the seventeenth century as a

¹¹ Consitt, *London Weavers' Company*, 135.

¹² D.C. Coleman, "An Innovation and its Diffusion: The 'New Draperies,'" *The Economic History Review* 22, no. 3 (1969): 418.

¹³ Coleman, "An Innovation and its Diffusion," 424.

¹⁴ Coleman, "An Innovation and its Diffusion," 424.

competitor in the production and sale of the new draperies came as a result of strangers introducing the methods and techniques necessary for such a development.

Although by the 1620s and 1630s most English weavers in the company used silk, the number of alien artisans in London remained considerable, as petitioning members and the Weavers' Company's freedom and admission records showed. Each year the company admitted new strangers and foreigners into its ranks. As Alfred Plummer demonstrated, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, it admitted roughly nine strangers and fourteen foreigners each year. From 1627 until 1630, the number of strangers and foreigners being admitted only slightly decreased to, respectively, seven and eleven per annum, but from 1637 until 1640, the numbers again rose to eight strangers and fifteen foreigners admitted each year.¹⁵ As with the number of individuals admitted, the company's freedom register for 1630 to 1641 indicated a rise in the number of members, strangers and English alike, granted license to weave. It, too, had shown a numeric rise by the latter part of the decade with 1638 in particular standing out as a year of unusually high numbers of freedoms and licenses granted. In 1630, for example, only five out of a total of thirteen persons made free served their apprenticeships under weavers. In the following year this rose only to eight, out of a total of sixty-four freedoms granted. Between 1632 and 1634, the number of freedoms granted to weavers remained at eleven per year, while the total number of freedoms granted by the company rose from seventy to 143. Over the following years the number of weavers becoming free of the company continued to rise from fourteen in 1635 to nineteen in 1637. By 1638, however, thirty-two weavers were granted their freedoms, out of a considerably high total of 196

¹⁵ Alfred Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company, 1600-1970* (NY: Routledge, 1972), 175.

freedoms granted to other tradesmen that year.¹⁶ In the following years, the number of weavers made free went back down to fifteen in 1639 and nineteen in 1640.¹⁷

In the company's memoranda book the earliest petition found complaining of leaders not enforcing company ordinances on strangers was addressed to the company court on February 15, 1624 by members of the commonality named John and William Counley, Robert Ball, William Saunders, Anthony Browne and William Beales.¹⁸ Confessing their "manyfold greivancs which they susteine by reason of disorders which are suffered dalye to increase and growe," the petitioners expressed their "wante of puttinge the good orders of the Hall in execucon, and punishinge the offenders, accordinge to the said orders."¹⁹ They complained that despite having "spent much tyme in sueinge for reformacon," they found no "finale redresse but rather in some parte discouragement."²⁰ That sometime before the date of this petition the company's rulers stopped appointing new members to the special body of yeomen was mentioned in a hand copier's side note at the bottom of the petition, where it read that the company's court agreed to appoint, yearly, "the first sixteene men under the liverie."²¹

Whether the bailiffs, wardens and assistants of the company agreed on their own to allow the yeomanry to be revived, or whether they had agreed under pressure from

¹⁶ As London custom permitted, livery companies often had members practicing trades other than the ones for which the companies were named.

¹⁷ The last year covered, 1641, was incomplete, and showed only eleven freedoms granted to weavers. See Weavers' Company Freedom Register, 1630-1641, MS. 4647, ff. 504-77.

¹⁸ William Counley, John Counley, Robert Ball, William Saunders, Anthony Browne, and William Beales, letter of petition, 15 February 1624, "To the Bailiffes Wardens and Assistants of the Companie of Weavers London. The Humble Petition of a Great Number of the Commonaltie of the Said Companie Humblie Sheweth," MS. 4647, f. 294.

¹⁹ Counley, Counley, Ball, Saunders, Browne, and Beales, letter of petition, 1624, "Humble Petition...of the Commonaltie," MS. 4647, f. 294.

²⁰ Counley, Counley, Ball, Saunders, Browne, and Beales, letter of petition, 1624, "Humble Petition...of the Commonaltie," MS. 4647, f. 294.

²¹ Counley, Counley, Ball, Saunders, Browne, and Beales, letter of petition, 1624, "Humble Petition...of the Commonaltie," MS. 4647, f. 294.

City authorities is impossible to say, but the agreement failed to hold. On December 13, 1625, in front of a committee of aldermen initially set up by Lord Mayor Allan Cotton to “duly examine the great abuse and deceit in making of silke and silke lace, uttered and sold within this cittyte,” John and William Counley proposed a solution.²² To combat the problem of false woven works being made, they asked the committee to force the company court to appoint only yeomen who “are honest men and sufficient workmen...to search and present the offenders unto the bailiffs wardens and assistants.”²³ Their proposal makes clear that the company’s court members, despite their apparent abidance to the agreement, nevertheless proved selective in choosing the sixteen yeomen for that year, favoring candidates who would not take their duties of search as seriously, or perhaps as effectively, as other qualified members. The petitioners pleaded to the committee “that we are a great number of poore men,” and warned them that “unless there be a yeomanrye chosen and established to suppress all the said abuses,” they would continue to be unable “by our hard labours and best industrye to mainteyne our families, nor to paye every man his due, which is a great corosine to our consciences.”²⁴ However convincing such a plea might have appeared, it fell on deaf ears, for according to another hand copier’s note at the end of this petition, it was “preferred to the comittee aforesaid, but nothinge done therein.”²⁵ It remains unclear why the committee refused to

²² Lord Mayor Allan Cotton, letter of order, 13 December 1625, “Tewsdai the Thirteenth of December 1625,” MS. 4647, f. 166.

²³ The petition suggests its writers were not elected by the officers to be two of the sixteen yeomen for that year. See William Counley and John Counley, letter of petition, 1624-1625, “To the Right Worshipfull Sr Edward Barkham Knight and Alderman Mr. Alderman Cotton Mr Alderman Hammersley Mr Alderman Ducie Mr Alderman Raynton & Mr Alderman Moulson, Committees Appointed for Hearinge the Greivances of the Generalitie of the Company of Weavers London. The Humble Petition of the Commonaltie of the Said Companie,” MS. 4647, ff. 163-4.

²⁴ Counley and Counley, “The Humble Petition of the Commonaltie,” MS. 4647, f. 164.

²⁵ Counley and Counley, “The Humble Petition of the Commonaltie,” MS. 4647, f. 165.

act, for no source exists indicating what their reply might have been. Perhaps they disagreed with the petitioners' proposed solution for the problem of false works being made, or wished not to become involved in another episode of the company's ongoing internal affairs. Whatever reasons this committee might have had in making the decision to stay out of the company's affairs, London's City authorities could not ignore them permanently and, indeed, would find themselves intervening more often in the following years.

As reasonably expected, the agreement made in 1624 to annually elect a yeomanry failed to last, and by 1626 the company's leaders had stopped electing them. Bringing the matter to the court of aldermen at Guildhall to debate it with members of the company's ruling body at a scheduled hearing on March 8, 1626, certain members of the commonality again implored City authorities to "confirme them a yeomanrye."²⁶ As if to point to the precedence of the body of sixteen in order to prove its validity, the petitioners reminded the court that during the "eightene monethes" before that year, "sixteene young men" were appointed by their company, and had been "well approved of, and encouraged by the said bailiffs wardens and assistants."²⁷ "Yet now," they bemoaned, "the sons of aliens or strangers are become bailiffs wardens & assistants of our company," who meticulously worked to make "voyde, that which the former bailiffs wardens and assistants have allowed and confirmed concerninge the honest proceedings of the said sixteene men."²⁸ Out of all the petitions dating in the 1620s and 1630s, this one stands out

²⁶ Weavers' yeomanry, letter of petition, 1626, "This is the True Coppie of the Peticon Upon Which the Order in Anno Julie 1627 was Made," MS. 4647, 183.

²⁷ Weavers' yeomanry, letter of petition, 1626, "This is the True Coppie of the Peticon Upon Which the Order in Anno Julie 1627 was Made," MS. 4647, f. 183.

²⁸ Weavers' yeomanry, letter of petition, 1626, "This is the True Coppie of the Peticon Upon Which the Order in Anno Julie 1627 was Made," MS. 4647, f.183.

as the only document mentioning sons of strangers serving as company leaders. It is likely its authors meant, instead, to emphasize alien members' strong influence on officers' decisions to suppress the yeomanry, since only freemen could become liverymen, then bailiffs, wardens, and assistants.²⁹ The hearing came to no conclusion, and the City's lord mayor, Cuthbert Hackett, ordered a second one headed by a special committee composed of several aldermen and the City's recorder, Sir Henadge Finche, to hear out the petitioners' complaints and "certifie this court in wryteing under their hands how they finde the same and their opinions."³⁰ The outcome of this second hearing, which took place on March 14, remains unknown, though it can be said with certainty that any reconciliation it might have brought between both parties failed to last through the remainder of the year.

According to a document found in the company's memoranda book entitled *A True Relacon of all the Proceedinges Betwene the Bailiffs Wardens and Assistants...and They Then, Sixteene Men, Then of the Yeomanry*, the conflict between yeomen and company leaders ensued through the years 1626 and 1627.³¹ The document details the yeomens' complaints and testimonies, showing the dramatic nature of the conflict. Its account dates from roughly the end of September 1626 through April 1627.³² In the first account, yeomen protested the allegedly unwarrantable admission into the company of a

²⁹ London authorities in this period usually denied alien progeny the freedom of the City. See Jacob Selwood, "English-Born Reputed Strangers': Birth and Descent in Seventeenth-Century London," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 733-4.

³⁰ Lord Mayor Cuthbert Hackett, letter of order, 8 March 1626, "Hackett Maior. Uppon Conference of the Former Petition. This Order was Made. Jovis Octavo Die Martij 1626. Anno q Regis Caroli Anglie etc: Secundo," MS. 4647, ff. 185-6.

