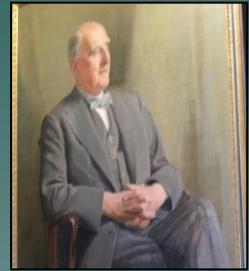
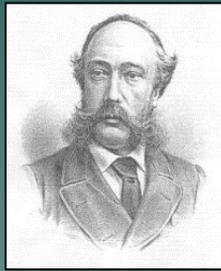


As a consequence of the current Covid-19 crisis, the Cutlers' Company has decided to re-elect the 2019-2020 Company for a further year. Following the disruption to his year in office, the present Master, Nick Williams, will serve a second year. This is not the first time there was such a re-election. It also happened during the two World Wars.

The 1624 Act of Incorporation states that the Company must be elected each year – a Company consisting of a Master, two Wardens, six Searchers and twenty-four Assistants. Each Company elects the next Company, drawing on Freemen who can be elected to replace any retiring Members. The present situation prompted a search of the records for other occasions when Masters served more than their initial year.

There was a number of Masters in the 17th century who had the same names, but it is impossible to know if they are the same men. The 18th century records show that men were elected as Members for a few years, then left the Company and later might be re-elected. But, if a Master died during his year, the Immediate Past Master generally resumed duties. This happened, for example, in 1741, when Past Master Richard Kent took over when Thomas Rose died, and in 1779, Josephus Parkin completed John Rowbotham's year in 1781.



Left to right, Mark Firth, David Ward, William Ellis, William Wood

It was not so unusual in the 19th century for elected Masters to refuse, or defer their year, as many were involved in building up their businesses, especially in overseas markets. In 1838, George Wostenholm, was elected but did not take the oath, telling the Company he was going to America, and so was excused. Samuel Hadfield, the Master in 1837, stepped in. When Wostenholm again refused to take office in 1842, he was fined £30 – almost £3,000 purchasing power today. He eventually became Master in 1856.

Mark Firth was Master from 1867-1868, but stepped in for David Ward, who was elected in 1868 but was fined for refusing to serve. When Ward eventually took office in 1877, having been on and off the Company for a number of years, the Company discovered that he was not actually a Freeman. Embarrassment all round!

William Ellis was elected at the start of the First World War. Few Company meetings were held and, because the Senior and Junior Wardens were on active service, Ellis was again elected in 1915. He didn't want to have another Installation but the Company insisted. With no idea how long the War would last, it was decided to keep the same Company for the duration. Ellis eventually served through 1917. During the Second World War, William Wood, who had been Master in 1924-1925, was re-elected as Master from 1940 to 1944.