³¹ Hackett, letter of order, 1626, "Jovis Octavo Die Martij 1626," MS. 4647, ff. 185-6; Weavers' yeomanry, letter of report, 1627, "A True Relacon of all the Proceedinges Betwene the Bailiffs Wardens and Assistants of the Companye of Weavers of London, and They Then, Sixteene Men, Then of the Yeomanry. As Followeth. In Michaelmas Terme 1626," MS. 4647, f. 188.

³² "Hackett, letter of order, 1626, "Jovis Octavo Die Martij 1626," MS. 4647, ff. 185-6.

certain “stranger newly come over from beyond the seas” named “Raph Plush.”³³ According to the yeomen, they had, sometime previous to that event, secured “promises from [bailiffs and wardens] Mr. Willson and Mr. Baker, Mr. Lamote and Mr. Stone, that they would admytt noe more strangers” except those able to prove they “had ben of some good contynuance in their congregacon.”³⁴ When Plush arrived at Weavers’ Hall, Mr. Baker sent the yeomen to obtain a warrant from the City recorder for a man named Thomas Scott in Southwark, “and in the meane time admytted the said Raph Plush stranger in our absence.”³⁵ In the same month, the yeomen complained of another similar instance, when Richard Fletcher, a coachman, was not only made free, but given license to practice the trade of weaving, despite his never having served an apprenticeship. Similar to the case with Plush, Mr. Baker purportedly promised the yeomen that Fletcher would not be allowed to engage in the trade. The yeomen distrusted Mr. Baker and went to the company hall when Fletcher was to receive his freedom. Upon their arrival, the court’s beadle barred them from entering, while the company’s leaders, despite Baker’s promise, granted Fletcher the right to ply the trade.³⁶

In further retaliation during this ensuing conflict, the bailiffs and wardens made several searches of the yeomen’s houses in the early months of 1626. Several of these actions resulted in hostile encounters when the bailiffs and wardens demanded a four pence penalty be paid, and when refused, took pewter pots and dishes instead.³⁷ The yeomen argued that the 1577 ordinances set the penalty at one penny.³⁸ On February 16,

³³ Weavers’ yeomanry, letter of report, 1627, “A True Relacon of all the Proceedinges,” MS. 4647, f. 188.

³⁴ Weavers’ yeomanry, letter of report, 1627, “A True Relacon of all the Proceedinges,” MS. 4647, f. 188.

³⁵ Weavers’ yeomanry, letter of report, 1627, “A True Relacon of all the Proceedinges,” MS. 4647, f. 188.

³⁶ Weavers’ yeomanry, letter of report, 1627, “A True Relacon of all the Proceedinges,” MS. 4647, 189.

³⁷ Nicholas Bacon, Christopher Wray, and James Dyer, letter of ordinance, 26 April 1577, MS. 4647, f. 53.

³⁸ Bacon, Wray, and Dyer, letter of ordinance, 1577, MS. 4647, f. 53.

bailiffs and wardens searched the house of the yeoman Henry Smith, and seized his pewter pot on account of his refusal to pay the four pence. The same also happened to William Counley on April 20, who apparently requested the searcher, Warden Gabriel Stone, to show proof of his right to take four pence instead of one penny. Unable to show proof, and refusing Counley's offer of one penny, Stone made off with his pewter dish instead. Earlier in that month, yeoman Richard Percie offered one penny to Stone after the warden searched his house, and it was reported that Stone "beat the said Percies wife and tooke a peece of pewter as a distresse."³⁹

By this point, the lord mayor and aldermen had to intervene to restore peace in the company. On July 17, 1627, Lord Mayor Hugh Hammersley reaffirmed the rights and duties of the yeomen, ruling in favor of them.⁴⁰ For the remainder of the 1620s, no yeomen submitted petitions complaining about the bailiffs, wardens or assistants obstructing their rights, suggesting that for two or more years after the 1627 order, the conflict between the two parties had finally subsided. Although this brought a temporary peace to the yeomen's struggles, it was not the end of tensions within the company.

Complaints about the weavers' leadership resumed in 1630, as new petitions reached the court of aldermen complaining that the company's leaders kept the yeomen from executing their duties. The commonality, along with the yeomanry, were growing increasingly agitated about their leaders, who in turn were becoming more resistant to criticism from below. Commonality and yeomanry alike were organizing, meeting in

³⁹ Weavers' yeomanry, letter of report, 1627, "A True Relacon of all the Proceedinges," MS. 4647, ff. 189-91.

⁴⁰ This is revealed in a 1630 petition discussing the order. See Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 1630, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London of London, And the Right Worshipfull the Aldermen his Brethren," MS. 4647, f. 215.

secret, and aiming to expose the corruption of the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants.⁴¹ On September 13, 1630, approximately thirty members of the commonality, including the company's yeomanry, met at the Black Boy tavern in London's Cornhill Ward to discuss the ongoing complaints they had with the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, chiefly for reason that the lord mayor and aldermen's orders for the bailiffs and wardens to enforce company ordinances on trade abusers, deny weaving licenses to unqualified tradesmen, and allow yeomen their rights were being neglected.⁴² The company's governors, who learned of the secret meeting, wrote to the lord mayor that thirty of their own members secretly gathered together for no other reason than "for some evill purpose."⁴³ The thirty immediately denied the allegation and wrote to the lord mayor, urging him to "have a charitable construction of or [sic] meetinge together," and to make a further order "that ye said 16 men may be enjoyned to contynue a weekly search as formerly hath ben done," and "that such abuses as they shall find...may be foorthwith reformed."⁴⁴

Declaring themselves a committee, the thirty members drew up another petition, and on September 30, William Counley, Samuel Seaton, Robert Warde, and Peeter Gringant presented it to the lord mayor. Their intent was to "shew unto this honorable courte the great and manyfold abuses used in the said trade of weaveinge to the generall

⁴¹ Weavers' commonality and yeomanry, letter of petition, 13 December 1630, "Dated This 13th Daie of September 1630. 6^o Caroli Regis," MS. 4647, f. 200.

⁴² Weavers' commonality and yeomanry, letter of petition, 1630, "Dated This 13th Daie of September 1630," MS. 4647, f. 200.

⁴³ Samuell Seaton, Robert Warde, and William Counley, letter of petition, September 1630, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior and Courte of Aldermen. The Humble Petition of Samuell Seaton Robert Warde and William Counley. Cittizens and Weavers of London, Whoe are Injoyned to Appaere This Daie Before this Honorable Court, in the Behalfe of the Rest That Mett Together at ye Blacke Boye in Cornehall, the 13 of September 1630," MS. 4647, f. 205.

⁴⁴ Seaton, Warde, and Counley, letter of petition, 1630, "The Humble Petition of Samuell Seaton Robert Warde and William Counley," MS. 4647, f. 205.

hurt of all that use the said trade.”⁴⁵ They complained of “the great negligence of the said bailiffes, wardens, and assistants in not duly executing of such orders,” issued by the court of alderman commanding the leaders to refrain from licensing unqualified weavers and bring company ordinance violators to justice, “for the well governinge of the same trade.”⁴⁶ They accused their officers of discouraging the yeomen in their duty to conduct searches, lamenting that, as result, “those 16 men...hath much neglected to search and present offenders.”⁴⁷ They urged the lord mayor and aldermen that the yeomanry’s right of search was “the life of our trade,” and “the neglect thereof our utter undoeinge.”⁴⁸ Accusations that the company’s leaders were “takeing sumes of money & valuable guifts of intrudors,” unqualified weavers that never served seven-year apprenticeships, “to allowe them to use the trade of weaving” was a new charge.⁴⁹ They asserted that greed had led their leaders to license so many “intruders,” men like Fletcher and Plush, into the trade, and that as a result there were too many unqualified weavers in the company.⁵⁰ That the leaders worked to obstruct the yeomen in conducting their tasks of search and correcting offenses strongly suggests that by 1630 they had grown tired of defending themselves against the constant complaints.

⁴⁵ Seaton, Warde, and Counley, letter of petition, 1630, “The Humble Petition of Samuell Seaton Robert Warde and William Counley,” MS. 4647, f. 204.

⁴⁶ Seaton, Warde, and Counley, letter of petition, 1630, “The Humble Petition of Samuell Seaton Robert Warde and William Counley,” MS. 4647, f. 204.

⁴⁷ Seaton, Warde, and Counley, letter of petition, 1630, “The Humble Petition of Samuell Seaton Robert Warde and William Counley,” MS. 4647, f. 204.

⁴⁸ Seaton, Warde, and Counley, letter of petition, 1630, “The Humble Petition of Samuell Seaton Robert Warde and William Counley,” MS. 4647, f. 204.

⁴⁹ Seaton, Warde, and Counley, letter of petition, 1630, “The Humble Petition of Samuell Seaton Robert Warde and William Counley,” MS. 4647, f. 204.

⁵⁰ Seaton, Warde, and Counley, letter of petition, 1630, “The Humble Petition of Samuell Seaton Robert Warde and William Counley,” MS. 4647, f. 204.

The London authorities' response, if given, no longer exists and they may have given no response at all, as Andrew Plummer guessed, for reason that by then, they had been increasingly "reluctant to become involved in the Company's internal dissensions."⁵¹ Their hesitancy was reasonable, given the ineffectiveness of the earlier 1627 order made in favor of the petitioning weavers. Inaction by the City likely emboldened the yeomen's 1630 petition, the controversy around which demonstrated the ease with which livery companies could ignore City orders. Although the City held authority over the companies, in practice the lord mayor struggled to prevent the Weavers' Company's officers from obstructing yeomen in their search, or from licensing unqualified people in the trade of weaving. The financial benefit which the company's administrators might have received from allowing such abuses to continue, either personally or for the company's treasury chest, evidently outweighed any concern they might have had for fairness in the trade.

The petitioners again sought the City's support sometime later in 1630. Weavers from the commonality complained to the lord mayor that the continued suppression of the yeomen's activities was causing, as the old argument went, "the generall hurte of the ffreemen of the said trade."⁵² Apparently, the earlier mentioned Richard Fletcher along with "John Bates, William Smith...Peator de-Mount" and others were plying the trade, even though London authorities had ordered them to stop.⁵³ The City gave no response to

⁵¹ Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 151.

⁵² Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 1630, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London," MS. 4647, f. 215.

⁵³ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 1630, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London," MS. 4647, f. 215.

the petition, and for more than a year the commonality and yeomanry, from the company's memoranda book, appear to have remained silent.

Thus far in the petitions, the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants issued no response to members' accusations of personal greed, but in 1631 they wrote to the lord mayor defending their licensing of strangers and foreigners of other trades in weaving.⁵⁴ They argued that "the number of such as intermedle wth their trade wthin the compasse of their guild is not growne fewer but many more," and because of this they had no choice but to overlook unlawful practices, so as to encourage such artisans to join the company, both for the financial benefit it could bring and in the hope to eventually get everyone following the ordinances. They assured City authorities:

the greatest thinge they ayme at, is to reduce the strangers into obedience and conformity of lyke and to have them lyve under government in such manner as the ffreemen and members of their owne Companye doe without which your peticoners canne expect noe other than downefall ruyne and overthrowe of the Companys native borne their wyves and children and the spoyle and utter destruccon of their trade, and that in a very short tyme.⁵⁵

They admitted that they knew not how to effectively enforce the ordinances on strangers, but that their main desire was to admit strangers anyway in the hope that they could eventually control them.⁵⁶ They desired to bring the aliens into the guild, overlooking illicit practices for fear the foreign-born artisans might "flye to other companyes," and be received by the "Justices of Peace and Scriveners," regardless of whether or not they had

⁵⁴ The petition is the only one by the officers to appear in more than six-hundred pages of documents from the company's memoranda book.

⁵⁵ Weavers' bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, 1631, "To the Righte Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London, And to the Right Wor:ll his Bretheren the Aldermen of the Same. / The Humble Petition of the Bailives Wardens and Assistants of the Companie of Weavers in London," MS. 4647, f. 226.

⁵⁶ Weavers' bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, letter of petition, 1631, "To the Righte Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London," MS. 4647, f. 226.

the qualifications.⁵⁷ The officers asserted that if the ordinances were strictly enforced, the number of strangers working outside the Weaver's Company would continue to increase, causing the guild to further lose its hold on the trade of weaving.⁵⁸ A scribe's note on the petition indicates it was neither "respected &c. nor toke effect," meaning the London authorities rejected the leaders' argument for allowing unqualified weavers and strangers into the company and trade.⁵⁹

The company leaders' above argument demonstrates their biggest concern rested with immigrant weavers working outside of the company rather than with enforcing its ordinances. The bailiffs, wardens, and assistants desired foremost to enfold as many aliens and foreigners into the company as they could through any means necessary with the hopes of eventually enforcing the rules. The leaders understood the reality that too many alien weavers operated outside of the company, and the only way to influence these artisans was to bring them into the organization. This strategy marks a shift from earlier attempts at the beginning of the seventeenth century to control the strangers by enforcing laws towards a new tactic to bring them into the company and license them in the trade to make money for the company and, perhaps, for the officers themselves.

On March 12, 1632, the commonality managed to get company leaders to realow the yeomanry their rights of search, "to the end that by their inquire and dilligence reformacon may be therein more speedily [had]."⁶⁰ That such an order was reluctantly

⁵⁷ Weavers' bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, letter of petition, 1631, "To the Righte Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London," MS. 4647, f. 223.

⁵⁸ Weavers' bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, letter of petition, 1631, "To the Righte Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London," MS. 4647, f. 223.

⁵⁹ Weavers' bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, letter of petition, 1631, "To the Righte Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London," MS. 4647, f. 220.

⁶⁰ Weavers' bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, letter of order, 12 March 1632, "An Order for the Yemonry. Tewsdaie the 12th of March Anno DM 1632 And in the 8th Yeare of the Raigne of our Sovereigne Lord Kinge Charles &c.," in *Ordinance and Memorandum Book*, f. 263.

made under pressure from City authorities again seems likely, for by the following month, the governing officers rescinded it, officially declaring void the yeomen's right of "searching to discover abuses."⁶¹ The yeomen never gave up, however, and by 1633 they managed, once again, to get the City involved. Again, the lord mayor reaffirmed their right of search, and again, the officers ignored it after a short time had passed.⁶²

Later that year, yeomen submitted another petition to the lord mayor, this time complaining of company leaders refusing to give them their due payment for searches.⁶³ According to orders made by City authorities in 1594 and 1627, the yeomen's payments were to be collected from among journeymen's quarterages, but perhaps because their right of search had been voided the previous year, the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants denied the yeomen their payments.⁶⁴ According to the petition, when the yeomen had threatened to bring the matter to the lord mayor, it came to no effect. They wrote that the company leaders boldly told them City authorities "hath noe authority to make orders for the government of the said Company of Weavers."⁶⁵ The lord mayor issued no response to the yeomen's complaints about company leaders.

Up to this point, the company's liverymen remained silent about the ongoing conflict between the company's ruling officers and the commonality and yeomanry. By

⁶¹ Weavers' yeomanry, letter of petition, April 1632, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior and the Right Wor:ll the Aldermen his Brethren of the Cittie of London. The Humble Petition of the Greatest Part of the Younge Men of the Company of Weavers Appointed to Search and Find out Abuses Comitted in or Amongst the Said Companie," MS. 4647, f. 245.

⁶² Weavers' commonality and yeomanry, letter of petition, July 1633, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London and to the Right Worshipfull his Bretheren the Aldermen of the Same Cittie. / The Humble Petition of the Comonaltie of the Companie of Weavers of London," MS. 4647, f. 260.

⁶³ Weavers' commonality and yeomanry, letter of petition, 1633, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London," MS. 4647, f. 260.

⁶⁴ Weavers' commonality and yeomanry, letter of petition, 1633, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London," MS. 4647, f. 260.

⁶⁵ Weavers' commonality and yeomanry, letter of petition, 1633, "To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London," MS. 4647, f. 260.

1633, however, it seems that at least some of them could remain quiet no longer, joining artisans against the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants. They delivered a petition to the court of assistants titled *The True Causes, Whie Wee of the Livery are Unwillinge to Have any of the Auncients That Formerly Have ben Bailiffs to be Chosen Bailiffe or Warden Againe*. The title suggests growing dissatisfaction with the officers, though the petitioning liverymen assured them such dissatisfaction was not out of jealousy, but that they found the officers had “ben very negligent in punishing of offenders.”⁶⁶ Like the commonality and yeomanry, the livery, too, were beginning to complain of their leaders allowing company ordinance violators to “contynue in their disorderlye practises.”⁶⁷ They even accused their officers of not only turning a blind eye to offenders, but also defending their actions. They explained that “when the Bailiffes have ben readye to give sentence against the offenders, even then one or other of the auncients [assistants] hath kept up and pleaded for them, whereby the sentence of justice hath ben staid and they [the offenders] emboldened to contynue their disorderly and unlawfull courses.”⁶⁸ The liverymen also claimed that some company ordinance violators had become friends with some of the officers, “whoe will speake in their behalf...for many of us hath heard as much from their owne mouthes.”⁶⁹

The liverymen also shared the suspicions that the commonality and yeomanry had concerning the personal greed of the bailiffs and wardens being the principal cause for why they allowed offenders to continue unpunished. Taking into consideration “the

⁶⁶ Weavers’ livery, letter of petition, 1633, “The True Causes, Whie Wee of the Livery are Unwillinge to Have any of the Auncients That Formerly Have ben Bailiffs to be Chosen Bailiffe or Warden Againe,” MS. 4647, f. 253.

⁶⁷ Weavers’ livery, letter of petition, 1633, “The True Causes, Whie Wee of the Livery,” MS. 4647, ff. 253-4.

⁶⁸ Weavers’ livery, letter of petition, 1633, “The True Causes, Whie Wee of the Livery,” MS. 4647, f. 253.

⁶⁹ Weavers’ livery, letter of petition, 1633, “The True Causes, Whie Wee of the Livery,” MS. 4647, f. 253.

sumes of money you have received for many yeares past,” they listed in their petition the amounts received by the company court for admission of strangers (£5), foreigners (£3), and liverymen (£5), and the fees charged for making men free (3s. 4d.), binding apprentices (2s. 6d.), turning them over to foreigners and strangers (2s. 6d.), and admitting journeymen (2s. 6d.).⁷⁰ Assuming that because of these fees the company would by then have had “a competent stocke, of money in the Hall, to have ben employed for the good of the generalitie and releife of the poore,” they pointed out that “in the Hall there is litle or none, and for land (the Hall excepted) there is none at all.”⁷¹ In other words, the petitioners claimed the officers had mismanaged the Weavers’ Company’s revenue.

Around the same time, liverymen and yeomen alike alerted City authorities to another accusation against their leaders, speaking for one additional practice by the officers which proved particularly aggravating for members of the commonality. In an undated petition addressed to the lord mayor sometime in the early 1630s, they accused John Renshall, one of the assistants, of having “theis thirtie yeares or thereabouts, bound dyvers boyes as to serve with himself,” and immediately turning them over to strangers for fees.⁷² They also made a similar accusation against Thomas Pell, the beadle of the company, who for the past “seaven yeares,” they claimed, bound “unto himself about twentie apprentices, and disposed of them in manner aforesaid.”⁷³ In a second, undated

⁷⁰ Weavers’ livery, letter of petition, 1633, “The True Causes, Whie Wee of the Livery,” MS. 4647, ff. 254-5.

⁷¹ Weavers’ livery, letter of petition, 1633, “The True Causes, Whie Wee of the Livery,” MS. 4647, ff. 254-5.

⁷² Weavers’ yeomanry and livery, letter of petition, undated, “To the Right Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London, And the Right Worshipfull the Aldermen his Brethren. / The Humble Petition of Divers of the Liverie and Yeomanrie of the Company of Weavers,” MS. 4647, ff. 282-3.

⁷³ Weavers’ yeomanry and livery, letter of petition, undated, “The Humble Petition of Divers of the Liverie and Yeomanrie,” MS. 4647, f. 283.

petition they again accused Pell of binding “John Cleare and the sons of other freemen of this city, and selling and turning them over to serve the tearmes of yeares of their apprenticeshipps, or any pte [sic] thereof with strangers or fforreyners.”⁷⁴ Whatever immediate response the City might have issued for these charges, however, has not survived.

Evidence suggests personal greed was a motivating factor among the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants. A 1577 ordinance granted the officers the right to collect a silver spoon weighing 1.5 ounces from members when they became freemen.⁷⁵ The spoons were a form of currency usually meant to be melted down and sold or bartered later.⁷⁶ By the 1630s the leaders had broadened the letters of the ordinance by asking for spoons from apprentices. The ordinance never specified whether these items could only be required from freemen, and the officers were beginning to demand them from young men coming out of their apprenticeships and journeymen before granting them their freedoms. This meant the spoon became a requirement for London citizenship and mastership of the trade.⁷⁷ Many former apprentices and their masters complained of the requirement in the late 1630s because many could not afford it. The added expense led to an increase in poor journeymen and non-free members of the company. A July 1637 petition presented to the lord mayor on behalf of John Gurnell and William Burges, former apprentices to George

⁷⁴ Weavers’ yeomanry and livery, letter of petition, undated, “To the Worshipfull Mr Alderman Bromfeild Mr Alderman Cranmer, Mr Alderman Harrison, Mr Alderman Gurney, and Mr Chamberleine,” MS. 4647, f. 363.

⁷⁵ The custom by which members donated silver spoons weighing an ounce and a half to the company upon being made free dated back to its of it was required for the freedom, in addition to the traditional sum of 3s. 4d. which also needed to be paid to the company. Since the ordinances never specified the spoons as a requirement it might be assumed that for many years the donation of these spoons was an obligation of freemen, given to the company when they made enough money to afford them. See Nicholas Bacon, Christopher Wray and James Dyer, untitled ordinance, 1577, MS. 4647, f. 58.

⁷⁶ Bacon, Wray and Dyer, untitled ordinance, MS. 4647, ff. 58-9.

⁷⁷ Bacon, Wray and Dyer, untitled ordinance, MS. 4647, f. 58.

Dixson and William Counley, as well as “divers others poore younge men that have duly served,” insisted many young men had been denied their freedoms because they lacked the “mony to bye a silver spoone,” and that “a great damage to all other poore younge men and...the utter undoeinge of some there wives and children” resulted.⁷⁸ Appealing to civic authorities, they claimed that because the officers prevented the apprentices from becoming freemen, the City could not tax them and “doth loose much mony.”⁷⁹

By the end of the next month the lord mayor and aldermen issued an order to the Weavers’ Company, calling for the bailiffs and wardens to cease collecting silver spoons from men wishing to be made free. As with all other City orders concerning the weavers, this one, too, achieved no lasting effect. On April 10 of the following year another petition, this time delivered to the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, complained that the leaders again denied men their freedoms unless they provided a silver spoon. By the end of the month, however, officers revived their earlier promise not to deny any men their freedoms on such a basis. Whether their second promise resulted from further pressure by City authorities is unclear, but to safeguard their power from any perceived threat from below, they made abundantly clear their traditional right to require any item or sum of money of “any young man after he is made free of the citty and company,” that is, from the freemen upon whose money they relied for payments to the company, City, and Crown.⁸⁰ In the company’s memoranda book, no other petition exists complaining of this issue, suggesting that perhaps the leaders stayed true to their second promise. The only

⁷⁸ John Gurnell, William Burges, George Dixson, and William Counley, letter of petition, July 1637, “To the Right Honourable the Lord Maior of the Cittye of London and to the Right Worppfull the Aldermen his Brethren,” MS. 4647, f. 457.

⁷⁹ Gurnell, Burges, Dixson, and Counley, letter of petition, July 1637, “To the Right Honourable the Lord Maior of the Cittye of London,” MS. 4647, ff. 457-8.

⁸⁰ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, April 1638, “To the Bayleiffes Wardens & Assistants of the Company of Weavers,” MS. 4647, f. 454.

conclusion that might be drawn here from the brief event described above is that the company leaders might have demanded the money either out of greed or out of wishing to make additional revenue for the company.

According to a document in the company's memoranda book made later in the same year, the earlier mentioned case about Pell finally caught the lord mayor's attention. After receiving information from an informer, Ralph Latham, in November 1637, Lord Mayor Richard Fenn summoned Pell to court to answer for his abuses. According to Latham's report, a man named John Tratman, then freeman of the City, never served a seven year apprenticeship with any freeman, but "deceptfully presented himself" before City Chamberlain Robert Batman and upon the false testimony of himself and Pell, was made free.⁸¹ When Tratman testified before the aldermen's court at Guildhall, he "did verifie and acknowledge the informacon aforesaid," and "alsoe did acknowledge that he is in fault & have offended in manner and forme," as Latham alleged.⁸² Accordingly, the City disenfranchised Pell. Whether London authorities tried Renshall as well, however, remains unknown.

Toward the close of the 1630s, the earlier complaints made against the bailiffs, wardens and assistants in regard to their loose enforcement of company ordinances, and their admission and licensing of unqualified alien and foreign weavers appear to have died off. Perhaps the company's internal divisions had by this time subsided somewhat. From the mid-1620s and up through most of the following decade, the issue of how to control the alien weavers coincided with a rise in internal conflicts between the company's ruling body and its ordinary members. In practice, the rulers proved unable to

⁸¹ Lord Mayor Richard Fenn, letter of report, 1638, MS. 4647, ff. 440-1.

⁸² Fenn, letter of report, 1638, MS. 4647, f. 443.

protect the livelihoods of company members from the economic encroachments of strangers. The officers instead desired to bring the strangers into the company in hopes that by having them under their authority, they could conform them to the guild's ordinances and by-laws. As will be shown in the next chapter, such hopes were not met. While the leaders showed more concern with getting these immigrants into the company than with enforcing its laws on them, the commonality and yeomanry resented the strangers being admitted, because to them it meant that immigrants were further usurping the trade and causing members to abandon their occupations and take up other means of living. That the company's internal struggles sometimes required the intervention of the City attests to its crippled ability to oblige the alien weavers to conform to its rules.

Chapter 4:

External Challenges Facing the Weavers' Company in the Reign of Charles I

On August 9, 1675, between thirty and 200 agitated English weavers gathered in Spitalfields. When ominous news of the gathering reached Weavers' Hall, concerned company officers immediately dispatched some of their members to ask the lord mayor to suppress it.¹ By the time authorities arrived at Spital Square, however, it had been too late. For five days, belligerent protesters rampaged through Spitalfields, Shoreditch, Hoxton, Whitechapel, Clerkenwell, and Stepney, breaking into strangers' homes and warehouses.² The cause of their riot was the alien artisans' use of engine looms, or Dutch looms. These were labor-reducing and skill-saving devices which, from the time Dutch merchants first introduced them around 1610, threatened the employment and business of thousands of trained journeymen and masters throughout the seventeenth century. London's guild weavers remained dependent on the older, single looms that provided more adequate employment and wages. Long frustrated with the City and Weavers' Company's continued failure to suppress the newer, automated looms, the 1675 protesters took matters into their own hands, ripped the large machines out of shops and homes, and burned them in the streets of northern, northeastern, and eastern London.³

Like the 1675 rioters, petitioning weavers in the early Stuart period resented the strangers' use of engine looms. They feared the impact which these machines could have

¹ Alfred Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company, 1600-1970* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 194.

² Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London, 1500-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 225; Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and Difference in Early Modern London* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 36.

³ Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 194; Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries*, 225; Selwood, *Diversity and Difference*, 36.

on production. According to members of the Weavers' Company in 1616, the engine loom threatened the employment opportunities of a considerable number of English weavers because a single person using one of these new looms could produce woven goods at a rate roughly seven to ten times higher than a person operating on a single loom.⁴ As shown in the previous chapter, the commonality's deepest grudges concerned unqualified weavers competing unfairly, but the Dutch looms facilitated this problem by allowing individuals to quickly learn and ply the trade outside of guild membership. The new devices further allowed strangers to create employment and trade networks exclusively within their communities, systems of work existing successfully outside of the Weavers' Company that challenged the guild's power over the trade, and threatened its members' livelihoods. From the perspective of the petitioners, because of the labor-saving technologies and productive work methods strangers introduced, alien artisans intended to undermine the company and trade, and cause many guild weavers to fall victim to an increasingly unregulated early modern economy.

The growing popularity of the new draperies discussed in the previous chapter coincided with the introduction of the engine loom, which specialized in weaving goods made with a blend of imported silk, wool, and linen materials.⁵ The products typically

⁴ Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 163.

⁵ As the silk trade between England and the Mediterranean grew in late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the market for the old draperies, which typically were heavy cloth wares of plain appearance made up of either linen or wool, gradually became displaced by the new draperies. These newer goods which tended to be lighter, and more patterned than the older ones, were also composed of a combination of silk, woolen, or linen materials. Some French and Dutch overseas merchants who brought in these materials evaded import taxes and weight standards, and they sold these materials exclusively within their respective London communities. Native textile artisans often complained of strangers making these newer and more fashionable kinds of goods with cheaper imported materials such as Spanish wool and Venetian silk because of a lack of effective regulation on merchant strangers. See Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 162-4; D.C. Coleman, "An Innovation and its Diffusion: The 'New Draperies,'" *The Economic History Review* 22, no. 3 (1969): 418, 424.

produced by the new looms included tapes, gartering, ribbons, laces, and “ffilleting.”⁶ Other kinds of cloth producers and sellers such as haberdashers and clothiers needed these items, and narrow woven wares remained in high demand in London’s marketplaces throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Those who owned engine looms held a competitive edge over company masters and journeymen relying on the older, single looms to maintain employment, suitable wages, and fairness in the trade.

In addition to enhancing production, the Dutch looms required less skill than single looms, but because they were relatively expensive, only wealthier employers could afford them. According to Alfred Plummer, each of these automated devices in the early seventeenth century was valued anywhere from six to twelve pounds.⁷ These new looms supported the growth of a non-guild regulated labor system utilized by early capitalists who were not artisans themselves, but could dominate London’s cloth markets by purchasing several of these looms, putting them in warehouses, and hiring cheap, semi-skilled laborers to run them. This newer, more modern kind of labor system found no place in the City’s guilds, dependent as they were on the traditional household work structure and the apprenticeship system for regulating trade access and economic mobility of masters, journeymen, and apprentices. In effect, these automated looms introduced by strangers facilitated the development of new labor methods that posed a

⁶ For lack of a modern equivalent to this word, “filletting” was a thick kind of tape. See Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, 1635, “Grievances which the Generallity of the Native Born, Being Weavers of London doe Susteine, Haveing Served their Apprenticeshipps Accordinge to the Lawes of the Realme,” Worshipful Company of Weavers, A/030/MS04647, f. 302, Guildhall Library, London.

⁷ Plummer, *London Weavers’ Company*, 198.

serious external challenge not only to the practical powers of the Weavers' Company over its trade, but also to the value and necessity of its artisans' skilled labor.

Whether or not masters could not afford these new machines, or they resisted investment in them to protect their journeymen's employment, remains uncertain. Most of the yeomanry and commonality continued to use the single looms, and often petitioned London authorities in the 1620s and 1630s to have the Dutch looms suppressed in the City, to avoid competing with them. Since most of the company's masters still owned and operated single looms, a divergence was growing between rich and poor employers. The wealthier of the two groups, so-called enterprising masters, was a relatively small population of untrained and non-apprenticed artisans operating outside of the company's membership. Most of these individuals likely were French and Dutch merchants who traded exclusively both within the alien communities of London, and with their countrymen across the English Channel.⁸ The other group were the small masters, a considerably larger collection of traditional household employers who belonged to the Weavers' Company's commonality and yeomanry, and who, along with their journeymen employees and apprentices, were most affected by the enterprising masters.

It took only a few years after the engine looms were first introduced to London for members of the company to start complaining of the threat which the devices posed to their livelihoods. In 1615, antipathy toward strangers had become enough of a problem that James I formed a grievance committee comprised of City aldermen to hear and

⁸ It remains uncertain whether any of the master craftsmen in the Weavers' Company used engine looms, since neither the petitions in the company's memoranda book, nor any other source found here confirmed it. For information on merchant strangers and their trade connections to the Dutch, Venetian (and possibly Levantine) silk trade, see William Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants to England* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1969), 196-7; Ralph Davis, "England and the Mediterranean, 1570-1670," in F. J. Fisher, ed. *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England in Honor of R. H. Tawney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 125.

consider various artisans' complaints against alien tradesmen and merchants. Weavers' Company members complained of aliens exceeding limits on apprentices and journeymen, hiding the employees when shops and houses were searched, smuggling silk lace, and living – and therefore selling – more cheaply than the English.⁹ At the petition's end, they briefly made their request for “the newe devise of a loome” to be prevented.¹⁰ The committee failed to suppress the engine looms, and according to another petition made to a similar committee, by the following year the automated devices had become more of a problem for English weavers.¹¹ In again requesting for it to be banned from the City and realm, the petitioners lamented to London aldermen that “by their ingenious machines,” the strangers were attempting to “usurp the trade from the English.”¹² The engine looms remained unsuppressed.¹³ As shown in the previous chapter, City authorities often struggled in tackling problems that involved aliens.

The automated devices remained in use and, for the next two decades, they exacerbated other kinds of economic disparities for which native artisans increasingly blamed strangers. According to petitioners writing at an unknown date in the early 1620s to the ministers and elders of the French and Dutch churches on behalf of the commonality, a growing number of poor English weavers were by then “beinge opprest daily” by a “great number come over...from your countries.”¹⁴ These new arrivals were mostly “boyes of fforteene or eighteene yeares of age” who belonged to “noe church,”

⁹ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: James I, 1611-18*, vol. 81 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1858), 300.

¹⁰ Green, *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. 81, 300.

¹¹ Green, *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. 88, 397.

¹² Green, *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. 88, 397.

¹³ No evidence showing the aldermen's response to the weavers' 1616 petition is provided in the *Calendar of State Papers*, the only source found indicating the petition's existence .

¹⁴ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, undated, “To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders of the French and Dutch Congregations,” MS. 4647, f. 144.

and who settled into London for economic reasons.¹⁵ The petitioners asserted that James I's privilege granted in 1616 to Protestant strangers, bestowing immunity to guild laws, could not be applied to the newcomers because they were neither religious refugees nor members of the alien congregations.¹⁶ Many of these young men were secretly instructed in the trade outside the rigor of apprenticeships and hired by alien masters to perform journeymen's work, "whether they can doe the tenth parte of the trade yea or noe."¹⁷ The petitioners argued that the newcomers, employed in such a way, "within twoe or three yeares become like their maisters, to lyve without order veiwe or search."¹⁸ Given the lesser amount of training required by engine looms, and the relatively quick rate at which the young strangers were allegedly trained, it is possible most of these new arrivals performed their work on the automated devices. The writers remarked that if any of these alien laborers or their masters were discovered by company yeomen and charged for their offenses, they "most rebelliouslye shutt their doors," or "pull out a coppie of his majesties letters...soe wee obeying, stand as amazed."¹⁹ This was the case with a stranger named Bart who had once been arrested by the City chamberlain "for offending or [sic] Corporation," but who, upon being released, went to the house of an elder of the French Church near Merchant Taylors Hall to procure a copy of the king's 1616 letters.

¹⁵ Weavers commonality, letter of petition, undated, "To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders," MS. 4647, ff. 144, 146.

¹⁶ In 1616, James I directed these letters under his privy signet to all courts in the realm in order "to permit and suffer all Strangers (handy crafts men) members of the Outlandish Churches to worke and labour in their severall handycrafts for relief of them their wiues and children in London and elsewhere within this Realme without any suits or molestations." These documents confirmed the earlier letters patent issued by Elizabeth I to all Protestant strangers in the realm in the fifth year of her reign. See Jan Hendrick Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum* (Delhi: Facsimile Publisher, 2017), vol. 3, pt. 1, 1324.

¹⁷ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, undated, "To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders," MS. 4647, ff. 144-5.

¹⁸ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, undated, "To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders," MS. 4647, ff. 144-5.

¹⁹ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, undated, "To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders," MS. 4647, ff. 146-7.

Documents in hand, Bart then ran “to Guildhall to Mr. Chamberleine, and there shewes yt, and braggs that he cares for nothings,” evidently having evaded further punishment.²⁰

Some of these newly-arrived strangers, along with migrants already long established in the City, worked as brokers to sell “one anothers goods, upp and downe” the streets of London, and “from shopp to shop.”²¹ The same petitioners argued that such a practice had long been banned, explaining that previous royal acts which Parliament had ratified stated that “noe forreyner stranger or other should merchandize...with another.”²² “Yet yt shalbe proved,” the authors continued, that “many hundred pounds worth of goods are sold...one stranger for the other, they neither careinge for order nor lawes.”²³ Somewhat boldly, the petitioners even told the ministers and elders that “many brokers have risen amongst you,” such as “Davy Marshall an elder, Thomas Lacombe, Micall Castall, John Castall, John Oder, Robert Treyo, John Crowin,” and “divers others.”²⁴ Some of these brokers were alleged to have become considerably wealthy, living as gentlemen, or as enterprising masters. The petitioners alleged that the rich brokers in the French congregation brought overwhelming competition to the weaving business and trade and, as a result, were “grinding the face of this comon wealth.”²⁵

²⁰ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, undated, “To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders,” MS. 4647, f. 147.

²¹ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, undated, “To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders,” MS. 4647, ff. 148-9.

²² Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, undated, “To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders,” MS. 4647, f. 148.

²³ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, undated, “To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders,” MS. 4647, ff. 148-9.

²⁴ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, undated, “To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders,” MS. 4647, f. 149.

²⁵ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, undated, “To the Worthie and Worshipfull the Ministers and Elders,” MS. 4647, f. 149.

Through the 1620s, petitioners continued to express their disapproval of strangers' tendencies to hire brokers, but their main resentments rested with aliens using engine looms. English weavers expressed particular disapproval of the allegedly poor quality goods strangers abundantly made on these devices. Writing on behalf of the Weavers' Company's leadership and commonality, yeomen William and John Counley reported in two undated petitions written sometime in 1624 or 1625, that although the narrow wares engine looms produced were not "soe good" in quality "as that which is made upon single loomes," they could be sold at lower prices, and produced in higher quantities than those typically made by guild members who still used the old single looms.²⁶ As a result, the City's market was becoming saturated with cheaply made goods. Such products, the petitioners continued, proved considerably appealing to customers who saw only their low prices, and who purchased them without knowing their poor quality, to "the great preiudice of the buyer."²⁷

The same petitioners also exhibited concern about the machines' negative impact on employment. They claimed that shortly after its invention, authorities in Holland banned engine looms because the devices "tooke away the living of a great number of poore."²⁸ No such ban is evident in England, however, and strangers continued to use

²⁶ William Counley and John Counley, letter of petition, 1624-1625, "To the Right Worshipfull Sr Edward Barkham Knight and Alderman Mr. Alderman Cotton Mr Alderman Hammersley Mr Alderman Ducie Mr Alderman Raynton & Mr Alderman Moulson, Commitees Appointed for Hearinge the Greivances of the Generalitie of the Company of Weaver London. The Humble Petition of the Commonaltie of the Said Companie," MS. 4647, f. 162.

²⁷ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 1635, "Grievances which the Generallity...doe Susteine," MS. 4647, f. 302.

²⁸ According to Alfred Plummer, the earliest known version of an engine loom was invented in Danzig between 1579 and 1586. Shortly after the loom's prohibition in the city, its inventor was privately drowned or strangled. In 1604, a similar loom appeared in Leiden, and there, too, was prohibited sometime before its 1610 arrival to England. See Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 163; William Counley and John Counley, letter of petition, 1624-1625, "Grievances Which the Generalitie of the Companie of Weavers doe Susteine by Theis Severall Meanes. Followinge," MS. 4647, f. 157.

Dutch looms in both the City and realm for many years after they introduced them. James I might have favored these automated machines because of the increased production they brought to the kingdom's domestic cloth industries. Any improvement reduced the realm's reliance on unfinished exports to western Europe's industrial centers like Antwerp and Leiden, and the king had encouraged strangers to introduce other inventions to boost English and Scottish luxury crafts.²⁹ At the end of the petition, John and William Counley requested that if the aldermen viewed the machine "to be beneficiall for the common wealth," then they should "sett down an order, that none may use the said engine, but onely such as are weaver by trade," since "they which now use them are most of them merchants, and other tradesmen."³⁰ Behind the petitioners' request to take exclusive possession of the engine looms and get them out of the hands of unqualified weavers, was their desire to bring strangers under the control of the Weavers' Company, suggesting the guild's commonality and yeomanry had some common cause with its leadership shortly before they turned against their officers.

By the mid-1620s, the threat which engine looms posed to employment was becoming more evident in the petitions. The Counley's told the same committee of aldermen that the number of Dutch looms operated in the City had grown to about "ffourtie and foure or thereabouts."³¹ They explained that because these machines had either ten, sixteen, twenty, or twenty-four shuttles each, they took away "the liveinge of

²⁹ John Marriot, *Beyond the Tower: A History of East London* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 35-6.

³⁰ Counley and Counley, letter of petition, 1624-1625, "The Humble Petition of the Commonaltie," MS. 4647, f. 162.

³¹ Counley and Counley, letter of petition, 1624-1625, "Grievances Which the Generalitie...doe Susteine," MS. 4647, f. 157.

ffoure hundred foure score and sixe persons,” or 486 workers.³² A great number of these employees were involved in the ancillary parts of the trade, the servile or menial tasks associated with the practice and business of weaving that were typically performed by small children and old men to maintain a minimal but honest living, and keep “themselves and their families from beggine and ydleness.”³³ Some of the children involved in ancillary work labored “till they were fitt to performe other worke,” such as when they reached the age of fourteen and could become apprenticed to a master of the trade.³⁴ If the petitioners’ estimation on the number of weaving-related jobs being lost based on the number of shuttles each existing Dutch loom had on it was accurate, it meant that the machine’s increasing use in the City posed a serious problem for its poor cloth workers.

Engine looms threatened employment for journeymen and apprentices too. The automated devices enabled many non-apprenticed youth and other non-free and non-denizen workers in the City and its livery companies to be hired for less pay than demanded by the Weavers’ Company. One result was a younger, poorer, and semi-skilled group of workers who were drawn from outside the City, whether from its suburbs, from provincial towns like Norwich and Colchester, or from across the English Channel. For City authorities, these workers attracted to toil on the looms lived in the cheaper housing

³² Counley and Counley, letter of petition, 1624-1625, “Grievances Which the Generalitie...doe Susteine,” MS. 4647, f. 157.

³³ Ancillary weavers might also have served in ways similar to apprentices, as helpers or assistants to masters and their journeymen, a key difference here being that ancillary workers were paid and apprentices were not. According to Alfred Plummer, some of these types of employees also assisted in narrow weaving, such as the making of ribbons and laces, materials in which the engine looms specialized. See Plummer, *London Weavers’ Company*, 164; Counley and Counley, letter of petition, 1624-1625, “Grievances Which the Generalitie...doe Susteine,” MS. 4647, f. 157.

³⁴ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, 25 January 1635, “To the Right Worshipfull Sr Iohn Bankes Knte his Maties Attorney Generall. / The Comonaltie of the Company of Weavers,” MS. 4647, f. 360.

characteristic of the strangers' and foreigners' accommodations found in places like Bishopsgate Without, Spitalfields, Shoreditch, Whitechapel, St. Katherine's, and Southwark.³⁵ The looms contributed to the rapidly growing suburbs. As John and William Counley complained to the 1624-1625 committee:

there are many... which take boyes weekly for smale wages, and teach them the trade of weaveinge, and these boyes within two or three yeares become journeymen, and in short tyme are maisters, and then trayne up others in like manner, to the utter undoeinge of such as have served seaven yeares for their trade accordinge to the statute.³⁶

Although the committee received their grievances, the two yeomen's lengthy written plea to the City to suppress these looms brought no evident results. It might have been that the aldermen could do nothing about it since, as shown in the previous chapter, the City had little influence over weaving-related matters for which the company was responsible. Just as the guild's officers proved unable to practically control the strangers, so too might it have been impossible for them to keep alien weavers from using engine looms.

On December 13, 1625, the lord mayor set up another committee of aldermen, possibly under orders from the Crown, to "duly examine the great abuse and deceit in making of silke and silke lace, uttered and sold within this cittye."³⁷ The strangers' access to, and use of, cheap imported silk and wool in order to make lower quality wares created problems for English cloth artisans who had less access to them. The petitioning weavers often called cheaply-made wares false goods or works. One undated weavers' petition provided some detail of the results from the committee's investigations. City leaders

³⁵ Alfred Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 194; Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 225; Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and Difference in Early Modern London* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 36.

³⁶ Counley and Counley, letter of petition, 1624-1625, "Grievances Which the Generalitie... doe Susteine," MS. 4647, f. 158.

³⁷ Lord Mayor Allan Cotton, letter of order, 13 December 1625, "Tewsdai the Thirteenth of December 1625," MS. 4647, f. 166.

found John Demeere, a stranger, guilty of making false goods but they could not sentence him, “by reason there was noe statute to comite him and the rest,” or, in other words, because they found no law defining what constituted false works and lacked a system through which to check and seal mixed woven wares.³⁸ In reaction, members of the Weavers’ Company’s commonality and yeomanry, headed by William Counley, Thomas Marckham, Richard Perry, and Henry Smith, immediately went to work. Drafting an elaborate proposal in a petition, they asked the committee aldermen to issue City orders requiring all weavers, including strangers, to bring their goods to Weavers’ Hall before putting them to sale, “there to be sealed,” or approved, “by twoe of the companye, which hath skill to distinguish the fine silke from the grosse and course silke, and the sound and good, from that which is rotten.”³⁹ They also requested the aldermen to prohibit any merchants or tradesmen of other livery companies such as the silk men and the haberdashers from buying any wares without the seals on them.⁴⁰ The bill also proposed that “there shalbe power granted to seize uppon all fforreine lace, ribbin, and other things made of silke, contrarye to the statute, which nowe are brought in.”⁴¹ At the end of their proposal, they asked that all alien weavers who lived “disorderly and out of government” of the company, be registered in the City with their names and places of habitation,

³⁸ William Counley, Thomas Marckam, Richard Perry, and Henry Smith, letter of petition, 1625, “To the Right and Honorable the Lord Maior and Court of Aldermen. The Humble Petition of the Comonaltie of Weavers. Beinge all Sworne Men unto the Orders of the Company,” MS. 4647, f. 169.

³⁹ William Counley, Thomas Marckam, Richard Perry, and Henry Smith, letter of petition, 1625, “Certaine Propositions to be Made to the Company of Silke Weavers, for the Benefitt of the Said Companie,” MS. 4647, f. 175.

⁴⁰ Counley, Marckam, Perry, and Smith, letter of petition, 1625, “Certaine Propositions to be Made,” MS. 4647, f. 176.

⁴¹ Counley, Marckam, Perry, and Smith, letter of petition, 1625, “Certaine Propositions to be Made,” MS. 4647, f. 176.

revealing the petitioners' overall desire to make it easier for company authorities to control strangers transgressing ordinances and competing unfairly.⁴²

City Councilor Mr. Watson favored the bill, however he delivered it to Parliament the following year, suggesting that London officials knew of their inability to act as the main authority on guild-related matters, especially those which also involved migrant craftsmen who tended to live in fields and suburbs where the City struggled to enforce its laws.⁴³ By referring the matter to Parliament, Watson likely recognized that for the weavers' proposal to be effective, the bill needed to pass through central legislation rather than Common Council, London's legislative body. The events surrounding the bill's proposal might also suggest confusion among company and City leaders about who had responsibility over these matters. While the company requested the City to act, London in turn sought parliamentary aid. In the end the bill never made it to the House of Commons, as the petitioners lamented, "by reason the Parliament broke up soe suddenly" in 1626.⁴⁴ The petitioners failed to note the day and month of Parliament's dissolution, but it might have been on June 15, when Charles I dissolved Parliament after the House of Commons had been prolonging legislation until the king fired George Villiers, the duke of Buckingham, whose expensive and unpopular naval raids on France's Channel islands incensed members of Parliament and their constituencies.⁴⁵ No legislation of that kind appeared into law after that year, possibly as a result of continued political clashes

⁴² Counley, Marckam, Perry, and Smith, letter of petition, 1625, "Certaine Propositions to be Made," MS. 4647, f. 176.

⁴³ Counley, Marckam, Perry, and Smith, letter of petition, 1625, "The Humble Petition of the Comonaltie of Weavers," MS. 4647, f. 169.

⁴⁴ Counley, Marckam, Perry, and Smith, letter of petition, 1625, "The Humble Petition of the Comonaltie of Weavers," MS. 4647, f. 169.

⁴⁵ *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 1, 1547-1629* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1802), 871; Otto Zoff, *The Huguenots: Fighters for God and Human Freedom* (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1943), 300, 302-3.

between Crown and Parliament in the period leading up to the king's personal rule (1629-1640).

The problem of unregulated imported materials, and the cheap, semi-skilled labor methods utilized by strangers using engine looms continued to plague native weavers through the 1630s. In the years 1632 and 1633, John and William Counley petitioned the French and Dutch Churches, complaining of the unfair business practices of enterprising alien masters and their laborers. As in the previous decade, the writers again complained of the:

great multitude of youths...boyes of ffifteene, sixteene or eighteene yeares of age, that come over from all parts of your countryes and here are sett at worke, by many of your congregacons whether they cann doe the tenth parte of their trade, yea or noe.⁴⁶

As suggested above, most of the strangers who hired these young unqualified weavers were also members of the alien congregations, an accusation made before by native weavers writing to the alien elders and ministers in the early 1620s. By these later years, however, the strangers' engine looms and labor practices were destabilizing the apprenticeship system, where youth under the age of twenty had needed to serve a company master "for seaven yeares, at the leaste" according to the Statute of Artificers, a law since 1563.⁴⁷ The young, non-apprenticed weavers apparently set a bad example for many of the small masters' lawfully bound apprentices who "murmer and grudge at their

⁴⁶ William Counley and John Counley, letter, 1632-1633, "To the Reverend Ministers and Worshipfull Elders of the Ffrench and Dutch Congregacons," MS. 4647, f. 296.

⁴⁷ This statute, which first came into law in 1563, and which was reconfirmed by James I in 1606, and again by Charles I sometime in his early reign, made the seven-year minimum of apprenticeship service the standard requirement for all aspiring guild artisans living and working in the kingdom of England and domain of Wales. Counley and Counley, letter, 1632-1633, "To the Reverend Ministers and Worshipfull Elders," MS. 4647, f. 296.

longe service,” and “often runne away.”⁴⁸ The strangers circumvented apprenticeship custom upon which the City’s livery companies depended in order to determine who could become both a freeman and tradesman of London.

Charles I had granted the strangers some autonomy, but questions remained as to what this meant. The Counleys in the same 1632 or 1633 petition accused strangers of abusing Charles I’s letters patent, issued sometime earlier in his reign, which allowed members of the French and Dutch Churches to exercise their trades free of guild laws. They explained to the churches’ ministers and elders that whenever the company’s officers and yeomanry made their searches, some of the weavers in their congregation “shutt their doores against them,” and whenever any was served a warrant to come before a justice, they would “flye to the Church for refuge.”⁴⁹ Here, too, they bemoaned the loss of employment facilitated by the uninhibited use of the engine loom, a machine they continued to lament was “very hurtfull to our trade.”⁵⁰ They concluded that many strangers remained “here amongst us seaven, eight or nyne yeares without government,” causing “many good [English] housekeepers, which have served many yeares for their trades,” to be “utterly undone,” and “constrayned to give over house keepeinge,” many themselves becoming “servants to the strangers.”⁵¹ The petition’s authors made apparent that the damaging effects which petitioners in the 1620s had predicted the strangers’ unfair production methods would bring to the Weavers’ Company and its commonality if

⁴⁸ Counley and Counley, letter, 1632-1633, “To the Reverend Ministers and Worshipfull Elders,” MS. 4647, f. 297.

⁴⁹ Counley and Counley, letter, 1632-1633, “To the Reverend Ministers and Worshipfull Elders,” MS. 4647, f. 296.

⁵⁰ Counley and Counley, letter, 1632-1633, “To the Reverend Ministers and Worshipfull Elders,” MS. 4647, f. 296.

⁵¹ Counley and Counley, letter, 1632-1633, “To the Reverend Ministers and Worshipfull Elders,” MS. 4647, ff. 297-8.

left unchecked, were becoming increasingly significant. By the 1630s, alien weavers, laborers, and enterprising masters prospered, compelling a growing number of small masters to abandon their position as skilled householder artisans, and work for employers who likely knew comparatively little about the actual art of weaving itself.⁵²

Growing frustrated by a lack of response from City or alien church authorities, the Weavers' commonality began to take their grievances to the Crown. On January 25, 1635, they wrote to Attorney General John Banks informing him that "one hundred" engine looms existed in the City, which by then had taken away the work of "twoe thousand of natyve borne subjects."⁵³ Through automated machines and unskilled, cheap labor, the petitioners wrote, "alyens have almost gotten all the worke and ymployment in the said trade of weavinge from the ffreemen" dwelling in the City.⁵⁴ Matters continued to get worse for small masters and journeymen alike whose household workshops could no longer endure competition with the strangers' cheaper and more productive labor methods. "For want of worke of the said trade of weaving," the petitioners informed the attorney general, many freemen in their company were forced "to fall to servile laboures as portors labourers waterbearers and such like," while others took "reliefe of the severall parishes where they dwell."⁵⁵ Some "in distressed manner" got out of England, leaving "their wyves and children," or resorted to "lewd courses as

⁵² Counley and Counley, letter, 1632-1633, "To the Reverend Ministers and Worshipfull Elders," MS. 4647, f. 298.

⁵³ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 1635, "To the Right Worshipfull Sr Iohn Bankes," MS. 4647, f. 360.

⁵⁴ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 1635, "To the Right Worshipfull Sr Iohn Bankes," MS. 4647, ff. 355-6.

⁵⁵ Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 1635, "To the Right Worshipfull Sr Iohn Bankes," MS. 4647, ff. 355-6.

theft and such like.”⁵⁶ A number of others, however, seemed to find no work at all, so that “many hundreds of his highness poore natyve borne subiects,” and “many poore children...lye ydle in the streets ready to perish.”⁵⁷ At the end of their written plea to the attorney general, the commonality requested that the Crown consider whether the “alyen weavers and their servants” be made to “duly observe the lawes and statuts of this realme,” and that the “engynes with many shuttles...be suppressed.”⁵⁸ Nothing appears to have immediately followed their lengthy request.

The commonality continued to petition Crown authorities. On June 20 the same year, they reported to John Polegrene, a member of Charles I’s guard, “that dyvers aliens heretofore (and still) doth come from beyond the seas and worketh in London and the subburbes thereof.”⁵⁹ Here they explained that, as in earlier times, aliens continued to reside “with dyvers families in one house,” where they “lyve at a farr smaller expence, and...may sell their worke, at a lower rate then the natyve borne can.”⁶⁰ Since their earlier petition made to the attorney general, another 400 people had lost work due to the multitude of alien weavers and engine looms employed in London.⁶¹ Although no legislation immediately followed from this petition, matters continued to get worse for the English weavers, and Charles I needed to intervene. On May 25, 1638, the king

⁵⁶ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, 1635, “To the Right Worshipfull Sr Iohn Bankes,” MS. 4647, ff. 355-6.

⁵⁷ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, 1635, “To the Right Worshipfull Sr Iohn Bankes,” MS. 4647, f. 360.

⁵⁸ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, 1635, “To the Right Worshipfull Sr Iohn Bankes,” MS. 4647, f. 357.

⁵⁹ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, 1635, “Grievances Which the Generallity...doe Susteine,” MS. 4647, f. 300.

⁶⁰ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, 1635, “Grievances Which the Generallity...doe Susteine,” MS. 4647, f. 301.

⁶¹ Weavers’ commonality, letter of petition, 1635, “Grievances Which the Generallity...doe Susteine,” MS. 4647, f. 302.

ordered all of these automated devices out of the realm by July 4.⁶² The documents left in the company's memoranda book, which go up to 1645, are not clear about the effectiveness of the king's order to remove the looms.⁶³ Less than four years later the English Civil War began, and in the second half of the seventeenth century Dutch looms were again in use around London, causing problems for some weavers and ancillary workers.⁶⁴ A sign of their continued frustration after the English Civil War was the August 1675 riots in which weavers broke into strangers' homes in areas north, northeast, and east of London's walls and destroyed as many engine looms as they could find.

The violence involved in the 1675 riot suggests it had been a culmination of long-standing economic problems caused by these machines, and the strangers' living and work methods, which had only plagued poor English cloth workers and artisans in the early Stuart period. In the years following the strangers' introduction of engine looms to the City in 1610, native weavers increasingly lost their living by the trade, as demonstrated by the weavers' petitions in the 1620s and 1630s. In these years petitioners continuously complained of strangers impoverishing them by evading company ordinances and by-laws, hiring their own youth as small wage laborers, disrupting the apprenticeship system, bringing more strangers into London, hiring brokers, and making false wares with cheaply imported or smuggled materials. The alien weavers' engine looms, and their confessional and communal ties with their countrymen both in London and across the Channel facilitated these practices, and created external challenges to

⁶² John Bruce, ed. *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1637-8*, vol. 391 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1869), 454; Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 164.

⁶³ What are left in the memoranda book include several undated weavers' petitions and ordinances, proceedings against Thomas Pell, two letters by jailed members, incomplete freedom registers, vintners' and brewers' petitions, and two royal proclamations.

⁶⁴ Plummer, *London Weavers' Company*, 194; Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries*, 225; Selwood, *Diversity and Difference*, 36.

which the Weavers' Company, as well as the City, were not equipped to respond effectively. The result was that in the years leading up to the English Civil War, thousands of native weavers and ancillary workers lost out in competition with the strangers in the trade.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion: The Decline of the Weavers' Company

Native weavers' resentments of London's strangers operating the trade in disregard of the Weavers' Company's laws were neither new to the 1620s and 1630s, nor exclusive to those years alone. As shown in chapter one, from as early as 1595, and possibly before then, yeomen complained to the French Church about its artisan members exercising the weaving trade unfairly. More specifically, however, they charged the alien weavers of keeping "apprentices and loomes, twyce or thryce as many as they ought."¹ In addition, they accused strangers of teaching their countrymen silk weaving outside of the company's apprenticeship rules.² Perhaps most relevant to the complaints made by petitioning members of the company in later years, they charged the French weavers of handing over "the secrets of our occupacon to their worke maisters, that nowe they are growne as cunnige in any worke as our selves."³ The petitioners portrayed alien artisans and their non-guild regulated work practices as a threat both to London's trades and to the English craftsmen's way of life.

Indeed, the economic changes introduced by the growing migrant population in the City during Charles I's reign presented significant challenges to the Weavers' Company and the trade. With a reliance on slow training methods, household work

¹ Thomas Deloney, William Muggins, and Willington, letter, June 1595, "To the Minister and Elders of the French Church in London, Grace and Peace in Christ Jesus," Worshipful Company of Weavers, A/030/MS04647, f. 127, Guildhall Library, London.

² Deloney, Muggins, and Willington, letter, 1595, "To the Minister and Elders of the French Church," MS. 4647, f. 127

³ Deloney, Muggins, and Willington, letter, 1595, "To the Minister and Elders of the French Church," MS. 4647, f. 128.

structures, and older forms of technology to preserve its practical control over the weaving craft, the company was ill-equipped to protect its members' livelihoods from alien weavers who brought automated technology, lived in the City's burgeoning suburbs that were difficult to monitor, and created exclusive networks among their countrymen allowing them to work more cheaply and productively. Added to these difficulties, guild leaders struggled to enforce their ordinances and by-laws on strangers, particularly on French and Dutch church members who had procured copies of royal letters patent allowing them ecclesiastical immunities to such laws. Although the company's officers and commonality held commonly shared concerns for controlling the strangers, they struggled within the company over how to enforce compliance. The external and internal challenges thwarted the company's ability to adapt to the rapidly changing early modern economy.

Scholars including John J. Murray, Laura H. Yungblut, Ian W. Archer, and Lien Bich Luu, writing on the history of London's strangers, emphasized the benefits that immigrants brought to the City's culture and economy, which outweighed tensions between aliens and the English population. Most of these studies examined the perspective of City, Crown, or livery company authorities, or the French and Dutch churches, because the majority of sources used involved state papers domestic, royal proclamations, parliamentary papers, aldermanic and Common Council records, alien church consistory documents, or manuscript collections related to City or privy council authorities such as Lord Mayor Allan Cotton, or William and Robert Cecil. By limiting their analyses to such perspectives, these scholars failed to notice the voice of ordinary artisans. Using weavers' petitions, this thesis has attempted to show the complexity

behind native Londoners' resentments against strangers, the collision of old and new means of production, and the feuds which ensued between leaders and members within guild structures that mirrored parliamentary resistance to divine right and the breakdown of medieval political hierarchies during the English Civil War. This thesis has emphasized the economic hardships which English artisans encountered daily, fueling native craftsmen's tensions both with strangers outside of the company and the guild's officers.

The petitions reveal vital challenges to the Weavers' Company, which struggled to assert control over the cloth-making trade in the seventeenth century. The company was not alone, and as Rappaport had shown, London's livery companies were in steady decline from the second half of the sixteenth century.⁴ Although Jacob Selwood and Joseph P. Ward asserted that, when compared to other livery companies, the Weavers' were more successful in controlling the strangers, the petitions filed between 1620 and 1638 tell a different story.⁵ The company's internal struggles prevented it from effectively conforming alien weavers to its laws. Company leaders made clear to London officials in 1631 their desire to control strangers by admitting and licensing as many as they could into the company and trade, but the officers' strategy proved unsuccessful, as shown four years later by petitioning weavers complaining to Attorney General John Banks about the economic plight of thousands of members.⁶ Selwood's additional

⁴ Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 46.

⁵ Joseph P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 126; Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and Difference in Early Modern London* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 63.

⁶ Weavers' bailiffs, wardens, and assistants, 1631, "To the Righte Honorable the Lord Maior of the Cittie of London, And to the Right Wor:ll his Bretheren the Aldermen of the Same. / The Humble Petition of the Bailives Wardens and Assistants of the Companie of Weavers in London," MS. 4647, f. 226; Weavers' commonality, letter of petition, 1635, "To the Right Worshipfull Sr Iohn Bankes," MS. 4647, f. 360.

argument that company leaders usually responded positively to members' complaints in the early seventeenth century has been disproved by the conflict, narrated in chapter three, between company leaders, and the commonality and yeomanry, which started in the mid-1620s.⁷

Despite Ronald Pollitt's claim that petitioning craftsmen's complaints against aliens were rooted in xenophobia, defined as an expressed dislike of people born outside the realm, the petitions suggest other motives.⁸ The question of English xenophobia, a modern word, is problematic in that it betrays early modern considerations about what it meant for an outsider to belong in England. Although non-English by language, religion, and place of origin, law-abiding strangers who contributed to the economy nonetheless demonstrated loyalty to the Crown and belonging to the kingdom by being good subjects. Seen in this light, weavers' grievances against alien artisans breaking trade laws had some xenophobic qualities, but they demonstrated more significantly the complex social and economic reasons upon which such complaints gave rise. What the petitioners of the 1620s and 1630s wanted foremost were fair trading practices. They rarely expressed a desire to remove the strangers from England. Instead they wanted them in English society and under its rules, so that they could live and work fairly with alien weavers. Problems arose because commoners demanded more power from company leaders to accomplish this aim. To presume that the petitioners' repeated expressions of alien resentment were nothing short of xenophobia ignores a larger, more complex set of factors including the breaking-down of guild monopolies, the economic disturbances of newly-introduced

⁷ Selwood, *Diversity and Difference*, 63.

⁸ Ronald Pollitt, "'Refuge of the Distressed Nations,' Perceptions of Aliens in Elizabethan England," *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 1 (1980): 1015.

machinery, and the dominance of a small, enterprising master class working outside of the livery companies.

In further contradiction to Pollitt's argument about English xenophobia, strangers were counted among the company's membership. English weavers resented alien weavers working outside the company, making this a case of company artisans against non-guild artisans, many of whom also happened to be strangers. As noted in chapter three, petitioners in 1626 complained about some sons or grandsons of strangers making their way into the company's court and serving as bailiffs, wardens, and assistants. While the petition served as the only one that made such a claim, its writers made no mention of any ties which the officers might have had with the alien communities and their churches. As Ole Peter Grell had shown, by the 1620s, the membership of the Dutch Church had long been in decline as a result of slowed Dutch and Flemish immigration to London, and assimilation of their second and third generation progeny into English and Anglican society.⁹ Although at the same time the City's Huguenot congregation enjoyed new growth due to revived religious struggles in France, there exists no further evidence of who these company officers were, or what connections they had with stranger communities. It is likely such ties never existed because second and third generation strangers were adapting and conforming, identifying themselves mainly with their English peers with whom they regularly associated, and not with stranger immigrants. The petitioners' concern was with the economic changes aliens facilitated, which challenged guild regulation and therefore demonstrated disloyalty to the Crown and country.

⁹ Ole Peter Grell, *Calvinist Exiles in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Ashgate, 1996), 90-1.

As scholar Chris Dent argued, London authorities, and some members of Parliament, particularly those representing the City, supported free trade, which might explain why these officials seldom addressed petitioners' complaints.¹⁰ Although royal patents granted to individuals stood against the interests of the Weavers' Company, so too parliamentarians supporting freer trade ran against the interest of the company. This complicated relationship helps explain the failure of both parliamentary and City authorities in assisting the Weavers' in enforcing laws on unqualified weavers working outside the company. Automated technologies proved vital to the strangers' non-guild regulated ways of production, a system of work that allowed changes to the trade in which the guild's traditional labor methods found no place. Pre-industrial age automated technologies like the Dutch loom testified to the emergence of more modern systems of work that were already challenging the social and economic orthodoxy of the City's guilds as early as the first half of the seventeenth century.¹¹

The increasing number of strangers plying their trades outside of livery companies demonstrates the economic changes occurring in London's weaving trade. Using methods in prosopography pioneered by Sir Lewis Namier, this thesis has shown that strangers tended to live cheaply and close together in suburban areas north, northeast, east, and south of London, places where City and guild authorities struggled to enforce laws. Many aliens embraced the developments that were challenging the livery companies' power over trades because their unregulated operations were more adaptable to new technologies and business methods. Exclusively amongst themselves and their

¹⁰ Chris Dent, "'Generally Inconvenient:' The 1624 Statute of Monopolies as Political Compromise," *Melbourne University Law Review* 33, no. 2 (2009): 422-3.

¹¹ Norah Carlin, "Liberty and Fraternities in the English Revolution: The Politics of London Artisans' Protests," *International Review of Social History* 39, no. 2 (1994): 241-2.

communities, alien weavers utilized the engine looms and the new labor approaches such devices enabled, creating cheap narrow-woven goods with low-quality imported materials that were in higher demand than the more expensive, higher quality single-loom goods. They employed brokers to sell each other's products, not in marketplaces as was lawful for strangers, but on the City's streets, shops, and houses, where they were not allowed to vend their concealable false wares. They taught the secrets of weaving to their countrymen and women brought up in other trades.

From the beginning of Charles I's reign, native weavers' voices became considerably louder as the economic changes facilitated by immigrants to London made it increasingly difficult for many English artisans to support themselves and their families. The success of strangers working outside of the company's rules strained the organization's members. The complaints which the commonality made against the bailiffs, wardens, and assistants of the company rested, in no small part, upon their desire to address the migrants and the changes they brought through traditional means by enforcing apprenticeship laws and the Weavers' Company's ordinances over trade, suppressing labor-saving technologies, and preventing false, or cheaply made goods from entering the London markets. By accomplishing these things, they hoped to maintain their livelihoods, control the craft, and thwart the rise of enterprising masters dominating the trade using expensive engine looms. In the two decades leading up to the English Civil War, the petitioning native weavers thought their exclusive titles, that is their social status as qualified artisans and citizens of London earned through years of servitude to their company, were losing the prestige they once had.¹² Perhaps they feared they might

¹² Carlin, "Liberty and Fraternities," 241.

become amalgamated into a lower group of laborers. A considerable number of them demanded a voice in their respective London companies, the ruling members of which rarely complied.

The example of the petitions demonstrates the decline of the Weavers' Company's practical power over the London weaving trade in the early seventeenth century and reflects the more significant trend of the downturn experienced by City livery companies. Weavers' complaints in the 1620s and 1630s made apparent the availability of cheap labor provided by immigrants living in the rapidly-expanding suburbs. Their mechanical looms saved hours of labor and could be operated by unskilled laborers, who, undoubtedly, challenged the status quo and the traditional role of the livery companies. The mechanized looms and a shift to a freer market economy marked an economic turn that led to the industrial revolution in the following century.

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